Humaniola Humanities and Language
International Journal of Linguistics, Humanities, and Education
Volume 3 Issue 2, June 2026
E-ISSN 3031-5670

The 'Fugu-Blouse' Controversy: Colonial Perceptions and Sartorial Decolonisation in Ghana-Zambia Relations

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Fugu; Smock; Sartorial decolonization; National dress identity; Dress Politics.

Article history:
Received 10 April 2026
Revised 1 June 2026
Accepted 14 June 2026
Available online
30 June 2026

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.32734/s3r51d05

ABSTRACT

Dress politics remains a crucial arena where colonial legacies, national identity, and diplomatic representation intersect. Yet how indigenous Ghanaian presidential attire is perceived within intra-African encounters is underexplored. This qualitative case study examines the February 2026 Ghana–Zambia 'fugu-blouse' controversy, in which Zambian social media users mislabelled President John Dramani Mahama's indigenous Ghanaian smock a 'blouse.' The resulting Ghanaian rebuttals and the subsequent Fugu Wednesday policy constitute a decolonial intervention. An integrated thematic and critical discourse analysis of 30 heterogeneous, purposively sampled data sources reveals that, among Zambian comments, misrecognition exemplifies enduring colonial epistemologies in intra-African encounters. The Ghanaian counter-discourses, however, fostered awareness, generated apologies from some Zambians, and reframed the smock as a symbol of nationalism, historical resistance, and cultural pride. The Fugu Wednesday policy emerged as a strategic state-led intervention for sartorial decolonisation and promotion of indigenous dress. Nevertheless, critical policy analysis reveals significant structural lapses. The policy directive lacks a dedicated funding strategy, implementation guidelines, monitoring mechanisms, and enforcement provisions, making compliance largely voluntary and thereby risking tokenism. Surging demand has also exposed supply constraints among smock weavers, yet the policy provides no explicit capacity-building support. The study concludes that the Zambian–Ghanaian 'fugu–blouse' controversy and the Fugu Wednesday policy response have collectively resignified the Ghanaian fugu as a national dress identity. This study advances postcolonial literature by identifying intra-African sartorial misrecognition as a neglected dimension of coloniality, showing how colonial logics shape African perceptions and why cultural literacy is essential for Pan-Africanism.

How to cite:
Navei, N. (2026). The 'Fugu-blouse' controversy: Colonial perceptions and sartorial decolonisation in Ghana-Zambia relations. *Humanities & Language: International Journal of Linguistics, Humanities, and Education*, *3*(2), 090-117.

1. Introduction

Dress is a critical communicative medium, encoding identity, values, and histories across cultures globally. A plethora of scholarship affirms that dress, costume, dress fashion, and dress regalia function as communicative tools through which individuals and collectives articulate personality, religious affiliation, social status, political diplomacy, and national identity (Allman, 2004; Essel et al., 2021; Howard et al., 2012;

Navei & Donkoh, 2022; Navei, 2024a; Warritay, 2017). In West Africa, traditional attire serves as a living archive of collective memory (Danso et al., 2019; Warritay, 2017). The Ghanaian *fugu* (smock), originating in northern Ghana (Essel & Amissah, 2015; Navei, 2024a), has transcended its ethnic roots to become a unifying symbol of national identity (Essel & Amissah, 2015). Its nationalistic valence derives from Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, who wore the smock at the 1957 independence declaration, symbolically rupturing colonial dress codes and advancing sartorial decolonisation (Botwe-Asamoah, 2005; Essel & Amissah, 2015).

Subsequent presidents have intermittently donned indigenous attire as acts of nationalist expression (Essel, 2019), yet Western suits remain the default in formal dress politics, sustaining colonial legacies (Essel, Navei, & deGraft-Yankson, 2021; Essel, Navei, & Donkoh, 2023). Current calls to decolonise political dress codes intersect with cultural identity and the revitalisation of the textile industry (Essel et al., 2023; Essel et al., 2021; Navei & Donkoh, 2022).

Scholarship on Ghanaian political dress culture has concentrated primarily on inaugural presidential attire, demonstrating how clothing communicates ideology and constructs national identity (Essel, 2019; Essel, Navei & deGraft-Yankson, 2021; Horsu et al., 2025). However, presidential dress choices at international ceremonial events and their potential diplomatic implications remain underexplored. This scholarly dearth tends to limit understanding of how indigenous Ghanaian dress, when worn by presidents abroad, might be perceived in cross-cultural contexts.

A recent case crystallises this gap. On 4 February 2026, during Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama's bilateral visit to Zambia, his *fugu* was misrecognised as a "blouse," sparking widespread Ghanaian outrage (BBC News, 2026a; GhanaWeb, 2026; GBC, 2026; Moro, 2026) and prompting the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Creative Arts to institute "*Fugu* Wednesday" as a decolonial and promotional intervention (Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Creative Arts, 2026; BBC News, 2026b). This raises two critical questions: 1) How does sartorial misrecognition operate in intra-African settings? 2) How does state policy mobilise dress for decolonial ends?

Viewed as a case of identity politics enacted through dress, the controversy allows this study to address the aforementioned questions. It interrogates whether the misrecognition by Zambian social media users exemplifies enduring colonial epistemologies within intra-African encounters and explores how Ghanaian reactions, together with the *Fugu* Wednesday policy directive, constitute a counter-discourse of sartorial decolonisation. In so doing, the analysis shifts Ghanaian scholarly focus from presidential inaugural dress symbolism to international sartorial diplomacy, theorising intra-African misrecognition as a neglected dimension of sartorial decolonisation.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in postcolonial theory, which emerged from anticolonial struggles and was formalised through Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Said demonstrated how Western epistemologies constructed the "Orient" as an inferior and exoticised "other," legitimising imperial domination. Building on Said, Bhabha (1994) advanced concepts of hybridity and mimicry, interrogating ambivalence in colonial and postcolonial identities. Fanon (1963) explained how the denigration of indigenous cultural forms damages collective self-recognition.

This study interprets the misnaming of the Ghanaian indigenous dress (the fugu) as a "blouse" by Zambian social media users as an extension of Said's (1978) notion of Orientalist othering, demonstrating that such logics operate intra-continentally, not only between the West and the non-West but also among African societies where colonial hierarchies of value persist. Within this intra-African context, an indigenous dress identity (fugu) is glossed over by a colonial judgment as a "blouse." Bhabha's notion of mimicry is particularly relevant, where the misrecognition reflects persistent colonial hierarchies of dress and taste. Decolonial thought further posits that coloniality persists beyond formal independence and must be actively resisted by recovering indigenous epistemologies (Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

The relevance of postcolonial theory to this study lies in its capacity to analyse how dress, policy, and popular discourse function as sites of cultural resistance and identity reclamation. By focusing on an intra-African (Zambia-Ghana) encounter, this study extends postcolonial critique beyond the coloniser–colonised dichotomy (Said, 1978), revealing how colonial logics mediate African-to-African perceptions, a phenomenon the study terms "*intra-African epistemic fragmentation*." This concept is defined as the process by which colonial logics mediate African-to-African perceptions - here, sartorial misrecognition - even in an intra-African encounter (Zambia-Ghana) beyond the coloniser–colonised dichotomy, contrasting with Said's focus on East-West Orientalist dynamics. Postcolonial theory, therefore, provides an indispensable lens for understanding how the Ghanaian *fugu* is mobilised as a sartorial decolonial symbol of national dress identity.

2.2 The Ghanaian Smock

The smock is an indigenous dress of the people of northern Ghana. While some traditions attribute the smock's origin to Burkina Faso's Mossi or Nigerian Hausa/Nupe influences (Asinyo, Howard & Seidu, 2021; Essel & Amissah, 2015; Fusheini & Adu-Agyem, 2019), a divergent perspective holds it as indigenous to northern Ghana without external provenance (Kuupole, Dzramedo & Adjei, 2022; Navei, 2024b). Despite historiographical variation, there is unequivocal consensus that the smock is of northern Ghanaian origin (Essel & Amissah, 2015; Fusheini & Adu-Agyem, 2019; Navei, 2021a, 2023, 2024a). Reflecting the ethnic and linguistic diversity of its northern heartland, the smock bears multiple local names: *fugu* in Mossi (Ahiabor, 2013), batakari in Hausa (Essel & Amissah, 2015), bim'maŋli, a Dagomba term (Fusheini & Adu-Agyem, 2019), dansika or banaa in Gurenɛ (Atampugre, 2018), Sisaala gerɔ in Sisaala (Navei, 2021a), and Lowɛgya in Dagaare (Kuupole et al., 2022).

The smock fabric is woven from cotton yarns that were historically hand-spun but are now predominantly factory-produced (Asinyo et al., 2021; Essel & Amissah, 2015). Traditionally, smock garments were hand-sewn using locally made needles (Essel & Amissah, 2015; Fusheini & Adu-Agyem, 2019), although machine sewing has become increasingly prevalent in contemporary production (Azuah et al., 2024). The smock exists in a wide range of forms, fulfilling diverse sociocultural functions as royal attire, protective war regalia, and everyday casual wear, while also exhibiting varied aesthetic qualities in terms of shape, length, colour, and volume, as illustrated in Figure 1 (A–E). Its material characteristics, particularly its colour, weight, and coarse texture, embody an indigenous aesthetic that conveys both authenticity and durability (Fusheini et al., 2019; Agaasa, Nangpaak, Kokonu, & Adongo, 2018).

A. Sleeveless Smock (Essel & Amissah, 2015)

B. Long-Sleeve Smock (Fusheini et al., 2019).

C. Large Dagomba Royal Smock (Fusheini et al., 2019)

D. Mini Sisaala Royal Smock Outfit with a Bulky Extended Crotch (Navei, 2023).

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E. Sisaala warriors in ritually dyed war smocks with leather-cased charms appliquéd for protection from gunshots and to repel spiritual missiles (Navei, 2021; 2023).

Figure 1 (A–E): Typology of Ghanaian Smocks, Showing Variations in Form, Status, and Function.

The review indicates that the smock embodies cultural heritage, signifying status, lineage, and spiritual protection, thereby anchoring it firmly within the sociocultural fabric of northern Ghana (Essel & Amissah, 2015; Fusheini et al., 2019; Navei, 2023).

2.3 The *Fugu* as a National Dress Identity

Notwithstanding the smock's indigenous association with northern Ghana, it has transcended its regional origins to emerge as a significant marker of Ghanaian national dress identity (Essel & Amissah, 2015). This transformation was championed by Ghana's first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. On 6 March 1957, Nkrumah and his compatriots wore handwoven smock tops (Figure 2) to declare Ghana's independence (Essel & Amissah, 2015; Osseo-Asare, 2021). This act constituted a deliberate rupture from

colonial dress codes, a sartorial decolonisation agenda, projecting an indigenous Ghanaian garment onto the national stage (Botwe-Asamoah, 2005; Essel & Amissah, 2015). Nkrumah strategically chose the smock to unify the savannah north with the coastal south, positioning it as a national dress for a newly independent Ghana (Osseo-Asare, 2021; Essel & Amissah, 2015). Shortly after independence, proposals to make the smock a national school uniform were debated but rejected on economic and formality grounds (Osseo-Asare, 2021), reflecting persistent preferences for Western (colonial) attire. Nevertheless, the smock's nationalistic legacy endured, with subsequent presidents adopting it as nationalistic attire (Osseo-Asare, 2021; Fusheini & Adu-Agyem, 2019). President Mahama's government recently instituted *Fugu* Wednesday to encourage national patronage (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts, 2026), reaffirming the smock as a key site for negotiating postcolonial Ghanaian identity.

Figure 2. Kwame Nkrumah and his fellow compatriots wearing smocks during Ghana's independence declaration on 6 March 1957 (Essel & Amissah, 2015).

The smock continues to evolve, serving both indigenous and contemporary Ghanaian tastes. Despite challenges such as high production costs, competition from imported textiles, and limited government support (Asare et al., 2019; Dzramedo & Dabuo, 2015), it persists as a testament to indigenous creativity and a wearable assertion of Ghanaian identity in the postcolonial era (Danso et al., 2019).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach and Philosophical Standpoint

This study employed a qualitative research protocol to examine the nuanced meanings, discourses, and identity negotiations embedded in the Zambian social media mislabelling of President Mahama's *fugu* as a 'blouse' during his bilateral visit to Zambia (4 February 2026), the subsequent Ghanaian counter-discourses, and the government's *Fugu* Wednesday policy directive. The study is situated within an interpretivist philosophical standpoint, which holds that social and cultural reality is multiple and constructed through human interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach enabled

contextual interrogation of how cultural misrecognition and policy actions influence identity formation within postcolonial debates.

3.2 Research Design

A single instrumental case study design (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995) was adopted. The Ghana–Zambia '*fugu*-blouse' controversy and the subsequent *Fugu* Wednesday policy constitute a bounded, contemporary case. The study covered the period from 4 February to 5 April 2026, examining the initial misrecognition, the emergent counter-discourse, the policy announcement, and the early public response. This time-bound case study design was appropriate, as the study relied exclusively on pre-existing, publicly available digital and media sources. Such an approach obviated the extended processes typically associated with qualitative case studies, namely, ethical clearance for primary participant recruitment, prolonged fieldwork, and subsequent transcription and analysis. In this instance, the data existed in textual form and required only systematic searching, retrieval, and purposive sampling. Limitations, including the inability to assess long-term effects, are explicitly acknowledged elsewhere in the manuscript.

3.3 Population, Sampling, and Participant Demographics

The population comprised all publicly accessible media materials generated in response to the Ghana–Zambia '*fugu* blouse' controversy and the ensuing *Fugu* Wednesday policy. These included official government statements (Ghanaian and Zambian); social media commentaries (Zambian and Ghanaian); narratives from Ghanaian smock weavers and traders; parliamentary statements; and local and international media reports. A heterogeneous purposive sampling strategy, complemented by convenience sampling, was employed to select the following stakeholder groups, yielding 30 data sources in total (Table 1).

The Ghanaian President, the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Members of Parliament were conveniently sampled for their detailed interpretative statements about the controversy. Similarly, the Zambian President, Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, and Foreign Affairs Minister were conveniently sampled for their statements on the controversy. The *Fugu* Wednesday policy document and media reports from heterogeneous outlets such as Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), JoyNews Ghana, TV3 Ghana, Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC), Zambia Reports, Zambian Eye, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), YEN Online News, GhanaWeb, Ghana News Agency (GNA), Arab News, and France 24 were conveniently sampled for their extensive/comprehensive reportage, ensuring a balance between televised and online media and between local and international framing to ensure authentic data generation.

For social media users, an initial corpus of 250 Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) posts and comments was identified between 4 February and 5 April 2026. The corpus comprised entries that explicitly engaged with the controversy over labelling the Ghanaian smock as either a *fugu* or a blouse. The selected entries attracted varying levels of engagement, from 4 to over 3,000 reactions, capturing both highly visible and less prominent viewpoints. The sampling process involved four stages: direct relevance to the *fugu/blouse* controversy (n = 187); removal of duplicate and repetitive content (n = 112); identification of entries expressing explicit sentiment orientations, including mocking, defensive, apologetic, educational, and culturally explanatory

perspectives (n = 35); and the final heterogeneous purposive selection of ten (10) comments for detailed critical discourse analysis. The selected comments were chosen for their discursive richness and capacity to illustrate the dominant and competing narratives surrounding the controversy. They therefore served as illustrative, information-rich cases rather than statistically representative samples (Patton, 2015) of all social media users participating in the debate.

Table1. Categories of Participants/Sources and Sample Numbers.

No.	Category of Participant/Source	Number Sampled
1	Ghanaian Government Officials	3
2	Zambian Government Officials	3
3	Ghanaian Parliamentarians	3
4	Media Outlets	11
5	Zambian-Ghanaian Public Social Media Comments	10
Total		**30**

(Source: Fieldwork, 2026).

3.4 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected exclusively from publicly available sources—social media posts, media reports, official government statements, and parliamentary records-concerning the controversy from 4 February 2026 to 5 April 2026. All materials were systematically catalogued with full metadata to ensure transparency and auditability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018).

Three structured protocols guided the collection process. First, a netnographic observation protocol (Kozinets, 2019) was employed to analyze social media data collected from Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X, using keyword searches ("fugu", "smock", "blouse", "Mahama Zambia", "*Fugu* Wednesday"). All posts were timestamped and, where possible, cross-referenced with multiple archival screenshots. The author systematically catalogued approximately an initial corpus of 250 related social media posts during the collection period; the 10 selected comments represent a heterogeneous, purposive subset chosen for thematic richness and typicality, not statistical representativeness. Comments were selected to include mocking, rebuttals, and apologetic voices from both Zambian and Ghanaian media reports. The author acknowledges that social media samples overrepresent digitally active, urban, younger demographics and cannot access private or offline conversations. Furthermore, a document review protocol (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) directed the retrieval of media reports, with inclusion criteria requiring direct relevance to the controversy and publication within the data collection window. Additionally, official government statements and parliamentary records were sourced from parliamentary and televised reports.

Triangulation across social media, media, and official commentaries addresses the limitations of any single source type, providing a comprehensive evidentiary base (Flick, 2018).

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis integrated thematic analysis (TA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fairclough, 2013). The TA followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases: familiarisation, initial coding, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. This process exclusively identified patterns and emerging themes from the data set. The CDA (Fairclough, 2013) was applied to key textual extracts from social media, media reports, and official statements. Analysis focused on transitivity—how actors and actions are represented (such as who labelled the *fugu* a 'blouse'); modality—expressions of certainty or evaluation (such as 'that is a blouse' vs. 'it looks like a blouse'); and presupposition—taken-for-granted assumptions (like Western dress as default 'formal' attire). This linguistic lens revealed how power, coloniality, and resistance were discursively enacted.

Trustworthiness was secured through four strategies. Credibility was achieved by triangulating (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) multiple data sources (social media, media, photographs, official documents, and commentaries) and providing thick description (Geertz, 1973). Dependability and confirmability were ensured through a full audit trail (raw data archives, coding logs, and analytic memos). Transferability is supported by detailed case characterisation. To minimise emic bias (the author as a Ghanaian), reflexivity was practised through systematic self-questioning, peer debriefing with two independent researchers (one Zambian, one non-African), and a deliberate search for disconfirming evidence (such as Zambian apologetic voices and Ghanaian critiques of tokenism). These procedures ensured findings were data-driven rather than shaped by preconceptions.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study used only publicly available data and did not involve direct human subjects. All social media posts were captured as screenshots and archived on a password-protected university drive. No personal identifying information (usernames, profile pictures, location tags) was retained. Direct quotes are presented without any identifiers that could enable search engine re-identification, in compliance with AoIR guidelines (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). For photographs published by media outlets covering the controversy and the Fugu Wednesday policy implementation, all identifiable faces have been blurred to prevent recognition, and no individuals are named.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Zambian Misrecognition of Ghanaian Fugu as "Blouse"

On 4 February 2026, President Mahama arrived at Lusaka's Kenneth Kaunda International Airport wearing a traditional Ghanaian *fugu* (smock), as observed in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3. President John Dramani Mahama with his wife arriving at Kenneth Kaunda International Airport, Lusaka, Zambia (4 February 2026), wearing the Ghanaian *fugu* (Source: The Presidency, Republic of Ghana, 2026).

Figure 4. President John Dramani Mahama (left), wearing the Ghanaian *Fugu* (smock), received by Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema (right), attired in a three-piece Eurocentric suit with tie (Source: The Presidency, Republic of Ghana, 2026).

Within hours, Zambian social media users labelled the garment a "blouse," a "maternity blouse," and other dismissive epithets, which were widely reported in Ghana (Moro, 2026), Zambia (Zambian Eye, 2026), and externally (BBC News, 2026a). The following were some of the Zambian social media mockeries (https://web.facebook.com/share/p/1LJbpGW5t3/) of the Ghanaian president's indigenous smock (Figures 3 &4):

> Wow. The entire 6 meters of chitenge just on the top. In Zambia, normally, 5 meters is for the wife and two or one meter for the husband. But for our visitor, it seems the entire 6 meters is for him alone (Zambian Social Media User 1, Facebook post, 4 February 2026).
>
> Mmmm, that blouse is their traditional attire...? Mmmmm, what's that now? (Zambian Social Media User 2, Facebook post, 4 February 2026).
>
> Could you please clarify if it was intended for the madam? …it's giving ladies vibes (Zambian Social Media User 3, Facebook post, 4 February 2026).
>
> He was coming in the night, so he mistakenly wore the blouse of the madam (Zambian Social Media User 4, Facebook post, 4 February 2026).
>
> Ni top dress elo it's a blouse pantu you tailor akayapya. (Zambian Social Media User 5, Facebook post, 4 February 2026)

A Zambian media practitioner stated:

> When we saw the Ghanaian president [Figure 3], many people here assumed it was some kind of loose blouse or ceremonial shirt. It did not immediately register as a formal or presidential attire because our expectations of leadership dress are still shaped by Western suits and ties. (Media interview, 6 February 2026)

The repeated use of "blouse," a European garment category with feminine connotations, operates as what postcolonial theory terms Orientalist othering (Said, 1978). The mockery employs specific discursive strategies: comparison to Western garment categories ("blouse"), aesthetic judgement based on volume ("6 metres of chitenge"), and gendered framing ("maternity"). These linguistic choices presuppose that Western dress conventions constitute the norm against which African attire is judged as deviant.

The study acknowledges that alternative interpretations of these comments are possible. Zambian social media users may have engaged in humour or teasing between African nations, a common phenomenon in digital spaces. Lack of familiarity with Ghanaian dress culture, rather than colonial epistemology, may explain the comments. Some comments may represent legitimate aesthetic disagreement rather than epistemic violence. However, the postcolonial reading is most compelling given the specific linguistic blouse framing (a gendered Western garment category) of the president's smock and the historical context of colonial dress hierarchies documented in the scholarship (Allman, 2004; Essel et al., 2023). The analysis does not claim that all Zambian commenters intended epistemic violence, but rather that the discourse reproduces colonial evaluative frameworks regardless of intent. One Ghanaian social media user provided this context:

> Heerhhhh, most Zambians need…reset or better still decolonisation. So you guys are proud of your president wearing the white man's attire. For your information, what president Mahama is wearing is called *fugu* in Ghana and it's a traditional African wear which is widely regarded by well-meaning Ghanaians. Try reading and travelling and you will know you are still in total dark. (Media Analysis, 10 February 2026)

This reaction confirms Fanon's (1963) account of colonial psychology: denigration of indigenous cultural forms damages collective self-recognition. The Zambian mockers were not Europeans but fellow Africans, an intra-African repetition of colonial epistemologies. This finding extends postcolonial critique beyond the coloniser-colonised binary, revealing what Bhabha (1994) calls the hybrid space where colonised subjects may unconsciously reproduce the very hierarchies that subjugated their ancestors.

4.2 Ghanaian Counter-Discourse: Reclamation, Education, and Social Media Activism

Ghanaian counter-reactions to the Zambian mislabeling of President Mahama's smock as a blouse unfolded across multiple registers: official ministerial statements, parliamentary solidarity, celebrity advocacy, and grassroots social media education. The Ghanaian Minister of Foreign Affairs (Media statement, 6 February 2026) explicitly anchored the *fugu* in Nkrumah's independence gesture:

> This is my president's favourite attire, the *fugu*. We are all excited about the buzz that the president's deliberate choice of apparel [Figure 3] has created. It has triggered a renaissance in what Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah described as the African personality. That we should reclaim the African identity, the African dignity, and the African culture. When we talk about restitution and we talk about reparations, it is not just compensation for the transatlantic slave trade, but it is a certain conscious mental effort to go back to our roots, to go back to identity because they did not only seek to enslave us; they sought to rob us of our unique identity, of our unique dignity, and of our unique traditions.
>
> And that is why we celebrate our African presidents who are continuing that charge, the charge of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the charge of the founder of Zambia, President Kenneth Kaunda.
>
> And for the young ones on social media who want to know more about the attire. This is the attire the founder of Ghana, Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, wore when he declared independence on the 6th of March 1957 in Ghana. (https://www.facebook.com/reel/1267765581883557)

The minister's statement employs intertextuality, invoking Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda, and the discourse of reparations, to elevate a fashion critique into a political defence. This affirms scholarship on Nkrumah's deliberate use of the smock for sartorial decolonisation (Osseo-Asare, 2021; Essel & Amissah, 2015). It also aligns with Hall's (1996) idea that cultural identity is not an essence but a position.

In contributing to the discourse, a Ghanaian fashion magazine employed direct juxtaposition:

> Dear Zambians, the outfit worn by our President is not a BLOUSE. It is a Ghanaian traditional attire known as *FUGU*, also called Batakari. Our President is intentionally promoting the local garment industry both within and beyond our borders, unlike your President, whose suit is not African. It is unfortunate that many of you, despite having access to smartphones and the internet, still choose to remain ignorant. It's time for us to emancipate ourselves from Mental Slavery. (Ghana Fashion Magazine, Facebook post, February 5, 2026)

Such dichotomies (African versus Western) and the visual contrast between President Mahama's smock and Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema's three-piece Eurocentric suit, as observed in Figure 4, are rhetorically effective, even if they oversimplify cultural hybridity. Furthermore, all Ghanaian discourses concurred that the

smock is a classic Ghanaian indigenous dress, with others calling for historical awareness of indigenous dress culture and cross-cultural respect for the same. A Ghanaian historian and cultural commentator referred to the *fugu* as "an unofficial national dress... Unlike kente, which is largely ceremonial, the smock is everyday wear… Our ancestors even wore it into battle. It represents Indigenous technology and self-reliance" (France 24, February 13, 2026).

A particularly illustrative instance of state-led counterdiscourse emerged from Ghana's president, who, in a televised interview on 5 February 2026, directly addressed the Zambian misrecognition by re-anchoring the *fugu* within Ghana's pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence history. The president stated:

> It's called the smock in English, but in our language, some people call it *fugu*, some call it batakari. Now, this [smock] is a traditional dress...it's part of our culture. And so, in the past, it was worn by kings, royalty, and warriors. When our warriors were going to war, they wore smocks. And the belief was that the smocks were soaked in some herbs and then some spiritual thing was done. So when you fire a bullet, it can penetrate. And so the smock portrays a lot of things in our culture. And significantly, on the day Ghana, the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence, on the day our independence was declared, our president, Kwame Nkrumah, was wearing a smock. He and all the freedom fighters were wearing smocks. So smocks have become an integral part of our cultural identity.
> (https://youtu.be/vKDM0lZqgaw?si=KmMnWA1jzih9ACbn)

The historical narratives made by Ghana's president are consistent with existing scholarship. Research confirms that the smock is an indigenous Ghanaian everyday dress and can also serve as ritual armour in warfare (Navei, 2021a, 2023; Agaasa et al., 2018). Likewise, archival records and visual evidence substantiate that Kwame Nkrumah and his fellow independence fighters wore smocks at the Old Polo Grounds on 6 March 1957 (Osseo-Asare, 2021; Essel & Amissah, 2015). Thus, the official's discourse, while rhetorically constructed, is grounded in verifiable cultural and historical referents.

Critically, the counter-discourse was not monolithic. Zambian voices of apology and self-reflection also emerged. A Zambian wrote:

> My social media feed has been filled with anger from Ghanaians who feel hurt and disrespected after some Zambians, in a display of extraordinary ignorance and regrettable social media behaviour, mocked the *Fugu* by calling it a blouse. To my Ghanaian brothers and sisters: I understand your outrage. You have every reason to feel personally offended. The *Fugu* is a piece of your identity, dignity, and culture woven into fabric. The Zambians who mischaracterised the *Fugu* are few, and they are genuinely ignorant of Ghanaian culture and traditional attire. Do not judge Zambia by the noise of a handful of people who hide behind social media to mock, insult, and chase likes. On behalf of my country, I offer an apology. We should never use platforms built elsewhere to demean one another. One Africa. One People. (Zambian Social Media User 7, X post, February 5, 2026)

The Zambian post highlights deep cultural connections between the two nations, demonstrating that the mockery was anomalous within a broader pattern of mutual admiration. This exemplifies Bhabha's (1994) hybridity as a site of negotiated meaning, where cultural translation can transform insult into an opportunity for mutual education. Ghana's president (Televised Interview, 5 February 2026) acknowledged this transformation:

> …I wore the smock to the United Nations, the highest platform in the world. I'm surprised that Zambians didn't see me in a smock… But the smock weavers in Ghana will be very happy because I, by the power of social media, have given them branding and marketing that they couldn't have ever dreamed of ever getting. And I'm sure that by the time I leave here, the number of searches for *fugu*, batakari, and smock is going to be quite high…. I thank Zambians for marketing our *Fugu* for us. And it might become an export item in our bilateral trade. We'll export some *Fugus* here and create a new fashion trend. (https://youtu.be/vKDM0lZqgaw?si=KmMnWA1jzih9ACbn)

This affirms Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity, in which cultural translation turns insult into mutual education. More broadly, Ghanaian counter-discourse drew on a coalition of state and non-state actors, each deploying distinct rhetorical strategies. Collectively, they transformed intra-African mockery into sartorial decolonisation, re-centring the Ghanaian indigenous smock as a legitimate national dress identity worthy of continental respect.

4.3 The *Fugu* Wednesday Initiative as a Decoloniality Policy

On 10 February 2026, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts introduced *Fugu* Wednesday as a dedicated day for Ghanaians to wear smocks. The minister stated:

> DECLARATION OF WEDNESDAY TO WEAR *FUGU*
>
> On behalf of the Government and the good people of Ghana, and in furtherance of our collective commitment to preserve, promote, and celebrate Ghana's rich cultural heritage, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts wishes to inform the general public of Government's decision to encourage all Ghanaians, as well as friends of Ghana, home and abroad, to dedicate every Wednesday to the wearing of *Fugu* (Batakari), in all its diverse forms, designs, and expressions, complemented by its distinctive and beautiful accessories.
>
> This initiative is intended to deepen national cultural awareness, affirm our identity, and project Ghana's heritage with pride to the world. Beyond its cultural significance, the initiative is expected to generate far-reaching social and economic benefits, including the empowerment of local weavers, designers, artisans, and traders across the value chain, as well as expanded business, employment, and commercial opportunities nationwide.
>
> The government hopes that this collective embrace of *Fugu* will strengthen national unity, stimulate the creative economy, and serve as a powerful symbol of Ghana's cultural confidence and self-expression. (Minister-TCCA, Press release, 10 February 2026)

A cursory analysis of the *Fugu* Wednesday policy shows that the government is intentionally using dress to address issues related to postcolonial identity. The text reveals deliberate rhetorical strategies that position the *fugu* as a symbol of cultural reclamation, economic empowerment, and national identity, grounded in postcolonialism (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994) and addressing both symbolic and material dimensions of coloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), reinforced by contemporary perspectives on culture as economic capital. The policy establishes

legitimacy through institutional authority and collective ownership, invoking “the government and the good people of Ghana” to construct both state sanction and popular consensus. This aligns with Gramscian hegemony, presenting policy as organic rather than imposed. The emphasis on “collective commitment” situates the directive within a continuum of cultural nationalism, echoing Nkrumah’s African personality and sartorial decolonisation (Essel & Amissah, 2015) and Hall’s (1996) notion of identity as performative.

The policy thus reclaims not just the garment but also its semiotic system, which resists colonial mislabelling and affirms indigenous epistemologies. By highlighting the *fugu* diversity, the text challenges homogenising narratives and reinforces its status as a dynamic cultural tradition.

A close analysis of the *Fugu* Wednesday policy directive reveals the deployment of aspirational collectivism to construct national unity, cultural confidence, and self-expression, transforming the *Fugu* into a unifying national symbol and a tool of psychological decolonisation (Fanon, 1963; Osseo-Asare, 2021).

However, a critical policy analysis must also interrogate what the *Fugu* Wednesday directive omits. The policy directive contains no funding mechanism, monitoring framework, enforcement mechanism, or review timeline. The operative verb, "to encourage", renders compliance voluntary, preserving the colonial-era hierarchy in which Western suits remain the professional default Monday through Thursday, while indigenous attire occupies a scheduled, optional (Asare, 2026) and therefore symbolically subordinate slot.

4.3.1 Parliamentary Endorsement of the *Fugu* Wednesday Policy

On 11 February 2026, the first Wednesday after the *Fugu* Wednesday directive, dozens of Ghanaian MPs, including Speaker Alban Sumana Kingsford Bagbin, arrived in Parliament wearing smocks (https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1Dy6i9rewk/; Parliament of Ghana, 2026a), a collective sartorial act that signalled parliamentary solidarity with the *Fugu* Wednesday policy (Figure 5).

A **B**

Figure 5(A-F). PHOTOS: National *Fugu* Wednesday Observed in Parliament on 11 February 2026 (Source: Parliament of Ghana, 2026a).

Their verbal statements on the floor further endorse the policy, affirming the smock as a Ghanaian nationalistic dress identity (Parliament of Ghana, 2026; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cLN7d0D07o; Arthur-Mensah, 2026). One MP declared:

> The iconic Ghanaian smock, locally known as *fugu* or batakari in my local language, traces its origin to the Northern and Savannah regions of Ghana … emerging around the 15th century … Its tightly woven nature, interlocking motifs and signature patterns symbolise strength, authority, culture, pride and unity … I am very glad that the Government has declared Wednesdays a National *Fugu* Day, encouraging all Ghanaians and friends of the motherland to dedicate every Wednesday to wearing *fugu* in its various forms and designs, further promoting this outstanding traditional outfit on the world stage. (Parliament of Ghana, 2026b)

Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) reveals two strategic moves. First, historical legitimisation: tracing the smock to the 15th century anchors it in pre-colonial heritage, affirming scholarly consensus (Essel & Amissah, 2015) while countering any narrative of recent invention. Second, semantic accumulation: the chain of abstract nouns, “strength, authority, culture, pride, and unity”, produces a crescendo effect, overwhelming regional or folkloric framings. The pairing of martial symbolism ("strength" and “authority”) with nation-building discourse ("unity" and “pride”) is deliberate.

Another MP reframed the Zambian ‘blouse’ mockery as an economic opportunity:

> We can forgive them [Zambians] because they did not know the significance … The President of Zambia, in an attempt to atone for the misunderstanding of his people, indicated that he was on a mission to order several smocks for the people of Zambia. That gesture was a very interesting one for him to calm the social media banter that ensued … I see the declaration [*Fugu* Wednesday policy] as a means to energise the industry and provide livelihood support to the people who deal in this clothing. What is important for us is that, as a Government, we need to provide concrete support to the weavers and those who sew this clothing so that they can meet the emerging huge demand that we expect for the smock in our country. So … I want to encourage my colleagues … to provide the support that they need so that they can meet the market demand, earn some income, and boost the local economy.

Here, productive reframing from offence to economic revitalisation is evident. The mockery is first acknowledged ("We can forgive them"), then transcended via the Zambian president's order for smocks. The modal verb "need" shifts the register from cultural defence to policy prescription. Most significantly, the MP redefines *Fugu* Wednesday as "a means to energise the industry"—an economic framing ("market demand," "income," "boost the local economy") that converts a defensive reaction into a proactive developmental agenda. This discursive move from insult to opportunity exemplifies 'counter-Orientalist recuperation' (Said, 1978): using misrecognition to mobilise material resources for indigenous industry.

A third MP reinforced nationalist defence against denigration:

> I would not allow anybody to make a derogatory statement about him [President John Dramani Mahama] because he had worn a smock – this is pure ignorance. It is high time we, as parliamentarians, woke up and made sure that we are proud of our culture so that the rest of Ghana, Africa, and the world would appreciate it.

This statement highlights supra-partisan national solidarity. The repeated reference to President Mahama creates an intertextual link between executive and legislative authority, constructing a unified state position. The inclusive first-person plural ("we, as parliamentarians") and the exhortation to "wake up" position cultural pride as a collective parliamentary duty. The simultaneous wearing of smocks by MPs from different parties and from both northern and southern Ghana, visible in the chamber, materially supports this claim, reinforcing the scholarly consensus that the smock unifies north and south (Osseo-Asare, 2021; Essel & Amissah, 2015). Moreover, entry into the *Hansard* record institutionalises the smock as official state attire.

Other MPs contributing to the discourse concurrently highlighted and reaffirmed the cultural and nationalist symbolism of the Ghanaian smock, as well as its associated wearing dynamics, including how the hat is worn and which colours are worn by whom, among other semiotic codes. In sum, these parliamentary interventions do not merely respond to the Zambian controversy; they institutionalise the smock as pre-colonial, economically valuable, supra-partisan, and officially sanctioned national dress. The parliamentary record thus becomes a site of discursive decolonisation, transforming colonial misrecognition into legislative affirmation of Indigenous cultural sovereignty.

4.3.2 Media Report and Framing of How Ghanaians Embrace the Fugu Wednesday Policy

Media coverage of the first *Fugu* Wednesday (11 February 2026), declared on 10 February 2026, constructed a celebratory narrative framing the policy as a grassroots, citizen-led cultural revival rather than state imposition. Discourse analysis reveals four framing registers: institutional diplomacy, affective citizenship, embodied practicality, and elite legitimation.

The University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) exemplified institutional endorsement as cultural diplomacy. At a dinner for visiting international university partners on 24 February 2026, UPSA's vice-chancellor gifted them *fugu* (Figure 6), demonstrating institutional acceptance of the *fugu* as a symbol of cultural pride while contributing to cultural diplomacy through international guest engagement (UPSA Press Release, 25 February 2026). The act of gifting transformed a formerly mocked garment into a diplomatic asset, which Hall (1996) terms a signifier of "cultural confidence" mobilised for soft power.

A B

Figure 6(A&B). UPSA Vice-Chancellor presenting a *Fugu* to international partners as institutional endorsement of the *Fugu on* Wednesday (Source: UPSA, 2026).

Public voluntary compliance with the *Fugu* Wednesday policy was also reported (Figure 7). JoyNews (11 February 2026) quoted citizens expressing pride: "We were informed that wearing this attire should be part of our responsibility in championing the cause of the state. I feel so proud to be in *Fugu* this morning." Another stated, "I'm a lover of *fugu*, and when I heard the declaration by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, and Creative Arts… I felt proud. I had planned to wear it later in the week, but when Wednesday was announced, I chose to wear it today."

Such discourse constructs *fugu* wearing not as coerced but as voluntary, affectively charged participation in postcolonial dignity. This aligns with Bhabha's (1994) performative identity, where weekly repetition of a cultural act consolidates national belonging.

A B

C D

Figure 7. Ghanaians wearing *Fugu* on the first National *Fugu* Wednesday. (Source: JoyNews, 2026).

Embodied practicality and everyday decolonisation featured in BBC (11 February 2026) coverage (Figure 8) and that of Arab News (23 February 2026). A civil servant noted: "*Fugu* is an easy wear. You pick it up and off you go. You don't have to iron it." Another, owning over seven *fugus*, remarked: "I wish I will be allowed to wear it anytime to the office… it's one of the outfits I love most." Another Ghanaian indicated that "…it [smock] makes me feel connected to where I come from" (Arab News, 23 February 2026)

This discourse grounds decolonisation in mundane, embodied experience rather than pure symbolism. As Fanon (1963) argued, genuine decolonisation operates at the level of habitus. References to ironing and office constraints reveal colonial dress codes (starched Western suits) as disciplinary technologies, while *fugu* offers liberation. This finding extends Essel, Navei and Donkoh's (2023) observation that sartorial decolonisation requires not only policy but also the reconfiguration of what feels "proper" and "formal".

A B

Figure 8. BBC Report of Ghanaians wearing *fugu* on the first National *Fugu* Wednesday (11 February 2026). (Source: BBC News, 2026c).

The executive arm of government's legitimisation through political surprise was also reported. Amu (2026) revealed that Minister Gomashie stated President Mahama "was pleasantly surprised to see Cabinet members dressed in *fugu*," noting he "did not recall issuing any directive." This discourse distances the *Fugu* Wednesday policy from top-down coercion while legitimising it through the executive arm of government, complementing legislative solidarity and overwhelming public compliance, as discussed herein. Such executive endorsement affirms the nationalistic acceptance of the *Fugu* Wednesday policy, reiterating the smock as a Ghanaian national dress identity.

Economic boom and supply constraints emerged as a prominent framing following the controversy and the *Fugu* Wednesday directive. A *fugu* factory owner told

the BBC that business was booming: "... I have had calls coming in from several places both within and outside Ghana. I just met someone who said Zambians have called her, and they are interested in the *fugu*, so she would want me to supply it to her" (BBC News, 11 February 2026c). France 24 (13 February 2026) confirmed a spike in demand, quoting a trader: "People are coming specifically for it now… we can't weave them fast enough." The secretary of Ghana's smock weavers and sellers association affirmed that the "*Fugu* Day" celebration has meant higher demand and more pressure on weavers, many of whom are struggling to increase production: "Using our hands slows the process and limits our ability to be productive. We need industrial machines" (Arab News, 23 February 2026).

This discourse frames *Fugu* Wednesday as an economic stimulus for indigenous enterprise. However, repeated references to supply constraints threaten to exclude smaller producers and limit scalability, requiring urgent government attention.

4.3.3 Fears of Tokenism and Commodification of the Smock through the Fugu Wednesday Policy

Critical voices warned that the *Fugu* Wednesday policy, while welcome, risks reducing indigenous attire to symbolic tokenism rather than structural transformation. In an opinion piece, Hasford Judge Quartey argued the following:

> If *Fugu* is dignified enough to be worn by the sitting President and significant enough to inspire national policy, why do we continue to treat indigenous attire as a once-a-week cultural observance rather than a professional standard? … For decades, Ghana's workplace culture has revolved around "Friday Wear" … its structure subtly reinforced a hierarchy: Monday to Thursday were reserved for Western business suits, while Friday became the day for Ghanaian wear…creating an unspoken ranking: the Western suit became synonymous with authority and seriousness, while indigenous attire became symbolic and occasional. Cultural confidence cannot thrive on tokenism. It must be normalised. (Reported online at Today Online by Asare, 2026)

Quartey called for structural integration, not episodic celebration: "If Ghanaian wear became the default Monday-to-Thursday professional standard, it would create predictable and sustained demand for local production." Beyond tokenism, concerns arose over potential commodification. A fashion designer cautioned, "It is a careful, intentional process. If we treat it only as a commodity and not as heritage, we lose something important" (Arab News, 23 February 2026). These critiques echo those of Essel, Navei and Donkoh (2023), who argued that decolonisation of dress requires statutory legislation rather than episodic celebration.

Beyond these discursive critiques, a review of the *implementation framework for the Fugu Wednesday policy* reveals structural vulnerabilities that make tokenism likely. The directive contains no funding mechanism, monitoring and evaluation modalities, enforcement provisions, or review timeline. Media-reported testimony by Weaver exposes a further disconnect. For instance, the weavers' association secretary stated, "We need industrial machines" (Arab News, 2026). A factory owner confirmed that *demand for fugu* exceeds supply (BBC News, 2026c). Yet within the available media corpus covering the study period, no weaver or trader reported receiving government technical assistance, capital injection, or subsidies following the policy announcement. Without concurrent investment in weaving infrastructure and market diversification,

the *Fugu* Wednesday risks becoming not merely tokenistic but also a missed opportunity for structural sartorial decolonisation.

4.4 Pan-African Discourses on Controversy

The controversy exposes tensions within Pan-African identity formation. A Pan-African commentator observed that "This incident is a wake-up call. We often speak of African unity, but we do not invest enough in understanding each other's cultures. Colonial borders may have divided us politically, but epistemically, we remain fragmented" (media interview, 10 February 2026). This finding extends postcolonial scholarship by demonstrating that coloniality operates not only in North-South relations but also within South-South interactions. The misrecognition of *fugu* becomes a case of intra-African Orientalism (Said, 1978), where one African context evaluates another through inherited colonial frameworks.

However, the Zambian president's (Media Statement, 6 February 2026) intervention proved decisive:

> I am very happy that the Ghanaian foreign minister, you dressed like that. I asked my team to post on various platforms… that the president of Zambia will be ordering more of that stuff for himself. And you saved my words because you spoke very well about the importance of our culture and traditions (GBC, 2026); https://www.instagram.com/reels/DUaQtLQDII5/

Supporting this position, the Zambian Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry (media statement, 5 February 2026) added, "Mr. President [Ghanaian president], I should mention that your counterpart [Zambian president] is opening a 140 million dollars' worth of textile industry. Please use that one as the best for developing the *fugu* for the other parts of Africa" (https://www.facebook.com/reel/2396036334197329). Zambian media reports further affirm the positive reception of Ghanaian *fugu*. High-ranking Zambian officials were publicly observed wearing the Ghanaian fugu (Figure 9), and a dedicated *fugu* exhibition was held in Zambia to strengthen bilateral ties (Figure 10).

A

B

Figure 9 (A&B). Zambian ministers in the Ghanaian *fugu* at the Zambia–Ghana Business Cocktail in Lusaka (ZNBC Today, 2026a).

A

B

C

D

Figure 10 (A&B). Ghanaian *Fugu* Exhibition Held *at* Lusaka Showgrounds to Strengthen Zambia-Ghana Ties (ZNBC Today, 2026b).

At the *Fugu* and Kente exhibition in Lusaka, the Zambian tourism minister emphasised that cultural exchanges strengthen relations and promote cultural tourism, noting that Kente and *fugu* "are not just fabrics but cultural symbols representing royalty, identity, craftsmanship, and the rich heritage of the Ghanaian people" (ZNBC, 2026b). The Ghanaian Special Aide to the Tourism Minister agreed that the exhibition would promote both nations' cultures, while a Ghana Export Promotion Authority representative added that it would open trade opportunities, promote culture, and create professional linkages in the textile industry (ZNBC, 2026b). ZNBC further reported that while the Silozi Heritage Foundation Chairperson called the exhibition "the true beginning of the Pan-African movement," urging Zambians to market their own culture, a Lusaka resident similarly argued that the exhibition created an opportunity for Zambia to showcase its culture to Ghanaians (ZNBC, 2026b). Also, *fugu* is reported to have notably inspired new Zambian fashion designs. For instance, ZNBC reports revealed that Zambia's revived textile industry in Kabwe has begun integrating Ghana's iconic *fugu* with local Zambian designs, transforming diplomatic gestures into fashion innovation and industrial collaboration (Muchimba, 2026).

Taken together, these discursive shifts illustrate how a moment of potential intra-African friction was reframed into an opportunity for cultural and economic Pan-Africanism, thereby challenging persistent epistemic fragmentation inherited from colonial borders.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examined the Ghana–Zambia '*fugu*–blouse' controversy as a discursive site where dress, identity, colonial legacies, and decolonial aspirations intersect. The findings demonstrate that the initial labelling of the Ghanaian smock, worn by President Mahama on a state visit to Zambia on 4 February 2026, as a 'blouse' by some Zambian social media users reflected enduring colonial hierarchies of dress and legitimacy that continue to shape perceptions of formality and cultural value within Africa. The controversy, therefore, reveals that coloniality persists not only in North–South relations but also in intra-African encounters, challenging assumptions that shared continental identity automatically produces mutual cultural understanding.

However, the controversy evolved beyond misrecognition. Ghanaian counter-discourses, expressed through official state responses, parliamentary interventions, media engagements, and grassroots social media activism, transformed a moment of ridicule into an opportunity for cultural education, identity affirmation, and diplomatic engagement. The emergence of public apologies from some Zambians, the adoption of the *fugu* by some key Zambian officials, the organisation of *fugu* and kente exhibitions in Lusaka, Zambia, and growing interest in Ghana–Zambia textile collaboration demonstrate that cultural misunderstanding can generate constructive dialogue and mutual learning. These developments illustrate what this study conceptualises as *positive hybridity*, whereby cross-cultural misrecognition becomes a catalyst for cultural exchange, economic collaboration, and renewed Pan-African solidarity rather than a source of enduring division.

The study further finds that the *Fugu* Wednesday initiative represents a deliberate state-led attempt to institutionalise sartorial decolonisation by repositioning the smock as a visible symbol of Ghanaian national identity, cultural pride, and historical resistance. In this regard, the policy extends the symbolic work of Ghanaian counter-discourses by embedding indigenous dress within a broader framework of cultural nationalism and heritage promotion. Nevertheless, critical policy analysis reveals significant structural weaknesses that may limit its long-term effectiveness. The *Fugu* Wednesday policy initiative lacks a dedicated funding mechanism, implementation guidelines, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, enforcement provisions, and targeted support for smock producers. Consequently, the policy risks functioning primarily as a symbolic intervention rather than a transformative framework capable of generating sustained cultural and economic change.

A key theoretical contribution of this study lies in identifying intra-African misrecognition of indigenous African wear as a neglected dimension of postcolonial discourse. While much postcolonial scholarship has focused on Western representations of Africa, this study reveals that colonial logics have been internalised to the extent that they mediate African-to-African perceptions. The study, therefore, argues that the project of Pan-Africanism must extend beyond political and economic integration to include sustained investment in cultural literacy, mutual recognition, and the decolonisation of inherited systems of value and representation.

In conclusion, the Ghana–Zambia '*fugu*–blouse' controversy and the subsequent *Fugu* Wednesday initiative have collectively contributed to the resignification of the Ghanaian smock as a symbol of national identity, cultural pride, and historical resistance. Yet the long-term success of this resignification depends on whether symbolic recognition is accompanied by sustained institutional commitment and structural support. This includes instituting funding mechanisms, implementation guidelines,

monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and enforcement mechanisms for the *Fugu* Wednesday policy directive. Without such interventions, the policy risks remaining largely symbolic rather than a binding national framework. Additionally, whether this resignification will translate into lasting change in Ghanaian dress codes, textile economies, and intra-African cultural literacy remains uncertain, particularly when surging demand for smocks has exposed severe supply constraints among weavers, yet the policy offers no concurrent capacity-building support. The study argues that the struggle for decolonisation extends deeply into the symbolic and everyday realms of cultural expression. Nevertheless, symbolic reclamation without structural transformation and implementation guidelines risks epistemic tokenism. Therefore, the project of sartorial decolonisation in Ghana remains ongoing, requiring continuous negotiation, critical reflection, and deliberate, robust policy and legislation actions that address these implementation lapses.

To address these identified lapses, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts (MoTCCA), in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, should undertake a coordinated set of actions. First, to remedy the absence of a funding mechanism, the Ministry must secure a dedicated fund and an annual budget line for the *Fugu* Wednesday policy, covering public sensitisation, material subsidies for weavers, and administrative costs for monitoring and enforcement. Second, to address the lack of implementation guidelines, the Ministry should draft and publish a comprehensive guideline document that defines acceptable fugu attire, sets expectations for the public and private sectors, and mandates compliance by public officials, among other measures. Third, to overcome the absence of enforcement mechanisms, the ministry should initiate stakeholder consultations to draft parliamentary legislation that transforms *Fugu* Wednesday from a voluntary suggestion into a binding national framework. This could start with mandatory compliance with the *Fugu* Wednesday policy by all public officials, thereby securing broader national buy-in and ensuring the policy's success. Fourth, to fill the monitoring and evaluation gap, the ministry should commission a longitudinal impact study, informed by a robust monitoring and evaluation framework that tracks wearing frequency, economic indicators (weaver incomes, job creation), public attitudes, and unintended consequences, with annual public reporting. Fifth, given the increased demand for smocks following both the controversy and the introduction of *Fugu* Wednesday, the Government of Ghana, through MoTCCA, should provide targeted support to the smock value chain. This should include investments in weaving infrastructure, mechanisation, skills development, access to affordable raw materials, and sustainable market expansion initiatives. Strengthening production capacity would ensure that the cultural and economic benefits generated by the policy translate into improved livelihoods for weavers, designers, traders, and other industry actors.

Building on the positive outcomes that emerged from the controversy, the governments of Ghana and Zambia, through their respective ministries responsible for foreign affairs, trade, tourism, culture, and creative arts, should institutionalise bilateral programmes for cultural literacy, dress education, and indigenous textile exchange. Reciprocal dress education initiatives, textile exhibitions, skills exchanges, heritage diplomacy projects, technology transfer arrangements, and collaborative fashion ventures would strengthen cultural relations, expand economic opportunities, and reduce the likelihood of future cultural misrecognition. Also, given Zambia's $140 million textile rehabilitation and its demonstrated interest in integrating *fugu* designs, the

Ghanaian government, through the Ministry of Trade, should negotiate a bilateral textile cooperation agreement. This could include technology transfer (Zambian industrial machinery for Ghanaian weavers) and co-branded '*Fugu*-Zambian' fashion lines, transforming diplomatic gestures into sustainable economic Pan-Africanism. Finally, drawing on the lessons of the controversy, the presidents of Ghana and Zambia should jointly advocate, through continental and regional diplomatic platforms (such as the African Union), for greater recognition and respect for indigenous African attire as legitimate formal and diplomatic attire. Such advocacy would help reduce intra-African epistemic fragmentation, strengthen cultural literacy across the continent, and advance the broader project of sartorial decolonisation.

6. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

In terms of limitations and suggestions for further studies, this study relied exclusively on publicly available media data, which, while rich, may overrepresent digitally active, urban, younger demographics and may not capture private or offline conversations that may have shaped the controversy. The sample, though diverse, is not exhaustive. Future research should complement this analysis with ethnographic fieldwork among smock weavers, traders, and consumers across northern Ghana to capture the lived experiences of the Fugu Wednesday policy's impact. Longitudinal research is needed to determine whether symbolic policy translates into improvements in sustainable livelihoods. Comparative research across African nations would illuminate how different postcolonial states have navigated similar dress politics. Finally, research on intra-African cultural literacy programmes could inform Pan-African educational interventions to prevent future incidents of misrecognition.

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