ABSTRACT. During his tenure as premier from independence in 1957 until he was ousted by a military and police coup in 1966, Kwame Nkrumah was the living personification of the Ghanaian nation-state. As the self-proclaimed Civitatis Ghaniensis Conditor – Founder of the State of Ghana – his image was minted on the new national money and printed on postage stamps. He erected a monument of himself in Accra, changed the national anthem to make references to himself, customised the national flag to match the colors of his CPP party, made his birthday a national day of celebration (National Founder’s Day), named streets and universities after himself, and amended the constitution whereby he became Life President. Since the coup, many of the symbols of nationhood that Nkrumah constructed have been debated, demolished, reconsidered and reengineered by successive governments to rewrite the Ghanaian historical narrative. This article analyses the contentions of one of Nkrumah’s first expressions of symbolic nationalism – that of the national coinage.

KEYWORDS: Civitatis Ghaniensis Conditor; Ghana Cedi; Ghana money; iconography and money; Kwame Nkrumah; nationalism; symbolic nationalism.

The act of coining or producing currency has been synonymous with an expression of independence since the earliest years of coinage in Ancient Greece (Mudd 2005).
I want the Queen and the people of Britain to know . . . [that] my Cabinet have decided, with my agreement, to put my head on the coinage, because many of my people cannot read or write. They’ve got to be shown that they are now really independent. And they can only be shown by signs (Nkrumah 1957: 12).

Introduction

The Republic of Ghana (West Africa) celebrated its Golden Jubilee of nationhood on 6 March 2007, the year coinciding with the 200th anniversary of the parliamentary act that abolished the slave trade in the British Empire. Scholars have begun to review the history and achievements (or lack thereof) of this nation-state during the last fifty years. Undoubtedly, the legacy of Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah – Ghana’s first Prime Minister and President – is one of the central issues of debate. His notoriety as one of the foremost Pan-Africanists (after Marcus Garvey), African nationalists and stalwarts of the Non-Aligned Movement has been well documented and is constantly being reiterated. However, what is missing from this interrogation is an analysis of the ways in which Ghanaian nationhood was symbolically expressed in the public domain during the Nkrumah era – a void that this article aims to address.

There are several significant public symbols of nationhood that are used by nationalists, political elites and intellectuals to popularise national history and culture, and for nation-building purposes. Hobsbawm and Ranger’s treatise on Invented Traditions (1983), Smith’s (1986) theory of Ethnosymbolism, Billig’s writings on Banal Nationalism (1995), and Igor Cusack’s works on African nationalism (2000, 2005), have acknowledged the importance of national symbols to the nation-building project which contribute to ‘the homogeneous cultural branding of . . . [the State’s] flock’ (Gellner 1983: 140). The list includes national flags, anthems, music, coats of arms, emblems, statues, monuments, museums, national dishes, national ceremonies, parades, remembrance days, rituals, artefacts, dress, holidays, oaths, shared memories, myths, languages, etc. Noticeably absent from this list is national money, which historically has been an essential tool used by nationalists to consolidate new nation-states.

This article analyses how national money formed an essential aspect of Nkrumah’s economic and symbolic/semiotic nation-building strategy after the Gold Coast (Ghana) gained its independence from Britain. It will analyse the extent to which Nkrumah’s monetary nationalism had been elaborated, contested, deconstructed and revived by other nationalists and political stakeholders since independence. First, however, it is necessary to briefly review the leading theories and debates on nations and nationalisms. This will allow us to situate the Ghanaian nation-building project during the Nkrumah era within the wider context of nation-building in general, and African nationalism in particular.
African nations and nationalisms

Modernist (as opposed to primordialist or perennialist) theorists of nationalism have defined nations in various ways, including being ‘imagined’ (Anderson 1991) or ‘invented’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Smith (2001: 19) defines the ‘modern nation’ as ‘a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members’. Gellner (1983: 138) theorises that cultural homogeneity, a literate and historically self-conscious population, and an anonymous, mobile citizenry whose allegiance is to the state are precursors to nationhood. Breuilly (1993) sees nationalism as a predominantly political movement designed to create or maintain a hold on nation-states.

Some of these rigid definitions are problematic for our discussion of nations and nationalisms in Africa, and would indeed preclude most African countries from the category of ‘nation.’ Grinker and Steiner (1997: xix) contend that Africa is ‘a subject that has been constructed, invented, and interpreted in writing’, and that ‘Africa’ is construed in a unitary category, although it comprised an amalgam of diverse ethno-linguistic groups spread across the spatial and temporal confines of the continent. Most of Africa’s fifty-three nation-states – the majority of which gained independence in the early 1960s – are but microcosms of this literary (and colonial) creation. However, while most African nation-states may be non-homogenous invented or imagined communities, they are nonetheless real in the minds of those who consider themselves Congolese, Ghanaian or Nigerian. For example, the Ghanaian scholar Michael Amoah (2007: 5) argues:

With time, ethnonational heterogeneity evolves into national homogeneity (and vice versa) if the conditions are right . . . heterogeneity is not an absolute obstacle to the attainment of a single national identity for the multinational postcolonial state . . . Hence modern Ghana is a nation and all citizens within the Ghanaian state share similar nationality irrespective of ethnonational heterogeneity.

Moreover, in light of the primordialist-modernist debate on the threshold of nationhood (‘when is the nation’) and whether or not non-European polities pass the temporal litmus text of nationhood, Amoah (2007: 7) asserts that, ‘there existed such nations in the Gold Coast as the Fanti and Ashanti prior to 1789 France, late 18th century England, and 1957 Modern Ghana’.

Thomas Hodgkin (1957) defined African nationalism as any movement which asserts the rights, aspirations and claims of any group that opposes European colonialism. In their quest to gain total independence from Europe and to consolidate the new nations, nationalist leaders and adherents of the négritude movement, such as Aimé Césaire (Martiniquan poet), Léopold Sédar Senghor (first President of Senegal) and Kwame Nkrumah, sought to highlight the common cultural and political history of Africa (Grinker and Steiner 1997: xxviii). The positive aspects of black history and culture were
articulated through their individual writings, speeches and political activities. However, not all the négritude advocates were fixated on highlighting the glorious African past as the location of contemporary African identity and mobilisation. Nkrumah, for example – in line with the political stance of Frantz Fanon (Grinker and Steiner 1997: 625) – realised that the realities of Africa at the time were more important than its past.

**Nkrumah, Janus and symbolic nationalism**

Nationalists may simultaneously pursue modernisation goals, while at the same time holding on to tradition. This forward–backward oscillation – termed Janus face of nationalism – has been analysed by scholars including Nairn (1997), Tricia Cusack (2000) and Igor Cusack (2005b). The backward-looking gaze of nationalists is meant to resurrect those national heroes, legends and events that give the nation a deep-rooted history, as well as to legitimise and authenticate particular regimes. However, as Rathbone (2000: 3) points out, the post-war climate in Africa did not necessarily embrace the notion of a glorious African past as a precursor for the founding of independent, progressive and modernising societies:

African nationalism after 1945 was undoubtedly revolutionary; colonial rule and chieftaincy were widely perceived to be unheavenly twins linked by mutual support, an unholy alliance, and they were thus jointly destined to enjoy the fate of all doomed ancien régimes. Moreover nationalist ideology, and its translation into policy throughout Africa, was very insistent about the imperatives of material modernization and economic transformation. Chiefs were widely regarded as barriers to the achievement of either of these goals; they stood for the past, for other-worldly values, and were opposed to both individualism and modernising corporatism.

Therefore, leading nationalists like Nkrumah – although having an acute awareness of the African past and its traditions – focused on the forward face of Janus. Rathbone (2000: Introduction) further reveals that Nkrumah abhorred traditional leaders – symbolised by native chiefs – who ruled the various ethnicities that made up the Gold Coast/Ghana. He saw them as relics of the past with outmoded customs and traditions, and colonial collaborators who encouraged tribalism and political balkanisation. This made them obstacles to national unity and modernisation, and Nkrumah sought to curtail or eliminate their powers. Nkrumah’s rejection of tradition – the backward gaze of Janus – is exemplified by his Convention People’s Party’s (CPP) motto, ‘Forward Ever, Backward Never’. Furthermore, Nkrumah was not from the dominant Akan (the Asantes, for example) or Ga (Accra-based) ethnic group, and did not have the option of pursuing an ‘ethnic’ or backward-looking nationalism; he had to opt for the ‘civic’ or forward-looking one. Consequently, instead of resurrecting a glorious past, he chose to propagate a new national narrative for the present and future, promoting himself as the nation’s sole Founding Father and focusing on modernisation.
and development through African Socialism. The enormous Volta River Project, the main outcome of which was the construction of the Akosombo Dam and Power Station between 1961 and 1965, exemplifies Nkrumah’s focus on forward-looking, State-led industrialisation and modernisation. According to the Volta River Authority (VRA 2007a), the Akosombo Hydroelectric Plant and Dam marked ‘an important step for industrialization and economic growth of the newly independent state of Ghana’. In a state ceremony, Kwame Nkrumah officially commissioned the Volta River Project in January 1966 (VRA 2007a), and a set of four postage stamps was issued on 22 January 1966 to commemorate its completion (see Figure 1a–b). The building of the Akosombo Dam resulted in the creation of the Volta Lake, the largest man-made lake in the world (VRA 2007b: 4). The Volta River Project also represents the single largest investment project in Ghana to date (at an estimated initial cost of £130 million), and the dam still provides hydroelectric power to Ghana and its neighbours, Togo and Benin (VRA 2007a; Ghana Home Page 2007).

Like most of the leaders of newly independent, multi-ethnic nation-states in Africa, Nkrumah faced the problem of popularising ‘Ghana’ to a populace of over fifty ethnic groups. In the case of Ghana’s similarly multi-ethnic neighbour, Côte d’Ivoire, Steiner (1997) explores the failed attempt by President Félix Houphouët-Boigny – the first President of the country – to use the Festimask (an outdoor festival showcasing ‘common’ Ivoirian tradi-
tional masks) as a unifying marker of Ivoirian-ness. In addition to masks, other ‘traditional’ symbols of national identity have been placed on Ivoirian banknotes and coins and that of other ‘francophone’ West African nations that use the Francs CFA common currency (Steiner 1997: 672, footnote 2).

However, the iconography of banknotes, coins and postage stamps issued during the Nkrumah period did not feature ‘traditional’ or ‘ethnic’ symbols, though there were a few. Rather, they represented modernity and development, and elements of progress such as industrialisation and the exploitation of Ghana’s natural resources. Moreover, unlike many other African states, there were no images of Founding Fathers or traditional rulers such as chiefs who, as previously stated, Nkrumah perceived as backward and aligned with the former colonial masters. Instead, he chose to mint his likeness on money and postage stamps as the unmasked personality around whom (he hoped) the entire nation would rally and identify.

Since every work of construction – including the nation-state – requires an architect(s), this article will now examine how the main architect of the Ghanaian nation-state – Kwame Nkrumah – sought to construct Ghana in his own image and likeness through one medium of mass propaganda that has been neglected in the literature namely, national money and its associated iconography.

National money

Mudd (2005) notes that ‘the act of coining or producing currency has been synonymous with an expression of independence since the earliest years of coinage in Ancient Greece’. Moreover, banknotes and coins are similar to postage stamps, which ‘may be seen as tiny transmitters of the dominant ideologies of the state destined for the imagined community of the nation’ (Cusack 2005a: 591). Since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1957, money has been crucial to the nation-building project in Ghana in several ways; it was vital to economic nationalism and development; money was essential to the consolidation of the ethnically and geographically diverse nation-state; the iconography on Ghanaian currency has been used to showcase who is in charge, and to articulate a particular version of history and national identity – as Eric Helleiner (1998, 2002: 2–3) would agree.

Eric Helleiner (1998: 1409) identifies five ways in which national currencies contribute to a sense of national identity or nation-building: (1) they provide a vehicle for nationalist imagery that constructs a sense of collective memory and tradition, (2) they act as a common medium of social communication by which communicative efficiency and communal thought may be achieved by the people, (3) they provide collective monetary experiences that may allow members of a nation to exhibit a sense of belonging to a national community with a common destiny, (4) money contributes to notions of popular sovereignty, and (5) money enhances the somewhat semi-religious nature of
nationalism. The second and third notions are in line with Benedict Anderson’s (1991) postulations that the rise of print capitalism and vernacular language (during the sixteenth century) facilitated the spread of the *imagined community* that is the nation-state.

As Gold Coast nationalists clamoured for political nationhood, they also insisted on attaining monetary independence; political and monetary freedom would be concurrent events. Ankomah (2006: 3) asserts that Nkrumah ‘knew that political independence without economic empowerment was valueless’. Political independence notwithstanding, Ghana had the option of remaining in the West African Currency Board (WACB) colonial common currency system. Since 1912, the WACB had managed the issue and circulation of the West African Pounds, Shillings and Pence currency for Britain’s five West African colonies up to, and in some cases beyond, independence (Caine 1948: 93–9; Carland 1990: 495–502; Hopkins 1973; Loynes 1962, 1974; Newlyn and Rowan 1954). However, the new government and its new central bank, the Bank of Ghana (BoG), opted to create its own national money – the Ghana Pounds, Shillings and Pence (BoG 2006). As the Minister of Finance of the Gold Coast had said in the Legislative Assembly on 5 April 1955, ‘the issue by this country of its own currency will be one of the more significant marks of its attainment of full nationhood’ (WACB Annual Report 1954–5: 10). Hence, just as the Union Jack was lowered in Accra and some colonial administrators headed back to London after the nation-state of Ghana was inaugurated on 6 March 1957, WABC agents picked up their coins and banknotes and handed over operations to BoG officials, which fully assumed national banking functions in 1958 (BoG 2006). The BoG retained the essential aspects of a central bank as practised by the WACB; it exercised a monopoly on currency issues and wielded powers to enact and enforce monetary laws. Therefore, the WACB left behind a legacy upon which the new monetary regime was built.

On 14 July 1958, the new Ghana Pound banknotes and coins were made available to banks and post offices nationwide (see Figures 2a and b, 3a and b). Ghana became a member of the IMF on 20 September 1957, and also secured membership in the Sterling Area (NA – DO 35/6194 July 1958, October 1958). The initial strength of the Ghana Pound was a boost to the morale of the young nation-state, given that it was equivalent to the Pound Sterling currency of its former coloniser, Great Britain, almost three times the value of the America Dollar, and worth its weight on the Gold Standard (IMF 1958; NA – DO 35/6194 24 October 1958; NA – DO 35/6194 7 November 1958; NA – DO 35/6194, PR 986/58 6 November 1958). With some £7–24 million of the new currency put into circulation in the first four months of the launch, the BoG reported that ‘the new currency has been well received and the public appear to have confidence in it’ (‘Ghana Bank Note Circulation’ 1958; NA – DO 35/6194 17 July 1958: 3). Despite this proclamation that currency decolonisation proceeded very smoothly and successfully, there were several challenges to the changeover. For example, there were technical and
syntactical inconsistencies and miscommunications concerning the new money, and political battles over the imagery that would appear on the coinage. These issues were tackled by a sustained public relations campaign to boost confidence in the national coins and banknotes.

**Civitatis Ghaniensis Conditor**

Unwin and Hewitt (2001: 1005) establish that, ‘banknotes are more than simply economic phenomena, and they provide an important expression of the cultural and political identities that have helped to shape the nations in the past ... [through] portraits of key historic personalities that dominate the imagery’. In the case of Ghana’s coins in the early independence period, portraits of these ‘key historic personalities’ were replaced by that of a then living ‘Founding Father’, in the personage of Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah.

As part of his nation-building, nationalisation and Africanisation policies, Kwame Nkrumah’s image appeared on Ghana’s national coinage, commemorative coins and postage stamps (see Figures 3a–d and 1d). The Latin phrase ‘Civitatis Ghaniensis Conditor’ – Founder of the State of Ghana – was also inscribed above his image (NA – DO 35/6194 August 1958). Nkrumah stepped onto the world stage during the era when the ‘cult of leadership’ was a part of national identity, as evidenced by men such as Lenin and Mao who moulded nations through their own hegemonic nationalisms. As Asiedu-

![Image](image_url)


Acquah (2006) argues, the CCP’s press machinery engaged in the adulation, deification and promotion of the ‘personality cult’ of Kwame Nkrumah as the only legitimate leader of Ghanaian and African liberation, at the expense of his domestic rivals. This is evident from the iconography of banknotes, coins and postage stamps produced during the Nkrumah era, which did not feature any other Ghanaian political leader besides Nkrumah himself. Hence, the placement of Kwame Nkrumah’s image on these state-issued media signaled the beginning of his rise to messianic dominance of the political landscape.

Benjamin (1968: 239–40) maintains that not all images (such as artwork on banknotes) are meant to be consciously looked at, but only to be seen. However, as Mwangi (2002: 31–2) argues, the illustrations on paper money are both meant to be seen (passively) and looked at (deliberately), since, for example, an ordinary person should be able consciously to observe money to ascertain its authenticity. The same holds true for coins; technical problems with the new Ghanaian coinage that threatened to undermine their authenticity validate Mwangi’s observations. The following Ghana Government press communiqué illustrates the point:

In certain parts of the country – particularly in Kumasi and Tamale – there is apparently doubt as to the genuineness of some of the new Ghana two-shilling pieces, the public having found that, on a number of these coins, the effigy of Dr. Nkrumah is not as clear-cut as on others. The Prime Minister’s hair, for example, does not show clearly on these particular coins, with the result that the head appears too smooth . . . These smooth-headed coins are perfectly genuine and should be accepted if, in all other respects, they are the same as the coins on which the hair shows clearly (NA – DO 35/6194, PR 719/587 August 1958).

Despite the BoG’s explanations that the ‘smooth-headed’ coins were quite simply a result of worn out dies, there were reasons for concern about any doubt in their ‘genuineness’, especially in the context of cities such as Kumasi in the Ashanti Region and Tamale in the Northern Region that had divergent geo-political, economic and cultural interests. These inconsistencies challenged the smooth transition from colony to nation-state, and may have been translated into doubt about the ‘genuineness’ of the Nkrumah regime itself in Accra (ibid.). There were also syntactical misunderstandings about the wording on the new currency that threw the government into yet another public relations battle. The BoG expressed concerns that the public was literally interpreting the annotation on the new banknotes, which stated that they could be used ‘for the payment of any amount’. On 25 July 1958, the Bank issued this short press release:

There is still some confusion in the public mind regarding the wording on the new Ghana bank-notes which reads: ‘This note is issued on statutory authority and is legal tender in Ghana for the payment of any amount.’ What this wording means is merely that there is no limit to the amount that may be legally paid in the form of bank-notes. Each individual note, of course, is value only for the amount printed on the face of it. A ten-shilling note is worth ten shillings. A pound note is worth one pound. And a five-pound note is worth five pounds (NA – DO 35/6194, PR 674/58 25 July 1958, emphasis in original).
The Queen or not the Queen? That was the central question and the controversy that surrounded the decision by the Nkrumah government to put the image of Ghana’s first Prime Minister on the coinage and postage stamps of the new state, instead of that of Queen Elizabeth II. Nkrumah’s deviation from the currency norm of minting the coinage of Commonwealth countries with the English Queen’s effigy created contention in London and Accra. Top-ranking officials from the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), Crown Agents, Royal Mint, Bank of England and the British High Commissioner in Accra weighed in on the issue. For example, in 1957 correspondence written by J. Chadwick addressed to G. S. Whitehead (both of the CRO) expressed concern about the ‘problem’ of Ghana omitting the Queen’s image from its national currency after independence. ‘The first step is, I think, to go back to the Mint and ask for definite assurances that all coins issued by non-Republican Commonwealth Members bear the Queen’s effigy. If they do not, particular cases should be quoted’ (NA – DO 35/6194 27 February 1957). Whitehead’s response to Chadwick’s letter confirmed that it was common practice at the Royal Mint that the Queen’s effigy appears on all the coins of non-Republican members of the British Commonwealth, except in the case of perforated coins, in which case only the Queen’s name is placed on the coin (NA – DO 35/6194 5 March 1957). Chadwick (NA – DO 35/6194 February 1957) also instructed Whitehead that:

The second step would be to draft a letter to the keeper of the Mint, and clear it first with the Colonial Office. The line would presumably be that we fully support the Mint view that Ghana should adhere to Commonwealth practice; that we hope that their representative on his visit will take this line strongly, quoting other Commonwealth precedents as necessary . . . The final step would then be a letter to Mr Maclennan enclosing copies of all the correspondence, and asking him to do what he can to support the Mint representative, and if need be, to make representations himself at a high level with a view to keeping the Ghana Government on the right lines.

Therefore, Ghana was seen to be behaving as a renegade state by deviating from the Commonwealth currency practice and the British Government wished Ghana to be put back ‘on the right lines.’ However, while the letter expressed disapproval and annoyance that Nkrumah chose not to use the British Monarch’s image on Ghana’s national currency, the official recognised his sovereign right to do so. ‘We must at the same time bear in mind that Ghana will be master in her own house in this respect, and has already created one undesirable precedent in the shape of an Independence stamp bearing not the Queen’s but the Prime Minister’s effigy’ (ibid).

Going against the GAS

The Ga Aborigines Society (GAS) – an organisation that represented the interests of the Ga ethnic group found mainly in Accra – also objected
vociferously against the placement of Nkrumah’s likeness on the national coinage – even sending letters to various interested parties within and outside of Ghana to complain about the issue. The tone of one such letter, which was sent to the British Prime Minister in Whitehall, portrayed Nkrumah as an unreasonable, ungrateful and deceptive political opportunist who manipulated historical antecedents to fit his political agendas (NA – DO 35/6194 28 June 1957). The GAS lambasted the Ghanaian Prime Minister and his Cabinet for their inconsistent rhetoric about the readiness of Gold Coasters for independence and lamented Kwame’s patronising behaviour toward the Ghanaian masses. Concerned about Nkrumah’s increasing tendency towards totalitarianism, the GAS also accused him of betraying his fellow patriots and of egotism, arrogance and political misrepresentation. They blasted the Nkrumah government for taking all the political credit for gaining independence and especially for having historical amnesia about the role of the Ga masses and other players in securing political freedom for Ghana.

The members and officers of the GAS declared that they ‘seriously disagree that the ‘head’ of Dr Kwame Nkrumah should be adopted on the new Ghana coinage’ (ibid.). They cited the contradictions in Nkrumah’s (1957: 12) rationale – as expressed in the London press – that his image on the national currency was warranted because the majority of the population in Ghana could not read or write, and therefore needed symbols as evidence of their independence. Arguing that the profound administrative changes from a colonial to a national government were sufficient proof of independence from British rule, the GAS wrote that Nkrumah’s argument was ‘illogical’ and that Ghana’s ‘illiteracy does not in the least purport gross backwardness and want to civilisation . . . we are not in as low an estate as to be goaded only by symbolic diagrams’ (NA – DO 35/6194 28 June 1957). The GAS continued to articulate its disagreements with Nkrumah by stating that ‘an assertion as misrepresenting and unbecoming as that so obviously betrays a gross overweening spirit, which is apt to taint our precious Democracy with some corruptive hues of totalitarianism’ (ibid.). Nkrumah’s initial justification for the Gold Coast gaining independence – based on the premise that it was ready for self-governance now – was also called into question. ‘Does the Prime Minister merely mean to prove himself inconsistent before the Imperialists by saying the opposite of what he said at the time he was fighting for the front, namely that his Country was fit to govern itself?’ (ibid.).

Moreover, they maintained that Nkrumah was not the sole patriot that fought for independence and therefore was not the only one who merited the honour of being commemorated on the national coinage. Were it not for the limiting prevalence of historical circumstances and treaties such as The Bond of 1844 that was still in effect after the Second World War – The Ga Aborigines Society argued – the ‘great and noble feats achieved by worthy [Ga] patriots throughout the years . . . could long have rescued our Country from the fetters of Colonialism’ (ibid.). This implied by default that Nkrumah’s rise to the status of Head of State (contentiously symbolised by his head
on the national coinage) was a matter of historical luck, a mistake at best, or a result of the unrecognised assistance of the Ga and other peoples. In the latter respect, the Ga Aborigines Society agreed ‘that the Self-Government status of the Gold Coast has been achieved by and through a team work’ (ibid.). Nonetheless, the organisation argued that the Gas were the most active anti-colonial voice after the expiration of the Bond treaty in 1944, supported by other entities such as the Movement For Colonial Freedom, to lobby for and achieve the political freedom of the Gold Coast through ‘universal demonstrations of true patriotism’ (ibid.). They also impressed upon the British Prime Minister that it was the Ga masses that had saved Kwame Nkrumah from being deported during his anti-colonial campaigns – a fact, which they insisted, was overshadowed by Nkrumah’s headiness (ibid.). In the end, the GAS argued for the placement of a neutral image on the new Ghanaian coinage, rejecting the immortalisation of both the British Queen and the Ghanaian Prime Minister on the national money, and maintaining a political stance that was as much anti-colonial as it was counter to a despotic domestic government:

We are therefore vehemently protesting against the adoption of Dr Kwame Nkrumah’s ‘head’ to appear on our new Ghana coinage. While we are unanimously and earnestly preferring the Ghana Emblem and Coat of Arms to the ‘head’ of the Queen as being the Head of the State, Kwame Nkrumah’s ‘head’ should not at all come into the picture for consideration. Away with that!!! Away with that!!!! (ibid.).

Lobbying London

Three months after independence, Kwame Nkrumah became the first African premier to attend a Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference, held in Great Britain. In a self-authored article titled, ‘Why The Queen’s Head is Coming Off Our Coins’, which he wrote for the Daily Sketch, Nkrumah sought to set the record straight regarding why he (1) replaced the Queen’s image on Ghana’s currency with his own; (2) printed national postage stamps bearing his photograph; (3) ordered a twenty-foot statue of himself to be erected in Accra; (4) moved into the Castle of Accra which was once the abode of the Queen’s representative; and (5) organised ‘youth camps’ that resembled Nazi-like labour camps (Nkrumah 1957: 12). According to the article, his detractors lamented these self-aggrandising actions and queried whether or not Nkrumah was becoming a ‘budding dictator’ or a ‘pocket dictator’ who was ‘power-drunk with success’, and proclaimed him guilty of ‘sedition against the Queen’, among other charges. In defence of these allegations, Nkrumah (1957: 12) wrote:

Well, let me say at once that my Cabinet and my party have done all these things. And we are not ashamed of it. But if people think that these are the first signs that we are leading Ghana, our country, out of the Commonwealth and that they are going to
make me dictator, THEN THEY ARE WRONG. I want the Queen and the people of Britain to know WHY we are doing these things. My Cabinet have decided, with my agreement, to put my head on the coinage, because many of my people cannot read or write. They’ve got to be shown that they are now really independent. And they can only be shown by signs. When they buy stamps they will see my picture – an African like themselves – and they will say ‘Aiee . . . look here is our leader on the stamps, we are truly a free people’ (emphasis in original article).

The Prime Minister’s Secretary, Kofi Baako, also asserted that the Cabinet agreed to the minting of Nkrumah’s image on the national coinage to pay him homage and in ‘commemoration of his politically salvative [sic] achievement’ (NA – DO 35/6194 28 June 1957), a notion that was seen as ‘puerile and unreasonable’ by the Ga Aborigines Society (ibid.).

As to the status of his twenty-foot monument that would grace the landscape of the capital, Nkrumah insisted that it was being constructed ‘as a sign. 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: 12). Furthermore, Nkrumah insisted that he had moved into the Castle of Accra because, ‘to my people it is the seat of government. The Governors have lived there for centuries. Now it is logical that their Prime Minister should live there’ (Nkrumah 1957: 12). In defence of his ‘fascist, nazi’ youth camps, Nkrumah maintained that they were ‘a mild form of National Service’ necessary to fill the huge unemployment gap and contribute to the development needs of the country (Nkrumah 1957: 12).

**Coinage, commemorations and coups**

As Cusack (2005a: 593) writes of commemorative or ‘historical’ stamps, commemorative coins also ‘reflect the events, peoples and places that impinge on a nation’s consciousness . . . [and are] a visual remembrance of a particular history of a country’. Kwame Nkrumah did not limit the minting of his effigy just to legal tender currency and stamps. As part of the Republic Day celebrations, the Government ordered 15,000 pieces of 22 carat gold coins from the Royal Mint in London (see Figure 3d). These commemorative coins featured on the obverse side a new effigy of Nkrumah inscribed with the words ‘Kwame Nkrumah First President of Ghana’. The reverse side featured the inscriptions ‘Republic Day, July 1, 1960’ as well as Nkrumah’s personal standard (see ‘Gold for Ghana’ 1960; ‘Gold Piece For Ghana’ 1960).

In 1965, a year before the coup d’etat against Ghana’s first Prime Minister, the Ghana Pound gave way to a new national money – the Cedi and Pesewa currency – imprinted with Nkrumah’s image (see Figures 2c and d and 3c). On 24 February 1966, Kwame Nkrumah was ousted by a military and police coup while he was abroad (Ghana Armed Forces Museum 2006). During the siege, Dr Nkrumah’s more-than-life-size statue (Figure 4) was viciously attacked and defaced by an angry mob (National Museum of Ghana 2006). However, the desecration of Nkrumah’s statue would not be the only symbolic attack on

his leadership. On 17 February 1967 – one year after the CPP government was overthrown – the military regime issued the New Cedi and Pesewa (Nₕ) currency series, noticeably without the former President’s image, to replace the 1965 Cedi notes and coins (BoG 2006). In launching the new money, Colonel A. A. Afrifa, then Commanding Officer of the Second Battalion of the Ghana Army, and National Liberation Council member in charge of Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs, announced to a crowd at the BoG ‘that the new currency was being introduced to do away with the need to have any effigy on the country’s currency, particularly that of a tyrant whom Ghanaians want to forget once and for all’ (Komen-Sapanin 1967: 28). After Afrifa’s inauguration of the new currency to replace ‘the old cedis and coins on which the despotic ex-President Nkrumah’s effigy appears’, however, certain trading interests, especially in Accra, initially refused to honor the trade-ins due to various concerns, including massive counterfeiting of the old C50 and C100 notes (Tetteh 1967: 1, 3; see also Komen-Sapanin 1967: 28). After that time, however, the value of the national Cedi currency began a downward spiral from which it has only recently recovered.

The new money order

Nkrumah’s image did not appear on Ghanaian money for thirty-five years, since the ‘currency coup’ of 1967 in which his image was symbolically ‘ousted’

Figure 4. Original monument of Dr Kwame Nkrumah, National Museum. Accra.
from the national money. During this period, the iconography of the national currency has been characterised by ‘neutral’, i.e. ‘a-historical’ and ‘a-political’ images such as national projects (the Akosombo Dam, cocoa farming, timber extraction, etc.), and cultural images portraying the daily lives of ordinary Ghanaians. The political landscape of Ghana since Nkrumah, characterised by successive military coups and counter-coups in the 1960s and 1970s, the double decade premiership of Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, and the economic roller-coaster of this era, are contributing factors to the iconographic absence of the Osagyefo from the Cedi. During this three-plus decade period, Nkrumah’s legacy underwent a continuous process of re-evaluation and reconsideration, and moved from ‘that of a tyrant whom Ghanaians want to forget once and for all’ (Komen-Sapanin 1967: 28) and a ‘despotic ex-President’ (Tetteh 1967: 1, 3) to one of a misunderstood, nationalist visionary who was just ahead of his time, according to some Ghanaians (Dwamena 2006).

In the 2000s, Ghana became relatively calm politically and stable economically under the rule of current President John Agyekum Kufuor. In 2002, Nkrumah reappeared on the front of what was then Ghana’s second highest currency denomination, the 10,000 Cedi note, the theme of which was ‘Nationhood’. However, this time he did not appear as the sole Founding Father of the nation; on the contrary, his image was flanked by five other patriots (some of whom were Nkrumah’s political rivals) that led Ghana to independence from Great Britain in 1957 (see Figure 2e). Collectively referred to as The Big Six, they are Kwame Nkrumah (1909–72); Emmanuel Odarkwei Obetsebi-Lamptey (1902–63); William Ofori Atta (1910–88); Edward Akufo-Addo (1906–79); Ebenezer Ako-Adjei (1916–2002); and Joseph Boakye Danquah (1895–1965) (BoG 2002: 2). This single image of The Big Six is a constructed composite picture taken from individual photographs of each of the men in single file (Ayensu 2007: 224). Furthermore, the formerly highest denomination banknote – the 20,000 Cedi bill (see Figure 2f) – also carried an image of one of Ghana’s noted nation-builders, though he is not counted as a member of The Big Six. This banknote underscores the importance of national money as a mass media tool used to broadcast history and highlight those historical personalities who have contributed to nation-building and national identity. The 20,000 Cedi banknote – the theme of which was ‘Culture’ – was released in 2002 by the Kufuor government. Its obverse side features a portrait of the internationally acclaimed artist Dr Ephraim Amu (1899–1995), who ‘recognized the power of music as an instrument of Nation building and his most famous work ‘yen ara Asase Ni’ [God Bless our Homeland Ghana] was, between 1948 [time of the Accra Riots] and 1957, Ghana’s unofficial National Anthem’ (BoG 2002: 3).

In July 2007 the Ghanaian currency was ‘re-denominated’; prior to July, one US dollar was equal to almost 10,000 Cedis. After this date, however, one New Ghana Cedi (GH₵1 – see Figure 2g) was made equivalent to ₵10,000 of the old Cedis. Consequently, the re-denomination made the new currency worth a little more than the US dollar and currently the highest-valued
national currency in Africa (at least on paper; see Acquah 2007: 1–7; Ayensu 2007: 224–5; Kufuor 2007). The new Ghana Cedis ‘constitute a new family of notes and coins’ (Acquah 2007: 3) whose iconography ‘combines artistry with wide-ranging tributes to the founders and features of Ghana’s modern nationhood’ (Ayensu 2007: 224). The obverse side of the banknotes features an image of The Big Six and the Independence Arch, a symbol of Ghana’s sovereignty. The reverse sides of the banknotes ‘depict symbolic landmarks of Ghana’s progress’ (Ayensu 2007: 225), including prominent national monuments and concepts: The Akosombo Dam (GHc1, symbolising socio-economic development); the University of Ghana (GHc5, symbolising the role of education in national progress); the Headquarters of the Bank of Ghana (GHc10, acknowledging the BoG’s guardianship of the financial system); the Supreme Court Building (GHc20, representing the rule of law); and the Christianborg Caste (signifying the seat of Government and ‘good governance’ on the GHc50 note, see Figure 2h). Moreover, the notes have been embedded with some historical designs and security features, such as a watermark of Tetteh Quashie (and a cocoa pod) who is credited with bringing the first cocoa seeds to Ghana from Fernando Po in 1879 (Acquah 2007: 3–6; Ayensu 2007: 224–7).

With the Ghana Coat of Arms on their obverse sides, the Pesewa ‘coins also pick up on the imagery of [Ghana’s] national identity . . . hinting at natural wealth, African Freedom, Commonwealth links . . . [and] Ghana’s heritage and traditions’ (Ayensu 2007: 225). The iconography of the reverse sides depicts the scales of justice (1 Cedi coin), a market woman (50 Pesewas), a cocoa pod (20 Pesewas), a book (10 Pesewas), a traditional hornblower (5 Pesewas) and the Adomi Bridge (1 Pesewa) (Acquah 2007: 3–6; Ayensu 2007: 224–7).

The inclusion of Kwame Nkrumah’s icon on issues of Ghanaian banknotes since 2002 may indicate that history and time have reconciled the perceptions about Nkrumah’s legacy in Ghana as it relates to many issues, especially nation-building and nationalism. It may also represent an attempt by the current Kufuor government at national reconciliation to heal the political wounds of history as the nation approached the fifty-year mark. This rewriting or re-minting of history, rather, as reflected in the iconography of the 10,000 Cedis bill and the new Ghana Cedi banknotes and Pesewa coins, takes into consideration the other history-makers and contributors to the independence cause and subsequent nation-building processes. The commemoration of Ghana’s birth as a sovereign country and a member of the family of nation-states on 6 March 1957 was duly celebrated with much fanfare and a US$20,000,000 budget during the Ghana@50 celebrations in 2007 (Ghana Home Page 2006).

Conclusion

From independence in 1957 to the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah in 1966, money became an essential tool used to articulate symbolic/semiotic nation-
alism and to bolster national identity in a territory that was geopolitically, economically and ethnically diverse. In this article, it was argued that the Africanisation of currency formed an integral part of Kwame Nkrumah’s nationalisation policies. The premier sought to establish Ghana’s status as an independent nation-state by breaking away from the West African Currency Board (WACB) colonial common currency system and establishing national currencies – the Ghana Pound, Shillings and Pence in 1958 and the Cedi and Pesewa currency in 1965.

After exiting the WACB, Kwame Nkrumah caused controversy in Britain by substituting his image on the new Ghanaian banknotes, coins and postage stamps for that of Elizabeth II. Some British officials felt strongly that Ghana – still a Dominion in the British system between 1957 and 1960 – was deviating from the norm of maintaining the image of the British Monarch on the currency of Commonwealth member states. On the other hand, Nkrumah argued that putting his likeness on money was the only way to convince his people that they were truly free and independent, since the majority were illiterate. Moreover, unlike the two-faced Roman god Janus, Nkrumah’s image on Ghanaian coins faced only one direction – forward. Ironically, though, his image on the coins resembled that of a Roman Emperor, especially since it was circumvented by the Latin title – *Civitatis Ghaniensis Conditor*.

Embellished with nationalistic symbols, the iconographic elements of Ghanaian money and postage stamps during this period also reflected the political ideology of Nkrumah, with an emphasis on nation-building, economic nationalism, and pan-Africanism. These icons of independence included Independence Square (‘Black Star Square’), Parliament House, the Bank of Ghana, and national development schemes such as logging, cargo shipping, and the harvesting of cocoa. However, this monetary regime now managed by the Bank of Ghana faced numerous challenges. In the provinces, especially among illiterates, technical problems with the minting of coins and public misunderstandings of statutory wordings on banknotes initially caused confusion and doubt in the new money. As a result, the Bank of Ghana was constantly engaged in damage control through a sustained public relations campaign to bolster confidence in the national currency.

Furthermore, the portrayal of Kwame Nkrumah as the face of the Ghanaian Revolution alienated other stakeholders who were co-contributors to the independence cause and co-builders of the new nation-state. Traditional leaders such as the *Ga Aborigines Society* (GAS) were vehemently opposed to Nkrumah’s portrait being on the national coinage; they felt that this action necessarily negated their role in the attainment of nationhood. However, as the Nkrumah government advanced into a one-party state in 1964, these dissenting voices found less and less space to articulate their political opposition to the *Osagyefo*. Nonetheless, the growing dissatisfaction with the socio-economic and political realities of the Nkrumah regime partially contributed to the military coup that removed him from power on 24 February 1966. During the coup, Nkrumah’s statue that stood in front of
Parliament House in Accra was demolished by a street mob and his image was subsequently removed from the currency – the name of which was changed to the New Cedi to signal the new political order.

Subsequently, Kwame Nkrumah’s historical legacy has undergone a process of re-interpretation, as evidenced by several symbols of nationhood. His monument that was demolished during the coup was recovered by the National Museum of Ghana in 1975 and unveiled there on 3 March 1977, where it is currently on display (albeit with the arms missing, see Figure 4). Moreover, after a thirty-five-year absence, Nkrumah’s image reappeared on Ghanaian money – the 10,000 Cedi banknote – in 2002, as well as on the re-denominated Cedi (the Ghana Cedi) in 2007. However, this time Nkrumah was not featured as the sole Founding Father of the nation, but as one of the Big Six, who are recognised in the country’s historical narrative as the Founding Fathers of the Ghanaian nation-state.

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Notes

1 For example, the theme of the 2006 Historical Society of Ghana Conference was, ‘Preserving and Recording Ghana’s Past: Fifty Years of Ghana’s Independence’.

2 The Twi-language title ‘Osagyefo’ (the Redeemer) was bestowed upon Nkrumah by his supporters for leading the Gold Coast to independence from Britain.

3 For example, The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) convened an international conference in July 2007 titled, ‘Ghana@50 – In search of Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah – Charting New Frontiers of Knowledge and Leadership for Africa in the New Millennium’.

4 Many of these public symbols of nationhood – incidentally or coincidentally – begin with the letter ‘M’ and are interrelated in nature and scope. They include Money, Monuments, Memorials (of Martyrs), Museums, the Media, Music, Merrymaking, Memory, and the Man on the spot. How do these Ms of Nationhood contribute to nation-building in general? Money is circulated to millions of people at a time; busloads of school children and other ‘national’ groups pay regular visits to national Museums where government-trained guides feed them a particular national narrative; Monuments dot key intersections in the center of townships, tops of hills, and major road intersections in big cities for countless numbers of pedestrians and motorists to glance at or observe; Merrymaking activities such as official
ceremonies, independence days, festivals and durbars entice people to watch spectacles that are not only meant to amuse and generate money, but to commemorate the deeds of national heroes and mark important historical antecedents. The state Media also plays a major role in popularising these national events. By analysing these ‘Ms’ of nationhood we can reconstruct important historical events and highlight the centrality of historical figures such as Kwame Nkrumah – the Man on the spot – to the nation-building project of particular nation-states.

5 The statue of Kwame Nkrumah at his mausoleum in Accra is postured as a forward-facing founding father, assuming the ‘Forward Ever, Backward Never’ position.

6 The iconographic promotion of Nkrumah’s numerous nation-building initiatives such as the Volta River Dam project forms part of my current research on the politics of postage stamps in Ghana.

7 An exception to this norm was Ceylon (Sri Lanka). The Royal mint had produced two commemorative coin sets for Ceylon to celebrate the Buddhist anniversary, none of which featured an image of the Queen. See NA – DO 35/6194. 05 March 1957. Response from G. S. Whitehead to J. Chadwick.

8 Compare Figures 1c and d.

9 Copies of the letter were also sent to the Speaker of the Ghana National Assembly, the Leader of the Opposition, the Ga State Council, the Joint Provisional Council, as well as the London and Ghana press.

10 The Bond of 1844 was a treaty of political alliance between the British and a confederation of Fante states to protect the latter against Asante aggression. It was later extended to include other coastal and inland polities, and effectively signaled the beginnings of formal British colonialism in the Gold Coast.

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Iconography of Ghanaian money


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