

Kanga Traditional Costume as a Tool for Community Empowerment in Tanzania in Ubuntu perspective - A Literature Review

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Abstract : Introduction: Ubuntu culture represents African humanism with collective and positive feeling of people living together, interdependence, equally and peaceful etc. Overtime, Ubuntu culture developed varieties of communicative strategies to express experiences, feelings and knowledge. Khanga or kanga (garment) is among the Ubuntu cultural practice of Bantu speaking people along the East African coast following interaction with Arabs and Bantu speaking people to formulate Swahili culture. Kanga or Kanga is a Swahili word which means a traditional soft cotton cloths in varieties of colours, patterns, and styles which as a deep cultural, historical, and social significance not only in Tanzania but the rest of East African coast. Swahili culture is a sub culture of Ubuntu African culture which is rich in customs and rituals that serve to preserve goodness and life where Tanzania, like the rest of East African societies along the Indian coast engaged in kanga dressing custom under Swahili culture to express their feelings and knowledge sharing. After the independence of Tanzania (formerly Tanganyika) from British colonial rule, Kanga traditional dressing gained momentum in Swahili culture and spread to the rest of East Africa and beyond. To date kanga dressing holds a good position as a formal and informal tool for advocating marginalised groups, counselling, psychosocial therapy, liberation, compassion, love, justice, campaign, and cerebation etc. Methodology: A literature review method was guided by Ubuntu theory to assess the implications of kanga traditional dressing in empowering Tanzanian community. Findings: During slavery, slaves wore Kaniki and people despised Kaniki dressing due to its association with slavery. Ex-slave women seeking to become part of the Swahili society began to decorate their Kaniki clothes. After slavery was abolished in 1897, Kangas began to be used for self-empowerment and to indicate that the wearer had personal wealth. During colonial era, freedom of expressions for Africans were restricted by colonial masters thus Tanzanians used kanga to express the evils of colonialism and other social problems, Under Ubuntu value of unity and solidarity liberation and independence fighters crafted motto and liberation messages that were shared and spread rapidly in the community. Political parities like TANU used kanga to spread nationalism and Ujamaa policy. kanga is more than a piece of fabric-it is a space for women to voice unspeakable communication and a women-centred repository for indigenous knowledge, feminisms addressing social ills, happiness, campaigns, memories and reconciliation etc. Kanga provides an indirect voice and support vulnerable and marginalised populations and strongly it has proved to be a peaceful platform of capture attention of government and societies. Kanga textiles gained increased international fame when an Obama kanga design was produced upon the president's election in 2008 and his visit to Tanzania in 2013. Conclusion: Kanga preserves and symbolises Swahili culture and contributes in realization of social justice, inclusion, national identity and unity. As an inclusive cultural tool, Kanga spread across Africa to international community and the practice has moved from being a woman domination dressing code to other sex orientations.

Keywords : African culture, Kanga, khanga, swahili culture, ubuntu

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