

Tatani kuwalira?

(A night structure from the Mua area)



(miniature model)

Themes

1) Death of an unredeemed child (*kulongosola*) no great loss 2) Piety for the dead 3) Redeeming (*kulongosola*)

Etymology

Tatani kuwalira means, 'Why do we not wail for that...?'

Description

This one metre long night structure consists of a dummy made of banana leaves and strapped by palm leaves to a bamboo stretcher. It is carried by two Kapoli dancers, acting as undertakers to the catafalque. The male singers introduce them with these words: "*Why do we not wail for that funeral, that funeral? Why do we not wail for the funeral... of a newly born child (not yet redeemed)?*" Accompanied by the *chisamba* rhythm, the Kapoli swing the stretcher sideways, with great reverence. They form a funeral procession around the *bwalo*, expressing grief. **Tatani kuwalira** appears during the night vigil of funerals but not at the burial of a newly born child. According to the Chewa, a baby is

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not yet a child at the time of birth. He only becomes fully human three or four months after birth, following the rite of socialization which includes the sexual re-engagement of the parents (*kulongosola*). Before this ceremony, the baby is still considered as a 'creature' not yet fully human. A child who dies before this time is buried in a special graveyard (*senye*) early in the morning or at night and the women alone carry out this duty. Moreover, the women are not to mourn or demonstrate in any manner. They must keep silent and bury the little thing in a shallow grave.

In the song, one can detect the criticism of the chief directed to the family and the family head in allowing the procession demonstrated in the dance. Such decorum is reserved for an adult or to a child who has entered fully the *mbumba*. **Tatani kuwalira** reminds the community of the importance of the *kulongosola*, the rite by which the little 'creature' is warmed up and is made into a fully human being. If a child dies after this ceremony, the burial rite will follow the *mwambo* and will offer the baby the same homage reserved for a human. This means that the small corpse will be welcome in a portion of the adult cemetery (*manda*), and buried and mourned by the women before the sun reaches its zenith. **Tatani kuwalira** emphasises that funeral procedure should follow the rules held by the Chewa. While recognising the tragedy of death and the grief of the mourners, he states its real importance by offering a reminder that the creature had not yet become human. One could compare its death to a miscarriage or a stillbirth. Such situations are difficult to accept but are more bearable than the loss of a fully developed child.

Song

"Tatani kuwalira maliro, maliro? Tatani kuwalira...maliro a mwana wakhanda?"

Source

Interviews in 1991 and 2007