

KOFIA IN ZANZIBAR

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There are many different traditional costumes in the world. In Zanzibar, a Swahili man is said to be fully attired when he puts on an embroidered cap, locally known as *kofia ya viua* or just *kofia*, robe (*kanzu*) with a coat, and sandals taking a Swahili name of *makubadhi*

The *Kofia* is round-shaped with a flat top, adorned with embroidered designs all over. For convenience of simplicity in classification *kofia* are divided into two main groups, simple-designed and complex-designed caps

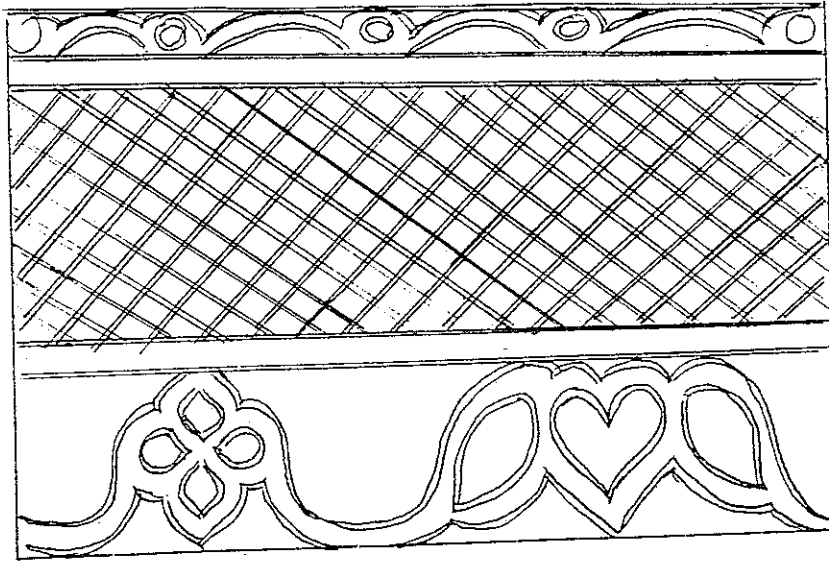
Traditionally *kofia* are given names according to what the design types appearing on them look like. However it should be noted that the design types are not carbon copies of objects an artist has represented. A *fundi* (a craftsman who specializes in drawing of *kofia* designs) normally takes a small part of that object or thing and then changes it in conformity with cap-designing art, which, to a great extent, puts much emphasis on producing criss-cross patterns. Worth pointing out is that this art is not done for the sake of art as many people think. Almost all designs are drawn from the environment in which the *fundi* live, making the art itself a true representation of the life of the people

The common names of Zanzibar caps are *kikuti*, *kidema*, *lozi*, and *besela*. There are so many names as more new designs of caps are coming up daily

To begin with, the *kofia* called *kikuti* (palm leaf), for example, represents availability of countless coconut trees in the isles. Life without coconut trees in Zanzibar is nearly impossible to imagine. Fishing, a bread earning activity to many Islanders, is represented by a design of *kidema*, a locally made fishing trap. Fishing by using *dema* is one of the traditional fishing methods practiced in many parts in the Isles

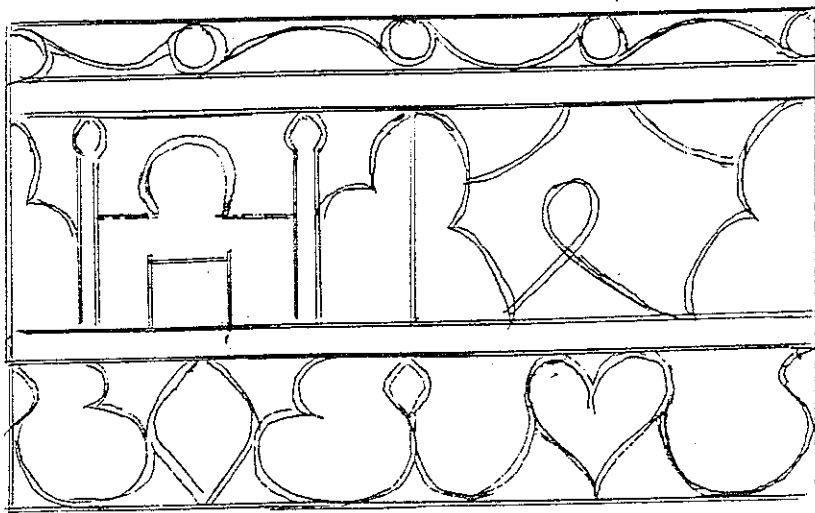
Besela is the name of the Zanzibar wooden bedstead, which is a treasured household item. Made from expensive timber, *besela's* peculiar designs may please many. The cap artists have come out to preserve the name as the possibility is high for this type of bedstead to disappear in future.

Unlike other *kofia*, *lozi* designs do not have any representation from the environment. *Lozi* is a corruption of the English word 'rose', a flower loved by many for its pleasant smell. Because the rose is regarded as the best flower so *lozi* is taken to be the king of all *kofia*

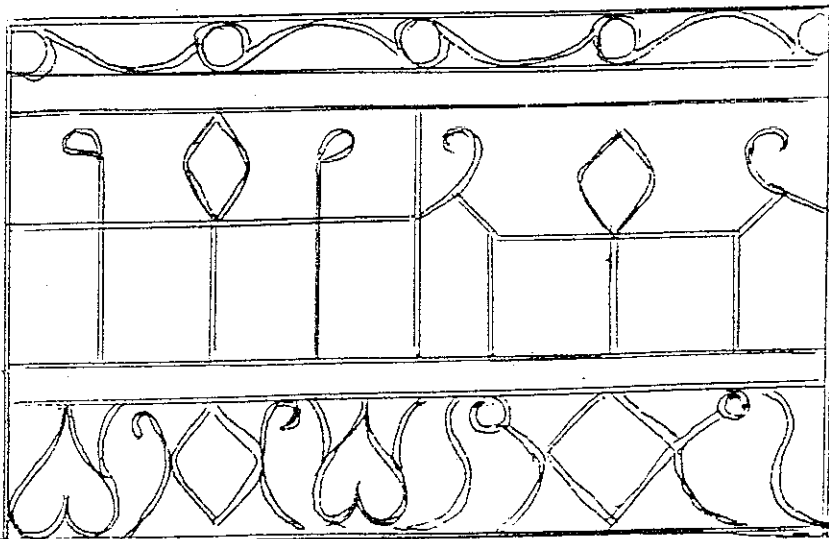


Bulibuli ya kazi

(Exemple of simple-designed kofia)



Mskiti



Besela

Islam, the religion of which most Swahili are followers, has been given a central place in *kofia* design. There is a *kofia* called *msikiti* (mosque) which depicts a dome-like pattern and two minarets. Some craftsmen have gone further to produce the name of God, Allah, in Arabic writing

A butterfly-like design is still the sole cap which represents flying creatures. This type of *kofia* is called *kipepeo* (butterfly)

The first modern stadium in Zanzibar, built by the Chinese government in the 1970s, attracted the attention of the late Mzee Shaka, a well-known craftsman from Makunduchi in the southern part of Zanzibar. He produced a cap design named after the stadium, *Uwanja wa Amaan*.

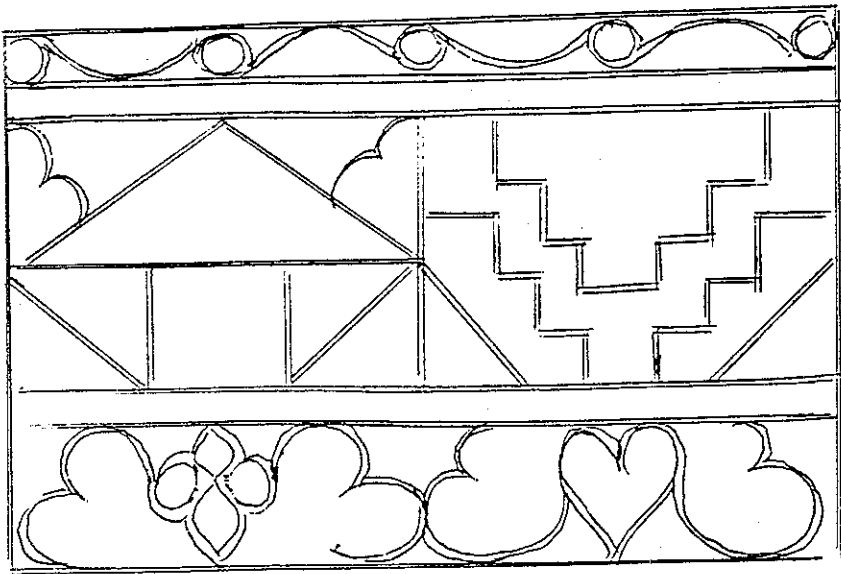
The more elaborate a *kofia* is designed, the higher a price it will fetch in the market. Such *kofia* will normally be worn during special occasions like e.g. wedding ceremonies. The *lozi* design is preferred by many as a bridegroom's attire because of the complexity of designs and its beauty. This cap also enjoys popularity among the pilgrims to the Muslims' holy city of Makkah.

The fact that wearing a headgear is *sunnah* (a commendable deed in Islam, but not absolutely binding) has led to the popularization of the *kofia* in the Isles, where more than 95% of the population are Muslims. In fact, wherever populations of Muslims are found in East Africa the *kofia* has become a popular clothing. It is no surprise, therefore, that the *kofia* stands today for both Muslim and Swahili identity.

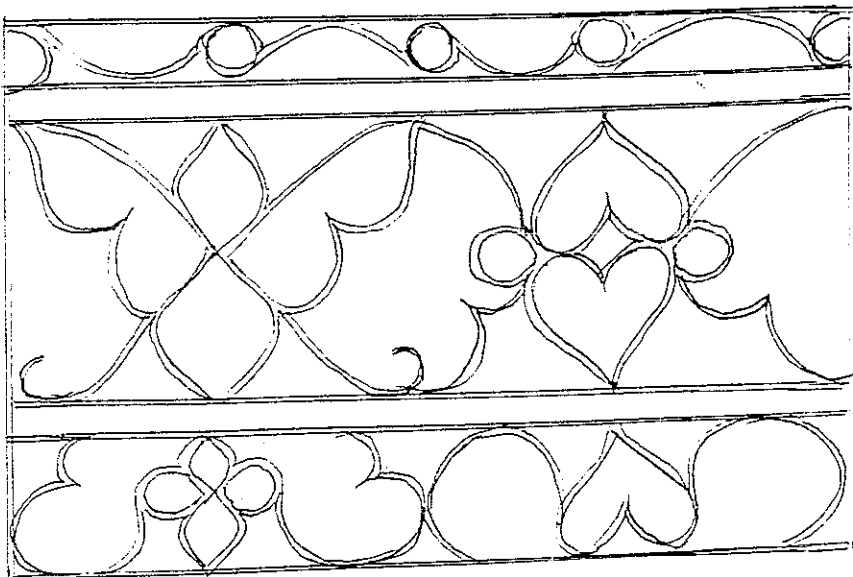
The close association of *kofia* and Islam is again demonstrated in one of the Swahili sayings used frequently by sheikhs to warn Muslims against committing sins. The saying reads: *Uislam si kuvaa kanzu au kofia* (Islam is not just to wear robe or cap, Islam means following good deeds)

Swahili social activities, notably the burial ceremony is characterized by wearing *kofia*. A person for whom a *kofia* is not the regular clothing, if seen with it one day, may be asked a question like: *Nani amekufa, mbona kofia kichwani?* (Who has died? I see you have put on a cap.)

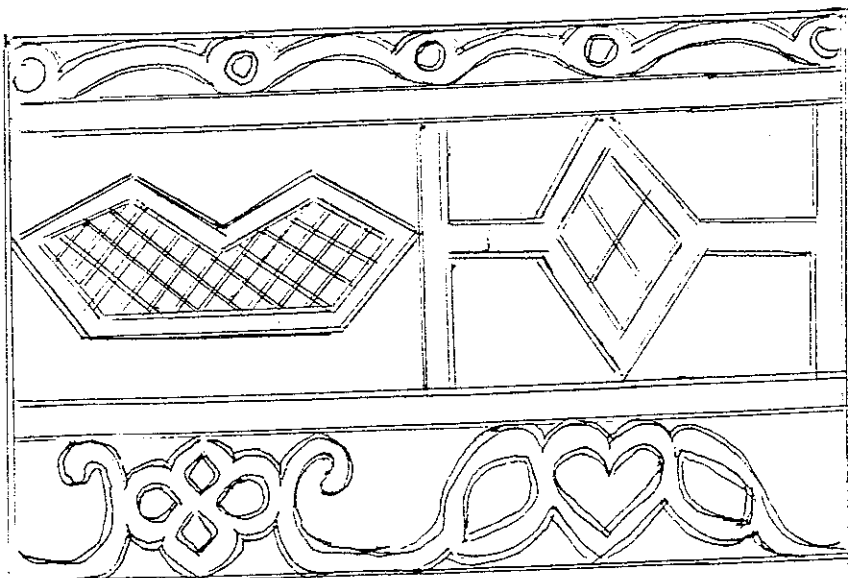
Different people have different motives for putting on a *kofia*. There are those who feel uneasy going out bareheaded. They regard themselves to have not fully dressed without *kofia*. Some feel shy to expose their bald heads or grey hair. Others feel that old age binds them to wearing *kofia* or else they might be accused of clinging to youthfulness, if they do not wear the cap. Likewise, some young people object wearing the caps on pretext of looking like old people. Nevertheless, the majority of people wear the caps because they are regarded as decent clothing with the addition of religious significance.



Uwanja wa amaan



Kipepeo



Kidema

In the past the *kofia* played a certain role in communication, particularly on matters related to sexuality. Because the liason between a woman and a man was always kept away from the public gaze, *kofia*-related communication was used to date women. The meeting in public of a man and a woman who are not related, was normally received with suspicion. It is, therefore, said that women were sent messages by their lovers through the particular way of wearing the *kofia* and their intended meanings. It is said that a Swahili man used to wear a *kofia* in a certain style to transmit a message to his lover. There were styles showing that a wearer of *kofia* wants to meet his lover at a particular place.

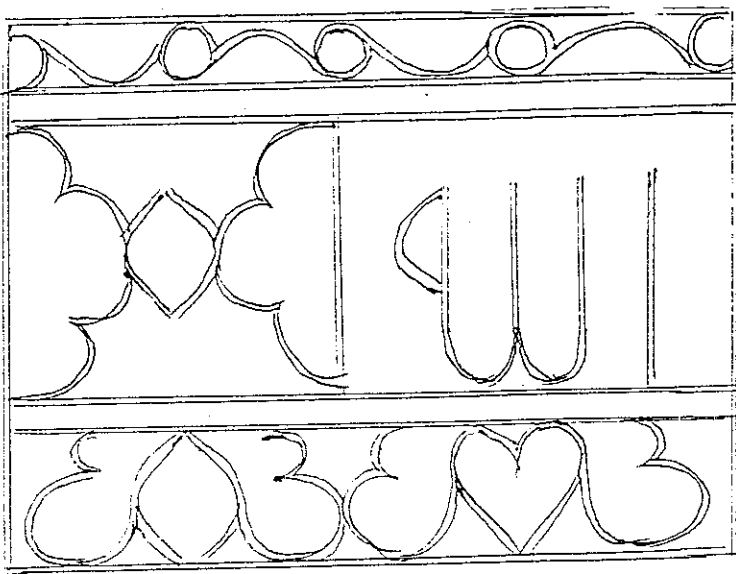
The simple designed *kofia* have other functions apart from being clothing. On a Friday prayer attended by hundreds of Muslims, the cap can be used for collecting donations from the worshippers. A person with a cap in his hands passes along the rows to let the people put money in it.

On a wedding day, after completion of exchange of marriage vows (*nikah*), the bridegroom is supposed to meet his wife at her parents house. Before he enters her room, the bride's female relatives joke with him. Such jokes may be implemented in different ways. The women may, for example prevent the bridegroom from going to meet his wife. Then the bridegroom's best friend takes off his *kofia*, puts in some money, and hands it over to one of the women. Then the door is opened to allow the bridegroom and his friends to say hello to the bride. In this situation handing over money by using the *kofia* is considered as more respectable than by using a hand.

Both young and old people respectively have invented their own wearing styles of *kofia*. The former tend to wrinkle the cap while the latter wear the cap as it is. One of the wearing styles that indicates that a Swahili man is comfortable and relaxed is one in which a cap's top flat is made to appear pointed. And, if you slant your *kofia* on the head in a certain way (*kutega* or *kutengua*) it means you look down on people. People may perceive you as a self-important person. To take off someone's *kofia* is an act of bad habit.

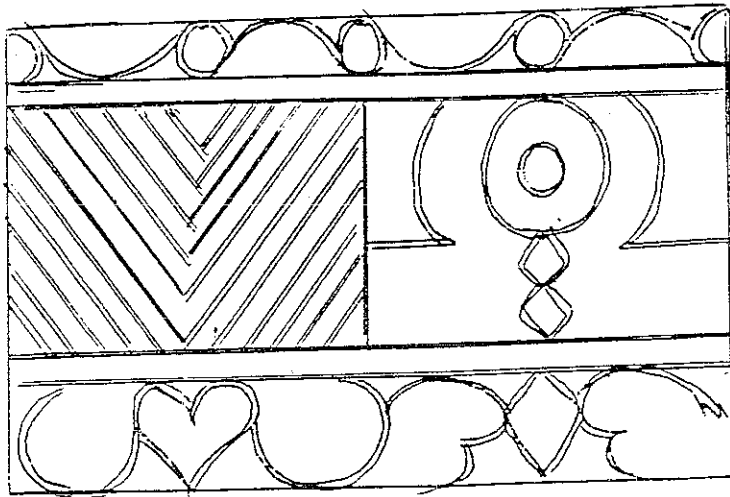
Among the special gifts bestowed to a state guest visiting the Isles is a *kofia*. During his state visit in Zanzibar in 1990, the South African president, Nelson Mandela, was bestowed the *kofia* called *lozi*.

The former Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere, was a great lover of the *kofia*. In the 1960s and 70s he was hardly seen bareheaded in public meetings or other state functions held in Swahili areas. It is said that Nyerere's love of the *kofia* helped him politically. The Swahili regarded him as one among them because of the great value attached to the *kofia*. Whether this is true or not, it is undisputable that a non-Swahili who frequently wears a *kofia* has a greater chance to be easily integrated into the Swahili community.

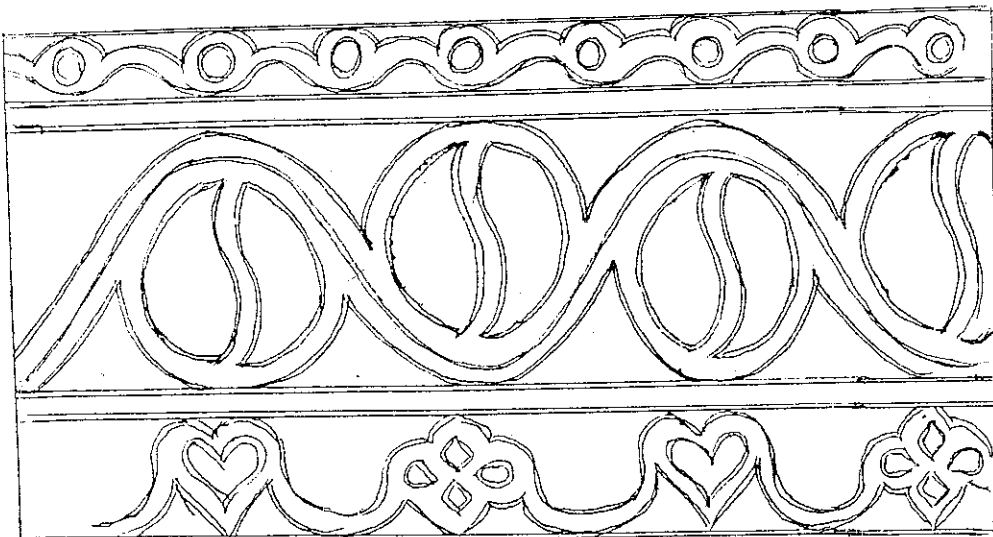


(Kofia with the name of God)

Allah in Arabic



Kikuti



Lozi