

Chitondolo

(A night structure from the Mua area)



Themes

1) Sexual taboos (*mdulo*) 2) Women's hygiene cycle

Etymology

Chitondolo is a type of small fish, reddish in colour and common in rivers. It is used here as a euphemism for the woman's menses and sexual avoidance.

Description

The night structure consists of a bamboo frame depicting a small fish. One dancer carries the structure on his back while crawling. **Chitondolo** is 1.5 metres long and close to 50 centimetres high. The frame is covered with red maize husks to give the likeness of this type of fish. The mouth is wide. The eyes are marked with paint. Fins are sometimes added. The tail resembles that of a fish.

Chitondolo appears during the night vigil of funeral rites, particularly when they involve *chinamwali*. It moves forward and backward to the *chisamba* rhythm. It does not rotate. The male members

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welcome it with these words: "***Chitondolo*** has come! What can my child do? ***Chitondolo*** has come!" The red **Chitondolo** fish evokes the idea that the child has grown up or has reached her first menses. She will be taken to the river to wash and be given the advice relating to her condition. There at the water, she will be told to avoid those small fishes that could be attracted by her blood flow. This is another parable to teach her to avoid sexual contact during these periods. The redness of the fish is equated to that of the glans of the penis. The heart of the *namkungwi's* teaching is focused on hygiene during a woman's period and the use of hygienic towels, the 'door' closing the access to her sexual organs. During their menses, women should avoid men for fear of getting hurt but also for fear of killing their partners with the *mdulo* disease. The presence of **Chitondolo** at the initiation reinforces this teaching. The structure, once popular in the past, has today fallen into disuse because of the decline of structures in general and also the tendency to shorten the initiation rites.

Song

*"Wabwera **Chitondolo!** Mwana wanga atani (2x)? Wabwera **Chitondolo.**"*

Source

Interviews in 1991 and 2007