



SIGHTINGS

WHAT DOES AN AFRICAN LOOK LIKE?

INCREASINGLY, ORDINARY AFRICANS RESEMBLE ORDINARY AFRICAN-AMERICANS—FROM AROUND 2009. The sub-Saharan region imports about a quarter of the world's used clothing, much of it from the United States. In fact, up to 80 percent of the 2.5 billion pounds of clothes that Americans donate each year to places like the Salvation Army and Goodwill stores eventually end up in vast markets like the one pictured above, in Uganda.

Each day, at the numerous open-air bazaars in and around Kampala, hundreds of thousands of shoppers pick through a sea of imported clothes each day. A Ralph Lauren shirt—only slightly frayed—may cost less than local traditional garb. Indeed, it's not uncommon for local businesspeople to snap up suits to wear to their next meeting.

However, in getting a good bargain, some critics see a bad deal. As one local Ugandan told *The New York Times* some years back, "These secondhand clothes are a problem. Ugandan culture will be dead in ten years, because we are all looking to these Western things. Ugandan culture is dying even now. It is dead. Dead and buried."

Losing local culture is one thing. Losing money is another—and some governments are taking notice. Because importation of secondhand clothes tends to hurt domestic textile and apparel manufacturers, some countries, such as Nigeria and Eritrea, ban or institute heavy restrictions on pre-owned clothing. South Africa, for instance, permits charitable—but not commercial—resale of imported used clothes. And every so often, Ugandan lawmakers also threaten to crack down on the trade. No one seems worried, though. Even where there's heavy regulation, illegal marts openly thrive. With markets, like clothes, it seems black never goes out of style. —VADIM LIBERMAN