



THE DRESS THAT TALKS: THE KANGA FABRIC IN CONTEMPORARY SHAMBAA WEDDING CEREMONIES IN NORTH-EASTERN TANZANIA

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Abstract:

This paper examines the kanga dress as communicative clothing in the Tanzania context. Using observation of various situations and interpretation of texts in kanga, it examines the significance of the kanga dress particularly in Shambaa wedding ceremonies. The sample of the wedding ceremonies is determined by the writer's knowledge of the culture and traditions of Shambaa ethnic group. The paper analyses how the kanga dress in Shambaa offers women and the community a communication means. It argues that kanga is an essential part of ritual and social activities in Shambaa culture. Employing examples of the kanga worn in wedding ceremonies, the paper contends that there is a relationship between the occasions and types of kanga worn by women. This relationship also exists between occasions and the sayings inscribed on the kanga women wear for particular occasions. In fact, the kanga texts communication facilitates the understanding of the Shambaa culture.

Keywords: kanga dress, communicative cloth, culture, tradition, contemporary

1. Introduction

Kanga is the dress that Tanzanian women and other women in the African Great Lakes region wear not only in different occasions but also in different styles. They sometimes wear it as head-kerchiefs and it serves more than just being a piece of clothing. For Tanzanian women, this colourful kanga fabric serves as a means for communicating a particular message depending on a given occasion and context. Among the Shambaa ethnic group of North-eastern Tanzania, the kanga assumes a particular communicative function in traditional ceremonies including wedding ceremony. It offers women and the community in general a unique communication means. In fact, as an essential part of social activities in Shambaa culture, the kanga demonstrates a relationship between the occasions and types of kanga women wear. This paper, therefore, contends that there is a close affinity between

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occasions and the sayings inscribed on the kanga women wear for particular occasions. In addition, it argues that the kanga serves as a communicative tool that expresses individuals' feelings in both marital and relational issues.

2. Methodology

This paper is based on the findings of a qualitative study that examined the various social settings and the individuals who live in these settings. The qualitative approach focused on how human beings organise themselves and their settings, and how people of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth (Mack *et al.*, 2005). The qualitative techniques allowed the researchers to observe and understand how people structure and render meaning to their daily lives. The study also paid attention to the emotions, motivations, symbols and their meanings, empathy, and other subjective aspects associated with naturally evolving lives of individuals and groups (Berg, 2001).

Qualitative research also assists the engagement in textual analysis that involves the identification and interpretation of a set of verbal or non-verbal signs (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). Textual analysis is normally used to interpret texts (films, television programmes, clothes, magazines, advertisements, graffiti, and so on) to try and obtain a sense of how particular cultures at particular times make sense of the world around them (Frey *et al.*, 1999). According to Peirce (1998), everything that people encounter, from clothing, books, food to architecture, is a sign that compels them to think about something other than itself. This implies that, through a textual analysis method one can analyse and interpret the selected text or texts and construct meaning. In textual analysis, meaning can be analysed from the perspective of the reader's reaction and the cultural context in which the text was created or the contemporary cultural context in which the text is experienced today (Berg, 2001). In the context of this study, textual analysis, therefore, assists people in gathering information from the kanga texts, analysing and interpreting them. Guided by this perception, the researcher interpreted and constructed meanings from kanga texts to gain understanding of how the Shambaa women communicate through the kanga they wear.

2.1 Dress and culture

Culture in this paper denotes the ideas, knowledge, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people, community or society. It includes art, clothing, entertainment, style and principles expressed or enjoyed by a majority of a population at a given time.

Generally, dress plays an important role in people's lives for it is often through its meaning that they substantiate their sense of self and place in society. It expresses the folk's stable traditions, customs, and ways of society (Cunningham and Lab, 1991:6). Moreover, dress reflects culture as a way of life, shared abilities, habits, beliefs and customs of a people or social group. Furthermore, it expresses people's individuality and their sense of themselves. Dress also helps to demonstrate the manner in which people order their world of cultural categories such as class, race, status, gender and age, and express cultural principles,

for example, the values, beliefs and ideas accounting for their lived experience in the world (Barnard, 2002; Kaiser, 1997; Lurie, 1992). The dress also helps to substantiate and give concrete cultural meaning to individuals (Barnard, 2002). Through dress, therefore, people can understand individual or group identity or identify cultural rituals and the rites of passage shared by community members.

Park (2014) asserts that each culture has its unique traditional clothing (dressing). It is the culture that decides what, when, and how to wear certain clothes, and guides its members to interpret the messages communicated through clothes. For Park, clothing communicates a wide range of ideas and to a wider audience. These ideas and meanings associated with clothing or dress may be transmitted visually or through written description. Cunningham and Lab (1991:8) explicate thusly: *“For communication to occur, the meanings must be shared by the communicators.”* Building on this view this paper treats the kanga as a dress/clothing that communicates particular messages as envisaged by the wearer and their social milieu. Indeed, through the kanga, women communicate and express their feelings that, in the case of the Shambaa, also facilitate the communication of their culture.

3. Kanga dress

The kanga is a rectangle of pure cotton wrapper with a border all around it and printed in bold designs and bright colours. It is usually worn as a traditional outfit and, in most cases, women wear it in matched pairs. In Tanzania, the kanga is a popular dress as it is used as a medium of communication at social, economic and political levels (Yahya-Othman, 1997; Beck, 2001). Most of the women wear a particular kanga to send a message to a particular person or group (Linnebuhr, 1992).

3.1 Age and gender roles determine kanga style to wear

Kanga is traditionally a women's wear. It is always associated with a normal part of a woman's outfit. It also expresses art, beauty, culture, and customs of women. The wearing of the kanga among women differs from place to place. On Tanzania mainland, for instance, women wear the kanga around their waists from one piece, with the second piece casually thrown over their shoulders. In the coastal areas such as Zanzibar, the kanga is strictly an outfit to be worn inside the house (Hamid, 1996). Coastal women in Tanzania wear their kanga by tying one piece under the armpits above the chest, while the other piece is tied around the waist, leaving the upper part bare. If it happens that a man (excluding a husband) comes inside a house, the lower piece is untied and used as a wrapper to cover her chest (ibid.). She cannot do this to a husband. The same style is used by matured girls (Yahya-Othman, 1997). Girls who have not reached puberty wear kanga differently. They pass both ends under the armpits and a knot is tied on the back of the neck. Once they are married, it is prohibited for them to wear kanga in this style. Beck (2001) points out that the kanga is worn in different styles depending on the women's age and their daily activities. Overall, particular styles depend on whether a woman is cooking, relaxing at home, working in the

fields, attending a wedding, mourning or praying. Nowadays, some girls use the kanga to make different outfits such as gowns, skirts, or pairs of trousers.

Usually, it is not very common for men to wear the kanga in Tanzania. Mostly, men who wear kanga are married ones. They use them as night wear (Hamid, 1996). Like women, men wear the kanga in different styles. Hamid highlights the fact that among the Sukuma ethnic group in Tanzania, men wear the kanga over a shirt and a pair of trousers. According to Hamid, wearing a kanga in the Sukuma community symbolises the prestige a man gets from being married. He differentiates a Sukuma man and Zanzibar or coastal regions men in wearing kanga—that a Sukuma man from upcountry wears kanga as part of his casual working dress whereas the Zanzibar and coastal men use it as a night wear.

Among the Shambaa ethnic group, the use of kanga begins from the day a new baby is born. As soon as a baby is born, it is wrapped in a kanga. The baby uses the old kanga as the first napkins that give it warmth and protection from the cold. Moreover, woman tightens a kanga around her belly after delivery so that the enlarged uterus can shrink back to its normal size quickly for her to regain her figure. Mothers also strap their babies onto their backs or their chests using the kanga. In addition, a little boy wears kanga during circumcision period. Here men appear to wear the kanga in special moments; they have to gain status to wear it.

3.2 Kanga dress expresses mood

According to Allwood (2002), the dress or cloth is one of the types of body movements, which functions to indicate or display social status or role in a particular social activity. Dress may be used to express, disguise and reflect mood (Roach and Eicher, 1979). Barnard (2002) also underlines the fact that clothes and mood are two inter-related constituents as they affect the overall personality of an individual. In daily routine, one can observe the contrasts of mood in different types of clothing that can be either positive or negative. Raunio (1982) mentions also that we choose clothing daily to cope with social circumstances and one's feelings. She asserts that expressive features of favourite clothes help to create a feeling of togetherness with other people, to stand out, produce an impression and control feelings, images and impressions of others.

Furthermore, Hamid (1996) and Yahya-Othman (1997) affirm that dress and mood are inter-related principally because the kanga expresses one's mood. According to them, the kanga indicates whether the wearer is in a happy or sad occasion. For instance, during and after the funeral, widows cover their heads and whole body with the kanga, leaving only the face and hands open. Women who attend burial ceremony also wear the same, although they sometimes cover their heads with a scarf. This form of dress reflects the sharing grief with a deceased's family. In addition, a mother who has lost a child has her stomach tied tightly with the kanga showing that at the particular moment she is experiencing the same pains that she experienced in labour pain.

3.3 The significance of colour in the kanga dress

Colours of the kanga are significant as they also communicate a particular. Traditionally, a Zanzibar woman wearing a kanga that bears red and black colours makes her husband aware that she is in menstruation period and could not give the husband a conjugal right (Hamid, 1996). Thus without uttering words, the wife informs her husband about her state. Similarly, the white coloured kanga is adorned during the full moon to symbolise the purity of the woman's heart towards her husband.

3.4 Kanga dress as a communicative cloth

According to Borgatti (1983), the African cloth has its underlying symbolism which actually takes its root in the peoples' values and belief system. For Borgatti, there is a symbolic usage, motif colours, and the messages that cloth "speaks". In this regard, how people use cloth help us to understand them, their culture, their proper social relations and their behaviour. Dress therefore, represents the people's history, oral tradition, ethical beliefs and social value.

In Tanzania, the kanga dress is mainly used as a wrapper for women. Through its images and proverbs imprinted on it, the kanga communicates messages between the wearers (women), family members and outsiders. In this case, the kanga serves as a communication tool, through which messages are disseminated. Yahya-Othman (1997) treats the kanga as a medium of communication that is predominantly used by women and relies on its printed inscriptions (Kanga name/text). She states that, like a caption on a T-shirt, a kanga inscription can communicate sentiments to anyone who happens to read it and those who happen to read a particular kanga inscription can interpret it depending on the phrases they see. Yahya-Othman remarks that when a woman reads a kanga inscription for the first time, she often comments on it or discusses its meaning with the kanga wearer. Beck (2001) contends that women also use the kanga to express their sentiments pertaining to conflicts, resentment, jealousy, discontent, quarrels, and sexuality. This implies that kanga is the tools that women use to give their messages to a community.

Yahya-Othman (1997) and Beck (2001) explain further about how the kanga communicates and conveys a message. They state that a communicator conveys her message by wearing or giving a certain kanga, which has been chosen for its particular inscription. When a particular kanga is selected to be worn as a means of communication, the message recipient might be someone who is expected to see the kanga being worn by the communicator. However, not everyone who sees the wearer of a kanga will be its intended message recipient. Sometimes, the intended recipient of the message may not even be present but a friend or someone closely related to her or him may read the message from a person wearing that kanga and pass on the message to the intended recipient (*ibid.*). In such circumstances, the cultural and social context must be understood by the givers and receivers of the intended message (Beck, 2001). Yahya-Othman (1997) argues that the kanga is a communicative genre that compensates for communicative barriers or communication gaps. She insists that women use the kanga as a device to air out their sentiments without being held responsible. Yahya-Othman's (1997) and Beck's (2001) views indicates that effective communication commonly relies on the socially-shared recognition of the kanga as a way of

conveying vital messages to the intended recipients in a particular community. Moreover, the messages on the kanga were designed with the Tanzanian women, for example, in mind and their cultural experience. Thus, it is easy for these women to relate to the message and gain access, often to the encrypted message, often in a form of a saying.

3.5 Kanga communication in contemporary Shambaa wedding

Kanga is a very common dress in wedding occasions. In the Shambaa community, like in many of Tanzania communities, the kanga dress plays a significant role in wedding ceremonies. During the preparation of a wedding, the organisers of the ceremony bring a particular kanga to a wedding committee and tell people about a 'dress of the wedding'. This particular wedding dress is called 'sare' (a uniform in a dress for specific event). The intention of bringing this special kanga to a wedding committee is to inform members and every community member about the choice of the kanga. The choice has to consider the price so that every woman can afford it and has to fit the colour of the wedding day. Thus the kanga assumes the function of a decoration during a wedding day.

This kanga is expected to be worn by all the women during various activities concerning the wedding ceremony and, particularly on the day of this special event. Relatives who are far from the wedding committees are also informed through cellular phones to send the money for this dress. Depending on the decision of the bride and groom (on the wedding day), the preparation usually takes six months to a year. The bride's side has its own sittings. However, the members have to make sure they do not pick the same kanga as the groom's side. This means there must be co-ordination between the two parties. The communication between these sides suggests that the dress is an indicator of a group identity.

Moreover, the kanga dress in Shambaa wedding identifies a group of women who are committed to their community and appreciate the importance of the wedding ceremony. Indeed, the women's devotion and contribution to the preparation of wedding ceremony shows appreciation to the whole event that gives a new identity to the wedded couple, respect to the parents and the whole community. It also strengthens a Shambaa tradition of doing things in a communal way.

Generally, wearing the chosen kanga during the wedding day in Shambaa community means a lot to the participants as it is socially uplifting. If one is a close family member, for instance, and does not wear this particular kanga during the wedding day, the community will think she has alienated herself from this significant family event. People might question her commitment to the family and community values. The same feelings emerge if one is a close family member, a friend or a community member, and is not informed about this wedding dress. She and her family will feel alienated. This orientation underlines the importance of communal life; it enhances a sense of belonging. It also emphasises an individual's responsibility in her/his community. In this situation, the kanga becomes a dress that demonstrates the Shambaa culture and how the Shambaa share abilities, habits, beliefs and customs. In this case, the kanga becomes a "*portrait that substantiates and gives concrete cultural meaning to individuals*" (Cunningham and Lab, 1991:6) in the Shambaa community.

The kanga dress in Shambaa wedding ceremonies can also connote the financial status of the family. If a mother, a wife or a daughter cannot afford to buy this special kanga, a husband, a father, a son or brother has to buy that kanga for them. Failure to do so signifies poor status of the family or exclusion of a community member from community activities. A mother can buy kanga for a daughter and the vice-versa. The kanga, in this case, becomes a matrix for family financial status that denotes an individual as a lazy or irresponsible person. Such a situation enhances hard work spirit in a society that enables individuals to become responsible for their community in social-cultural activities. Implicitly, the kanga gives recognition and identification to community members. In this regard, McCracken's (1998) affirms that the cloth helps people understand individual or group identity (such as gender, social role, occupation role, economic status, political belief or allegiances). The following kanga exemplifies a kanga that can be a 'dress of a wedding day'.



Figure 1: *Naiwe leo furaha ya harusii*
(Let today be a happy wedding day)

The text in this kanga is well-wishing the wedding day. It indicates that a person who made a choice of this kanga aspires to see a joyous wedding day punctuated with merry-making, a day that is full of happiness. The text suits a wedding occasion and expresses a joyous mood. This kanga can serve as a gift to the wedded couple. It can also serve as a souvenir that will always remind the wedded couple of their special day. Although the wearer of this kanga is expected to be a wife, the message conveyed in it is meant for both the wife and husband because parents and friends communicate their heartfelt wishes to both of them. Such a kanga can also be used as a wall decoration in the couple's bedroom. Furthermore, the wife can often use it to dress their bed as a gesture of cherishing their matrimonial life. The kanga in this context demonstrates a degree of intimacy in the married couple's life, family and community relationship.

Furthermore, the kanga can also be used to identify age groups or the in-laws during the wedding day. Mothers and aunts of an expected couple can wear the kanga with the same pattern, flowers, colour and textual message. Sisters of the bride or the groom can wear their own patterns too. Despite the difference in colour and pattern, the texts have to be always meaningful and significant to the addressee of the text—the bride and groom as well as other participants. The texts on the kanga have to denote well-wishing expressions and blessings to the couple hence have to bear a positive message. Typical kanga inscription for wedding occasion include *Ndoa na iheshimiwe na watu wote* (Marriage should be respected by all), *Harusi na iwe ya heri* (Let your marriage be a blessing), *Wifi karibu nyumbani* (Welcome home sister-in-law), *Mungu aibariki ndoa yenu* (God bless your marriage), *Furaha ya harusii*

(Happiness of the wedding). The bride's age-mates may opt to make gowns, pairs of trousers or skirts and blouses using the kanga of the wedding or choose their own colour and pattern with relevant content.

Normally, the bride's mother and her mother-in-law wear their own pattern with the same colour and their texts may differ from the rest to signify a unified relationship initiated by their children. It is also meant to symbolically solidify the unity of the two families. Their unique kanga denotes their significance in the whole wedding process because they are the ones who brought the bride and groom into this world. Their kanga may differ in colour but bear the same texts. Such similarities celebrate their new relationship. The texts of the mothers' kanga may include *Mungu wape heri wanandoa hawa*. (God give the married couple blessings), *Maisha mema hutokana na baraka ya wazazi* (Good life comes from the parents' blessings), *Mungu awape heri daima* (God bless you always), *Mungu nakushukuru kwa baraka zako* (God, I thank you for your Blessings) *Ndoa ni jambo la heri* (Marriage is a blessing). A mother may wear the following kanga to praise and thank God for the stage that her daughter/son has reached of entering matrimony. These kanga inscriptions affirm that parents always wish the best for their children and pray for their success, much in line with the positive values ascribed to the marriage institution. At times, they also use the kanga to express their gratitude to their creator, whom they believe bestows on both them and their offspring, who have now become adults, life and happiness as illustrated in the kanga below:



Figure 2: *Hakuna Mungu kama wewe*
(There is none like you God)

The text on this exhibits heartfelt appreciation to God, who is above everything else. Overall, the positive messages and well-wishes they express for their children during their wedding indicate that parents never stop praying for their children. Although the message is intended for the wedded couple, they also serve as reminders to the rest of people who attended the wedding ceremony of their values as well as norms and values that make them a people with deep-rooted cultural roots. In this regard, such message communicate communal message consistent with the way they partake together in communal rites of passage.

Marriage is a rite of passage that is significant among the Shambaa ethnic group; it gives respect to the parents and the married couple. As the society upholds the belief that it is a disgrace to the family for a girl to have a child before marriage (Shemsanga, 2013), a parent who opts to wear *Hakuna Mungu kama wewe* kanga also suggests that raising a child up to marriageable age and witnessing her getting marriage without disgracing the family is an

achievement that needs God's grace and blessings. In this case, the recipient of the message is God. However, the message may address any one in the family or entire neighbourhood to remind them about the power of the creator. Usually, in such occasion many will buy the kanga whose texts convey a message to the newly-married couple. They would wish to communicate with this couple through their wedding gifts. The buying of the kanga for wedding ceremony is, therefore, determined by a sender of a text (message) and what they intend to convey to the receiver of an intended text.

The Shambaa have a tradition that make a man responsible for his wife even before marriage. When a man is expecting to wed a girl, he has to send a package of clothes, shoes and ornaments to the bride before the wedding. This package is called *Sanduku* (suitcase). Traditionally, the value of the *sanduku* will be determined by the pairs and quality of the kanga contained therein. This implies that the type and number of the kanga in the *sanduku* determine a man's wealth and constitutes a positive attribute of a responsible husband-to-be. One of the kanga might have a text: *Kitunze kidumu* (Nourish the relationship for it to last). The kanga in this sense portrays Shambaa as a community that construct as man in a traditional masculine form based on patriarchal values. In this regard, the man is expected to cloth a woman as an indicator of being a responsible husband.

Kisutu is one unique kanga a bride receives before or on a wedding day. Normally, the bride is receives this kanga from her grandmother or her husband-to-be when he brings the *sanduku* to the bride. This kanga is inscribed with a special design of small crosses and rosette. A young woman wears *kisutu* kanga as a symbol of entering adulthood (Hamid, 1996; Beck, 2001). The *kisutu* kanga normally bears three colours: white, black and blood-red known as *Damu ya mzee* (blood of an elder man). According to Hamid (1996), a young girl who has started menstruation or a woman who has just delivered a baby will be given a red and black coloured kanga whereas a bride will get a specially designed multi-colour kanga with red, black and white colour. These colours bear a significant message to the bride: The red colour bear witness to her virginity; the black colour is the pain of being deflowered; and the white colour is the male seed which she is going to see for the first time. In most cases, the *kisutu* kanga has no written text because colours in themselves constitute an interpretive text.

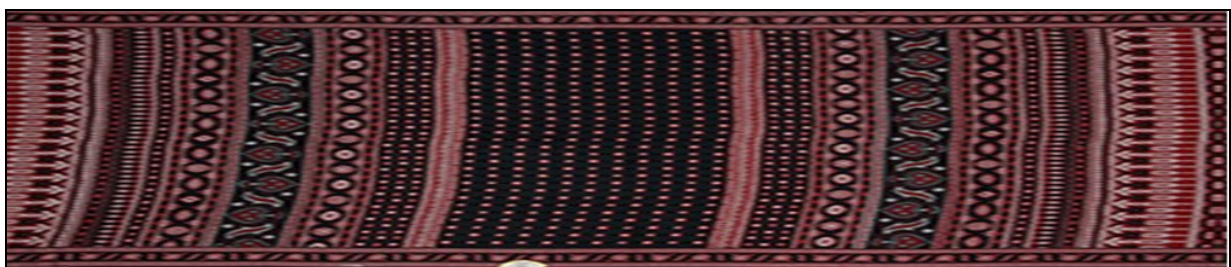


Figure 3: A kanga photograph known as *kisutu*

Hamid (1996) further asserts that some kanga bear texts that exhibit a wife-husband passionate relationship. Hamid's views are vivid in Shambaa weddings as some of the kanga that are kept in the *sanduku* are *kisutu* or other types that are used for the same purposes and

some exhibits texts such as *Mimi ni wako daima* (I am totally yours), *Nitunze nipendeze* (Care for me to remain enticing). Although this kanga is given to a wife, the message is meant for the husband, the provider in the traditional sense of marriage. The message implies that a husband is expected to take care of his wife so that she maintains her health and shining beauty.

During wedding ceremony, one who gives the kanga as a gift to the wedded couple has to display it for the audience to see. S/he will read the message aloud for everyone to hear. This explains that the wedded couple belongs to the whole community and is supposed to be inculcated with words of wisdom and reminded about what people expect from them after gaining this new status. The message in this particular session addresses values that cultivate and maintain a good relationship between the couple and the community such as love, generosity, patience, prudence, and dignity. The couple may also be reminded about the importance of maintaining their faith in traits of humanity that bind the community together and makes it prosper such as responsibility, accountability and hard-work. The following kanga may be bought as a gift to a just wedded couple to give a message of generosity:



Figure 4: A kanga with the inscription *Shika nakupa zawadi*
(Hold it I am giving you a gift)

Wedded couples normally respect wedding gifts. They also pay attention to the messages of the kanga texts because they leave a mark in their hearts and whenever a wife wears a kanga, it reminds her about the person who gave it to her and their relationship. Women can also keep the kanga for a long time depending on the value of the kanga, particularly its embedded message. The kanga in this situation creates a community bond and good relationship. Furthermore, it becomes a portrait of love among the family and community members.

The choice of kanga gift may depend on the level of intimacy between the sender of the message and the wedded couple (receiver). For instance, the kanga below denotes a close relationship between the one who gives the gift and the receiver.

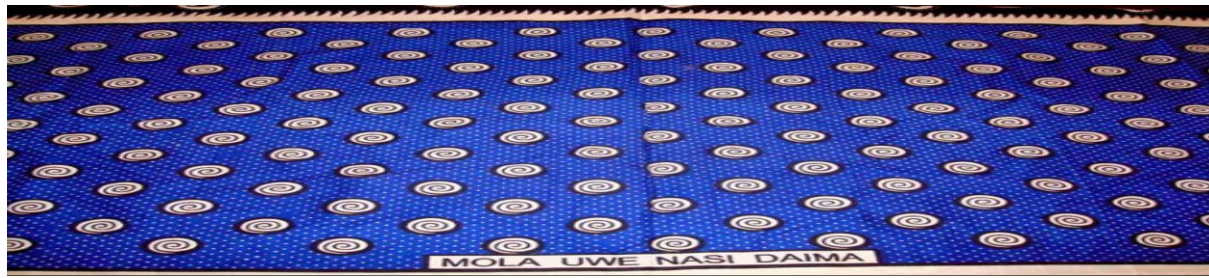


Figure 5: A kanga with the inspiring words *Mola uwe nasi daima*
(God be with us always)

The text in this kanga is an earnest plea on the part of the buyer who can be a family member or a close friend to a receiver of a gift. The addressee of the message in the kanga is a wedded couple but may also include the buyer him/herself because of the word *nasi* (us). The text signifies the intimate relation between the buyer and the receiver of the message. The buyer can be a mother, father, uncle, aunt, sister or brother.

Normally, people would like to know how many pairs of the kanga the newly-married couple has received. Assigned people will count them and give a feedback on a number of pairs of the kanga that the couple receives and it is always a prestigious thing for those who get plentiful of them. The audience, particularly the family and neighbours, are also interested in knowing the quality of the kanga; the price and brand of the kanga. In this regard, the kanga assumes symbolic status and relationship between the bride, groom and parents with other community members. If the bride receives many pairs of the kanga during the wedding day, it implies that the bride and her parents have a good relationship with community members.

Another interpretation may mean the parents and the bride or groom have invited many people. Inviting many people in this case denotes a well-to-do family. The opposite signifies poor relationship or a low income family that may not afford to invite many people to the wedding. In such a situation, the kanga communicates to people about the social classes in the community marked by their financial position. Mothers of the bride and groom are given kanga gifts and kitenge (wrapper, often of heavier than the kanga that bear no texts) as a gesture of appreciation for bringing these children into the world and taking care of them. The same interpretation applies to their number of the kanga and vitenge they receive. Hence, their relationship to others and their financial status may determine what they receive.

Another ritual practised with the kanga during the Shambaa wedding is placing the kanga on the floor for the wedded couple to tread on as they walk from church to their car or as they alight from the vehicle carrying the couple to the house. The distance determines how many of the pairs of kanga are placed on the ground. This situation demonstrates how the newly-married couple is highly honoured and the recognition they receive from the family and community. This practice also speaks volumes about the value that the newly-wedded couple has earned in the eyes of the community. In addition, the kanga in this performance becomes a matrix of the relationship between the family and the couple, and their financial status. Marriage happens to be the only rite of passage in Shambaa for which the people can

undertake such a ritual. In fact, this unique performance and experience mark a significant stage in the life of the married couple. The performance reminds them that community owes them respect, and so does the couple in a mutual understanding of the value of the sanctity of marriage in the Shambaa community. The couple is taught to humble themselves before others. Moreover, this performance also signals that respect is earned.

Individual faith and Godly wishes can also be observed through the kanga texts showered for the newly-weds for their marital celebrations. For instance, the kanga below is often given as a gift from someone to a bride and groom. At times, the kanga comes as a gift from a husband to a wife.



Figure 6: A kanga with the words *Yarabi tupe salama tuishi kwa kupendana*
(God give us peace and the love for each other)

The text expresses the view that, for a couple to maintain peace and love, they need God's assistance. The buyer in this case prays and wishes that the married couple maintains peace and a good relationship.

After marriage, the married couple may use the kanga to express their feelings towards each other or towards their relatives. A wife can buy a kanga, for instance, deliberately for her husband when she finds out that he is mistreating her or cheating on her. The messages may include: *Tukae tuheshimiane wazuri hawaishi* (Let us live and respect each other as a couple as beauties are born every day), *Wao ni matawi, mimi ni shina* (They are branches, I am the root). These messages are meant for partners who go astray. On the one hand, the messages denote that there is no longer harmony in their marriage; on the other hand, they serve as a coded warning to respect the marriage and uphold fidelity. Implicitly, these two messages indicate that temptations outside marriage are distractions to a union that is supposed to remain solid.

This tenuous situation may last for a while and when they try to settle the matter, the wife may remind her husband to take care of her by buying or wearing the kanga below:

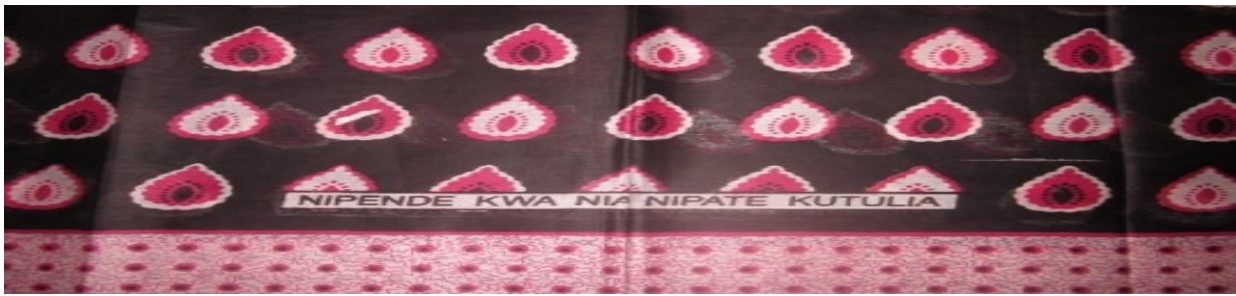


Figure 7: A kanga crafted with the love message *Nipende kwa nia nipate kutulia*
(Give me heartfelt love so that I can have peace of mind)

However, like all the kanga, the message can be read in different ways. If someone has already found a new sweetheart or life partner, the kanga can actually be given as a gift of congratulations or cheers. It may also serve as a wedding gift to cement the existing relationship or to alert the husband that it needs sincere love and devotion to maintain a stable relationship.

A number of couples have revealed that the in-laws have a tendency of bothering them. In such cases, a wife or a husband can buy a kanga to comfort each other, particularly if the in-law advises the daughter or son to break the relationship up while the couple still love each other. If the couple is strong enough not to be shaken by anyone, the husband may buy his wife the following kanga:



Figure 8: A kanga with insolent words *Wache waseme*
(Let them talk)

The text message is meant for the couple as a word of encouragement but also for the intrusive in-laws. A wife will deliberately wear this kanga whenever she intends to meet her in-laws or their close friends and relative. When the in-laws read the text, they may feel guilty and refrain from further bothering the loving couple.

During the wedding day, parents are given an opportunity to say a word of wisdom to the bride and groom. One of the recurring subjects has been wife-beating. Some parents do not say much but just use a kanga to give a message to the husband and the audience. The father, mother, uncle or aunt, who is chosen to speak for a bride's family, unwraps the kanga and reads the text out aloud. Sometimes, s/he lets people read it in a chorus way. One of the messages on such a kanga reads as follows: *Mke hapigwi kwa gongo hupigwa kwa upande wa kanga* (a wife is not beaten by a stick but with a piece of kanga). This text cautions the husband not to beat his wife; instead, he should take care of her by buying her kanga. In this

case, kanga symbolically stands for caring and providing for the family, which fosters harmony in the house. In fact, it is also a Shambaa custom for men to buy the kanga for their wives when they want to apologise for their wrong-doing. When a husband angers his wife, he buys her a pair of kanga that bears an apology. In such a context, the kanga serves as a tool of maintaining piece in marriage life.

4. Conclusion

The paper has established that the kanga is a traditional dress that talks, which among the Shambaa has assumed great symbolic and instructive value. The paper has demonstrated that amongst the Shambaa, the kanga serves as a communicative tool that expresses individuals' feelings that have a far-reaching implication in enriching marriage values as well as communal values. The analysis on the use of the kanga among the Shambaa during marriage ceremonies and attendance activities show that the inscriptions on these kanga are discursive as their meanings depend on the reader's perception in relation to the meanings that their respective society have come to associate with wisdom or adages inscribed on the kanga, which are in fact borrowings from popular saying of the society. The paper also demonstrates that the kanga has the power to strengthen or destroy a relationship depending on the circumstances and context and the embedded message. Furthermore, it reveals that the wearing of the kanga and its use in cultural performances helps create an understanding of various degree of intimacy between individuals in a particular community in relation to their society's values. The kanga can also denote the financial status of individuals in a community. Kanga dress, therefore, is an important source of understanding individual or group identity and culture, as, the kanga dress has done in relation to the Shambaa culture.

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