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RETURN TO SENDER 13

Spring Summer 2027

Collection Notes

Spring Summer 2027 continues an ongoing study into the iconography and promise of post-independence East Africa, which we refer to as *freedom culture*.

1960s-1970s: As newly independent African states attempt to define themselves outside of colonial formality, a lighter political dress code emerges. For a brief moment, power is not presented through distance and rigidity.

No figure encodes this shift more clearly than Zambia's founding president Kenneth Kaunda, after whom the Kaunda suit is named. The Kaunda suit removed the tie and rejected the stiff construction of imperialist tailoring. Climate-appropriate, short-sleeved, and made of breathable fabrics, it dismissed European formal wear and brought African leaders closer to the people through lightness. Lightness became an expression of solidarity.

If the Kaunda suit represented the promise of solidarity from state power, then Princess Elizabeth Bagaaya of Tooro Kingdom in Uganda demonstrated how elegance and fashion were strategic tools for global politics.

Appointed by Idi Amin as Uganda's first roving ambassador and Foreign Minister in 1974, Princess Bagaaya traveled Europe and America carrying the country's reputation in her bearing – royal lineage, the first female lawyer in Uganda, actress and fashion icon. She appeared on the cover of Harper's Bazaar UK, the first Black model to do so.

The end of colonial rule produced an era that still carried the cut of empire but was beginning to form its own contemporary silhouette. Dress became one of the first languages of *freedom culture*. The era of promise was interrupted by political unrest.

RETURN TO SENDER 13 reads post-independence Africa as a design system that was never fulfilled. The Kaunda suit and Elizabeth of Tooro are African icons of *freedom culture*.

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