

## Katibula

(A day or night head cover or an orange day mask from the Mua and Dedza areas)



(Mua version)



### Themes

1) Familiarity between brother- & sister-in-law (*chilamu*) 2) Success in marriage 3) Sexual taboos (*mdulo*)

### Etymology

**Katibula** derives from the verb *kutibula*, which means, 'to pound broken grain' (*mphale*). After the grain has been pounded (*kukonola*) and the husk taken off, the broken white flour grains are pounded (*kutibula* or *kusinja*). *Kutibula* can also mean, 'to slap' or 'to beat' a thing or a person.

### Description

**Katibula** belongs to the Kapoli family. He is related to Kapoli or Kasinja (refer to these entries), though they differ slightly in their singing and dancing styles. Kapoli sings with a high pitched voice while

[www.kasiyamaliro.org](http://www.kasiyamaliro.org)

Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art, Mua Parish, P. O. Box 41, Mtakataka, Malawi

**Katibula** and Kasinja sing in a lower pitch. All swerve their feet while dancing. **Katibula** of Mua pretends to avoid blows while dancing, as if he had already been struck. He carries a small winnowing basket filled with cow dung to express putrefaction and a tin of water mixed with red clay (*katondo*) giving the impression of blood, which he pours on his kilt or loincloth while dancing. **Katibula** of Dedza limps while swerving his feet, showing that he is weakening or dying.

The appearance of **Katibula** also varies from region to region. **Katibula** of Mua wears a costume like that of Kapoli (kilt, leglets, armlets, a bark head cover with a hole on top of his head, and mud smeared all over his body). The Dedza version presents him with a large carved wooden mask (40 cm.) painted orange and a crushed forehead, as if he had been beaten. The eyes are deeply set in their sockets. The nose is slender, long and painted white, representing the male sexual organ. The mouth is hideous, showing greed and lack of sexual control. The ears are tiny to emphasise deafness to the ancestors' advice, particularly with regard to sexual morality and the respect of sexual taboos. The red or orange colour of the mask reinforces this. The headgear of the mask is made of tatters. The dancer wears a tatter vest, a kilt or a loincloth, leglets and armlets.

The character of **Katibula** is ancient and traces its origin to the Dedza plateau or the Lilongwe plain. In the past, it used to perform exclusively for funeral and commemoration rites. Later, it appeared at any kind of ritual. The last two decades have witnessed his disappearance.

Many songs belong to **Katibula's** repertoire. A few examples will reveal his personality. The first runs: 1) *"This kind of joking relationship (chilamu) goes too far, that of grabbing the breast... this goes too far, Mr. Mwale!"* This song refers to the joking relationship that a husband enjoys with his sisters-in-law. The relaxed relations imply cordiality and familiarity but should never degenerate into sexual intimacy. The expression of 'grabbing the breast' is a euphemism for adultery. Sex between in-laws is perceived as incest and the epitome of witchcraft. It is prohibited by the Chewa moral code and is seen as an abomination.

A second song is as follows: 2) *"(The head of the family group says:) You husband, you sleep here! You wife, you sleep there. Me, poor husband, where can I have sex? (To have sex) is a matter of good luck!"* This song wrestles with sexual interdicts between husband and wife at the time of prohibition. When the woman is experiencing her menses, husband and wife are instructed by the family head to sleep separately and not to share the same mat. This precaution is prescribed by the *mdulo* complex, by which hot and cold must be kept separate. A woman in her period is perceived as cool and has therefore to abstain from sex, which is conceived as hot. During this time, both husband and wife must keep sexual continence and are not to indulge in sex (*kudika* – to wait). The husband should not press his wife for sex. If he does, it is believed that she will transmit to her husband her 'bad blood' and kill him through the slimming or swelling disease (*mdulo*). Moreover, her husband is not to approach other women for sex. His hot condition could also endanger his wife, and adultery would ruin their relationship and marriage.

A song from Dedza runs as follows: 3) *"Have you seen **Katibula**? Has he passed nearby? I saw him going this way together with his wife. He thought of jumping over the stream. There he dropped with no strength (died). He went, **Katibula!**"* Another Mua song asks: 4) *"Why did he go with a load on his*

head? What took him was his deafness... He went (died), **Katibula**, he went, with a load on his head." The songs play on the double meaning of the word, 'to go', meaning 'to be on a journey' or 'to die'. The image of jumping over water conveys having sex with a woman who is menstruating. **Katibula** forced his wife for sex despite her condition. He ignored the rules of the ancestors regarding sexual abstinence. He contracted *mdulo* and died. **Katibula** of Mua carries a basket of cow dung ("a load") to express that his body stinks and is rotting away. As he dances, he pours the red liquid over his kilt and his body parts to suggest that the cause of death is *mdulo*. The dance which suggests avoidance of blows and the hole on top of his head equate to the crushed forehead displayed by **Katibula** of Dedza. Both are the consequence of incurring the *mdulo* disease, the ancestors' advice regulating sex, which leads to inevitable death.

The four songs emphasise sexual morality and the importance of social rules and the *mdulo* complex. **Katibula**'s teaching reinforces the necessity of *kudika*, 'abstinence', when one's partner is experiencing her menstrual cycle. It reinforces the sacredness of sex and marriage. It proposes sexual abstinence as a path to a healthy marriage, both physically and psychologically.

### Songs

- 1) "*Chilamu chotere ndi chowawa, chogwira bele ndi chowawa, chogwira bele ndi chowawa a Mwale!*"
- 2) "*Wamuna mugone uko! Wakazi mugone uko! Wamunane n'kaponya mwai wake!*"
- 3) "*Mwaona a **Katibula**? (2x) Kodi adutsa ku? E tate e tate, ndaona adutsa pomwepo e tate ndi akazi awo. Amati adutse m'madzi. Apa agwa mphamvu. Anka a **Katibula**!*"
- 4) "*Ankiranji a **Katibula**? Katundu ali pa mutu. Kwa'atenga kusamva a **Katibula**! E tate de anka a **Katibula**, ankira katundu ali pa mutu.*"

### Source

Interviews in 1992 and 2007

### Reference

Scott, D.C. (1892). *A Cyclopaedic Dictionary of the Mang'anja Language spoken in British Central Africa*. Foreign Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland: Edinburgh. pp. 607 – 608