

# Kalolo

(A day or night structure from the Mua area)



(night)



(day)

## Themes

1) Avoidance of an early (illegitimate) pregnancy 2) Sexual taboos (*mdulo*)

## Etymology

**Kalolo** is the name of a chief from the western part of the Lilongwe district adjacent to the country of Mkanda. It is interesting to note that many of the structures and mask characters are identified with important chiefs throughout the Chewa country.

## Description

In the first millennium AD, the proto-Chewa, or Banda people, took up residence on the lakeshore close to Mankhamba. The first capital of the later Malawi, or Phiri, people under their Kalonga was also on the lakeshore at Manthimba, before they migrated to the high plateau where they occupied

[www.kasiyamaliro.org](http://www.kasiyamaliro.org)

Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art, Mua Parish, P. O. Box 41, Mtakatika, Malawi

the Lilongwe plain and the high country of Dedza. The location of chief Kalolo is at a great distance from Manthimba, where King Undi and with him Kalolo would have parted from the Kalonga Dynasty. There is no oral tradition recalling his departure from the lakeshore, and therefore it is difficult to presume that our structure goes back to Kalolo's days at the lakeside. The most plausible explanation for linking the Mua structure to the Kalolo chieftainship of the western part of Lilongwe plain is that it originates from Lilongwe. The structure was probably 'imported' to the lakeshore by a member of *Nyau* from the Mua area. He grew up in the Lilongwe district and would have imported the character of **Kalolo** to the lakeshore around the 1940s or earlier. **Kalolo** quickly took part in the celebration of initiation and funeral rites and was also part of the great festival for the dead (*dambule*). In the last three or four decades, **Kalolo** has completely vanished, together with a great variety of structures that used to be common to *gule* celebrations around the Mua area.

The mini structure stands one metre high and consists of a bamboo frame built in the shape of a granary with a small head and two stiff arms. The night version is coated with dried grass and woven with palm leaf zigzag patterns forming vertical lines. The day version uses maize husks instead of palm leaves. The granary shape is modified toward the top to form a dome and an apex, on which a small head made of grass is added. Alternatively, a carved mask with a snout is used for this purpose. Details of the eyes, ears, mouth, and teeth feature in the day version. Dried palm leaves are used to create an extravagant hairstyle. Two arms made of grass and wrapped with bark are fixed to the side of the granary and terminate in fingers, to emphasise that the structure represents a human being. The granary shape indicates that the person is a woman, and her round belly reveals that she is expecting a child. The structure is performed by a very young dancer, often a child, who has to squat because of the short height of the structure. The dancing style of **Kalolo**, moving forward and veering to the right and the left alternatively, expresses that the mother-to-be is struggling with the last days of her pregnancy. The male singers accompany her moves with the following words: "*Come out of the house, so that we may meet chief Kalolo!*" The cryptic song requests the expecting mother to pay a visit to the chief with her parents. The purpose of the invitation is to answer to a court case. The girl has fallen pregnant without being officially married. She had been warned during her initiation about the danger of pregnancy before marriage. Her condition has forced her to hide inside the house for fear of meeting the instructor who has taught her. She has failed to listen to her wisdom and to be prudent in her contact with boys. She is now close to delivery, and has not been instructed in how to deal with this new experience. The *namkungwi* can only do so, after the case has been solved. The charges are serious: she is accused of having 'cut' the chief, her own parents and the village by not having informed them about her condition. Her careless behaviour has endangered their lives. She has exposed them to the mystical disease of the *mdulo*. In such a case, she is required to appear in front of the chief with her parents and to hear his verdict. Usually, the chief will inquire about who is her boyfriend and will impose on both of them a fine in the form of two goats or cash as a compensation for her attempt on the chief's life. She and her boyfriend will have to share the cost of the fine. The first pregnancy ritual and instructions can follow only after the payment of the fine to the chief. Once the matter is over, the instructress will be sent to her house for the necessary preparation.

**Kalolo** focuses its teaching on respecting the *mwambo* and the rule of the *mdulo*, which isolates 'hot' from 'cool'. The fact that the girl did not pay attention to these rules has made her parents, the chief

and the entire village vulnerable to disease that could have killed them. The payment required in kind or in cash has the power to remove such sanction and to bring restore them to a condition of normality. **Kalolo** recalls the teaching of the ancestors about both sex and marriage. It reinforces the belief in the *mdulo* and the social order concerning marriage procedures. Above all, it dramatises the chaos caused by premarital sex and single parenthood. It warns also of the risk of having to deal with delivery when a young girl is not fully developed physically. With the advent of school, marriage is increasingly delayed. The fact that many families have adopted Christianity has led to a change in attitude toward traditional initiation. They have been persuaded to adopt a Christian manner of initiation instead, which lacks the moral and social compulsion of the former rite. Instances of premarital pregnancy have become more frequent, and the message of **Kalolo** is now more relevant than ever. It is sad to think that the character of **Kalolo** will not find a replacement!

### **Song**

*"Turukamo m'nyumba, tikaone a **Kalolo** Kalo **Kalolo** (5x)!"*

### **Source**

Interviews in 1986, 1992 and 2007

### **Reference**

Ntara, S.J. 1973 [1944 original]. *The History of the Chewa (Mbiri ya Achewa)*. Translated in English by W.S. Kamphandira Jere. Notes by Harry W. Langworthy. Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH: Wiesbaden. pp. 78 – 82