

Chapana (Ntchisi)

(A day or night mask from the Ntchisi area)



(night)

Themes

1) Hygiene in marriage 2) High mortality 3) Responsible parenthood 4) Sexual taboos (*mdulo*)

Etymology

Chapana means, 'that which has trapped'.

Description

Chapana features an animal head of undetermined species. The mask is made of an old fish trap covered with black goatskin for the day mask or with vegetable matter for the night performance. The shape shows an open mouth with something trapped between the teeth. The headgear is made of tatters and the dancer wears a tatter suit and carries weapons (knives or clubs). He appears only at funerals. Upon entering the *bwalo*, the character roams around the arena threatening the crowd with his weapons. He flings his legs and arms sideways. The male choir explains the dance: "*It trapped, it trapped even its owner.*" The enigmatic song refers to a husband who fathers many children, of which

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none remain. They all died one by one because he does not keep the sexual taboos, the rules of sexual abstinence (*kudika*). These taboos must be followed closely, especially after childbirth or when a child is sick. The death of his children might be explained by his laziness and by the fact that he does not take the children to the medicine man or to the hospital. The hygiene in the home is poor and the children die of diseases. The animal features of the character **Chapana** imply that he is a witch and that he eats his own children. He neglects the *mdulo* and does not provide the care and hygiene that his children need, the very way witchcraft might kill the children. **Chapana** admonishes parents who are selfish. There is no need to look for scapegoats (weapons), but instead we should look at ourselves, and our irresponsible behaviour.

There is another, rather different **Chapana** from the Mua area.

Song

“Chapana, Chapana (2x) Chapana eni ake.”

Source

Interviews in 1991, 2000 and 2007