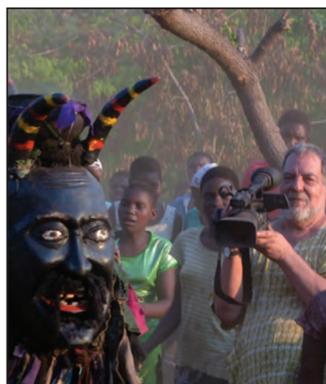


CLAUDE BOUCHER is a Catholic priest in the Society of Missionaries of Africa, or the 'White Fathers'. He has spent over 40 years living and working amongst the people of Malawi, and, as a trained anthropologist, has studied the traditional practices of those cultures with which he has had contact over the decades, notably the Ngoni, Yao, and Chewa. In particular, he has documented the details of the *gule wamkulu* through meticulous collection of data from numerous interviews, and through direct documentation of the great dance in photographs and video footage. Boucher has been a long-term advocate for the importance of recognising the richness of African culture, amongst Africans themselves and in the church and international community. He established the Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art in 1976, and today it operates a museum, art gallery, small research library, accommodation facilities for visitors, and a shop that sells some of the most creative carvings and other artworks to be found in Malawi, returning significant income to the local community of carvers and artisans. Boucher is well known across Malawi, and has been adopted into Chewa society, with the local clan name, Chisale.



Claude Boucher films Mbaula



The jacket illustration depicts a stylised scene of *gule wamkulu* with a compilation of structures. The structures are a mix of day and night characters. Dominant are the figures of **Kasiya maliro** (night version), the antelope, with a baby Kasiya maliro (day version) in tow, and **Njovu** (day version), the elephant. These seminal structures represent mother and father ancestors; the small Kasiya maliro shows fertility. Arrayed with them are **Chimkoko** (day version), the animal-coach synthesis that portrays communion between the ancestors and the living; **Kalolo** (night version), the small granary with head and arms, that condemns early pregnancy in uninitiated girls; **Sitiona mvula** (night structure), the small cone teaching respect for parents; **Kalulu** (day version), the clever hare, who espouses promptness and attention to community leaders; **Mkango** (day version), the lion, who reflects the importance of the chief and authority; **Kamba** (day version), the tortoise, who discusses fertility and sexual taboos; **Chikwangwala** (day version), the noisy crow, condemning gossip that destroys the unity of the village; **Akutepa** (day version), the tall, slim female figure who espouses respect for the elders and avoidance of early pregnancy; **Chimbebe** (day version from Dedza), the dog-headed symbol of fertility; and **Nkhono** (day version), the snail, whose trail reminds us that the evil we sow will follow us to the grave.

Gule typically starts at night, as depicted by the moon, and extends into the day. The division of the night and day becomes diluted through the medium of the dance, just as water dilutes the boundary between the living and the dead. The watery setting refers also to the terminology of *gule* where hunting and fishing references are common. The *dambwe* where the characters originate can be seen as a watery symbol of fertility and links with early Banda beliefs of rain shrines and spirit wives. The *gule* characters are said to be 'fished from the pond' and here the world is shown through water, casting life as a dream-like reality, with the spirits joining the living through the water medium. In the creation story of the Chewa, the origin of the world, humans and all life on earth was in a deluge, and water remains the life blood of the land. The blue tonings emphasise this water-land-sky linkage, where the boundaries of the worlds of living and dead are blurred. The bubbles reinforce the potency of this ferment of communion, just as the beer brewed for the rituals acts to bind the living together and with the ancestors who are present through the *gule*.

The visiting spirits are arranged in a circle to emphasise the notion of the dance on the *bwalo*, the performance arena. The village spreads below, with men and women arrayed on opposite sides. *Gule wamkulu* is about communion between opposites: water and land, hot and cool, men and women, the living and the dead. In this painting, Claude Boucher depicts the fusion and unity that underpin and empower the great dance.

African art and culture/religion/ethnography



KUNGONI CENTRE OF CULTURE AND ART

BOUCHER

When Animals Sing and Spirits Dance
Gule Wamkulu: the Great Dance of the Chewa People of Malawi

KUNGONI CENTRE OF CULTURE AND ART

When Animals Sing and Spirits Dance

Gule Wamkulu: the Great Dance of the Chewa People of Malawi

Claude Boucher (Chisale)



Additional text by Gary J. Morgan

Photographs by Arjen van de Merwe

When Animals Sing and Spirits Dance is an introduction to the diversity and drama that is the *gule wamkulu*, the 'great dance', of the Chewa people of Malawi. Covering 200 characters bedecked in mask and costume or woven structure, the book reveals not only the physical variety of the characters but also analyses their songs, dances and often codified messages that are delivered through word and action. It is through the dancers of the *gule wamkulu* that the ancestors communicate with the living and give instructions on how to abide by the code of moral conduct, the *mvambo*. It is also through the great dance that we can glean intimate insight into the values and world view of the Chewa.

Illustrated throughout with colour photographs and original artworks, *When Animals Sing and Spirits Dance* is a lively interpretation of the great dance, told very much in the voice of the Chewa themselves. The songs are interpreted in both Chichewa and English, with appropriate recognition that direct representation is often impossible.

The *gule wamkulu* was declared a masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2005. This book is a worthy entrée to the majesty, spectacle and spirituality that is the great dance.