

Chimzukwa

(A black day mask from the Msinja area)

Themes

- 1) Dishonesty, theft & robbery
- 2) Manipulation/exploitation
- 3) Witchcraft harms the practitioner (*choipa chitsata mwini*)
- 4) Witchcraft

Etymology

Chimzukwa means, 'the big ghost'.



Description

The black mask (35 cm.) shows a long scrawny face with wrinkles, aquiline nose and elongated lips on a mouth with only one tooth. The eyes are red and fierce, like those of a witch, the eyebrows bristling and the ears shrunken. He has a moustache and long goatee. The salient low cheeks show small scarification marks made by the diviner where medicine has been inserted. The headgear is made of dirty black jute rags. The dancer wears a vest and loincloth made of jute. He carries a flywhisk and a worn out winnowing basket (*chipapa*) brought from the graveyard.

In the arena, the character displays frenetic, uncoordinated movements. He swerves his feet, jumps up in the air and runs after the spectators. He takes his winnowing basket and flywhisk and covers the heads of some of the onlookers in order to stimulate dreams about ghosts. He does this to teach that such objects belonging to the graveyard should not enter the village. The dancer performs during funeral and commemoration rites of elders who are suspected to be witches because of their antisocial behaviour. The performer must be a senior person able to keep sexual abstinence, so as not to invite the evil spirits (*ziwanda*) into the village. During **Chimzukwa's** dance, the men sing for him, "*Those who exploit others (claim to) have refused to handle horns. They were afraid of this. Yes, they were afraid of the effects: starting with sickness. They excuse themselves, saying this and that. Ho, you hear of one becoming a big ghost, of another becoming a big ghost; because of stealing, one has been transformed into a big ghost. Chimzukwa.*"

Chimzukwa portrays an elder who has been identified as a witch because of his exploitative and antisocial behaviour. The song, dance and general appearance of the character tell his history. Either he rushed to the diviner in order to have incisions made and medicine inserted into the cuts or he kept diabolic animals at home (hyenas, owls, lions) or other dangerous objects connected with witchcraft. He also refused to play his fair part in contributing to the life of the village, preferring instead to take advantage of the work and property of others, which had, unknown to him, been protected by medicine that causes disease (*chiwindo*) to the thief. As a consequence, he developed this strange sickness. He asked that when he died he should be buried in a certain way, or he would return as a ghost. Once he had died and people forgot his last request, his prediction came true. The deceased really transformed into a 'big ghost' that troubled and frightened the village.

The character of **Chimzukwa** warns the villagers against being involved with witchcraft, even unwittingly thru exploitative practice, for fear that such strange phenomena may result. Exploitation and witchcraft harm not only others; they can also harm the practitioner himself, as evil reaps its just desserts – *choipa chitsata mwini*. One should not wish to change into an evil spirit who will threaten the community. Antisocial people do not join the ancestors' community. After death they wander forever and keep sending misfortune and harm to the village.

Song

*"Atidyenawo adakana kugwirira nyanga. Adaopa izi. Inde tate de. Adaopa izi tate de kuyambira matenda tate; angoti izi nenu, izi nenu ogo tate de. Anauka **Chimzukwa** ena tate. **Chimzukwa** ena tate de, awo n'magwiragwira awo, adauka **Chimzukwa**."*

Source

Interview in 1992