

## Chimkwapulo (Golomoti)

(A red day mask from the Golomoti area)



### Themes

1) Positive aspects of modernity 2) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)

### Etymology

**Chimkwapulo** means, 'the big whip'.

### Description

This large mask of 40 centimetres in bright tones of red portrays a senior man with threatening features. It is characterised by long moustaches and hirsute eyebrows. **Chimkwapulo** is totally bald; tatters replace the hair around his bald head. The features show wrinkles on his forehead, deep labial lines descending from a pointed nose, drooping lips and aggressive teeth in both jaws, a pointed chin and large ears. All these details convey that he is extremely old: he appears to be the central pole of the extended family group or an important person on the Malawi scene.

**Chimkwapulo** wears a tatter suit embellished with a kilt of fertiliser bag laces and a large belt. He

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carries whips and two flywhisks embodying the power of castigation proper to his seniority and position.

**Chimkwapulo** enters the *bwalo* with great stamina and swerves his feet with manifest energy in the style of Mandevu, the bearded one, or Lambwe, the protector of the buffalo herd. The male choir sings for him: “*Achimkwapulo* (big whip), *shave your moustache which frightens the children!*” The women reply with any song of their repertoire. **Chimkwapulo** performs at funerals and at commemoration ceremonies. He is also present at initiation rituals; and even at any other type of celebrations. His appearance in *gule* (of Golomoti) goes back to the period of the mid 1990s and copies the model of Mthembanji but differs in term of appearance and emphasis from the Mchanja version. This indicates that the character had been introduced from somewhere else without the full comprehension of the original meaning of what the character was standing for. Refer to the entry for **Chimkwapulo** from Mchanja, which reveals a **Chimkwapulo** who is wrestling with the introduction of multiparty politics and the downfall of Kamuzu Banda. The Golomoti version could well imply the same political overtones but in a more reserved manner. This is made particularly obvious by the fact that the appearance of **Chimkwapulo** is less threatening (no horns) and that he does not chase the women. Moreover the women’s song does not add any extra pinch of salt by giving him an obvious political overtone.

**Chimkwapulo** features an elderly person who neglects his appearance and does not pay much attention to his clothing. His mere appearance frightens the children of the village. Old people are anachronistic figures in the village. Their manners and their teaching are old fashioned as they are too strict. During the period of the 1990s, the villagers had experienced democracy and became more concerned about their looks. Fashion had already set foot in the country, influenced by the introduction of Malawi Television and the exposure to the western world through other TV channels. The younger generations began to notice that their elders were perceived as belonging to the past and as refusing to move along with the times. **Chimkwapulo** comes as an invitation to senior people to join the winds of change and to move ahead into the new age, adjusting to the new life style and opting for modernity. Nevertheless, the acceptance of democracy implied a painful political change for the country. (This is the message of **Chimkwapulo** from Mchanja.)

The **Chimkwapulo** of Golomoti could carry the same political message as that of Mchanja but without being as explicit. The Golomoti version has been modelled on that of Mthembanji, a village which is situated only a few kilometres away from Mchanja. How could the Mthembanji version have ignored the political overtones of **Chimkwapulo** and shown such differences in its appearance? This remains a puzzle, emphasising the great creativity and freedom of the artists of the *mzinda*.

## Song

“A *Chimkwapulo metani ndevu mutiwopsyera ana!*”

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## Source

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