

Ketekente in Ghana's Diplomatic Relations, Tourism and Global Pan-Africanism Drive

Benjamin Quarshie¹, Robert Richard Yao Kpogo¹, Henry Ofose Ameyaw², Theresa Addai²

¹Department of Creative Arts, Mampong Technical College of Education, Asante Mampong, Ghana

²Department of Social Sciences, Abetifi College of Education, Kwahu Abetifi, Ghana

Email: bquarshie@mtce.edu.gh, robertyaokpogo@gmail.com, hoameyaw@abeticoe.edu.gh, theresaaddai2013@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study investigates how Ghana's handwoven cloth traditions (*Kente* by the Asante and *Kete* by the Ewe) collectively referred to in this paper as "*Ketekente*" have contributed to the country's cultural diplomacy, global tourism appeal, and the broader Pan-African movement. This study employs a qualitative narrative and contextual analysis of archival materials, media coverage, and historical records. The findings demonstrate that *Ketekente* has gradually evolved into a global symbol of African identity. It has been prominently featured in civil rights campaigns, diasporic reunification ceremonies, and diplomatic representations of Ghana's cultural heritage. The cloth's visual language and symbolism have elevated Ghana's image as a cultural giant on the continent. However, findings reveal a lack of structural organisation within the weaving sector, limited awareness of copyright protections among weavers, and the marginalisation of the term "Kete" in global discourse. The paper proposes the inclusive term *Ketekente* as a cultural rebranding strategy and advocates for the formalisation of the sector through policy support, national weaving centres, and intellectual property education. The study contributes to ongoing theoretical and policy conversations about cultural capital, textile nationalism, and postcolonial identity, with practical implications for heritage governance and Afrocentric diplomacy. These measures are essential to enhance the economic value, global visibility, and heritage preservation of *Ketekente* in Ghana's diplomacy and tourism landscape.

Keywords

Cultural Diplomacy, Intellectual Property, *Ketekente*, Pan-Africanism, Textile Heritage, Tourism

1. Introduction

Culture plays a vital role in defining the identity, cohesion, and diplomatic posture of nations across the globe. Ethnic groups, through their unique traditions and artistic expressions, assert their place in global discourse. In the context of Ghana, two identically remarkable indigenous textile traditions (Kete by the Ewe and Kente by the Asante) have become internationally recognisable cultural artefacts. Whereas there is yet another handwoven cloth by the ethnic societies in Northern Ghana popularly called Fugu, the Fugu uniquely distinguishes itself, characterised by rather monotonous or monochrome, duo or triadic (three-colour) long parallel strips of weaves. In this study, the multi-colourful geometric patterned Ewe and Akan handwoven fabrics, herein contextually and collectively referred to as *Ketekente*, represent more than just a decorative cloth. They embody historical narratives, spiritual philosophies, social hierarchies, and political ideals. The visual vocabulary embedded in these cloths continues to serve as a medium of communication across cultural, temporal, and geopolitical boundaries (Micots, n.d.; Kraamer, 2006). Contextually, we refer to these handwoven fabrics as visual vocabulary because the colour scheme, patterns and motifs as woven by the indigenous Akan and Ewe origins hold proverbial semiotics that communicate essence, cultural knowledge, classism and socio-political acumen. These semiotics are best understood and interpreted by the indigenes who create them.

Globally, there is growing scholarly interest in Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs) such as this new focus, the *Ketekente*, as they symbolise the intangible heritage of indigenous communities. In recent times for example, as noted by de Freytas-Tamura (2018), Disney's trademark registration for "Hakuna Matata" which is a Swahili language phrase meaning "no worries" as commonly used largely in Africa has generated debates about intellectual property (IP) rights and cultural appropriation (de Freytas-Tamura, 2018). In a similar context, Ghana's Copyright Act 2005 permits use of Kente as TCE and traditional knowledge by individuals and for public interest purposes such as training, education, news reporting among others (Okorie, 2019). It is against this background that the legal concerns were heightened and met with unique views when Kente was featured in the Black Panther movie to represent the cultural identity of the Black People (Okorie, 2019). International initiatives led by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) have responded by advancing sui generis protection models for TCEs that strengthens collective custodianship and customary governance systems (Arora, 2025) perhaps leading to the enlistment of Kente as a cultural artifact by the UNESCO recently (UNESCO, 2024). Even as the handwoven cloth is physically tangible, we contextually posit the semiotics they embody as intangible heritage which the indigenes are the custodians. These embodied expressions encapsulated in the handwoven cloth encompass artistic symbolisms that are often vulnerable to cultural misappropriation in the absence of robust intellectual property frameworks (Wendland, 2018). However, the debate about the IP and copyright ownership (Arora, 2025; Collins, 2019) especially about the Ghanaian handwoven

cloth deserves further consideration as the section 76 of the Copyright Act 2005 classifies such cultural objects as “folklore” because they are made by unidentified Ghanaian authors, to this end gives way for legal contentions when the author is known or can be identified (Okorie, 2019) as in the case of Amos Akwasi Gogo, whose work hangs in the hall of UN conference building as a gift donation from Ghana to the UN in 1960 (United Nations, 1960). For Ghana, the colourful Kete or Kente has not only become a national cultural symbol but also a powerful tool for international diplomacy, soft power, and Pan-African identity-building (Essel, 2019; Okorie, 2019; Paquette, 2020; BBC News, 2021). Therefore, enlisting only Kente as Ghanaian cultural object does not encapsulate cultural balance as Kete of Ewe origin also possess identical colourful patterns.

Historically, the question of origin of the colourful multi-pattern handwoven cloth has been a point of contention between the Asante and Ewe ethnic groups. Kpogo et al. (2022) note that the term Kete is rooted in the Ewe language, meaning “open and close”, reflecting the interlacing technique used in weaving. In contrast, the term *Kente*, widely popularised in both academic and commercial discourses, lacks a clear etymology in Akan as against the common knowledge that Akan culture is known to have actual meanings for their names. Adding to the complicated dialogues regarding the meaning of name Kente is the complex inconsistencies of mythological narratives (Padilioni Jr., 2017). Whereas some Akan legends claim Kente came as result of two hunters, fascinated by a spider weaving, imitated the technique with raffia fibres, others ascribe the meaning to “*Kenten*” (meaning basket in Akan) to reference the woven structure (Fening, 2006; Padilioni Jr., 2017). It is interesting to note that historical scholarly accounts reveal that Ewe communities such as Agbozume and Kpetoe have long-standing weaving traditions that predate colonial influence (Kraamer, 2006). However, due to its extensive royal association and institutional patronage, Asante Kente has received disproportionate international attention, resulting in the marginalisation of Ewe Kete weaving traditions in global textile literature (Adire African Textiles, 2018; Micots, n.d.).

Beyond origins, Ketekente has served as a potent emblem of national pride and international representation of Ghana, African and for the Black people (BBC News, 2021). Ghana’s first president, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, strategically adopted the colourful handwoven cloth in state functions to assert cultural sovereignty and challenge colonial aesthetics (Essel, 2019; Kraamer, 2006). Since then, successive heads of state and cultural ambassadors have reinforced the cloth’s visibility on the global stage. The symbolic use of Ketekente during diplomatic events such as the welcome of Queen Elizabeth II and United Nations appearances has projected Ghana as a cultural beacon on the continent. In recent history, the cloth was worn by members of the U.S. Congress during anti-racism protests, linking Ghana’s heritage to broader global struggles for justice and Black identity (Paquette, 2020).

Despite its global prominence, Ghana’s handweaving sector faces significant challenges. The lack of formal policy regulation, limited copyright literacy among

artisans, and the absence of institutional protections make the sector vulnerable to foreign exploitation. Some researchers have raised concerns about Chinese mass production of printed Kente lookalikes, which undermines the authenticity and economic viability of the indigenous craft (Okyerere & Denoncourt, 2021). While Ghana's Copyright Act (2005) and Patent Act (2003) exist, they offer limited protection for indigenous cultural property, leaving artisans and local weaving communities with minimal legal recourse (Collins, 2019).

Moreover, although the National Folklore Board has initiated moves to patent Kente as a national heritage symbol at the United Nations (GhanaWeb, 2019), practical benefits for local weavers and clarity around implementation remain elusive. Arguably, the move by the National Folklore Board could potentially leave out Ewe Kete since Kente is widely known as Akan cultural object, thereby justifying the integrative "Ketekente" term. As the cultural economy of textiles expands globally, the need for inclusive terminology, such as Ketekente, and the formalisation of the weaving sector has become urgent. Scholars and policymakers alike advocate for the establishment of national weaving centres, improved infrastructure in weaving towns, and education on intellectual property rights to unlock the full socio-economic and diplomatic potential of this craft (Kpogo et al., 2022). Against this background, this paper critically investigates how Ketekente contributes to Ghana's diplomatic relations, global tourism appeal, and participation in Pan-African cultural movements. Through contextual and narrative analysis of multimedia archives, the study explores how the cloth functions as both a cultural product and a strategic tool in Ghana's international engagements. It argues for a more equitable, inclusive, and economically sustainable framework to govern the production, representation, and global promotion of Ketekente.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital and symbolic power, as critically extended by Musoba and Baez (2009) through the concept of an *economy of translations*. Cultural capital is understood as socially valued cultural knowledge and practices that exist in embodied, objectified, and institutionalised forms and are converted into symbolic power through recognition and legitimation. Ketekente is conceptualised as an objectified form of cultural capital, materialised through handwoven textiles that encode historical memory, semiotic meaning, and ritual authority. Its symbolic value is not inherent but produced through institutional endorsement, royal patronage, and diplomatic deployment, which elevate the cloth beyond craft into a nationally and globally recognised cultural symbol. Musoba and Baez's notion of translation is central to this analysis, as it explains how cultural artefacts gain legitimacy when they are rendered intelligible and valuable within dominant institutional and global discourses. This perspective illuminates why Asante Kente has accrued greater symbolic capital than Ewe Kete despite comparable cultural depth, reflecting unequal access to mechanisms of recognition rather than differences in cultural worth.

Ubuntu theory complements and extends this analysis by foregrounding relationality, communal value, and shared humanity as the ethical foundations of cul-

tural meaning and social recognition. Ubuntu, commonly articulated as “*a person is a person through other persons*”, positions cultural artefacts such as Ketekente not merely as individual or ethnic property but as collective resources that derive significance through social interdependence, reciprocity, and mutual recognition (Hoffmann & Metz, 2017). From an Ubuntu perspective, the marginalisation of Ketekente within national and global cultural economies represents not only a symbolic imbalance but also an ethical rupture in the collective stewardship (Hoffmann & Metz, 2017) of Ghana’s cultural heritage. As contextually applied to this study, the frameworks set the tone as analytical tool for critical examination of the Ketekente as an invaluable pearl where culture, power, diplomacy, and economic value intersect, while also foregrounding the need for more inclusive modes of cultural recognition and governance.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative exploratory research design (Quarshie et al., 2022) to examine the cultural and diplomatic significance of Ketekente, the collective reference to Kete (Ewe) and Kente (Asante) handwoven textiles in Ghana’s diplomacy, tourism, and Pan-African advocacy. The research focused on how these textiles serve as material and symbolic artefacts within national and global narratives. Data were collected from purposively selected multimedia and textual sources. These included televised diplomatic events, cultural exhibitions, online photo archives, government publications, news features, and scholarly articles. Purposive sampling based on criterion within the scope enabled the selection of critical artefacts and documents that directly engaged with the visual, political, and cultural representations of Ketekente. This approach, as argued by Ahmad and Wilkins (2024), is effective in selecting rich, relevant cases in cultural research.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2020) reflexive thematic approach, combining content and critical narrative analysis (Quarshie & Poku, 2025; Rainey & Call-Cummings, 2024; Bengtsson, 2016; Souto-Manning, 2012) to identify how Ketekente has been positioned in diplomatic spaces, antiracism campaigns, and tourism strategies. Key themes were developed iteratively through coding and cross-comparison of data across the selected documents. Attention was paid to the symbolism, historical framing, and sociopolitical messaging associated with the textile in each context.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the thematic analysis, the study was guided by the framework proposed by Nowell et al. (2017), particularly the criteria of credibility, dependability, and confirmability. In line with these recommendations, a systematic audit trail was maintained to document analytic decisions, coding iterations, and theme development, thereby supporting dependability and confirmability (Kuckartz, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017; Bengtsson, 2016). Credibility was further strengthened through prolonged systematic engagement with the data and iterative review of codes and themes to ensure they remained grounded in

data sourced rather than researcher assumptions (Kuckartz, 2019). Ethical clearance was not required, as all data were derived from publicly accessible sources. However, intellectual property protocols were observed through proper citation and attribution. This methodology facilitated a context-rich, interpretive analysis of Ketekente as a cultural and diplomatic medium, enabling the study to interrogate both its symbolic capital and its structural challenges in the domains of intellectual property and national identity.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis of selected archival materials and cultural narratives revealed four dominant thematic roles that Ketekente plays in Ghana's diplomatic relations, tourism development, and Pan-African symbolism. These are discussed under the themes; *Diplomatic representation and state symbolism*, *Cultural solidarity and antiracism advocacy*, *Informalisation and marginalisation of weaving practices*, and *Missed opportunities in heritage-based tourism development*.

3.1. Diplomatic Representation and State Symbolism

Ketekente has consistently featured in high-profile political ceremonies, notably during presidential inaugurations and state visits. From the early post-independence era, when President Kwame Nkrumah donned the cloth to visually assert African sovereignty, to more recent appearances by President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo at international forums, Ketekente has served as a cultural signifier of Ghanaian identity on the global stage. These garments function not merely as fashion, but as deliberate diplomatic tools that embody resistance to colonial legacies and assert African pride (Essel, 2019; Kraamer, 2006). In **Figure 1**, a historic photograph from the Library of Congress presents Dr. Kwame Nkrumah being sworn in, wearing Ketekente cloth at his first presidential inauguration. Serving a similar function to deepen diplomatic ties, the Kente named "Adwene si Adwene so" which literally means "the meeting of minds", was gifted to the United Nations (UN) in 1960 to symbolically reflect the rudimentary mandate of the UN as interaction of different ideas and perspectives towards a common goal (United Nations, 1960) Such symbolic uses resonate with the theory of sartorial diplomacy, which posits that textiles and clothing can serve as non-verbal communicative artefacts in international relations (Zakharova, 2022).

The enduring presence of Ketekente at diplomatic events signals Ghana's strategic use of material culture to influence perception, foster soft power, and brand itself as a custodian of African heritage. Since Dr. Nkrumah's era, the Ketekente has emphatically resounded as a state symbol repeatedly featured either fully or sparingly in the wardrobes of all presidential inaugurations just as the recent case of second swearing of President John Dramani Mahama (See **Figure 2**). In the recent case of Excellency John Dramani Mahama, his inaugural costume blends both the Ketekente and Fugu (Handwoven cloth of the people of Northern Ghana usually distinct as stripped and non-multicoloured patterns as discussed earlier)

to highlight the rich Ghanaian cultural artistry (Sarpong, 2025). Just as Dr. Nkrumah, President Mahama therein through his inaugural semiotic costumology emphasise critical essence of the varied Ghanaian cultural objects in reflective resonance of his statesmanship. Whereas the focus of this paper is on the multi-patterned colourful cloths of Ewe and Akan origins, we strongly believe the Fugu deserves a level of cultural protection and enlistment by Ghanaian Folklore Board to promote the cultural heritage of the Northern ethnic societies and to intensify the Ghanaian identity globally.



Source: <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/pnp/cph/3c10000/3c12000/3c12300/3c12312r.jpg>.

Figure 1. Kwame Nkrumah in *Ketekente* for his presidential inauguration in Ghana, 1960.



Source: https://ameyawdebrah.com/kente-fugu-and-agbada-a-showcase-of-ghanaian-fashion-at-mahamas-inauguration/#google_vignette.

Figure 2. His Excellency John Dramani Mahama in blended *Ketekente* during his swearing-in as the 6th President of Ghana's 9th Republic.

Again, the findings of this study on Ketekente as a diplomatic and cultural symbol can be situated within Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital and symbolic power (Musoba & Baez, 2009). Kete and Kente weaving traditions represent more than aesthetic craftsmanship; they function as cultural capital embodied knowledge, artisanal heritage, and identity markers that accrue both social prestige and economic potential. When Ghanaian leaders and diasporic communities wear Ketekente in diplomatic forums or civil rights campaigns, they are enacting a form of symbolic power, reasserting African dignity and reclaiming visibility in historically Eurocentric spaces. For example, historical data reveals that, the Kete was used as a textile statement of civil rights, political and cultural identity by a Master Ewe weaver called Fiawodzo Anatsui (father of El Anatsui). As presented in Figure 3, the account records that Fiawodzo Anatsui of Anyako (a town in the Ghana Ewe land) wore Kete on the occasion of the Prince of Wales's visit to the Gold Coast colony in 1925, woven with English texts reading "*Lean liberty is better than fat slavery*" and "*God save the King*" (Clarke, 2013) indicating its use as a medium for expressing pride liberation than slavery which rubs off the civil rights and cultural identity of societies. The cloth as presented in Figure 3, also shows the mastery of integration of motifs like human figures and animals woven into geometric patterns which classically distinct Kete from Kente aside their semblance in multi-colour geometric patterns. As Skeggs (2013) argues, cultural capital is contextually defined by those who wield institutional power. Thus, by proposing a rebranding of the cloth under the unified term Ketekente, Ghana not only asserts cultural ownership but also challenges dominant narratives that marginalise indigenous African craftsmanship in global cultural hierarchies.



Source: https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/blogger_img/APIUysi8ZDco07fV97Ajjf6gd416hBaKG1GX0-QS58_IzdiWnA3_HdzLHUg7HaMj9xEXxsXdswhAhTJV5jlQvMQ=s1600.

Figure 3. Master weaver Fiawodzo Anatsui in Kete that reposes a textile statement advocating liberation and cultural identity during the Price of Wales's visit to the Gold Coast colony in 1925.

3.2. Cultural Solidarity and Antiracism

Beyond Ghana's borders, Ketekente (commonly referred to as Kente cloth) has become a powerful symbol of African heritage and Black pride, widely embraced by communities in the African diaspora as an expression of cultural identity and resilience (BBC News, 2021). Notably, during the 2020 global antiracism protests sparked by the death of George Floyd, U.S. lawmakers of the Congressional Black Caucus wore Kente stoles while kneeling in remembrance of a moment that reverberated worldwide (Paquette, 2020). While this gesture of the Caucus was met with mixed responses especially regarding the tensions surrounding the death of Floyd, the use of the stole underscored how Ghanaian woven cloth has been reinterpreted by diasporic communities as a symbol of ancestral connection and resistance of the people of African identity. Figure 4 presents an image sourced from *The Washington Post*, depicting U.S. lawmakers draped in Kente stoles during a protest in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement.



Source: <https://arc-anglerfish-washpost-prod-washpost.s3.amazonaws.com/public/KSPANZVIXQI6VEDD42N5MUQJIA.jpg>.

Figure 4. U.S. Congressional black caucus members wearing Ketekente cloth stoles.

Such international use of “Ketekente” as proposed, affirms its role within Pan-African discourse, where cultural artefacts are mobilised to build collective memory, forge solidarity, and confront systems of oppression (Hoffmann & Metz, 2017; Padilioni Jr., 2017). However, this also raises questions about cultural appropriation, authenticity, and the economic benefits (or lack thereof) that accrue to Ghanaian artisans and weavers. This is because, the mention of Kente in the narrative of the Black Caucus potentially marginalises Kete as the actual weavers of that particular collection of stoles used in this demonstration could have either be woven by the Asante or Ewe weavers. Again, artisanal appropriation remains blurry as it is uncommon for weavers to leave their signatures on the woven pieces. Perhaps this practice justifies the collective ownership (Hoffmann & Metz, 2017) of the handwoven fabrics as recognised by UNESCO as cultural artifact

(UNESCO, 2024). However, their recognition and use of “Kente” seemingly marginalises both Kete and Fugu thereby underline the proposed integrative term, KeteKente for the multi-pattern colourful handwoven cloth whereas Fugu is also uniquely recognised as another Ghanaian cultural object.

The global circulation of Ketekente as a tool for Black unity and civil rights advocacy resonates with the concept of Afrocentric diplomacy, a framework where African nations engage global actors through culturally rooted expressions (Botha & van Wyk, 2024). Sartorial diplomacy, in this context, becomes a medium for enacting Pan-African solidarity. For example, the symbolic use of Kente cloth by U.S. congress members during the George Floyd protests in 2020 was not merely performative but reflected a deeper diasporic connection to African heritage (Paquette, 2020). In this regard, Ketekente has emerged as a textile emblem of Pan-African resistance, akin to how dashikis or Afro combs became icons of the Black Power movement (Van Klinken, 2020). The politics of dress, therefore, is not peripheral but central to the ideological coherence of the Pan-African project. In this regard, use of the Ketekente by the congress consolidates its international or geopolitical usage as a semiotic cultural object and insignia to make visual statements of marginalised diaspora of African origin just as it was done in 1925 by Fiwodzo Anatsui.

3.3. Informalisation and Marginalisation of Weaving Practices

Despite the prestige and global visibility of Ketekente, the industry that produces it remains highly informal. Studies suggest that many weavers lack formal training in copyright or design protection (Kpogo et al. (2022)). In most weaving communities, traditional knowledge is transmitted orally and informally, leaving artisans vulnerable to design theft and economic exploitation particularly as foreign entities replicate patterns in mass-produced prints (Okyere & Denoncourt, 2021; Wendland, 2018). For example, it is common to find imported printed ketekente on Ghanaian markets sold at cheap prices for the masses to patronise.

The lack of standardisation, policy support, and access to intellectual property education impedes the sector’s growth. As Kraamer (2006) and Kpogo et al. (2022) notes, the skewed global discourse often referring to all Ghanaian handwoven cloths as “Kente” marginalises the term “Kete” and the contributions of Ewe weavers. This asymmetry reflects broader issues of cultural hegemony, requiring deliberate rebranding efforts that promote equity across ethnic contributions. Meanwhile, curated collections of the British Museum hold the sample unique master artistry of fine cotton Ewe cloth (object number 2008,2019.1) characterised supplementary weft patterns in multicolored stripes and seamlessly woven figurative patterns (See Figure 5).

This fragment demonstrates the characteristic weaving style and narrative visual language of Ewe tradition and is uniquely different from the Asante kente colourful patterns as presented in Figure 6. It is for this reason that the seemingly marginalised narratives about the Ewe Kete in literature against the popularity of

the Asante kente (**Figure 6**) becomes topical for national attention. Again, the labeling of the Ewe Kete (**Figure 5**) as “Ewe cloth” as against the Asante Kente (**Figure 6**) as “Asante Kente” on the British Museum website, whether deliberate or not, adds to nuanced marginalisation of the Ewe Kete master handwoven pieces. Similarly, for fairness in cultural representation, Fugu of Northern Ghanaian origin equally deserves curatorial space in the British Museum archives. Beyond the British Museum, academic, heritage literature and documentary on traditional textiles in Ghana shows that *Kente* is globally recognised and protected, but less documented for *Kete*, indicating an imbalance in scholarly and institutional attention to related textiles. Specifically, Ghana’s Kente was recently inscribed on UNESCO’s *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* list, highlighting its global prominence relative to Kete and fugu, which are lesser-recognised as woven forms in some public presentations or advocacies by government officials, historians and experts in the Ghana Folklore documentary (Ghana Business News, 2018; UNESCO, 2024; Kpogo et al., 2022). For instance, the re-branding of Asante Kente as an international commodity has been once advocated by a former Ashanti Regional Minister (Ghana Business News, 2018). However, due to their abilities to weave both geometric patterns and figurative motifs (Kpogo et al., 2022; Kraamer, 2006), such marginalisation could potentially minimise the production of the figurative designs as the geometric ones are what have been popularised as kente.



Source: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_2008-2019-1.

Figure 5. Ewe Kete (circa 1920-1940), object number 2008, 2019.1, British Museum.

3.4. Missed Opportunities in Heritage-Based Tourism

Heritage-based tourism constitutes a strategically important yet persistently underexploited avenue for the promotion of *Ketekente* within Ghana’s cultural economy. Prominent weaving centres such as Bonwire and Agotime attract both do-

mestic and international visitors, particularly during annual cultural events including the Agbamevorza and Bonwire Kente Festivals (Kpogo et al., 2022). Despite this visibility, the broader heritage tourism potential of Ketekente remains constrained by persistent infrastructural deficits, fragmented marketing strategies, and limited, uneven state investment. These structural limitations inhibit the translation of cultural visibility into sustained economic and cultural value.

Empirical field evidence further reveals an uneven tourism landscape in which select centres, notably Bonwire, receive disproportionate national and institutional attention, while numerous Ewe weaving communities remain marginalised within dominant heritage narratives. This asymmetry not only reinforces regional inequities but also weakens the inclusive national identity that Ketekente symbolically embodies. In this regard, UNESCO's (2021) framework for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage emphasises inclusive community participation, equitable representation, and decentralised transmission of heritage practices, thereby underscoring the need for balanced recognition across weaving communities. Prioritising and establishing decentralised weaving hubs, structured training centres, and integrated cultural tourism packages that advance diverse weaving traditions in Ghana could reposition Ketekente as a genuinely inclusive heritage brand while simultaneously strengthening local livelihoods and cultural sustainability.



Source: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Af2004-04-1.

Figure 6. Asante Kente (Circa 1880-1920), Object number Af2004,04.1, British Museum.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The preceding findings and discussions examined Ketekente as a culturally embedded semiotic textile with significance extending across historical, political, and economic domains. Drawing together the key insights from the study, the following sections synthesise the main findings and outline practical, policy-oriented

recommendations aimed at strengthening the sustainable governance, representation, and strategic use of Ketekente within Ghana's cultural and diplomatic landscape.

4.1. Conclusion

This study set out to examine Ketekente as a cultural, political, and economic resource within Ghana's national and international engagements. The findings demonstrate that Ketekente which is masterfully handwoven by both Ewe and Asante communities extends far beyond its material form as a textile artefact to function as a powerful instrument of diplomacy, a global symbol of African and Pan-African identity, and a largely underutilised asset within Ghana's tourism and creative economy. Through contextual and narrative analysis of historical events, state ceremonies, and protest performances, the study traced the transformation of Ketekente from a marker of ethnic prestige into a strategic tool of statecraft and soft power.

The deployment of Ketekente in presidential inaugurations, diplomatic encounters, and transnational civil rights movements underscores its capacity to communicate political values, consolidate diasporic solidarity, and project Ghana's cultural authority on the global stage. However, this symbolic prominence exists alongside persistent structural challenges within the weaving sector. The absence of formal institutional support, limited intellectual property protections, and uneven national recognition constrain the economic and cultural agency of weavers, who largely operate within informal systems. Furthermore, the marginalisation of the term *Kete* in global discourse and tourism narratives reflects deeper historical and institutional inequities that continue to shape cultural visibility and value. Collectively, these findings reveal a disconnect between Ketekente's international symbolic capital and the material conditions of its production, signalling the need for more coherent and inclusive cultural governance.

4.2. Recommendations

To fully realise Ketekente's potential as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy, economic diversification, and sustainable heritage preservation, this study recommends a coordinated, structurally grounded national strategy. Central to this agenda is the adoption of a deliberate national rebranding framework that formally positions *Ketekente* as a unified cultural symbol while explicitly recognising its plural genealogies within both Ewe and Asante traditions. Such a reframing would promote terminological coherence across educational curricula, tourism narratives, policy documents, and international cultural platforms, thereby strengthening Ghana's cultural visibility and symbolic cohesion in global heritage and creative economy circuits. In this regard, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts should advance inclusive heritage dialogues with scholars and cultural practitioners to ensure equitable representation of Ghana's diverse artistic traditions. National and international curatorial records and heritage archives should also be reviewed and updated to reflect a more accurate and inclusive account of Ghanaian textile

histories.

In addition, clear cultural guidance should be developed regarding the wearing of Ketekente as an anti-racist and solidarity symbol in global contexts. While the cloth has been widely adopted in civil rights protests and anti-racism movements, its symbolic use should be accompanied by contextual education that foregrounds its Ghanaian origins, historical meanings, and the lived realities of the weaving communities. Such guidance would help preserve symbolic appropriation and ensure that the wearing of Ketekente functions not merely as visual protest, but as an informed act of cultural respect, political solidarity, and ethical representation.

Equally important is the institutional development of weaving infrastructure through the establishment of national weaving hubs in both Eweland and Asanteland. Strategic collaboration between the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture and local governance structures would enable these centres to function as spaces for skills transmission, heritage conservation, design innovation, and structured tourist engagement. Embedding training and experimentation within culturally grounded environments, such hubs would facilitate intergenerational knowledge transfer while aligning traditional craftsmanship with contemporary creative and market demands.

The long-term sustainability of Ketekente further depends on strengthened intellectual property protection mechanisms. Targeted legal education and advisory systems should be developed to empower weavers to protect their traditional cultural expressions from misappropriation and unauthorised commercial exploitation. Context-sensitive guidance on copyright, geographical indications, and related protections would align local practices with international frameworks, reinforcing cultural ownership while enabling ethical participation in global markets. In parallel, heritage tourism strategies should be decentralised to promote Ketekente beyond dominant sites such as Bonwire. Equitable investment in visitor infrastructure, interpretive centres, hospitality services, and curated cultural routes across multiple weaving communities would foster more inclusive and immersive engagements with Ghana's handwoven textile traditions. Such an approach would redistribute economic benefits while strengthening regional cultural identities within the national heritage economy.

Finally, the integration of Ketekente into Ghana's cultural diplomacy architecture requires closer alignment between cultural policy and foreign affairs. Embassies, consulates, and cultural attachés should be systematically equipped to deploy Ketekente within exhibitions, ceremonial exchanges, and public diplomacy initiatives. When worn or displayed in international anti-racism forums, cultural summits, or commemorative events, Ketekente should be presented with interpretive narratives that frame it as both a symbol of resistance to racial injustice and a living heritage sustained by specific Ghanaian communities. Addressing the structural challenges identified in this study will enable Ketekente to evolve from a powerful symbol into a fully institutionalised cornerstone of Ghana's national identity, cultural diplomacy, and global visibility.

5. Contribution and Implications

This study contributes significantly to the emerging scholarship on cultural diplomacy by positioning Ketekente not simply as a textile craft, but as a potent symbol of national identity, transnational solidarity, and economic potential. Proposing the inclusive term *Ketekente* to encompass both Ewe and Asante weaving traditions challenges prevailing narratives that marginalise the cultural legitimacy of *Kete*. It deepens understanding of how indigenous visual cultures serve as instruments of soft power and heritage branding, while also raising critical awareness of intellectual property gaps in Ghana's creative sector. In this way, the study offers a conceptual re-framing of Ghanaian handwoven textiles as both cultural artefacts and active agents in diplomacy and global cultural politics. As indicated earlier, the geometrically hand-woven colourful pattern cloth popularly known as Kente is produced by both Asante and Ewe weavers. However, its glocal popularity and high patronage could potentially contribute to the extinction of the additional figurative patterns that are exclusively produced by Ewe weavers only. The rebranding and adoption of the term *Ketekente* in this sense, potentially holds a great deal of preserving the cultural heritage of the Ewe people as well as deepening the marketing and economic values of the Ewe figurative Kete weaves as well as extending Ghana's heritage and tourism.

The implications of this research are twofold policy and praxis. At the policy level, the findings underscore the urgency for a coordinated national framework that safeguards traditional cultural expressions through robust copyright and geographical indication systems. This includes targeted education for weavers on intellectual property rights and stronger enforcement mechanisms against foreign replication of Ghanaian designs. Practically, the research encourages the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture to establish multi-regional weaving centres that function both as cultural hubs and tourist destinations. Such investments would not only enhance cultural preservation and economic growth, but also elevate Ghana's positioning in global Pan-African discourses. Together, these implications reinforce the central theme that Ketekente is not just a cloth, but a strategic cultural resource for Ghana's future.

6. Limitations and Further Research

While this study offers critical insights into the socio-political, cultural, and economic dimensions of Ketekente within Ghana's diplomatic and Pan-African contexts, it is not without limitations. Primarily, the research relied on secondary sources such as multimedia archives, historical documents, and scholarly publications. Although these sources provided rich contextual narratives, the absence of primary field data such as interviews with weavers, cultural policymakers, or diaspora communities limits the depth of lived experiences captured. Additionally, the focus on prominent national and international events may overlook micro-level perspectives from local weaving communities whose voices remain underrepresented.

Future research should adopt a multi-sited ethnographic approach to explore how Ketekente is experienced and understood by weavers, traders, tourists, and cultural actors across different regions of Ghana. Comparative studies examining how other African nations manage and protect similar textile heritages such as Nigeria's Aso Oke or Mali's Bògòlanfini may also offer valuable lessons for Ghana's policy landscape. Moreover, quantitative assessments of the economic impact of Ketekente-related tourism and export activities could strengthen the case for greater state investment in the sector. These future directions will help create a more holistic understanding of how indigenous cultural expressions can drive sustainable development and cultural diplomacy in Africa.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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