

N'mati n'katole bwemba

(A skin day mask from Mua)

Themes

- 1) Hard work
- 2) Marriage, preparation & instructions
- 3) Wisdom

Etymology

N'mati n'katole bwemba means, 'I said to myself, I will go and collect some tamarind fruits.'



Description

This mask is made with a dry goatskin moulded in the shape of a phallus. Holes are pierced for the eyes. The ears and nose are added with little scraps of skin. Three wrinkles are featured on his forehead. The dancer is entirely smeared with red clay and wears a small loincloth made of baobab bark. In his hands, he carries a knife and a bag for collecting tamarinds. As he moves slowly forward, he accents every step by swaying his hips while singing: *"I said to myself, I will go and collect some tamarind fruits, but I found somebody else had picked them (already)."* He keeps moving his pelvis suggestively, showing that he is burning with the desire to get married.

The character portrays a poor young man who goes to work outside his village in order to secure some income before he gets married. In his village, he was already engaged to a girlfriend who had promised to marry him on his return. When he came back, with new clothes and a hope chest, he found that his girlfriend had already been taken by someone else even poorer than he was.

This character is rarely seen today but used to perform on any occasion. It teaches young people that they have to plan and to prepare before getting married. Young women should marry a husband who has laid foundations for his future through hard work and not be deceived by the man who lacks substance but presents well with borrowed clothes. As the dancer carries his bag, he expresses the readiness of a husband to move to the wife's family and to work hard as their *mkamwini*. **N'mati n'katole bwemba** has prepared for marriage and is looking forward to a

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partner with patience and more common sense than his first girlfriend. The Chewa proverb says:
“Fulumira adadya gaga – The one who was in a hurry ate husks (instead of maize).”

Songs

“N’mati n’katole bwemba e e ndapeza atatola bwemba (2x).”

Source

Interviews in 1991 and 1992