

Chimbwira

(A black day mask from the Salima area)

Themes

- 1) Impotence can be cured
- 2) Infertility – impotence

Etymology

Chimbwira means, 'the impotent man'.



Description

Chimbwira from Salima resembles Chimbwira choka of Mua (refer to that entry), except for the colour of the mask and the message, which varies slightly. The mask (30 cm.) portrays an old man with wrinkles and a bald head. The face is rather sour and fat with a tiny nose, small ears and a large sad mouth with missing teeth. The headgear is made of tatters. The dancer wears only a loincloth, leglets and armlets. His body is smeared with mud. He carries a stick. All these details emphasise his misery. The expression of sorrow depicts that he has another personal problem. He is impotent. The men's song explains, "**Chimbwira**, the impotent man, he will go by himself. Leave him, let him go by himself. He will not make a court case. Why bother with **Chimbwira**? (He left out of shame. When I am away he searches for me. That one (searches for me) because he wants a child, **Chimbwira** the impotent. But he doesn't want to go to the medicine man, **Chimbwira**."

Chimbwira's dance consists in moving his pelvis erotically while holding his stick. He pretends that he is a potent generator of children, but all this excitement is only for disguising his handicap. The character is performed during funerals, chief's installations and puberty rituals. Infertility is an easy subject for entertainment. **Chimbwira** advises husbands who suffer from impotence and want to remain married that they should not imitate him and just disappear as he did. **Chimbwira** left his wife, pretending that he was going to seek employment in town or outside the country. But he had no intention of coming back. He left out of despair in order to hide his incapacity and to escape the shame of being called *gocho*, an impotent man. Instead, he should have consulted his

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people, who would have referred him to the medicine man (*sing'anga*). The Chewa have experience in such treatments for impotence, believing miracles can be achieved. The colour of the mask has shifted from the red of Mua to black in order to express the possibility that **Chimbwira** can be cured.

Song

"Chimbwira tate de a Chimbwira (2x), uyo achoka yekha tate de. Muwaleke iwo achoke apite tate. Sachita mlandu ai toto de. Chalaka a Chimbwira tate! Awa n'manyazi chabe tate! Ukusowa ndi mgubidi a Chimbwira tate de, mgubidi wa mwana iwowa tate de, Chimbwira. Saona asing'anga a Chimbwira."

Source

Interview in 1992