



KHANGAS

East African cultural jewels

A few Khangas from Kenya around the 80s

A few words about khangas

What it is: As it is known nowadays, the khangas (or kanga) is a typical East African cloth (150 cm wide by 110 cm long) made out of light and colourful fabric (cotton or synthetic). It shows a wide border (*pindo*) all around, a symbol (small motif repeated or big motif alone, or both) in the middle area (*mji*) and it is usually bearing a kiswahili saying (*jina*), or not. It is normally sold by pairs (*doti*) and is mostly worn by women as clothes. There are many ways to wrap it around (Jeannette Hanby & David Bygott, "Kangas - 101 Uses" 1984). They can also serve in multiple ways: as baby carriers, head wraps, aprons, pot holders, napkins, towels and much much more, like for covering shoes, handbags and so on... Its designs can be representative or geometrical, or both together and its price always stayed low so that anyone can afford it. The extremely light khangas are called "*nyepesi*", and are very good in hot weather.

It's history: It is originated in the midst of the 19th century and distributed along the East African great lakes and sea shores. One of the most ancient design is the Khangas Kishutu that was usually offered to young brides (see khangas n° 27). Khangas have much evolved since they appeared. Designs and fabrics have changed as to adapt to different contexts. At the beginning of the 20th century, Kaderina Hajee Essak, also known as "Abdulla", started to create designs and marked them "K.H.E. - Mali ya Abdulla". He often added a proverb in Kiswahili. It became common then to have a message which could be religious, political, promotional, historical or philosophical. It is a short sentence presented like a proverb or a motto and which can have different meanings. The more mysterious or ambiguous the better! The first khangas designs were mostly including dots in the middle area. So the khangas's name may come out of the African guineafowl (called khangas in kiswahili) which has many little dots on her dark plumage. Some people say that it might also come from the bantu verb "kanga" which means to wrap! At first the khangas were designed and printed mostly in India, then Far East and Europe. But since the 50s, Tanzania and Kenya developed their own manufactories. For example in Kenya: Mountex in Nanyuki, Rivatex in Eldoret or Thika Cloth Mills.



"Apart from its protective and decorative role, kanga is all about sending the message. It is the equivalent of the get well, greetings, or congratulations cards in the western culture but in this case the message goes a little bit beyond the normal meaning. For example, a fruit, a flower, a boat, or a bird could mean good upbringing or just the appreciation of beauty. On the other hand, a lion, a shark, or any such kind of dangerous animals could signal the sense of danger or a clear warning." Quotation found on "Swahili language and culture" - http://www.glcom.com/hassan/kanga_history.html



More information (history, culture, uses and examples):

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanga_\(African_garment\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanga_(African_garment))

http://www.glcom.com/hassan/kanga_history.html

<https://kabilakanga.wordpress.com/2017/01/28/kanga-kisutu/>

Jeannette Hanby & David Bygott, from "Kangas - 101 Uses", 1984, Kibuyu Partners, kibuyu@yahoo.com.

Why collecting khangas?

Attraction to them: Khanga, PinkShade's mother, was called like that because of her demonstrative and exultant love for khangas, both the guineafowls and the pieces of fabrics. I must say that she always cherished fabrics a lot and used to buy some all over the world and include them in her household. So when she discovered these East African cultural jewels, she enjoyed them very much because they express a joyful way of life, with beautiful designs, enriched by the sayings which are like enigmas challenging us to discover their meaning. For her first visit in Kenya, I offered her very first one, n°4, which says "SAHAU YALIOPIITA", meaning "forget about the past". It was particularly accurate as she just became a widow a few months before. Impressed by that significant gift, she couldn't prevent buying a few different ones in every place where we brought her to.



Surprising observation: At the end, when I noticed at her home a full drawer stuffed with bright colors, I realized that she managed to collect about 25 different designs, in only 3 short stays in Kenya. Not talking of the other khangas, coming from Tanzania, Madagascar and other countries.



Recalling and sharing: Knowing that the British Museum had a collection of about 12, I thought that it wasn't that ridiculous at all to make a little catalogue of her Kenyan textiles belongings, showing a picture of each, with some short references. She immediately asked to combine them with mines. But see, there is some funny inversion as I hardly have 7 of them, after having stayed in the country for about 4 years! And on top of that I bought only 5 of them. One was offered by a dear friend (the precious kishutu one, n°27) and the red, white and black one with nice palms, by my dear mother (n°17)! Anyhow, altogether it makes 30 khangas. Each of them folded in 5 and piled up all together, they reach about 48 cm high, not speaking about the weight which rises up to 6 kg!



Conclusion: Now back home in Europe, we both think we miss the khangas so much, the richness of their diversity and their faculty to evolve according to events and fashions... so when do we set off and try to find some more?



HASIRA ZA MKIZI TIJARA YA MVUVI

①

HASIRA ZA MKIZI TIJARA YA MVUVI

The anger of the cuttlefish is the gain of the fisherman

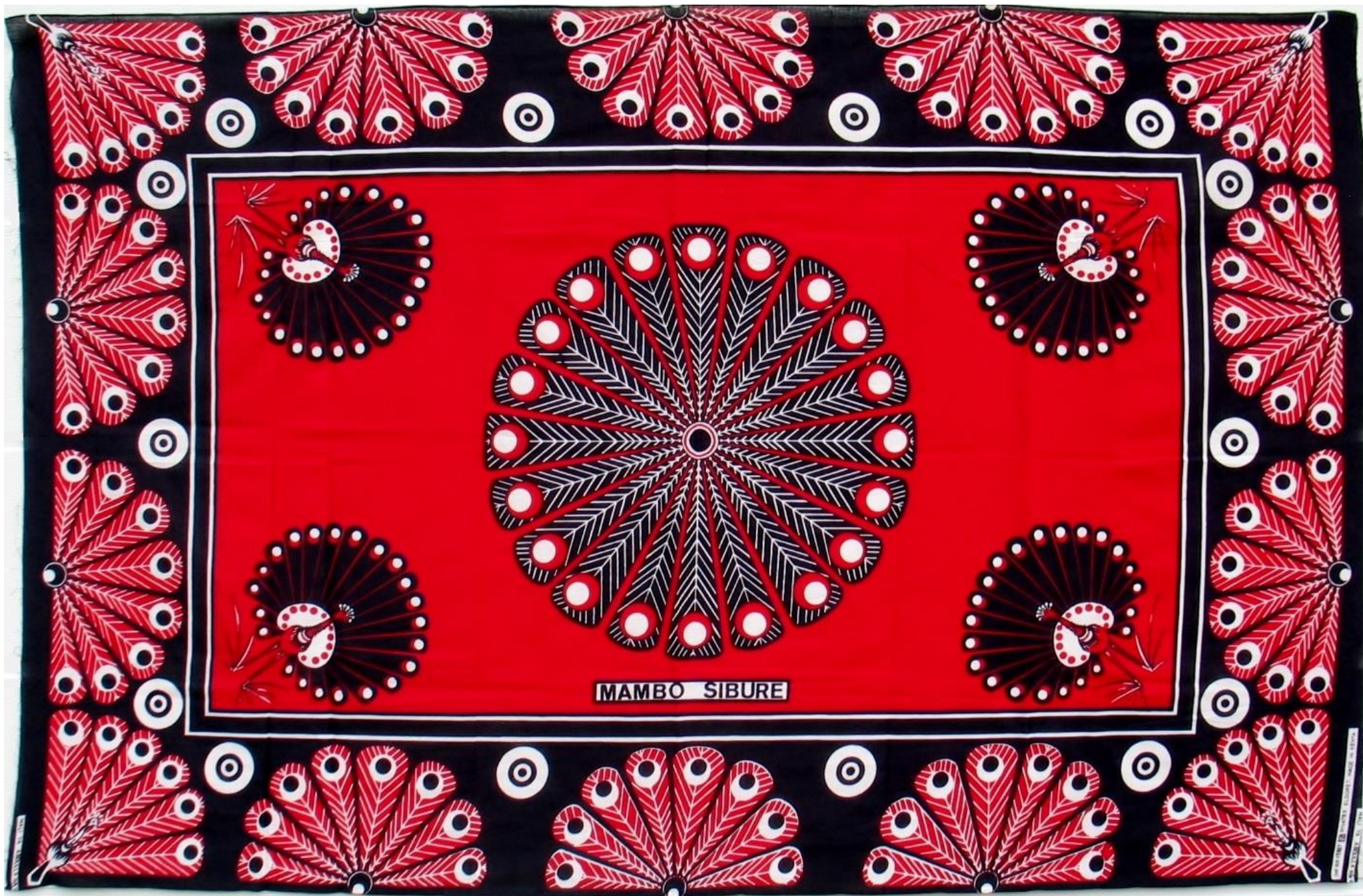
La colère de la seiche fait le bonheur du pêcheur

DESIGN N° 01-2479 MADE IN KENYA

Khangas which come in dark blue colour are normally called "*kanga za magharibi*" (dusk kangas)

Main subject: a swordfish and a dhow between two coconut trees

Owner PM/GM



MAMBO SIBURE

MADE IN ITALY

②

MAMBO SIBURE

Things don't happen by chance

Rien ne se produit sans raison

or/ou

Things don't look as they are

Les apparences sont trompeuses

N° RR 15187 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

MALI YA ABDULLA R/K1? (5 or 9)

Main subject: Peacock

Owner PM



TULIZA ROHO YANGU

③

TULIZA ROHO YANGU

Breathe my soul

Eveille mon âme

DESIGN N° 01-2490 MADE IN KENYA

Main subject: Coconut tree

Owner PM



SAHAU YALIOPIITA

④

SAHAU YALIOPITA

Forget about the past

Ne te préoccupe pas du passé

DESIGN N° 01-2470 MADE IN KENYA

Border including paisleys

Owner PM (gift from GM)



IVUMAYO HADUMU

⑤

IVUMAYO HAIDUMU

What roars does not last / What is famed does not last

Le succès perdure rarement

No references found... bought in Mombasa

Main subjects: Lantern and boats

Owner PM



UMEKUJA KUTEMBEA USIONDOKE NA UMBEA

⑥

UMEKUJA KUTEMBEA USIONDOKE NA UMBEA

You came to visit us, don't leave with gossip

Tu es venu nous rendre visite, ne repars pas avec des ragots

DESIGN N° 06-3687 MADE IN KENYA

Main subject: Flowers

Owner PM



KIJANA USIBADILISHE TABIA YAKO

⑦

KIJANA USIBADILISHE TABIA YAKO

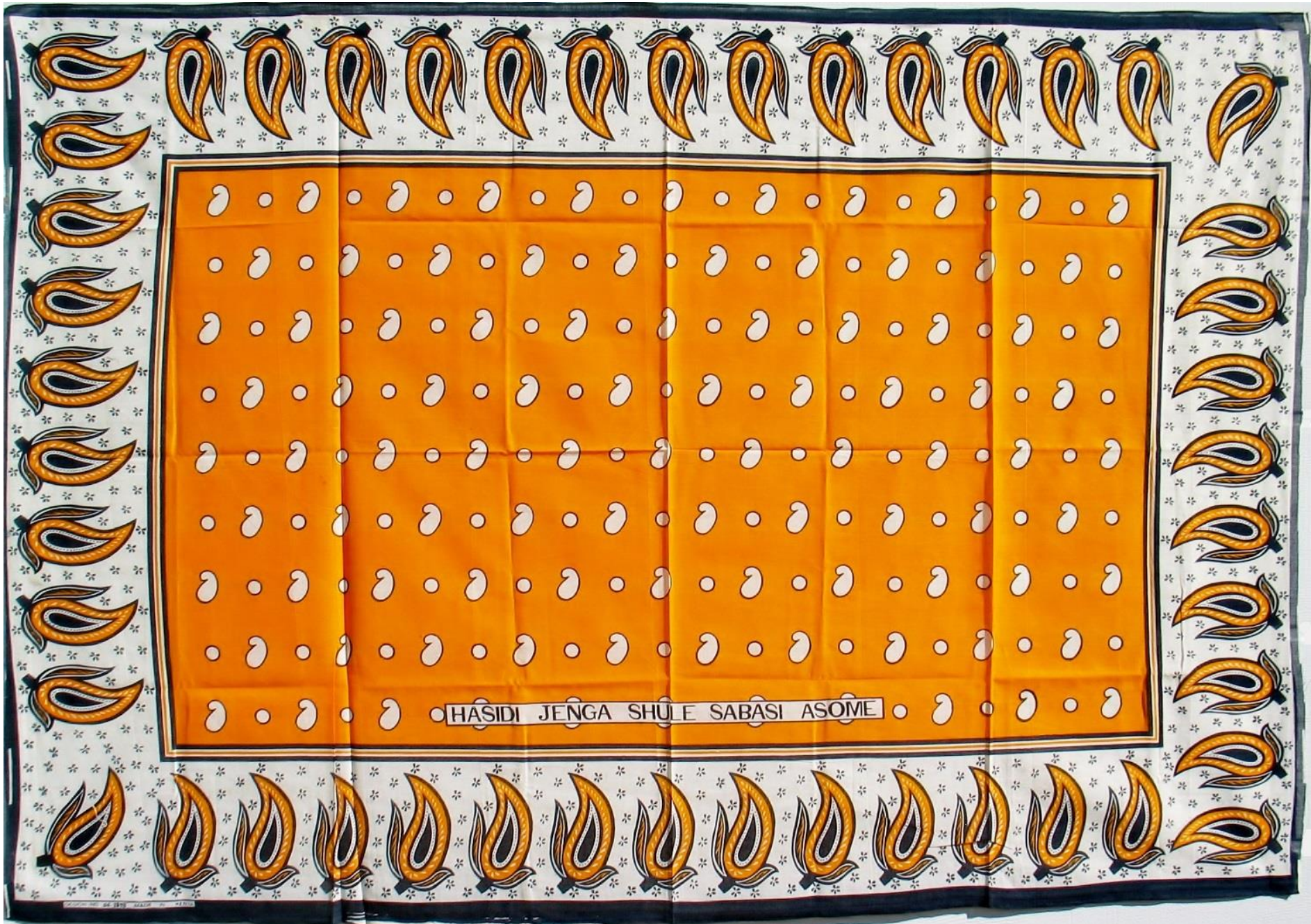
Young girl, do not change your behaviour!

Jeune fille, ne te laisse pas influencer !

DESIGN N° 01-3425 MADE IN KENYA

Geometrical and vegetation inspired

Owner PM



HASIDI JENGA SHULE SABASI ASOME

⑧

HASIDI JENGA SHULE SABASI ASOME

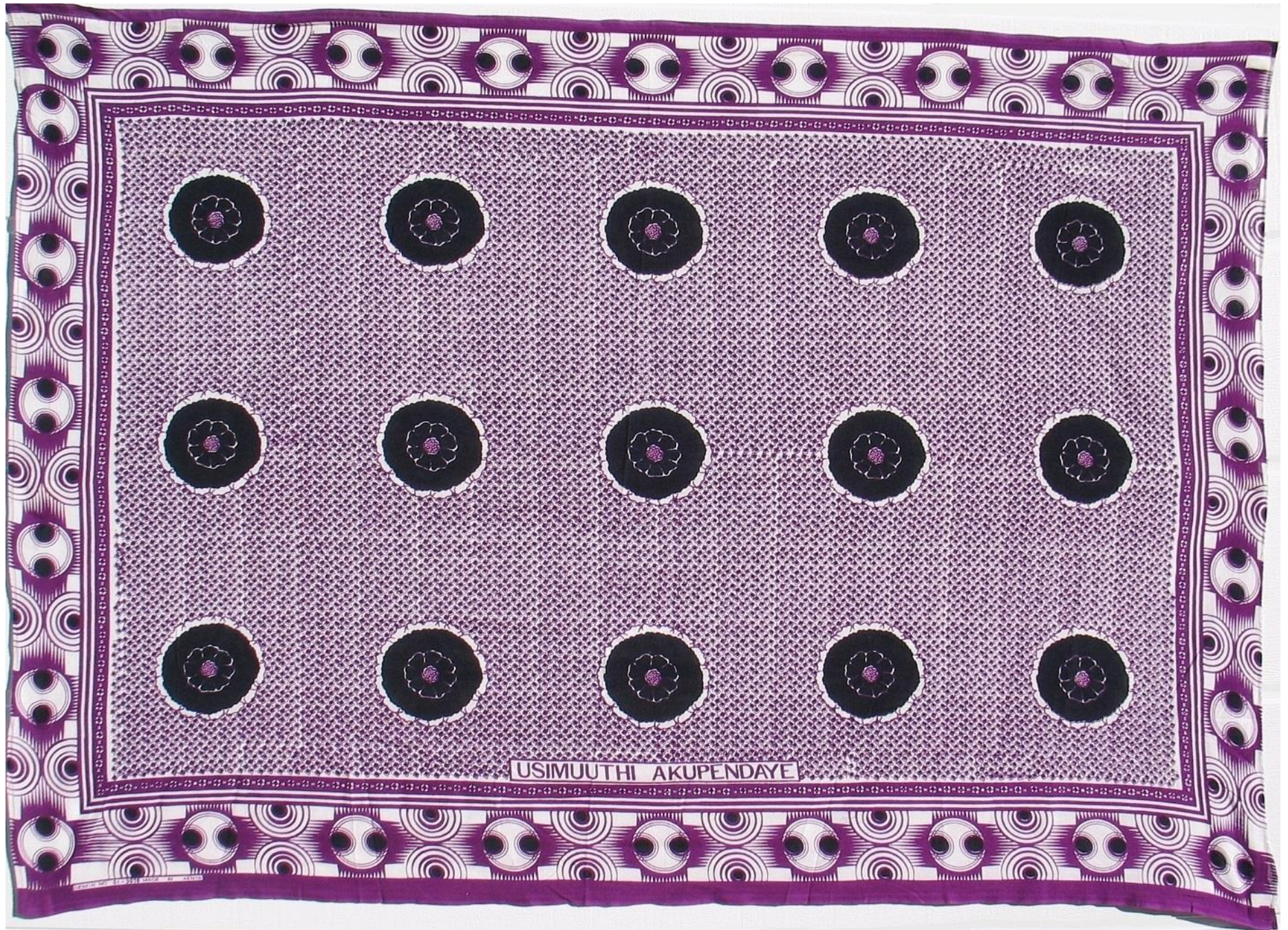
Jealous persons are building a school where hostility can be learned

Les gens jaloux créent une école où l'on peut apprendre l'hostilité

N° 06-3898 MADE IN KENYA

Main subjects: Cashew nuts and paisleys?

Owner PM



USIMUUTHI AKUPENDAYE

⑨

USIMUUTHI AKUPENDAYE

Do not envy the one who loves you

Ne sois pas jaloux de celui qui t'aime

DESIGN N° 01-3076 MADE IN KENYA

Main subject: Flowers

Owner PM



SI MZIZI SI HIRIZI BALI MOYO UMERIDHI

① ②

SI MZIZI SI HIRIZI BALI MOYO UMERIDHI

If no roots, no charms, at least a heart you possess

Si tu es sans famille, sans beauté, il te reste néanmoins un cœur

N° RR 15934 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

R/ 190K.H.E. REGO. (MALI YA ABDULLA) MOMBASA

Main subject: mixed paisleys and flowers

Owner PM



UPEMBO NA MTUNDAJI MWENYE MAKOSA NI NANI?

① ①

UPEMBO NA MTUNDAJI MWENYE MAKOSA NI NANI ?

Love is the reaper of who is at fault?

L'amour fauche celui qui est en faute ?

N° RR-15197 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

Khangas which come in dark blue colour are normally called "*kanga za magharibi*" (dusk kangas)

Main subject: Mango tree

Owner PM



HOHEHAHE HAKOSI SIKU YAKE

① ②

HOHEHAHE HAKOSI SIKU YAKE

There are more than enough voices in this world (?)

Il existe au monde plus d'avis qu'on ne puisse entendre (?)

or/ou

There will always be a lucky day for the lazy loiter, do not miss this day!

Il y aura toujours un jour de chance pour le paresseux, ne manque pas ce jour !

N° RR 15366 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

Inspired by vegetative subjects

Owner PM



MWENZANGU TUFANYE LAMSINGI

① ③

MWENZANGU TUFANYE LAMSINGI

Dear friend, let's build together strong foundations

Cher ami, tissons de solides liens

DESIGN N° 01•2686 MADE IN KENYA

Main subject: Cashew nuts?

Owner PM



KAMA MVUVI VUA USICHEZE NA MASHUA

KALIKU ANTIBI

① ④

KAMA MVUVI VUA USICHEZE NA MASHUA

If you are a fisherman, fishes won't play with your boat

Si tu es un pêcheur, les poissons ne joueront pas autour de ton bateau

ou

Comme on fait son lit on se couche !

ATLAS.D.N.4159.

Main subject: Fruit? Cherimoya?

Owner PM



TUFURAHIE MIAKA 25 YA UHURU

① ⑤

TUFURAHIE MIAKA 25 YA UHURU

Let us celebrate 25 years of freedom

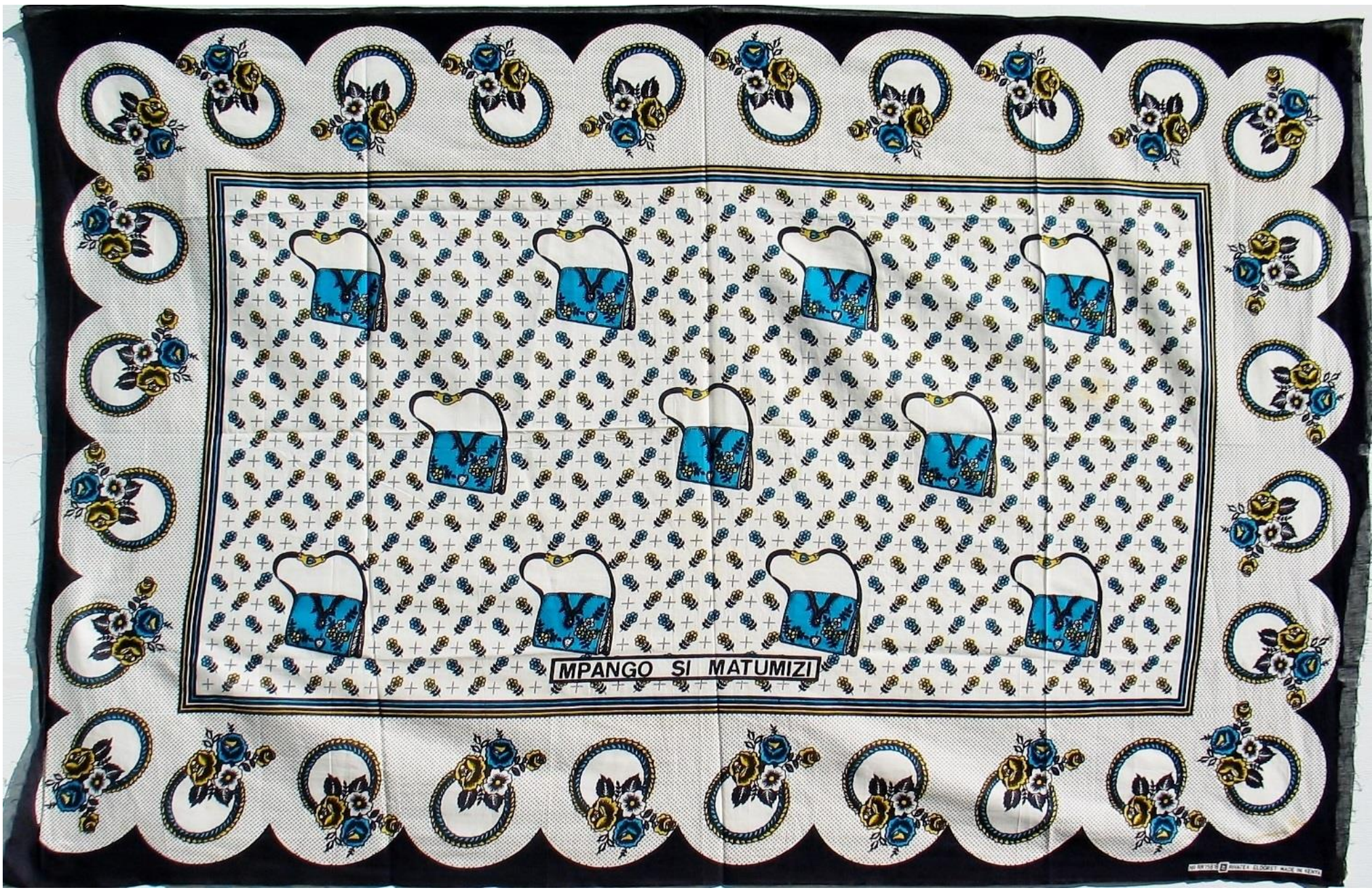
Fêtons 25 ans d'indépendance

N° RR 15882 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

This model is part of the British Museum collections
It was created in 1988 to celebrate Kenya's independence

Main subject: White mulberries?

Owner PM (doti)



MPANGO SI MATUMIZI

① ⑥

MPANGO SI MATUMIZI

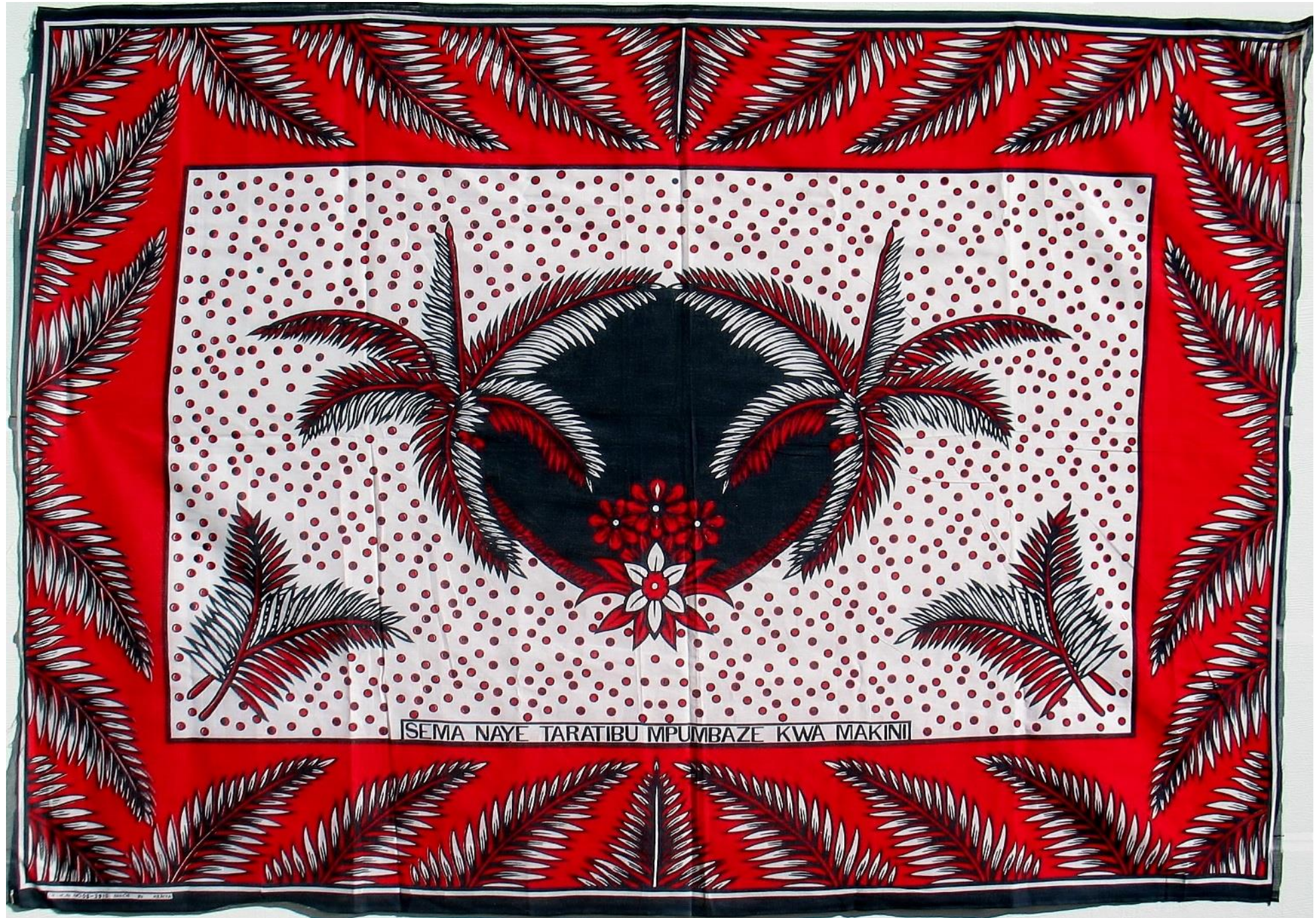
The plan has not been applied

Le plan n'a pas été mis à exécution

N° RR 15818 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

Main subject: Handbags

Owner PM



SEMA NAYE TARATIBU MPUMBAZE KWA MAKINI

① ⑦

SEMA NAYE TARATIBU MPUMBAZE KWA MAKINI

Talk to them calmly and attentively

Parle-leur calmement et attentivement

DESIGN N° 06-3910 MADE IN KENYA

Main subject: Palm leaves

Owner PM/GM (split doti!)



MIMI NA WEWE HATUACHANI

① ⑧

MIMI NA WEWE HATUACHANI

Me and you are bound together

Toi et moi sommes inséparables

MOUNTEX NANYUKI KS 200

Main subject: Flowers

Owner GM (doti)



HASIDI SI MTU KANDO NA JIRANI YAKO



① ⑨

HASIDI SI MTU KANDO NA JIRANI YAKO

A jealous person is never far from your neighbour

Il peut toujours se trouver quelqu'un de jaloux dans ton entourage

MOUNTEX NANYUKI KS 209

Main subjects: Grapes and hearts

Owner PM



DUNIYA NI MATEMBEZI

MADE IN KENYA

②①

DUNIYA NI MATEMBEZI

The world is about walking, seeing and learning

Découvrir le monde, c'est marcher, observer et apprendre

OU

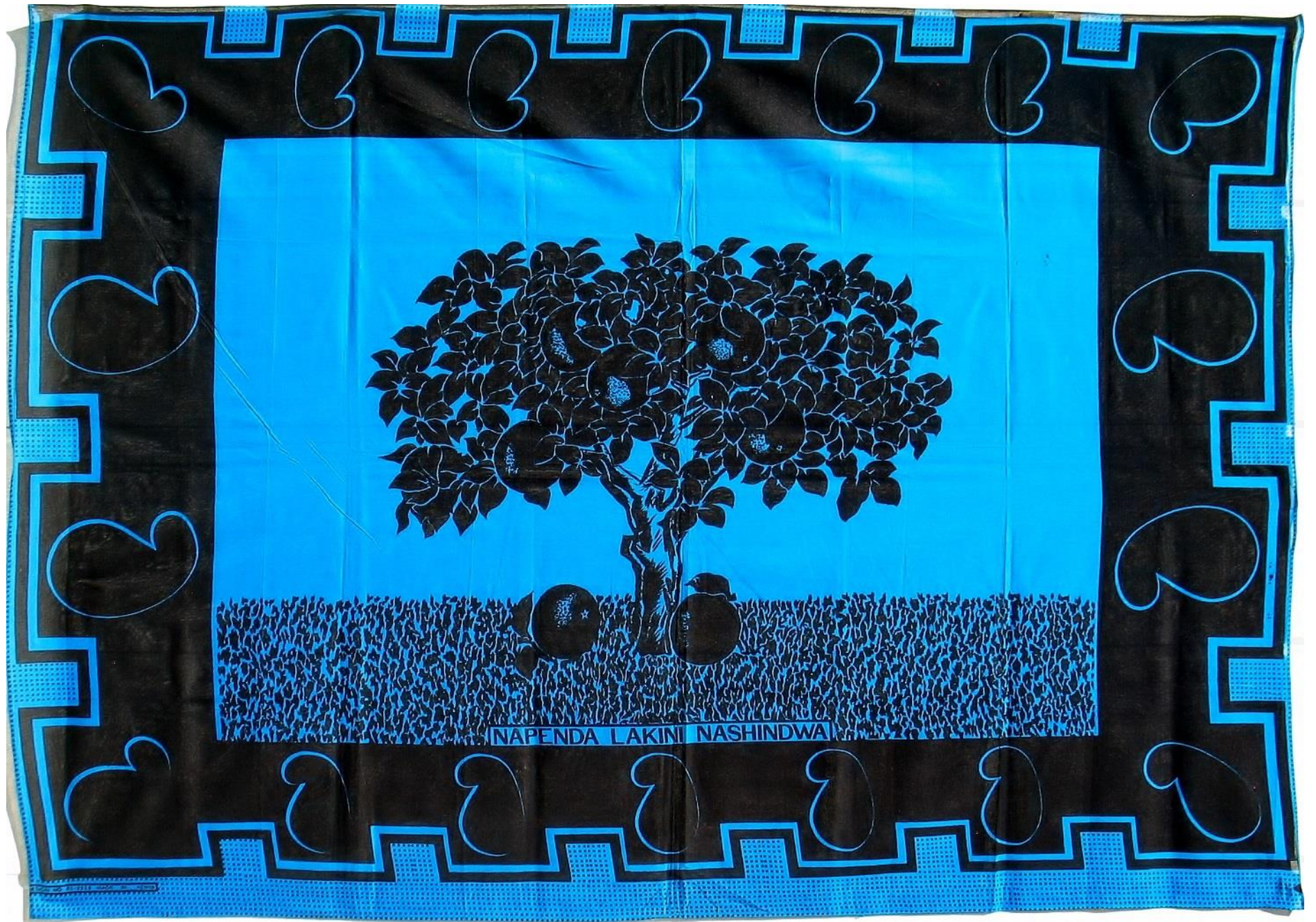
Les voyages forment la jeunesse

N° RR 15835 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

MALI YA ABDULLA 134

Main subjects: Seaweeds?

Owner PM



NAPENDA LAKINI NASHINDWA

②①

NAPENDA LAKINI NASHINDWA

I would like but I am unable

Je voudrais bien mais je ne peux pas

DESIGN N° 01-2226 MADE IN KENYA

Khangas which come in dark blue colour are normally called "*kanga za magharibi*" (dusk kangas)

Main subjects: Orange tree and cashew nuts?

Owner PM



USINICHUKIE BURE

② ②

USINICHUKIE BURE

Do not discriminate me for nothing

Ne me discrimine pas en vain

N° RR 15225 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

Main subjects: Pineapple and mulberries?

Owner PM



KUPENDANA SI AIBU

100% PAKISTANI MADE IN PAKISTAN

② ③

KUPENDANA SI AIBU

Those who love one another do not feel ashamed

Il n'y a pas de honte pour ceux qui s'aiment

N° RR 15865 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

Border including paisleys

Owner PM



AJIDHANIYE AMESIMAMA AANGALIE ASIANGUKE

② ④

AJIDHANIYE AMESIMAMA AANGALIE ASIANGUKE

Who thinks to stand firm should be careful not to fall

Celui qui se croit solide doit veiller à ne pas faiblir

DESIGN N° 01 3064 MADE IN KENYA

Main subject: Sunflower

Owner GM (doti)



MCHUNGULIA BAHARI SI MSAFIRI

② ⑤

MCHUNGULIA BAHARI SI MSAFIRI

Who only looks at the sea is not a traveller

Celui qui ne fait que regarder la mer n'est pas un marin

or/ou

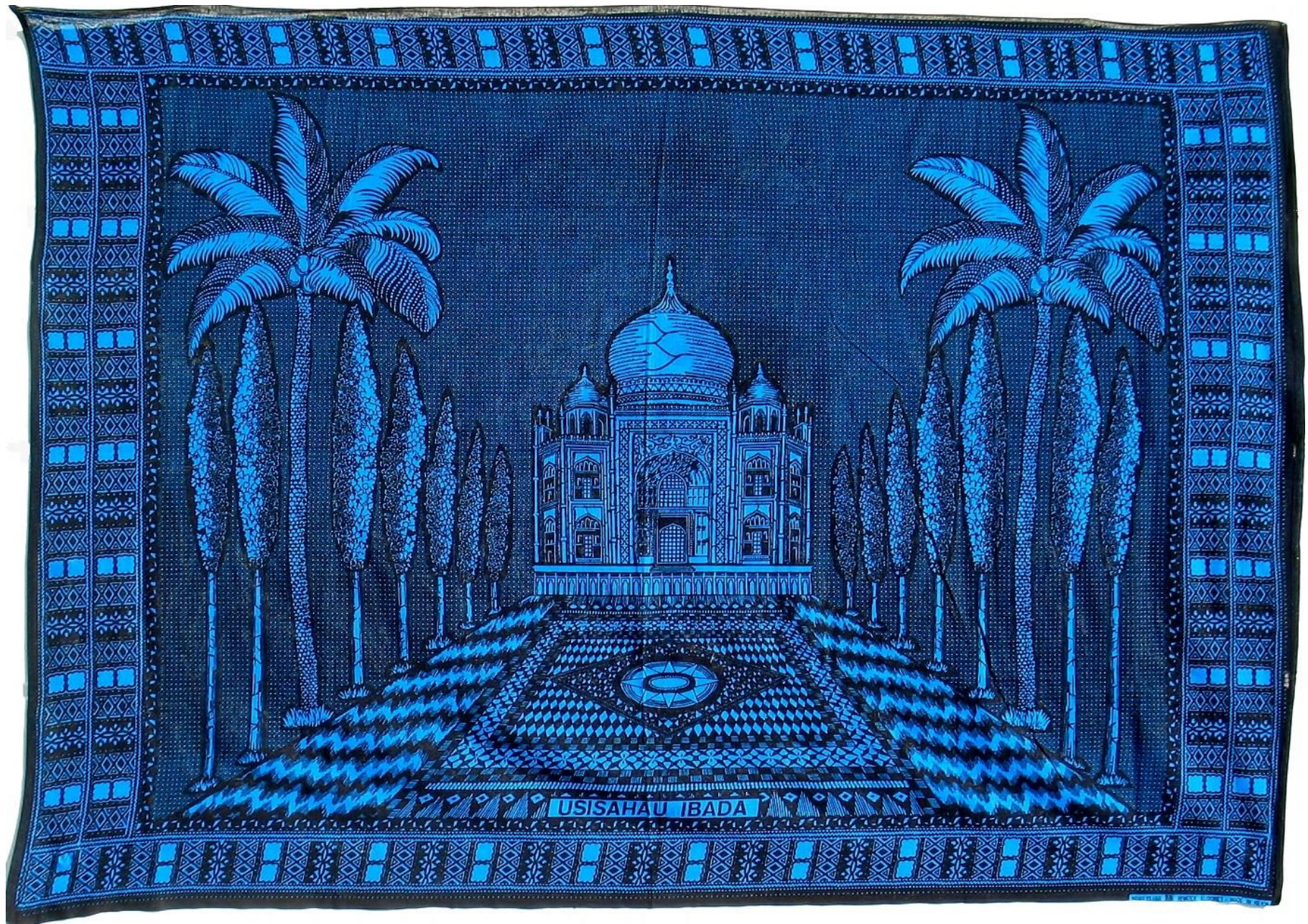
Dreaming is not enough, acting is necessary

Rêver ne suffit pas, il est nécessaire d'agir

MOUNTEX NANYUKI

Border including paisleys

Owner PM



USISAHAU IBADA

②⑥

USISAHAU IBADA

Don't forget to worship

N'oublie pas de prier / N'oublie pas de vénérer

N° RR 15468 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

Khangas which come in dark blue colour are normally called "*kanga za magharibi*" (dusk kangas)

Main subject: the Taj Mahal !

Owner GM



②⑦

N° RR 15165 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

ANCIENT DESIGN KISHUTU

This khanga is said to have one of the oldest and most well-known designs. Called “khanga kishutu” it was traditionally worn on the East African Coast and Zanzibar by a bride on her wedding day. The design usually comes without a saying although sometimes it appears with a saying at the bottom.

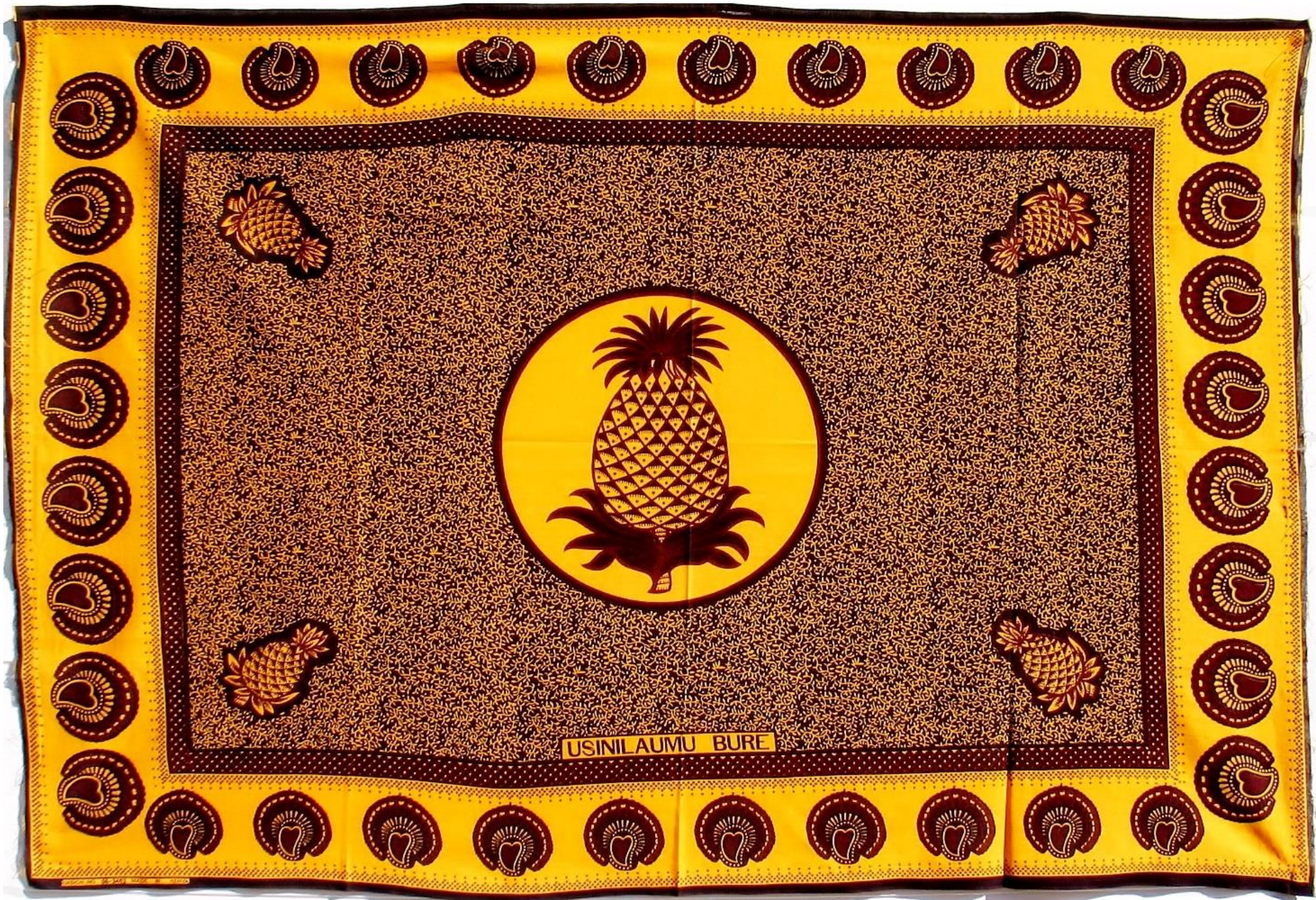
The red-black-white ones like this one are called “khanga kishutu cha harusi”.

There is a blue version which is more popular in Mombasa.

This model is part of the British Museum collections

It somehow reminds of certain carpets designs

Owner GM (gift from a dear friend)



USINILAUMU BURE

②⑧

USINILAUMU BURE

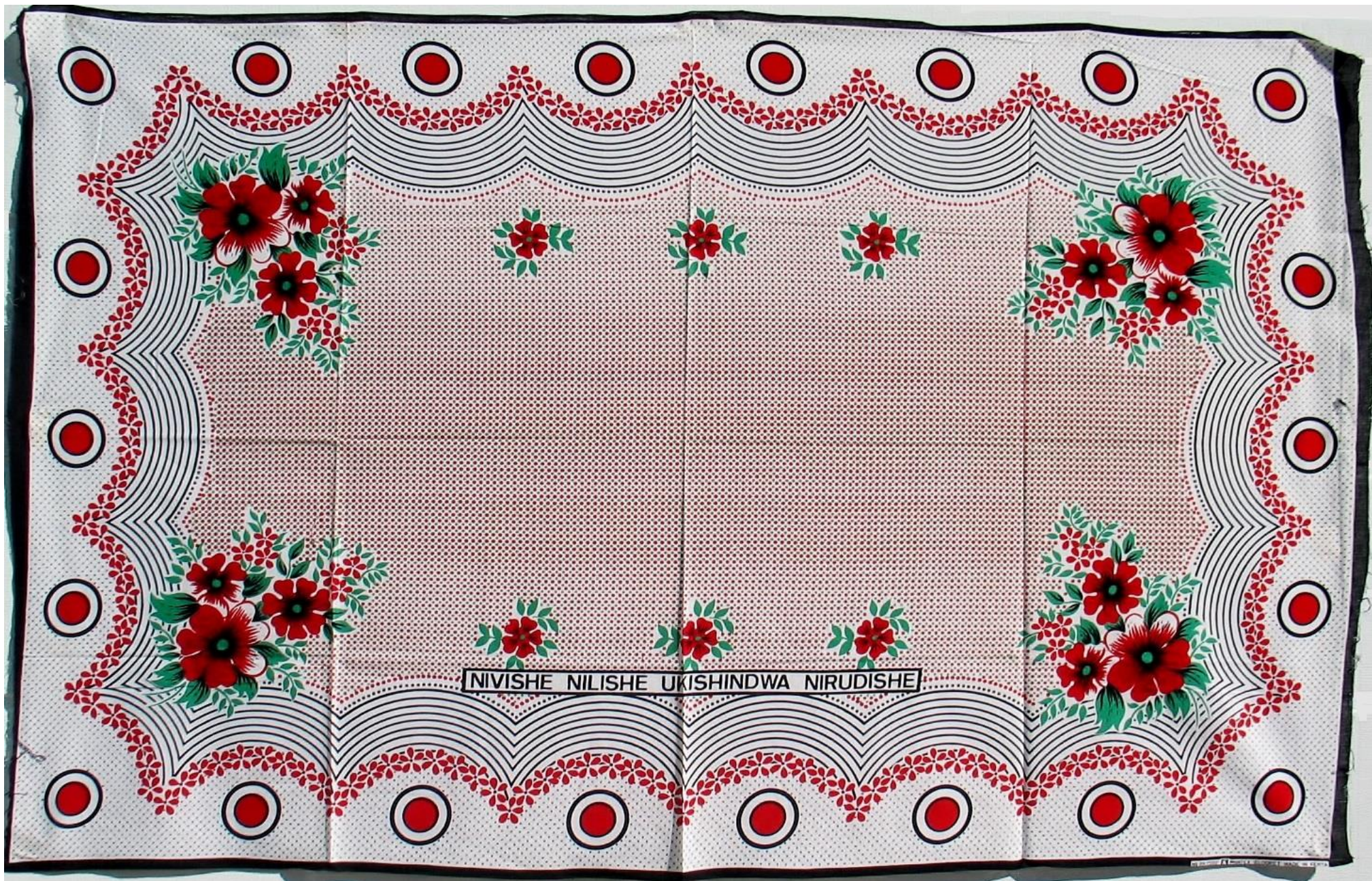
Do not blame me for nothing

Ne me blâme pas en vain

DESIGN N° 06-3462 MADE IN KENYA

Main subject: Pineapple

Owner PM



NIVISHE NILISHE UKISHINDWA NIRUDISHE

② ⑨

NIVISHE NILISHE UKISHINDWA NIRUDISHE

Dress me, feed me but If you cannot, return me

Si tu n'as pas les moyens de m'entretenir, oublie-moi

N° RR 15901 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

Main subject: Flowers

Owner PM



UMSAFIAYE NIA MOYONI ANA MAWAZO

③ ①

UMSAFIAYE NIA MOYONI ANA MAWAZO

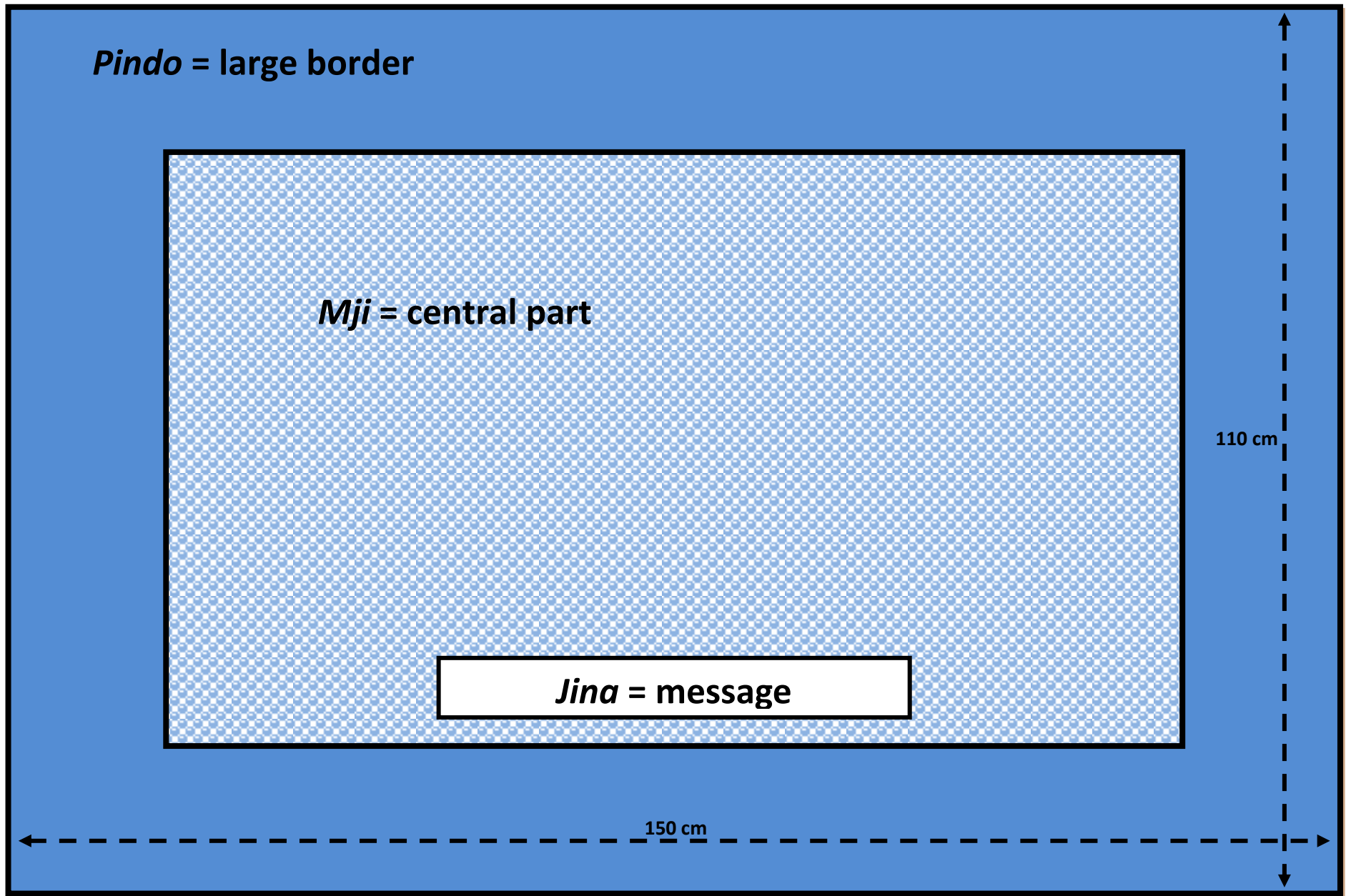
Those who have good intentions at heart (first) may have other thoughts later

Ceux qui ont de bonnes intentions au départ peuvent développer d'autres pensées

N° RR 16065 RIVATEX ELDORET MADE IN KENYA

This design looks like "Art Nouveau" style

Owner GM (doti)



The few different parts in the usual design of an East African Khanga