

Pali mfiti pa'dzi pano

(A pale pink day mask from the Mua area)

Themes

- 1) Discouraging evil spells & wishes
- 2) Unity & harmony
- 3) Witchcraft

Etymology

Pali mfiti pa'dzi pano means, 'There is a witch in this village.'



Description

The mask (25 cm.) is red or pink to represent, simultaneously, a witch and a witch hunter (*sing'anga*). It has a narrow forehead, swollen cheeks, a flat nose and a narrow mouth. Sometimes it has a beard. The headgear is made entirely of feathers. The face can be tattooed with tribal marks on the forehead, cheeks and chin, or these marks can be absent. The character wears a long sleeveless sack that reaches the ground and carries a two metre long walking stick and a rattle. He holds his stick with the right hand while dancing and rotates around it. The other hand rests on his hip while he moves his pelvis obscenely. He spins on his left foot and swerves the right one energetically. In this manner, he moves around the *bwalo*. Then he falls on his knees, abandoning his stick, and uses both hands to dig in the ground and throw dust, all the while wriggling his hips and moving backward on his knees. He then stands up and repeats the sequence again. During his dance, the men sing: "*There is a witch in this village! There is a witch in this village killing grown ups today. There is a witch in this village!*"

Pali mfiti is a witch who dances on graves at night. He digs up corpses in order to feed on human flesh. The character performs at funerals and commemoration rites, and during chieftainship and *dambule* ceremonies. During the funeral of an adult, **Pali mfiti** moves around the audience with his rattle, calling the spirits, as if he is a witch hunter who is looking for a culprit. He produces a razor blade and simulates the making of incisions on some people in the crowd, seeking the person responsible for the death of the deceased. His performance releases tension at such an

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emotional moment and the audience roars with laughter while he acts as a witch hunter. The character invites the villagers to stop being angry and jealous of each other and to cease using spells for defence. When a *sing'anga* makes his incisions on someone's body, his medicine has the power to reveal the person's evil intentions and to discover if he or she is a witch. **Pali mfiti** reminds people that they should not use witchcraft to solve their tensions and conflicts. The ancestors suggest instead sitting down and talking things over peacefully.

Song

"Pali mfiti pa'dzi pano tate! Pali mfiti pa'dzi pano lero tate mupha akulu. Pali mfiti pa'dzi pano!"

Source

Interviews in 1986 and 2000