**Fashion and the Politics of Clothing Discovery Box**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item &amp; Photo</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>T-Shirt Travels DVD</strong></td>
<td>This 2001 documentary explores the second-hand clothing trade. It follows clothing as it is donated in the United States and makes its way to Zambia. Second-hand clothing is an important part of present day economies throughout Africa, but also has major effects on local textile industries. This film shows these complexities alongside the everyday life of clothing traders.</td>
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<td><strong>Kanga</strong></td>
<td><em>Kanga</em> is a light piece of cotton fabric with colorfully printed patterns. Originally from the East African coast, Kanga is widely used by East African women in different ways. Two pieces of Kanga can be wrapped to cover the whole body; however, some women prefer just wrapping one piece around the waist. Kangas have Swahili messages printed on them, often proverbs (<em>methali</em> in Swahili), and women use them to pass specific messages to their husbands, hypocritical friends or neighbors, or simply to educate people about acceptable morals. New brides are given Kangas by friends and family as gifts during weddings, often with messages about how to maintain their marriages. Other uses include wrapping Kangas as slings for carrying babies and young children and as towels after taking a bath.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kitenge (Commemorative DRC Cloth)</strong></td>
<td>With a slightly coarser texture than Kanga, this piece of cloth belongs to a form of waxy fabric called <em>Kitenge</em> (plural <em>Vitenge</em> in Swahili). <em>Vitenge</em> are multicolored, and a little more prestigious than Kanga. They are used similarly to Kangas, although they have no particular messages printed on them. Some people, both women and men, sew <em>Vitenge</em> into skirts and blouses and pants and shirts, like this. In some African communities, Kitenge is given as a gift to a mother in-law as a show of respect. Kitenge can be designed in different ways for specific purposes; for example, the Kitenge shown here was designed for a commemoration of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s 50th anniversary. <em>Vitenge</em> appear in various forms across the African continent.</td>
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<td><strong>Waxprint</strong></td>
<td>The English term for Kitenge is <em>waxprint</em>. Though waxprint is associated with Africa today, waxprint fabrics actually originated in the Netherlands. <a href="#">Here</a> is a look at waxprint’s fascinating history.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Toghu (Commemorative Cameroonian Cloth)</strong></td>
<td>This is a velvet fabric called <em>Toghu</em> (pronounced as to-guu) from Cameroon. Initially, it was only worn by men and women of royal families to distinguish the ruling class from the ordinary people. Today, however, Toghu is widely worn during weddings and festivals and is more popular as a cultural dress among the Bamileke people who live in North-Western Cameroon. The fabric is waxy and hard and is designed into different colors. This particular Toghu combines the colors of the flag of independent Cameroon and is worn in independence day celebrations by most Cameroonians.</td>
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**Scarf**

Head scarves are now popular in most parts of Africa. Some, in different colors and textures, are wrapped to cover the head for religious purposes, while some people simply wrap scarfs around their necks to protect them from extreme cold. During some sporting activities, such as soccer, some fans cheer on their teams by winding scarves in the air. In some colleges and universities in Kenya, scarves are simply a style for both women and men students (one of the ways you would tell if people are university students is seeing them with scarves 😊). [Learn more](#) about the many different ways scarves are traditionally used as clothing in Africa.

**Book bag**

This is a bag used by children to carry books to and from school in Mozambique. The bag is made from local fabric, mostly sisal, and then decorated with different patterns and colorings. The texture of the material is much coarser than that of Kitenge. The pattern and coloring are common in other forms of clothing, such as suits and hats, which are made by local tailors.

**T-Shirt celebrating Congolese independence**

This is a t-shirt uniquely designed for celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2010 since their independence from the French in 1960. The shirt includes the map of Congo alongside its ruling presidents in four different periods after its independence. Each period shows the number of years each of the presidents ruled up until 2010, with the longest serving dictator Mobutu Sesseseko ruling the country as its second president for 25 years (1965-1990). You can watch videos of the 50th anniversary celebrations [here](#), DRC recently held presidential elections on 30 December 2018, and its current president is Félix Tshisekedi.
### Bama Caps

*Bama caps* are attributed to the Bama people of Borno in Nigeria. The caps are famous for their intricate embroidery and durability. These caps were originally worn by community leaders. They have become complementary to any traditional suit in Nigeria and across West Africa today. When starched, these caps stand elegantly atop the head because they are made from strong fabrics.

![Bama Caps Image](image)

### Gobi

*Fila* is the generic name for all caps like this. They are worn by the Yoruba people of southern Nigeria. Made with *aṣo-oke* (woven fabric), damask, or velvet, fila is worn by men to complement traditional Yoruba attire. Usually the loose part of it is slouched to the right. There are different types of fila, and this one is called *gobi*.

![Gobi Image](image)

### Batik cloth

*Batik* is originally from Indonesia but has widely spread across the world. It is made from cotton, different vegetable dyes and hot wax, usually heated with a mixture of paraffin. It has a slightly rough texture. In Africa, Batik is a common cloth used for women in West, East, Central and Southern African countries. Men buy Batik for their wives as gifts. In some communities in Tanzania, Batik also accompany dowry one pays when they marry. Some women also exchange Batik as a sign of friendship. In some countries of West Africa, women showcase their beauty or economic wellbeing with the quality of Batik they wrap on their bodies.

![Batik Image](image)
**Bandana**

*Bandana* is well known in many cultures of the world. It is a piece of cloth designed with beautiful colors and patterns. This particular one is weaved to look like royal hats which were worn by many African kings and chiefs as a symbol of authority. This bandana surrounds the head with the top uncovered. Different countries use bandanas with their political, social, and cultural meanings to commemorate anniversaries, campaigns, or sports.

**Skirt**

This skirt is made to reflect the Adinkra symbols from the Akan people of Ghana in West Africa. Adinkra symbols are carved in many objects such as stools and walls, and are printed on clothes. The symbols convey specific cultural meanings related to traditional knowledge and wisdom. Akan people believe interpreting Adinkra symbol is like tracing the meaning of a proverb. People who wear clothes with Adinkra symbols may intend to convey specific messages/wisdom to other people. Such clothing serves a similar function as *kangas*.

**Kanzu**

*Kanzu* is designed from either silk, cotton, poplin or linen. Kanzus are mostly white in color and usually made to the ankle or floor length. They are usually worn with a black suit jacket. Kanzu has both political and religious significance in East Africa. In pre-colonial Uganda, Kanzus were worn exclusively by Kabakas (Buganda kings) as symbol of political authority. Kanzu has become a popular garment for men in Uganda and are used especially during important events like weddings, funerals, and holiday functions. Along the Swahili Coast of Kenya and Tanzania (mainly Zanzibar), Kanzu is a popular clothing for Islamic men in and out of the mosque.
Batik blouse and skirt

This is a Senegalese version of Batik. Traditionally, special designers used ochre and glue from specific trees to infuse different patterns on the fabric, then it was heated in the sunshine to weave the patterns together. Nowadays, the fabric is mechanically designed and manufactured, and the industry has considerably expanded. Aissa Dione is one the most renowned Senegalese artists associated with this kind of fabric. The pieces in this box are a woman’s skirt and blouse. They are worn for special events such as ceremonies, weddings, funerals and important gatherings. They are markers of beauty, fashion and social class.

Children’s outfit

This Togolese fabric is designed for both men and women. The fabric texture is slippery in the inner layer and slightly coarse on the outside. Light cotton is blended with hot wax and then allowed to cool. Different colored pigments are then mixed in paraffin and used to design patterns on the fabric. During the colonial period in West Africa, messengers wore this type of fabric. Today, in most West African films which portray territories governed by kings, palace guards are mostly seen wearing this fabric. It is mostly a fashion for the lower classes.

Suit

This multicolored print was traditionally designed by the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe. In the precolonial period, the fabric was a marker of ethnic identity. This piece, made by the company Makotis Africa, distributes the fabric worldwide, going beyond ethnic associations. The fabric can also be made into different pieces: clothes, wall curtains, bedsheets, bandanas, hats and so on.