

Kwakwase

(A black day mask from Mua and Dedza)



Themes

1) Selfishness/Self-centredness 2) Forbidden sex 3) Sexual obsession

Etymology

Kwakwase derives from the Chewa verb *kukwakwasa*, 'to sweep'. It is an example of onomatopoeia, describing the noise of the broom that sweeps. **Kwakwase** stands for somebody who cannot control his sexual instinct.

Description

The black mask (25 cm.) of **Kwakwase** shows an androgynous face, with tribal marks and the three lines characteristic of women's makeup (*mchome*). The hair is grey. Two grey horns like those of a goat protrude from his head. These show that he was made to pay a fine of goats because of his perverted behaviour. His elongated red eyes manifest avidity for sex. His small mouth and nose are intended to give him a sexy appearance. The round face is deprived of beard or moustache. His headgear is made of sisal dyed grey. The dancer wears a dark kilt on top of a loincloth, leglets and armlets. He moves around the *bwalo* with a mini broom and a flywhisk. He is sexy, and likes to move his hips, shaking his pelvis erotically. He runs after any woman while the men sing, "Sweep, sweep, sweep!"

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The character once performed at funerals to warn people against promiscuity. Today **Kwakwase** is rarely seen. More recent characters teaching about sexual irresponsibility and abuse have replaced it.

When **Kwakwase** sees somebody from the opposite sex he cannot resist his urges: his brain stops functioning. His sexual misconduct goes beyond what is acceptable and reaches perversion. Such a person is blind to traditional sexual morality. He overlooks the rules of affinity, avoidance, minority and status. He is eager to have sex with one of his in-laws, with a child who is not sexually mature or with someone who belongs to a higher status, such as the chief's wife. Any sign of kindness and sympathy from a woman is interpreted as an invitation. That is why **Kwakwase's** dance is so blatant: he chases the women, looks under their *chitenjes* and thrusts his hips, desperate for a partner. His reputation is that of sweeping up all the women on the way, leaving none behind. **Kwakwase** portrays someone with a sexual addiction, who is corrupt and selfish. His behaviour is so ugly that he makes himself an outcast, an antisocial person to fear and avoid at all cost.

Today, **Kwakwase** is rarely seen; more recent characters that teach about sexual abuse and irresponsibility have replaced it.

Song

"Kwakwa kwakwa Kwakwase!"

Source

Interviews in 1973, 1992, 1994 and 1999