

CAPULANAS ... CAPULANAS ... CAPULANAS ... CAPULANAS ... CAPULANAS

'A real Mozambican woman must have a capulana, two capulanas; ten capulanas there can never be too many! Like the women themselves capulanas have a name and tell stories. (Paulina Chiziane)

Welcome to this exhibition of capulanas - the traditional, vibrant and multifunctional fabric widths, that are such a distinctive characteristic of women's lives in Angola and Mozambique.

The everyday capulana is a 2 metre fabric width wrapped round the body and tied in a loose knot at the waist. Capulanas are fairly cheap, costing from £1 to £3 for the best waxed cotton but endlessly versatile and practical: they protect the garments worn underneath from dust and dirt when sitting on the ground or in an open bus; they fit in handbags and can be brought out when needed; they are used as wraps when the temperature drops and as rugs to sit on; they make comfortable baby slings and carriers as well as curtains, door and bed coverings; they are used to make luggage bundles and bags for beans and grain; they require no sewing and are easy to launder and easy to store. Sometimes other garments are made from capulana fabric- male ones too (see Berta shirt). There is also a more ceremonial capulana the size of a double bed sheet with white lace sewn in the middle - the Mucume - often given as a marriage gift.

But capulanas are more than pieces of cloth - they tell stories, mark moments in history, record ways of life. They are visible signs of belonging and accompany women to great events. In May 2010 at St Stephen and St Lawrence Maputo a woman was honoured on her 100th birthday by being presented with capulanas from generations of women in her family who, at that point, all dressed in the same capulana. It was a powerful and moving tribute.

Capulanas are intimately connected to womanhood: Paula Chiziane notes 'Among various social strata one hears the expression 'Luisa Diogo is a woman with a firm capulana' to symbolise the power and dignity of the former Prime Minister. At moments of great challenge women are advised to 'tie your capulana well'. At moments of success it is said she 'tied her capulana well'. Chiziane concludes 'In the European tradition men offer their sweethearts flowers. In the Mozambican tradition they offer capulanas. There's a reason for this. Flowers wither and die, capulanas last. The capulana does not age, but is eternally renewed. It is the best cloth in the world'.

Many of the capulanas on display show traditional African patterns, designs, colours and themes reflecting the things that are important in predominantly rural, agricultural societies from food (maize; onion and fish), to music (drums). They chart new influences (tractor tyres and armchair) and are used in the way we use T shirts - as badges of identification (Diocese of Niassa). Capulanas also mark significant moments in history (1998 capulana marking the death of Berta Sengulane -the wife of Bishop Dinis of Lebombo, and the 2000 flood capulana). Every aspect of life is recorded on capulanas - from secular to political and religious including: President Guebuza (see display), Pope John Paul II, former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey and former President Samora Machel. Soon we hope there will be an ALMA one!

*ALMA: Angola London Mozambique Association. See www.almalink.org . For more information contact Sheenagh Burrell, ALMA Communications Officer at almacomms@london.anglican.org

CAPULANAS ... CAPULANAS ... CAPULANAS ... CAPULANAS ... CAPULANAS

Capulanas in this exhibition:

Double Gold Matrimonial Mucume Capulana

Religious & Historical Capulanas

1998 Berta Sengulane

2000 Flood

2007 Diocese of Niassa

Traditional Capulanas

Woman's head

Birds and clouds

Fish

Sunrise (Blue)

Nacala Sunflowers (Black and Orange)

Onions

Maize

Drums

Sewing

Birds and Butterflies

Traditional Geometric Patterns

Modern Life Capulanas

Scissors and Dressmaking

Tractor wheels

Armchair and table lamp

Umbrellas

Political Capulanas

The Frelimo Guebuza Capulana

Josina Machel

*ALMA: Angola London Mozambique Association. See www.almalink.org . For more information contact Sheenagh Burrell, ALMA Communications Officer at almacomms@london.anglican.org