

Mchokochoko

(A white day mask from the Mua area)

Themes

- 1) Adultery & rape
- 2) Success in marriage
- 3) Polygamy
- 4) Promiscuity

Etymology

Mchokochoko is the Chewa name for the White Browed Sparrow Weaver. *Mchokochoko* or *kapasule* means, 'go away' or 'pull it down'.



Description

This tiny white mask (15 cm.) represents the weaver bird's head and stresses the colour of semen. The stylised bird's bill evokes the shape of the penis. The red eyes are identified with the testicles that draw the potency from the head. The dancer wears the traditional outfit of *gule* and carries bark strings for building weavers' nests. As he enters the *bwalo*, he plays with the string as if it were a yoyo. Then he starts moving his hips frenetically, implying a strong sexual urge. He then throws up one leg at a time and starts swerving his feet sideways with great strength. The men beat the drums and sing: 1) "*Promiscuous man, it is dawn!*"

The Chewa believe that these noisy birds construct several nests but leave each unfinished. This habit has inspired people to draw a parallel to their own human world. A playboy likes to impress girlfriends and promises to marry them all. **Mchokochoko's** lack of commitment means that he will not be married for very long. He likes to change partners, make new conquests, marry and remarry. Following the Chewa tradition, each time a husband marries he has to build a house for his wife-to-be. Before **Mchokochoko** finishes the house, the marriage is already over. He plans to remarry and to build the next house. Such unstable men rarely enjoy family life or appreciate the pleasures of marriage. A polygamist has to run from one house to the other in trying to satisfy his wives, but does not know the pleasure of a stable family. An adulterer has to hide in order not to be caught. The men's song, "*Promiscuous man, it is dawn!*" resembles the noisy call of the

www.kasiyamaliro.org

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

Mchokochoko bird. It is a warning to adulterers whose secret encounters with their girlfriends profit from the cover of night. Dawn is the time to escape before it is light. The women's song echoes this call by reminding these men that a person who lives in a stable marriage enjoys sex more than a thief who hides in order to steal illicit sex: 2) *"The dance (sex) is most enjoyable in the early hours of the morning when the sun is rising. You don't need to help me! The penis stiffens in the morning when the sun is rising. You don't need to help me!"* This song is an invitation to be serious in marriage and to adopt mature behaviour. Men of this kind are blessed with a happy sex life and numerous progeny.

Songs

1) *"Aweremuna oye eaye, aweremuna tate de, kwacha!"*

2) *"Gule amakoma ngwa m'mawa kutacha! Ndiyika ndekha! Mbolo imamveka ngwa m'mawa kutacha. Ndiyika ndekha!"*

Source

Interviews in 1993 and 2000

Reference

Sinclair, I. (1987). *Field Guide to the Birds of Southern Africa*. Struik: South Africa. p. 302