

## Kambulumbunde or Kamwaza mtumbira

(A day mask from the Mua, Golomoti and Khwidzi areas)



(Mua and Golomoti version)

(Khwidzi version)



### Themes

1) Assisting transition of deceased to spirit world 2) Spirit of service to community 3) Sexual taboos for funerals 4) Unity & harmony

### Etymology

The word **Kambulumbunde** comes from *kubulumunda*, 'to roll on the ground', in order to express grief or because of being restless in one place unable to get away or because of carrying a heavy load.

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In the past, it was not uncommon to see people who were grieving during funerals putting mud or ashes on their head or rolling in the dust in order to demonstrate their deep sorrow. The same gesture can also be used to express one's own frustration if deprived of freedom. Those two meanings are applied here to the sexual ban on the occasion of funerals and commemoration rites. This ban is lifted when the mound on the grave disappears, or becomes erased, having slowly sunk over time. This is the meaning of **Kamwaza mtumbira**.

## Description

In the Khwidzi area, **Kambulumbunde** is portrayed with a very large 70 centimetre black mask resembling Kwakana but lacking the erect horn on the forehead. The animal-like features include a long snout armed with countless teeth and a muzzle like that of a bull with two flared nostrils. The lower jaw is often mobile and is articulated with a rubber band. Two pointed, red ears project from the sides of the head. Two broad-based, rather conical horns prolong the shape of the head as in Kwakana. The round eyes are embellished with a sunray pattern. Four wrinkles line the face. The headgear is made of woven white cotton strings. The horns and long snout symbolise the male sexual organ. The dominance of black and white colours and the minimal use of red convey sexual prohibition. The general appearance of **Kambulumbunde** suggests aggression and ferocity in order to highlight the importance of sexual taboos.

The Golomoti and Mua version is faceless. A piece of cloth or jute is wrapped around the head of the dancer and is smeared with red or black mud leaving only the eyes uncovered with a small patch around the nose for breathing. He wears a loincloth. The entire body and the loincloth are also smeared with red mud. The character carries two white sisal flywhisks or leaves.

**Kambulumbunde** enters the dancing ground showing signs of grief as the men sing, "**Kambulumbunde**, (the one covered with mud because of grief or restlessness) *erases the mound (mtumbira)*. *He is mad (wamsala, sexually uncontrolled)!*" As soon as the drumbeat reaches its peak **Kambulumbunde** changes his mood. He starts moving his hips lewdly and runs after the women with the intention of grabbing them. The message of this pantomime is clear.

**Kambulumbunde** simultaneously expresses the community in grief and the ban on sexual relations at the time of funerals. Sexual activity performed by any member of that community could compromise the smooth transition of the deceased to the spirit world. The Chewa call this breech *kudula maliro*, 'to cut the person in transition'. This grievous offence would weaken their plea to the ancestors to receive the spirit of the deceased. Red (sex) and white (death) should not be juxtaposed for fear of breakage or cutting (*mdulo*) or of missing one's purpose (*tsempho*). The neglect of sexual taboos compromises the future and delays the journey of this 'embryonic' spirit on its way to join the ancestors. A delay to reach the spirit world makes the spirit moody, restless and frustrated. He takes revenge on those who have compromised his journey by haunting their dreams and by multiplying miscarriages in their family instead of blessing their fertility. Such fears motivate the village to rally in a communal spirit of solidarity by keeping the sexual taboos. Sexual activity can only be resumed once these rites are over or the funeral mound has been erased at the graveyard.

**Kambulumbunde** personifies this kind of restless spirit. He voices his grievances and loudly proclaims the prescribed *mwambo* of sexual abstinence at the time of grief.

## **Song**

*“Kambulumbunde, Kamwaza mtumbira... wamsala!”*

## **Source**

Interviews in 1997 and 2001

## **Reference**

Scott, D.C. (1892). *A Cyclopaedic Dictionary of the Mang'anja Language spoken in British Central Africa*. Foreign Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland: Edinburgh. p. 23