

Njala ipita n'khasu or Adzinja tipale nawo

(A yellow day mask from the Pemba area)

Themes

- 1) Living off other people (community parasite)
- 2) Drought, famine & food security
- 3) Laziness

Etymology

Njala ipita n'khasu means, 'Hunger disappears with the hoe.'

Adzinja tipale nawo means, 'During the rainy season, let us help with the weeding.'



Description

This yellow mask (25 cm.) introduces an *mkamwini* (tribal marks) who aspires to be a farmer but only wants to profit from other people's work. He is portrayed with an oval face, a half bald head, staring eyes and many wrinkles. The character has swollen cheeks, a long thin nose, and a drooping mouth with teeth appearing only on the bottom jaw. The deep labial lines give him a gloomy look. The headgear of the mask is made of white goatskins to emphasise that he has joined the family group as 'breeding stock' and fills the role of a husband (*mkamwini*). The body of the dancer is clad in the usual tatter suit and a large belt. He carries a short useless hoe, showing that he is not a worker, and a whip, to convey the message that the ancestors condemn idleness. His general appearance is that of a man who has lost his vigour through hunger.

In the arena, he pretends to hoe, with a few strokes of his mock hoe here and there. Then, he drops his tools and starts swerving his feet left and right. After a while he moves his pelvis obscenely. As he dances the men sing: *"Let us weed with you, you who hunt during the rainy season! During the dry season where were you? You say, Let us weed with you, let us weed with you! During the dry season, he says, Let us weed with you! During the rainy season, he says, Let us weed with you! The words 'Let*

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us weed with you!' put us to shame! Hunger disappears with the hoe!" The song reprimands people who are lazy. They want to eat but do not want to work. They may say, *"Let us weed (eat) with you,"* but in fact they are unwilling to help themselves. They are there to weed but are absent for the hard work when the field needs to be tilled. They flatter their relatives but are too lazy to contribute in a meaningful way. They count on the generosity of others. **Njala ipita n'khasu** shows that the ancestors discourage laziness and grant poverty to those who are unwilling to work. As the Chewa proverb says, *"Ulesi ulibe mtolo – Laziness breeds poverty."* Or in another proverb, *"Andiitana pakalowa njoka, paka lowa mbewa, akumba okha – He counts on me when there is trouble (killing a snake), but when there is good food (mice) he eats it alone."* The character of **Njala ipita n'khasu** relates to the famine of 1966 – 68 and reappears at regular intervals when Chewa villagers are hit by drought. Funeral rites are events at which the food security message can be heard.

Song

"Tipale nawo de de asaka m'dzinja tate! Kodi m'chilimwe munali kuti? Mukuti Tipale nawo, Tipale nawo (3x) tate! M'chilimwe akuti Tipale nawo! M'dzinja akuti Tipale nawo tate! Mau akuti Tipale nawo akutipatsa manyazi de tate! Njala ipita n'khasu!"

Sources

Interview in 1992