

Galu wanga Chimbwala

(A small night structure from the Mua and the Mtakatka areas)



Themes

- 1) Adultery & rape
- 2) Dishonesty, theft & robbery
- 3) Faithfulness
- 4) Obedience/disobedience
- 5) Self-control/discipline

Etymology

Galu wanga Chimbwala means, 'My small dog called Chimbwala' (on the road, a thief or an adulterer).



Description

The small dog (30 cm. long) is made of bundles of grass tied together to form its body, legs, head and tail. The bundles are wrapped with bark strings to form the skin. The fur made of reed heads (*ngayaye*) or baobab bark is tied to those strings to look like long greyish or reddish hair. *Gule* artists sometimes add ears, eyes and tongue made of other materials. Kapoli is the owner of the dog; and he performs with it only at night. For this occasion Kapoli wears a bamboo frame helmet with palm leaves loosely woven on top. The ends of the palm leaves are tied together on the apex to form a sort of small broom. Alternatively, the regular headgear of feathers worn during the day may be worn for the night ritual. Kapoli also wears a kilt, leglets and armlets made of the same palm material, which reflects the moonlight and is visible in the dark. His body is smeared with red clay. He carries his dog with great affection into the *bwalo*. He puts it down in the arena as if he is sending his faithful servant on a mission. But the dog does not come back. Kapoli starts looking for it. He dances, swerving his feet energetically. As he comes close to the dog, he grabs it and carries it in his arms. He walks around the *bwalo* showing it to the crowd to reveal its unfaithfulness. Before Kapoli enters the *bwalo* and is about to start his mime, he intones a song for his dog in a high-pitched voice. The women continue to sing this song in a more articulate way: 1) "My dog called **Chimbwala**, always on the road, will go away with strangers," or 2) "My dog called **Chimbwala** has grabbed meat, **Chimbwala**."

The first song stresses that **Chimbwala** is not loyal to his master; it follows anyone. The second suggests that the dog is involved in thieving or adultery. The *Nyau* see Kapoli (the owner of the dog) as the great adviser of the spirit world, who admonishes the community during these night vigils. In this context Kapoli focuses his teaching on the authority of the chief and of the head of the family group (*mwini mbumba*). Both have their own messengers that they send out, like a dog, to negotiate on their behalf. These are the chief's assistant (*nyakwawa*) or the family group's representative (*malume, nkhoswe*). Here **Chimbwala** is Kapoli's messenger like the *nyakwawa* or the *malume* sent out to settle village or family affairs. **Chimbwala** is not trustworthy. He goes on his mission but forgets why he has been sent. He is easily distracted. He follows any stranger and becomes involved in other business, often getting himself into trouble. He may be sent, by the family group, to arrange the marriage of a nephew. Instead of doing so, he spends his time at the beer party or he flirts with women. He is more interested in his own affairs than the business at hand. He takes advantage of his mission to steal or to indulge in adultery (to grab meat or women). **Chimbwala** is an unfaithful servant who is easily sidetracked.

Kapoli's dog teaches the village that the family leader has to be motivated by duty rather than by personal desires and pleasure. As the Chewa proverb says, "*Ukalingira mzengo, usamati asakhwi afumbula* – When you leave your home with the intention of cutting down the rafters of your house, don't follow the mice that have cleared the road." (That is, don't forget your purpose.)

Songs

- 1) "*Galu wanga Chimbwala adzanka ndi alendo.*"
- 2) "*Galu wanga Chimbwala wagwira nyama (2x), Chimbwala.*"

Source

Interviews in 1990, 1992, 1999 and 2000

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