

Kabuwaza or Kapatsa Kabuwaza

(A day or night head cover from the Mua area and a black day mask from the Pemba area)



Themes

- 1) Living off other people (community parasite)
- 2) Laziness
- 3) Responsible parenthood
- 4) Sexual obsession

Etymology

Kabuwaza means, 'to be poor, destitute, and needy in everything' (including a shelter to stay). The Pemba version adds **Kapatsa Kabuwaza** meaning, 'He who gives to **Kabuwaza**!' but the real message suggests the opposite, that is, 'Do not give to him!'

Description

The Mua version belongs to the Kapoli family. The character has a day or a night head cover topped with a cowlick. The dancer's body is smeared with ashes. He wears a fibre kilt at his waist and leglets

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and armbands. He carries a whip, a sign of castigation from the spirit world. He has the obligation to care for the needy and emphasises the importance of hard work.

The Pemba version of **Kabuwaza** is more complex. It features him with a 30 centimetre oval, black mask portraying an elderly person, with a balding head and a receding hairline in grey (made of Samango monkey skins). The character has long sideburns, a thin moustache and a clean goatee. All these details are created using the same type of skins. The headgear of the mask is made of tatters and white sisal. The narrow and domineering forehead, crossed by numerous white wrinkles, emphasises insecurity. The bulging eyebrows and long thin angular nose give him an austere look that commands pity. The tiny round ears express deafness. The closed mouth and heavy red lips are streaked with a white vertical line to suggest gloom, misery and gluttony. The swollen cheeks and the deeply incised dimples are placed close to the mouth to emphasise that **Kabuwaza** is preoccupied with food. The white line dissecting the mouth conveys duplicity and cheating. The 30 centimetre long cowlick on the forehead is made of feathers and reveals that he is also obsessed with sex. The red tribal marks suggest that he is a Chewa. The **Kabuwaza** of Pemba wears a torn shirt and shorts. His outfit is completed with leglets and armbands. A belt made of bark strings holds up his shorts. All these details articulate **Kabuwaza's** destitution or laziness. Similarly, he carries a hoe and a knife to the arena. He presents these tools forcefully to the women requesting them to cultivate his land. They refuse his request. Shocked by their rebuff, **Kabuwaza** starts chasing the women with the intention of grabbing them sexually. He jumps like Kapoli and rotates his pelvis obscenely, while the men sing for him: 1) *"Poor since a long time! If only he would go to the field (with his hoe), Mr Poor since a long time!"*

The dancing of the Mua version of **Kabuwaza** is less explicit and omits the mime with the hoe, but conveys a similar message. **Kabuwaza** (as Kapoli) sings for himself and the women intone after him: 2) *"Poor today! Poor today! Poor for a long time!"*

Both songs stress that **Kabuwaza** was an orphan. He lost his parents when he was very young but despite his misfortune, he never did anything to help himself and ascend from his misery. The Pemba song and the mime emphasise that he would not be needy, *"If only he would go to the field (with his hoe)."* In both versions, the performance of **Kabuwaza** is linked to funeral and commemoration rites. This is to emphasise that **Kabuwaza** enjoys feasting at commemoration but refuses to share in the communal work at the time of burial. For such occasions, **Kabuwaza** becomes a living example of behaviour required for these events. People who share in joy should also share pain and hardships when times are difficult. **Kabuwaza** is lazy and selfish. He is poor and will remain poor forever. He is a healthy fellow, who profits from the fact that he is an orphan. He chooses to be a parasite, expecting to be given all that he needs by the rest of the community. That is why the Pemba version calls him **Kapatsa Kabuwaza**, which means 'Do not give **Kabuwaza** anything!' since he is profiting from the situation and is not really in need. Through both forms of **Kabuwaza**, the ancestors reprimand lazy people. They experience poverty because they refuse hard work. If they are married, their union does not last, since they fail to support themselves and their family. Moreover, their obsession with sex casts them as irresponsible parents, who like to beget children but fail in their responsibility to feed them. They have a large family, because they fail to restrain their sexual appetites. Their irresponsibility becomes the source of misery and deprivation for both wives and children. People like

Kabuwaza are strongly recommended not to marry. They often remain single because they lack the sense of responsibility and the motivation to care for others.

Songs

1) "**Kabuwaza** ye ye ye, ye ye ye **Kabuwaza** kale! Chikhala apite ku munda ndiye ye ye o tate **Kabuwaza** kale!"

2) "**Kabuwaza** lero! o lero! **Kabuwaza** kale!"

Source

Interviews in 1991, 1992 and 2007