



## DECOLONISING GHANAIAN PARLIAMENTARY DRESS CODE

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### **Abstract:**

Dress fashion has sociocultural, economic and political expressions. In the political purview, dress fashion remains a viable catalyst capable of provoking dialogue for democratic action as people could proclaim their allegiance to a group or country through their dress fashion. In Ghana, there have been several attempts to decolonise the dress fashion culture. This study sought to deepen the advocacy dialogue through analysis of Facebook reactions to Right Honourable Alban Sumana Bagbin's adornment of indigenous Ghanaian royal dress regalia for parliamentary business and his clarion call on the floor of Ghana's parliament on January 25, 2022, on the need to decolonise Ghanaian parliamentary dress code. Through the adoption of a mixed approach situated within the convergent parallel research design, censused Facebook reactions of Ghanaians regarding Speaker Bagbin's clarion call were examined. Sentiment analysis was used as the data analysis tool. The study revealed Ghanaians' overwhelming endorsement and commendation for Speaker Bagbin's adornment of indigenous Ghanaian royal dress fashion for parliamentary business. The study concluded that Ghanaians are clamouring for parliamentary dress code decolonisation as part of the pragmatic steps to revamp the sickening textile and fashion industry to deal with increasing fashion needs of the people. To ensure exemplary leadership of wearing made in Ghana by the legislature, executive and other arms of government to push the decolonisation agenda beyond mere rhetoric of wear Ghana, is to make the practice statutory. In that regard, Ghana's parliament must make laws to make what the executive, legislature and judicial wear in discharge of their duties in the public sphere statutory to contribute to developing the textiles and fashion industry for job creation, preservation of Ghanaian cultural values and national identity.

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## 1. Introduction

On January 25, 2022, Right (Rt) Honourable (Hon) Alban Sumana Kingsford Bagbin, the seventh Speaker of the eighth parliament of the Republic of Ghana, made a clarion call on the floor of parliament on the need to decolonise the Ghanaian parliamentary dress code. His statements on the floor of parliament have generated public debate. Bagbin's call seemed to be informed by his twenty-four (24) consecutive years of experience as a parliamentarian (1992 – 2016). He might have observed high patronage and use of the Western (foreign) three-piece suit for parliamentary business to the detriment of the indigenous Ghanaian classics. This observation by the lawmaker is, however, not peculiar to the Ghanaian parliament. Many parliaments in Africa have similarly adapted Western dress fashion as their official dress code for parliamentary business. Specific reference could be made to the Kenyan parliament (National Assembly of Kenya) which has consistently raised motions for some senators to be expelled from the chamber of their parliament for wearing indigenous Kenyan attires (Muturi, 2019). The Kenyan parliamentary dress code mandates every member of parliament, and even visitors, to wear a Eurocentric suit and tie before entering the chamber of parliament (Muturi, 2019; National Assembly of Kenya, 2017). In Kenyan parliament, for instance, a motion was once raised against a senator for wearing indigenous Kenyan dress fashion to parliament, where in the determination of the motion the then Speaker of the Kenyan National Assembly contended that:

*“Honourable Members, the debate as to what constitutes ‘appropriate dress code’ is not new to this House. History is replete with instances where the Chair has been invited to determine whether or not a Member is properly dressed. Indeed, it is a matter that is not unique to the Parliament of Kenya, or perhaps the National Assembly.”* (Muturi, 2019, p. 2)

Speaker Muturi referenced Kenyan Privileges Act, 2017, 2(c) which provides the appropriate dress code for members. Rule No. 8 of the Kenyan parliamentary dress code for senators, media representatives and guests states that:

*“Members, members of the press and guests shall not enter the chamber, lounges, dining room or committee rooms without being properly dressed. For the purposes of these rules, proper dress means:*

- (a) a coat, collar, tie, long-sleeved shirt, long trousers, socks, and shoes or service uniform for men; and*
- (b) decent formal business wear for women.”* (Muturi, 2019, p. 4)

As to the question of admissibility of wearing indigenous African attire for parliamentary business, Speaker Muturi points to a case involving Hon. Koigi Wamwere (then Member for Subukia) who entered Kenyan parliament house smartly dressed in African attire. This caught the attention of *“Hon. Dr. Bonaya Godana who sought the interpretation of the Chair as to whether the Hon. Wamwere was properly dressed. The Speaker determined that, decent as he may have been, the Member was not properly dressed”* (Muturi, 2019, p. 6).

However, in the case of the South African parliament, there is no specific dress requirement for the Speaker as well as parliamentarians (South African Legislative Sector, 2019; Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2004). Whereas the Speaker may be expected to dress formally, parliamentarians have the liberty to dress according to their personal tastes, provided such dress code is in accordance with the dignity of the House (South African Legislative Sector, 2019; Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2004). Formal dress in the context of South African parliament has become *“customarily identified with a lounge suit or dark suit for men, day or evening dress for ladies, or formal traditional attire”* (South African Legislative Sector, 2019, p. 56). Although the South African parliament *“recognises diversity, and therefore Members of Parliament and Provincial Legislatures are allowed to wear their religious or traditional attire in Parliament”* (South African Legislative Sector, 2019, p. 56), it still places premium on the adornment of colonial dress fashion (lounge suit or dark suit) for parliamentary business.

It sounds puzzling why after many years of attaining independence, many African nations struggle in their quest to decolonise their dress code to the extent that the admirable indigenous African dress fashion seemed forbidden in the precincts of some African parliaments let alone adorned for the conduct of parliamentary businesses. In the case of Ghana, the National Commission on Culture (2004) emphasises that *“to promote national identity, institutions like the University, the Judiciary and legislature shall be encouraged to adapt local design and patterns in their regalia, uniforms and paraphernalia”* (p. 44). Per the aforementioned policy framework of the Ghana National Commission on Culture, the parliament of Ghana is one of the critical institutions expected to promote Ghanaian nationalistic dress identity through the exemplary wearing of indigenous Ghanaian classics for parliamentary business for the larger emulation of the Ghanaian populace. Therefore, the clarion call made by Bagbin to decolonise the Ghanaian parliamentary dress code is in harmony with the cultural policy of Ghana.

In legislative matters in Ghana’s parliament, the speaker is the first officer of the House; and the third highest officer of the State. He precedes after the President and the Vice President in terms of order of hierarchical powers in State matters. Article 57(2) of the 1992 constitution of Ghana states that *“the President shall take precedence over all other persons in Ghana; and in descending order, the Vice-President, the Speaker of Parliament and the Chief Justice, shall take precedence over all other persons in Ghana”*. In furtherance, Article 60(11) of the 1992 constitution of Ghana adds that where *“the President and the Vice-President are both unable to perform the functions of the President, the Speaker of Parliament shall perform those functions until the President or the Vice-President is able to perform those functions or a new President assumes office, as the case may be”*. These constitutional provisions

stipulate the powers and authority of the Speaker of Parliament. Considering the constitutional powers, authority of the Speaker and his leadership role, it is crucial to place a premium on his pronouncements in parliamentary proceedings. It is against this backdrop that the study finds Speaker Bagbin's exemplary adornment of indigenous Ghanaian dress fashion, and for that matter, his clarion call to decolonise the Ghanaian parliament dress code, a worthwhile step that needs further probe. The study, therefore, sought to analyse the sentiments expressed by Facebook followers and or netizens on Rt. Hon. Alban Sumana Kingsford Bagbin's clarion call statements on parliamentary dress code decolonisation, some of which appeared on his Facebook wall on January 25, 2022. Bagbin's statement was accompanied by a photograph of him in indigenous Ghanaian fashion.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

The study was underpinned by the concept of decolonisation in the context of African fashion. The concept of decolonisation has received varied interpretations and definitional perspectives. On the surface value, the concept bothers on redemption, consciousness, liberation, self-confidence, self-dignity, and self-reliance as well as the vision of obtaining political, economic and cultural independence from colonial influence and power. Oelofsen (2015) affirms that decolonisation refers to the change that colonised countries go through when they become politically, economically, culturally, and mentally independent from their former colonisers. From a similar definitional standpoint, Khanna (2020) views decolonisation as an embodiment of the colonised nations' revolutionary or emancipatory consciousness which arises from the imprints of psychic trauma of colonial racialisation. In this context, the definitions tend to focus on colonised countries gaining their political independence and sovereignty. Tordzro (2021) avers that decolonisation entails rewriting the wrongs of our colonisers, undoing the harm, the humiliation that has been done to nations, societies, communities, people, spiritually, morally, physically, and mentally. Moeke-Pickering (2010) posits that the decolonisation approach seeks to overturn the order of the colonial situation.

Many studies have examined decolonisation in the context of African dress fashion (Tordzro, 2021; Warritay, 2017; Essel & Amissah, 2015; Katende, 2013; Howard, Sarpong & Amankwah, 2012; Sarpong, Howard & Osei-Ntiri, 2011; Gott, 2009; Booth Library, 2009; Aris, 2007; Akwetey, 2007; Botwe-Asamoah, 2005; Allman, 2004). In Africa, dress provides a *"powerful arena for colonial relations to be enacted and challenged, and serves as a method of cultural expression and resistance"* (Aris, 2007, p. 2). Aris adds that *"dress fashion reveals dimensions of political and social transformations that could not be discerned through observed behavior or verbal and written articulations"* (Aris, 2007, p. 2). Tordzro (2021) observes that the commendable effort of Ghanaian fabric retailers (women) in naming Ghanaian cloth with local names, a sign of ownership, is one concrete example of how decolonisation could be achieved. Gott's (2009) study reveals that for political power and authority, the British colonial rule in the early twentieth century restricted public flamboyant dress expressions of wealth and superior status in Gold Coast (now Ghana)

(Gott, 2009). Some of the Asante flamboyant styles of fashionable dress displays were locally coined as *Premanfoo*, *Obirempon*, *poatwa*, amongst others (Gott, 2009).

Colonisation in Africa led to the normalisation of Western dress codes across the continent but it took a nationalist agitation in the Gold Coast to promote the return to *kaba* and other indigenous Ghanaian dress styles (Warritay, 2017; Gott, 2009). Also, in pursuit of Africa's dress decolonisation agenda, Kwame Nkrumah is said to be responsible for making kente visible on the world stage (Booth Library, 2009). This, Nkrumah did, through his historic visits with President Eisenhower in Washington, D.C. in 1958 and 1960, whereby Nkrumah and his entourage all wore kente (Booth Library, 2009). Nkrumah's choice of kente for important and highly visible international occasions has helped to establish such indigenous Ghanaian dress fashion as a potent symbolic image for Africans and African-Americans alike (Booth Library, 2009). Also, Botwe-Asamoah (2005) reports that Nkrumah's address to the national assembly on July 10, 1953, focused on dress cultural advancement of the old Ghana Empire that existed till the eleventh century long before colonialists' invasion. In that assembly, Nkrumah was reported to have said that "*the inhabitants of Ghana wore garments of wool, cotton, silk and velvet*" (Botwe-Asamoah (2005, p. 51). Studies corroborate that Nkrumah's regular adornment of Ghanaian kente, and smock fashion (Figure 1 & 2) for national and international public occasions, turned such textiles into national and Pan-African symbols of freedom and independence which contributed significantly to the Ghanaian dress decolonisation agenda (Spencer, 1999; as cited in Warritay, 2017; Essel & Amissah 2015; Akwetey, 2007; Allman, 2004). "*The main reason behind Nkrumah's advocacy for a dress cultural advancement for Ghana was premised on the case that clothing was one of the means through which the British used to colonise Ghana and as a measure of civilization*" (Allman, 2004; Essel, 2019a; 2019b; as cited in Essel, Navei & deGraft-Yankson, 2021, p. 36). Nkrumah felt that the use of indigenous Ghanaian dress fashion by Ghanaian top leadership for public occasions (Figure 2) would significantly help in decolonising the minds of Ghanaians as such actions signify a break away from the shackles of colonialism, serves as a dress cultural visual aesthetic order for Ghanaians and promote the use of made in Ghana clothing (Botwe-Asamoah, 2005; Essel, 2014; Essel & Amissah, 2015; Essel et al., 2021).

It is equally observed that African countries have become dumping grounds for cheap Western second-hand clothes which has not only led to the closure of many textiles industries in Africa but a continuation of the new colonisation of Africans through clothing (Cobbing, Daaji, Kopp & Wohlgemuth, 2022; Rutayisire, 2021; Matcho, 2021; Wolff, 2021; Mwenda, 2018; Wetengere, 2018; Katende-Magezi, 2017; Hoang, 2015; Hansen, 2014; Imo & Maiyo, 2012; Sarpong, Howard & Osei-Ntiri, 2011; Baden, & Barber, 2005). Africans are now "cloth-minded" not only in second-hand clothing but Westernised dress fashions, a deadly disease that once infected, has become difficult to be cured (Wetengere, 2018). Cobbing et al. (2022) clarify that colonialism is not only a force for shaping geopolitics but its influence can be detected in the fashion industry over the decades, through the positioning of second-hand clothing exports as a way to help low-income countries" rather than finding a convenient way of offloading the problems

of overproduction and overconsumption if any (p. 9). Hansen (2014, p. 2) typifies that “countries of sub-Saharan Africa are the world’s largest secondhand clothing destination, receiving close to 30 percent of total world exports in 2006”. With specific reference to Ghana, second-hand clothing importation is at the ascendancy. “With a global market share of 5.1 percent and approximately \$180 million in used clothing imports in 2020, the West African country [Ghana] comes” (Ahiabile & Triki, 2021, p. 7). The high patronage of cheap secondhand clothes in Africa (Ghana) means a continuous substitution of the rich indigenous African clothing styles for that of Western dress culture, a shared practice of new colonialism. It is also noted in post-colonial Ghana that a new set of foreign fabric design patterns have emerged which are different from what used to be popular in Ghana around the 1960s and 1970s (Howard, Sarpong & Amankwah, 2012). The inflows of such cheap new foreign textile brands in Ghana are occasioned by the proliferation and adaptation of aesthetic-oriented pirated foreign design concepts with a higher market of consumers than that of Ghanaian symbolic-oriented dress fashions (Howard, Sarpong & Amankwah, 2012).

The misperceptions held by Ghanaians that indigenous African (Ghanaian) clothing styles are inferior to that of Western dress fashions perhaps, led Howard, Sarpong and Amankwah (2012) to pose two critical questions such as; how must the quest for change in the global world discard one’s valuable and prestigious cultural heritage? Are we to allow foreign design ideologies to dictate what is ideal for us to the detriment of our traditional design philosophies which need to be preserved for the generation to come? Finding concrete answers to the aforementioned questions means that the right steps have suddenly been initiated to decolonise the erroneous mindset held by Ghanaians towards their dress fashion.

In tracing the historical background of indigenous African fashion to the era of pre-colonialism, scholars report that the African dress fashion system was once robust before colonialism but got relegated by European colonialists who, myopically, understood dressing mostly as a marker of civility or savagery (Rutayisire, 2021; Wolff, 2021; Essel, 2019a; Howard, Sarpong & Amankwah, 2012; Sarpong, Howard & Osei-Ntiri, 2011; Akwetey, 2007). It is rather unfortunate that the colonialists have succeeded in altering Africans’ collective understanding of their rich indigenous dress fashion repertoires, and now, Africans themselves have since helped to reproduce, market, and/or promote Western clothes to the decline of theirs. However, Africans (Ghanaians) can bounce back to their dress cultural roots if only those in national leadership positions decolonise their dress fashion choice for the emulation of the Ghanaian masses. On another breath, African nations, for instance, Ghana, should take more deliberate and enthusiastic steps in ensuring dress fashion decolonisation through massive education, training, and research to debunk the colonial perception held in and outside Africa that Africa’s (Ghana’s) fashion art and practice is inferior as compared to that of Western dress fashion (Essel, 2019a).



**Figure 1:** Kwame Nkrumah and his fellow compatriots wearing smocks during the 1957 Independence Day Declaration in Accra. (Source: Information Service Department, Accra)



**Figure 2:** Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (seated in the middle of the first row) and his cabinet clad in Kente in toga style. (Source: [https://m.facebook.com/GoldCoastGhanaa/posts/dr-kwame-nkrumah-and-his-cabinet-ghana-goldcoastghana/2499143437078062/#\\_=\\_](https://m.facebook.com/GoldCoastGhanaa/posts/dr-kwame-nkrumah-and-his-cabinet-ghana-goldcoastghana/2499143437078062/#_=_))

## 2.1 Ghanaian Dress Fashion and National Identity Construction

Dresses are key identity markers. Warritay (2017, p. 51), affirms that in Ghana, indigenous colour prints and patterns on fabrics are “*meaningful; they mark life events, social standing, age, gender, occupation and more*”. Although there are a couple of reasons for wearing dresses, they could be worn for aesthetics and/or to communicate the wearer’s mood, and/or cultural identity (Navei & Donkoh, 2022; Essel, Navei and deGraft-Yankson, 2021). Mamiya (2016) adds that apart from dress serving as protection, it functions as a channel for nonverbal communication. Mamiya explains that the non-verbal expressive attributes of dress among others, in some circumstances indicate one’s



age, gender, social status, political status, mood, economic background, intellectual state, religious affiliation, and identity (Mamiya, 2016). Howard, Sarpong and Amankwah (2012) also point out that due to the nonverbal communication effectiveness of clothing, Ghana's identity and cultural heritage are being projected and preserved to the extent that Ghanaians are noted for building a wardrobe of African prints with symbolic patterns. Warritay (2017) corroborates that clothing is used to signal identity as well as to reflect the cultural and social landscape of a people. Akwetey (2007, p. 69) notes that *"the style and drape of the cloth on the body do a lot to give information about the wearer's identity and actions. In other words, the way the cloth is moved, arranged or held around the body is a language"*. This means that clothing has what it takes to determine a person's personality, social status and identity. This connotes that the various distinct and vital symbolism associated with the wearing of indigenous Ghanaian cloth has the potency to reveal the unique cultural identity and social status of the wearer. Akwetey (2007, p. 71) exemplifies that the *"Asantehene may of necessity wear his cloth without a tunic in or outside Ghana as a symbol of his identity"*. Adrover (2015) is also of the view that dressing is a strategic and powerful element to the extent that Ghanaian noble chiefs rely on the visual and sensorial impacts of dress to actively draw attention to their authority. Therefore, dress fashion in Ghana plays a symbolic, communicative, and aesthetic role, and is definitive of their cultural and social identity (Navei & Donkoh, 2022; Essel, Navei & deGraft-Yankson, 2021).

The first conscious effort engendered at the national level to create a cultural identity in the form of national attire is attributable to Kwame Nkrumah, the first democratically elected president of Ghana. Nkrumah did not only tout the ideals of nationalism and Pan-Africanism but he brought the people of Ghana together through his national dress agenda. *"He popularised the smock from the Northern and Upper regional cultures and wore the Asante Kente with the tunic. By doing so, he identified with all the sub-cultures of the nation thus forging a national unity"* (Akwetey, 2007, p. 116). The dress codes of most Ghanaian presidents-elect (from 1960-2021) for their inaugural ceremonies centred on indigenous Ghanaian classics (fashion from Kente, Adinkra cloths, and Smock) to express their cultural identity locally and externally (Essel, Navei & deGraft-Yankson, 2021; Essel, 2019b; Akwetey, 2007). Essel (2019b) observes that the indigenous fashions adorned by Ghanaian presidents-elect consisted of symbolic kente weave patterns, the construal of colours and Adinkra motifs sourced from Ghanaian cultural repertoire with multi-ethnic nationalistic character and mindset with the aim of fostering unity, nationalism, a sense of belonging and display of their Ghanaian identity. In addition, Essel, Navei, deGraft-Yankson (2021) in their recent study on presidential fashion choice found that Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo wore a Eurocentric three-piece suit for his second term of presidential investiture on 7th January 2021 which is alien to the indigenous Ghanaian dress cultural identity and, therefore, described as non-nationalistic in the context of Ghanaian national identity construction. In view of that, Essel et al. (2021) recommended that succeeding Ghanaian presidents-elect should endeavour to source their dress fashions from the rich Ghanaian traditional fashion and textile products in order to visually communicate their Ghanaian nationalistic identity as



well as promote the unique fashion and textile industry for the patronage of both local and international community.

From the foregoing dialogue, there is consensus in the literature that dress fashion is one of the major ways through which Ghanaian cultural and nationalistic identity could be showcased internally and externally. It comes with associated economic benefits to the Ghanaian textile and fashion industry. Besides, it shows fashion diplomacy. Therefore, if Ghanaians, particularly those in leadership positions, deliberately wear indigenous Ghanaian dress fashion products for public occasions and on a daily basis, it stands the chance of being emulated by the citizenry.

### 3. Methodology

The study was situated within the convergent parallel research design (Dawadi, Shrestha & Giri, 2021; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell, 2014; Demir & Pismek, 2018; Snelson, 2016) to analyse the reactive comments on Right Honourable Alban Kingsford Sumana Bagbin's statements that made a clarion call to decolonise Ghanaian parliamentary dress code. The convergent parallel design was utilised in analysing social media comments (Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2017; Snelson, 2016; Bruneel, Wit, Verhoeven, & Elen, 2013; Annabi & McGann, 2013; DiStaso & Bortree, 2012; Grasmuck, Martin, & Zhao, 2009) and reactions which were engendered by the Facebook post of the Speaker Alban Sumana Bagbin on the parliamentary dress code. The Convergent parallel design was used for its ability to holistically and harmoniously handle both qualitative and quantitative data while clarifying possible contradictions or incongruent findings through rigorous probes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The reliance on social media data (Facebook) for the conduct of the study is empirically grounded in research (Zachlod, Samuel, Ochsner & Werthmüller, 2022; Drivas, Kouis, Kyriaki-Manessi & Giannakopoulou, 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Chen, Cheng & Chen, 2018; Stieglitz, Mirbabaiea, Rossa & Neubergerb, 2018; Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2017; Townsend & Wallace, 2016; Social Media Research Group, 2016; Al-Qurishi, Al-Rakhami, Alrubaian, Alarifi, Rahman & Alamri, 2015; McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014; Batrinca & Treleaven, 2014; Moreno, Goniou, Moreno, & Diekema, 2013; Efthymioua & Antoniou, 2012; Thiel, Kötter, Berthold, Silipo & Winters, 2012). Al-Qurishi et al. (2015) observe that social media has become one of the largest sources of huge amounts of data for scientific inquiries. Social media data source contains thoughts, discussions, and debates expressed in public social conversation, which could be used not only as an essential component of the decision-making process but also in industry, academic and political decisions (Al-Qurishi et al., 2015).

Anchored on the justification of the wealth of social media data for academic research, the study, through the use of the census sampling technique, gathered data from all Four Thousand, Two Hundred (4,200) Facebook followers of Speaker Bagbin Facebook handle (dubbed Hon. Alban S. K. Bagbin) who reacted to Speaker Bagbin's January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022 Facebook post of himself clad in Ghanaian royal dress regalia for parliamentary business. Also, portions of Speaker Bagbin's official opening remarks that

both on his indigenous Ghanaian royal outfit were transcribed and analysed. The data collection period spanned from January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022 to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022. Both the quantitative and qualitative data were concurrently and respectively analysed in themes using simple descriptive statistics (tables and charts) and sentiment analysis of the opinions, sentiments, evaluations, appraisals, attitudes, and emotions (Liu, 2012, Schwaiger, Hammerl, Florian & Leist, 2021) shared by Ghanaians (Speaker Bagbin's Facebook followers) on Bagbin's parliamentary royal dress regalia as posted on his Facebook wall. The analysis of the comments bothered on words, sentences and emoticons. Though the reactive comments on Right Honourable Alban Kingsford Sumana Bagbin's statements that made a clarion call to decolonise Ghanaian parliamentary dress code were matters of public record, the comments were anonymised in the analyses with names of alphabets.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Speaker Bagbin's Maiden Royal Dress Regalia for Parliamentary Business and Clarion Call for Decolonisation of Ghanaian Parliamentary Dress Code

The first sitting of the first meeting of the second session of the eighth parliament of the fourth republic of Ghana, which occurred on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022, was stylishly graced by the Speaker, Rt. Honourable Alban S. K. Bagbin in an indigenous Ghanaian royal dress fashion (Figure 3 A, B & C). This action of Speaker Bagbin came as a loud surprise to many Ghanaians since Ghanaian parliamentarians are largely noted for their accustomed Western suit fashion for parliamentary business. However, on the said occasion, Speaker Bagbin did not only outdoor himself in a prestigious indigenous Ghanaian classic, but, he seized the opportunity to passionately make a clarion call for all Ghanaian parliamentarians to reorient their parliamentary dress choice from their accustomed over-subscription of Eurocentric suits to the detriment of indigenous Ghanaian dress fashions for parliamentary business. In his opening remarks, Rt Honourable Alban S. K. Bagbin asserts that:

*"Hon Members, this is the Parliament of Ghana, a unique made in Ghana product and we must showcase and market it to the world as a brand. We must create a unique set of values and norms that will give a unique character to our Parliament to set it apart from the colonial legacies of the British system. My outfit today, as the Speaker presiding, is to set in motion that agenda. The practice of MPs decently dressed in traditional attire led by the Speaker is long overdue. Ghanaians accept representation of the people to include representation of the full identity of the Ghanaian – i. e. culture, tradition and more importantly their dress code.*

*I am glad that this decision accords with some of the propositions of the first President of Ghana, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, and the other founding members of the Parliament of the First Republic. The dominant dress code of members of the National Assemblies of independent Ghana was native costume [indigenous fashion]. The Speaker of the first*

*Parliament of the First Republic of the Country – 1960 to 1965 – Rt [Right] Hon Joseph Richard Asiedu appreciated and practiced it. Where we got it wrong, I don't know! ...the robe, i. e. the long garment, the headgear and bib, constitute the ceremonial dress of the Speaker. This ceremonial dress is worn to distinguish the Speaker from members and to reflect the pomp and pageantry of special national occasions... the ceremonial dress is not meant to be a daily apparel of the Speaker. Even the British has long abandoned this dress code. Ghana has long abandoned only the headgear and the bib. Hon Members, I assure you, we are not on a walk in the park in this journey of renaissance and transformation. We will not walk alone in this matter. We have a lot of followers and supporters. It is with this, I happily invite all of you to wear Ghana, grow Ghana, eat Ghana, brand Ghana, and transform Ghana. From now I want to see more members appear in Parliament decently adorned in traditional dress.” (Bagbin, 2022)*

Speaker Bagbin's historical reference to the first President of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah as a notable advocate and pioneer of advancing Ghanaian nationalistic dress cultural identity is succinctly the case. Scholarly evidence corroborates the views of Speaker Bagbin that Nkrumah's deliberate adornment of indigenous Ghanaian classics such as kente and smock fashion (Figures 1 & 2) for (inter)national ceremonies, turned such classic wears into Ghanaian nationalistic and/or Pan-Africanist symbols of identity, freedom and independence which contributed significantly to the Ghanaian dress decolonisation agenda (Spencer, 1999 as cited in Warritay, 2017; Essel & Amissah 2015; Booth Library, 2009; Akwetey, 2007; Botwe-Asamoah, 2005; Allman, 2004). This notable Ghanaian nationalistic dress cultural identity agenda patriotically pursued by Nkrumah, and Rt Hon Joseph Richard Asiedu (Speaker of the first Parliament of the First Republic) as argued by Bagbin, appears relegated to the background by many Ghanaians in leadership positions. As for Speaker Bagbin's rhetorical assertion "*Where we got it wrong, I don't know*", the answers lie in the hands of the parliament of Ghana which he leads. Per the democratic arrangement of sovereign Ghana, parliament is clothed with the power to enact laws for the wellbeing of Ghanaians (Article 93(2) of Constitution of Ghana, 1992). In that regard, parliament could contribute to decolonising the dress culture of parliamentarians and Ghanaians by extension, through legislation. However, Speaker Bagbin's exemplary adornment of indigenous Ghanaian dress fashion (Figure 3: A, B & C) and his assertive clarion call to Ghanaian parliamentarians to emulate was a step in the right direction. The compelling issues contained in Speaker Bagbin's clarion call in favour of Ghanaian MPs reverting to the wearing of Ghanaian classics for parliamentary business, though belated, are succinct since MPs are the people's representatives and iconic figures with a strong following in Ghana.



A



B

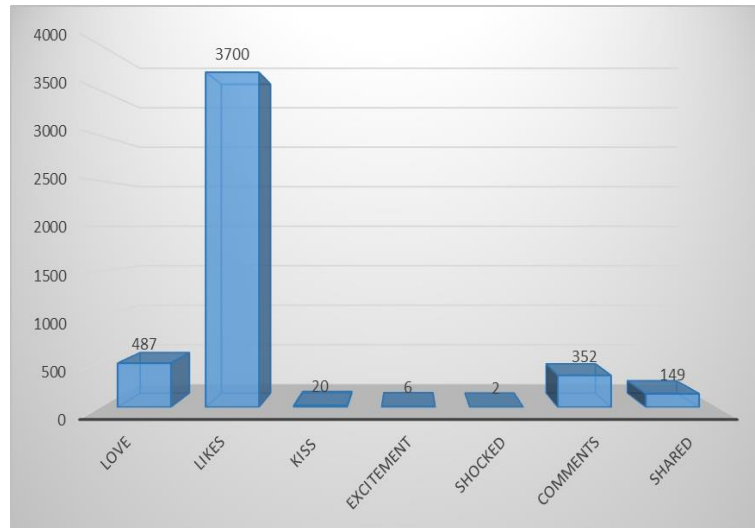


C

**Figure 3:** (A, B & C): Speaker Bagbin in Indigenous Ghanaian Royal Dress Regalia for Parliamentary Business. (Source: Parliament of Ghana, 2022).

#### **4.2 Reactions of Ghanaians to Speaker Bagbin's Maiden Adornment of Royal Dress Regalia for Parliamentary Business**

Speaker Bagbin's maiden adornment of royal dress regalia for parliamentary business caught the attention of print and electronic media including social media. For the purpose of drawing inferential reasoning, this section of the study does a sentiment analysis of Facebook reactions of Ghanaians regarding Speaker Bagbin's maiden adornment of indigenous Ghanaian classic (Figure 4) for parliamentary business as posted on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022 on Bagbin's Facebook wall (dubbed Hon. Alban S. K. Bagbin).

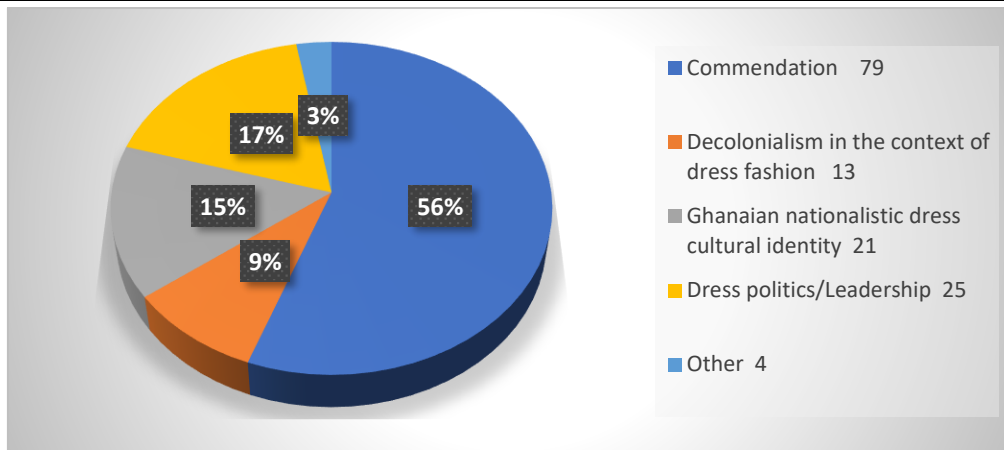


**Figure 4:** Distribution of Facebook Reactions to Speaker Bagbin's Post on his maiden Royal Dress for Parliamentary Business (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

From January 25, 2022 to March 31, 2022, a total of Four Thousand, Two Hundred (4,200) Facebook users (as observed in Figure 4), reacted to Speaker Bagbin's Facebook post of his photograph (Figure 3C) where he was in indigenous Ghanaian royal dress for parliamentary business. A cursory view of the distribution of the reactions (Figure 4) reveals that Speaker Bagbin's Facebook post was *loved* by Four hundred and eighty-seven (487) Facebook users whereas Three Thousand, Seven Hundred (3,700) people liked the post. Meanwhile, twenty (20), six (6), and two (2) people, respectively, reacted to the post through emojis such as; kiss, excitement, and shock. Whereas Three Hundred and Fifty-Two (352) people commented on the post, One Hundred and Forty-Nine (149) participants shared the post with others. Considering the overwhelming attention received by Speaker Bagbin's post, as observed in Figure 4, it shows that Speaker Bagbin's choice of indigenous Ghanaian classic (Figure 3A, B & C) for Parliamentary Business as well as his clarion call for Ghanaian MPs to follow suit is profoundly appreciated by Ghanaians. This confirms the assertion made by Essel, Navei and de-Graft (2021) that dress fashion has the potency to induce reactions in the minds of the viewing public.

### 4.3 Analysis of the Comments expressed by Ghanaians on Speaker Bagbin's Dress Code

This section analyses all the comments made by Bagbin's Facebook followers regarding his clarion call for MPs to revert to the wearing of indigenous Ghanaian fashion for parliamentary business.



**Figure 5:** Thematic Representation of Facebook Comments on Speaker Bagbin's Royal Dress Regalia (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

Figure 5 presents a thematic distribution of One Hundred and Forty-Two (142) Facebook-filtered comments on Speaker Bagbin's post. Rigorous analysis of the comments revealed the themes: commendations; decolonialism in the context of fashion; Ghanaian nationalistic dress cultural identity; and dress politics/leadership. A cursory view of the chart (Figure 5) revealed that 56% (79), representing the highest number of the comments, sought to commend the speaker for his maiden adornment of indigenous Ghanaian royal classic for parliamentary business. Whilst 9% (13) of the respondents' comments bothered on decolonialism in the context of dress fashion, 15% (21) of the comments were themed under Ghanaian nationalistic dress and cultural identity. Also, dress politics and leadership theme had 17% (25) comments. It is also noteworthy that some of the comments, representing 3% (4), bore divergent views different from the selected themes as observed in Figure 5.

#### 4.3.1 Comments of Commendation

Sentiment analysis of the comments revealed most of them to be words of commendation to Speaker Bagbin for his exemplary adornment of indigenous Ghanaian classic for parliamentary business while making a clarion call for all MPs to follow suit. Some of the comments were in admiration of the Speaker's outfit while others called on MPs, the president as well as Ghanaians to embrace the clarion call made by Speaker Bagbin. Some of the comments read:

*"I really admire and salute you! This should set Ghanaians to re-examine themselves and put things right. Kudos!"* (Facebook Comment A)

*"Great great great initiative Mr. Speaker, may God grant you more wisdom in the performance of your duties."* (Facebook Comment B)

*"All Ghana is very proud of you. Thanks for setting the pace, Hon Speaker. Lots of love. 🙌🙌🙌🙌🙌"* (Facebook Comment C)



*"You are looking very decent and it's a true representation of the people you represent.... I so support this motion, Sir."* (Facebook Comment D)

*"Masha Allah!! We're proud to be Associated."* (Facebook Comment E)

*"Nice one Sir. I love your outfit."* (Facebook Comment F)

*"The man of the people  
The man for the people  
Then man to the people...."* (Facebook Comment G).

*"You are looking very decent and it's a true representation of the people you represent.... I so support this motion."* (Facebook Comment H)

*"Nice outfit 🤩; you looking good in it, I think the rest should learn and practice it."* (Facebook Comment I)

#### **4.3.2 Decolonialism in the Context of Dress Fashion**

Some of the comments expressed on Speaker Bagbin's Facebook post are in tandem with his clarion call for decolonising the Ghanaian parliamentary dress code. The comments support Rt. Hon. S. K. Bagbin's invitation to his colleagues in parliament to join the agenda of decolonising the Ghanaian parliamentary dress code. Other comments revealed that the speaker's apparel was considered novel; making some people to demand similar dressing by the judiciary arm of government as well as lawyers to take a paradigm shift from their dress code to incorporate Ghanaian indigenous dress styles. The comments stressed that the Ghanaian culture has symbolic elements in the Speaker's dress code which presents a uniquely African and Ghanaian identity and communicates a message of decolonialism. One of the comments read:

*"The best news I've seen so far in 2022. May bench wig wearing lawyers take cue from this move by the Revered Speaker. But not for colonialism, three piece suit and tie shouldn't have been over formalized as a popular formal attire. Suit and tie should have just been a courtesy in response to globalization which warrants we exchange culture (dressing). A clarion call on all Ghanaians to normalize our African Prints."* (Facebook Comment J)

*"60 years ago, following our first republic, Kwame Nkrumah integrated our culture into our governance. One notable thing was that on the opening of parliament, linguists from each region would be present."* (Facebook Comment K)

*"If dey [they] start dressing like this, their minds will come home."* (Facebook Comment L)



*“Waiting one day to see every MP [Member of Parliament] in this special traditional dress in parliament.”* (Facebook Comment M)

*“Very nice n [and] good. hoping our courts will follow soon.”* (Facebook Comment N)

The comments stress the case of the foreign-driven nature of the Ghanaian parliamentary dress code and corroborate Speaker Bagbin’s clarion call for its decolonisation through the use of indigenous Ghanaian classics. The call has become imperative because the dress culture in Ghana’s colonial historical development as revealed in studies (Rutayisire, 2021; Duplessis, 2016) suggest that the colonialist embarked on a mission to enforce their fashion on Africans to the detriment of African’s dress cultural identity and fashion system. Therefore, the clarion call made by the Speaker for Ghanaian MPs to decolonise their parliamentary dress code finds expression in Aris’s (2007) assertion that dress provides a way to enact and challenge colonial relations and serves as a method of cultural expression and resistance. The attempt made by the Ghanaian Speaker of parliament, Bagbin, therefore, offers a renaissance paradigm shift to the promotion of the rich indigenous dress fashion culture for the patronage of the larger Ghanaian populace, thereby, contributing to decolonising the dress culture of Ghanaians (Navei & Donkoh, 2022).

#### **4.3.3 Ghanaian Nationalistic Dress Cultural Identity**

The data analysis also suggested an overwhelming endorsement of Speaker Bagbin’s attempt to promote his Ghanaian nationalistic cultural identity through clothing. The comments positioned the Speaker’s dress as a critical apparatus adorned to advance the Ghanaian national cultural identity vision pioneered by Kwame Nkrumah. Some of the comments read:

*“Well done sir. I think Mr. President n his ministers as well as his appointees n all meaning Ghanaians will gladly accept this n emulate what Mr speaker has initiated to promote Ghanaian values n [and] culture as well as create employments ... so with this I proposed Ghanaians shld [should] desist from wearing African wears on Fridays only ....Thank u sir.”* (Facebook Comment O)

*“Mr Speaker well done. As you have set the motion in agenda, MPs should henceforth represent the identity of their constituents and possibly have a day to Represent their constituents via their wear.”* (Facebook Comment P)

*“Good initiative. National Commission on Culture must appreciate your innovative means of promoting and preserving our rich culture.”* (Facebook Comment Q)

*“Hala, Mr. Speaker... Good cultural representation. This is good for our made in Ghana development agenda.”* (Facebook Comment R)

*"Little efforts like this will make [an] impact..."* (Facebook Comment S)

*"Sir, do this to promote our diverse cultures of ... Ghana. Next time dress like a chief from Northern Ghana. 🍌🍌🍌🍌."* (Facebook Comment T)

*"If you are so concerned about advertising made in Ghana products, smocks are made from the North where you came from. Why are they not being advertised? Or they are not made in Ghana products? By the way... Thank you for your good service to Ghanaians."* (Facebook Comment U)

While Speaker Bagbin was commended for his promotion of Ghanaian dress culture through the wearing of indigenous Ghanaian royal regalia for parliamentary business, he was challenged to consider projecting the dress culture of the chiefs and good people of northern Ghana (where he hails from) in his subsequent clothing choice. The proponents variously described Bagbin's outfit (Figure 3: A, B & C) as the dress culture of the royal chiefs of the Ewe people of Ghana. For instance, the use of *Togbe* (a highly respected title preserved for Ewe Chiefs) in some of the comments such as: "Togbe BAGBIN", and "Paramount Chief of Parliament, Togbe Hon Alban S.K. Bagbin" to describe Bagbin's adornment of indigenous Ghanaian kente (kete) fabric in a toga style with a round-neck shirt combination is synonymous with the culture of the people of Eweland. Therefore, the decision of Speaker Bagbin (Dagaaba by ethnicity) to rather dress like an Ewe chief to preside over parliamentary business puts him beyond nuclear ethnic expression but demonstrates his unique Ghanaian nationalistic and cultural sensibility in making the clarion call to Ghanaian parliamentarians that consists of an amalgamation of different ethnic backgrounds. This resonates with the assertion that in President Nkrumah's quest to create Ghanaian nationalistic identity, he did not only tout the ideals of nationalism but he brought the people of Ghana together by popularising smock from the Northern and Upper regional cultures and wore the Asante Kente with the tunic (Akwetey, 2007). By doing so, Nkrumah identified himself with all the sub-cultures of the nation thus forging a national unity (Akwetey, 2007). Bagbin, in this context, wanted to uniquely present himself to become a subject of attraction as well as generate a national dialogue to create a sense of Ghanaian nationalistic dress cultural identity worthy of emulation. Speaker Bagbin's dress choice (Figure 3 A, B & C), therefore, gives an impression of Ghanaian cultural representation and a viewpoint of portraying diverse cultural backgrounds.

#### **4.3.4 Dress politics/Leadership**

There is scholarly consensus that posits that clothing has significant political dimension because it affects the relationships among citizens leading to social transformations (Adrover, 2015; Aris, 2007; Miller, 2005). Miller (2005) further argues that fashion is a viable catalyst to democratic action that could provoke dialogue about social and political matters, and that dialogue is a part of a democratic culture (Miller, 2004). Miller stresses that people could proclaim their allegiances – political, cultural, religious, and

professional– by the way they dress. It is, therefore, not out of place that the study found some of the sentiments expressed on Speaker Bagbin’s outfit (Figure 3 A, B & C) bother on dress politics, fashion diplomacy, and/or leadership. Some of the comments portray Speaker Bagin as the leader of the parliament of Ghana, and bestows in him a sense of exemplary leadership. Some of the sentiments expressed are that:

*“This man is graciously aging. A shining example of quality.”* (Facebook Comment V)

*“Leadership by EXAMPLE. Kudos Hon Alban S.K. Bagbin.”* (Facebook Comment W)

*“Leadership of example ... Your reign will forever be great.”* (Facebook Comment X)

*“Great initiative Mr Speaker. Indeed, leadership by example.”* (Facebook Comment Y)

*“Very handsome and good leadership example.”* (Facebook Comment Z)

*“Leadership by example, well done.”* (Facebook Comment ZA)

*“Good leadership.”* (Facebook Comment ZB)

*“This man is graciously aging. A shining example of quality leadership.”* (Facebook Comment ZC)

*“If only your outfit will reflect your judgments of National Issues as a Patriotic citizen and not the rubber stamp of your political party.”* (Facebook Comment ZD)

*“You are indeed number 3 and you are far better .... 🇵🇸🇵🇸🇵🇸🇵🇸🇵🇸.”*  
(Facebook Comment ZE)

The comments herein referred, put emphasis on the nobility of leadership by example through clothing. The fact that Speaker Bagbin’s dress code (Figure 3 A, B & C) reflected his clarion call, it paves the way for the MPs to gladly follow suit. As observed in some of the sentiments, Speaker Bagbin who is the head of the legislative arm of government (parliament) has been copiously referred to as number 3 illustrating Bagbin as the third iconic figure of the land with the president as the number 1 and vice president as number 2 as stated in article 57(2) and 60(11) of the 1992 constitution. In the scheme of the democratic dispensation of Ghana, Speaker Bagbin occupies a high-ranking portfolio. Therefore, Speaker Bagbin’s adornment of indigenous Ghanaian classic was, strategically, to add meaning to his Ghanaian parliamentary dress decolonisation agenda. This resonates with Adrover (2015) assertion that leaders strategically rely on the optical and sensorial powers of dressing to draw attention to their authority.

## 5. Conclusions

The study set out to analyse Facebook reactions to Right Honourable Alban Sumana Bagbin's adornment of indigenous Ghanaian royal dress for parliamentary business and his clarion call to Ghanaian parliamentarians to decolonise their dress choices for parliamentary business. The study found that the topical issues embedded in the Facebook sentiments expressed by Ghanaians bothered on commendations of his actions, decolonialism in the context of fashion, Ghanaian nationalistic dress cultural identity promotion, and dress politics/leadership agenda for development.

Also, with Rt Hon. Alban S. K. Bagbin as the head of parliament, his Ghanaian dress code highlights the nobility of leadership by example which stands to pave the way for parliamentarians to join hands in decolonising the Ghanaian parliamentary dress code in favour of indigenous Ghanaian classics. In this wise, as the leader of parliament, Speaker Bagbin's exemplary adornment of indigenous Ghanaian dress fashion for parliamentary business was, therefore, a critical dress diplomacy deliberately chosen to appeal to the conscience of Ghanaian parliamentarians to join hands in decolonising the parliamentary dress code in order to protect, promote and preserve the Ghanaian nationalistic dress cultural identity.

Again, Ghanaians' overwhelming endorsement and commendation for the Speaker's adornment of indigenous Ghanaian royal dress fashion for parliamentary business is testamentary to their expectation of decolonisation of the dress culture of all arms of government namely the legislative, executive and judiciary in the bid to fully decolonise the dress culture for development. They stressed that the Ghanaian culture has symbolic elements, as observed in the Speaker's dress code, which presents a uniquely African and Ghanaian identity and communicates a message of decolonialism. The clarion call for decolonisation of Ghanaian parliamentary dress code by the speaker of parliament is a rehash of President Kwame Nkrumah's pragmatic Ghanaian dress cultural identity promotion efforts which brought in its wake pride in nationalism, job creation in the textiles and fashion industry and Ghanaian cultural entrepreneurship.

It is evident that Ghanaians are clamouring for parliamentary dress code decolonisation as part of the pragmatic steps to revamp the sickening textile and fashion industry to deal with increasing fashion needs that may arise from the decolonisation agenda. Since parliamentarians are people's representatives and iconic figures with a strong following, their patronage by wearing of Ghanaian classics has the tendency to inspire the people they represent.

To ensure exemplary leadership of wearing made in Ghana by the legislature, executive and other arms of government to push the decolonisation agenda beyond mere rhetoric of *wear Ghana*, is to make the practice statutory. In that regard, Ghana's parliament must make laws to make what the executive, legislature and judicial wear in discharge of their duties in the public sphere statutory for emulation by the people of Ghana to contribute to developing the textiles and fashion industry for job creation, preservation of Ghanaian cultural values and national identity.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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