

Muweruza

(A type of night head cover of Kapoli from the Salima area)

Themes

- 1) Bribery
- 2) Greed
- 3) Responsible leadership
- 4) Sale of land and land grabbing

Etymology

The word comes from the verb *kuweruza*, which means, 'to judge' or 'to correct behaviour'. *Muweruzi* is a judge. The term is applied to the chief and his assistants, who settle disputes, particularly those concerning land.



Description

This faceless head cover is made of white maize husks, which hang to the shoulders of the dancer and fall in two long tails in front and back, reaching to the navel and the base of the spine. This particular type of headwear imitates the white wigs worn by the old colonial judges. **Muweruza** belongs to the category of Kapoli. His costume is that of Kapoli: a maize husk kilt, leglets and armlets. His body is smeared with ashes.

The character of the judge appears only toward dawn of the night vigil when chiefs (*mafumu*) and elders (*manyumba*) are enthroned. His dancing style is typical of Kapoli, and he sings his own song with a high-pitched voice and then lets the women take over: "*You, the chief's assistant, you keep selling the land to outsiders so that others complain! You keep saying: Go away from here! Go away from here!*" The song criticises the chief's assistants, but is intended as a reprimand to chiefs, who sell the land of their people to strangers instead of distributing it to the villagers. **Muweruza** un.masks false and insincere leaders, who pretend to care for the village community but are more concerned about their own interests than their people's needs. Leaders of this type show no understanding for

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their subjects and treat them unfairly. They are deaf to the people's requests, and exploit power for personal gain. **Muweruza** takes advantage of the ritual of enthronement of chiefs and elders to inculcate in the newly enthroned a sense of responsibility and to spare them unpopularity with the villagers. **Muweruza** is also a reminder to leaders that, according to tradition, no one owns the land or can sell it for his or her own benefit. It is to be used by all for the community's subsistence.

Song

*"Inu anyakwawa, mungogulitsa minda (2x) anthu achabe kuti alankhule! Mungoti: chokani pano!
(2x)"*

Source

Interview in 1992