

Mbidzi

(A day structure from the Mua area)



(miniature model)

Themes

1) Sexual taboos (*mdulo*) 2) Sexual taboos for funerals

Etymology

Mbidzi is the Chichewa word for zebra.

Description

This structure is several metres long and a metre high, and portrays a zebra. The black and white stripes are made either of different colours of maize husks or of black paint on white canvas. It is activated by two men. The structure is used at a funeral when the body of the deceased is brought out of the house and taken to the cemetery. At this solemn moment, the zebra dances to the rhythm of the *chisamba*. It jumps and shakes its rump as the men sing, "*The zebra has come! Let us borrow drums and play for it. The zebra has come!*"

Like Kasiya maliro, **Mbidzi**'s body is decorated with black and white markings. These two colours are crucial to the teachings of the Chewa sexual code. This code has a bearing on every major event of people's life. These periods are marked by sexual taboos, which eliminate the colour red

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(sexual heat) from the triad of black – red – white. This triad is the norm for the female cycle and the cycle of life in general. During funerals and any event that is symbolically linked to death, including birth and puberty, sexual activity, represented by the colour red, is banned. Through death the community enters a period of darkness (black) that is only dispelled after the shaving ceremony when the light (white) will be allowed to shine again. The appearance of white expressed by Kasiya maliro and the white markings of the zebra emphasises the return to normality by lifting the sexual taboos. Following Chewa philosophy, the structure of the zebra provides practical rules of conduct with regard to sexual behaviour throughout the entire cycle of funeral and commemoration rites following the experience of death in their community.

Song

*“Yabwera **Mbidzi** eae, tiye tikabwereke ng’oma e tikamuimbire. Yabwera **Mbidzi!**”*

Source

Interviews in 1987 and 2000