

Inscribing the Mask: Nyau Masks, Ritual and Performance
Among the Chewa of Central Malawi

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents an interpretation of nyau masks of the Chewa people in the central region of Malawi.

Theoretically, ethnography in the thesis is informed by text interpretation as in the writings of Paul Ricoeur (1979). Texts in the thesis include the inscription of a performance, narratives of ritual events, oral discourse, and the masks themselves. Masks as texts include form, color, imagery, portraiture, construction and materials used, naming, roles, and movement; and the discourse about these.

In the thesis masks are inscribed in their various roles as they are performed in funerals, initiations into the nyau society, and funeral remembrance dances. Each Chapter develops one context of masks and masking, ending with an interpretation of that context. Each interpretation builds upon the interpretations of others from one Chapter to the next, culminating in an overall interpretation of Chewa masks and masking in the final conclusion. This methodology is further focused by one recurring theme of masks; life, death and a sense of rebirth, in reference to the work of Bloch and Parry (1982) and others.

Seven Chapters elaborate central ideas about the masks and the nyau masking society. These ideas include: performance and the masked event; the mask materials, mask-makers and re-creation of mask identity; the masks in relation to one another and in relation to the community; masks from historical experience; values and hierarchy of masks; ritual roles in masking; and a construction of nyau cosmology which is embodied in masks, particularly Kasiyamaliro.

The thesis attempts to demonstrate that Chewa masks, with all the inherent conflicting, diverse and differing local understandings presented in each context, also presents a totality; an interpretation which incorporates all of these contexts into a larger text. This wholeness is shown to be construed from the myriad details which make up masking, accounting for change and adaptation while asserting a continuity in the central theme of death and rebirth.

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Hand-drawn diagrams by Alexander Zarzuri

KEY CHICHEWA WORDS IN THESIS

Nyau: name of masking society; also used to refer to large mask constructions, and all masks as a whole

Bwalo: ritual and community space; a designated space for the Gule Wamkulu

Gule Wamkulu: name of the masked dance performance, more specifically the public dance event

Namkungwi: teacher; also title of senior woman in nyau

Wakunjira: male nyau leader, the organizer of the dancers

Dambwe: secretive space as in graveyard clearing, where dancers dress and prepare for Gule Wamkulu, and site of boy's initiation

Mzimu: name of spirit, and more specifically ancestor spirit

Chirombo: wild animal; also name of large animal constructions such as Kasiyamaliro and Njobvu.

Fano: Image

Common mask names are listed at the end of the Introduction.

INTRODUCTION

'Lament of the Images'

They took the masks
The sacrificial faces
The crafted wood which stretches
To the fire of the gods
The shrines where the axe
Of lightning
Releases invisible forces
Of silver.

And when the Images began
To speak
In forgotten tongues
Of death
The artists of the alien
Land
Twisted the pain
Of their speech
And created a new Chemistry
Which, purified of ritual
Dread,
They called
Art.

Touch the spirits
Of the deepest night.
The masks still live
Still speak...
Hear the terror of their
Chants
Which breed powers
Of ritual darkness

The makers of Images
Kept their secrets well
For since the departure
Of the masks
The land
Has almost
Forgotten
To chant its ancient songs
Ceased to reconnect
The land of the spirits.

The makers of Images
Dwell with us still
We must listen
To their speech
Re-learn their
Songs
Recharge the psychic interspaces...
Of the magic and fearful
Universe. - Ben Okri (Excerpt from poem. 1991. p.9-13)

Inscribing the Mask: Nyau Masks, Ritual and Performance Among the Chewa of Central Malawi is a thesis about nyau masks, the nyau society which makes and performs the masks, the Gule Wamkulu performance with masks, the dancers who wear masks, and the larger Chewa society including all who organize, observe, perform, and participate in any way with masks, the masking society and masked performance.

My involvement with this topic coincided with interest in field research, first-hand observation of a masked performance, and awareness of the insistent discourse about masks as a great secret. Curious, I pursued this secret and continued to do so over a period of nearly ten years. Some of the results of this curiosity and the elusive secrecy grounded in formal study are written herein.

There are several problems inherent in field research which necessarily also exist in the study of African masks, including the confrontation with this mystery of masks suggested by Okri. One is the range of answers about what the masks are and are not, which seem to be conflicting and contradictory. Another is the appropriation of what is foreign so that it may be understood in terms the researcher and a western audience may understand. These two problems and a host of others including language, differing conceptions, the difficulties of living and working in the field in a particular time and place, have been engaged in research and the material now presented in written form is one outcome of this engagement.

Herein is not a list of objectives which were devised for study, carried out and presented. Both the research and the writing of this document have unfolded over a period of years of reflection about observations, interpretations, and necessarily my own experiences in research. Had this been a thesis based primarily upon literature research it would, indeed, have been a very different approach. However, the material in this thesis is based primarily

upon original field research and documentation, supplemented by related literature and analyzed according to a specific method and theoretical construction.

In undertaking the writing of this material, I have accepted three points as valid interpretations based upon extensive field research:

1. That the masks are created explicitly for ritual purposes which are described by the Chewa as religious.
2. That the complexity of how the masks are described and explained by the Chewa relates to the complexity of Chewa cosmology; beliefs held by many people, the aura of secrecy surrounding the masks and the sheer number and range of masks across the central region of Malawi.
3. That the complexity can be understood not by looking at the bits and pieces of secrets or one description set equally against another description. Rather, the complexity is made more clear by studying the masking complex as a whole, looking for recurring themes and consistent comments, even if contradictory.

Further, these themes and comments are clues that another understanding is intended beyond the surface or literal one, and that another kind of language is being used. Translated in western terms, this language is metaphorical, both literal and figurative, and in the case of the Chewa masks it is both the physical, 'real' world and the metaphysical or religious sense of the supernatural world.

As the thesis unfolded itself in writing, the specific theme of death and new birth became more distinct, and the many voices of different people became more united. This is one presentation of those voices and theme as a whole, translated from words, actions and gestures into writing and from other kinds of texts into hopefully grammatical sentences.

The purpose of this Introduction is to set out the framework of the thesis, beginning with the history and scope of my research and the literature about the topic. Following this is a detailed discussion of the methodology and theoretical approach used in the analysis of the ethnography about masks. Four key concepts are defined which recur throughout the analysis of ethnography. The reasoning for the chosen framework is explained referring to other possible approaches. The ethnography remains as it was in field research, and as it is now in written form. A list of mask names, a description of the dance performance, discourse about the masks, and other introductory material about the ethnography begins in Chapter One.

Research

Field research was conducted over a period of several years in the central region of Malawi. Within this region, the primary areas of research included Bunda, Nanjiri, Nkhoma, Namitete and Linthipe, Lilongwe and Dedza. Areas included in the scope of research through interviews includes Kasungu, Dowa, Salima and Mtakatika.

The Chewa people are matrilineal, and largely matrilineal, though this custom is rapidly changing as young people leave the villages to find employment. This study focuses on the rural village areas, where the masked dance is routinely performed for funerals and initiations into the nyau society, whose male members are primarily responsible for producing the masked dance. Information has come primarily from nyau members during field research.

There are good reasons for a more regional study of masks and the masked society. No single village has more than a few masks and dancers. Each village event needs participation from other villages, and this participation includes dancers and observers from one part of the region to another. Thus, an event in Bunda may have participation

from Nkhoma and Lilongwe, and an event in Nkhoma may have participants from Linthipe, Bunda and Dedza.

Also, the most senior and sought-after mask-makers are not located in any one village area. Dancers from Bunda travel to Nkhoma to meet the mask-maker of their choice, and a mask-maker from Dedza on the western border of Malawi sells his masks in Mtakataka, near the eastern border of Malawi and Lake Malawi.

The range of masks seen and presented in the thesis, and the cohesive testimonies about the masks from one part of the region to another could not have been documented without the broader geographical study. In addition to this larger geographical range of research, I was able to spend a considerable amount of time in the same few villages, attending masked events in the same villages from one year to another, and working with the same assistants from one year to another. Thus, the broader range could also be placed in localized village settings.

In the periods of research, I have seen more than fifty dance performances, varying from a few dancers to large events with 30 dancers and more, in both afternoon and night performances. Each event included participation from other village areas. Thus, this study of mask forms required a more regional approach to include the diversity of forms, as well as the many consistencies and variations which indicate patterns of use and a common knowledge about the masks from one village to another.

Research culminating in this thesis began in 1984 to 1986, primarily in Bunda and Namitete. Permission to see my first village performance was granted by the Malawi Congress Party, regional Chief and village Chief in June 1985 in the Bunda region near Nanjiri. This was followed by a series of events in Bunda, and later Namitete, near Chitedze.

In 1988, I returned to Malawi, visiting sites in Bunda and Namitete, and Nkhoma while visiting my primary assistant, Mr. Bobo Yosiya, who was in the hospital there. In Nkhoma, I enlisted the assistance of another nyau member who, though anonymous in this thesis by his wishes, became my primary assistant in that region.

I returned again in 1990 to do field research for my MA thesis, returning to the same sites, but also adding new ones, especially in Nkhoma. At the conclusion of this research period, I had become fully initiated into the nyau society, both the male and female initiations, in two different village areas. In 1991, I returned very briefly on behalf of Organizing for Development, an International Institute.

Research for this thesis was conducted from May 1992 until December, 1992, coinciding with the dance season. This year was a particularly difficult one, due to drought and the resulting shortage of maize needed for making beer for the dance ceremonies, and maize husks needed for constructing the large nyau animal mask forms. The year 1992 was also a year of political change, with more intense scrutiny of foreigners who were not attached to specific missions, such as myself. While this made research more demanding, having to respond to queries about my interests and political inclination, it was by no means impossible.

The largest problem was that fewer large events were occurring due to the drought. With the fears of food shortages by the end of the planting season, some people were also demanding money for their assistance, more so than in any previous year. However, this final research period was also the most fruitful, and this research is reflected in the thesis.

Finally, throughout the writing of the thesis, I have avoided providing specific names of people and villages, unless I was clearly permitted to do so. This is in

consideration for the people who have come forward to discuss the masks and the society which creates them. Most agreed to speak with me, knowing I had been initiated into the society, but asked not to be used as a reference. In deference to this common request, I have mostly refrained from doing so. I am deeply indebted to individuals who, in some cases with great courage, agreed to share their knowledge with me.

Literature on Nyau Masks

The missionaries in Magomero were the first to report the "formidable looking" masks in the masked dances known as nyau, in 1862.¹ Even then, it seems the masked dance was understood as an established religious and social phenomenon. These early missionaries wrote about "elaborate masks symbolizing the unity of the world of humans, animals and spirits." They added, "The dancers forced the people into taking sides, choosing between the missionaries and their Yao clients and those who practiced the rites of the Mang'anja religion."² Edouard Foa, a French traveler, also described the masked dance in 1900, suggesting the dance depicted the reunion of man and wild animal.³

Specific literature on nyau masks prior to the end of the colonial period is quite limited and primarily descriptive including early articles by W.H. Rangeley, (1949), who described several masks from the Nkota-Kota District, H. Stannus (1910) and AGO Hodgson, (1933).

Masks in Malawi have also been part of larger studies, including the seminal work of J.M. Schoffeleers (1968, etc. to 1992). Scott and Heatherwick (1892, 1929), J.P. Bruwer (1952) Archibald Makumbi (1955), Ian Linden (1972), H. Langworthy (1975), J.W.M. Van Breughel (1976) and Schoffeleers and Lindgren, (1985). Schoffeleers and Blackmum (1972) published an article describing masks among

the Mang'anja in the southern region of Malawi.

Recently, Yoshida has published substantial articles on nyau masking and masked events in a Zambian village, (1991, 1993) and the University of Malawi has published a book on Malawi dance and theater, by Kamlongera et.al. including the nyau masked event, Gule Wamkulu (1992).

By far the most important work has been done by J.M. Schoffeleers, whose own thesis includes detailed descriptions of nyau, mythology and initiation lessons.⁴ Since that time, his work on the Mang'anja peoples in Malawi has included interdisciplinary research in history, theology, and anthropology. Most recently, (1992), he has published a book on the Mbona cult of the 16th century in the southern region of Malawi, with a summary section on the Gule Wamkulu and the masks. While his research was in the southern region of Malawi, the nyau society in the central region in my own research has revealed similarities with his descriptions from twenty-five years ago.

While acknowledging the debt to Schoffeleers and others in attempting this study of Chewa masks, I accept that this thesis is my own responsibility. The originality of this thesis, I believe, lies in the field documentation of masks, and the original treatment of the ethnographic material; specifically Chapter two in use of history, Chapter three in the relation to society, Chapter five in the specific use of metaphor in a documented mask ritual, and Chapter seven in the interpretation of the mask Kasiyamaliro.

Theoretical Framework of the Thesis

"When I looked out through the mask I saw a different world." "I saw a different reality"

- Ben Okri (1991 p.245 and 246)

This thesis is first and foremost about masks. Each of the seven Chapters presents one perspective about the masks. Each perspective is developed through description of actions, explanations and comments in discourse about the masks, and narratives about masks. Since each Chapter is a narrative of ethnographic material, there are topics which recur from one Chapter to the next, but in a different context from one another. The material relates to one perspective in each Chapter, so what may seem to be a mere repetition of material such as color, relates to only the perspective, or layer, being presented in the context of that Chapter, which is consistent with the theoretical frame. The ethnographic material presented in each Chapter is then followed by short conclusions interpreting the ethnography. Each Chapter is intended to build upon the information presented in previous Chapters, culminating in a more holistic understanding of the masks and masking complex.

By masking complex, I mean the underlying organization of masks within the masking society, including the range of masks together, the roles of masks, performance and performance organization, initiation into the masking society, the lessons learned about masks, and ultimately the various forms of discourse surrounding the masks and masking society over the central region of Malawi. The masking complex is the masking society of nyau, a society of many texts and a larger text in itself.

The language used, while specifically referring to Chichewa language, is necessarily the language of Western thought: anthropology to describe society, history to describe historical experience, art history to describe art forms, and religious terms to describe cosmology and the supernatural world.⁵

My approach is one of interpretation. Ethnography cannot otherwise be presented and analyzed. An ethnographic account is the result of experience in field research, and

interpretation of that experience is present in spite of the careful recording of only what people say and what people do. The recording of what one sees and hears requires an interpretation about these senses into written language, a translation from one language to another, from action to written text and from visual image to written text.

The interpreter may simply present material without acknowledging that any presentation is, in fact, already a kind of interpretation, or choose an interpretive model from a range of options. I have chosen one specific interpretive model, that of Paul Ricoeur. In particular, my approach assumes Ricoeur's understanding of symbolic action, discourse and metaphor, as explained in his essays (1971, 1979). For a much more in-depth explanation than required for the reading of this thesis, I refer to his book on hermeneutical interpretation in the human sciences, translated and edited by Thompson (1981).

The literature on each of the above concepts, symbolic action, discourse, metaphor and interpretation is vast and Ricoeur reviews literature related to each of these concepts. However, in light of the range of literature available, my reason for choosing Ricoeur is simple: Ricoeur, more than other contemporary theoretical writers, has specifically related the interpretive method of hermeneutics to the social sciences. Ricoeur has broken theoretical ground particularly in interpreting symbolic action as well as discourse as 'text', which I have adapted to masked performance as 'text'.

Others have successfully taken aspects of Ricoeur's work to analyze ethnography. For example, Clifford Geertz (1973) is particularly known for his work in interpretation, referring to Ricoeur and ethnography as 'text' in his well-known work on Balinese cockfights. Turner (1969, 1974) particularly applies the concept of symbolic action to ritual among the Ndembu, describing these actions as

'dramas'. Turner is referred to throughout the thesis as a source of ethnographic comparison of the Ndembu, related geographically, historically and socially to the Chewa, but also to refer to similarities in approach to material. H. Moore (1986) in her theoretical analysis of the ethnography of spatial domains, has reviewed Ricoeur and incorporated his work in great detail. D. Parkin (1982) also analyzes Ricoeur in relation to semantic anthropology.

For my own work, I found Ricoeur's method specific and useful in providing a more holistic approach to appropriating and understanding ethnographic material than the analysis of, say, practice (Bourdieu. 1977) or structuralism (Levi-Strauss. 1963), though either of these, or others, or a combination, could have been chosen.⁶

In saying this, I also realize that hermeneutics and Ricoeur are not autonomous. The richness of hermeneutical interpretation as applied to the social sciences depends upon the theoretical work which has come before. Certainly the field of linguistics from Saussure's 'langue' and 'parole' to semiotics and structuralism are important precursors to this understanding of text interpretation. Much work has been done in interpreting symbolic action and discourse,⁷ and others have written at length about adapting metaphor to society and masking,⁸ but few, if any, have combined each of these and other key concepts used in this thesis, with as much research and as much published work as Paul Ricoeur.

Discourse and Symbolic Action as Text

Action refers to that which is actually acted out; movements, performance, ritual, and the masked event. Discourse is the spoken language referring to what is said about, or in reference to, masks. The ethnographic presentation of action and discourse also includes the oral texts related to masks and masking: myths and stories, initiation lessons, and songs. Each of these, where relevant in the Chapters, is compared to the body of

literature about nyau masks and geographically related literature.

Discourse, as described by Ricoeur (1971. p.74 to 75), is "language-event or linguistic usage", a speech event based on the "linguistics of the sentence". He then sets out specific traits which allow the "hermeneutic of the event and of discourse." Discourse is in the present; it is temporal and self-referential, while it yet "refers to a world which it claims to describe, to express, to represent." He adds,

it is in discourse that all messages are exchanged. In this sense discourse alone has not only a world, but an other, another person...to whom it is addressed.

In this thesis, discourse refers to the spoken representations about the masks; the countless exchanges between informers and myself about the masks, masked performance, and the nyau society. Discourse is the series of moments when dancers, chiefs, nyau leaders, chief's wives, senior women, and so many people speak about masks. Each of those moments when a mask appeared in the dance and something was said, discussing the event before, during and after the masked performances, the words others shared with me about nyau in all kinds of situations, are all discourse.

This discourse is separate from personal reflection about what others have said, and from the reconstruction of fieldnotes to make sense of something said over and again, and the writing of words on a pad of paper, and again in this thesis. Ricoeur (1971. p.76) differentiates the temporal moments of discourse from the writing of those words as 'inscription', as what was said, now, outside the moment of saying. I recognize this separation is necessary in writing a thesis.

Ricoeur (1971. p.80) then continues to describe 'action' and meaningful or symbolic action which may be "equivalent

to the fixation of a discourse by writing." Or, to "treat action as a fixed text." Such action is also temporal, but, following the method of Ricoeur, may be subject to the same kind of 'inscription' as discourse. This fixation of action in writing makes it possible to interpret according to the methodology in Ricoeur's essays.

Another approach to interpretation of action is evident in the work of Bourdieu (1977) who looks first at the 'social actors' and their 'practice'. Bourdieu (p.3) stresses the "theory of practice inscribed" as a necessary part of objectivist knowledge. Ricoeur's method of inscribing action may be similar to Bourdieu's particular understanding of this aspect, but ultimately Bourdieu is concerned with a more rigorous science of practice beyond the hermeneutical interpretation presented here.

In a recent publication, Barnes and Duncan (1992) have specified Ricoeur's interpretive method, using the same "Model of a Text" (Ricoeur. 1971) as I have chosen for this thesis, demonstrating that "the social-life-as-text metaphor is easily applicable to landscape" p.6, referring to the earlier comment in their work that "we use an expanded concept of text: one that includes other cultural productions such as paintings, maps and landscapes" p.3 They conclude, after analysis of Ricoeur's essay, that:

"landscapes, social action, paintings, maps, language, and of course, documents, are all held to be susceptible to textual interpretation." (p.12)

I would add to this, the mask.

Metaphor

Ricoeur's explanation of metaphor is particularly illuminating in its application to society, and has greatly enhanced my own understanding of Chewa masks. This is one example of why I chose Ricoeur rather than settle for the rather loose term 'metaphor' which is, after all, a linguistic and poetic device with a general meaning. Ricoeur is the theoretical bridge between metaphor as

linguistic device and its application in social action, discourse, and as translated in this thesis, the mask. As Cohen (1979. p.4) writes,

"I risk the opinion that only Donald Davidson and Paul Ricoeur...possess developed theories of meaning; and their views of the semantics of metaphor are consistent with their general semantic theories."

By metaphor, (Greek: meta-beyond,over, pherein-to bring, bear or carry) I refer to Ricoeur's essay, (1979) on the metaphorical process, his incorporation of other work on metaphor going back to Aristotle, and his use of terminology relating to metaphor as indicated later in this section of the thesis.

Metaphor is a very complex concept. As Harries (1979 p.170) notes about a conference on metaphor, "when we talk about metaphor [we assume] we agree on what we are talking about," adding "but the papers...reveal disagreements." Harries continues, "All descriptions of things presuppose a disclosure of their being." Much of this is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the 'disclosing' of a 'world' is important in making "existent things present" even if the existent thing is not tangible but made present in the form of a mask.

Goodman (1979.p.175) sums up the importance of metaphor in various disciplines, including I think, studies of art in society:

"Far from being a mere matter of ornament, [metaphor] participates fully in the progress of knowledge:...in illuminating categories, in contriving facts, in revising theories, and in bringing us new worlds."

As Barnes and Duncan (1992. p.12) assert: "By our metaphors you shall know us."

Four Key Theoretical Concepts

The method of text-interpretation for this thesis may be summed up in four key concepts specifically explained by Ricoeur: disclosing of a world, metaphor and the metaphoric

properties of 'imaging' and 'feeling'; plurivocality of reality, and 'existential perplexity' such as the central theme of death and regeneration.

The choice of these four concepts narrows the very wide field of Ricoeur's work into a few key ideas which will recur in the thesis. The purpose of specifying these concepts is to define precisely such common terms as metaphor and image, and to clue the reader that terms such as the 'disclosing of a world' have a specific reference. These terms will appear in the body of the thesis and be referred to without necessarily citing Ricoeur, or raising other theoretical issues. The thesis, as stated, is about masks, and not a theoretical discussion. I chose these particular concepts because I found they enlightened an interpretation of the material, and aided me in trying to grasp more precisely the special significance of the masks.

1. Disclosing a world: The power to disclose a world may be understood as the power of the text to disclose or reveal a possible reality and its dimensions. It is a disclosure which is more than the actual discourse, that is, what is said. It is what that discourse is actually about, what larger situations are referred to, and what kind of world is being disclosed. With this disclosure, there is the possibility of orienting oneself within that world, or 'appropriating' what was once foreign.

Discourse may include both information about what is said and what is implied, or referred to, in the speaking. The power of disclosure is to open a world of possible implications "beyond the limited horizon of [the speaker's] own existential situation."⁹

2. Metaphor: The metaphor as insight, as a thinking and a seeing, incorporates more than one understanding at the same time, as in the many layers of interweaving text in different contexts. This is the 'plurivocality' of interpretation, the multivocality of several possible

meanings in the construing of the details.

Imaging as the imagination, is the concept of seeing more in a single image than only one thing, the duality of actual image and imagined image. It also implies what Ricoeur calls a 'picturing dimension', an image in the mind.

Image itself comes from the Latin: imago, imaginis, a copy or likeness. In this thesis, the term image is also broadened from the work of art to the Abingdon Dictionary (1981. p.104) definition which concludes, "The image is a figure which is so constructed that it enables something to be really present", and a "created reality".

Also, Ricoeur asserts metaphor involves 'feeling', or to be 'felt' as in the interiorized thought rather than the actual physical emotion. It is the feeling of fright as a thought, and at the same time not actually being frightened. Imaging and feeling are disclosed in the discourse about how the masks affect people as being frightening, fearful, dangerous, and also funny, serious and sensual. They are at once 'felt' or thought of as dangerous spirits, and imagined or pictured as an image of an actual spirit. The inferences involve both a seeing and a feeling, and conflicting yet coinciding seeing and feeling.

Not only are masks themselves a part of the text of society, but they are also the metaphors of society. Masks are the images, the 'pictured dimensions' themselves which evoke other images as likenesses, and are the 'iconic as felt'. Masks, as individuals, are also texts, so the mask is both metaphor and text, a whole and a part of a whole.

3. Plurivocal reality: The plurivocality of reality is the third key concept. As Ben Okri writes at the beginning of this section, "I saw a different reality" looking through

the mask. There is at least a dual reality: the everyday, the actual or literal, and the reality which comes about through the presentation of fiction which is perceived and articulated as another reality (as in Okri's statement). Through the disclosure of the world of masking, other potential realities are also made apparent. In other words, the masks and masking complex are re-interpreted over and over again into new possible realities.

In the thesis, seemingly similar material is presented in different Chapters. This is an example of the plurivocal reality...that the same topic is seen simultaneously in more than one way. The parts making up the masks, the descriptions of mask characterizations, the status of the mask, present more than one reality at the same time, and so re-appear in the ethnographic material in different guises depending upon the perspective being explored in the Chapter. Plurivocal realities become much more complex as the 'different realities' are seen to be mutually exclusive, as in living and also being dead. This concept is extremely important in understanding the deeper 'realities' in the latter part of the thesis.

4. Existential perplexity is the larger issue or central theme by which the details are interpreted. Ricoeur refers to 'existential perplexities', or 'aporias' Pepper to 'root metaphors', Collingwood to 'absolute presuppositions,'¹⁰ Black to 'conceptual archetypes'. Of these terms, I have chosen Ricoeur's 'existential perplexity' to explain the recurring central theme of masks and masking: that of life, death and regenerated life. This term, I think, implies reference to the existential problems of all humanity.

'Existential Perplexity' of Life, Death and Rebirth

According to Ricoeur, metaphor "suggests, reveals, unconceals- the deep structures of reality."¹¹ These deep structures, according to Ricoeur, refer to 'existential perplexities,'¹² or in other words, the primary realities

of mankind, including life and death. The universal predicament of man, such as death, is a 'deep structure', a reality which the fiction of metaphor makes us see and feel in different ways. Through metaphor, we 'feel' and imagine and think of potential realities about death without having experienced death itself.

Over and over again during field research, one such existential perplexity became apparent as the single most important reason for the existence of masks and masked rituals. This theme, as already suggested, is the relationship between the dead and the living, of life and death, and rebirth or regeneration; the hope of transformation into new life after death.

As a 'root metaphor', this theme of life, death and new life is well-documented in the literature of masking and in the study of societies in Africa and elsewhere¹³, particularly in the work of Bloch and Parry (1982) and Metcalf and Huntington, (1991).

This theme, primarily drawn from discussions with Chewa people, best demonstrates the strong religious beliefs I encountered there, over and again, during field research. There was an insistence on beliefs of a cosmological, metaphysical and supernatural order. This insistence found expression in the central theme of this thesis, grounded in other literature of the Chewa (notably Schoffeleers, Van Breughel and Linden as previously cited) and more general anthropological sources as cited in the above paragraphs. Given this insistence, the last Chapters particularly impart the cosmological aspects of Chewa masks and masking, and the language used reflects this.

These 'deep structures of reality' are the substance which give metaphor and interpretation the power of 'disclosing a world'. There is never a single answer to the problem, condition, or understanding of death, or of life, or of truth or love, and these are the stuff that reality and

fiction, metaphor and interpretation, are made of.

In writing this thesis, I have presented actual events, and actual statements and interpreted them in light of these concepts. As Ricoeur writes, "metaphorical language requires an art of deciphering which tends to unfold the several layers of meaning."¹⁴ Each Chapter then is another layer, another interpretation, another part of the whole, another way of thinking, and seeing and feeling in Chewa society. Each mask and each Chapter discloses a world, culminating in the final Chapter in which each of the different perspectives of masks and masking are interpreted in light of the central theme of life, death and regeneration.

Ultimately, the interpretation is my own, but it is an interpretation which has been built upon ethnographic documentation and local exegesis, followed by my own reflection. Ricoeur insists that the interpretation of the whole requires the 'appropriation' of what is foreign, and this element necessarily makes the interpretation my own, as I have assimilated what was foreign in order to come to an understanding of Chewa masked performance.

ENDNOTES TO INTRODUCTION

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- 1 See Procter's diaries, 1860-1864, edited by Bennett and Ylvisaker. reprinted in 1971. p.234
- 2 See L. White 1987. p.63 from the diaries of missionaries in Magomero in 1862.
- 3 See Foa, 1900 p.41-44
- 4 Schoffeleers. 1968. Chapters 4 and 5
- 5 This necessity of translation of ethnography into an inscribed text is expressed very well by Ingold, T. (1993):
 "Just as literary translation involves taking ideas expressed in one language and 'carrying them across' into the terms of another, so-it is said- anthropology involves the translation of the ideas and concepts of other cultures into terms comprehensible to a western readership." (p.217-218).
- 6 The choice of any theoretical approach or method is in the end, arbitrary, because when a choice is made other possibilities are necessarily excluded. Since this thesis is not about interpretive models or theoretical options, I reserve the right to choose this particular method and approach over other possibilities.
- 7 Turner (1974) writes about symbolic action in ritual among the Ndembu, and Geertz (1973) on interpretation among the Balinese. For another view, see Palsson (1993), Barnes and Duncan on landscapes, maps and paintings (1992) Issacharoff on performance (1989), Barber and Farias on African oral texts (1989), Clifford (1988) on culture and art, Moore (1986) on spatial ethnography in Kenya, Todorov (1983) on interpretation of discourse. For other approaches to social action see Giddens (1979) and Bourdieu (1977), for a more in-depth discussion of discourse than required for this thesis, see Ricoeur (1976), also on discourse and symbolic action as text cited in this thesis see Ricoeur (1971), and see Burke (1941) for a philosophical view of symbolic action in literary forms.
- 8 Metaphor is one key concept which Ricoeur explains in a particular way which I found useful in methodically interpreting ethnography, as in Chapter 5 and the Conclusion. In his review of literature, Ricoeur refers frequently to Aristotle. In addition, the following specifically describes metaphor related to the study of society including Barnes and Duncan (1992) Butler (1984), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Harries (1979) Donaldson (1979) Goodman (1979) and Ricoeur (1979) In Sacks (ed)., Fernandez (1974), (1977), Nisbet (1969), and Black (1962) among others. Tonkin (1979) uses metaphor especially to describe masks and masked performance, and is analyzed in the conclusion. I have also referred specifically to Pepper (1942) Geertz (1973), Turner (1974), and Parkin (1982) in the

Introduction. Many have used metaphor to describe society and/or masks without specifying or explaining a particular definition or sense of the word, leaving the reader with only a general understanding of metaphor. In light of this and the related literature, I think Ricoeur's precise definitions of metaphorical process remain important in the discussion of ethnography as presented in this thesis.

- 9 Ricoeur 1971. p.98
- 10 See Reece. 1980. p.353 and p.98
- 11 Ricoeur 1979. p.151
- 12 Ricoeur 1979. p.100
- 13 This body of literature includes Metcalf and Huntington. 1991, Fardon. 1990, Maxwell. 1983, Bloch and Parry. 1982, Tonkin. 1979, Levi-Strauss. 1975, Schoffeleers. 1968, Turner. 1962, 1967, White. 1961, Hertz. 1960, Eliade. 1958, and Van Gennep. 1909 among others.
- 14 Ricoeur 1971. p.89

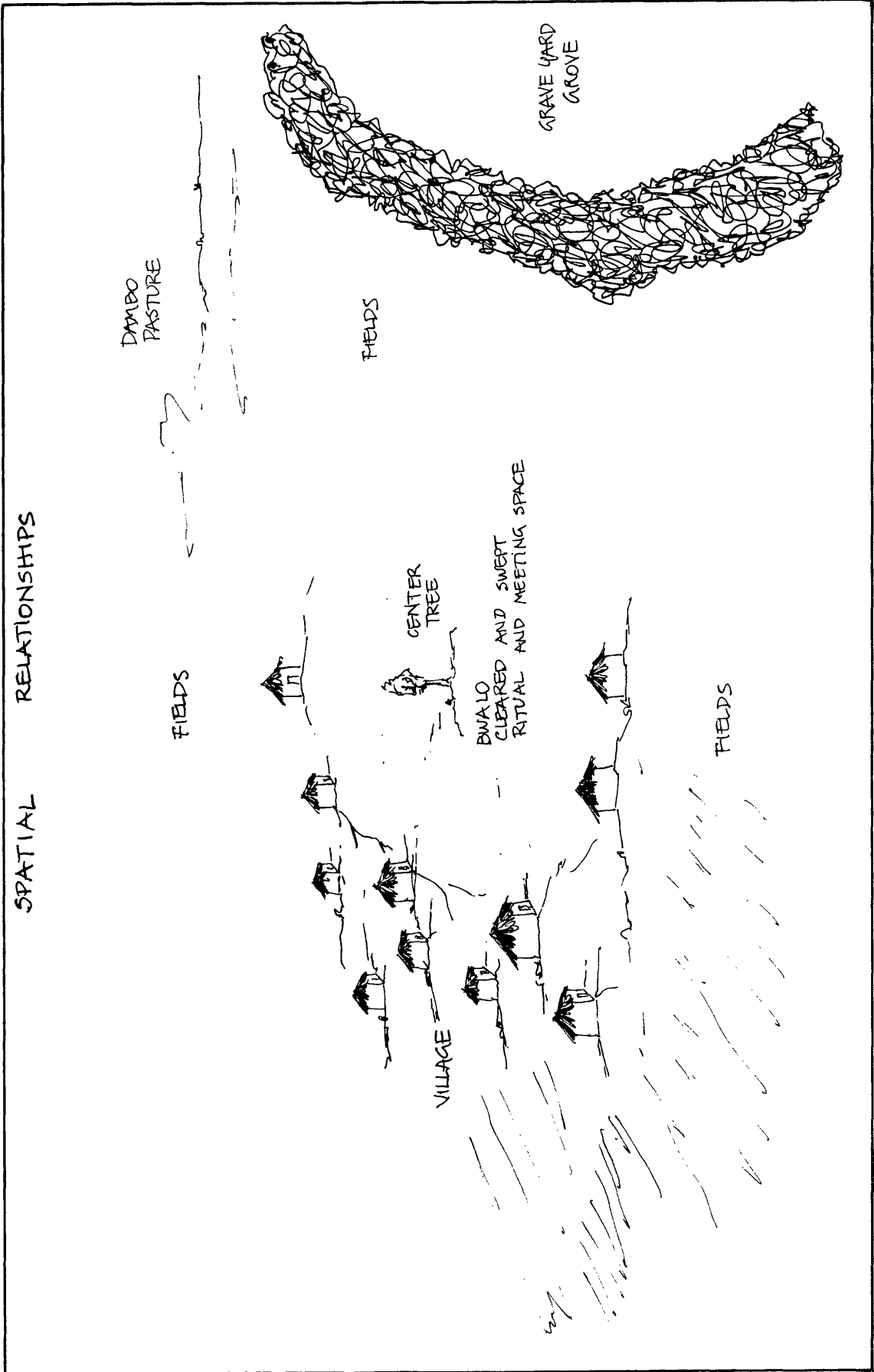


Fig. 1

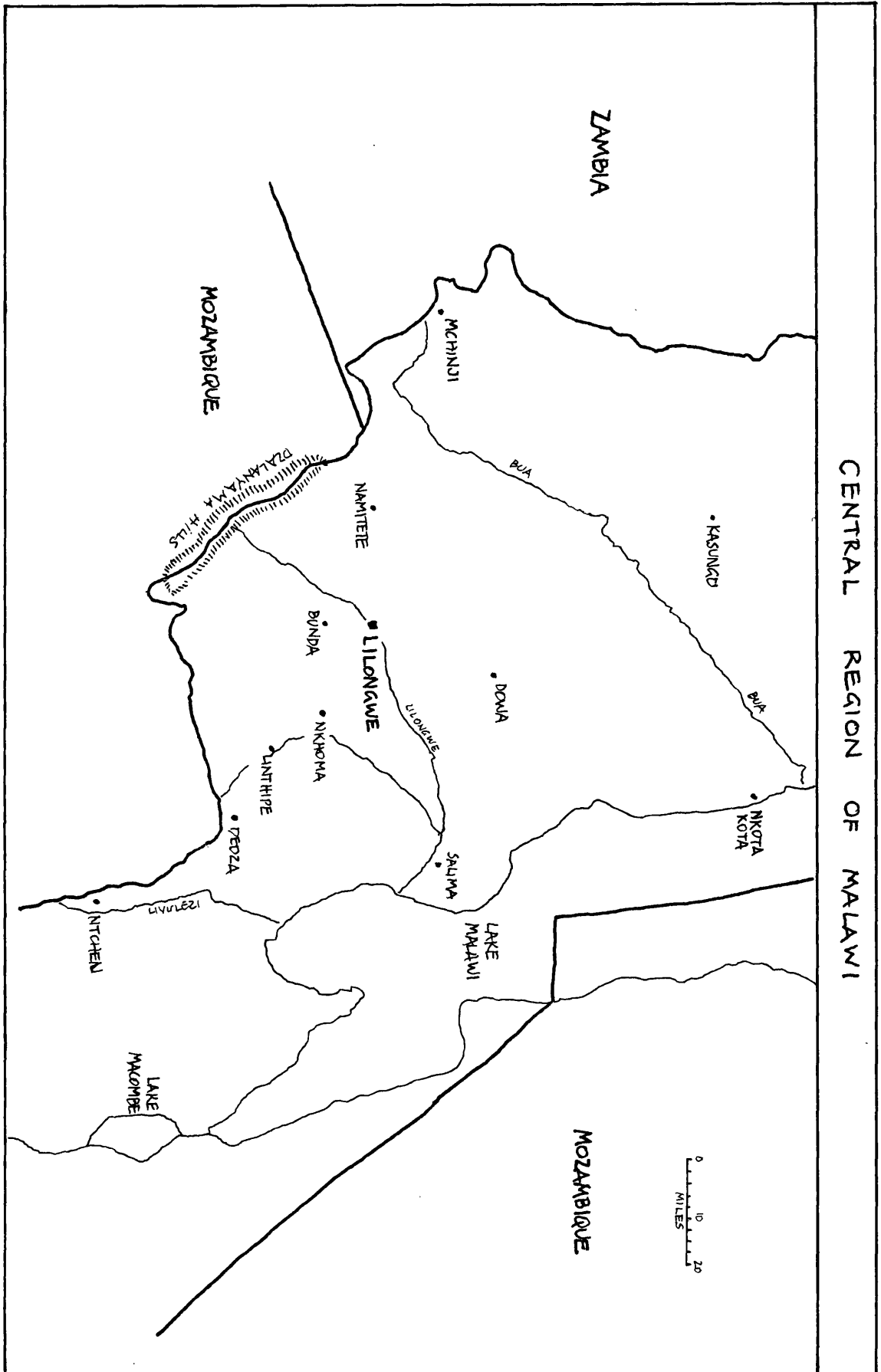


Fig. 2



Fig. 3

CHAPTER ONE: The Masked Event

"It is the strength with which they [initiates] concealed it [secret] that makes us sure of their initiation and makes us yearn to know what they knew."

-Umberto Eco (1989 p.433)

Myth and Historical Documentation of the Dance

The earliest documentation of nyau masked performance and the descriptive sighting of masks is from missionary writings in Magomero.¹ Masks were witnessed by early missionaries who recorded the 1862 event in their diaries. Not only did these early missionaries see the masks, but offered an interpretation which is still suggested today by members of nyau and those who have written about nyau.²

The missionaries were present for a funeral April 14, 1862, during which "nyau dancers appeared from the river bed and ran wildly through the village dancing." "They wore elaborate masks symbolizing the unity of the world of humans, animals and spirits."³ One missionary, Lovell Procter, described the nyau mask as:

"a formidable looking object which came..to dance with its attendant spirit." "It is probably a representation of the present shape of the departed."⁴

These early sightings from missionaries indicate a masking tradition which certainly predates the coming of European missions in the 1860s, of which these writings were among the first. The masked dancers were seen as "a powerful and frightening demonstration of the strength of Mang'anja religion" and was reported as a force which made the people choose between foreign missions and nyau.⁵

The masked tradition is presumed to have antiquity in

origin, according to Schoffeleers and others.⁶ Schoffeleers suggests the nyau masked dance may have origins as far back as the Late Stone Age hunter-gatherer societies, and traces the separation of nyau from rain shrine worship as an indication that the history of nyau goes back into the first millennium AD.⁷

In nyau mythology, the ideas about the origins of masking are based upon two distinct oral narratives, both emphasizing differences between women and men. One suggests women first owned the masks and the dance for their own initiation, and then men either co-opted this practice for themselves, or claimed the masking for themselves through magic.

Another narrative describes a time of famine. In the time of famine, it was said that the women kept the food for themselves, and sent the men out into the bush to survive on their own. In retaliation, the men in the bush hid their faces with feathers and hides, and came back to the village.

At first, they frightened the women away, so they could steal food from their cooking pots. Then after the worst of the famine, they came again and danced for the women, who gave them food or coins to leave them alone. Soon enough, this practice became more common, and the men danced and the women paid them with coins.⁸

In this myth, the first masks danced for the women were the feathered and hide ones, made very simply. The men were in the bush, outside the village, and entered the village with their masks made of animal parts from outside the village. As described by nyau members, when the men entered the village, they resembled strange and dangerous animals or other-worldly spirits, and the women ran from them in fright.

The story told by women, incidentally, is that they still have the masked dance in their own initiation which men are forbidden to see.⁹ Men copied the women's tradition and developed it into the performance of today. In either view, masking began as a gendered division which developed from a few simple masks to the masking complex of today.

Oral History of the Chewa and Masks

The Chewa of the central region say they come from the Luba area of Zaire.¹⁰ Masking as a tradition, the Chewa say, also came from Zaire, carried with the people through years of migration and movement. It is said that the place of their origin is known as Malambo, a place in Zaire.¹¹

From Malambo in the Luba country, the Chewa migrated into northern Zambia, moving southward and then east into the highlands of Malawi. In the course of this migration, they passed the mountains of Dzalanyama, also the site of creation according to Chewa mythology, known as Kaphirintiwa.¹² This site is over the western border of Malawi in Mozambique. From there, the people migrated into Mozambique and then moved east into Malawi.

Once they were in Malawi, they say they settled into villages. During all the years of movement, the tradition of masking was carried with them. Wherever the people went, some of the masking traditions followed. One elder mask-maker explained how the Chewa in parts of Mozambique and Zambia villages had only one or two of the mask forms, since the people were only passing through Dzalanyama, and did not settle there permanently until much later.

The mask-maker asserted that only after the people settled in villages, did the tradition of masking once again resurge. In this oral history, the tradition always existed, it was always present, but it remained latent until the people were settled enough to develop the

tradition again.

The masks of the Chewa today, and those collected and dated throughout this century, bear little visual resemblance to any of the Zairian masks. I asked this question, why the masks were so very different, was this really a tradition from Zaire? The answer was told in a story:

{Paraphrase} 'If you have a bag of seeds, with a small hole, and you are on your bike travelling, a few seeds come out and a plant grows but it is not the same as the rest. It is left along the way. But the garden planted in the settled place is cared for and takes root. Here they settled. They brought the skills and the tradition, and they made new masks. Or, the masks could be likened to the bird who takes seed and flies for miles. The bird drops some along the way, and eats some, before it settles.'

This story was then explained to me by the same mask-maker and my field assistant. The masks are not like Zairian masks, and should not be. The masks are very different, but still are from the same tradition. These were made by the new settlers, in their own way. It was explained to me by the master carver that "sometimes the student is better than the teacher" and so the work varies from the teachings.¹³ In Malawi, the masks are the masks of the students, those who first learned in Zaire who passed the tradition and skills down to others during the journeys.

In these stories and explanation are the seeds of innovation, of change in masking style, form, and imagery from the Zairian traditions. In the new settlements, innovative forms developed from the skills learned before. Thus, the oral tradition provides an explanation for the development of a distinctive style of masking, recognizable throughout the central region and the Chewa diaspora.¹⁴ Similarities are recognizable in masks dating from the early 1900s, the earliest existing masks dated in collections, to the 1990s.¹⁵

I asked about other masking traditions geographically close to the Chewa, such as the Makonde. The response of the mask-maker was one of familiarity with the work of the Makonde, but he firmly said that tradition was a different

one, not linked to their own tradition from Malambo. He repeated that their masking skills and tradition did not come from the east, but from Zaire, by way of northern Zambia.

In a more empirical attempt to date the mask forms, amino acid tests of rock paintings depicting nyau mask forms have been done. Schoffeleers and Lindgren dated white rock paintings of nyau forms, particularly the Kasiyamaliro antelope-like form, to the 1700s, but one such painting depicted a Galimoto, a grass and bamboo frame version of a modern car, in the same time period.¹⁶

In June 1992, old rock painting sites dated to 1000 years in age, had been painted again. In black outlines, several versions of the Kasiyamaliro had been drawn on the rock shelter surfaces, some with the names of schoolboys from Balaka who had made the markings. This choice of Kasiyamaliro and zinyau (plural of masked dancers) followed the older traditions of paintings on the preserved rock shelter sites.

Other indications of early Chewa peoples, or Proto-Chewa¹⁷ are evident in the archaeological findings of pottery, iron smelting and signs of agriculture from the first millennium AD, and a continuing practice of pottery-making up to the present forms still being produced by Chewa women in the central region.¹⁸

Despite these efforts at dating Chewa migrations, masks and masking tradition, oral accounts remain the best source of information. According to these accounts, from various chiefs, mask-makers and nyau members, the masks which are the most important and are of the oldest tradition are the large animal constructions, known as Chirombo, (wild animals), and zinyau which include Kasiyamaliro antelope forms and Niobvu the elephant, both used in initiation ritual.

While these are the most common and among the most important of the animal constructions, any animal's likeness may be made into an image and performed in the night dances. The range includes hares, buffaloes, lions, snakes and zebras to name only a few common ones. These animals all together form the earliest tradition of masking, according to oral assertions by nyau members, and are most likely to be the mask forms which have survived from the Late Stone Age, as suggested earlier in this Chapter by Schoffeleers.

These forms are the primary ones in specific ritual roles associated with funerals and the initiation of boys and of girls. As a group, these masks are the closest of the masks to the miyambo, the customs and learning passed down as wisdom from the elders to the young in initiations. These are also the masks most closely related to the cosmology, or understanding of the world within nyau.¹⁹

The majority of masks presented in this thesis are the masks covering the face, rather than hiding the entire body. This tradition of face masks also is said to come from Zaire, but it relates to human forms more than animal ones, and to societal situations more than cosmological ones. In the understanding of time, the Late Stone Age animal constructions may be described as being in a kind of mythical time, while the other masks are remembered more concretely from the mid-1800s to the present.

Andrew Roberts notes a sharp difference in the notion of time between the far past and the past which is known, dating around the mid-nineteenth century.²⁰ This pattern is also present among the Chewa I interviewed, with the earliest times remembered in some detail dating to the mid-nineteenth century. This is also largely true of the oral accounts of masks, which are specifically related to events from the mid to late 1800s.

Chewa leaders insist the masking existed long, long ago

before the remembered times now documented from the 1800s. How long remains a mystery, but it does seem likely that both the animal constructions and societal masks did exist prior to documented historical records.

Nyau Society

Those who make the masks, perform the masks and organize the masked events for the village community are initiated members of the nyau society. Men and women have separate initiations but it is the men, with very rare exceptions, who make the masks and perform with masks for the community events. Male members of nyau maintain a strict secrecy about the masks from women and outsiders, with the exception of certain senior women entrusted with knowledge from both the male and female initiations. Women maintain secrecy about their own initiation from initiated men, and from all non-initiates.

The nyau society itself encompasses the central region of Malawi, parts of the southern region, crossing the borders of Malawi into eastern Zambia and into Mozambique. Nyau may be described as a localized society with initiations which include primary elements which are very much the same from one village area to another, with recognizable codes from one member to another.

There is no centralized hierarchy of nyau for the region. There are nyau leaders in each village which practices nyau, who have generally come from other villages sharing the same knowledge from nyau initiation. Since the men more commonly move from their own villages to another, the men have developed passwords, signs and gestures recognized by all other initiated men throughout the region, signalling they have been properly initiated.

Initiations occur in the local village, though the best teachers may come from other villages and initiates may

also come from other villages which are not having initiations that year. Thus, there is a certain sameness, yet with variations, in the instruction and practice of nyau from village to village and throughout the central region of Malawi.

How the Chewa Explain Masked Performance

Nyau members uniformly describe the Gule Wamkulu performance in the same ways. The most salient remark repeated over and over again from one village area to another, in both English and Chichewa, was: "this is our custom", "tradition" and "religion", all translated by the Chewa themselves from mwambo. (See definition in endnote)²¹

The Great Dance, Gule Wamkulu is also called the Great Prayer, (Pemphero lalikulu). Members of nyau have said they revere God, (Mulungu, Chiuta, Chauta), as being the one who created life, created man and the world, as being one God who created all. God as a mysterious creative force is also referred to as the creation in the soil, the soil from which all living things are sustained, and the soil from which the masks have emerged. This is described in more detail in Chapter Seven.

The masks themselves are described as spirits, (mzimu), specifically as spirits of the deceased, and the ancestors. Spirits are not considered as gods, but rather are considered to be with God, where they are aware of the happenings of living people.²² Some say spirits, or ghosts, mzukwa hang in the trees of the graveyard until God takes them to be with him. They are present there in the graveyard, for an indefinite and unknown period of time.

Of those who have died, certain persons are given remembrance dances one year to several years after their deaths. These individuals include Chiefs, the female Namkungwi of the Chief, and other senior members of Chewa society. The people are mostly those who died at an old

age; the ones who held senior positions in the village.

These people are considered particularly dangerous in death, since they possessed special knowledge resulting from their age and position in society, and are considered capable of affecting the living in the village. These senior people, as described by nyau members, are particularly thought of as being mzimu, ancestor spirits, after death, and need the remembrance dance to pacify and appease them.

Masked performers are mzimu, ancestors, the deceased, then; and some indeed represent specific people who have died, relatives of those in the community, and most commonly senior people. The 'ghosts' of these senior people become more powerful ancestor spirits, a passage commemorated by a remembrance dance (See Chapter Seven). The masked dancers are all these deceased emerging from the graveyard to enter the bwalo, the ritual space, for the dance performance.

In this sense, masks are also referred to as being the dead, and are seen to be as the appearance of the dead might actually be. The body is covered with ash, transforming the appearance of the skin. The costumes are tatters of cloth, animal hide, sisal strings, stripped fertilizer bags, and feathers. The appearance is considered other-worldly, not of the living world, but of the world of the dead.

Another interpretation of the masks given by nyau members and those outside nyau alike is that the masked dancers are like wild animals, fearful or strange animals from the graveyard. A number of masks actually do resemble wild animals, and the large animal constructions are referred to as Chirombo, (wild animal) (See Chapter Seven). However, this connotation goes further. Even the masked dancers wearing human-like faces are likened to wild animals. Many of these masked dancers cry out in what is described as animal-like tones, wear the trappings of dead animals and

birds, and resemble animals in some of their dance movements.

The references to the dead and to the wild animal are also compared together as being opsya, (awful, frightful, dreadful things). Dead people coming out of the graveyard for the funeral event evoke images of death which are described as frightening and fearful. Wild animals can be very dangerous, and the masked dancers are described as being very dangerous.

Images of death, dread and danger are further evoked by associations with secrecy, witchcraft and sorcery, which is a description given by those outside nyau in particular. Nyau and the masks are associated with secret medicines, night-time activities, secret knowledge, and things of the dead. These associations are referred to by nyau members, who also say they place medicines in their masks for protection against jealousy and witchcraft, and spit in the mask before wearing it as a preventive measure against evil spirits.²³

While members protect themselves against witchcraft and consider their activity to be dangerous, those outside nyau often describe nyau as being based on witchcraft and witches, (mfiti), something which is vigorously denied by nyau members.²⁴

Still other non-members, those outside nyau, claim the dance performance is mostly a means of making money. Dancers collect money for their performance during the dance, and may be promised money by the village Chief for coming to his event. Teachers of nyau and nyau leaders are given money to initiate the young, and to teach the higher levels of secretive knowledge to new Chiefs and new teachers.

In another interpretation of nyau, those who are about to be initiated are told stories about the masked dancers as

being spirits from the graveyard. They are told that the nyau leaders go fishing in a deep pond in the middle of the graveyard, using eggs as bait. With the eggs, they catch the nyau spirits, pulling them out of the water. Once caught, they dance in the bwalo, and then return to the pond. The mask forms are described as being mysterious, unknown, and other-worldly to the young, to outsiders and even among some nyau members.

Urban outsiders tell stories about brief encounters with nyau, or about a relative or someone they knew who had an encounter with nyau. The stories include a young boy who was beaten until permanently crippled for telling secrets, a woman who cut her foot open while running away from the nyau dancers, people being hit with sticks and beaten, domestic animals being killed and taken, pots smashed and personal belongings being stolen and kept in the graveyard until payment was made to release them.

Their own experiences are of narrowly missing an encounter by visiting relatives in a village at the wrong time, by being sheltered in a house for hours until the masked nyau dancers had gone. There are stories of girls fleeing their village to avoid being initiated and becoming 'one of them'. One assistant who had converted to Christianity described how his own village was banned from having the Gule Wamkulu by the Malawi Congress Party after "too many deaths"; killings by nyau dancers. Some Christians refuse to speak about it, saying it is evil. Other outsiders simply say they know nothing, and say that those (nyau) people will never tell them anything.

In all of these accounts, there is fear associated with nyau, and a sense of awful secrecy. Nyau seems above the law, governed by its own law. The Chewa say punishment is carried out in secrecy, usually in the graveyard, and no one tells the truth later. I have seen that the very word 'nyau' makes some people catch their breath and step back. People have said it causes the skin to tighten and the

hairs to stand up.²⁵

In summary, outsiders both expressed fear and repugnance in going to a masked performance, and at the same time keen interest in seeing what goes on in a dance. In contrast, nyau members describe the dance as part of their lives, part of the community, and something that, in all its fearfulness, is very much enjoyed.

Both insiders and outsiders²⁶ view nyau with seriousness, both associate it with death, the graveyard, and the other-world of spirits, wild animals, and night-time activity. Nyau is described as dangerous and having power outside the norms of everyday life, outside the law of most people as it is governed by its own internal rules and codes.

To insiders it is part of their world, their cosmology, the wisdom passed on to them by their ancestors. To outsiders it is witchcraft and evil, and very secretive. To both those inside nyau and outside, it can cause the skin to crinkle in fear.

Masked Performance: Gule Wamkulu

The Great Dance, Gule Wamkulu, (Gule, a dance; Wamkulu, great as in stature, size, and fullness) is a performance rich in variety, color, song, rhythm and movement. Intricate rhythms of several drums are echoed by the movement of the dancers, with swirls of red dust flung from their bare feet.

The dancers are all masked, either with masks covering the face with carved wood, feathers cloth and hide; or masking their whole body with various constructions of grasses, sisal, and dried maize leaves covering wood frames resembling animals. All the masked performers are male, members of the nyau society. All members have undergone initiation into the nyau society, which includes learning

to be familiar with the masked forms.

Gule Wamkulu is performed in the village bwalo, a ritual space with a mature tree in the center.²⁷ The bwalo is owned by the Chief for the village as a whole. It is a place of meetings and community gatherings, and especially the performance of Gule Wamkulu.

Chewa villages in the central region of Malawi each have a bwalo, if the people in the village have a Chief who is recognized as part of the structure of group headmen, regional and paramount Chiefs in the area, and practice nyau.²⁸ Each new Chief opens his or her own bwalo, designating it as a space apart from the village with his or her medicines of chieftaincy buried near the central tree. It is considered a privilege to have one's own village bwalo, which provides the right to have the Gule Wamkulu performance.²⁹

The bwalo is located just outside, or alongside, the village area of houses. It is an open area which is swept to keep it clear of growth and excess dust. Standing as it does alongside all the activities of village life, fields, gardening, animal pasture and the graveyard, it is considered the center of the community.³⁰

The village is made up of a grouping of houses organized into small open family compounds. The appearance of villages has altered since Independence, with changes in the construction of some houses, surrounded by fields rather than forested areas. Chewa villages still predominantly consist of round houses made of mud with thatched roofs as in the past. While the round houses are still numerous, rectangular houses are common as well, and more prosperous villages include larger houses of cement or burned bricks with corrugated iron roofs. The majority of villages studied consist mostly of the round or rectangular mud houses, however.

These houses may include a granary of grasses and bamboo, housing for animals such as goats and chickens, and in a large family, a smaller house, or two houses, for older children of the same sex. This family grouping is surrounded by other such groupings, comprising fifty to 300 people.³¹

Members of each village are related to an ancestress, or a living elder grandmother. In this matrilineal, matrilocal society, the village is made up of related women: sisters, mothers, daughters. The men grow up with their female relatives, then as adults, they move to another village to marry. Married men, then, usually live in the village of their wives, yet are deemed to belong to the village of their mothers.³² Polygyny is also acceptable for men, but they must maintain separate households rather than move their wives from their own villages into one.³³

Men are initiated into nyau around puberty, in their own mothers' villages. As initiates, they are accepted into any of the Chewa villages practicing nyau, as bona fide members.³⁴ Thus, men have a society of their own within the wife's village. These men may bring with them skills in the Gule Wamkulu, making them welcome additions to the community.

The village itself is surrounded by fields (minda) of maize and beans, but also cassava, groundnuts, and various other crops. Farming is the livelihood of most village people. The fields lay outside or alongside the village, as does the bwalo. Beyond the bwalo, usually across a field or pasture for cattle, there is a designated area clearly defined by large trees. It is a forested pocket, a grove of naturally wooded space, now set apart from the plateau savannah of village, field and fallow areas. This dense grove of trees is the graveyard.

The graveyard, (manda), is a space set apart visually, but also set apart by society. Those who enter the graveyard

are members of nyau, and only those permitted to go by the Chief. This restriction is lifted during burial ceremonies, when all those present join a procession into the graveyard. As a general rule, no one enters the wooded space without a specific purpose.

This is the space where the Gule Wamkulu dancers prepare for the dance. Here, they practice their performance, they dress in their masked costumes and they suggest new songs. Here, the boys are initiated into nyau and become mature, (kulu). This is the place where the zinyau, (the plural form of nyau used for the many animal constructions and masks), are kept. They are said to stay here and sleep here. This is the home of the masks, and the place of "birth" of the masks by carvers who work in the privacy and secrecy of the dense grove.

Within the graveyard are trails known by members who frequent the secretive space. One trail leads to the dambwe, the space where dancers gather before the Gule Wamkulu, and the space where masks are made, and where they are left to 'sleep'. In other words, the masks remain and are said to 'live' in the graveyard when not in use.

Another trail leads to a space for the initiation lodge, and another may lead to another quiet clearing where the carver can create the masks. The trails intertwine and lead to various outlets from one side of the grove to another. From outside, the trails leading in are barely visible, covered with high grasses between the end of a field and the beginning of the line of trees.

Along the trails are the sites of graves. Most are mounds of earth, some fresh and others packed down from rains and new growth. More recently, some of the graves are covered in cement, and some are formed in the likeness of the antelope-like mask, Kasiyamaliro, and painted white.³⁵

The forest grove is full of shrubs, grasses, roots and plants used in making medicines. The medicines for the young initiates who become nyau members are found in the graveyard. Birds whose feathers are still used in covering the masks are hunted in the graveyard. The dense grove of the graveyard is the last remaining 'wild' space, circles of trees in an otherwise populated and deforested savannah grassland.

The Gule Wamkulu, the dance performance of masked characters, is part of the ritual events of community life; rites of passage from youth to maturity, funerals, funeral remembrances and the celebratory opening of a new bwalo for a newly selected Chief. The entire ritual event lasts for days, often including two nights of performances, followed by a final afternoon performance.

The afternoon performance is the one which attracts the highest attendance with the most participation from surrounding villages. It is the most visible, has the most dancers, and has become an event as a public show, a popular event as well as the community ritual event it has always been.

Masked dancers perform other ritual roles outside the main dance performance, Gule Wamkulu, which correspond closely to the specific purpose of the ritual; initiation of girls, funerals, initiation of boys and funeral remembrance. Specific masks are used in specific roles with their own significance apart from the more public Gule Wamkulu performance in the village center.

Gule Wamkulu is the actual delimited space and time of the Great Dance, most commonly the three-hour day performance. It is this dance which has become a national heritage, being performed in National Day celebrations and Malawi Congress Party rallies. It is this dance which has become part of the repertoire of secularized African dance shows in Zimbabwe and South Africa.³⁶ These performances are,

obviously, completely divorced from the ritual context to do with the deceased.³⁷

The masks themselves have tremendous variety, with more than 150 varieties documented.³⁸ There are masks of human faces in red, black, pink and flesh colors, white, and more rarely, yellow. There are masks of feathers, and hides and combinations of these with cloth. There are simple cloth masks with painted faces, there are depictions of animals with masks covering the face for buffalo, and long-snouted bushpigs. Then there are the large constructions which cover the entire body of the dancer, and sometimes are large enough to contain ten or more dancers at once.

Within this variety of forms, there are rules guiding the use of certain masks in ritual and in the Gule Wamkulu performance. The dancers are not randomly allowed to enter the bwalo to perform, but in general, enter with permission from a senior nyau leader, the event organizer, who guides dancers by means of the sound of a rattle. Certain dancers enter the bwalo without this permission and guidance, though the overall performance is structured by nyau leaders.

Presenting the Gule Wamkulu event first in this thesis is intended to portray how the masks and dance are seen for the first time by most outsiders, and even in the memory of Chewa villagers as children before initiation. Masks are things which enter the village from 'out there' in the graveyard, a secret and forbidden place for children and all non-initiates. Young children are not kept awake for the night performances. The most common first experiences of nyau and the masking complex remains the day performance of Gule Wamkulu.

Each Gule Wamkulu event is unique, as each event varies from village to village and from one area to another area. No one village has enough dancers for their own event, so other villages are encouraged to participate producing an

ever-changing variety of masks and dancers for each performance, depending on which villages participate, and which masked dancers attend.

The preparation for a masked event may take several months, or in the case of a funeral, may take less than one day. The preparation may be elaborate, involving many dancers and participants for a large organized event such as the initiation dances and the funeral remembrance performances for senior Chiefs. The preparation may also be quite simple, but in either case, the dance performances are structured very similarly from one event to another, and from one village to another.

Since each village depends upon the participation of other villages, no one village is sufficient in the study of mask forms, including varieties, variations and interpretations of forms, on its own. Dancers from outside the village area may come from miles away to attend a specific dance performance, and so a regional approach is necessary to observe the range of masks possible for any single event.³⁹

In the organization of a single Gule Wamkulu performance, the Chief of a village coordinates with several other villages, inviting the Chiefs, the senior women, and the dancers from neighboring villages to participate in the event. Messengers are sent to other Chiefs for their responses. There is a great deal of cooperation between villages to assist one another. Each Chief knows he will need the support of other Chiefs to perform masked events, and the all-important funeral rituals for members of his own village.

Dancers from other areas may also be invited to perform in a Gule Wamkulu, and the best dancers are often in demand, moving from one performance to another on the popular weekend dates. Dancers are known to the Chiefs, who may offer them money to perform, apart from whatever money they receive from admirers during their actual performance.

The cooperation from other villages becomes part of the excitement of the event, as the number of dancers, types of dancers and community of peoples present for the dance will vary each time depending upon who has chosen to participate. With participation from outside the immediate village and circle of relatives, I suggest, the dance becomes a social occasion as well as a ritual one.

Over the years of field research I have observed as many as fifty different masked events. For more than a dozen of these performances, I have recorded specific sequences of masked dances. This documentation was collected in 1992, after observing these same recurring sequences of masked forms in the dance. The actual sequences noted in 1992 closely matched the observances from 1985, 1988, and 1990. The variations between village events has been great, ranging from five or six different dancers to more than three dozen masked dancers in one event.

There is a constancy in the sequence of masked dancers from one dance to the next, though there are no hard and fast rules which govern this. Most commonly, the feathered masks known collectively as Kapoli, are first. These masked dancers announce the event in song, and 'sweep the path' for the greater masks to come. As I was often told, the minor mask precedes the more important masks, and a variety of Kapoli feathered masks usually precedes the more important wooden carved masks. Within the first quarter of the dance, at least one important mask emerges, heightening the excitement.

More than midway through the performance, there is often a large, important mask which performs as the climax of the performance. In large performances, this mask may be Chilembwe, a two-man animal mask form. This mask is followed by a number of more important masks, and begins to slow with more Kapoli toward the end. At times, another carved wooden mask or a popular, created mask known for



clearing the crowds dance at the very end of the performance, signifying it is time to disperse.

In my own initiation performance, the new and popular mask form known by the English word 'Doctor' ended the performance, throwing the dusty earth of the bwalo at the audience to get their attention before performing, and scattering the people afterwards. This new mask was made of a plastic Halloween mask, depicting both the village doctor with medicine bundles around his ankles and waist, and the modern doctor with a stethoscope around his neck.

Gule Wamkulu in Namitete, November 1992⁴⁰

(Funeral remembrance combined with a girl's initiation)

The year 1992 was a year of drought, when the rains ended in January rather than March or April. The harvest was a meager one, and shipments of maize and corn were being sent to Malawi from donor agencies around the world. As a result, the Gule Wamkulu performances had been curtailed, as this one was, in order to preserve maize for the villagers, which would have been used for the brewing of beer and the feeding of visitors. Initiations were few, and those which were being done were often performed in combination with other events, such as funerals and funeral remembrances.⁴¹

This particular event was in part a remembrance of those who had died. The event was important for me because a Namkungwi, a senior woman and instructor, whom I had known before, had died one month before I returned to Malawi for this period of field research, so for me this would be a personal recollection of her.⁴² Combined with this performance was the initiation of a matured young woman who, in the year of drought, had not had the opportunity to be properly initiated. This dance would be the last planned event for the season. Already, the dark blue rain clouds were on the horizon, and rains had fallen to the south. The coming of rains is the time of planting again,

and the dance season would end.

I arrived in the morning, as the women were gathering to sing and dance. Women beat the drums and the senior women dance together in a line in the center of the group of women, before the drummers. They are led by the Namkungwi, who has been instructing the young woman. As a fellow initiated member, they accepted me into the group, which is separated from the men, who keep a respectful distance from the women.

As the women perform their own dance, the men are entertained by three or four wandering nyau dancers. These are mostly younger ones, with cloth, hide and feathers of their own making covering their faces. Their bodies are whitened with ash, and they carry switches or adzes with them. The clothes are simple: dark shorts or cloth wrapped around the hips with bits of animal hide or burlap around the shoulders. They wear rattles of metal or gourds with seeds or soft drink metal tops around their ankles.

Throughout this morning, during the women's Chisamba dances, a variety of these masked dancers appear in the village, wandering through freely, grouping together or alone to dance. One of these has a black plastic Halloween mask. He goes from the graveyard to the village and back, dancing with a club raised in the air just outside the dense grove of the graves. As they wander through, some of the men, and a few of the women toss them small coins to dance for them.

For this event, a dancer from a neighboring village has come wearing a wooden carved mask of a man's face with animal horns. He is early, and rather than wait for the performance, he has decided to come into the village and dance with the younger dancers. The mask is Holi, translated as 'join me'. The mask's name and the song he sings invites the dance viewers to join him in the graveyard and in death. He is covered with the burlap-like

woven fertilizer bags commonly used as costumes by the masked dancers, worn as long loose cloths.

By late morning, the women have concluded the Chisamba dances, and have gathered together as a group to watch the coming of the Kasiyamaliro. The men are on one side opposite the women, as the younger men and boys are seen rushing into the village. The boys carry branches of trees, which they wave in the air and scrape on the ground. They surround three large antelope-like forms, ten feet tall, covered in woven dried maize husks known as Kasiyamaliro.⁴³

Wovera! Wovera!⁴⁴ The women sing as the three elegant shapes enter the open bwalo and perform, turning in circles round and round, the long loose tails flying in the air. These three Kasiyamaliro have come from three different villages, including the village of a nyau artisan who creates these forms. Kasiyamaliro has appeared in the village for the remembrance dance, prior to the performance of Gule Wamkulu in the bwalo itself.

Each of them performs together and singly, round and round, with the boys scraping the earth with their branches to remove the traces of footprints left by the dancers hidden beneath the antelope frame. After performing for some minutes, with the women singing the whole time, the Kasiyamaliro departed, leaving the village behind, to return to the graveyard from whence they had come.⁴⁵

During the village performance of the Kasiyamaliro, the Gule Wamkulu dancers gathered behind a grass fence outside the graveyard nearer to the bwalo. A space, an opening, had been set aside for them to enter the bwalo.⁴⁶ While they gathered behind the fence at first, once the dance began they emerged in a large group, to watch the performance before their own turn to dance.

The drums were warmed for tone and resonance, and the

people gathered for the dance. Only the young woman to be initiated and her teachers were still in the village house apart from the rest. Meanwhile the community as a whole surrounded the bwalo for the performance.

The masked dance performance, Gule Wamkulu, nearly always begins as this one does, with a masked dancer called Kapoli, which speaks in a falsetto high-pitched voice, calling out a song to the women who answer back in song. Usually, though not always, the first song is a general announcement of the day's event, the reason for being there. The dancer then performs while the women sing and the drummers beat a rhythm specific to the kind of masked dance being performed.

Kapoli is likened to a rooster, with a mask of feathers covering the entire head. The mask is commonly made of chicken feathers with possibly the feathers of guinea fowl, but may include feathers from any bird.⁴⁷ The feathers are tied on to a wire frame covered with string netting and placed over the head. The dancer can see through the feathers, still hiding his face.

Kapoli is also a term for many other masks which may not be differentiated, such as Kasinja, Kachipapa, and a variety of other masks of feathers and cloths. It is a generic term encompassing a variety of similar masks from one village region to another, as well as being a specific mask.

These Kapoli can speak, which sets them apart from other masks. As the masked dancer enters the bwalo, he addresses the women in a song, and they answer back in the same song. He waits until the women are singing strongly and the drums have begun to beat fully, and then performs his dance. The dance itself constitutes the stamping of the ground and the flinging of dust with the feet. His movement sets all the torn cloth pieces, and sisal fringes of his costume in full motion.

The dance performance is punctuated with abrupt stops and starts, and the masked dancer may stop and begin a second song for the women to sing in the middle of his performance. The performance continues for only a matter of a few minutes. In this time, the dancer pauses, and men come into the bwalo to hand him coins. The women who sing and dance and the drummers are also given coins for their performances by the men.

A senior nyau leader, usually the Wakunjira, or organizer of the nyau dancers, stands in the bwalo with a rattle. It is his job to keep the performance moving, and he may signal the end of a performance at any time by rattling for the dancer to finish. He also chooses the order of dancers from the grouping of masked dancers present by rattling for one or the other to come forward.⁴⁸

The second performer in this dance is another Kapoli, also from Namitete, followed by a third Kapoli from another village. Each of these performs by giving the women a song, waiting for the drumbeat, and dancing, stopping to collect coins, then dancing again.

Following the third Kapoli were a pair of Kapoli, two dancing as a pair moving in tandem with one another, from yet another village. These dancers are joined by a senior woman, a Namkungwi. She entered the bwalo with the Wakunjira, the male organizer of nyau. Throughout the performance, this woman may dance with the masked dancers, and move freely from one side of the bwalo to the other. She is the only woman allowed to enter the bwalo and dance. All the masked dancers, as stated previously, are male.

The next performers are no longer one of the feather and hide mask varieties, but a pair of carved wooden masks painted bright red, named Simoni. They do not speak, so do not give the women their song. However, the women sing a song for them, before the drums beat, but this time with a

distinctive rhythm for the Simoni masks.

The masked dancer then performs with the same stamping and flying of feet, but with movements identified with the mask form. During pauses, the masked dancer stretches and even pretend to scratches, as he collects coins. During the dancing, the Simoni are half-crouched and then in one movement stand upright, still dancing, with one hand in the air after the other.

The dance is popular, and more men come rushing out to give this more experienced dancer coins. Another Simoni follows, dancing on his own. This dancer begins with a prayer, bobbing his head up and down turning in a circle, before beginning his own interpretation of the same dance rhythm from the drums. This mask is pinkish, beige, the color of flesh, and has a deep brown moustache. The head is covered in cloth which looks like black hair. He is followed by yet another Simoni pair in this dance sequence.⁴⁹

One pair is clearly immensely popular, and this one garners the most coins and permission by the Wakunjira to perform more than one round of dancing. The masks are well-carved, recognized by some of the nyau members. Each dancer performs with each movement tied to the complicated beat of the drum. The ninth performer is another Kapoli, representing the same village as the two popular Simoni who danced before him.

From one event to another, the most exciting dances are performed from about half-way through the number of performances to the climax about two-thirds through the event. Given the number of performances for this event, this next mask, the tenth, marks about the half-way point.⁵⁰

Chimbano is the next performer. Chimbano is a mask with an animal-like face and sharp teeth. This one is bright red,

with a long nose said to depict a pig. The long wooden tongue inside is movable in the slightly opened mouth revealing rows of teeth made of soft wood. The masked dancer characterizes an old dignified man, walking with a cane out to the center of the bwalo. He moves his masked head slowly side to side from his slightly stooped shoulders.

The movement of the mask around the bwalo as an old man is in stark contrast to his movements in the dance. The women sing a song for him, and he begins to dance with great agility, head up in the air. The dancer of this mask today is also the carver of the mask. This was the third time I had seen this mask form, performed in this village, but each time it has been a different one made by the same man. The dancer/carver performs with his own masks then sells them and makes another very much like the first. He retains the Chimbano's own character of the mask as an old man, however, in each performance.

Chimbano is followed by another important mask form, Chadzunda, a black carved wooden mask depicting a Chief. Chadzunda masked dancers are one of the few which do not wait to be invited to dance. These two masked dancers did not wait in the group with the other masks, but entered for the first time without guidance from the rattle. They performed without intervention, and left when they had finished, without being told when to go.

On this occasion, there were two Chadzunda dancing as a pair, both from the same village.⁵¹ The Chadzunda appear as rivals, dancing to a rhythm of their own in angry rivalry which is resolved in the end. This masked dance is noted for the visual appearance of the masks which have deep furrowed brows carved into the wood, and are covered with the hide of a serval, a leopard-like hide. These masks carry prestige as representatives of Chiefs.

These Chadzunda masks were received with great excitement, as men poured into the bwalo to give the dancers coins, the women were singing at their best, and the audience had begun to encroach on the circle around the bwalo in their excitement.

Once the audience encroaches into the bwalo space two things might happen which did not occur at this particular event. One is that acrobatic dancers may be called into the bwalo to somersault into the crowds, pushing them back, as I witnessed in this same village in 1985. Secondly, as occurred in another performance in a nearby village nyau members entered the bwalo with a thick wooden pole, and rammed the crowds to push them back and maintain order.⁵²

The Chadzunda, the climax of this performance, was followed by another Kapoli, followed by yet another Kapoli. This sequence was followed by the performance of Makanja,⁵³ a tall mask form of a dancer on stilts covered in colorful tatters of flying cloth.

This Makanja is made of cloth with a long, protruding nose, though other Makanja dancers wear carved wooden masks. The masked dancer comes from the Bunda area, and was identified as Chief of a village there. On stilts, rising high above the audience, the dancer runs and jumps around the bwalo, dancing on his long legs.⁵⁴ Makanja, like Chadzunda and Chilembwe, does not wait to enter, but comes on his own.

Then two other mask forms entered the bwalo, sitting on the side. There were masked dancers wearing a Maria mask and Simoni mask, both in bright red. The dancers sat together, chatting, as a European couple might do, an uncommon sight with the gender separation in a Chewa village.

The Maria masked dancer performed next, the fifteenth performance of the day. Maria is a female mask worn, as all Chewa masks, by a male dancer. The dancer wears a

woman's dress, with false breasts and earrings. This mask is also from the host village, the third carved wooden mask to be performed from the same village. The dance of Maria is distinct from the others, with erotic overtones and the swishing of skirts. The masks are popular for their color and variety, with scarification marks on the faces. Many of these female masks have scarification marks painted on the face, but this one's face had raised marks in the carving of the wood.

The Maria is followed by Nyolonyo and two more Kapoli performances. The second of these was well-acclaimed, with the masked dancers standing on one another's shoulders during their dance performance.

Nyolonyo masks are cloth masks, plain and featureless in the front and the back, with tall feathered sticks, one above the front and one above the back of the cloth mask. The sides often have lines and circles randomly stitched on to the cloth. The dancer's legs are white with ash, and the dancer wears a 'skirt' of swaying sisal strips or brightly colored pieces of yarn. He carries an adze in the dance.

He is followed by one more Simoni, a bright red-faced Simoni, which was the last major performance. This mask has a small moustache and narrow slits of eyes above high, prominent cheekbones. This one is referred to as Simoni, but is also known as Kadyankhadze, one who eats the poisonous sap of the nkhadze tree. He is followed by Kapoli, Nyolonyo and a final Kapoli, as the crowds of people begin to dissipate. The finale is rarely a triumph, but more of a means of calming, to get the people to disperse.⁵⁵

After the final Kapoli had danced, the attention of the crowd turned to the village, from which the young woman was expected to enter the bwalo. In the village, a group of

senior women had gone to collect the girl who was now prepared for her public debut as a mature woman.

From a distance the girl could be seen carried above the group of women on the shoulders of her teacher. The women had made a clay figure in the shape of a nyau animal form and placed it on the initiate's head. The figure was covered in white maize flour paste and dotted with black and red. Her hair was plastered with clay, also white with black and red dots, to hold the figure in place. She was wearing only her bra⁵⁶ and her chitenji skirt. Her torso was covered with dots on the back and chest, red and white.

For her dance, she shimmied her arms, moving her arms very rapidly, back and forth and close to the body, without moving her head. She circled the bwalo remaining on the shoulders of her teacher, with the senior women singing and surrounding her, then she was taken back to the initiation house. There, the clay figure was removed by the teachers and thrown in the pit latrine by the initiation house. The young woman was then taken to be washed, completing her initiation as a mature adult of the community.

Other Performances

Gule Wamkulu is often preceded by mnjedza which is the performance by Chiefs, senior nyau members, Chief's wives and senior nyau women prior to the first Kapoli. No masks are worn, but each dancer carries a fly whisk, or cane, or a simple stick. They are said to clear the bwalo of all untoward spirits before the masked dancers enter the bwalo. In this sense, they are also preparing the way for the spirits to come to the bwalo.

In mnjedza, the men dance together in a single file, and the women do the same. In one particularly fine mnjedza performance, the two lines, one of men and one of women, circled the bwalo, then danced in patterns, one inside the

circle from the other, one following the other, then cutting across one another in organized patterns. Often, the lead Chief is a senior chief, wearing the emblems of his position: the serval hide and the cane or fly whisk.

Heralding mnjedza are a group of male elders, who circle the bwalo chanting and carrying sticks. The elders are given responsibility for beginning the mnjedza and ending it. These same elders watch over the entire proceedings, and comment on the event with one another afterward.

But the most important role of the nyau and the Gule Wamkulu is the funeral itself, according to nyau members. While this event is necessarily arranged in a short time, and therefore, especially in the case of community members without senior rank and position, may have far fewer masked dancers than other events, the funeral ritual is particularly poignant.

In one example, there was a funeral dance for a man who died in a car accident in 1990. He had been initiated as a young boy in a Chewa village in Bunda. Later, he had become a Christian, and went to school. At the time of his death, he was a mature man working in accounting in a firm in Blantyre, the largest commercial city in Malawi. Though he left his village, and nyau long ago, back in his village he was given a nyau burial.

In the funeral of this man, the most prominent masked dancers were Kumchere, a masked dance which is not common in the Gule Wamkulu. The Kumchere is a mask of cloth and feathers. Its most prominent costume feature is an erect penis made from rolled rags, with the end painted red. Kumchere performed with obvious sexual motions, and animal-like movements half-crawling in the dance.

Kumchere had been the mask once worn by the deceased nyau member, and the other Kumchere dancers had come 'to welcome

him to the grave' according to nyau members. It would have been the deceased's choice to have his own masked dance performed in this way, they said.

Before and after the dance performance, the bush around the village and especially near the graveyard, were particularly dangerous, with nyau dancers threatening passers-by. In this event, two Pwanyanya masked dancers lingered outside the village, with jagged red mouths painted on burlap bags.

The dance itself, a simple one with few mask forms aside from Kumchere, was preceded by the Kapoli rushing into the village with the men from the graveyard. Four Kapoli were carrying a stretcher of carved wood, which they 'pierced' through the ring of women standing close to the village house where the deceased lay.

The four Kapoli rushed inside the house, as the women inside hurriedly escaped outdoors. Two Kapoli leapt over the body twice, then the four Kapoli emerged from the house, carrying the body wrapped in white cloth, and ran to the graveyard.

Another man in Nkhoma became very ill, and was taken to the hospital. He called the Chief to hear his requests, and, though he had accepted Christianity, he requested a nyau funeral, with his most favored masked dance, Nyolonyo, and the Kasiyamaliro. The Chief began to organize this event, knowing the man would soon die.

In this funeral dance, the masked dancers, Nyolonyo, performed as requested by the then-dying man. Though he was an older man, he had never married, and the comments by the people suggested he should still have a full burial, even though, sadly, he had no wife and no children. An older unmarried man with no children is suspect in Chewa village life, and there seemed to be a common sentiment

that he should be given a proper burial in spite of his social condition.

During the performance, a Kapoli climbed to the top of a thatched roof overlooking the dance space as other masks performed. Another Kapoli beckoned toward the graveyard. As in other funerals, Kapoli dancers forced the crying women out of the house of the deceased. This time, though, the body of the deceased was carried to the graveyard in a procession behind the tall antelope mask of Kasiyamaliro, with the entire village and neighbors following in solemn and tearful silence.

Still other events are joyful occasions, such as the announcement of a new Chief, and the consecration of the new bwalo for the Chief. These occasions are more festive, with longer performances of the Gule Wamkulu, without the interference from masked dancers stalking the bush and the graveyard.

The announcement of a new Chief occurs during the performance of the Gule Wamkulu. At some point during the performance, the new Chief is 'caught' by a relative who covers the head of the new Chief from behind. The performance ends, as the crowds celebrate, women ululating, children running round the new Chief, and the masked dancers dancing in the midst of the people.

I have described the day-time Gule Wamkulu, which is usually the final dance in any masked event. Night dances are distinctly different from day dances in mood and in masks which perform. Any mask may be performed, but in the darkness and relative chaos of the night dance, the carved wooden masks are less likely to be seen, heard or appreciated. The most common masks performed at night are the large basketry forms, the animal constructions covered in the light-colored woven maize husks.

The animal constructions, known collectively as Chirombo and zinyau, are made in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, all large enough to conceal at least one dancer within its form. They depict a number of animals, but the most prominent include antelopes, bulls, buffalo, hare and zebra. I was told by nyau members that any animal could be represented in the Chirombo form.⁵⁷

With the pale color of the dried husks, these animal constructions dramatically catch the moonlight, as they twirl and circle the bwalo. The light interplays with the shadows from the large tree in the center of the bwalo, creating its own special effects on the moving masks. These constructions are performed in groups, at times with three, ten, or even twenty large mask forms in the bwalo at one time.⁵⁸

Accompanying these large constructions are male unmasked nyau dancers, running through the bwalo, coming close to the mask forms without touching them, crying out as wild animals, and generally kicking up the red dust of the bwalo. The mask forms twirl, purposely approaching the ring of observers, sometimes scattering the audience when coming too close. The night air is filled with the smell of the earth, as the air thickens with dust. The drums beat continually, echoing the cries and noises of frantic movements of the nyau members dancing with the masks.

These sequences are often repeated, interrupted at times by the entry of masked dancers with feathers, hide and carved wooden masks. These perform their own dance, as in the daytime performance, and then leave the bwalo, followed by the next dance sequence. In the course of a large night dance, ten or more large constructions may perform several times, interspersed by the masked dancers with their own song and performance.

The night dance may be climaxed by the sudden appearance of

a large bus with masked dancers inside,⁵⁹ again covered in the woven maize husks of the large animal constructions. In the Bunda area, particularly, there are low-flying helicopters over the fields of nearby tobacco estates. The helicopter has been re-created in the woven husk structure, as well as the more common car, Galimoto.⁶⁰

The night dance ends with the large constructions circling the bwalo, and returning to the graveyard in darkness. The people then disperse as well, using the moonlight to ease their travel home.

In the funeral remembrance performance of Gule Wamkulu, (as described in the beginning of this section and in Chapter Six), the same large animal constructions appear in the day performance. On these occasions, the appearance is more brief, usually circling the bwalo at the beginning of the dance. In other events, such as the funeral itself or in the consecration for a new Chief, the Kasiyamaliro often comes last, ending the performance.⁶¹

Conclusion

Throughout the Chapter, the detailed dance description and comments about the dance and nyau are intended to be understood from the position of the outsider, myself and others, seeing the dances for the first time.

Yet they are enough to enable us to understand masks and masked performance as 'the disclosure of another world' a world that is presupposed in performance, in oral traditions about performance, and in the spatial relationships of village, bwalo and graveyard/forest.

The theme of death and life in nyau masking is evident from the descriptions of the masks and spatial arrangement of the masking realm. Masked dancers prepare for the

performance in the secrecy of the graveyard, the place of death. These same masked dancers perform in the village itself, the place of the living. The Holi masked dancer sings out to the living to join him in death, to leave the village and come to the grave.

List of Twenty Common Mask Genre⁶²

1. Carved wooden masks

Chadzunda	Chief
Maria	Common female mask form
Simoni	Common male mask form
Chimbano	Animal mask form
Makanja	Mask of dancer on stilts
Kadyankhadze	Male mask form
N'gan'gande	Male mask form

3. Masks of feathers, hide, cloth and natural materials

Kapoli	Common generic name of feathered masks
Kasinja	Male form
Kachipapa	Female form
Nyolonyo	cloth, with two feathers, carries axe
Mbiyazodooka	Broken pot
Pwanyanya	Smasher
Kan'gwin'gwi	Messenger
Jere	Leads elephant mask
Chilembwe	Horse form covered with oiled sisal

3. Chirombo, large forms covered with dried maize husks

Kasiyamaliro	Antelope-like mask
Njobvu	Elephant mask
Ndondo	Python mask
Chimkoko	Larger version of Kasiyamaliro
Galimoto	'Large-bellied' automobile

CHAPTER ENDNOTES

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- 1 See the diary of Lovell Procter, reprinted by Bennet and Ylvisaker. 1971. p.234, and Landeg White 1987. p. 63
 - 2 Many nyau members have spoken of the masks as wild animals, as humans, and as spirits, separately and together. Nyau as a word encompasses masks, masked dancers, the secretive society which produces masks and members of the society, and the masked performances.
 - 3 See White 1987. p. 63
 - 4 See Bennet and Ylvisaker 1971. p.234
 - 5 See White 1987. p.63
 - 6 See Schoffeleers 1975. p.60 Paper presented to Society of Malawi, reprinted 1985.
 - 7 Schoffeleers. 1975. p.63
 - 8 Women do pay coins when the individual dancers come into the village, such as the messengers of upcoming dances. But primarily it is men who pay the dancers and only men who pay them during the Gule Wamkulu performance.
 - 9 Women do wear cloth masks, and even elaborate carved ones, such as one in the collection of masks at Mua Mission. They also dress as men, as well as women and dance for the young initiates in the secrecy of the initiation hut. This is from field research, 1988 and 1992.
 - 10 This was said by Chiefs and senior mask-makers, reaffirming other accounts. See Phiri. 1975. p.40.
 - 11 This place of origin is sung in one of the songs associated with a mask form depicting Chiefs, Chadzunda.
 - 12 See Schoffeleers and Roscoe. 1985. p.19. p.34-35
 - 13 This quote is from one of a series of interviews with an elder master carver, translated through my field assistant during field research in 1992.
 - 14 Included in this diaspora are the Chewa peoples in Zambia and Mozambique, and also groups of former slaves referred to by Tew 1950. p.30, in Tanzania and by Deliche 1993, in Somalia, (as topic of an unpublished paper presented to the African History Seminar, School of Oriental and African Studies.)
 - 15 The dating of masks now in the British Museum collection is mostly dependent upon estimates given by the owners and mask-makers. There was no incentive for ageing the masks more than necessary, and in fact, there seemed to be a higher value placed on more recent masks by the people themselves.
 - 16 See Schoffeleers and Lindgren. 1985. p.35
 - 17 For more information on the Proto-Chewa see Schoffeleers. 1979. p.149-155.
 - 18 See K. R. Robinson. 1973. p.31-40, and p.44-46, and Alpers. 1968. p.3-4
 - 19 See Chapter Seven in thesis.

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- 20 See Roberts, 1973. p. 22 and footnotes, p. 211
- 21 These statements were made in English or translated into English by members of nyau. In Chichewa, custom and tradition are Miyambo, or singular Mwambo, which refers to the teaching of customs to children by instructors as in initiation. The passing down and teaching of wisdom, is also described as mwambo in Scott and Heatherwick's dictionary, 1929. p.353.
- 22 See Heatherwick, 1929. p. 348
- 23 One mask had a string with a few beads attached inside described as medicine against witches. Nyau members say to dress with the mask is dangerous because of its association with dangerous things, such as things associated with witchcraft and the dead. However, they insist nyau is not based on witchcraft or sorcery. Rather, they use medicines to protect themselves from witches and sorcerers, especially in cases of jealousy to protect against those who are envious of their dancing ability.
- 24 Literature on witchcraft seems to support the insider's view. Marwick (1965) in particular juxtaposes nyau as a society which teaches good societal behavior and sorcery which embodies all that is negative in society. Yoshida (1991) makes the case for a tripartite cosmology incorporating masking, sorcery and spirit possession, yet clearly differentiates sorcerers and maskers. In the wider literature, witchcraft is associated with all that is bad, antithesis of society and is explained as opposed to religious beliefs, which would coincide with nyau member's insistence on nyau as their religion. (See Chapter 8 for further discussion and literature review).
- 25 (*Nyau-nyau* is defined in Scott. 1892. p.480 as: "Feeling of one's skin drawing together, crinkling, from fright...") This definition, of the skin reacting to fear, was described particularly by initiated members now living in urban areas, and non-initiated Malawians.
- 26 I should make it clear that these sources of both insiders and outsiders include men and women. While the material from nyau members relates in some cases to specifically male domains, initiated Chewa women also offered insights into the perception of nyau as spirits, as wild animals, as being related to medicines, and as being their custom and the way their ancestors did things. At least one woman in each village receives training in both the male and female sides of nyau, and are well versed in the teachings of each.
- 27 See Heatherwick, 1929. p. 28 for other uses of the bwalo and for definition of the word.
- 28 Not every Chewa village performs the Gule Wamkulu. Throughout the central region, villages have divided between Christian practices and nyau practices, forcing in some cases, the actual division of a village into two separate villages, one with a Christian Chief and one with a nyau Chief. This thesis is focused on the

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- majority of rural villages which continue to practice nyau.
- 29 Having a bwalo is equivalent to being able to bury your own dead properly. Without use of the bwalo, people in a community must resort to requesting permission from other villages with a bwalo to perform community rites such as funerals and initiations of the young into maturity.
- 30 See Heatherwick 1929. p. 28
- 31 This range is derived from the government census reports by village in districts in the central region, from the National Statistics Office, Zomba, 1977.
- 32 The literature on Chewa kinship is referred to in specific terms throughout the thesis, but includes the work of G.T. Nurse (1978), Lucy Mair (1969), Naran Coissaro, (1966) and others.
- 33 Not once did I observe a man living together with two wives in the same place, though divorce, remarriage, and polygynous marriage are not uncommon. This separation of wives was explained as being customary in the course of field research.
- 34 Members are easily identified by code words and gestures taught in secretive initiations. The same basic code words and questions are taught in initiation over the peoples comprising nyau, and certainly in my research area. See Van Breughel 1985. p.502, and Schoffeleers 1968. p.357
- 35 I have seen three such cement graves with the likeness of Kasiyamaliro on them. It is still rare to find the cement markers in rural areas, but these graves are of people who are well respected for their commitment to nyau. It is an honor to have the Kasiyamaliro on the grave. I was told this, though they could not tell me who the person actually was.
- 36 Mysterious Nyau dances are advertised for tourists to see in Victoria Falls, and outside Harare in Tengenenge art center. Experienced nyau dancers have told me about competitions to perform in South Africa and other parts of southern Africa for money.
- 37 This was apparent in personal communication with Tom Blomefield, the head of Tengenenge Sculpture Community in Zimbabwe, June 20, 1993.
- 38 This number was given me by Fr. Claude Boucher who has a collection of more than 400 masks, including many new varieties from the central and southern regions of Malawi. These, combined with my own documentation of more than fifty, and others by Kenji Yoshida together may exceed this figure.
- 39 The range of research and the reasons for doing a regional study are addressed in the foreword.
- 40 I chose this event to focus on the various masked dances. Often, events will begin with the elders walking round the bwalo, with a chanting song. For another description including the role of the elders, see

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- Kamlongera et.al, 1992.
- 41 See Yoshida. 1993. p.40 who also records the combination of initiation and funeral events. He cites this as the normal condition in Zambia, whereas in Malawi the initiation is a separate event which is combined for economic purposes.
- 42 This Namkungwi died in April 1992. A large event for her remembrance was being planned for June the following year.
- 43 In other funeral remembrances, including one seen in this same village, the Kasiyamaliro comes into the bwalo, rather than the village for the main event. The day before the final afternoon event, the Kasiyamaliro in this village did emerge into the village itself, twirling among the houses before being led off again by the throngs of boys and men. I suggest this is another indication of efficiency in enjoining two rituals into one in this year of drought.
- 44 Woyera is translated as shining, brightness, whiteness, clean and pure, and beautiful by various translators. Also see Heatherwick 1929. p. 602 and 125, for yera and -era. This definition is referred to again in Chapters Six and Seven.
- 45 The appearance of Kasiyamaliro first is most common in funeral remembrances. They may also appear for the initiation dances, but more commonly appear last in initiations. They universally appear last in the funerals of senior people, since the Kasiyamaliro leads the procession of people from the bwalo to the graveyard. Thus, it is commonly first in the funeral remembrance, and last in the funeral itself.
- 46 In the performances I have seen in this same village over several years, most of the dancers are visible throughout the event. They sit together on one side of the bwalo, watching the performance themselves. This is not as common in other villages, where the dancers appear on the fringes of the bwalo just before their own individual performance, and then leave, returning to the graveyard or move on to another performance.
- 47 The feathers on masks were once indicative of its authority, with the wings of an owl on a particularly powerful carved mask in a Dowa area village, for example. Most masks now have a variety of more common feathers, and more masks are being made today without any feathers at all.
- 48 In other events where the dancers are not all present throughout the performance, there is an organizer in the bwalo and another in the graveyard or liunde, any hidden place where the dancers gather to perform. The order of dancers is then coordinated in the liunde before the dancers enter the bwalo.
- 49 Having the same masks follow one another is a strategy and choice by the event organizers, senior and active nyau members. Other performances have more variety,

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- mixing the kinds of masks rather than grouping them all together. However, this is partly determined by who actually shows up for the dance.
- 50 I have attended performances with as few as ten or twelve masks and as many thirty or forty different performances. The variety depends upon a number of factors: availability of the best performers, the importance of the event, and adequate payment for dancers. The villages, such as the host village, which have pride in their performances, and are willing to participate in other performances in other villages will receive more reciprocal help for their own.
- 51 It is rare to have two such fine dancers of this particular mask in one village. Other pairs I have seen include two dancers from different villages in the same area.
- 52 In other Gule Wamkulu performances unlike this particular one, the climax performance was by two dancers in a mask form called Chilembwe which bounds into the bwalo without warning and without being led. This mask is a large, tall two-man animal mask covered with oiled sisal fibers swaying with each movement. At the sight of this large mask form pushing into the bwalo in one event, young children ran in fear, some crying, and even young women fled, looking back again from a safer distance. This performance in 1992 lacked this theatrical drama and the throngs of people, but represents a more common performance which occurs in nearby villages every week compared to the great performances which are fewer in number and are widely attended.
- 53 The word Makanja comes from the root nja- to tread firmly. See Heatherwick 1929. p. 387.
- 54 In other events, I have seen these masked dancers leap into the air, jump over a man's head, somersault on the ground and still be able to rise up without assistance.
- 55 In several performances, I have seen a mask called Mbalangwe which turns in circles, and is known to chase people away if they linger too long. Francis Moto, in personal communication, also referred to a large red carved mask in his home village which chases people away at the conclusion of the dance performance.
- 56 In other village areas, the initiated girls are expected to go through this dance bare-chested. However, this practice is changing, and the wearing of the bra is an example of that change. In Bunda, closer to the capital city, three girls undergoing initiation wore simple sleeveless tops. Further south, away from the city, girls were initiated with bare chests.
- 57 For detailed description of these forms, see Birch 1988, p. 28.
- 58 For more description of the mask construction, see Birch 1988. p.28-29.
- 59 This bus was described by an assistant who attended a

dance I had missed in another village. The bus was described as being life-size, and filled with people, albeit in masks. Such constructions as buses, cars and airplanes are not uncommon, I was told, though I have not seen one myself.

- 60 In the Bunda area, the compound of a group Chief has a helicopter in clay outlined on the side of a house as well.
- 61 The reasons for the appearances of Kasiyamaliro at the beginning and end of certain performances will be more clear in the descriptions in subsequent Chapters. Even so, these general rules are not always the case in every kind of event, or in every village which practices nyau.
- 62 The use of the term 'genre' is explained in more detail in Chapter Four, to identify, differentiate and establish a hierarchy of masks.



Fig. 4

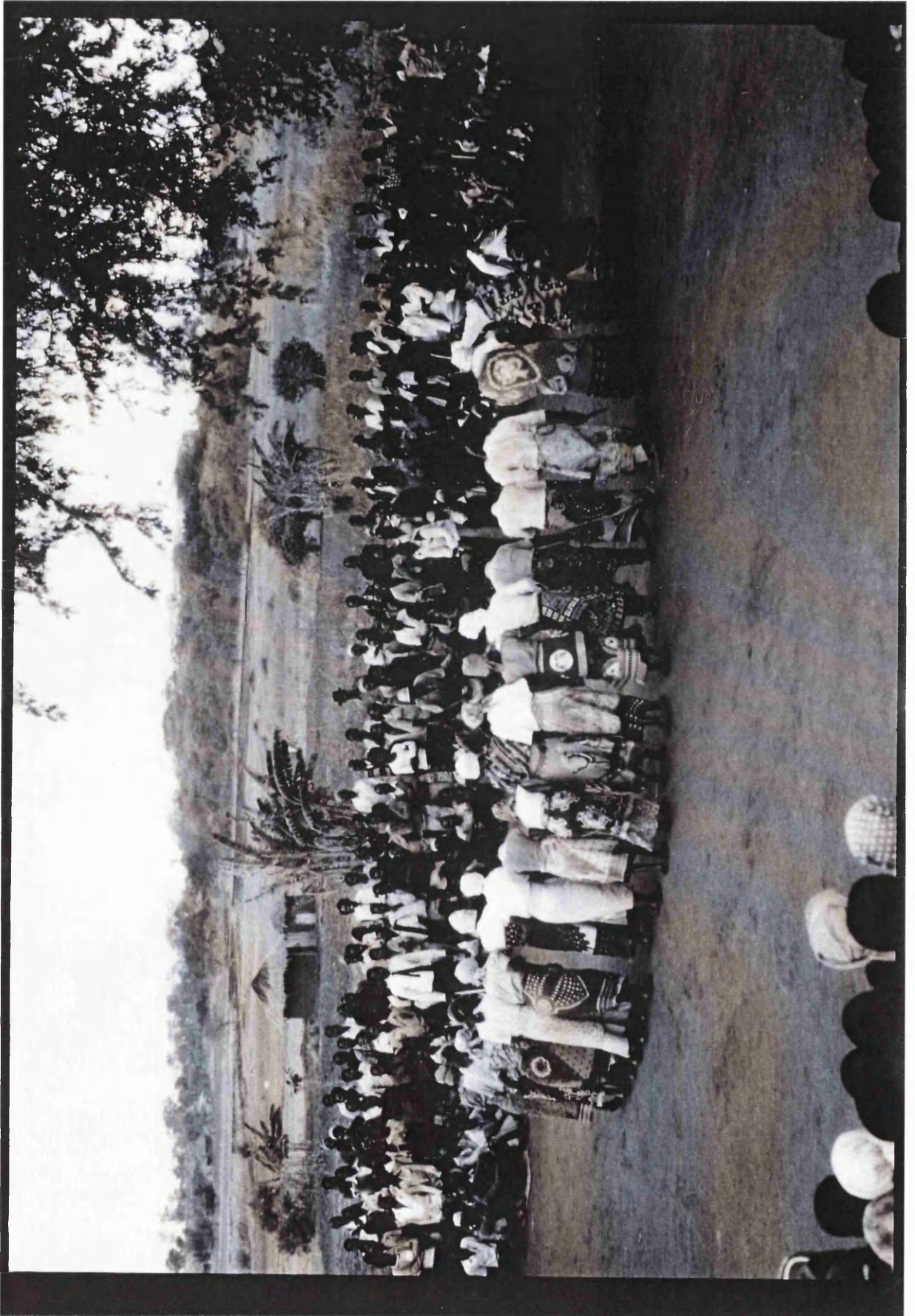


Fig. 5

CHAPTER TWO: Masks in History

Masks, Outsiders and Historical Events

Masks exact and presuppose certain events and experiences in the history of the Chewa. The objective of this section is to investigate the representation of social history through the current practices in masking, re-constructing historical experience from the interpretations of masks today.

One aspect or dimension of the experience of masks is the manner in which they represent different kinds of history. On the one hand there are specificities of individual villages, titles and institutions, and masks. On the other there are those temporal concerns that transcend such specificities. In Chewa experience one can distinguish between: 1). Mythic origins 2). oral tradition relating to the Maravi Empire 3). history, in the sense of events for which there is written documentation, in particular, early European and Arabian contacts leading to colonial rule and the post-Independence period.

Masks of wild animal form, consistently described as the oldest and earliest masks, can be related to an economy based upon foraging and hunting, or to the remembrance thereof (given that their construction depends upon maize, an introduction from the Americas by the Portuguese in the 16th century).

In contrast, the leadership roles, enacted by masks such as Chadzunda, were established in the context of the Maravi Empire, at its peak in the 16th century, and its subsequent division into groups such as the Chewa and Mang'anja by the 18th century.

The formation and dissolution of the Maravi Empire overlaps

with the inception of external (especially Portuguese explorers and plantation farmers and Arab traders and slavers); and in due course leading to British and Portuguese colonial rule. Masks such as the Simoni Portuguese slaver and British colonial officer can be dated to events such as these. Masks relating to post-Independence experience include masks depicting a modern Doctor, foreign aid workers and Mozambican refugees.

It is not possible to account for all nyau masks by reference to these temporal categories; but a great many do entail these implications.

Masks have clearly entered the performance repertoire at specific times for specific reasons, embodying/enacting historical experiences in the life of the community even if the original circumstance are not known. Nevertheless, in field research, some of the historical reasons for the existence of certain masks were made clear by nyau members. I was thus able to trace the origins of certain masks to historical events, and therefore, to date the likely year or period of their appearance in the dance.

The earliest dateable mask forms in this sense are probably the Arab and Portuguese slavers, and Ngoni warriors. The presence of Portuguese landlords with slaves in this region has been recorded by Gamitto, in his official travels with the Portuguese military in 1831. Lacerda, another military officer, recorded his expedition into the region in 1798. Both Lacerda and Gamitto indicate settlements of Portuguese in large farming and mining estates in Mozambique, near the border with Malawi.¹

The earliest slave raiding incursions into the Chewa area by Arabs and Portuguese took place in the course of Maravi Empire, (16th to 18th centuries) and ended by the late 19th century². In contemporary nyau dance performances, masks representing slavers are shown as red-faced foreigners with facial features described by the Chewa as frightful and

cruel. One such mask has a silver earring in one ear.

The slave trade continued through the "times of war" marked by the inception of the Ngoni raids in the 1830s, through to the end of that century. I was told many peoples still feared foreigners well into the 20th century, afraid of being sold into slavery.³² Yao people, who had adopted Islam, encroached on Chewa villages along the lakeside.

These "times of war" are documented by early missionaries in Magomero, particularly in Lovell Procter's diaries from 1860 to 1864. In one passage after another, Lovell describes seeing the smoke rising from distant villages attacked by the 'Achawa' as the Yao were called. Raids or stories of raids occurred month after month, and sometimes every other day, according to the missionary diary of Lovell Procter from Magomero 1862, noting 'Achawa' raids against the Mang'anja and Chewa. These villages were further threatened by the 'Makololo' warriors, who even frightened the 'Achawa' raiders.⁴

In this "time of wars" as it is still referred to in the central region, people fled from Ntcheu and Dedza into the savannah highlands and up into the mountains of Nkhoma. Chewa peoples from Salima near the lakeshore, also fled from slavery and incursions of Yao peoples into the savannah highlands and up on to Nkhoma mountain.⁵ People whose families fled into Nkhoma mountain describe the Ngoni raids as if they had happened a few years ago.

The people who climbed Nkhoma mountain survived the first raids. They built houses on the mountain's side, and in the mountain saddle. They gave offerings at the rain shrine, buried two Chiefs in the years they survived on the edge of rock, and performed the masked dances in the secrecy of the mountain saddle.

Ngoni warrior masks, and the masks of slavers are said to evoke great fear in the people who remember the raids and

remember their parents and elders talking about the raids. The dancer wearing the Ngoni warrior mask described the fear of the elderly people who remembered stories about living on the mountain during the Ngoni raids. He felt his mask was very important to cause these emotions, and he felt he was the most feared of all the dancers. "I feel more powerful than anyone, even the Chief. All the Chiefs have to fear me when I dance."⁶

The Jere Regency

In addition to the Ngoni warrior there is a masked tradition called Jere, the masked dancer responsible for leading the largest and most respected mask signifying the power of the Chiefs: Njobvu, the elephant. The elephant itself belongs to the category of large animal constructions said to be the oldest and undated masked tradition. These masks most likely existed well before the 1800s, being the most important masks in Chewa construction of the world, which is explained in Chapter Seven.

Jere is a word taken from the Ngoni Maseko clan, who broke off from other Ngoni at the Zambezi River.⁷ Jere became a common clan name in Malawi introduced by the Ngoni, and possibly, at the same time, became the name of a mask form. Jere is also the name of a series of Ngoni Chiefs, beginning with the sons of Zwangendaba, the Zulu military leader who first fled Shaka, crossing the Zambezi in 1835.

The first Jere clan name began in 1848, prior to the subsequent invasions into Chewa populations in Malawi. The first of the Jere kings, a son of Zwangendaba, eventually settled in northern Malawi in the 1850s, near Rumphu. He ruled until his death and was succeeded by Amon Jere from 1896 until his death in 1970. Yet another Jere chieftaincy was formed in the then-Chewa area of Nkota-Kota.⁸

Other off-shoots of the Jere regency migrated southward, settling in Chewa territory in Ntchisi, Dowa and Mvera by

the 1870s. From these positions, the Ngoni raided the Chewa, capturing slaves, until the warring abated with the presence of Scottish missionaries in 1878. The Ngoni Jere areas came, reluctantly, under British rule by the turn of the century. Eventually, the Ngoni intermarried, and adopted Chewa customs.⁹

The word Jere may also be related semantically to ijere the Ngoni word for a rogue bull elephant. This description is further explained by Young as "the sort of animal that enters a native village, lifts the tops off maize bins and gorges on the contents."¹⁰

Given this semantic connection, it is not difficult to see why the mask Jere leads the elephant Njobvu into the bwalo and into the village. The Ngoni raiders may have been likened to the rogue bull elephant rushing into the village, frightening off all the people, and stealing their food.

Kwa (place where one comes from) Jere is also defined as the 'great place', 'the place of Jere', the court, and the Chief's capital; all references to the powerful Chief of the Zulu, former ruler of the Ngoni. Young asserts in his publication from 1932, that old men also said Jere meant 'great numbers'.¹¹ Together Jere may be interpreted as the place of great numbers, and perceived as those great numbers arriving in warring parties to conquer the scattered Chewa villages.

The term Ajere is also linked to "famed hunters", and is associated by nyau with depictions of hunters.¹² Hodgson (1933. p.134) describes a performance by Njobvu and four Ajere with axes imitating the killing of the elephant. While Njobvu is considered a very old mask form, it is firmly associated with Jere today. As the Chewa say, one does not appear without the other in the dance.

Maravi Clans and Chief Lineage

Another 19th century name, Kabunduli, is found among the Chewa mask repertoire, particularly in the northwest area of the central region. The mask form known as Kabunduli, or more commonly Duli, is described by the Chewa as tough, dangerous, and a soldier or fighter. The dancer carries a weapon such as an axe. The role of Duli is one of an enforcer, who patrols the area around the graveyard and near the dancers to keep outsiders away.

The name Kabunduli dates from the 18th century and possibly earlier,¹³ and is the name of a Maravi sub-chief in the Lake District west of Nyasa who defeated his cousin, Kanyenda, referred to as a Chewa. Kanyenda was the Maravi (Mazizi)¹⁴ King's son, identified with the Mwali, or Banda clan and Kabunduli the King's nephew, associated with the Phiri clan.¹⁵ Eventually, the nephew's chieftaincy, Kabunduli, defeats the chieftaincy of Kanyenda.

The chieftaincy of Kabunduli is explained in a story of a search for a new Chief, in which a messenger is sent with a fly whisk and medicines to lay on the Chief's head. After the Chief has slept, the messenger asks how he slept, and if he replies, 'I dreamt of war' he is the new Chief, Kabunduli.¹⁶

Chadzunda, as the mask form depicting Chiefs, may be linked with the story of Kabunduli. The importance of this possible historical link between Kabunduli and the Chewa mask Chadzunda, is two-fold. First, the dominance of the Phiri clan over the more established Banda suggests the stronger emphasis on political authority and lineage as presented by the mask of Chiefs, Chadzunda, and second, introduces the emblems of chieftaincy, the fly whisk which is part of Chadzunda's attire, and the medicines.

If these relationships are indeed manifest in nyau and

masking, then I would suggest that the medicines are the mzinda¹⁷ the bundle of special medicines given by a senior Chief to a subordinate Chief to give the subordinate the privilege of opening his own bwalo, the right to organize nyau in his own village. In other words, it is the medicine which confers and legitimizes the right to conduct rituals, nyau rituals of initiation and proper burials within the Chief's own village, and marks this Chief as a subordinate of a specific paramount Chief.¹⁸

Chilembwe in the Colonial Period

John Chilembwe, educated and trained by missionaries, staged an uprising against the British colonial administration in Magomero in 1915. The uprising failed, but the drama of the event was felt in the southern and central regions of Malawi. Stories of the English chasing after the rebels are still told by people old enough to remember the event. Participants in the uprising fled back to their villages, and though the British were diligent in their search, some were never captured.¹⁹ But the elderly still talked about the coming of the white people on their horses, galloping after the rebels.

Since the time of the uprising, in 1915, a new mask appeared in the repertoire of the Chewa performance. It is the Chilembwe, a large, animal-like construction holding two men within a hollow frame, with four sisal-covered leggings; the four legs of the horse. The head is on a long pole held by the man in the front end of the construction, and the whole frame is covered in oiled sisal strips, making it dark brown in color. Some nyau members have said it is a horse, and the sisal tied down the back of the pole, is like the mane of the horse.

Unlike other large animal constructions, this one is performed as part of the Gule Wamkulu, without the ritual role of the other large constructions. Also, Chilembwe is described as being quite recent unlike the other large

constructions. Usually it is seen bounding toward the bwalo, forcefully breaking through the ring of people. As it approaches, young children and even young women run away, as in the original scenario of the chase.

Nyau members in the southern part of the central region clearly identified the mask form as a horse, and elderly people still remembered stories of Chilembwe's men escaping the British soldiers who were on horses. In Bunda, in contrast, the direct experience with Chilembwe's raid is not evident, and the nyau members refer to Chilembwe as a more recent mask adopted as a kind of antelope.

It seems that over the decades, as in Bunda, the form of the horse came to resemble other large animals, like the buffalo or bull, or antelope, further obscuring its possible 1915 origin. In the central savannah areas, the word for roan antelope is Chilembwe, and the mask form has been re-created as an antelope form, especially north of Nkhoma in Bunda, in the range of this animal.²⁰ Nyau members in Bunda say that the Chilembwe mask is fairly recent, perhaps first performed as little as twenty years ago, while those in Nkhoma seem to relate the mask to the experience of Chilembwe's raid.

Younger nyau members could not tell me whether the mask name referred to either a roan antelope or the man Chilembwe. This was particularly true in the northern areas of the central region, such as Bunda, further geographically from the site of Chilembwe's raid. Nyau members in Kasungu, north of Bunda, have said they do not have the mask form Chilembwe in their repertoire.

It seems plausible that the mask form may have been first made for the funeral or funeral remembrance dance for the death of Chilembwe himself, in a village area familiar with the man and his violent act and violent death. Chilembwe was born into a Nyanja village, his mother's village, which must have had experience of nyau. This form may then have

been adopted by other nyau members, and eventually became a well-known mask genre in the region, with or without the knowledge of the association with Chilembwe himself.

Also, Chilembwe stands as a separate category of nyau mask, an animal construction between the categories of the more powerful animal constructions, Chirombo night masks and the human day mask forms. It is also associated with the very enemies Chilembwe tried to overcome: the British and their horses (even today only expatriates own horses). Chilembwe is a mask that embodies the energies of the rebel, and the administration that defeated him, and their horses; and is in some areas the horse is re-interpreted as some an antelope.

Chilembwe has become an established and popular character in the Gule Wamkulu. Whether it is commonly always identified with Chilembwe as the man who staged the uprising against the British or not, it stands as a powerful and potent force within nyau, a furious spirit of the dead.²¹

Makanja, Maasai and Pastoralists

Stilt dancers are not unique among the Chewa. Varieties of dancers wearing stilts are evident in other masking complexes of Africa such as the Dogon, Igbo, and Ndembu. The tall masks have been referred to as water fowl, as being tall as a two-story house, and as being tall ghosts by various researchers. While it seems likely that the masked dancer on stilts is known in various masked performances, local interpretations of its origin and role may be quite different.

Etymologically, the Chewa stilt form Makanja may be broken down to its basic forms, (Maka: surpassing, exceeding others; and nja: of firm tread, from outside, being numerous, the dust raised as an indication of great numbers).²² Associated words provide another clue to this tall mask form in its song, which refers to a person from a

foreign country, (Dzikolendo)²³, and to being the fastest, the strongest, the one who beats the rest, as described by nyau members, (Namphala).

These clues were finally joined with the explanation of a mask-maker and assistant that the carved mask represented the Maasai warriors, and more generally the tall cattle-herding peoples from 'a foreign country' in this case from the north. These foreigners were considered the best warriors in the world; fearful people who kept cattle and were known to drink blood. The Maasai are also very tall people compared to the relatively short stature of the Chewa people. The Chewa referred to them as the tall people from another country, (Zowa wa Makongono).²⁴

If this interpretation by nyau members is to be accepted, then the inclusion of Makanja with a carved wooden mask in the Gule Wamkulu may be tied to historical events. Perhaps the Maasai may have been encountered by nyau members from the turn of this century to World War I, while the Nyassa Kings African Rifles were stationed in Kenya. The Nyassa battalion of the Kings African Rifles served in the British conflict against the Mullah in Somaliland as early as 1899, and served in British East Africa, including being stationed in Nairobi, from 1901 through World War I.²⁵ If the contact between the Maasai and the Nyassa (Malawi) forces occurred through the Kings African Rifles, it seems likely that the representation comes from this time.

The characterization of the Maasai as warriors from pastoralist societies, may have resulted from the strong experiences of nyau members who served in the wars against pastoralist warriors in Somalia. This historical experience might then have been attached to the mask of the tall fearful warriors, and the choice of Maasai as one representative peoples of those encountered by the Nyassa soldiers in Somalia and Kenya. Since the Chewa say that only witches eat corpses and drink blood, the diet of fresh

blood of the pastoralist societies, it seems reasonable that this practice would be disgusting and frightful to the farming nyau members.

There was no indication by nyau members that the mask had another representation prior to the one of a tall warrior.²⁶ However, it is still possible that the Makanja form existed prior to encounters with the Maasai, as the Ngoni were also considered tall people and fearful warriors who kept cattle.

The masked dancer Makanja commonly has a wooden carved mask, according to mask-makers, indicating its role as human.²⁷ The masks are carved with the same realism of the other masks, and can be white, pale red and most often, black. The black color of the Makanja is another indication of its formidable warrior's strength. Such a mask was described to me by nyau members as being virile, strong, masculine and handsome.

However, Makanja are danced with cloth and hide masks as well, and may be associated with an even more distant past with long-legged waterfowl, though few would suggest this explicitly. So it remains that the totality of the mask...tall in height, with a carved face mask, songs which refer to the warrior from another country, with the strength and physical prowess of a Maasai or Ngoni warrior, movements which in the best dancers are acrobatic with somersaults and leaps, all indicate the same theme.

Christianity, Missionaries and Nyau Masks

The presence of missionaries has been a major cause of change, and a continuing process rather than a single historical event. Missionaries are depicted in the masks in friendship, in ridicule and in fear. The relations with missionaries were varied and changeable over time, and the masks reflect these variations.

The first missions were established from the mid-1800s

onwards. Early missionaries were often treated with complete distrust, being feared by the people as potential slavers.²⁸ By the early 1900s, however, the growth of missions included the Universities Missions to Central Africa, Church of Scotland, Dutch Reformed Church, the White Fathers, Montfort Fathers and Marist Brothers, and the Baptist Industrial Mission.²⁹

One example of the earliest missionary mask dates from the late 1930's, according to those who showed me the mask and knew the late mask-maker. No one any longer remembers the name of the man whose portrait it is. But it was said that the mask was of a priest, tied to the opening of a Catholic parish church in Linthipe, coinciding with the making of this mask. The mask depicts an open-mouthed smile, jolliness, even happiness; a friendly addition to the masked community.

In another example, the mask's face of a contemporary Presbyterian missionary is described as sour, unhappy and even angry. While the name of the Catholic priest is no longer known, the identity of this other mask is remembered within the community and region where it has performed since the 1950s.

The Presbyterian missionary is remembered for insisting on women coming to the hospital to give birth, and a road was cut from the village to the main road leading to the hospital. According to nyau and Christian members alike, however, some of the women had no wish to go to the hospital, preferring to give birth in the village.

This Presbyterian mask is known as Kasapoli, (one who does not stand up from hoeing in the garden), the opposite of the popular mask form Kapoli (to stand up from hoeing). It is portrayed in the dance entering the bwalo and chasing the women away, then dancing alone. The dancer wears a chitenji, a woman's skirt, indicating his insistence in persuading the women, to talk to them, rather than observe

the gender separations between men and women on childbirth in the village. According to members of the community, the masked dancer's performance demonstrated how the missionary tried to talk to the women, but ended up by himself, dancing alone.

Another interpretation provided by a Chewa Christian (also initiated into nyau), is that the masked dancer is portraying the character of the Protestant mission, as people who did not dance, did not drink, and were generally considered sour and angry by the nyau community. Also, the mask refers to the mission which forbade its members to participate in any of the masked events. This ban included the obligatory funeral performances for members of the village communities.

Opposition to nyau by Christian missions had its effects on Chewa society and nyau masking. Christianity caused tremendous rifts in villages and between families, who were faced with the choice to become Christian or to remain with nyau. One village was split in half by Christians and nyau, and remains split to this day, divided by a dirt road and by continued animosity.³⁰

A man from Bunda described his own village as having been split, but retaining the same Chief in the mid-1900s. Christians moved to one side of the community, and nyau to the other. Finally, even the graveyard was split between Christian burials and nyau burials. This village resolved its differences, however, in the 1980s, and now includes members of both Christian and nyau beliefs within its graveyard bounds. Other villages retain an uneasy coexistence, as was evident in an event I attended in 1992, where the few practicing Christians stayed indoors the entire day while the rest of the village community performed the nyau dance.

Interestingly, with this animosity, aspects of Christianity

have been adopted in the nyau masked dance. Maria and Simoni (also referred to by nyau members as Simon Peter) in Chewa tradition are directly related to the Biblical names. Nyau members refer to a less common mask called Joseph as a father, and a triptych of Joseph, Maria and an infant in Maria's arms is described by Rangeley in (1949. p.³¹). This triptych, apparently, is no longer commonly performed. Interestingly, the BaKonga and the Bemba,³² also link their traditional concept of God, (Nzambi), with "Desu, (Jesus) Maria and Nzambi" ³³

The name Maria has been incorporated in the Chewa experience, along with the veil worn for Mass by Portuguese Catholic women. This practice of Maria masks having a veil or scarf covering the head was still prevalent in the 1980s, but was not apparent in the same village areas in 1992, having fallen out of use.

The adoption of Christian images in the masking complex has undergone some change, as the Christian churches and nyau society are at odds with one another. Members of nyau are at times also members of a Christian church, and tend to practice both, often covertly. These nyau members bring Christian religious practices and insights into the realm of nyau. Others are diametrically opposed to one another, as in the Christian who refuses to attend nyau functions, and the nyau dancer who satirizes Christian prayer in the dance.³⁴

Labor Migration

The practice of Malawian workers migrating to work outside Malawi began in 1903, when 930 men were recruited by Wenela, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association. By the year 1970, as many as 92,000 working age males in Malawi were recruited to work in the South African mines.³⁵ In 1935 a commission was set up to examine the impact of Malawians leaving to work outside the country. They found that 25 to 30 percent never returned to their homes, wives

and families. Further, at one point, one of every four males in Malawi were outside the country as migrant workers, indicating the tremendous social upheaval of migration in just over 30 years.³⁶

One man, a recruiter for Wenela, remains in the Namitete village today in which he once recruited workers in the 1950s. Mr. Davis has been identified by a former Colonial officer still living in the area who knew the man. The mask of Mr. Davis appeared at a funeral remembrance dance, where it performed in the likeness of Mr. Davis, as the villagers remembered him.

This mask may be viewed as an emblem of one social process: the leaving of males in large numbers to earn wages in a foreign country. In the initiation of girls, one song is still sung about the men leaving the village to find work, and the women having to wait behind and not take another husband.

In a final tribute to the Colonial period, there are accounts of the coronation of King George V performed by masked dancers in the nyau performance. The performance included the crowning of the British King.³⁷

Nyau Masks, Politics and Personalities

Since Independence, nyau masking has been encouraged. Masked dances are incorporated in the National Day celebrations, and the Malawi Congress Party has included the dances in their programs to attract people to rallies and speeches. The Malawi Congress Party has also become more involved in the nyau practices. Since the time I began attending the dances in 1985 to 1992, such changes were evident. Malawi Congress Party members and Area Chairmen were incorporated as speakers at the beginning of events by 1992, announcing monies raised and naming supporters.

In 1992, the political situation was changing. The era of the Life President was challenged by calls for multi-party elections, and a referendum on allowing opposition parties was promised. There were various reports in 1992, and after my departure in 1993, of nyau dancers being sent to opposition party rallies to break up the rallies.

In areas such as Bunda which are closer to the main cities, the youth league members were present (1992) at the nyau events. These youths wore their para-military red shirts and carried clubs to keep people in order, patrolling the audience during events. In more unruly events in the past, nyau acrobats and other members controlled the crowds by somersaulting into the audience to push them back, or rushing into one section of people who had moved too far into the center of the bwalo in the excitement of the event.

New masks have appeared since Independence, most notably the masks of the Life President and his Official Hostess.³⁸ In 1979, Queen Elizabeth II arrived for an official visit to Malawi. With her was a man described by a mask-maker as "tall, heavy, a big man with a moustache, and quite handsome". His face was re-created two weeks after the mask-maker watched the Queen's arrival from the observation deck at the airport.

Development and Foreigners

Even development projects are depicted in the dance, on local village terms. One example described to me by a nyau member from Dowa recalls the experience of villagers during the building of the main roads. The building of a road for the young independent country of Malawi was said to be undertaken by the South Koreans. Near Dowa where the road was built, the Korean workers were rumored to have caused a disease among the local villagers. This episode in time is remembered by the mask MaKorea, and its accompanying song about the disease.³⁹

Modern Innovations

The supposedly earliest category of masks, the large animal constructions of mythic origins has also been extended to include similar constructions of cars, Galimoto, and helicopters, and a bus whirling round the night-time bwalo full of passengers. The inclusion of these constructions in the repertoire of zinyau is relatively new, and reflects the change from the past when animals were part of everyday life, to modern times where the sightings of large animals are likely only in the wildlife refuges, and the population is now acquainted with moving vehicles.⁴⁰ The car or Galimoto is painted on rock shelters along with paintings of Kasiyamaliro, in a procession of nyau characters.⁴¹

Automobiles, buses and aircraft are more common sights today. The masks are now described as being moved by "drivers" who "steer" the masks in the bwalo. The word, 'yende' to move, is now appropriated to include the mechanical 'steering' of the masks. Yet these masks are incorporated within the genre of the large animal constructions, the mask forms most closely associated with religious beliefs and wisdom of the elders.⁴²

One explanation is suggested in the work of MacGaffey who equates such images of vehicles in dreams among the BaKongo with the movement of souls.⁴³ With this insight, it may be plausible to think of the vehicles as a means for the movement of spirits.⁴⁴

The single most important lesson in nyau is that these large mask forms are moved by people. People are inside the animal, not spirit forms. This secret, once revealed, changes the initiates' perception of the masks, as they are now known to be fellow initiates and not strange and dangerous animals after all. The revelation that helicopters seen flying low over the village fields are driven and moved by man is an important part of the lesson as well. Man controls the vehicles. Man drives the large

animals.

Thus, the experience of travel in buses and cars, of roads and aircraft overhead are now incorporated in the Chewa masked event. Interestingly, these experiences were made part of a repertoire of mythical proportions, as the oldest masked tradition now incorporating the newest mask forms.

Bridging Local and Imported Medical Traditions

Another mask form appeared for the first time in the Bunda area in 1990, known by the English word Doctor. This dancer wears a Halloween mask of soft plastic which allows the dancer to eat a banana while sitting among the elders and he wears medicinal bundles around his ankles, and a stethoscope around his neck.

In his various performances, he has sat in the bwalo with a dancer wearing a Maria mask, holding hands as Europeans do, and on another occasion carried a camera, taking a picture of me taking a picture of him. His popularity has grown since he began performing, and he is regularly invited to Gule Wamkulu performances.

Media Personalities

Charlie Chaplin⁴⁵ is remembered by middle-aged Malawians who have seen the old films in primary school. Chaplin has been re-created as a mask in various ways. One is a pale-painted mask of a Simoni, and another is a black-painted, elongated mask made in 1989. The latter mask was made by an elderly mask-maker who explained how he first saw this character, Chaplani in Kenya, many years ago, describing him as a very funny man.

The masked dancer appears in the dance wearing a black coat down to his knees and black trousers. He is tied by the hands, held on a leash and restrained by a Kapoli. As he enters the bwalo, he breaks through the restraints, and dances in a frenzy, described as frantically hitting out at the people. This description may be likened to the early

films in which Chaplin was filmed in fast motion.

Elvis Presley also appears in the dance. The masked dancer wears a costume with an exaggerated high collar, and the Simoni mask form of Presley includes long black sideburns. The dance is like other Simoni dances, unlike the famous movements of Presley himself.

These mask forms were created prior to common familiarity with television, videos, and films. As Malawian society as a whole opens to the outside world with television and increased travel, more of these kinds of masks may become part of the nyau repertoire.

Mozambican Refugees

Finally, since the late 1980s, refugees have been streaming into Malawi fleeing the civil war in Mozambique. These refugees have been gathered into camps since that time, creating dense populations of people on the borders of Malawi. In 1992, nyau members reported that people in the Mozambican refugee camps were dressing in masks from the Gule Wamkulu and begging for money along the main road. In 1993, one assistant wrote to inform me about a mask depicting the Mozambican refugee in the Gule Wamkulu, painted black and made of carved wood. This mask may become another example of the ongoing historical experience in contemporary Chewa masking.

Conclusion

Masks incorporate experiences originating outside the Chewa village. As nyau leaders explained, those who observe the masked dance in the bwalo include outsiders: visitors, guests, and foreigners. They may come with a friend, or attend the funeral of someone they knew. These outsiders present in the bwalo are present in the masked dance. Those who were once part of the community, such as missionaries or health workers, or colonial administrators, or development workers or refugees, are remembered in song,

dance and masked form.

Historical events and experiences involving the community are also present in the bwalo, as stories of Ngoni raids, Chilembwe's uprising, and the arrival of Queen Elizabeth accompany the performance of certain masks. These stories, both the original events and the enacting, are part of the community experience, re-enforced and re-told through the visual imagery, movements, and song of the masked dancer.

CHAPTER ENDNOTES

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- 1 See Gamitto 1831. p.40-44, for accounts of Portuguese estates and slavery.
 - 2 See Yoshida 1993. and 1991., both articles represent contemporary Chewa masks and nyau in Zambia, an area once under Undi's rule.
 - 3 In interviews in the Nkhoma region, people said there were still people far from the roads who would run if they saw a foreign face, for fear of slavery. Others said only that some people did not come down from the safety of the mountains for many years after the first groups returned about the turn of the century. (1900)
 - 4 See Procter, Lovell diaries from 1860-1864, ed. by Bennet and Ylvisaker, 1971. p.241, reports on April 24, 25, 27 and 29, 1862.
 - 5 This was documented as part of the oral history told by members of one village on the eastern side of Nkhoma mountain in 1992.
 - 6 This quote was taken from the masked dancer who still performs this dance, from the Nkhoma region in an interview during field research in 1992.
 - 7 See Young. 1932 p. 146.
 - 8 See Pachai. 1973. p. 22, 25-27
 - 9 See Pachai 1973. p.30 to 35
 - 10 See Young. 1932. p.146
 - 11 See Young. 1932 p. 146
 - 12 This linkage is asserted by Pachai. 1973 .p.2. Pachai suggests Ajere and Azimba are stone age hunting groups, but both names also refer to more modern peoples and leaders, Jere of the Ngoni, and the Zimba peoples, both south of Malawi.
 - 13 See Pachai. 1973. p.11
 - 14 The Karonga of that area was Mazizi, whose successors retain the title of a paramount Chief today, indicating historical links with the Chewa. This may also be related to relationship of Chief's son and Chief's nephew in the Chewa succession of Chiefs.
 - 15 In Chewa history the Banda clan is linked to spiritual leaders, and the Phiri clan is linked to political leaders.
 - 16 See Young. 1932. p.84
 - 17 Mzinda refers also to a large village or capital. In this case, the word implies the village in which the headman has the authority to conduct nyau rituals.
 - 18 This use of medicines for political legitimacy to carry out religious functions by Chiefs, may be from Phiri influence, rather than the Banda influence of relying on female ritual leaders, as supported by Phiri. 1975. p.75-76
 - 19 In one village area alone, an elderly woman recalled how

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- six men who were with Chilembwe came back to the village after the raid, and remained hidden there without being caught.
- 20 See Murray, SS. 1922. p.199-208 for range of roan antelope, Chilembwe, as being common north of Dedza, or in the central part of the central region, but not in the southern part, or in Magomero, the site of Chilembwe's raid.
 - 21 This interpretation is my own, but based upon the values associated with Chilembwe and its placement in the hierarchy of masks.
 - 22 See Scott 1892. p.445
 - 23 Rangeley 1949. p.25 also notes this reference to Makanja as Dzikololendo, a foreigner.
 - 24 See Cullen Young 1932. p127
 - 25 See Murray. 1922. p.259 to 260.
 - 26 Rangeley 1949. p. 25-26 refers to Makanja as tall, and coming from another country. He further suggests that if a masked dancer of Makanja dies while wearing a mask, he is taken away to another chief's country to be buried there.
 - 27 An elderly mask-maker explained this connection between the Makanja and the tall warrior from another country, the Maasai. He also insisted the Makanja is properly supposed to have a carved wooden face mask, as a person, rather than the hides and tatters of cloth worn by some of the dancers.
 - 28 This was specifically related in an interview with an elderly Christian woman who recalled how her parents feared the white Protestant missionaries. She recalled how her parents later lost their fear, and this woman, according to her family and herself, became the first Chewa woman to marry in the mission church. Her own village has been split: half nyau and half Christian. She is the eldest, the ancestress, for her own Christian village, where nyau is not permitted. Her relatives live on the other side of a dirt road, and practice nyau.
 - 29 See Murray. 1922. p.237 to 244
 - 30 This village is one I visited frequently, mostly on the Christian side, to speak with a well-informed Christian who was initiated into nyau as well, and continued to participate in the nyau events.
 - 31 While nyau members have referred to Joseph in the dance, he is no longer a common character. The characters of Simoni and Maria, however, have assumed prominence as mask forms throughout the central region.
 - 32 In addition to Maria, Joseph, Jesus and Peter Simon, John the Baptist is portrayed in the masked dance. This was noted in personal correspondence with H. Hinfelaar. 1993.
 - 33 See CMN White 1961. p.32, reference to Van Wing. 1938 linking Nzambi as original concept of God among the Luvale but after Christianity, Nzambi is linked to trio

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- as Desu, Maria, Nzambi.
- 34 See Linden 1974 for conflicts between Christianity and nyau. Also, the issue is very much present today in mission sites around Malawi.
- 35 See Pachai 1973. p. 121, 127
- 36 Tew 1950. p.43, notes that in certain Chewa areas, particularly Kasungu, as many as 43.8 percent of all able men had migrated for employment.
- 37 See Schoffeleers 1975. p.66, also personal communication with former colonial officer, Major E.W. Ricketts.
- 38 These masks are in the private collection of Fr. Boucher in Mua Mission.
- 39 MaKorea is a story told to me in an interview with Henderson Chikamlango, a nyau member from the Dowa area, and a University student at the time, (August 1992).
- 40 This innovation is described in more detail in Chapter Seven
- 41 See Schoffeleers and Lindgren 1985. p.26
- 42 For another interpretation see Yoshida. 1991. p.238
- 43 See MacGaffey 1986. p.50
- 44 See Kaspin p. 52 for interpretation of vehicles as conveyors of messages to the spirit realm among the Chewa
- 45 Charlie Chaplin is referred to by Schoffeleers 1975. p.66. A mask depicting Chaplin is in a private collection in Malawi, and a Chaplin mask was in the dance as 'Chaplande' in a new black version from 1989, as described to me in field research in 1992. Malawians have said to me that they remember seeing the old Chaplin films in the local schools.

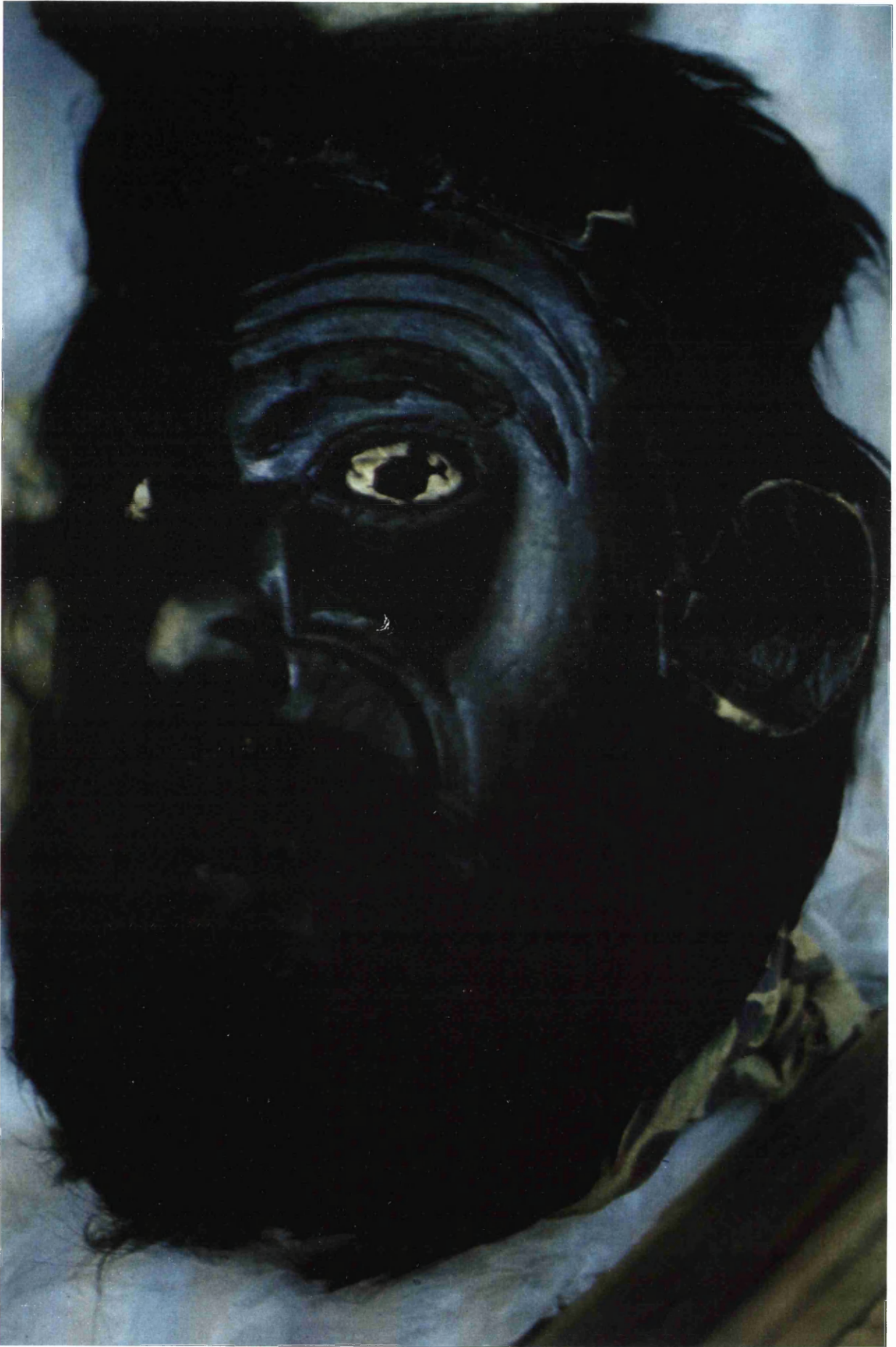


Fig. 6

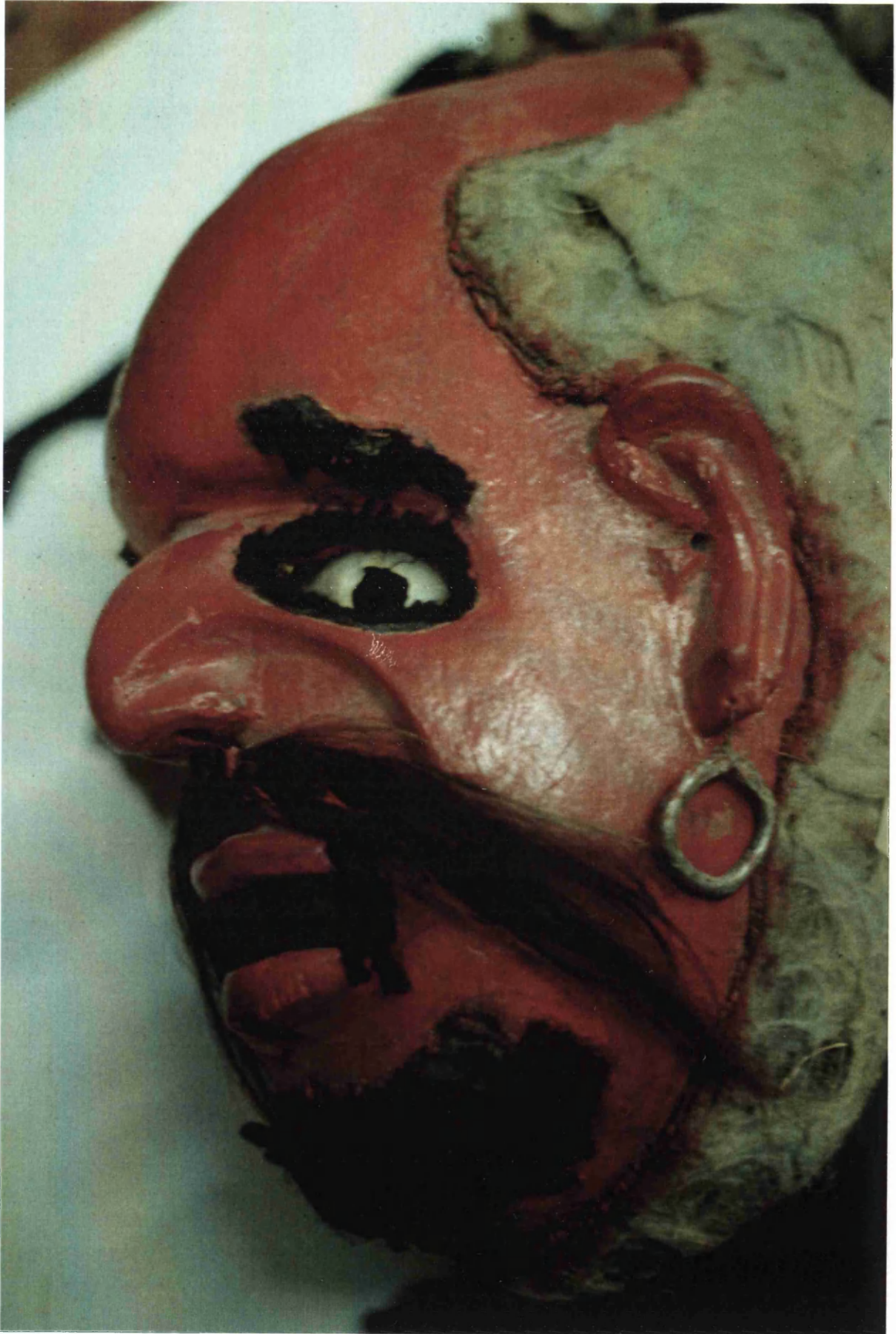


Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

CHAPTER THREE: Masks and Community

"For this Feast of the Human Community their Council resolved that a symbol of the great re-union be carved."

- Wole Soyinka (1963 p.2)

Masks in Social Roles

Masks are understood by nyau members as portraying social roles and as being in relation to other masks, forming familial relationships similar to those in a Chewa village. The complexity of these relationships take on new dimensions as masks are shown to be part of a larger socio-historical structure.

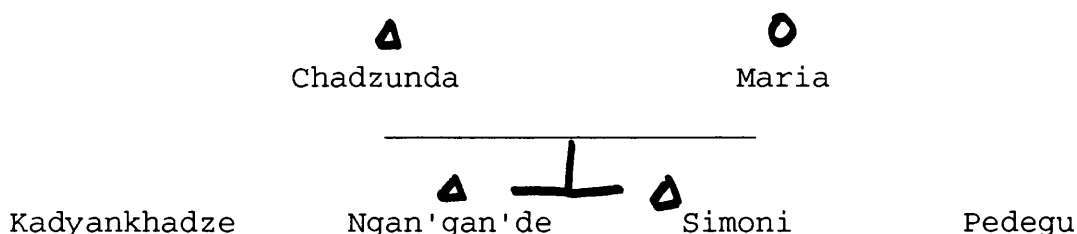
Masked dancers assume societal roles associated with the mask's genre. Masks of different genre are rarely performed together in the same dance sequence, and so, the relationships between one mask genre and another remain implicit in the Gule Wamkulu. Though different mask genre rarely perform together, the relationships between masks and the specific social roles of certain mask genre are widely understood and articulated within the village communities. In field research, it became apparent that these relations were taken for granted, and therefore, the clear exposition of familial relations was rarely articulated to me. After having the relations described, other comments (such as "all things come in pairs")¹ were more clearly understood by me as implying these relations.

Masks are considered members of mask families, and these families are considered to be initiated members of nyau in a community belonging to the same village. Mask associations are familial, but also indicate other societal associations such as village structure, matrilineage and matrilocality, historical adaptations, the position of Chief within the family, succession of Chiefs within the

village, and the positions of families with afflictions, illness and social ambiguities in the village community.

Certain mask genre are described by nyau members and mask-makers as belonging to one of two family groupings: the family of the Chief and the family of the poorest members of the village.²

THE MASK FAMILY OF THE CHIEF



This chart shows the senior mask family, a grouping of masks all made of carved wood, which are considered to be related to one another as the family of the Chief. The first family of masks is the family of the village Chief, and all six masks exist throughout the central region. Each mask embodies certain values, positive and negative, of character and behavior in Chewa society. These values are expressed in the dance performance.

Unlike outsiders, those initiated into nyau, with knowledge of the village structure and organization of masks within families, will recognize each masked character's behavior and how this behavior relates to the larger society. As follows, each mask will be described with the associations attached with the mask genre, and described in relation to one another within the family itself.

Chadzunda

Chadzunda is a Chief, but is also the senior head of

household. The other family members are a female mask as mother, two sons with varying qualities, an orphan and the Chief's sister's son. The family of Chadzunda is contrasted with another family of 'lame' (chikama) people. The 'lame' people include a father and mother, two sons and an orphan. The lame people in the village community are also part of Chadzunda's, the Chief's, responsibility.

Chadzunda represents a village chief, and the hierarchy of authority in the village setting. The Chief is the leader of the people. He represents power in his role as Chief, lineage in the matrilineal succession of the chieftaincy, and unity in keeping the village together as a whole, as a unit, as one group of related peoples living together.

His power is not absolute, however, or as strong as the neighboring Ngoni chief, whose rule is more absolute.³ Chadzunda, in comparison to Ngoni and other patrilineal society Chiefs, reflects a poor Chief of little or no account. The mask's own name, Dzunda, (Cha is a prefix for large or great) refers to "a 'bit' chief with no authority-when war comes it will sweep him off" (Scott 1892. p.145) which may be a reflection on the role of the Chewa Chief compared to the Ngoni counterpart.⁴

Chadzunda is depicted as an old man with deeply carved furrows in his forehead. As a mask form, Chadzunda does not assault others, but assumes a senior role of aged wisdom...the ageing Chief who is likely to be succeeded at any time.⁵

Within the social role of the Chewa Chief lies this ambiguity of a powerful and coveted position of authority and the realization that the Chewa Chief is thin, lean and of little authority compared to the war-like strength of their Ngoni neighbors and once-enemies.

Maria

Maria is assumed to be a foreigner, though the mask is most often the representation of senior and respected Chewa women who are initiated in nyau. The Maria of the family of masks is a woman of age, wisdom and respect. She is the mother, the ancestress, and the Chief's wife. Maria is known for giving very good advice, and tries to give good information to the Chief and others.

She is described as the mother of all, a most important mask role. Maria is the wife of a Chief, who has social expectations placed upon her by virtue of her husband's role. As the wife of the Chief, she is given the respect due her in this position. At the same time, she is interpreted by nyau members as also representing a Namkungwi, a woman of senior standing in her own right. As the Namkungwi, she is the protector and defender of the Chief, an instructor of the young, entrusted with the knowledge of nyau, initiated into the secretive knowledge of both males and females. As a mother she is also revered.

Maria is an older woman, but she can be carved to be young or old. The all-male carvers have said and suggested they clearly prefer the younger version of Maria, depicting young initiated girls who later take on senior roles. One elderly carver said he chooses to carve masks of women as they were when they were young, and again when they are older, keeping the face in mind, "before the faces are gone forever in death." So, he may carve two masks of the same woman: a just-matured girl and an older woman. He added, the older woman "may go...die", and he makes the face from his memory, to remember her as she was as a young woman.

She is important in both stages of life, while men have more importance, it may be argued, in age and wisdom. Women who are relatively young give birth to children, the all-important mother. In her old age, she assumes senior

roles, taking on the ways of wisdom as do the men, in her role as Namkungwi.

N'gan'gande

N'gan'gande is the eldest son, the first son in the line of sons. He is likened to the Nduna, the sub-chief or supporter to the higher Chief. In another sense, he is also a senior relative, or more specifically, a kind of mother's brother in relation to age to the next young man in age and importance: Kadyankhadze, N'gan'gande's father's sister's son. In his role as the Chief's eldest son, he is depicted as a man who is strong and mature in age, a man who could be selected Chief by his appearance.

N'gan'gande is a mask genre which is characterized by the wearing of a chitenji, a woman's skirt, and dancing with the women. One such mask made by a carver depicts the character of N'gan'gande as a fiercely handsome and masculine face, (actually the face of a handsome chief who had died a little bit young, in one case), which is attractive to the women. The character of the mask is one of enjoying his drink and running around with the women. He is merry, happy, dancing with the ladies, having a very good time, full of fun and jokes.

The ladies enjoy his company, especially when he dances with them, as he does in the Gule Wamkulu performance, indicating his association with them in the wearing of a chitenji, a woman's skirt. N'gan'gande is described as being a pleasure for the women during the Gule Wamkulu, a masked character who teases with sexual overtones, who is playful and well-liked by women.⁶ He is also described as being strong, tough, and a brave man in the eyes of the women. (Gan'ga: brave, strong man; a hero)⁷ However, he is also a man who, in full maturity, has not married. He has remained in his own mother's village.

Kadyankhadze

This character is the son of the Chief's sister. He is

also described as being the first son to N'gan'gande's other mother, the Chief's sister, who is living in the village. Kadyankhadze is an adult, but still a very young man compared to N'gan'gande. His character is depicted in his very name: (Kadya: to eat, Nkhadze: a tree with a poisonous bark and sap). Nkhadze trees are often used to surround graveyards. These trees emit a poison just by brushing up against the tree, which causes painful itching on the skin. Kadyankhadze lacks the humor of N'gan'gande, or mother's brother given the relative age difference between Kadyankhadze and N'gan'gande.⁸ He drinks, but without mirth, and is presented as a wild person, dangerous and untamed. His drinking produces anger.

In the dance , Kadyankhadze enters the bwalo, with head down, covered by feathers. In one sweep, the head shoots up and the feathers are thrust back, revealing what is said to be the pitiless anger of the face. In the dance, N'gan'gande may come before Kadyankhadze, playing and dancing with the women. When Kadyankhadze appears on the edge of the bwalo, N'gan'gande runs off, frightened by the other mask, which chases him out of the bwalo. Kadyankhadze, like Chadzunda, is one of the few masks which can enter the bwalo at any time, from any direction. Kadyankhadze is described as an outraged person, a crazy person, mentally disturbed and uncontrollable.

The face of Kadyankhadze is usually of the carver's imagination, rather than portraiture as N'gan'gande and Chadzunda commonly are. The mask is a fearful mask, in contrast to N'gan'gande which is fiercely handsome but playful. Both N'gan'gande and Kadyankhadze⁹ are both colored in shades of red, while reserving black for the Chadzunda.

Kadyankhadze is described by Rangeley as being "fierce and truculent", and a mask character which "sets out to terrify people." He chases women away, and may assault any

stranger, but would not harm a fellow nyau member, although even nyau members will run away for fear that Kadyankhadze will make them mad, (kulengelela).¹⁰

Pedegu

Pedegu is the next oldest of the four young men. This mask is the pitiful one, as much as Kadyankhadze is pitiless. Pedegu is the orphan, and stands for all orphans who do not obey the advice of others in the community. Pedegu is always confused; when called by the men in the dance, he goes to the women, and when called by the women, he goes to the men. The narrative described to me about Pedegu goes as follows:

Pedegu once had parents when he was younger. He was told to come work in the fields, so they could teach him how to farm for himself. But he never listened to their advice, or to anyone's advice. He played and never went to the garden. Now that he is older, his parents have died, and he never learned to take care of himself. His parents used to tell him he better work hard to assist yourself if we die...Now he is alone, and pitied, but no one will assist him. He is now a charity case for the Chief.

The mask is painted white, with big, long ears, though he does not hear well, or listen. He runs around the bwalo in the dance with his arms wrapped around his shoulders...the poor orphan who never listened. In the family of masks, he is the ward of the Chief.

Simoni

Simoni is the youngest son of the Chief, with no chance of ever succeeding him. This mask is painted red or flesh-beige tones, and is often associated with foreigners, sometimes correctly, and sometimes mistakenly, the same as Maria.

The representation of Simoni as the youngest son of the Chief is of a young man possibly still of school age, who is intelligent and clever; a boy who is handsome and well-liked, who does not get drunk or quarrel, who dances very well and very actively, who takes on leadership, and is

born into a rich family, the family of the Chief. Of all the young men related to the Chief, this one is most likely to attend school and to do well.

Simoni is also most closely associated with the Colonial period. The dance performance is partly derived from the Colonial officers, with movements which project both the authority of the officers and in unsuspecting moments, their ineffectual stance. Simoni enters the dance singly or in pairs, trios, or in groups of five or six. The dances are difficult and well-coordinated. They are popular masks in the dance performance for the aggressive athletic dance steps.

Simoni is interpreted by some nyau members as being very clever, and sometimes too clever in an unflattering way related more to shrewdness. Others interpret Simoni as intelligent and all the things a young man would want to be in Chewa society. In both cases, Simoni represents the young people who are going to school in larger numbers, and learning English. These youths are initiated, but are more likely to be interested in other pursuits.

Once again, there is ambiguity in the mask form which is seen as being bright but also potentially shrewdly clever and dangerous as the Colonial officers might have been perceived. The most irony in this mask is that the fine qualities of the youngest son of the Chief has no future in the succession of leadership in his own village.

Mask Family and the Village Community

This family of masks relates to the village structure of Chief and wife, eldest son still in the village unmarried; sister's son of the Chief and by age, of the Chief's eldest son who is also unmarried living in the village; the orphan who has been adopted by the Chief's family as dictated by the Chief's role as the leader and provider of his people;

and the youngest son of the Chief, the privileged son who is still young and probably going to school and is well-liked by all; again unmarried.

These societal masks do not depict a desirable family structure in a Chewa village. Unmarried mature men are not common, and the presence of the dangerous Chief's heir amidst the son's Chiefs is a recipe for conflict in Chewa society. By looking at the structure of the Chewa village, these relationships should become more clear.

Chadzunda as Lineage/Unity/Village Leader

Chewa villages are generally structured around relations to a senior woman, the ancestress, or actually the grandmother or great grandmother of the female relatives, the liwele¹¹ of the village. The pattern of marriage of people who are roughly in their thirties or older, has been that the man follows the woman to her village; a matrilocal system, with common exceptions as well.¹²

The choice of Chief is not always simple, since married men are generally deemed to belong to another village, and most mature men are married. The choice then falls to a man who has married close to the village of his mother. Sometimes, out of duty, the man is asked to return to his former home and serve as Chief of his family, and sometimes his wife or one of his wives will follow.¹³

At any time, a group of relatives may decide to break away from a village. In doing this, a man and his mbumba, (his sisters, other female descendants and their husbands and unmarried uterine brothers), form their own village with their mother or grandmother. This breaking from a larger community may be accepted by the larger village and Chief, or it may be by force. In one peaceful example, a lineage, or mbumba wanted to have their own relative as chief, and the group village headman agreed with them. A sub-group was established, with the group village headman as senior

Chief, followed by his village headmen as sub-Chiefs, numbered, one, two and now the new one, three.

In another example, the mbumba left the community altogether, and moved into new territory to the west in the 1930s. Here, they established their own village, with permission of the paramount chief of that region, and soon established themselves as the regional chieftaincy, allocating all adjoining lands to newcomers. Thus, the man who attracts the support of his sisters and female descendants becomes the village headman, also referred to as village Chief.¹⁴

The role of husbands in their wife's villages remains tenuous, since divorce by either party is relatively simple, and is not uncommon. The man can also be dismissed from the wife's village by her relatives, and at times, the wife who has chosen to live with her husband in his village may be dismissed by his relatives.¹⁵

Because of these ambiguities, succession is sometimes transferred from one family to another in the selection of a new Chief. The system protects against a dynasty since the man cannot be succeeded by his own son, but must be succeeded by his sister's son.¹⁶ Chadzunda as Chief, stands on his own, without a clear successor.

However, in spite of Chadzunda's weakness and the family situation fraught with potential problems, Chadzunda is responsible for promoting unity, harmony and peaceful relations, in his village. This is a theme which recurs in the Gule Wamkulu and in discussions with leaders of the Chewa people.¹⁷

Organization of Chiefs in Chewa Society Today

Each village Chief is accountable to a regional Chief, who oversees a regional area. These regional Chiefs then are accountable to a Paramount Chief. These Paramount Chiefs

work in tandem with the government organization known as the Traditional Authority, on issues of traditional courts, new chieftaincies, and any other issues involving traditional organization. The Traditional Authority works with the District Commissioner of the area on all issues regarding the modern government structure.

The village Chief, then, has standing as part of a political hierarchy. He leads his village for life, unless there is a serious situation or problem in the village. Even then, the village may split off, rather than de-pose the Chief, lessening the number of people under his rule, but allowing him to maintain his position.

The Chief's wife also has a certain standing in the village. If the Chief has returned to his own village to take up his role as Chief, his wife still has an honored position among his female relatives, and is treated with respect and authority. The Chief's wife is often close to the Namkungwi for the Chief, and the two of them work together to protect the Chief.

The sons of the Chief enjoy their relatively privileged position in the village, close to the Chief, as long as the father holds his title. The sister's sons are the ones longing for the chance to take over the chieftaincy, and this is where the friction lies.

In the Chief's family, the eldest son displays values which are not the values desired to be a Chief. But, he is well-liked. The youngest son, the least likely to be chosen as Chief, is the most suited in his behavior to ascend to the chieftaincy. He is intelligent, and the rich boy who is handsome and well-liked. However, the most likely to succeed the Chief of the young men, according to custom, is Kadyankhadze, the Chief's eldest sister's son.

During research in 1992, there was an incident related by a nyau member, and discussed in a group of people, about a

local Chief who was pressured by two of his nephews to give up some of his power to them. He had steadfastly refused, until one day the two nephews held him down and tried to beat him until he gave in. In the narration of this event which had just occurred, the Chief refused to give in, but was beaten so badly, he died in the hospital three days later. The police were said to be investigating the crime as murder.

In another incident confirmed to me by the Chief, his 18-year-old sister's son was dancing in the Chief's bwalo in a night performance with a Kasiyamaliro. The young man stopped for a long time in one spot, then, suddenly, the Kasiyamaliro sprang up, and then it keeled over onto the ground. Nyau members aiding the dancer tried to help the young man rise up and dance, lifting the Kasiyamaliro, but found him dead.

There seemed to be no question about it. The young man had tried to steal the Chief's secrets and medicines in the bwalo to take the Chief's power, and instead, died on the spot. The Chief was credited with very strong medicines, and the young man was buried in disgrace for trying to take over before his time.

Thus, as was described by mask-makers and nyau members, the angry Kadyankhadze, with fearful, pitiless face, the feathers thrust back in anger, is that sister's son every Chief fears. The imagery of Kadyankhadze's grabbing at the chieftaincy is heightened in the dance in which N'gan'gande was described as having to perform prior to Kadyankhadze, who then chases off the Chief's son to perform himself.

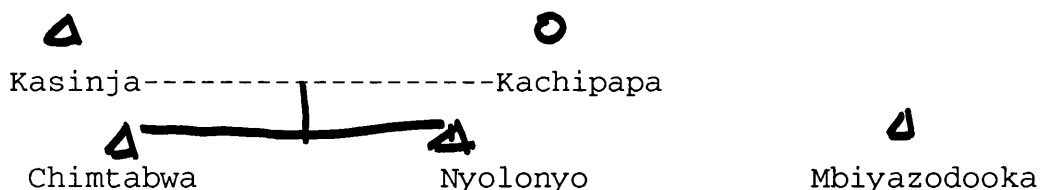
Further, Kadyankhadze's ability to enter the bwalo at will, without waiting for his turn, brashly interrupting another's performance, is a privilege usually reserved for Chadzunda, with few other exceptions. This was explained as part of Kadyankhadze's closeness to the chieftaincy, yet the mask depicts this character still aggressively claiming

that right, rather than that right being proffered to him. In this sense, Kadyankhadze is viewed as being so dangerous, even the Chief, or Chadzunda, cannot control him.

So, we have a village family which reflects the conflicting relationships of succession. A strong but poor Chief, a revered mother, but all the wrong traits for Chief in the likely successors and all the right traits in the least likely successor.

Chadzunda and Maria's family is contrasted with another family, imparting other insights into kinship and familial relationships. This is the family of the lame, afflicted and ill. Masks of this family differ from the Chief's family visually. Unlike the carved wooden masks of Chadzunda, these masks are made of feathers, cloth and hide, often made by the dancer himself. The variety of these masks is wide-ranging, but there is still a visual similarity from one village to another which makes these masks recognizable from one village to another.

'AFFLICTED' MASK FAMILY



The father of this family is Kasinja, and the mother is Kachipapa. The parents, Kasinia and Kachipapa, are known to chatter and talk, unlike the Chief's family which does not speak. They have three young men in their care as well. These are Chimtabwa, Nyolonyo, and Mbiyazodooka. The three young men may speak for their own songs, but are not known to chatter with people.

This family of masks is referred to as the 'lame' family by

senior mask-makers and nyau leaders. They are the lowest family in Chewa society: very poor, dressed in rags, without dignity. They are afflicted with illness, and handicaps, and are foolish people. They are not considered normal.

Kasinja

Kasinja, (Kasinja; to pound as in pounding maize into flour) the father, is still a respected mask in the range of Chewa masks. Kasinja is the masked form which may precede the funeral procession to the graveyard, and stay with the people there speaking in falsetto tones about the burial. In one funeral, the Kasinja performed during the dance, and later in the graveyard for the burial, making a strange sound in rapidly decreasing notes of didjidjidjidj, while dramatically pointing down and slowly leaning down toward the earth and the grave. (See Chapter Six).

Kasinja is also referred to as Kapoli, (Kapoli: to stand up from hoeing in the garden) a more generic name for a variety of masks with feathered headdresses, both of which speak for themselves, using the high falsetto voice of nyau dancers, disguising their own voice. Kapoli and Kasinja are most noted for the profusion of feathers, sometimes concealing the whole of the face and head in a mass of feathers, with a projection of bound feathers rising above the forehead. Kasinja is also masked by cloth or hide, with the head covered in feathers. The costume is made of sewn fertilizer bags and sisal.

Kachipapa

The mother, Kachipapa, (Kachipapa; an old basket for collecting ashes) represents a pauper, a lazy person, a person who dresses only in rags, similar to her husband Kasinja. Her name refers to an old basket, which she is said to resemble. According to Rangeley (1949 p.30), Kachipapa carried an old basket on the back during the dance, but this trait was already disappearing in 1949, and was no longer evident in 1992. Nyau members refer to her

as an old basket, and say the dancer could still wear the basket on the back.

In the funeral, Kachipapa stays up all night with the women, who dance and sing and brew beer until dawn. They are kept awake, being entertained by this masked dancer. The dancer is male, portraying a female. Still the dancer is also hurling sexual insults at the women, which are answered back with sexual insults about men to the mask. This constant teasing keeps everyone awake and laughing, but also may be interpreted as an ambiguous sexuality on the part of the mask, being male and female at once.

Chimtabwa

The son, Chimtabwa (Chimtabwa; large flat board) is a lame person, handicapped physically, and also handicapped mentally, being deemed stupid and foolish. He dances with a lame arm, or a lame leg, often showing much dancing skill in the depiction of lameness.

Nyolonyo

Nyolonyo (Nyolonyo; Soft, front and back) is a mask of cloth, a sack turned upside down over the head. The seam of the sack runs front to back, with one tall feather at the front, and one tall feather at the back. The appearance is the same from the front and from the back, which, it is said, indicates a person with no proper face. He has the same blank face in front as in back, and is attributed with having the same traits of stupidity, lameness and foolishness as his brother, Chimtabwa.

Nyolonyo carries an axe, or sometimes two axes in the dance, so it becomes a blank face which is also very dangerous. His movements are said to be suggestive of an ostrich, though ostriches are not found in Malawi. This depiction by nyau members could well come from Malawian migrant workers in South Africa, however. The feathers do resemble ostrich feathers, and are described as being

ostrich feathers. This depiction might also indicate a perception of ostriches as stupid birds.

Mbiyazodooka

Mbiyazodooka (Mbiya; cooking pot, Zodooka; broken) is a bit different from the others in this family. This mask does not portray mental stupidity. The dancer of Mbiyazodooka is considered stupid by virtue of his situation, and his lack of resolve or character to change it. He wears a broken piece of clay pottery on his head. It is often performed by young boys, depicting a child carrying a simple branch in his hand, walking about naked or nearly naked. Mbiyazodooka still dances showing his genitals today, unlike most other forms.¹⁸

Mbiyazodooka is the child of a broken marriage, a broken pot, of not belonging in either house, of having no proper home. In the story about this mask, the mother has left her village to join her husband in his own village. The mother dies in the father's village, and the child stays with the father. When his father dies, the people in his village now tell him it is time to go home. Home? Home to his mother's village, where he is not known. He is told "That woman brought no soil here", meaning she has no garden of her own, as she would have had in her own village. Now that she is gone, the people may tell the child to join his mother...in the graveyard.

In the past, and sometimes today, the deceased's own pot is broken over the grave. The broken pot is said to represent the one which belonged to the child's mother, and now this pathetic character carries the remembrance of his mother from the grave. His song in the dance is akwanu kumanda...his home is the graveyard.

Mbiyazodooka is an outcast, without any means to support himself. He is covered with flies and feces, and uses the branch to chase the flies away. He is associated with

being rotten, and is expected to soon follow his mother in the grave.

Even with connotations of stupidity and dirtiness, the family of the lame people has its own importance. It is said that the mother and father of this family can speak for themselves. They have their own falsetto voices and can be heard singing their own song. In this way, even the crazy people, the lame, the foolish, the outcasts, the rotten and the stupid can speak to the Chief and the community. This is interpreted by nyau members as telling the Chief he must still care for those of his village whom he would prefer to ignore. This is their voice.

Comparison of Two Families

The families of masks may be described as local narratives. The first is the leading family in the village, and the second is the lowest in the village. Each suggests character traits and relationships in Chewa village organization, and each suggests a sense of values attached to the character traits and relationships.

Both families have mothers and fathers, a nuclear family, which relates to the family compound or household unit in the Chewa village. The first mother is viewed in this context of mask family, as not only the mother of her own sons, but as the mother of all, an over-reaching view of motherhood. Being a mother is a clear virtue in Chewa society, and this mask in this context, extends this motherhood from her own family to the entire village, as the Chief's wife and the mother of the Chief's sons, but also as a mother image of 'goodness', and respectability.

Mothers

The 'lame' mother, is still a mother, and has a place in the hierarchy of masks above her children, and alongside

the women. However, there remains the ambiguity of her identity as a woman, and the negative aspect of her role in hurling sexual insults at the women the night before a funeral. The sexual remarks, especially references to male and female genitals, are considered rude, vulgar and unacceptable in the normal course of behavior, as emphasized by the Chewa.

The first mother, Maria, is often dressed in bright and beautiful clothes, as described by nyau members. On her face are the marks of scarification, seen less and less on the faces of young women, but still associated with womanhood and beauty. In contrast, the 'lame' mother is poor, and dressed in rags, with a cloth face which has few or no such distinctive marks. Being in such poverty that the woman wears rags, in Chewa society, is not a virtue. Dressing nicely in brightly colored cloths is a virtue, and is explained as being very much appreciated by Chewa men.

Maria may be interpreted further as an idealized mask in the family of masks, bearing the values of idealized womanhood: motherhood, beauty and attractiveness, sexuality, respected role as senior woman and matured woman, an initiated woman in the society, and one without her own voice...an ideal of soft speech, quietness and the wisdom to keep secrets very well.

The 'lame' mother, Kachipapa, (old basket) is the object of derision in her dress and her loud vulgarity in contrast to the idealized Maria. She once carried a dirty old basket on her back which further emphasized her position in life as a dirty pauper.

Both females may be regarded as wives of a polygamous Chief, and reflect the position of a Chief who can afford to keep more than one wife. (In Chewa society, it is customary for a man with more than one wife to keep a house for each one of them in her own village, or for one of them to accompany him to his village if he is selected as

Chief.) That husband must provide for both those wives equally in gifts of cooking pots, clothes, and other necessities.¹⁹

Fathers

The role of father in Chewa society is already an ambiguous one, though patrilineal tendencies exist more so today than in the past. He stays with his wife in her village, and must get along with the wife's family. If the marital relationship breaks, the father has no rights to his own children. Rather, he has responsibilities for his own sister's children, living in his mother's village.

The Chadzunda is the Chief, and also a father. He may reside in his own mother's village, bringing his wife with him, giving him a privileged position of kinship in his village. His sons are also privileged, but as already described, the Chief's sister's sons have the first rights to succession. Chadzunda is head of his household, and head of all the households as leader of the community. He is respected, and strong, and comparatively wealthy in his role as Chief.

In comparison, Kasinja is poor, with a poor dirty wife; a sign of failing to provide for his wife and family as is his duty in Chewa society. Kasinja's sons are stupid, or foolish, or lame and out of step with the norms of society. He has an orphan in his care, Mbiyazodooka, who is left filthy and uncared for.

Chadzunda has sons who are well-liked and bright. Chadzunda has in his care an orphan, who is looked after in some sort of way, and has on his hands a wild and dangerous nephew. Kasinja does not have the problems of the Chief regarding his nephews.

Chadzunda has an over-reaching quality of responsibility for his family, and for all of his people, as Maria has the over-reaching quality of motherhood for all. His

responsibility of care and consideration for his people encompasses care for the 'lame' family. For this, Chadzunda is respected as a mature man, an initiated man, a man bearing his responsibilities for his own family and all people in the village. Chadzunda, like Maria, does not speak in the dance. He does not need to speak to be heard in the community.

Kasinja, like Kachipapa, chatters in his dance performance, and in his ritual role in the funeral. This mask enters the bwalo in the Gule Wamkulu and first speaks out a song in a falsetto high voice for the women to sing to him. The songs may be critical of the Chief or any other community member specifically, or about poor behavior generally.

In Chewa society, the mature man is described as someone who listens, is quiet, and then speaks with wisdom. Chadzunda reflects this man, while Kasinja speaks for himself, loudly and repeatedly. At times, Kasinja, as a Kapoli, is likened to a rooster, a loud bird. In the dance performance, Kasinja or Kapoli are usually the first masks to perform, announcing in his falsetto voice the purpose for the event in his song. Kasinja has a voice, and can also speak in the dance directly about a community issue addressing the Chief.

The Chief must listen to even this foolish man, and his foolish wife, as members of his village. And, it is through these vulgar, loud and foolish 'lame' people that the village Chief may be given messages about discontent in his village. This discontent is shown during the Gule Wamkulu without the possibility of the 'lame' being punished for delivering these public messages.

Kasinja and Chadzunda can also be described as similar, in that both come from a kind of poverty. Chadzunda is Chief, but as described earlier, he is a Chief of no account or succession, and a Chief of poverty, without substantial

wealth. His name refers to being thin and lean, physical aspects related to illness and poverty. He is the big man, but ultimately a poor man leading people who are even more poor, and leading without the respect accorded other Chiefs.

The Sons: N'gan'gande and Simoni: Nyolonyo and Chintabwa

The Chief's sons are privileged in wealth and learning and position in the society. However, they can never succeed their own father, and so are not competing for the position of Chief. They are not dangerous. The eldest son is handsome, and wealthy, but spends his time wastefully in drink. He is not considered a respectable man, who displays good behavior. His younger brother is well-liked, and educated. Some refer to Simoni as being the first to attend school full-time.

The 'lame' family has one son who is truly lame and handicapped, but also considered 'not normal', and another son who is also not normal, but is so stupid and foolish that his face is indistinguishable from the back of his head. Both carry weapons and may be dangerous, unlike the Chief's sons who are not considered a threat.

Orphan and Outcast

There are also two orphans: Pedequ who is pathetic but under the general care of the Chief, and Mbiyazodooka who is considered rotten, filthy, dirty, and an outcast who should leave or die. Pedequ has not learned to care for himself, but he is part of the community. Mbiyazodooka is not part of the community, but still is in the over-reaching care of the Chief.

Sister's Sons

The last mask genre does not have a direct counterpart in the 'lame' family. He is the sister's son, the responsibility of the mother's brother but also the presumed successor to the chieftaincy. In this case, the

Chief's family and the community is endangered by the wild craziness of the Kadyankhadze. This fearful, dangerous character, totally unsuitable to be selected as Chief, is in line for that position.

Thus, the instability of the whole family and the whole community is underscored by the potential violence of this mask. In Kadyankhadze's character lies the inherent weakness of village organization; matrilineal succession, the vulnerability of the Chief, and the friction between Chief's sons and nephews.

Respect for the authority of the Chief is threatened by the instability of his sons, his likely successor, orphans, outcasts, and the afflictions of the 'lame' family. The inverse of these threats to the chieftaincy is the most important principle of Chewa community: unity, the unity of family, of village, and the entire community.

Animal Constructions: Familial Relationships

The large animal constructions made of bamboo, sisal strips and woven maize husk leaves also reflect the hierarchy of age, and the insistence of gender and pairing found in the mask families. Though I have seen no evidence of actual family structures in the same sense as the human masks, these Chirombo, or wild animals, are age and gender-related, manifesting traits which are visually recognizable.

Though the Chirombo may be of almost any wild animal, I will take the antelope form Kasiyamaliro as an example of how three generations are demonstrated in the masks.

Kasiyamaliro depicts a mature antelope, which can be identified as any one of a variety of antelopes.²⁰ The size and shape of the Kasiyamaliro form are indications of its age and gender. Kasiyamaliro is an adult who is fully

matured. A single man moves the most common ten foot tall mask form around the bwalo, usually with grace and elegance. The most common movement is to move into the bwalo, and begin to twirl, circling in place, moving faster and faster until the long woven maize husk tail flies in the wind. Others move across the bwalo in steady and quickened movements, threatening the crowds, but are usually intercepted before the mask form charges into the people.

The eldest generation of Chirombo is depicted in the larger, elongated form the antelope. This form is described by nyau members as an aged, dignified animal. One of these elongated forms included up to thirteen dancers inside, being thirty feet in length. In this case, the mask is called Chimkoko, (Chi: large or big; mkoko: the banana bunch growing on the tree, but also in nyau, the secret word for the maize husk leaves). The Chimkoko moves differently from the Kasiyamaliro, partly due to its enormous size. Its movements are described by nyau members as being slower, more cautious, and more dignified. The large form is carefully guided, leading ten or more men in a line as the sides undulate rhythmically.

Youth is portrayed in animal constructions which are lower to the ground, smaller, maybe four or five feet in height, and more compact. These are capable of being moved by a young person. These smaller constructions are performed primarily in the night dances, emerging from the darkness of the graveyard into the moonlit bwalo in groups up to as many as twenty at once. Movements are described by nyau members as being reckless and aggressive, as they race around the bwalo, crashing into one another, turning abruptly and racing across the bwalo again. These risk moving into the crowds watching the performance, upsetting chairs and people, (including myself more than once), to the laughter and excitement of the people.

Each of these antelope forms are recognized as youthful,

mature, and elderly according to size and movement. The largest Chimkoko is also called agogo, grandmother or more appropriately in this case, the ancestress. As in the village structure, the ancestress is the common relative of all, and the most senior old and aged mask is considered the ancestress of the animal constructions. This ancestress is followed by the mature adults who then give birth to the reckless youth, bringing the world of the wild animals closer to the world of human families.

Conclusion

The initial revelation by a mask-maker and a nyau members that the masks were specifically related to one another disclosed another world of masking, which was re-affirmed many times over in subsequent research. The answers to questions from the past assumed new significance, understanding that these familial and gender relationships were well-known and understood by the community observing the masked performances. One of the earliest comments about the masks, "all people have families" became a more vivid answer revealing knowledge about all kinds of human relationships expressed and understood in masking.

In describing the masks to me, the late Chief Mkuzi explained that the Gule Wamkulu includes all sides of man...the crazy, bad-mannered, beautiful, ugly, respected, ridiculed, deadly and feared, simple and funny..all experiences in human behavior. In short, he remarked that nyau masks included all of humanity.

Masked dance enables the enactment of all manner of human relationships: outcasts, the lame and the sick, poor families, husbands and wives, those in positions of authority, the embodiment of positive and negative traits in contradictory roles, political succession, those who are privileged and those who are impoverished within a single community. Each performance is a potential new reality, a

re-telling and a renewed story about human relationships. Each performance, with its familiar characters and new characterizations describe what is happening, has happened or may be happening in the community at any time. As Beidelman (1993. p.42) suggests, "The paradoxes of secrecy are epitomized both in actual masks and in all our roles as social persons."

Familial relationships of masks, both in the human community and animal community, are the same generational pattern and family structure as society. The world of masks, I suggest, is the dramatized counterpart of the world of man. Through the masks, society sees itself reflected, mirrored in mimicry of the human condition. In the Gule Wamkulu, the performance of the masks becomes a performance of the people themselves, seeing themselves and their world, the people looking in on their masked counterparts.

The masks also remain associated with spirits, the dead and the other-world of the ancestors. They have entered the bwalo from the graveyard and are believed to represent spirits of the mzimu, the ancestors, as described in the first Chapter. In this sense, the masks may be interpreted as the world of the dead greeting its counterpart, the world of the living.

Though masks are a mirror of life, of the living community, they also remain apart; associated with the dead. In the appearance and performance of the masks, the dead and the living are reunited. Even the world of the wild animals, always apart from man in life, return to the bwalo in their own generational structure, to resemble man and the living community. As suggested in 1862 by the missionary Procter and others since then, human spirits, wild animal spirits and humans are united in the ritual space of the bwalo.

CHAPTER ENDNOTES

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- 1 Quoted from my first field assistant, B. Yosiya, and repeated by others thereafter.
- 2 The information about the family of masks in this section was most specifically explained by a senior mask-maker, which echoed other discussions, explanations and associations of masks from various Chiefs, dancers, elders and nyau members. The relationships between each family member is described here as it was explained to me.
- 3 See Mair 1952. p.2-3
- 4 See Mair 1952. p.2-3
- 5 For another interpretation of Chadzunda see Rangeley 1949. p.28-29
- 6 For another description of N'gan'gande see **Rangeley 1949. p.31**
- 7 See Scott 1892. p.174
- 8 Among the Chewa, I was told that in the village, the sisters of a child's mother are also called mothers, and uncles are all the older male relatives who are kin to the mothers. Thus, Kadyankhadze may be both cousin and nephew to N'gan'gande at once, since one is considerably more mature in age than the other. Also, in this case, the son of the Chief holds a respected position, which the nephew/cousin should respect.
- 9 Rangeley 1949. p.27 to 28 refers to Kadyankhadze as a red mask in much the same way.
- 10 See Rangeley 1949. p.28
- 11 Coissoro, Narana 1966. p. 118:

Liwele is a term in the Coissoro's glossary, explaining the fact that villages are made up by female relatives of a senior woman, rarely more than five generations deep.

- This held true in my own field research, 1992.
- 12 I use the example of people aged thirty and older based upon field research which indicated that the younger generation, even in distant, rural villages, are marrying and moving into the cities and/or finding employment which take both the man and woman away from their villages and from farming, in greater numbers.

The marriage pattern among the Chewa of men moving into their wife's villages has been called uxorilocal and matrilocal. In field research, it appeared that new villages may have organized around the senior male relative chosen as Chief by the females, or the young woman's mother's brother, or grandmother's brother, but in villages which are generations old, the tie is more accurately described as the mother's village, the descendant of a grandmother. Therefore, I have sided with writers such as Nurse. 1977. p.13, who describe the

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- relationship as matrilocal.
- 13 Mair. 1952. p.10 In two examples, men were selected as Chiefs who lived outside their own mother's village, and were asked to return to serve as Chief. In a third case, the Chief of a village continued to live with his wife in her village which was within an hour's walk to his mother's village, and he served as Chief in absentia.
- 14 See Coissoro. 1966. p.116. Also there was an example from field research, 1990, of a new Chief peacefully selected to represent his own relatives, leaving the larger village community but staying under the auspices of the group village headman.
- 15 Coissoro 1966. p.122, asserts that husbands deemed unsuitable may be dismissed from his wife's village, with the assumption that the husband's true home is his own mother's village.
- p. 123. Coissoro notes that 80 percent of those who have married have divorced by age 40 and over; 30 percent of married persons stay together twenty years.
- Also, I have documented an incident in my own research of a young girl with child sent back to her village by the father of her husband, and other incidents, such as divorce, forcing women to leave their husband's village and return to their own mother's village, 1992
- 16 See Mair, 1952. p.10, and Coissoro, 1966. p.117
- 17 Unity as a binding concept permeating the masks and the dance was voiced in discussions and interviews with senior mask-makers, elders, chiefs, and Fr. Claude Boucher (MA SOAS). Umuntu or harmony, unity and wholeness is described as "the philosophical principle of all ...performance" in a thesis by Mazombwe. 1981. p. 204, referring to the Nsenga in southern Malawi. Unity as a theme is echoed in the organization of Gule Wamkulu events, requiring the participation and unity of several villages, and of all the villagers, to come together for a successful dance event.
- 18 For another interpretation of Mbiyazodooka among the Chewa in Zambia, see Yoshida 1993. p.45.
- 19 See Coissoro. 1966. p. 122. This has also been explained by the Chewa themselves during field research in 1992.
- 20 Four different antelopes were identified by elders to name four different Kasiyamaliro in the graveyard. Each Kasiyamaliro was individually identified, and then pointed out in Banda, et.al., a picture book of mammals. The four different antelope were: impala, roan, eland and waterbuck.



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

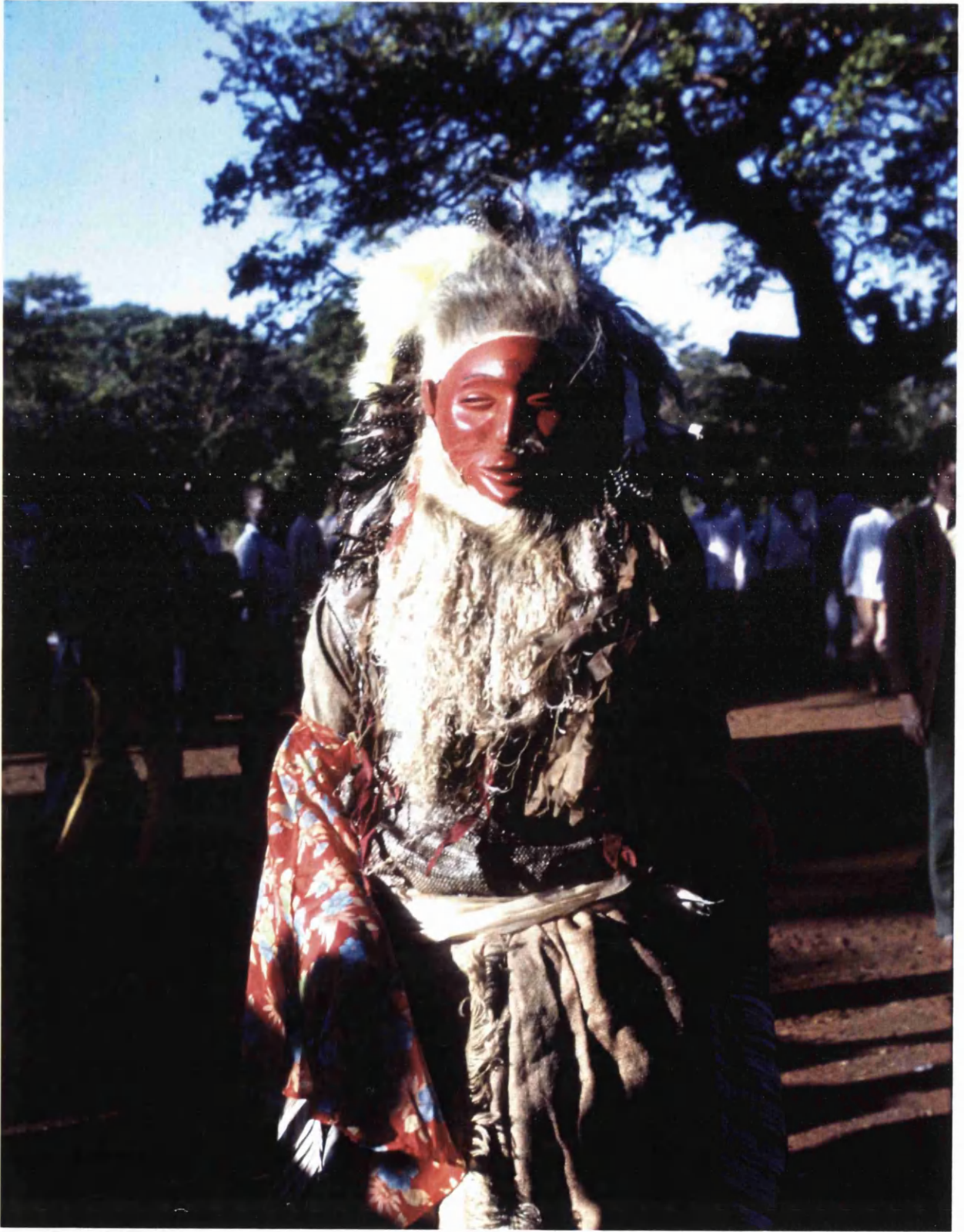


Fig. 13

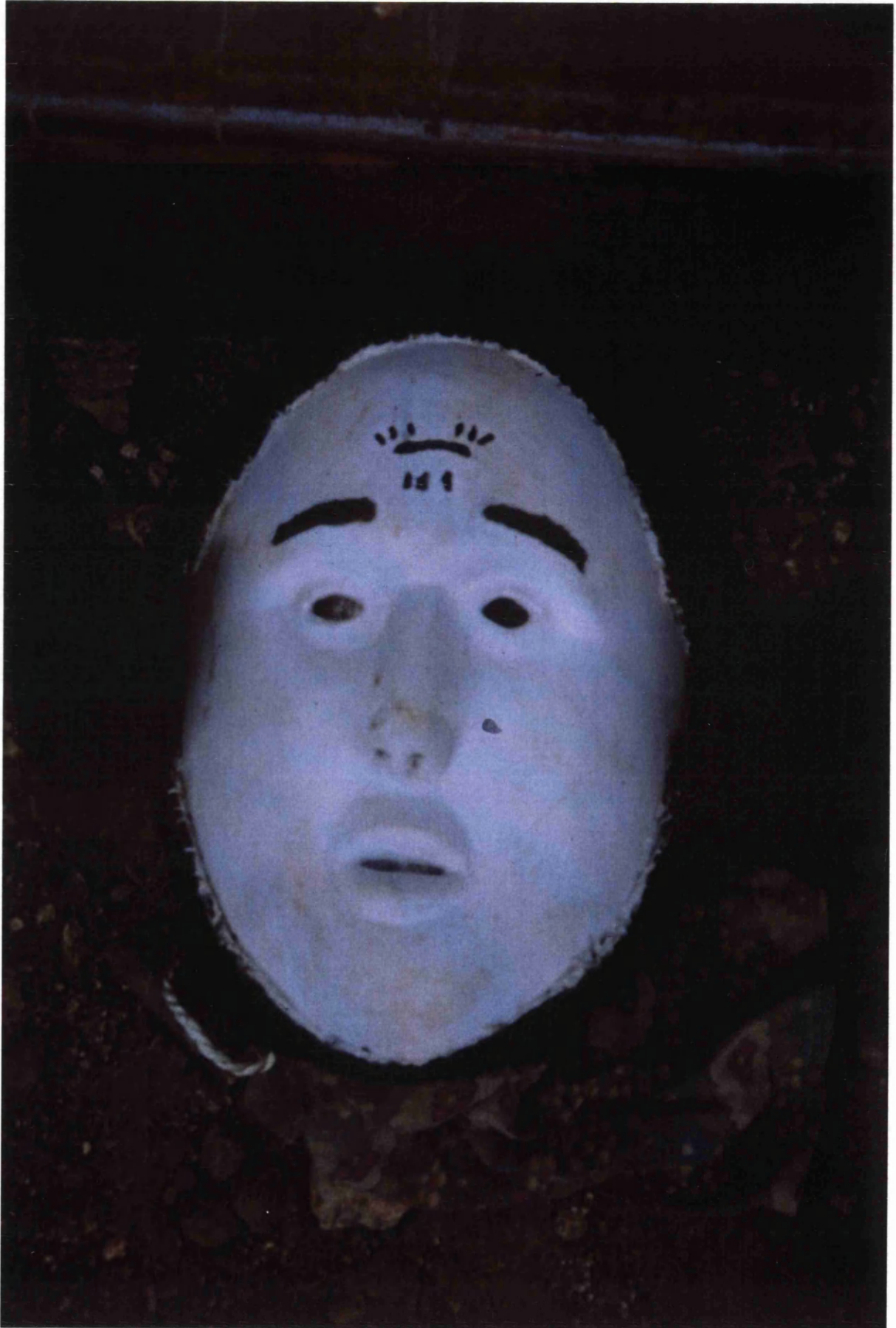


Fig. 14

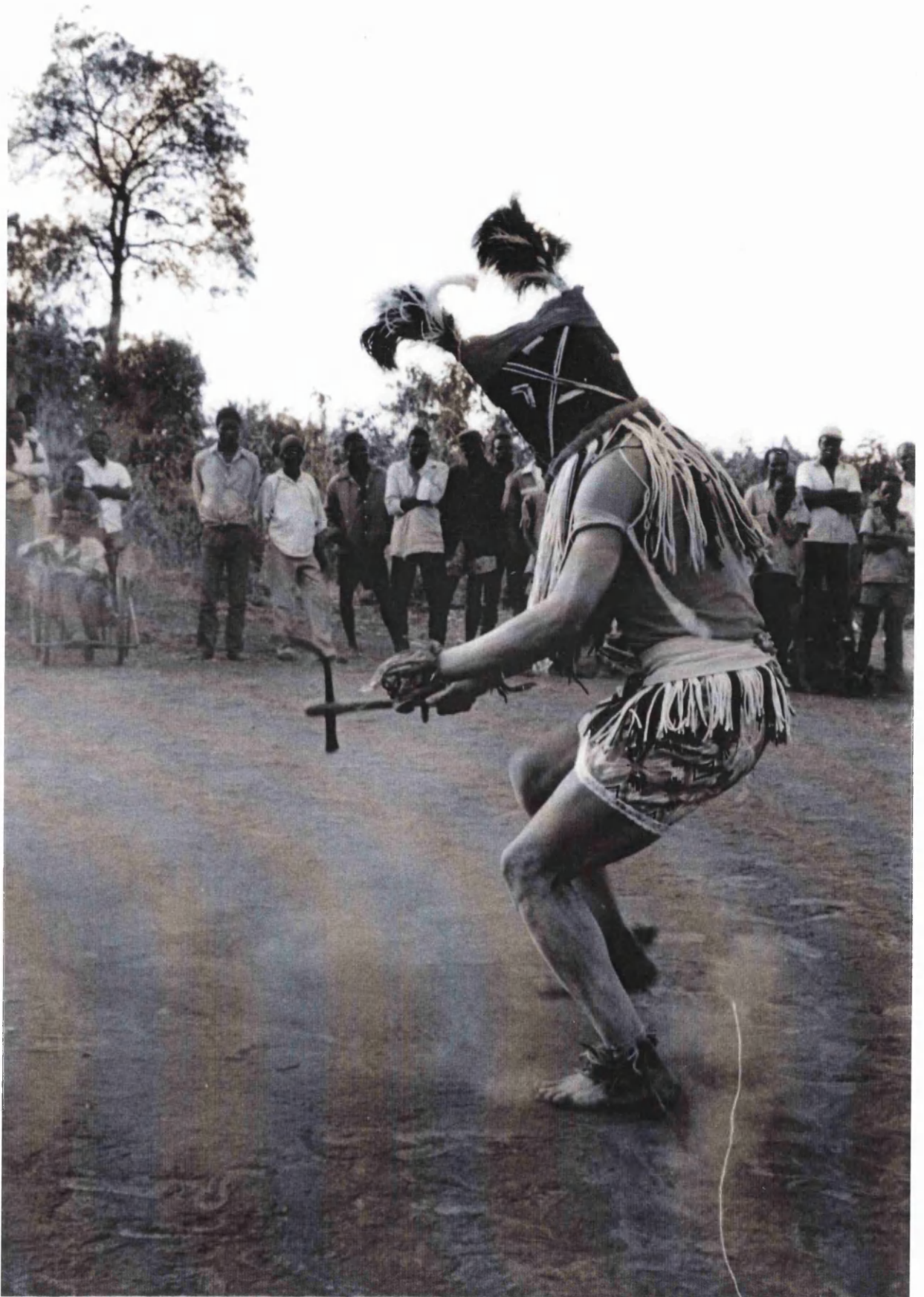


Fig. 15

CHAPTER FOUR: Mask Hierarchy and Values

"...traditional religious rites are based on a belief in spiritual beings who are integrated into human society by the normal hierarchical ties familiar within the particular society itself."

-J. Skorupski (1976. p.113)

Community Hierarchy and Shared Understandings

The community of people who observe the masked performance have come together for an event, an occasion, each with their own reason for attending, each with their own interests and knowledge about the masks, dance performance and nyau, and each with their own role in the event. The community is arranged around the bwalo informally yet grouped according to their societal role, gender and age of each person: chief, elder, Namkungwi, senior woman, new initiate, male, female, male child, female child, male non-member, female non-member, visitor.¹

During a performance, the community of people present is larger than the number of people in the village in which a performance occurs.² People coming from other villages are introduced, if they are not known, and placed in the bwalo according to their appropriate rank, status, role and gender. If a visitor asks permission to observe the dance, his or her status is determined by the chiefs and elders who have gathered for the dance.³

Any one group within the hierarchical arrangement of groups of people in the bwalo, as described above, may be said to have a shared understanding about a given mask which will be slightly different from another group. The different perceptions involve several factors: the level of given knowledge based on rank and status, the shared interests and experiences of the different groups, participation in the performance, and difference in age and gender which all contribute to shared understandings which are materially different from one another.

These differences of knowledge also imply a shared understanding about the performance and the masks by the community as a whole. There is a purpose, a reason for having such a performance, which is understood by all those present. Certain actions are observed and known by all present.

For example, it is easily seen that the masked dancers emerge from the grove of trees which is the graveyard, and that the dancer's face is always hidden. The fact that the face must not be revealed is understood by all. Also, people respond to the masked dancers during the performance similarly, indicating a common understanding of and reaction to the masks including fear and excitement, humor and teasing play.

The various segments of people also show diverse reactions to the masks in the same performance. Young children react with fear to certain masks, running away from the bwalo when the larger masks or frightening masks appear. Some even dissolve into tears and scream at the sight of certain masks.

Today in Chewa villages, boys are initiated by about ten to twelve years of age, and girls about the same time or by their late teens, depending upon puberty. The age range varies from as young as seven for boys and nine for girls, to adulthood for both boys and girls. In fact, initiations can also occur at any later time in life.

In their initiation, young men are taught about the masks, learning riddles about the masks, seeing them, touching them, wearing them; to lose the fear of them. These boys share an understanding of what the masks are made of, how they are made, and what it is like to be in the graveyard with the masks.

The girls also learn about masks separate from the boys. In their own initiation the girls come close to, touch and

walk around the Njobvu mask. They have learned that masks cover people, people they have seen and know, and are not wild animals or spirits from the dead, at least not directly.

Both boys and girls perform in the bwalo, dancing before the community, at the conclusion of their initiation. The girls' face is seen, and the boys' face is hidden by cloth masks. Still, though the boys have hidden their faces, the identity can still be known by the other boys, the boy's mothers, and even the girls with whom they have grown up, who would recognize their obvious individuality in body and movement.

Other young members of a village may choose not to become initiated, preferring instead to follow the teachings of Christianity. These young people grow up without the shared knowledge of the others through initiation and subsequent participation. Their shared understanding about the masks remains limited, especially so when they remain indoors during nyau ceremonies, as Christians in a predominantly nyau village may choose to do.⁴

The young who are initiated may become increasingly active in nyau as they grow older. In maturity, certain men and women receive more respect from others for their disposition, actions, behavior, and so on. The characters of some people are more appreciated than others, and they are chosen as leaders and to fulfill more senior societal roles. This, combined with interest and participation in nyau community events, sets individuals within a hierarchy of people in the community and in nyau.

Knowledge of Masking

The senior women undergo additional instruction in knowledge, the female side of nyau, by the Namkungwi. The senior men may be initiated a second time into the higher Njobvu rank, by undergoing an initiation ritual very much like the young boys, but by entering the Njobvu mask form

rather than the Kasiyamaliro. (See Chapter Six). At the most senior levels, men who are Chiefs, and women who are Namkungwi, are then instructed in the knowledge of the other side...male and female sides of nyau. The Namkungwi is present in the graveyard for the initiation of men, and is present in the bwalo, dancing with the masked dancers, and organizing the event. The Chief or a senior male initiated in the female side, may be invited to the girl's initiation house.

Besides this structured hierarchy of knowledge, there is knowledge gained from participation. Dancers, drummers and carvers are among those who make the masked performance happen. They will have personal knowledge about the creation of masks, and about the dancers who own, buy, sell and loan the masks for performances. They can recognize masks performed from one area to another, and will know who loaned the mask to whom for which occasion, and how much the good masks bring in income for the owner of the mask and/or the dancer.

Each of these groups has different, but complementary understandings about the masks. And each of these groups share common understandings at the same time, from one performance to another, whether the dance is in their own village, or in another village area.

For any performance, the community gathers around the bwalo. They do not stand randomly around the circle, but in well-defined stratified groups. These groups are defined by gender, age, and status or role, in a hierarchy of the community. In this Chapter, I will compare the organization of the masks with the organization of Chewa society as is evident in the spatial arrangement of the bwalo.

Hierarchy and Social Group

There is an unspoken arrangement of peoples, as all people

in the community go to the place which suits their position best. Everyone understands his and her position very well, and approaches the performance accordingly. Those who are visitors are given a specific status by their placement in the bwalo. Uninitiated men who wish to attend are sometimes asked to 'pay the road' or give money for permission to attend the performance. They are often placed among the younger men, furthest from the opening where the masked dancers emerge.

Chiefs and Elders

Chiefs are the leaders of the society, and have an aura of respect which is reflected in their placement in the bwalo. They are placed in a separated area, seated on chairs, or on mats laid out for the senior people. Shelters may be built of grasses for these senior people. Elders are placed alongside the Chiefs, in positions of honor and respect according to their status. The elders have the authority to criticize the event after the performance, and to banish songs or masks which are not of appropriate quality.

Men

On the other side of the senior men are other adult men who are members of nyau, who are positioned roughly according to their status from the highest, being nearer the Chiefs, down to the younger men with lower status, and from the younger men to the initiated boys and younger male children. Men placed furthest from the Chiefs and the opening of the bwalo for the masked dancers, are the uninitiated men. Men who are most active in nyau assume positions closer to the Chiefs than those who are initiated but are not actively involved in the masked dances.

Senior Women

The senior women, particularly the namkungwi female Chiefs and Chief's wives who have been given knowledge of both the male and female sides of nyau, share understanding of the masks and masked dancers much as the Chiefs and elders do.

They are given an important place in the bwalo near the drummers. These women are performers, needed to answer the song of the masked dancer, and to keep the momentum of the dance going with dance, ululations, clapping and song as an integral part of the performance.

The Namkungwi performs, but is also the most senior female ritual leader. The Namkungwi of the host village moves into the bwalo and dances with the masked dancer. She is part of the show, and part of the organization of the show. From the point of view of the senior women, the masked performance is a ritual event, a participatory event, and one which they help to orchestrate before and during the actual performance. These women are placed strategically beside or across from the drums for the performance.⁵

Occasionally the female Chiefs may sit together beside by the other Chiefs, but more often they are the bridge, the ones on the female side closest to the senior males.

Women

The young girls, young women, and senior women follow in order, with those who are participating in the singing closest to the Namkungwi. Other women are arranged by age; the oldest near the senior women and the youngest furthest from the senior women. The women nearest the young boys are most often young women with very young children and babies, standing between the youngest boys from the youngest girls in the circle. Women are deemed to have higher status by age, but also by levels of participation. Those women who have husbands who are prominent performers, or have accepted more responsibility for the preparing of food and brewing of beer, for example, will be accepted among other women of higher status who are more active in the nyau events.

Children

Babies including children up to three years of age, are

most often held by their mothers, wrapped on the mother's back. Older children are told stories about the masks which mystify and frighten the children. Small children are taught to believe that the masks are indeed spirits, and not men in masks. The spirits are frightening things, which may have been pulled out of a deep pool of water in some stories, or pulled literally out of the grave in others.

In initiation, the boys learn what they may have already begun to believe; that the beings are men, not spirits. Until then children are taught to run away from the masks for their own safety.

Among the Luvale, the arrival of the first makishi mask is the sign to young girls and children to run away.⁶ Among the Chewa, small children approaching nyau dancers may be hit with a switch for their impudence of coming too near. It is no great surprise, then, that young children, three to six years of age, and some older ones, run away, sometimes in tears, when they see a large mask form moving towards them.

Young girls of an older age may run as well, but with another understanding that as women they are not permitted to come too near the nyau for fear of being beaten or forced into the male initiation.⁷

Adolescents/Young Adults

Young men and women of marriageable age, teens and twenties, have another perspective of the dance. The girls are of an age where they have undergone their own initiation, and are now singing with the women or attending the performance with the other young women. Their role is a participatory one; if not singing, they are responding to the gestures and teasing by some of the masked dancers. One of the purposes of the masked dances, according to White (1961. p.24), is to "release tension and give pleasure and amusement to the women" which seems to be part of the nyau

performance as well.

In the course of a performance, certain masked dancers purposely interact with the women, either by chasing them away, or by teasing them with sexual overtones. Among the dancers are young men who know they are performing in front of their girlfriends, among the young women standing round the bwalo. As one dancer explained, he wore a shirt which he knew would be recognizable to the girl he wished to impress. The young woman and the dancer in this case share an understanding of the dance that is quite different from young children.

Another aspect of the adolescent understanding derives from the custom of men marrying outside their own village: young male dancers perform before potential brides from other villages.

Outsiders

In any masked event there may be outsiders present who are not part of the local community. These outsiders include people who are not Chewa, such as Ngoni or Yao people; urban visitors such as Malawian health visitors; and foreigners such as missionaries, development workers and even tourists. In certain situation these people are given permission to view a masked event. The guest of a member of the community may be welcome, but may be asked to 'pay the road', a small fee to help with expenses for the event. Yao men living in nyau areas are encouraged to go through a simple initiation in order to travel freely, but still retain their own religious practices. These guests are often placed at the furthest distance from the masked dancers.

Other outsiders may be treated as honorary guests, and are invited to join the senior people. The placement of each individual depends upon the decision of the chiefs who are present who may consult with on another, and with the elders and senior women, before deciding whether to charge

the person, how much to charge, and where they may be placed.

Summary

Each of these social groups, distinguished by age, gender and status in the community, understand the masked event from their own point of view. Chiefs have a social role to fulfill, as do elders. The female Namkungwi has a unique role in the performance itself, as do the senior women who perform in song, answering the male dancers. These senior groups of people also tend to be older in age, and share a certain status in the community which is accompanied by the privilege of additional knowledge about the masked events.

The younger groups, as demonstrated, have other perspectives according to the particular expectations of the community for their age. The young adults are preparing for marriage, and the community events are partly an opportunity for young men and women from different villages to meet one another. Children are encouraged to respect their elders and the rituals, and fear may be considered an expression of this respect. While these two younger groups are present in the bwalo, they do not share the same level of understanding as the adults in senior social roles.

These differences of understanding between initiates and non-initiates, adults and senior adults, men and women, are predicated upon the complexity of the village society, and to a certain extent reflect and represent that complexity.

Gender in Masking

The most consistent division of peoples in a Chewa village and in the spatial arrangement of people in the bwalo is that of gender. Men and women are separated in every ritual performance, and in daily village activities. This pervasive division between men and women is consistent in all social acts in the village.

Gender is also represented in every mask in the masking complex. Each mask is gendered, even if the gender is understated or less than evident at times to the casual observer. As described to me over and over again, "everything comes in pairs", and gender is the pairing referred to. People are not just people. They are male and female people. Masks are not just masks, they are clearly male and female masks.⁸

The status of masks is not dependent upon gender but rather upon the social role and age projected in the mask form. Male and female masks each have higher and lower status in the mask hierarchy.

For example, a Maria mask depicting an elder Namkungwi would be held in higher regard than a young Maria. The simple cloth mask of Kachipapa, the poor woman, would be lower in hierarchy than the young or old Maria. Each of the carved wooden masks and masks of hide, cloth and feathers is gendered, and has a social placement.

Masks are considered to be 'paired', as Chadzunda and Maria are understood as husband and wife. Dancers wearing male masks in any single performance may 'flirt' or 'tease' dancers wearing distinguishable female masks. Rarely, but at times, a Simoni and a Maria may sit together. This action, I am told, is imitating the public closeness of male and female foreigners as opposed to the formal separation of gender and of husband and wife in the public sphere of the Chewa. Male and female masks are performed separately, though pairings are generally understood, as the pairings of husband and wife are understood and known in the village.

Mask Categories and Genre

Masks are divided among the Chewa in various ways. Visually, Chewa sources divided masks into three

categories: carved wooden face masks, masks of feathers, cloth and hide, and large animal constructions of grasses, bamboo, sisal, and maize husk leaves. The masks were also divided into the night performers, primarily the large animal constructions, and the day performers, primarily the feathered masks and carved wooden masks. However, some of the masks may perform by night or day, depending on the occasion.⁹

Night masks are called Chiombo, (wild animals), as a category apart from the day masks. Both day and night masks, however, are also referred to as Chiombo, causing confusion to the outsider. The day masks are called mzimu, or spirits, though both day and night masks are described as spirits. Masks are also categorized by their various roles and relationships with other masks. These overlapping categorizations will become more apparent in the body of the thesis.

The formal criteria permitting the identification of a mask as of a specific type or genre also include a name that will be more or less familiar to people across a wide area of Chewa territory and in any one place, or performance there will often be more than one example of a particular type. If someone from the area says to someone from elsewhere, eg. "two Chilembwe are coming," both of them have some common knowledge and shared understanding of what to expect. Similarly when a carver makes a mask of a given type, that mask is at the same time his individual creation while also manifesting known formal criteria.

The understanding of mask as genre is helpful in describing and unravelling complicated ideas about masks, by placing a handle or title on what is seen, making some sense of the hundreds of individual masks seen performed. By naming the mask, the mask assumes a larger identity within a group, and from there, other social contexts are defined. Ritual roles of masks are described in terms of specific mask names and traits associated with the genre as a whole,

regardless of the individual identity of the mask.

The identification of masks with a specific genre allows dancers to perform to specific recognizable rhythms associated with the mask genre. Each mask genre is performed with a specific drum rhythm known throughout the region. This same particular rhythm is played for each performance of the mask genre, and is known by the dancer and any drummer in any village in the area.

Differentiation is as complex as the multiplicity of representation, since one genre may be defined as separate from another genre by its dance, and another by its color, and another by gender, or imagery, or ritual role, or representation of kinship roles, and so forth. Differences are as varied as the masks themselves, and all genres may be compared with each of several other genres, with variations between them.

In the end, what is perhaps more interesting, is that familiarity with the masks and the dance fixes a shared understanding of mask genre, which is easily recognized, even when the individual mask has never been seen before. The common mask genre are immediately recognized through familiarity, as several people may be asked spontaneously for the mask's name, and all give the same answer.

Masks which are of the same genre may also be given different names from one event to another because of an association with an individual performer, song, or movement. Rather than identify the same mask genre by more than one name, I have chosen to use the most common and known name to avoid confusion. More than this is not necessary to understand the whole of performance and masking. Therefore, the masks, as in the previous Chapters are all given the name which belongs to its genre.

Mask Values and Hierarchy

Among the masks there are various values asserted by nyau members which denote status, and contribute to an understanding of hierarchy. Among these values noted by nyau members are the roles the mask plays in ritual and in the dance. Among carved, wooden mask forms the color black is said to have higher status than the color red, which is more important than the color white. (See Chapter Five).

Use of sacks and animal hide for the masked costume is more prestigious than western clothing with strips of cloth as was pointed out to me over and over again during performances. Age depicted in a mask and a dancer is valued more highly than youth; as one member said specifically the more dignified and cautious dance movements of the old are "more important" (higher in hierarchy) than the excited and active movements of the young.

More powerful masks are preceded by less powerful ones.¹⁰ The masked character of Jere, made of cloth and feathers, precedes Njobvu¹¹. The two are paired together, but the lesser one always comes first. As explained previously, the more fearful mask Kadyankhadze, may be preceded by a lesser mask such as the flirtatious N'gan'gande. The feathered Kapoli is often first to dance in the masked performance, and is relatively low in the hierarchy of masks, being associated with messengers or the 'lame' family of masks, which is lower in hierarchy than the Chadzunda family.

The highest mask in the entire masking complex, according to a majority of nyau members, is considered to be Njobvu, the elephant. I write "considered to be" because it depends upon many perspectives; however this mask is senior in the hierarchy as the mask performed by Chiefs, for Chiefs, represented as Chiefs in the girl's initiation¹², and appears rarely, but usually in the funeral of a Chief.

The other animal constructions possess a higher status than the carved masks. These constructions are more closely tied to the secrecy and the sacred nature of nyau, and less to the performance of the dance itself. Certain constructions have more specific roles than others, tied to initiation, death and remembrance. Njobyu is the most important of all, followed by the construction represented as Kasiyamaliro.

Chadzunda is most often regarded as the highest ranking carved mask,¹³ Kan'gwin'gwi and other messengers such as Duli are the lowest in status. Just below Chadzunda are Chadzunda's family of masks, and the mask of Kasinja, head of the lame family.

The dancer himself is important to the hierarchy of masks. The identity of the dancer is known to only part of an audience, but certain masks, in tradition, are performed by men of certain rank themselves. Njobyu is performed by Chiefs. Chadzunda is performed by men who are Chiefs, senior members of nyau, and men with respected positions other than Chief.

New young members of nyau and relatively young dancers are messengers or guards, and construct their own masks of cloth and hide. Certain established dancers may perform more than one mask genre successfully, but will be considered active nyau members who are able to assume the roles in higher ranking masks as well as lower ranking ones. By custom Chadzunda is performed by men who are at least in their middle thirties in age.

Being considered strong, large and known for causing harm, masks such as the tall Makanja, rank higher than most masks made of cloth and hide. Makanja is known for its physical acrobatic ability combined with height as a strong warrior and is therefore considered a powerful mask. With the dread and fear other masks inspire, cloth and mud masks

such as Kamano¹⁴ which can kill and Pwanyanya which can maim, these are higher in rank than masks which are also made of sacks, cloth and mud.

The hierarchy of masks is apparent in simple observation during the dance in the treatment the dancers receive, and was verified by nyau members. Certain masks enter the bwalo at will, and others await their turn to perform. Chadzunda enters the bwalo wherever the dancers choose, breaking through the wall of people. They announce themselves with a bell or rattle, unlike Kapoli which is summoned by the performance organizer with a rattle. Kapoli is led into the bwalo, and allowed to perform until the master rattler leads him out.

One two-man mask, Chilembwe, is a powerful climax to many of the performances in which it appears¹⁵. By virtue of its dark color, powerful performance and ability to enter and depart from the bwalo freely, this mask has relatively high status. However, since this mask is not in a family of masks, nor is it in the category of animal constructions and has no ritual role, (though this seems to be changing), it also has less status than other masks.

The rank of a mask is determined by the values asserted, so that Chilembwe is higher in hierarchy when considering 'power'. Power as a value includes being kwibamtima, having a disposition or character of cruelty; ulemu, commanding respect, and opsya, being dreadful, fearful. Chilembwe is lower in hierarchy when considering its role in the dance compared to other large animal constructions. (See Chapter Seven).

Repeatedly, nyau members would describe how, as young boys, they used to misbehave with the lesser masks, but when the 'bigger' masks came, they would run. Invariably, these members would refer to the cloth and feathered masks as lesser, and the carved masks somehow more frightening, and

the large animals as masks they would not come near...the same hierarchy over again.

In order to analyze the myriad variations in hierarchy described above and single out specific values which establish one mask as higher in importance than another, it is necessary to first assert a hierarchy of all masks, as the Chewa are quite easily able to do. Regardless of all details raising and lowering the rank of individual masks, in the masking complex of nyau a single hierarchy of all masks by genre is consistent from one nyau member's ordering to another.¹⁶

The general hierarchy which follows reflects the comments in the preceding several paragraphs and was organized by nyau members working with me. This hierarchy was only challenged during field research in relation to the ordering of one or two masks, such as a senior male nyau member who insists Chadzunda and Maria are equally important, or Maria may even be more important. Another nyau member places Kadyankhadze as more important than Simoni and Maria, saying these are more recent masks. However, given that nyau members as a whole consider this ranking of masks common knowledge, and are in agreement with it, a hierarchy may be asserted as follows:

Higher in Status

Njobvu

Kasiyamaliro

Other constructions

Chadzunda

Maria

Kasinja

Chilembwe

Simoni

Chimbano*

Kadyankhadze

Makanja

Mbiyazodooka

Pedegu
 N'gan'gande
 Pwanyanya
 Kapoli
 Kwinimbila
 Kan'gwin'gwi

Lower in Status

*(This is an overall consensus repeatedly agreed to by members of nyau during field research. For Chimbano, see Njombwe Village case study later in this Chapter.)

The above overall hierarchy generally encompasses all values together. Below, masks are selected in relation to one specific value which have been suggested by nyau members as being important to Chewa hierarchy. Following are listings which begin to sort out the specific values which determine hierarchy within the masking complex.

AGE	ROLE	RESPECT	FEARED
Chimkoko	Kasiyamaliro	Njobvu	Kamano
Aged Maria	Chief: Chadzunda	Kasiyamaliro	Pwanyanya
Chadzunda	Namkungwi: Maria	Aged Maria	Kadyankhadze
Kasinja	Speaker: Kachipapa	Chadzunda	Duli
Kachipapa	Speaker: Kasinja	Chilembwe	Chilembwe

Values: Age, Role, Respect and Fear

1. Age as a value has more than one meaning. In one sense, age refers to the age of a person, as in older and younger, but also the position of a person in society which corresponds to age: girl, mother, grandmother, ancestress. The eldest, such as the old Maria, is the highest in status. In another sense, age refers to the perception of age in tradition. The animal constructions are the 'oldest' tradition in masking, are highly valued as the oldest custom, and therefore are higher in status. Chimkoko is considered the eldest form, the great grandparent, of the antelope constructions.

2. Role refers to the societal role the mask represents, such as Chadzunda as Chief, but also the role of the mask in ritual. Masks are worn to perform specific roles in the Gule Wamkulu, such as Kapoli 'announcing' the event as the first dancer. Kasiyamaliro is highly valued for its ritual roles in funerals, boy's initiation into nyau, and the funeral remembrance performances. Both Kachipapa and Kasinja play key roles in funerals, and have the ability to 'speak' their own songs in the Gule Wamkulu, unlike the masks portraying senior societal roles such as Chadzunda.

3. Respect (ulemu) refers to the level of seriousness attributed to a mask form. Respect for the mask increases with the perception of sacredness, importance of societal and ritual roles, and aura of powerfulness surrounding the mask form. In this respect, Njobvu is a mask performed by Chiefs, representing chiefly power. Both Njobvu and Kasiyamaliro are large animal constructions which are categorized as the most respected mask forms. Chadzunda is again, the Chief himself, and the aged Maria the senior ancestress of the village. Chilembwe is a large animal form, separate from the other large constructions, but given a similar distance and respect when it is performed.

4. Fear and dread (opsya) refers to the extent to which people run from the mask form, keep a distance from the mask form, or regard the mask form with wariness. Certain masks are more commonly known to harm people, (Kamano), (Duli), or smash objects, (Pwanyanya) and possibly even kill animals or people. Kadvankhadze, (to eat the poisonous sap of the nkhadze tree), relates to a fear of political instability, since this mask depicts the wild and untamed character of a man in line to succeed the Chief. Fear is also related to the power of the mask to do harm not only physically but in a spiritual sense. Fear of spirits is present in the form of Chilembwe as it is believed to be the spirit of a very powerful and angry person.

These four values, age, role, respect and fear; project four different kinds of hierarchies with four different sets of masks as most important. From all these varied local categories other values seem to emerge: Sacredness and Secular, Secrecy and Openness, Few appearances and Many appearances, More Visibility and Less Visibility, needing Permission to dance and Commanding to dance, for example. These values correspond with the higher and lower status of masks in the overall hierarchy as follows:

<u>Higher Status</u>	<u>Lower Status</u>
Sacredness	Secular
Secrecy	Openness
Fewer Appearances	Many Appearances
Less Visibility	More Visibility
Commanding to Dance	Permission to Dance

Few Appearances/Many Appearances

1. Masks which are performed the least are more likely to be higher in status than those which appear in profusion in the Gule Wamkulu. There is some correlation between the number of highest-ranking masks and the number of lowest-ranking masks performed in dances. This also has exceptions, making the correlation difficult to assert. However, in general, there are only one or two Chadzunda performances compared to eight to twelve performances of Kapoli masks in any one large performance. The correlation is more relevant to the animal constructions, which appear in the beginning or end of a day performance, or in ritual, and are not performed at any other time during the day.

Sacred/Secular

2. Masks which have a ritual role, as defined in Chapter Six, are considered to be more important than those masks with only a secular or social role. Certain masks enact specific rituals, such as circling the house of the deceased before a funeral, or leading the senior women and

men during the all-night vigil during before the burial. These sacred moments are apart from depictions of social roles, and are indications of a more senior position in hierarchy.

Less Visibility/More Visibility

3. Masks which require more space or distance during performance are higher in status than those which, for example, gather together around the bwalo entrance to wait for their turn to dance. Other masks low in status wander through the villages as messengers days before the dance, and are generally accessible and visible. In contrast Kasiyamaliro is often surrounded by initiates, keeping others at a distance and partially hiding the mask form from full view. Children may run away when this mask appears and others of the animal constructions appear. These masks are associated with the night dances, again restricting visibility. Other masks such as Chilembwe perform without the usual pauses for men to come and give the dancers money. The performance is unbroken, and people are kept at a respectful distance.

Commanding to Dance/Permission to Dance

4. Masks which command the right to dance, enter the bwalo seemingly at will and do not hesitate or wait for permission, are higher in status. Most carved masks and the feathered, cloth and hide masks are selected by the Wakunjira, the organizer. The Wakunjira may decide the sequence of the dance, and how long any one mask will be performed. Chilembwe, for example, comes from the graveyard directly into the bwalo, performing without such restrictions.

Secrecy/Openness

5. This opposition encompasses the others. Masks which are less visible, which emerge from the graveyard to the bwalo and back, are fewer in numbers in the dance performance, and which remain more secretive or sacred in representations than the openness of the known face of a

missionary, for example, are higher in status. Kasiyamaliro is more secretive; the mask is not seen outside specific times and not generally as part of the Gule Wamkulu day performance except for specific ritual moments. Information about Kasiyamaliro is only given after initiation, while descriptions of and discussions about the feathered and wooden masks are more freely offered. Feathered masks are more open; being seen in and out of the village and the graveyard for days before a large masked event; they are the most numerous in and out of the dance performance.

Mask Society as Mirror of Human Society

In initiation lessons there was no specific categorical knowledge taught about the hierarchy of masks, yet it is clearly understood by the community of nyau members. This understanding was revealed in off-hand comments during the dances, and was then further explained once I requested more details. These distinctions between masks were transcribed into the texts of my fieldnotes, over a period of years. From these comments and explanations, I would argue that each categorization of masks indicates a division or separation in society which is important in nyau, and important in the separation of people in the bwalo.

There is a relationship between these criteria for the ranking of masks, the spatial arrangement of people in the bwalo. People are, again, divided by age, gender, role in the village community, and by whether they are members or non-members of nyau; insiders or outsiders. These categories are the same ones which define the spatial placement of peoples observing the performance, and the same ones which define the communities of knowledge.

As with the masks, the categories of people may at times be conflicting, such as when a respected dancer is also the

reckless village drunk, or when an old man has not been initiated, or a young man has assumed a senior ritual role. The dual hierarchies of men and women add to this complexity, as women have senior status apart from men, and some women have status as wives of certain high-ranking men. These characteristics of the individual may be part of determining his status and place in a given community just as the individual characteristics of a mask's color and attachments may contribute to the ranking of the mask.

These same contradictions are present among the people around the bwalo, as social roles conflict with age, respect and gender. The woman who is also a Chief is one example, and the Chief who is also a relatively young man is another. There are also instances where an older man may be well respected and considered fierce, a positive trait, but regrettably is not in line to be Chief.

As suggested in the conclusion, the masks mirror the community. Values attributed to masks are also often attributed to people, and people are grouped together by gender, age, and role. Thus, the conflicts inherent in the hierarchy of masks are inherent in the arrangement of the community surrounding the bwalo.

Conclusion

Masked society and human society mirror one another, as described in the previous Chapter. The community of the living mirrors the community of the dead, but even more specifically, the community of the dead and the living share hierarchical structures and values which separate one social grouping from another. The complex interweaving of these societal values are present in the village organization and in the masked performance organization.

Different social groupings share different understandings, levels of knowledge and kinds of participation in the masked events. Each is necessary and complementary to

another, requiring the involvement of the community as a whole. The community of peoples surrounding the bwalo are distinctly separated into social groupings, but each person present is also part of the community of peoples sharing an understanding of the masked event itself.

As shown in this Chapter, the differences which separate and define groups of people around the bwalo are the same values which define the hierarchies of masks: age, gender, status and role in the community. The hierarchy of masks is reflected in the hierarchies of the community spatially arranged around the bwalo. The masked dance mirrors Chewa society, as Sydney Kasfir, (1988. p.7) suggests,

the "masking system is so highly integrated into existing social system that we can speak of masking as the cultural system, rather than its symbolic parallel."

As Skorupski suggests in his quote at the beginning of this Chapter, spiritual beings are believed to have the same hierarchical structure as society. Gelfand (1976. p.17), in research among the Shona, also found there was a "spiritual hierarchy". In nyau, those spiritual beings are the masked dancers, the former living members of community now in spirit form. Thus, the spirit of a senior woman in death is more powerful than the spirit of a young girl, and the spirit of the senior dancer active in nyau events is more important than the spirit of the initiated man who is not active. These hierarchical relationships are important in life, then, since they are also present in death.

With this exegesis of the importance of hierarchy and the tremendous variety in mask and social relationships, conflicts are then inherent in establishing hierarchies among masks, as well as humans. In the masking complex various relations are exhibited and exposed; relations of men and women, of Chief and their lineage, of the spirit world and the village, of families and of outcasts. Masks and masked characters become as complicated as people are

complicated, where charm and fear are combined in one human being, and the seemingly simple can also be deadly. The very complexity of the myriad representations, then, becomes the closest truth to being human, and representing all that is possible and actual in the human community.

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CHAPTER ENDNOTES

- 1 A spatial map of the bwalo for a dance performance is attached, (Fig. 16) with the various categories of peoples. In addition, the dancers, the wakunjira or organizer of the dancers, and others such as carvers who may be helping with the event, are in the graveyard or separated from the performance by a grass fence, mpanda, set up near the bwalo. These people are the closest to the masks and dancers, and have private knowledge about the performance, separate from the observers.
- 2 As will be discussed in more detail, no one village has more than a few masks and dancers. Each event is achieved through the participation of several villages, often ten or more, and dancers from the whole village area, or from elsewhere in the central region. Therefore, the community or group of individuals observing and participating in the masked performance is different from one masked event to another.
- 3 Prior to the performance, the participating chiefs and senior people gather together, as do the senior women. These men are consulted before strangers, (like myself) may be welcomed to the dance. In one funeral, a man was buried according to his tradition of nyau, though he had gone to school, moved to Blantyre, the largest city in Malawi, and had led an urban lifestyle. His fellow workers never joined nyau, were raised in the city, or were not Chewa at all. These people were accommodated into the funeral performance as guests, but were separated from members of nyau, and isolated in a far corner away from the dancers.
- 4 In 1992 Christian women confided in a young Malawian woman assisting me, telling her they feared the nyau, the masks and the masked dances. They stayed indoors all day during these performances, and expressed how they feared to go out, feared becoming 'one of them' by seeing something they should not see, feared being hit or attacked by the masked performers. Because of this fear, they were isolated from the rest of the community.
- 5 This arrangement around the circle has more than one possibility, in terms of where men and women meet. In many performances these women are next to the drummers. In other dance performances placement of the drums and the senior women who are singing are arranged opposite one another, rather than next to one another. The spatial order of hierarchy remains the same, but the senior women are next to the senior men, and the drums on the other side, followed by other men and then by younger men and boys.
- 6 CMN White 1961. p.4
- 7 I attended the initiation dance of three young women who were initiated into the men's side of nyau in 1992. They were accused of trying to sneak into the graveyard to see the nyau. Instead, they were caught and forced into initiation themselves. The girls were carried into the bwalo at the end of the normal dance performance, on

-
- the shoulders of the senior women, just as in the initiation of girls. However, men were encouraged to give money down the blouses of the young women, and they were treated without the respectful distance and discipline I have seen in the initiation of girls.
- 8 In field research, this emphasis of every part having a gendered counterpart became increasingly clear. To ignore the complementarity of gender is to miss part of the understanding of masks, and the cosmology of masking which permeates Chewa society, as will be shown in subsequent Chapters.
- 9 For example, the Kasiyamaliro made of maize husks and performed often at night, also regularly performs for the funeral rituals during the day.
- 10 "Hierarchy of power" in Cosmos. 1969. p.32
- 11 Jere as performing with Njobvu is described by Rangeley 1949. p.20 to 21, and was explained by various sources in field research.
- 12 In the girl's initiation, Njobvu is described as being the Chief, or in other words, representing the power and authority of the Chief. When Njobvu does appear in initiation ritual, the girl is asked to grasp the tusks, and to go around and under the elephant structure.
- 13 Except in Kasungu where there is no Chadzunda and Chimbano assumes the role and accoutrements of Chadzunda.
- 14 Kamano (teeth) is a particularly fearful mask performed in the Kasungu area. This mask consists of mud daubed on the face of the dancer. The lips of the dancer are tied back to expose the teeth. I was told that the Kamano masked dancers had killed several people over the past year (1991) in the Kasungu area. This mask form is not common throughout the central region.
- 15 In documenting the order of appearance of masks in performance, it became clear that Chilembwe's appearance was the climax of the performance, a little more than halfway through the entire performance. The dance of Chilembwe causes great excitement, with young children running from the massive beasts which move with agility in the dance arena. Chilembwe moves straight from the graveyard, bursting into the bwalo, dances, bursts out of the bwalo and goes directly back to the graveyard.
- 16 It is important to note that nyau members do place masks in order of importance, or rank, and can quite easily say 'this mask is greater (wamkulu) than that one'. This happened so frequently in field research that the ordering of masks into a hierarchy (a term also supported by Skorupski (1976), Gelfand (1967) and Cosmos. (1969), was considered common knowledge by members of nyau.

SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT OF DANCE OBSERVERS

GENDER and STATUS

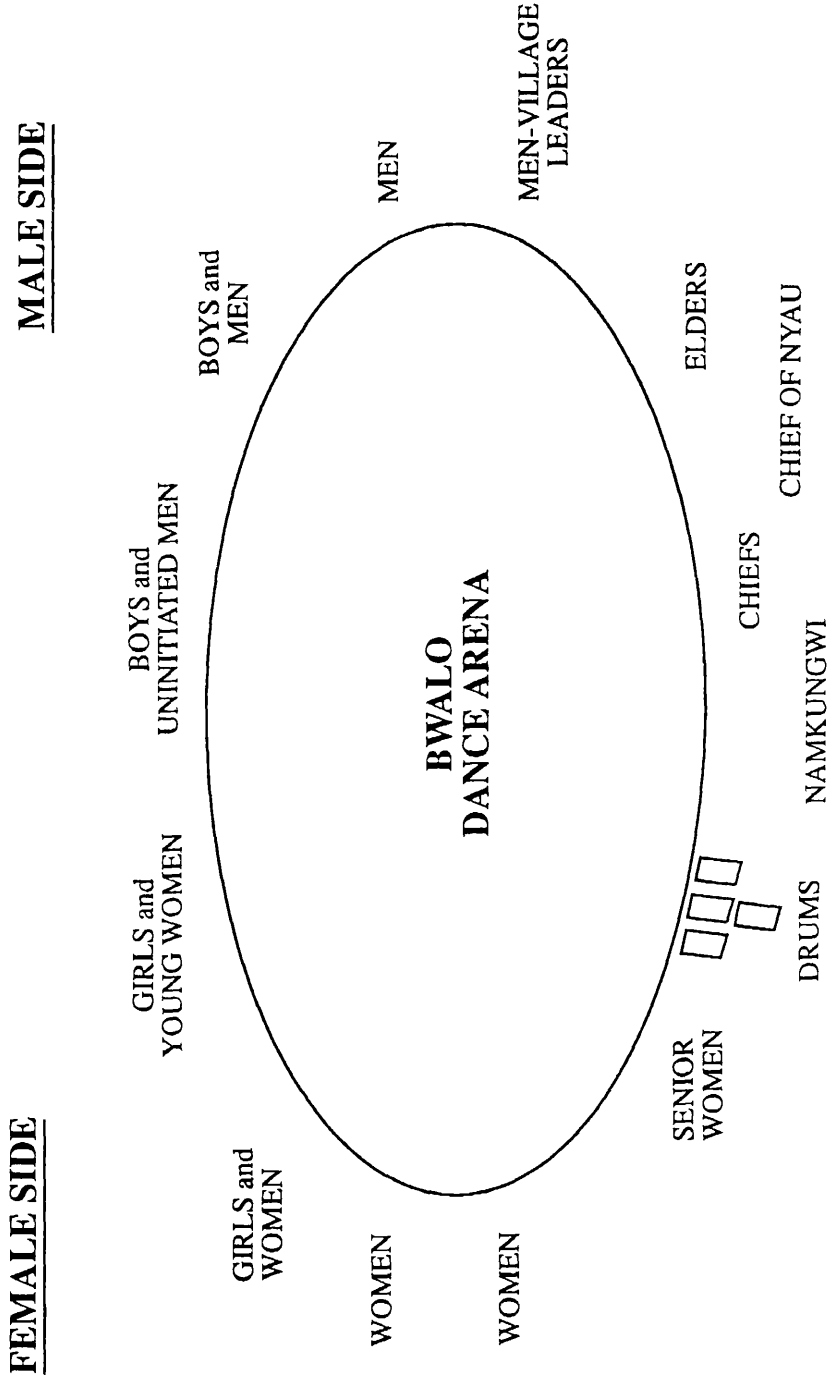


Fig. 16



Fig. 17

CHAPTER FIVE: The Individual Mask

[The mask] "was the face of one of those paradoxical spirits that move amongst men and trees, carved by an artist who has the gift to see such things and the wisdom to survive them." -Ben Okri (1991 p.244)

The Mask-Maker and the Mask

Some masks are carved of wood by skilled master mask-makers. These masks are individually identifiable from all others. Each is unique; the work of an individual carver, unlike the more generic forms of hide, cloth and feathered masks, or the large animal constructions often made by many hands. While there are men in many villages who are appreciated for their skill in designing the large constructions and who carve their own masks, in this Chapter I am concerned with the work of professional carvers; those who earn their living from making masks.

In the central region of Malawi, there are a number of individuals who derive their livelihood full time as professional carvers of masks¹. These carvers are sought out by nyau dancers for their superior workmanship, and their success as carvers by reputation. In the course of research, I was able to identify several of these carvers and their work.

Mask-Maker in the Community

Professional mask-makers live in the village, but set up their compound apart from the others in the community. In one case, the carver's compound was hidden behind a fence of grasses, and in another, the carver's house was on the village edge. Some are quite successful with their own small herd of cattle and larger house of mud and thatch, and perhaps even brick. Other carvers continue to live very simply, but carvers have a profession providing cash

income. This practice sets carvers apart from the vast majority of rural Malawians who derive their livelihood from farming.

Carvers collect wood from the graveyard², which places them in a category apart from the rest of the community who do not enter the graveyard except for funerals, and who are forbidden to cut graveyard trees. To make the masks in secrecy, carvers collect discarded chicken feathers and other objects from the village rubbish heaps, but only at night, risking treading on to a snake or other wild animal. They collect animal hides, some from the bush and some from rubbish heaps at night, both domestic animal hide such as cow, goat and sheep, and wild animal, such as mongoose, monkey, serval and civet.

The carver's profession takes them into the night, to the graveyard, to the bush and the rubbish heaps, marginal places of normal village life. It is considered more dangerous to travel at night (you might step on a snake). But it is also dangerous in the sense of a profession which leads the person to the graveyard, to the parts of life most people prefer to ignore and never enter into willingly. There is a sense of danger from association with the dead, the night and the refuse of society. They are associated with the fear of witchcraft; fearful time, fearful places, and fearful objects; therefore the carver following this tradition may be considered a brave yet frightening person.³

Mask-makers also find the things of the modern day world: cloths, synthetic materials which look like hair, paints instead of pigments, and in some cases, better tools than the old ones made by the now uncommon blacksmiths. Masks now have pieces of paper and cardboard used for making a facsimile of teeth and the white of eyes. Pieces of aluminum foil, ready-made wigs, cotton thread, ribbons, and various other ornaments are sought after today. Pieces of a discarded, synthetic textured car seat cover of black or

brown tones serves very well for eyebrows and hair, in place of the dangerous search at night for a piece of real animal fur.

Living in the villages without transportation, carvers must rely on people who go to markets and to the city shops. Some men who want a mask made will bring the materials of his choice. Sometimes, the carver has to go and search for these things. The purchase of a mask may be transacted with a can of white paint, which he uses to mix with red and yellow paints for the favorite tones of masks today.

Carvers tend to have better means than most in their villages to move about. (One carver spent many years in Zimbabwe, another lived in South Africa). They tend to have contacts in other places, and people who need fine masks tend to travel from some distance to see them. They draw upon this greater exposure to the world for their work.

The Making of a Mask

The creation of a new mask, according to one professional mask-maker, takes three days; one day to rough-cut the mask, and another day to smooth and finish the wood, and a third day to complete the work of painting and adding attachments: feathers, cloths, hides, furs, earrings, wigs, whatever. This would be to work at a fast pace, however, and masks are more likely to take a full week to complete by most makers.

The mask is carved with an adze, and smoothed with a metal scraper. Holes are burned into the wood with heated metal spikes for the nostrils and along the edges of the mask for attaching things on to it: such as animal hide, feathers and cloths. A metal needle is used with twine. The actual tools are kept in secrecy, hidden in the house of the carver or kept in the graveyard. The tools for making masks are rarely stolen.

The holes for eyes are made more realistic by attaching white paper to the inside of the mask, covering the holes, and then burning a small hole in the paper, leaving a burned ring of brown resembling the iris of the eye. Teeth are similarly made with the white portions of cigarette packs or other cardboard pieces. Older masks have the remnants of wooden tooth pieces, or maize kernels.

Carved wooden masks are often crowned with animal hide such as monkey or cow and covered with feathers. Moustaches are added with the fur of rabbit or mongoose, or the long hairs on a cow tail.⁴ Serval cat, which resembles leopard in coloring and pattern, adorns the carved masks of Chadzunda, the mask depicting a Chief. Whole serval hides may cover the shoulders and back of a Chadzunda dancer, unlike any other mask form. The same serval hide may be worn by a senior Chief during his role in the Gule Wamkulu.⁵

The fact that a serval hide is attached to the Chadzunda mask, and is worn by the more senior Chiefs is not coincidental, as the serval hide (which resembles leopard) represents authority, rank and position of a Chief, as explained in Chapter Three.

The feathers and hide are coveted today, more so as they become more rare and more difficult to replace. The 'skirt' or waist covering of one dancer with the Chadzunda mask has several hanging mongoose tails, which the dancer indicated would be almost impossible to replace today. Carved masks made today are often covered in various cloth and synthetic materials which resemble human hair or animal hide.

Stripped sisal is used as a costume, hanging as swaying fringe from the waist, knees, ankles upper arm or elbows. The messenger Kan'gwin'gwi is uniquely covered in long green banana leaves. Fertilizer bags of synthetic burlap are cut and sewn into trousers and shirts, trimmed with sisal. Rattles made of iron, gourd and seeds, and more

recently coke bottle tops, are strung with wire and tied round the ankles. Feet, for the dance, remain bare.

Attached to the base of the carved masks are assorted pieces of cloth to further conceal the face, and to secure the mask in its place. Tattered strips of cloth are tied on the bodies of some dancers in place of stripped sisal. Entire costumes are sometimes made of colorful cloth strips which fly in the air with the dancer's movements.

All of these materials, whether new or old, have been in some sense discarded. The empty cigarette packs, spare scraps of paper, plucked feathers, used fertilizer bags, bottle tops, tattered cloth strips and scraps of hide from deceased animals are the kinds of things which may be found in a rubbish pit.

Materials for the masks also include things such as wood, mud, sisal strips, wild animal hide, wild bird feathers, and other natural materials found in the bush, forest or graveyard itself. These materials together with the scraps of village life are transferred into the graveyard where they are transformed, recreated and re-used in the masks costumes.

Thus, the materials used to make masks have their origins outside the normal everyday life of the village. The gathering of materials is done under the cover of night, so that the rubbish of the village is removed without others having seen it.

Color and Mask Imagery

It has been all too often assumed that any one element of form, (shape, texture, motif, color) has a single significance. In my own field research it became apparent that there was rarely a single significance in any one element. The same color may have a range of identifications associated with it depending upon the

individual mask, giving rise to a set of related significances. When asked why a mask is red, people may give only one answer and an answer which was different from another person at the same event. However, the answers seemed to have consistency from one performance to another and one person to another, forming a body of related significances.

For example, the color red meant many different things. Different depictions exist simultaneously, and are described differently from one person to the next, for many different reasons. There are differences in levels and kinds of knowledge, of interests in the masks, and of specific local situations which may lead to more than one representation, and even conflicting representations at the same time. Divergent explanations may not depend upon one being right and another wrong, making exegesis a complicated undertaking.

In discussing two different red masks, I was told the following: the mask's color stands for Europeans, for sunburned Europeans, for an Indian, and also a Korean, or foreigners as a whole; and it is for women yet it may also be for a man. Red is associated with danger, not in western terms, but in Chewa terms in the dance. It is 'Cho-opsya' dreadful, frightening, something associated with fear. Yet, the Chewa say red is also beautiful, the favorite shade of color chosen by many people and a color much appreciated in the dance.

Therefore, not only can the color red⁶ not be regarded as representing any one thing, it can represent several conflicting ideas, suggested by different people about the same mask. One red female mask is identified simultaneously as a European woman, and as a Maria mask, with connotations of Mary Mother of Christ and the Catholic Church. To others, the mask is identified as the mask of a senior Chewa woman and/or wife of a Chief. The same mask may be interpreted as being the face of a Korean woman.

The color red may be perceived as a compliment to idealized female beauty, associated with Chewa womanhood. Red is also the color of various male masks, such as the Chief's sons and nephew, colonial officers and Arab slavers.⁷

Red is one of the three primary colors in the nyau mask repertoire of red, black and white. It is often said that black was the first color used on the masks, made from the charred wood of the fire. Later, red followed, and then white. The least used color for carved masks of the three is white. Although it is also used with red to give pink, pink as classed as red.

Black may be painted with red on the same mask. On one female mask, black visually sets off the eyes, the lips and the scarification marks against the red face. These marks are considered beautiful, and the color black can be used as a contrasting color to emphasize these.

However, black as a color is much more than a contrast to red. Black is associated with being dreadful, even more dreadful than red; it is a color of power, as in the use of black for the masks of chiefs, Chadzunda; it is considered more masculine. As others have said, in perceptions of attractiveness, it is better for men to be darker than women, and women to be redder than men.

Black also has the connotation of being from the grave, dripping black like the mud and earth where the dead are buried. The fact that the masks themselves emerge from the graveyard and are black in color is considered to be as an association with death.

Few masks in the range of carved masks, are truly white, with Pedegu, the orphan mask, as the single clear example. White is the least fearful, and is actually considered the opposite of fearful. Overall, the Pedegu mask described in Chapter Three, is a hapless and pitiful orphan, lacking the fearfulness associated with all the other masks.

While all the masks in the masking complex are considered 'opsya', or dreadful and fearful, the paler the color the less frightening the mask becomes.

There is more to the color of a mask than its paint. There are the black, red-rust and white of the feathers topping many of the masks and the off-white (also considered white) of the maize husks and the sisal strippings in costumes and animal constructions.⁸ The spotted and patterned hides of animals and brightly colored patterned cloth are referred to as 'manga-manga', or many-colored, but the colors of hides are mostly black and white, and various reddish, brown and golden tones associated with red.

In the past few years, the sisal which is pale, white, has been dyed in newly-popular shades of purple, as well as black, grey, and yellow. Purple and yellow may be considered a red, as grey and blackened sisal may be associated with black, but it is clear new colors are entering the dance performance with the availability of new paints and dyes. With these changes, adjustments in interpretations may also follow.

Identification of Masks with Master Carvers

In the course of field research, three mask-makers were specifically interviewed about their work, and about the making of masks more generally. Each one of the mask-makers produced masks which were purchased for use throughout the central region, and had been making masks for years, in one case since the late 1930's. The work of these well-known carvers could often be recognized and identified as having been made by the hand of a specific carver.⁹

The dancers, carvers and leaders of nyau were often able to identify the original makers of some of the masks performed in the Gule Wamkulu, whether the carver were a local man

who made his own mask, or the work of an expert carver perhaps 50 kilometers away. Identification was not clear in each and every example, but occurred often enough, once my interest in knowing this was accepted, to demonstrate a local knowledge of carvers and individual workmanship among the most active members of nyau.

Descriptions of individual work differentiate one carver from another. For example, the work of one carver is characterized by his treatment of the nose in each of his masks. The nose forms a triangular shape, with two straight planes on either side of the nose. This treatment of the nose occurs in his masks whether the masks are Chadzunda, Makanja, Simoni, and small Simoni masks for the young initiate.

Another carver, who has many examples of his work in the Gule Wamkulu across the central region, often carves senior male masks characterized by deep furrowed brows, with wrinkled foreheads and cheeks. His noses, while not as distinct as the above carver's work, are commonly rounded in a distinctive way in his work for both male and female mask forms.

A third mask-maker is a professional dancer as well as carver. His masks have smooth surfaces rather than furrowed, with noses which are small and sometimes referred to as 'sharp' by assistants who made the comparison between the features of the English foreigner and the features of the Bantu Chewa. The mzungu or foreigner is described as having sharper features. A mask made by this carver was described as being particularly masculine and virile by nyau members, due its blackness, shine, sharp features, and appearance as both a mature man and a younger one.

Prominent carvers often share training experience in an informal 'school' of nyau carvers. The eldest of the present-day carvers learned his trade as a young man, a Malawian working in Zimbabwe, making masks for the Chewa

men who had earned money and purchased a mask to take home with them. This man subsequently returned to the central region of Malawi himself, marrying into a village in Nkhoma. He continued making and selling masks, and apprenticed others who wanted to learn.

At least three of his apprentices have become professional carvers in their own right, developing the distinctive difference in style described above, and apprenticing others. In this informal 'school' the leading carvers in the central region were taught either by the same now elderly carver, or by his students.

The same elderly carver discussed changes in masking beginning sometime in the early 1900s. The masks were larger than face size, and often quite crude. They were ponderous and heavy to wear, causing difficulties for the dancers. In his own innovations, he made masks from lighter wood, the size of actual faces. He described his own work as being less crude, and more life-like. In his work, he chose to produce the image of an actual face, rather than a crude outline of facial features as was more common in the past.

In his discourse, this carver explained how the others who are now making masks have continued to follow his example. Masks are made life-size, to fit over the face as if they are actual faces placed over the dancer's own face. This kind of mask is universally made today by the professional carvers who were apprentices of this elderly carver and his own apprentices.

Masks are identified with the work of certain carvers, and the appearance and success of the masks in performance contribute to those carvers' reputations. The community of peoples with this specialized knowledge is not as small as may seem at first. Certainly the owners of masks who have commissioned the making of a mask, or visited the carver to see which masks were currently available will know the

maker.

I accompanied one Chief from Bunda who travelled to a village in Nkhoma to visit a mask-maker to commission a new mask. The trip took more than an hour's drive, and would have taken an estimated four hours journey by local bus, including the walk to the village itself. This, I came to understand, was not an unreasonable journey for a seasoned dancer like this Chief, to find the best possible mask.

Initiated women are also included in the community of people who would recognize the creator of a mask they have seen in the dance. This same Chief from Bunda who travelled to Nkhoma has a wife who was aware of the purpose of her husband's travel, and the carvers also have wives. The wife of one carver sat with us as the masks were taken from hiding and displayed. The wife of another quite openly directed me to the secluded place in the graveyard where she knew her husband was carving masks. A third wife of a carver showed me her husband's work in his absence. As observers and participants in the dances, the identification of masks with carvers becomes apparent to men and women alike who choose to be aware of and take interest in the masks.¹⁰

The fact that a mask can be attributed to a known carver is one important aspect of how Chewa people understand masks as individual, unique objects in addition to their roles in the dance or their specific genre. This individuality of the mask itself is another layer or dimension of the overall interpretation of Chewa masks.

Portraiture

Many masks are intended as physiognomic likenesses of known people. Thus one mark of a skilled carver is to achieve an image which is recognizable as the actual likeness of a known or remembered individual. One carver pointed out how my chin would be cut, and the shape of my nose in a

carving. Another demonstrated the shape of my assistant's face, and how he could carve a mask to look exactly like him so his wife, his family and his friends would know it was him.

The choice of faces is a decision of the carver, and the level of recognition is part of the carver's success in carving a likeness of a person. Carvers agreed in separate interviews, they may choose any face, even a face in a magazine. Alternatively, they also agreed they could simply carve a face from their own imagination, without needing the face of a live person to guide them.

Carvers do not have absolute freedom, however, in the choices of faces attached to certain mask genres. There are accepted expectations in the carving of certain mask genres and the choice of an actual person's face for that genre. These expectations are partly due to practice and tradition, but also due to the nyau society for which the masks are made. Carvers, as members of nyau, share a common understanding of the different mask genres, and of certain expectations in the imagery and likenesses in any one genre.

For the genre of Chadzunda, the black mask of the Chief, the face is expected to be a portrait, an actual physiognomic likeness of a Chief. The face chosen by the carver, and within the expectations of nyau, is the face of a deceased Chief, especially one who was much loved and respected in his lifetime. Choosing a known and respected Chief who has died re-enforces the belief in masked dancers as spirits of the deceased, mzimu, and nyau as the link with the spirit world.

In another example, the face, or likeness of a senior woman who has died is chosen for the respected mask genre, Maria, as her portrait. This Chewa woman is often misunderstood by outside observers as a representation of foreigners. However, the face itself is most often a Chewa woman. The

mask may be carved as her likeness in age and wisdom, but is more often carved in her likeness without the wrinkles of age, remembering her in her youth and child-bearing years.

In the case of Maria, the most senior carver insisted it should be the face of a deceased woman, just as the face of the Chief is of a deceased Chief. His masks do depict those who have already died, as he explains he has kept their faces in his head and carves them from memory.

Other Chadzunda and Maria masks do portray the faces of Chiefs and women who are very much alive. Masks are commissioned from these carvers to create masks resembling certain individuals. One Chief had a mask made of himself, which he performed himself in the Gule Wamkulu. Other masks were made in the likeness of one man's mother, still living, and another man's young wife. The masks were worn by the son and husband in the dances.

Another mask form, Simoni, is often carved in the likenesses of younger men. Specific Simoni masks have been described to me as being the recognizable likeness of a carver's nephew, a carver's son, and the faces of specific foreigners, such as a village recruiter for the mines, and a missionary who visited the village. One Simoni mask was even said to be carved in the likeness of a specific Chewa woman.

In contrast to these mask forms, other masks are more commonly not the faces of individual people. Kadyankhadze is the face of an imagined person rather than an actual person. The reason for the lack of portraiture in this mask genre, I suggest, is its particular anti-social role as described in Chapter Three. As a portrait, this mask would constitute an insult; a social condemnation.¹¹

Some images are also shrugged off by carvers as 'that one is of no particular person'; so not all masks are

portraits. Other identities are not known; either the mask has aged and the name of the person depicted has long been forgotten or the name or identity was lost after the mask was sold.

On the other hand, it is possible that an image may become too much like the actual person, in a manner beyond the acceptance of the community. It seems that an element of distance from the image as a re-creation of the living person is required visually and in the masked dancer's portrayal, if it is to be tolerated by the viewing community. Resemblance is important, but there do seem to be limits. The masked dancer who assumes the character of the once-living individual too much crosses a fine line of acceptance.

Thus, one Chadzunda mask made by a master carver some years ago, was carved in the physical likeness of a Chief who had died just a year before. This Chief was well known and respected in his village, and the people still missed him. The owner/dancer of the mask belonged to the former Chief's village, and he carefully reconstructed a dance with the former Chief's characteristic and endearing bumbling ways. In the dance, the Chief tried to harness two bulls, in an action which was still remembered in the village as the time the bulls ran off with the cart, leaving the hapless Chief chasing behind.

The performance was so like the former Chief in the resemblance of the mask's image, the way the dancer mimicked mannerisms of the former Chief, and the re-creation of an actual remembered event, that some of the people became upset, saddened anew by the loss of their Chief. As the dancer of the mask explained, due to this event he could no longer wear this mask in his village, and planned to sell the mask outside the area. Although the mask was only a few years old, it had fallen into disuse and disrepair, and had become infested with insects.

The remembrance of a Chief is, I suggest, a poignant moment nonetheless. In this case, the realization of the dancer in portraying the Chief as he was in life crossed the bounds, and made the mask alive to the people. In most cases, the mask is intended to resemble a Chief or some other deceased person but only at a distance, as a spirit form, and as a potentially fearful and dangerous manifestation from beyond the grave. The overt humanity of the mask removed its other associations with death and spirits, also removing the understanding of nyau for which it was first created.

As a master carver explained to me, the Chief would be happy to know he is being remembered in this way, that his own image is still present in the dance, and in a sense is still living with the people. Having his image in the dance even in death is a form of homage to a remembered community member. For this reason, the carver selects senior, respected people for the most important mask forms.

Portraits of living people in the Gule Wamkulu may also be a form of homage, albeit of a more personal nature, between the maker or commissioner of the mask and the individual portrayed. This was exemplified earlier, in the masks of one dancer's mother and another's wife, though this does not seem to be a common occurrence. Another portrait of a person still living, is the portrayal of some foreigners. This, however, is described as a means of remembering a person who is no longer present in the community. The absence of the person from the village is perceived as the death of that person for the community who then remembers the departed visitor through the imagery of the mask.¹²

Summary of The Identity of a Mask

Each mask has a multiplicity of identifiable marks or traits. Each individual mask can be distinguished from other masks in any performance, regardless of the broader associations attached to it. As an object created uniquely by the hands of a master carver, each mask comes into its

own being, just as any work of art has its own uniqueness, capable of recognition within a given social environment.

One such mask is N'gan'gande, a mask marked by color, costume, and its own individual portraiture, carved by a master carver. In the Gule Wamkulu, the mask will be worn by a dancer dressed in a woman's bright-colored cloth around the waist, and will dance freely with the women, unlike most masked dancers who keep a distance from the women. Yet, the mask is enjoyed precisely for its masculine traits.

This N'gan'gande mask is painted red, in keeping with this mask type, but also red for the vibrancy of color, and for the suggestion of fear or danger associated with the mask. This N'gan'gande has a bushy black moustache and black eyebrows, and black hair. The face is described by the carver, village Chief and the carver's wife as being very fine and handsome. The carver's wife in particular says the women will especially find the mask beautiful and appealing, (kongololo).

The face of this N'gan'gande is marked with furrowed forehead, a characteristic trait of this particular carver. The bright red color of the mask and the facial expression are explained as being both attractive and fierce; attracting women's attention and admiration, and being fearful at the same time.

The handsomeness of the mask, and its fierceness are partly evoked by the choice of physical likeness by the carver. He chose the recognizable face of a Chief who had died in the prime of his life. This Chief had not yet aged, and was remembered as being particularly handsome. He was a Chief, possessing a position of some respect and authority, but without the age which might have made his portraiture more appropriate for Chadzunda. As a senior person, but still younger, handsome, and a favorite of the women, this man had the traits belonging to the specific genre of this

mask, N'gan'gande.

Once this mask was purchased from the carver the likeness of the mask to a once-living Chief may not be known. However, when danced in the village area of the former chief, the people may more readily recognize the mask, and identify the mask as the man who died, alive again in the dance performance. The mask may be recognized as the local chief, now dancing again.

As time passes the identity of the portrait will be less well known, though people in the communities in which this mask is performed will remember the likeness of this particular mask. The mask itself is recognizable and distinct from any other, including other masks of the same genre.

I suggest this individual identification of a mask to a specific person is a significant aspect of local interpretation, even if the identification is not widely recognized. The members of nyau who know the dances well will recognize more than a good performance. They will know the dancer who purchased the mask, recognize the individual mask, and probably the work of the carver as well, and thereby the intended likeness.

The Life History of Masks

This section about the life history of a mask is intended to emphasize the individuality of each created mask form. I therefore wish to approach the Chewa mask as an object of art made by carvers widely recognized for their skill, and performed by recognized dancers and owned by known nyau members. Chewa people in rural Malawi are well aware of a mask's history, or at least parts of it, and this contributes to a fuller understanding of the mask. The life history of a mask is known and presented by those nyau members familiar with a specific mask, as a kind of provenance.

As each mask has its own maker, buyer(s), areas of performance, attached costume and subsequent changes, each mask embodies a life history of its own.¹³ How people remember the mask, reactions to the mask in performance, growing familiarity and popularity, diminished popularity and subsequent sale, the death of an owner or change in the dancer, and the passing on of the mask, the discarding of the mask only to be cleaned, re-painted and used again, are all part of its own particular life history.

The climate in Malawi, as well as the careful storage of wooden masks, makes it possible for carved masks to survive for decades, with some examples estimated as being well over fifty years of age still in use in the Gule Wamkulu. This longevity of masks allows the potential of a rich history of a mask's own changes as it passes from one owner and dancer to another.

The life history of a mask begins with its creation. In research, a master carver held up his completed mask for those of us in his house to see. It was a black Chadzunda mask of an older man with whitened moustache. I asked whose portrait this was, and I was told the name. Immediately, my assistant took the mask in his hands and murmured, "Ah, yes. It is of him." This Chief had died five years ago, I was told, and the mask looked very much like him. Another man in the carver's house agreed it looked very much like this Chief, as the mask was handed around and given back to the carver.

Those gathered in the carver's house to see the new mask became aware of its intended portraiture of a particular man; a Chief. In recognizing the Chief's features in the carved wood, they affirmed this intended identification, and would most certainly remember the Chief's portrait should they see the mask in future performances.

Once the mask is sold, the mask acquires other

identifications which may not have been intended by the carver. The mask history becomes intertwined with the history of individual owners, dancers, performance events and communities. As the mask is danced over and over again, the mask becomes recognized by whole communities in ways unforeseen by the carver who created it. The lives of the people who create, own and dance the mask are inextricably tied to the life history of the mask, which is tied to the experiences of communities of people and the masked events. The life history of a mask will entail changing interpretations as it shifts from one owner and even from one dance presentation to another. The complex, overlapping and shifting identifications by various communities of people in the life history of a mask indicate how it is re-interpreted over and over again in performance and as people's lives change.

Case Study of Three Chadzunda Masks

The first Chadzunda mask is carved in the likeness of former Chief Chauma, who had died a few years before the artist carved his portrait. The general appearance and the materials used in making the mask of Chief Chauma is much like the other Chadzunda made by this same carver.

The mask covers the face, with cloths and hide and feathers covering the top and back of the head, sides and under the chin. It is painted black instead of being blackened with pigments like charcoal as in the past. The life-like face has deep furrowed forehead, and is said to have a wise or powerful expression. The eyebrows, beard and moustache of this mask made of white fur to indicate age. The mask is topped with a profusion of feathers, mostly chicken feathers collected at night by the carver. These materials generally used for the making of Chadzunda, combined with the skill of the carver, had created the portrait of a Chief, specifically Chief Chauma.

A month later, the same mask of Chief Chauma was sold to a man in the Bunda area, a day's journey by foot. This man, Mr. Makoko, had never known Chief Chauma. When asked about the mask's portrait, this new owner shrugged and affirmed that he liked the mask very much, but did not know the person it represented.

Prior to purchasing the mask of Chief Chauma, Mr. Makoko owned and performed with another Chadzunda mask, which he had danced in tandem with yet another Chadzunda masked dancer, Mr. Katelele, since 1981.

Mr. Katelele had died the year before, (1991) and his mask was inherited by his younger brother, Mr. Msala. Mr. Katelele was a senior and respected member of his community in the Bunda area, and was expected to succeed the deceased Chief of his village, before his untimely death. After the death of Mr. Katelele, his younger brother, Mr. Msala, was selected as the new Chief.

With this change in events, the dancing pair had regrouped. The new dancer of Mr. Msala's mask had never lived up to the dancing expertise or the respected position of the deceased Mr. Katelele. The first mask owned by Mr. Makoko, also a Chief in his own right, and Mr. Msala's mask were now joined by a third Chadzunda mask, making a trio instead of a pair. This was done, it was explained, to change the dance routine until another dancer could be properly trained to take the place of Mr. Katelele. The three dancers tried to build the same level of excitement in the dance performance from before, with the original pairing. This also had failed to meet the high expectations from the original pairing.

At this point, Mr. Makoko decided to try a new mask, and retire the old one, along with its association as a pair with Mr. Katelele, for good. This was when he returned to the same mask-maker he had purchased his mask from more than a decade ago, and purchased the new mask of Chief

Chauma. Mr. Makoko tested the new mask in two dances, and, satisfied with the results, the new mask became the permanent mask of this well-known dancer. The old mask, so well-known and liked in the Bunda area, was then sold.

Another month later, and up to this time, the mask of Chief Chauma has been danced alone, no longer in a pairing. At the end of the dance season in 1992, Mr. Makoko was still working with other possible partners to form another duo as exciting as the previous one.

Identification of the Chadzunda Mask

For those Chewa people who are familiar with nyau and the masks, this mask is owned by one of the great dancers, Mr. Makoko, a man who respects and loves the dance. As was explained in Chapter Three, the Chadzunda mask is a mask of some prestige, and is performed by senior members of the community.¹⁴ Mr. Makoko was seemingly quite well-known in the Bunda area, as a performer and as a Chief. To nyau members, the mask became identified with the man himself.

I attended the dance in the Bunda area, when Mr. Makoko first wore the mask of Chief Chauma's likeness. Those I asked did not recognize the likeness of Chief Chauma, but immediately identified the mask as a Chadzunda. Even Mr. Makoko did not seem concerned about the actual likeness intended by the artist, but had wanted a Chadzunda mask; in other words, a mask with visual form and other associations which gave the mask an identity as Chadzunda. He also travelled a great distance to purchase a mask which would be distinct from other masks; one by a very skilled carver.

Having seen the mask before, I recognized it as the work of the specific carver, and as being the mask intended as the likeness of Chief Chauma. The mask for me was a remembrance of an actual person who had died, alive again in the dance. Those in Bunda explained that the mask was an ancestor, a deceased person, but the specific identity

of that person had already been lost, and presumably, was no longer of great importance.

For those in Bunda, it is a new mask, seen for the first time, yet recognizable as Chadzunda. For nyau members familiar with the individual dancers, the new mask is already associated with Mr. Makoko. The mask, then, is identified with a specific dancer, who is also a Chief in his own right. He is well-qualified to wear a high-ranking mask. Thus, the dancer is more than a good dancer and a known dancer; the man is a Chief himself, and so the mask takes on another nuance in its range of identities.

For those who do not know the dancer, the Chadzunda mask will gradually become familiar, and various new identifications will be associated with it. For example, if the mask is paired with another one as the old pair was joined together, this mask would soon be re-identified as one of a pair recognized as distinct from other Chadzunda mask pairings. It will be known as part of the repertoire of masks and pairs of masks in a particular village area, danced a particular way.

The identity of Chief Chauma's mask in its short life history so far includes the fact that it is intended as a portrait of a chief, and a deceased chief; its attachment to the owner and dancer who in this case is also a chief; the mask as one worn in specific dance performances in the Bunda community; and its broader association as the familiar and recognizable genre of Chadzunda.

The accessories or accoutrements worn in the dance performance are also identified with the mask. Mr. Makoko sold his other very famous mask, but retained the costume: a 'skirt' of bark strips and mongoose tails, a serval hide worn on the back, a cow bell made in England to announce himself, and iron ankle rattles. He wears a western shirt and shorts underneath the costume, commonly worn today for the dances. His legs will be whitened with white ash, and

in his hands he will carry a fly whisk made from a cow tail, and a flag of Malawi.

As mentioned previously, the serval hide is likened to leopard, and is a sign of a chief, and respected senior person. Today, these hides are difficult to find, so fewer dancers wear them. The fly whisk is an instrument of a chief, as is the serval. The skirt of bark strips and animal tails is again chiefly, especially so since the few hides still available are generally assigned to the chiefs. The English cow bell is an object of some rarity; an imported object which is not readily available, and an object associated with the once-powerful Colonials. The flag of Malawi is again a sign of chiefly power, associated with the national Chief of Malawi, the Life President. The ash on his legs is common to other masked dances, and is a sign of the nyau society and its own specialized knowledge. The iron ankle rattles are of some age, though it is difficult to say how old. They are made of iron by blacksmiths, but a kind which is not commonly made now, and if it is or can be, it is not commonly in use. New ankle rattles are made of strings of old bottle caps, among other things.

Mr. Makoko kept this costume worn with the old mask, and used it with the new mask. Thus, the people in his village area who have watched his performance for more than a decade would easily recognize the old costume with the new mask, making the visual image both old and new at the same time. The mask, then, becomes a new element in the re-creation of the well-known former dance performance, rather than a completely new performance.

The costume re-enforces the identity of the mask as a Chadzunda, and as a Chief, with the adornments of Chiefs, but now also with the added adornment of the national flag, an association with the still rather new sense of national identity.

The old dance routine is also retained, as the dancer enters the bwalo and rounds the circle in a frenzied step whipping the fly whisk and flag at knee-level then above the head. In his old dance, the pair of Chadzunda faced one another, and attacked, rolling over and over one another, sometimes into the ring of observers. The dancers sat up, shook their heads, crawled like animals, and rose again, continuing to perform, before leaving the bwalo with gifts of coins and kwacha currency notes from the men admiring the dance performance.

The dance performance of Mr. Makoko and his new partner, after the death of the experienced partner, Mr. Katelele, lacked the excitement of the old dance. The new dancer did not have the confidence and style of the old. The masks were the same, but the performance had changed. Adding the third mask seemed to cause more of a muddle, since the dynamism of the two rival Chiefs was missing. Now with the new mask, Mr. Makoko began making a new start of his own. The new masked dance will carry some of the memories of the old in its costume and presentation, but also begin to be re-identified as a character on its own.

Narrative of Chadzunda Mask: Spirit from the Grave

One year before field research in 1992, Mr. Katelele passed away. He was a fine dancer whom I had seen dancing with his mask paired with Mr. Makoko's original Chadzunda since 1985. As a dancer, and as owner of this mask, he was famous in Bunda among the nyau members. He was also well known as the man who had successfully managed disputes and problems in his village under the direction of his revered village Chief, who was ill for several years before he died. Mr. Katelele was the likely choice to become the new chief of his village. He died before he could be formally selected according to village procedures.

Within the first year of Mr. Katelele's passing, his younger brother assumed the Chadzunda mask, and also was

selected to serve as Chief of the same village. One year after the passing of his older brother, the new Chief arranged a funeral remembrance dance, coinciding with the marking of the grave with a cement covering; an adapted practice.

The day of the dance, people came from all over the Bunda area, as well as Lilongwe, Nanjiri, Linthipe and Nkhoma. So many people had known and respected Mr. Katelele. As they came, the village Chiefs honored the new Chief with gifts of money. These Chiefs were then treated as special guests, and given a meal of meat and nsima, boiled maize flour.

The first ritual act of the remembrance came before the dance. Senior men, male members of nyau, senior women, and all other initiated adult members of the community, in that order, approached the wooded graveyard. On the edge of the forest was the cement marker, painted white with green trim. People passed by the grave in silence, in a single line, and left coins on the marker. After all had the chance to pass by the marker, the nyau leaders present motioned everyone to stand back away.

A bell clanged from the depths of the wooded graveyard, and younger women and children ran away. The clanging became louder, and the image¹⁵ of Mr. Katelele in life, in the dance, was present. Chadzunda, the mask of Mr. Katelele, emerged out of the graveyard forest near the cement grave on the forest edge, walking past the grave as if the man's spirit were actually there in his masked form.

The man's own mask emerged first, pausing by the grave, then was followed by the mask of its pairing, as the same pairing which had been dancing in life for years, and now are departing. The two masked dancers paused together by the grave, then continued walking straight from the grave into the village, followed by the throngs of nyau members. The non-initiated children in the village only saw the

coming of the masks, and as is customary, ran away.

The two masked dancers entered the bwalo, as the crowd took shape around them. Then the dance began with the first original Chadzunda pair. The masked image, though not the portrait of the late Mr. Katelele, was the same one identified with him in the dance and in life. Now he was present again, dancing in the bwalo one last time.

Interpretation of Narratives

Each change in the mask's life history, as demonstrated in the case study of Chadzunda masks has the possibility of disclosing other worlds, or suggesting several identities for a single mask. Identities of the individual mask begin with its creation, the intentions of the artist, and the more generally understood parameters of masks within the nyau society; such as the genre of masking, the formal qualities of a certain genre, and the expectations by nyau leaders of dancers performing with a specific genre of mask.

In the case study of Chadzunda masks, the original intention of the artist to create a physiognomic likeness of a deceased Chief, seems to be of great importance in the understanding of the nyau society and this mask genre. Identification of the mask with a specific person whose likeness is presented, however, may lose importance after the mask is made, as in the case of the mask of Chief Chauma. From this very individual identification of a mask with a specific deceased Chief, the more general appreciation of the Chadzunda mask as a spirit form of a senior deceased person remains.

Once the mask is purchased and performed, new identities are associated with the mask simultaneously coinciding with older identities. For example, the mask remains a Chadzunda, and a Chadzunda mask remains black and aged, and chief-like, associated with chiefly attire in costume, and

a specific kind of dance and drum rhythm.

Other identities relate to the individual people who have owned the mask, and those who have performed with it. The owner, as in the case of the new Chief Msala, is not always the dancer. In the narrative of Mr. Katelele's masked form passing the grave, Chief Msala, the owner, was present as Chief of his village, and the head of ceremonies. Another man unknown to me wore the mask. Yet the individual most associated with the mask was the deceased man, Mr. Katelele. Even in death, the mask seemed to be his own.

Changes in the life histories of men and communities, such as the death of Mr. Katelele and the subsequent rise in fortune of his younger brother who became Chief and leader of his community, also changes the life histories of associated masks. Mr. Katelele's mask was inherited by a man who had the stature to own such a mask. The mask itself may be seen as a sign of chiefly succession within the community in this case study, (though not all Chiefs own or perform with masks, and some Chiefs are not active nyau members).

With the death of one man, the identification of his mask and the mask of his dancing partner began to shift. Mr. Katelele's mask retained an identity as the deceased man's mask, as well as the new Chief's mask. Different dancers and re-created performances of the two masks were attempted, until Mr. Makoko decided to sell his own mask and purchase another. In purchasing a new mask, his own association with a specific mask changed, retaining old identifications of Chadzunda and costume attire with new identifications of a mask distinctly different from the old one.

In this regard, the individual mask has multiple evocations, both known and unknown to the master carver who first makes it, and the dancers who later perform with it. These evocations are interpreted and re-interpreted over

the years of the mask's existence. Each dance performance in the hundreds in which one single mask may perform, each change of owner or dancer, each re-creation of the mask evokes new identities, adding to the mask's overall interpretation.

Conclusion

In this Chapter, the mask has been considered as an individual and unique object, with identities pertaining to the individual mask itself. These identities are derived from the life history of the mask; its manifestations from creation to performance and re-creation for other performances.

The parts, or each element in the making of the mask, can be interpreted individually. These physical parts include interpretations of a single color, and the collective use of various materials gathered from the graveyard and from the rubbish heap. These parts, incorporated into the mask, then contributed to a larger understanding of the mask.

The interpretations of these parts were at times conflicting, as exemplified by the various explanations ascribed to the color red even with a single mask. This plurivocity of the color red indicates the range of locally-valid interpretations of a single mask.

The other physical parts used in creating the mask share a sense of another reality outside reality of the everyday. This same sense of being apart from the everyday is also shared in the role of the mask-maker in his own community and in his collection of these parts with which he makes the mask. The mask-maker risks associations with the world outside the everyday, apart from the village social life, in collecting these objects which, also, are removed from the village social life.

Pieces of discarded materials from rubbish heaps are at

once recognizable objects used in daily life, but in the mask become part of a created reality outside daily use. The likeness of the objects, such as the common maize husk or cigarette package, become parts of an image, the mask, no longer common maize husks and cigarette packages. They resemble what was once familiar, but in the form of the mask, are transformed into another mode of being: described by the nyau as being of the dead and the spirits.

The central theme of death and rebirth may be exemplified in the various parts collected by the mask-maker to create the mask. The hide of an animal resembles the living animal, but is the animal in death, now re-created into part of the mask. Scraps of discarded paper are now transformed into the whites of eyes and teeth in the mask. The dirty discarded cloth scraps in the rubbish pits are now the tattered pieces attached to the mask. Materials collected from the death of society, the rubbish pits to be burned, are given a new life in the form of masks. In this sense, I suggest the masks themselves are created from the parts of society's dead.

This association with the parts of society which have metaphorically died is re-enforced by the role of the mask-maker who collects the materials under cover of night, and makes the masks in the secrecy of the dense graveyard grove. The parts are transformed from the reality of everyday village life to another reality of the world of spirits, with which the masks are constantly identified.

Through the life history of a single Chadzunda mask, and the group of Chadzunda masks in relation to one another there are other understandings about the nyau masks, referring to the same themes as above. These understandings or identities include the mask as a portrait, association of a mask with the dancer or owner, re-creation of the mask in the dance, the mask as the spirit of the late Mr. Katelele, the color black and use of serval hide on the mask.

Mr. Katelele's mask is both a likeness, an identity of a person once known in the community, and is the re-creation of that likeness in the form of a spirit of the deceased. The mask is at once, metaphorically, the fiction of the person himself coming back to the village as he was in life, and the image of that person now in death. Resemblance in portraiture is the seeing of a Chief, the image of the Chief, and the rendering of that image now in death.

Portraits of visitors and foreigners are devised as one Chief said, "to remember the person who has gone". In a sense, the foreigner who has departed from the village has departed from the life of the community, and may be perceived as being dead, gone away from them. The likeness of a recognized foreigner in a community is then, metaphorically, a resemblance as a remembrance, and a memorial of the departed. The similarity between the living person once known, and the re-creation of that recognizable face in the mask of a spirit form is both a reality and a potential reality...the fact of the person's absence and the fiction of their presence.

Mr. Katelele's remembrance ritual revealed how even though his own mask bears a likeness which is not his own, it is still identified with him. In this community, no one could tell me whose likeness was portrayed in Mr. Katelele's mask; the likeness was not recognizable as the portrait of any one person. Yet, this mask personified Mr. Katelele as he was performing in life, and now in spirit form. At once, the masked being was a remembrance of life, a fiction of the living Mr. Katelele dancing the mask, and also the reality of Mr. Katelele in death. By emerging from the graveyard and passing by the grave, the masked dancer at once appeared to be Mr. Katelele pausing by his own grave now as an ancestor, with only the likeness, the remembrance, of the man in life.

Mr. Katelele's mask, may be said to be the 'iconic as

felt'. The 'icon' or resemblance of the man as the masked dancer is 'felt' or thought to be the man's spirit itself. I 'felt' the masked being as Mr. Katelele myself, having known the man in life and having seen his masked performance since eight years ago. The fiction, the suspended reality, of Mr. Katelele's presence was 'felt', I believe, as the people stood silently, and almost breathlessly as the masked dancer appeared beside the grave. I suggest the people present 'felt' similarly, as they told me afterward it was indeed the spirit, mzimu, of Mr. Katelele present.

CHAPTER ENDNOTES

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- 1 For another view, see Yoshida 1993. p.37, who found there were no professional carvers in his area of research in Zambia.
 - 2 Graveyards, as described in the first Chapter, are sacred places. The trees in the graveyard are protected, so the mask-maker has a special claim to use of wood in the graveyard.
 - 3 The carver is not considered a witch by nyau insiders, or associated with sorcery. Rather, he is placing himself at risk of meeting up with these forces, of taking the risk of being more exposed to sufferings from witches. Dancers also take an increased risk of being the victims of sorcery, rather than perpetrating the crime.
 - 4 Examples of each are documented from identification of materials on masks, during field research.
 - 5 In the dance to open the bwalo performed by Chiefs, elders, Chief's wives and female Namkungwi's, the leading Chief wears a serval hide over his western clothing, when the hide is available.
 - 6 Even the color red itself is more than a deep crimson. Red is the range of reds, pinks, oranges and yellows. This is also suggested by Turner. 1967. p.60
 - 7 See Chapter Two for more details on specific historical ties with masks.
 - 8 The white of the maize husk forms is of great importance in understanding those mask forms, and is described in detail in Chapter Seven. The color white in carved masks is relatively insignificant, and rarely used except as a mixture to produce various shades more closely associated to red.
 - 9 In the course of field work, I could discern the hand of at least two reputed carvers in the making of very different mask genres, and would comfortably attribute certain masks to these carvers without having prior confirmation.
 - 10 The public stance of women, however, remains one of mute ignorance of such things. Only among initiated members and in private spaces such as the domicile, have women conceded to me that they have great knowledge of nyau and the masks.
 - 11 In another example, the carver of the newly made mask, the devil, refused to identify an individual as the inspiration of his mask, saying it was from his own imagination.
 - 12 I refer here to the many incidents of images of foreigners depicted in the masks. One Chief said he would ask his carver to make a mask of me to remember me after I had gone. I do not know whether this has occurred, but the sentiment was one of remembering a

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- person who may never return again.
- 13 For another account of identification of masks, see Vansina. 1984. p.21-36.
 - 14 As an example, I was told by one assistant that the mask of Chadzunda is normally worn by dancers who are at least 35 years in age, with some standing in the community.
 - 15 I refer again to the definition of image presented in the theoretical section of the introduction, of image as a "created reality" and of a "figure which enables something to be really present". See Crim. 1981. p.104



Fig. 18

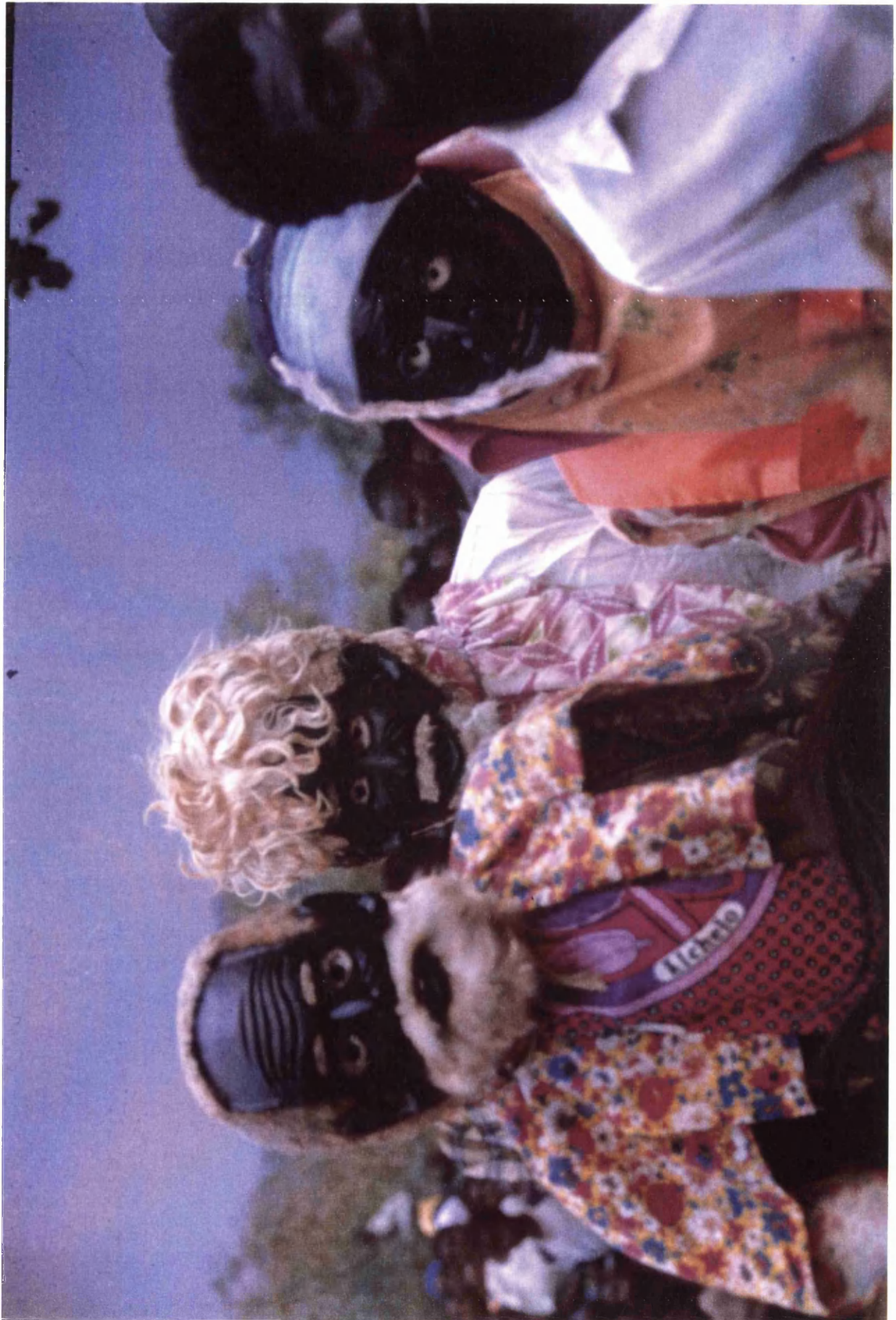


Fig. 19

CHAPTER SIX: Masks in Ritual Roles

"A touch, at that rounded moment
of night
And the dead return to life"

-Wole Soyinka (1963 p.40)

Masks with social implications as described in Chapter Three also assume specific ritual roles, which adds another layer or dimension of complexity in their exegesis. Certain masks are habitually assigned specific roles in funeral and initiation rites, and these are different from the more public dance performance, the Gule Wamkulu. The emphasis of this Chapter is upon these specific ritual roles.

I have found it useful to maintain a distinction between masks in Ritual and masks in Performance in the Gule Wamkulu. While clearly ritual is also performance, in Chewa terms the distinction can be maintained between masked acts which are apart from the delimited time and space of the performance known as Gule Wamkulu, as defined in the first Chapter.

Rules regarding use of masks in ritual roles are not hard and fast, and are not written to be referred to over and over again. Rather, the rules and the roles of masking are constantly re-established, as are the rituals in which masks appear. The continuity or sameness of ritual performance after ritual performance is evident, however, and is due, I suggest, to the habitual expectations of the people as to how the ritual should be, which masks are used, and which aspect is re-affirmed or recreated in each event. The diversity of these rules and roles makes up the tradition of masking and the ongoing possibility of change.

Funeral Ritual

The funeral of a senior member of the community involves the whole community for at least three days, and the ritual

burial of the deceased is an event with somber significance for the community. The precise process and tradition followed in any single funeral event differs according to the particular relationship of the living participants and the deceased who is being buried or commemorated and fully transferred from the community of the living to the community of the dead.

For anyone who has lost a relative or person very close to her or him, with whom one conversed or saw in fullness of life nearly every day, the funeral and the ritual event has significance far beyond the spectator's notes of the sequence of events.

I stress this because it is important to understand the context of people coming to grips with the reality of death. This moves the performance from the realm of entertainment into the ritual purpose it still serves very well. Ultimately for the village community, the sight of the masked dancers is a memory of death and dying, of losing someone known to them. Perhaps this removes some of the misunderstanding of why these masks are described by the Chewa as being so dreadful and frightful, as being like the dead, and referred to as mzimu, as spirits coming from the graveyard.¹

Funeral of a Namkungwi²

The Namkungwi is the senior woman of the village community. She is given training by other Namkungwi from surrounding villages in the secretive knowledge of both the men and the women. She is present in the initiation of boys as well as girls. In the dance performance the Namkungwi moves freely from the male side of the bwalo to the female side, and moves freely inside the bwalo dancing with the masked dancers, unlike any other woman and all but a few men. The Chewa Namkungwi and Chiefs alike say that without her support the Chief would fail, also described as saying the Chief would 'die', or lose his position.

When the Namkungwi dies, the actual death of this community member is not announced by the relatives in the house with the now-deceased woman. The Chief is summoned, and he then tells the Wakunjira,³ the organizer of the nyau dancers. People come to understand the death has occurred by the movements of people, and they begin to gather around the house of the deceased. As the people in the village come to understand what has happened, the masked messengers are on their way to neighboring villages to deliver the news.

Masked messengers are the Kan'gwin'gwi, (to have shooting pains along the limbs).⁴ The messengers are covered in layers of green banana tree leaves, and their faces are covered in cloth and hide, made by the individual dancer. Kan'gwin'gwi runs from village to village, dancing at each place for a few coins, and tells in his falsetto high-pitched voice that there is a funeral the next day. Several dancers are sent in different directions to inform their neighbors. Through the performance of song and dance, the news is conveyed.

While the messengers are spreading the news of the death, in this particular funeral event, the Wakunjira organizes others to finish work on a large animal form, in this case Chimkoko, also referred to as Kasiyamaliro,⁵ which will play the lead ritual role the next day. Others, known as adzukulu, volunteer to dig the grave. The local carver of masks now is employed to make the simple wooden coffin,⁶ and women collect money to buy a piece of cloth to cover the coffin, in this case a dark blue cloth with small prints of white and pink flowers.

At night, two funeral fires are lighted in front of the house of the deceased, on either side of the doorway into the house, where the deceased lies with her female kin around her. Women gather around one fire, and men around another fire, in front of the house of the deceased. These

people will be present the entire night, eating and sleeping outside the house of the deceased.⁷

The two funeral fires, male and female, may be interpreted as the living, the people alive keeping vigil outside the house of the dead. The living are not entirely detached from the deceased, but I suggest are interpreted as a continuity between the newly released spirit, or soul of the deceased, and the living community. As described to me by the people present, the senior men and women around their fires were keeping company with the deceased's soul, or spirit.

During the night, with the funeral fires burning, the spirit will be captured by Kasiyamaliro, according to the nyau members, leaving only the death of the body. There is, I suggest, in these two fires, a sense of life in the face of death. In nyau cosmology described in Chapter Seven, the creation of fire is interpreted as being necessary for the creation of new life from the ashes of the old.⁸

The women round the fire are mostly senior women, and in this event there are two young girls with them. The women dance Chisamba, which they perform for various other ritual events. The dance is circular, with women facing in toward one another, moving together back and forth. Women often play the drums for the Chisamba dance. Men by the opposite fire, do not dance.

Two young girls have been chosen to be initiated on this occasion. Initiation and the funeral of a senior person are at times performed together, as an occasion to prepare the girls for adulthood by keeping them awake with the other women, and allowing them to be close to the masked dancers, as adults are.

The actual initiation process is much longer, and involves teaching in menstrual cleanliness, sexuality and

childbirth, and learning proper behavior toward the Chief, elders, her future husband and people in the community. The masked event for initiation in 1992, was in a year of drought making a separate initiation an especially expensive and consuming event. So, the public initiation of girls coincided with the funeral event of the Namkungwi, even though the girls had not been thoroughly instructed yet.

The girls chosen for this initiation were ten years old. The women told me that by undergoing the rigors of the funeral event with their elders, the girls were learning to endure and be strong.⁹

During this first night after the death, the Kasiyamaliro comes to the house of the deceased, and circles it three times. Even if the Kasiyamaliro does not actually come,¹⁰ the people say they believe the Kasiyamaliro has dreamed of the death, and has come back to the village to claim the spirit. The Chewa say they believe in a separation between the body, mtembo, of the deceased and the spirit, mzimu, of the person. This separation is partly represented in the ritual of Kasiyamaliro coming to the house to attract and accept the spirit of the deceased.¹¹

At the funeral, it was explained to me that the Kasiyamaliro already knows there is a death, and is believed to come on its own without being informed. While these people are also members of nyau and know the Wakunjira has organized its coming, and that a nyau member is inside, they still say they believe in the ability of Kasiyamaliro to dream of the death. This, if interpreted metaphorically rather than literally, seemed to be explained as a belief in the presence, the closeness and omniscient watchfulness of a metaphysical or spirit world in the form of the wild animal spirit.

One masked dancer accompanied the women during their night-long vigil in this event. This masked form is Kachipapa,

the poor and shabby masked wife of the poor and shabby masked husband in the mask organization of families. Kachipapa is of course, a male dancer, but seems to be perceived as being closer to the women in portraying a female mask. In this guise, the masked dancer speaks to the women in his falsetto voice, and dances near them in the light of the funeral fire.

During the long night, the talk becomes more daring, more sexual; well beyond the sense of manner and decorum allowed in normal interaction.¹² As Van Breughel (1985. p.511) asserts, the obscene comments are called zolaula from the verb meaning "to utter words hidden". According to Van Breughel, the obscenities are about the power of the male and female organs and the ability to have children. He writes, "Nyao is...a prayer for continued fertility."

The Kachipapa masked dancer, identified as the Wakunjira himself, stays with the older women by the fire for the whole night. These women are the primary sufferers on this particular occasion, and they are kept awake the night long by the insults, teasing and dancing of the Kachipapa mask. All night, the senior women dance and talk, even laugh and tease, momentarily forgetting their sorrow, as a group together. These songs and exchanges wavered back and forth between silences into the dawn. The women remained by the fire outside the house until mid-morning, when the fires were extinguished.

At dawn, the adzukulu moved to the grave site. Often, I was told, a stone is thrown into the grave to chase away all witches and evil spirits, and then the digging begins. This did not occur in this instance, but as in many ritual ceremonies, not every act must be included each time. One assistant explained that the stone might have been thrown earlier, or even simply forgotten this time. This act was not deemed of critical importance, and the digging commenced.

This grave, as other graves I was told, was a narrow rectangular hole about ten feet deep, well above the digger's heads. At the base of these graves, a shelf is dug, in this case facing to the East, the place of the rising sun. The coffin is placed in the shelf, and then covered over with the large stones collected by the women, bricked into place with clay. Then the passage is covered with mud.

It is said that the gravediggers dig in one day only, never leaving the hole half done overnight for fear of witches entering the grave. The deepness of the grave and the digging of the shelf are again to prevent witches from uncovering the body and eating it, or using parts of the body to 'bewitch' others.

The digging is a long and arduous task, taking the better part of a day, beginning at dawn and continuing until noon. On this event, the adzukulu hit bedrock just a few feet down, and had to begin again. It was mid-afternoon when the adzukulu finished, so the ceremony could finally occur.

Returning to the morning events of the funeral, the same elder women remained in vigil before the house of the deceased. The elder women remained here, exhausted, but still dancing or resting. Younger women, fresh from a night's sleep, were responsible for collecting stones on the day of the burial. These younger women had been brewing beer, and preparing to cook for the many people expected to arrive for the ceremonial burial event.

By mid-morning, the senior women in front of the house of the deceased had taken time to rest from the all-night vigil. Meanwhile, the younger women are engaged in a kind of play with a masked dancer: Kan'gwin'gwi, the messenger. This Kan'gwin'gwi was older than the ones sent from village to village, who were still boys. This young adult masked dancer teased and flirted with the women, encouraging them to collect the large stones needed for the grave.

Kapoli, a masked dancer who can speak, as can Kan'gwin'gwi, Kachipapa and Kasinja, joins the messenger Kan'gwin'gwi in teasing play with the women. The masked dancers appear in the bwalo, the open ritual space for the dance performances. The mature women gather on the edge of the bwalo.

The masked dancers and the women engage in a game, with a few large stones set in a line, which had already been collected by the women for the grave. The masked dancer picks one up and carries it to the other side of the bwalo. The women follow at a careful distance, and pick up the stone again to carry it back to the other side. The masked dancers and the women 'chase' one another around the bwalo, the women always watching over their shoulders, prepared to rush away if the masked dancer moves too close.

Then the masked dancers will dance a little, or rest a little, and the playfulness begins again, as the women go about collecting more stones, teasing the masked dancers with them. Throughout there is laughter and chatter among the women, and sexual taunting between the masked dancers and the women in the form of chase and dance and general excitement in the game.

Mid-day continued into early afternoon, and more progress had been made. The senior women gathered again by the embers of the funeral fires. The carver had completed the wooden coffin and the body was laid inside, still within the house. The dark blue cloth¹³ was laid over the coffin. The adzukulu had not yet finished digging the grave, though it was already mid-afternoon.

In the graveyard, the adzukulu paused from digging and preparing a muddy clay for the grave, to reprimand a man from the community found in another village drinking instead of participating in the funeral in his own village.

His punishment was to be smeared with the mud of the graveyard, all over his body, head and face. With his hands tied behind his back, he was left standing and shivering from the cold, wet mud, in front of the house of the deceased throughout the funeral ceremony.

While the adzukulu continued their work, visitors began arriving from other villages. From the vantage point of the village location on a rise above the dambo, (low-lying pasture), lines of people could be seen for miles, with women bearing baskets and pots of food, and the various masked forms walking alongside the men. Each line started with the senior men, followed by other men, senior women and other women and any children who were with them. A masked dancer with the mask of Simoni walked with the senior men of one visiting village; seemingly as an emblem of that particular village approaching for the funeral. The masked dancer appeared to be coming as a gift to the funeral ceremony, representing the visiting village.

Another village was represented by a Chadzunda, another had a Simoni with them, and others had Maria, Djibebe, or Kapoli. As the line of people from the various villages approached, the men went to one side, nearer the graveyard with the other men, and the women joined the other women around the edge of the bwalo, and in the village.

As suggested above, this village was situated on a rise above a dambo¹⁴ area. The open space of the bwalo faced east, into the dambo and the view of the savannah, with the hills beyond. The people, then, could be seen walking from the dambo region into the bwalo. From there the women remained in the village, and the men moved further west toward the graveyard. The women sat east of the deceased's house, and the men sat west of the deceased's house. The masked dancers moved into the graveyard itself, to partake of ritual beer and food, and to prepare for the funeral performance.

The funeral event may also be described as a communion of the peoples gathered from some distance to attend the funeral. Food and beer is served to all present. People of the same gender, status and age tend to eat together in groups. Chiefs from all the villages share the same plates of nsima, separate from the other groups. This communion of food then extends to the communion of the masked dance performance, and the joining of all people to follow the nyau and the corpse to the grave.

After three o'clock in the afternoon it became known that the adzukulu had completed the work, and the funeral ceremony and performance could begin. The same messenger dancers who were in the bwalo earlier with the women, continued dancing and entertaining the women in the bwalo after a midday rest. Now, they disappeared to the graveyard. Another masked dancer, Kasinja, the poor father of the afflicted family, became the masked master of ceremonies. He was visible throughout the ceremonies, while the Kan'gwin'gwi's had disappeared to the graveyard.

The dances began, with Kapoli first. Kapoli is likened to Kasinja and Kachipapa as one of the masked dancers who 'talk'. They sing their own songs, and therefore, can say what they like without retribution. Kapoli is often the first character in any dance sequence, as described in Chapter One, to sing a song announcing the significance of the event.

His song is:

Mulungu mai wanga wamwalira

God my mother has died (Repeated twice)

Ndiye mundipatse wina

Give me another one (Repeated twice)

This is then repeated by the women, who sing Kapoli's song as he dances. This song, as explained to me, is a prayer

to God to give the people another person who can carry out the activities of the deceased person.

Then, the range of dancers perform, each dancer who came accompanying the people from his village, performs in turn, to the seemingly joyful celebration of dance and song.

Another Kapoli sings:

Anambewe ataya mwana

Anambewe (a woman's name) has thrown away the child

Pamene amathawa chilombo

When she was running in fear of the chirombo

Chimenechi sichizolowezi chabwino

which is not a good idea

This is a song reminding people about the importance of children for the future, to consider the children as much as the elderly.

Chirombo here refers to the large mask forms including Kasiyamaliro. The word also means wild animals, which the mask forms depict. It is common for women and non-initiates to keep a distance from the masked forms. Running from the mask in fear, however, does not mean the woman should throw away her child in fear.

A third song by Kapoli is:

Kwathu Kwatalika

My home is far away

Ndigone kwamkuno

I am going to sleep here

Chifukwa chake chiyani?

what is the reason?

Ndingaphedwe panjira
I might be killed on the way

This song was explained as showing that the day has already progressed, and when dusk comes, some will have to stay here in the village. To travel at night is to risk danger from wild animals, and also from witchcraft.

Djibebe, a black female mask follows Kapoli. The song is as follows:

Amuna awa ndiati awao
Who is that man

Ngati adziwa kuveka
As if he knows how to dress

Jede! Jede!
(Exclamation used in gossiping)

This song is about young men who leave their homes in search of wives in another village. If they are not clean, the women ask the girls who those boys are...that they could not be expected to look after someone's daughter properly if their dressing is any indication of how they behave.

The masked dance of Maria follows next with the song:

Alidama Isinati
Isinati (name of girl) is prideful, a harlot

Bwanji Sankhala pa akazi azake
She does not stay with the women

Koma pa amuna okha okha
But sits with the men all the time

This is a reprimand to the girl who does not stay among the women, but is flirting with the men. In Chewa society the mature woman gives respect to the men and earns respect for herself by keeping a certain distance.

The final dancer in this performance is Kasinja. Djitididi is the name given this Kasinja mask for his dramatic gesture and sound intimating the body being lowered into the grave. The sound starts high, and then the tone lowers, as the masked dancer himself dramatically points lower and lower to the ground. This mask is the last to perform. As he moves into the bwalo, the Kasiyamaliro antelope form can be seen moving away from the graveyard, past the bwalo, into the dambo, where the westward sun shines on the white-like frame against the pale green and drying grassland.

The song by Kasinja is:

Pepani wolira
Sorry the bereaved

Chalakwa ndi chiromerezi
The tremor has done wrong

Kubwera modzidzimutsa
To come all of a sudden

Mbale wathufu sakadafa
Our relative would not have died

Akanathawamo
He could have run away

m'nyumba
from the house

This song specifically refers to the tragic earthquake felt

in Malawi in 1990, and those who died when the houses collapsed on them. Another reference of the song is that of death, coinciding with the funeral. It is understood as a song of the dead in general terms, remembering others and the grief for those members of the community who have died.

Following his song, Kasinja made the tremendous sound and gesture toward the grave...Djidididididididi....down into the earth.

At the end of this performance, the whole gathering of men from the graveyard entered the village, forming a half circle on the west side of the deceased's house. The women likewise formed a semi-circle on the east side of the house, as the drums continued playing. The two groups formed a circle before the house of the deceased, with men on one side and women on the other.

Four nyau dancers appeared, surrounded by the men coming from the graveyard. Piercing through the men, four Kapoli masked dancers rushed into the village bearing a simple stretcher of sapling wood tied at the front to form a 'V' shape. With this stretcher, accompanied by the same Kasinja which ended the dance, these masked dancers pushed through the ring of people, and ran to the house of the deceased. They set the stretcher on the ground, and all sat down.¹⁵

At this point, the village Chief, and other relatives spoke about the woman who had died, about her role in the village, her family, their feelings for her. Announcements were made about the collections of monies on behalf of her family, naming those who had contributed, and all those who had helped in this time of need. The man being punished, still standing covered with mud, was chastised by the speakers.

At the end of the speeches, the senior women who had attended the funeral fires all night, announced the young

woman who would henceforth be named after the Namkungwi. This honor includes receiving part of any inheritance from the deceased. The girl chosen was congratulated with ululations as she emerged from the house of the deceased, in tears. The girl, in this case the Namkungwi's niece, is chosen by the senior women for her character, (mtima), or behavior being most like the woman who has died.¹⁶

During the speeches the large Kasiyamaliro moved into the dambo. As the Namkungwi's niece was named, the Kasiyamaliro moved into the bwalo, closer to the assembly at the deceased's house. In this funeral of the Namkungwi, the Kasiyamaliro appeared at a distance from the village, and then entered the bwalo, surrounded by young initiates. The song that was associated with Kasiyamaliro is:

Woyera! Woyera! woyera guleeee! Woyeraaa!
White light! Bright white! Clear white Dance! Beautiful!

WaKasiyamaliro guleeee woyeraa!
To leave the burial dance, how beautiful!

Tiyeni tipita maye gule woyera!
Let us go with the dance that is so bright!

The word vera or era means: whiteness, brightness, cleanliness, clearness, purity, the best word for holy, according to Scott and Heatherwick's dictionary from 1929. p. 602 and 125. Others present translated the word as simply beautiful, beautiful light and white; brightness.¹⁷ (This interpretation of white is important in understanding Kasiyamaliro in the following Chapter.)

The Kasiyamaliro for this funeral had been finished earlier that same day, having been started days before when it seemed the Namkungwi might die. Like other versions, the image was antelope-like, with a small head, a hump behind the head, and an elongated back rising to the end, holding

two dancers inside. This particular antelope form was male, though the makers could have chosen a female one as well.¹⁸ As in all the Kasiyamaliro genre, the mask covering is the woven dried maize husks, referred to as being white.

From this time, there was movement from every direction. As the mourners left the house of the deceased sobbing, the two young girls who had been with the women since the night before, were placed on the shoulders of a senior woman, bare-breasted as is still customary in parts of the region. The young woman who inherited the name of the deceased was also bare-breasted, and was placed on the shoulders of another senior woman.

The Kapoli masked men who had retreated behind the men for speeches, returned and entered the house of the deceased. Two of them each jumped over the body of the deceased twice. The coffin covered with cloth by the women, was then brought out by the masked dancers and placed on the stretcher on the ground.

The two girls and the newly named young woman were carried around the coffin twice. Suddenly, the Kasiyamaliro burst into the village from the bwalo, chasing people out of the way, and circling the house of the deceased twice as it would for two more consecutive nights. Kasinja left the scene and moved back to the graveyard, arriving before the others. The coffin on the stretcher was then picked up by the four Kapoli dancers to proceed to the graveyard. People began moving into two streams: the senior men moved first, with the coffin carried by the four masked men, followed by the women with the young girls.

Leading the procession of men in front of the coffin was the Kasiyamaliro, said to be bearing the caught spirit of the deceased, followed by the Kapoli carrying the coffin with the body of the deceased, then the most senior men in nyau...elders, chiefs, the Wakunjira, myself and my

assistants, and other initiated members of nyau.

In another procession, the two girls carried on the shoulders of women led the way down another path, followed by throngs of people, the mourners and senior women first, followed by men and other women, in the same order of age and status as the first procession. Before entering the gravesite, the two processions of people merged, and the bright white Kasiyamaliro led the entire procession, followed by the Kapoli with the corpse, then the two girls, and the young woman named for the Namkungwi.

Then the whole procession entered the graveyard, where they were met by Kasinja. All those present for the funeral were permitted to enter the graveyard grove, including mothers with their babies and the two young girls, though there were no other young children. The Kasiyamaliro circled the grave twice, and moved off, back out of the graveyard, out of sight. The two girls were taken down from the shoulders of the women and everyone sat down in the graveyard under the shade of trees, men together and women together in groups.

Kasinja again delivered his eerie sound and gestured, djidjidjidji, pointing down into the grave. Kasinja continued moving, dancing, gesturing, until the coffin had been placed by the grave, and lowered by hand into the grave for the adzukulu to bury. Two men in the grave itself worked to place the coffin in the small shelf dug out at the bottom.

People sat peacefully for some time in the shade of the wooded graveyard, a place normally visited only by nyau members for their own preparations. The adzukulu completed their work; placing the coffin in the shelf at the bottom and walling it in with the stones and muddied clay. The people began to disperse, first some of the women, and then a few of the younger men, in any order at their own discretion, as the grave was filled in with soil. Kasinja

remained near the grave to the end, until the burial was completed.

Back out of the graveyard after the burial all was quiet. People were sitting in groups around the houses, saying little. Soon some of the women were stirring the funeral fire to prepare for the all-night vigil again. At night, the Kasiyamaliro emerges from the graveyard again to circle the house of the deceased and returns to the graveyard. There would be dances on and off that night. Other masked dancers would be free to wander through the village at any time, underscoring the death and the abnormal presence of the dead in the village.

Such masks would include Kan'gwin'gwi, and Pwanyanya¹⁹ which do not perform in the bwalo dance, Gule Wamkulu, but linger near the graveyard crying out like animals and carrying switches to beat those who come too near. Others might be Kasinja or Kachipapa, or another of the guard or messenger masks known as Duli with cloth mask and ashen clothes.

By the second or third day, the burial event has ended, and the community is free from its funeral burden²⁰. The funeral fires are extinguished, and in the past, the house of the deceased would be burned. The ash from the funeral fires, I was told, appeases and 'cools' the spirits after the heat and dangerous excitement of the funeral fires.²¹ I was told these ashes will be placed near the path to the graveyard to cool the heat of the burial.

While the burning of the deceased's house is remembered as having been done in the past, and at times is still carried out, in this case the deceased woman's husband was still living, so he was allowed to keep the house. The rule about the burning is now quite variable, depending upon the living relatives. A vacant house may become the source of haunting dreams for a village member, which was described to me in another case, and so the house was burned.

In about three weeks, the same Kasiyamaliro circles the house once more. Mourners gather together to shave their heads, they say to free them of the deceased. Thereafter, whether the house burns or stands, they say the husband is considered to be freed of the spirit of his wife.

For the death of a senior person like a Namkungwi, there is likely to be a funeral remembrance in a year, or several year's time, possibly combined with the remembrance of other prominent community members, and in a sense all those who have died since the last remembrance event. In the remembrance performance, the Kasiyamaliro emerges from the graveyard, circling the bwalo, signifying its name, 'to leave the burial behind', and the deceased Namkungwi will be remembered as ancestral relatives are remembered.

In future masked performances, there may be a mask of the Namkungwi, which those who knew her may recognize. The mask may be kept in the family lineage and so those who danced the mask might always know it was the Namkungwi from the 20th century. If the mask is sold out of the village area, such a mask could survive all those who knew the Namkungwi, and so the object, the mask of her face, would become another Maria with an identity apart from the initial one, but still perhaps, the mother of all, the ancestress.

Initiation Ritual

The initiation of boys into nyau is the teaching of boys to become adults, according to the expectations of their community. In setting them apart from others who have not undergone the actual initiation, the boys learn the secrets of the masks. These secrets include knowledge about specific parts of masks; the materials used, and the way of making them.

In the course of initiation teachings and experience, the boys also come to know something about why the masks are

made, how they are made, and the experience of what it is to be within the nyau mask form. This knowledge comes from the actual experience of initiation, and from the understandings by which they have been raised, and by which they are now given new insights through songs, riddles and stories. The metaphors about masks and masking seem to be evocative of the greater issues of procreation, life and death, as presented in Chapter Seven, but are not explained explicitly in the initiation ritual.

The initiation for the boys can be done in as little as three days, as was my own initiation into the male side of nyau. Once initiated, the boys are allowed into the graveyard before any of the dances, and continue to learn about nyau throughout their lives. During those three days, the boys must learn specific things before being considered initiated.²²

As in my own initiation, I was told the new initiates are taken into the woods of the graveyard, into the heart of the woods, where there is a clearing for the preparation of nyau performances, known as the dambwe.²³ Here, they spend their days and their nights, (while I spent only days) under the guidance of teachers, and the nyau leader, the Wakunjira. They are also watched over by the senior woman, Namkungwi, who has been initiated in both male and female sides of nyau.

One critical lesson is the learning of nyau names for certain objects. One of the teachers sets out a row of objects on the ground.²⁴ These objects are common items, such as a feather, a maize leaf, a piece of grass, knife, and branch of tree.²⁵ These are also objects which are used in the making of Kasiyamaliro. In the initiation, the common objects have become ritual objects, with secret names, and new significance for the initiates. Each object becomes part of the making of masks, and part of the metaphoric property of masks, as suggested in Chapter Five, and further explained in Chapter Seven.

The boys are taught songs and passwords, and are treated roughly, according to their individual behavior, and as a group.²⁶ All around them are initiated members, some of whom are dressed in masks. Throughout the initiation ordeal, the masked men may come and go, and may ask the boys questions which they must answer correctly or be beaten. In my own initiation, the learning of the word for the stick, or switch, was enhanced by being threatened by a young masked dancer who raised his arm to strike me unless I could call out the correct nyau word for the object.

The boys, as myself, were taught to be prepared to answer any masked dancer with the nyau words when approaching the graveyard to prove membership and the right to proceed. If a dancer cries out as he reaches down and grabs a handful of earth, the person approaching should say the nyau word for the earth and the dancer will let him pass. If one fails to answer properly, the dancer might hurl the earth in one's face and attack the person.

The final ordeal for the boys is the ritual rebirth, the sign of renewal and the passage of life from youth to maturity. This ordeal is the final step in the rite of passage from initiate, (namwali), to being mature, (ku kulu), and occurs in the graveyard on the last day of the initiation process. To the initiates, Kasiyamaliro, the antelope-like animal mask form is a fearful enormous beast standing ten feet tall. Nyau members explained that the boys must face the Kasiyamaliro, the enormous wild animal they had been taught to fear, and to run away from when they saw it coming.

The boys are taken to the Kasiyamaliro, and made to enter the mimba, 'belly of the beast'²⁷ one by one, while the animal is seen moving and grunting. The boy is forced to crawl beneath the lifted form, and go inside. Mimba, is also referred to as a large stomach, and also the womb, and the enlarged abdomen of a pregnant woman. To be inside

Kasiyamaliro, the mimba, I suggest, is to be inside the enlarged, impregnated womb of the animal.

After going inside the beast, the boy emerges with the secret knowledge that the Kasiyamaliro is not moved by the spirits. It is moved by man; that man gives the wild animal its life.²⁸

In the course of initiation, the boys discover new significance for the commonplace things. They have been inside the nyau animal forms, and they have learned how the masks are made. In essence, they have gained new knowledge not shared by outsiders, through ritual and masking.

After the initiation, the boys are brought before the village community for the Gule Wamkulu. The boys themselves have been taught to dance during initiation, and they do so with their own masks. These masks may be as simple as a burlap bag tied over their heads, or as elaborate as having a small carved mask made for them. Carved masks may be commissioned from a carver in advance, or borrowed from an owner who has such a mask.

The incorporation of the boys into masking is part of the incorporation of boys into the ritual life of the community, for the younger men bear the primary responsibility for burial of the dead: the snatching of the body, the masked performance, the digging of the grave, and the teasing of the women to collect stones.

After the performance, the Kasiyamaliro, and all Kasiyamaliro made for the initiation performance, are ritually burned by the initiation teachers in the wooded secrecy of the graveyard. The boys are brought back to the graveyard one last time as a group, to witness the burning and to take the medicines which will keep them from going mad, dreaming about the masks.²⁹ Part of this medicine is the ash taken from the 'rib' or curved wood frame at the front of the Kasiyamaliro.³⁰

Initiation of Girls³¹

The initiation of girls, as I was told by men and women alike, is a much more intense process of learning than the initiation of boys, and quite different from the presentation of the two girls in the funeral ritual previously described. By the time the young woman emerges from the initiation house on the edge of the village, she should be well prepared sexually, and mentally, to endure the pain and the work of childbearing and child rearing. Hers is the more serious learning, according to Chiefs and Namkungwi, and requires more preparation and time. My own inclusion in the women's initiation was one of casual observance, since I was presumed to be mature. Rather, I was given formal instruction for the higher stage of female initiation, the lessons for the role of Namkungwi, the instructor.

The woman's initiation occurs ideally when she has reached puberty. This is not always the case, though, for various reasons. In 1992, many villages did not perform the girl's initiation rites due to the drought and lack of maize for the beer-brewing and food for the whole community. Parents cannot always afford to send their daughters as soon as they would like, since this initiation is more demanding and time-consuming than the boys', and requires more money to perform.

There are different levels of initiation as well, depending on the girl's status. Girls who are already pregnant by the time they are initiated are given a different initiation than girls who are initiated at puberty.

The initiation rites which are the most complicated ritually are the rites for the girl who has just reached puberty, the Thimbwidze rites. In this initiation process, the girls remain in the initiation house, set apart from the village, until they have thoroughly learned their

lessons. This may be for two weeks up to one month. In this time, she is taught about sexuality, about men, and about pregnancy and childbirth. She learns songs about the treatment of husbands by proper wives, and dances which give them grace and control in movement. They are taught the social norms of the village, such as how to greet people, especially the Chief.

To teach the girls about marital relations, the women perform with masks, song and dance. The teachers wear simple cloth masks, and women dress as both husband and wife, as the men dress as both male and female characters in the Gule Wamkulu. Senior women assume the role of husbands and instruct the girls in proper love-making and intercourse. This is also demonstrated less graphically in the play-acting of the masked song and dance between the husband and one or two wives.

Physically, the girls are shown how to move as in intercourse and childbirth. As one woman explained, the girl will not be allowed to leave the initiation house until she has shown she is capable of moving properly, and with enough strength to bear a child and the weight of any man. This way, the instructors can assure future husbands she is prepared physically to be a proper wife.

The secrecy of the initiation house is partly due to discretion, given the intimacy of the lessons being taught. Certain dances are not performed outside the initiation house except by wives for their husbands in the privacy of their own household. The women also secure secrecy from men, as men do from women. The secrets of childbirth were once the exclusive property of women. As this exclusivity diminishes as healthcare becomes more generally available, women continue to keep the secrets of the making of their own clay objects as the men do of their masks. One Chief's wife also explained that the initiation of girls in her village included the same row of objects as the men's initiation, though I have not seen this, and other women

pretend to have no knowledge about it. I say pretend because a woman who shows overtly that she knows about the men's secrets may be forced to undergo the men's initiation.

When all the girls in the group of initiates are prepared, the Gule Wamkulu event welcoming them into village society is planned. Just before dawn on the day of the dance, the girls are taken out of the initiation house and into the bush near the graveyard, where they encounter the large black form of Niobyu, the elephant mask form, emerging from the graveyard grove. As children they had been taught to fear the nyau forms, and were told to run away when encountering one. Even now, a fully grown and initiated woman may be beaten if she crosses a nyau dancer on a path, or does not run away quickly enough.³²

In this ordeal, the girls are faced with the nyau beast, blackened in color with black earth, said to indicate the grave. They are forced to come close to it, and one by one, to grasp its tusks with both hands. Then they must go beneath its belly, though not inside, and round the beast. In this way, they have learned to be close to the nyau, and the nyau has not harmed them.

Niobyu, of all the animal forms, is the most respected in that it is the largest mask form, and it is performed only by Chiefs. By grasping the tusks and going round this form, the girls are said to be paying respect to the Chief and the Chief's authority, according to the interpretation of certain Chiefs and Namkungwi. The grasping of the tusks, I suggest, also demonstrates the maturity of the girl who has learned about the opposite sex. It is the symbolic action of grasping knowledge of the other, in the fearful encounter with the largest mask form of all, associated with masculinity, power and the authority of the Chief.

In his thesis on Bemba women, Hinfelaar (1989. p.3)

explains the purpose of initiation of both boys and girls as becoming a whole person through the appropriation of knowledge about the opposite sex.

"During initiation ritual...neophytes were taught transcendence through the acquisition of the opposite gender. The young man ...reaches out to the cavity of the womb, and young women reach out to the symbol of the phallus."

Thus, it could be suggested that while boys are placed in the womb of the large, (and female-gendered) animal mimba of the nyau, girls grasp the tusks of the Njobvu, the elephant, as an expression of understanding or having learned about the sexual opposite, thus becoming more whole.

In the girl's initiation, much is made of the phallus; senior women create a phallus with their skirts, twisting the cloth to give it hardness. With this, the girls learn how to touch and caress their future husbands. For the boys, much is made of the taboo of eating from their mother's cooking pot, the shape of a womb, and the importance of eating the food from the cooking pot of his own wife.³³

For the initiation performance, the zinyau mask forms perform first at night for two consecutive nights, followed by an afternoon performance of the Gule Wamkulu on the third day. This sequence is true of many performance events: funeral remembrances, boys and girls initiations, and the consecration of the bwalo of a new Chief.

For the girls, the Njobvu appears in the early morning, near dawn. Njobvu is performed rarely, usually only for this occasion, and for the funeral of a very senior Chief. In the song of Njobvu before the girl's initiation dance, the elephant is coming, eating the fresh young shoots of grass. The elephant is a dangerous animal, coming to eat or swallow the young girls as the initiation of boys may be interpreted as being swallowed by the Kasiyamaliro and

killed, only to be reborn.

Another nyau form, Ndondo appears at night during the initiation of girls. This form is long, ten feet or more, made of a frame of flexible, willow-like branches. The long form is covered in vertical stripes: one of mud, and one of woven maize leaves, alternating white and black. In the course of this dance, the form is capable of encircling a large tree, as if it can climb like a serpent, reminiscent of a large python, Nsato.

The python may be said to be ritually associated with the girls and with womanhood, as the mythical husband of the priestess of the Mbona cult, as documented by Schoffeleers.³⁴ Mbona, the legendary man who brought rains, was reincarnated as a python, and became the husband of the priestess. Through the woman, the python would reveal information, making the senior woman the source of divine information to give to the people.³⁵

One of the secretive acts by women is to spy upon the men to see which of the large zinyau animal forms the men are creating for the girls initiation dance. It is dangerous business to risk being caught in the graveyard spying on the men, or trying to get hints from husbands. Ultimately, the female Namkungwi will be able to go into the graveyard herself and determine what is being constructed. Nevertheless, the women pretend not to know what the men are doing, and on the day of the girls performance in the afternoon dance, the women 'surprise' the men by making clay figures in the same shapes as those being produced by the men in the graveyard for the event.

These clay figures are unfired and intended to be destroyed after use. In the final celebration, the girls are prepared with the clay figures placed on their heads, and their hair covered with clay. Large dots of white and red are drawn on their upper bodies in clay. The girls emerge

from the initiation house on the shoulders of the Namkungwi, or phungu, the teachers.

In the performance, they shimmy their arms and shoulders, close to the body, in controlled movement, and keep their eyes cast downward. They move, shimmying, but cannot move their heads, maintaining balance. They are taught to believe that if the clay figure falls off, they could become very ill, and possibly die.

After the performance, the girls are taken to the river and cleansed. Their clay figures are thrown down the pit latrines, which, I suggest, is a form of death as in the destruction of Kasiyamaliro. The clay figures are thrown into the place of refuse, a tomb, from which they return to the earth; a new life in the form of the nyau figures, followed by the ritual death of those figures. I suggest the girls also anticipate a rebirth or new life from the death of the nyau figure, which parallels their own ritual death, and their subsequent rebirth as a mature woman.

Initiation of the Chief

Beyond the male initiation into nyau by Kasiyamaliro there is a second initiation into a higher status; initiation by Njobvu. This process includes the senior nyau members and fellow Chiefs instructing the new Chief in proper behavior and the most closely held secretive knowledge. The male Chief is given instruction in the female secretive knowledge, and his Namkungwi, his senior female supporter, is given instruction in the male secretive knowledge. After instruction, the Chief enters the belly of Njobvu, the largest, most powerful of all the animal forms. Once he emerges, he is said to have been initiated into Njobvu, the highest form of initiation reserved for the most senior, elder and respected members of the community. Female Chiefs are also given instruction by fellow Chiefs, and initiated into Njobvu. They also have a female Namkungwi who is given instruction in the male knowledge.

By undergoing the ritual rebirth of initiation into the most senior ranks of nyau, I suggest the Chief assumes both political and ritual power from the nyau society, needed to carry out his duties. He becomes more than a political authority. He is also a ritual leader, having power to call upon nyau for the rituals of death, remembrance and maturity for the community.

Masks and Ritual of the Spirits

Throughout the central region, Chewa remark on the ability of wayward spirits, (mzimu), to "catch" (kugwira), people in the village. Once a person is 'caught' by an unhappy spirit, the person begins to behave in strange ways; screaming, yelling, and demanding a nyau dance to save himself or herself, since both men and women may be 'caught'.

The spirit is said to come back for several reasons. It may not have been buried properly, with the correct funeral rituals and dance, the wishes of the deceased may not have been carried out, or the spirit may feel ignored by the community. I have been told that once the spirit has grabbed a person, its anger at not being regarded properly may cause the person to start sweating profusely, and breathing hard. The person may become very ill, and may possibly die if the spirit's demands are not met.

These accounts are from the memories of those who have seen people who have been 'caught', which apparently occurs from time to time. They report that the person becomes very strong, and may attack others, even throwing someone into the fire, if the spirit's demand for the nyau dance is ignored.

To relieve this spirit possession, the nyau is called upon for a dance that night. The spirit, through its victim, may demand specific kinds of masks and dances, and if

possible, the Kasiyamaliro or other large nyau forms will dance. The performance of the nyau, according to the demands of the possessed person as speaking for the spirit, is believed to end the spirit possession, releasing the caught person from the hold of the mzimu.

As in the scenario of the funeral ritual, the Kasiyamaliro or other large nyau form is believed to attract the spirit, and carry the spirit within its form, back to the graveyard. The nyau pacifies the spirit and lays it back to rest, resuming order and harmony between the village and the spirit world.

Funeral Remembrance Celebration/Ceremony

In the final ritual celebration to be discussed in this Chapter, those who were senior people in the village who have died, are remembered in a dance ceremony at least one year after their death. The following is a description of the beginning of one such performance in 1985.

From one to several years after the death of a prominent nyau member, a dance is organized marking the death of the individual. In the afternoon Gule Wamkulu, the Kasiyamaliro is the first mask to perform, guided directly from the graveyard into the bwalo, dancing once round the bwalo and departing again directly to the graveyard. In this short dance, from one to twenty Kasiyamaliro may perform. In one specific performance in 1985, three Kasiyamaliro were accompanied by an elongated thirty-foot version known as Chimkoko. Initiated boys dance with these nyau constructions, waving branches of leaves in the air and scraping the ground to disguise the dancer's footsteps, surrounding the masks as they move around the bwalo.

As interpreted by the Chewa, the Kasiyamaliro signifies the leaving behind of death, as performed in the anniversary of a funeral. The translation of Kasiyamaliro is 'to leave the funeral behind' (Kasiya-to leave, Maliro-funeral, or burial), emphasizes this relationship. In the funeral

anniversary dance, I suggest the Kasiyamaliro emerges first from the graveyard as if to deliver a message...to leave the grief of the funeral behind and begin a new life.

Using Victor Turner's understanding of liminality, after a liminal period of grief, the grievers must now accept their new status in life without the deceased. The deceased has also been in a liminal position, still tied to the grievers. With the appearance of the Kasiyamaliro, the deceased is accepted into the realm of the dead and the realm of the ancestor, and the time for grief must be left behind.

In one remembrance performance in 1985, the performance began with the sounds of animal-like calls from the boys and men in the graveyard, and the beating of the drums in the bwalo. People formed an oval around the open space of the bwalo in anticipation of the event. The performance itself was the ritual acknowledgement that those who they once knew as senior and important members of their own community had passed to another stage of existence, beyond death to ancestry and the hope of renewal. From this time onward, the spirit of the deceased should not return to the village, and the living should leave their funerals behind, remembering the deceased now as ancestors.

This particular community had not celebrated such a large event in years, and in 1992, still had not celebrated any event with the large nyau which emerged at that time in 1985. The large antelope form, Chimkoko, was thirty feet in length, with 13 humps, resembling an African dragon, a mythical beast, the ancestral mother of all beasts.

That day, as the sounds from the graveyard intensified, two Kasiyamaliro emerged from the camouflage of the graveyard trees and entered the bwalo. Another Kasiyamaliro emerged straight out of the graveyard, and as it turned into the bwalo, the length of the wild animal became visible,

surrounded by the singing and dancing of the young boys, scraping the earth with their branches of fresh leaves. All thirty feet moved into the far side of the bwalo, with more Kasiyamaliro twirling in circles all around it. The creature moved in snake-like undulations down its length. The dozen dancers inside stopped as one, stepped backward together, and moved forward, making one long circle around the bwalo, undulating along the way.

Majestically, the image moved to the point of entrance, and disappeared back into the graveyard trees from which it had come. The boys followed it all the way back into the trees. Then the first masked dancers of the Gule Wamkulu event came from the graveyard, and the masked performance began. The people were tremendously excited, and the dance performance was acclaimed a spectacular success.

This large creature, known as Chimkoko, had taken three months to construct, under the careful direction of senior artisans. The construction is the same as the Kasiyamaliro, with a hollow frame of branches, filled in with grasses and covered over with woven maize husks, tied into rows of sisal strips.³⁶

The mask form is considered an antelope-like wild animal, though the animal form is intended to be imaginary; not the life-like replication of any animal. Its head is the same as the Kasiyamaliro from this village region, with long slender nose, and tall tasseled horns on a curved, slender neck.

This one was female in gender, with many humps which are considered feminine. Its movements were described as slower than the others; more dignified, commanding more respect. This also indicates its age, as being much older than the others, the elder and parent and ancestress of the others.

The name Chimkoko, literally means the big bunch of

bananas, but the word is meant as a secret nyau word for the maize husk leaves themselves...the dried, discarded and white-like leaves of the garden, transformed into the nyau animal.

The time and effort to make this form, under the careful eyes of nyau artisans, elders and Chiefs, is the culmination of making an image which imparts a ritual understanding as well as an aesthetic appreciation. The people all around me, and those following the animal were clearly excited as I was, and afterward expressed their admiration for the large beast which appeared for only a few minutes, after three months of work.

Funeral Ritual: Analysis

I suggest the participation of peoples with the masked roles indicates a profound belief in the spiritual qualities of the masks to perform these most important rituals in life. Chiefs do not lead the dead to the grave; masked forms do. The masks themselves have been attributed with the power, energy, and spirituality to bridge the world of man with the other world. The mask is that bridge, and it is this linkage to the supernatural world, the world of God and spirits, that gives masks their powerful ritual role.

The masks with the primary roles besides Kasiyamaliro are the masks of the afflicted family, described in Chapter Three. The mother of the afflicted family stays up all night by the funeral fires, teasing, talking, playing, keeping the fires going and people awake. The father of the afflicted family is the one who appeared in the graveyard, remaining with the people for the actual burial. This masked figure was the last to leave the people, moving back into the wooded graveyard as the last people departed from the grave.

The lowly messenger, Kan'gwin'gwi, is the masked figure which is seen all day in the village, playing, teasing with the women to collect stones for the grave. This same figure travelled the day before, announcing the death to neighboring villages.

It seems that the more senior masks in hierarchy, the Chadzunda, Maria, and the privileged family are primarily present only in the Gule Wamkulu. Chadzunda rarely plays a leading ritual role. One such exception was described from the Dowa area, where a large Chadzunda mask is used to announce the death, appearing as the understood emblem of death. Chadzunda, in some villages, may also lead the deceased to the grave in absence of Kasiyamaliro. However, the use of Chadzunda in such ritual roles is largely as a substitute, replacing the immediate need for the Kasiyamaliro and other large forms which require time-consuming preparation.

There are also salient distinctions between mask forms which indicate their use in particular roles. In the funeral of the Namkungwi, the leading roles aside from the large animal forms, are the masked genres which can 'speak'. The privileged family of Chadzunda and Maria do not speak for themselves. Only the most poor, the handicapped, the stupid, lame and disturbed have their own voice to speak out.

One reason why only the masks of the 'afflicted' family portray specific ritual roles may be that the masks of the privileged family represent particular social roles in and of themselves. These masks of the Chief's family represent specific roles, status, position in the society which are linked to political lineage and societal organization of state. On the other hand, the masked dancers which 'speak', Kachipapa, Kasinja, Kan'gwin'gwi, are not attached to any specific societal role in the same way. Rather, the word Kachipapa, an old basket for ash, or for straining

beer has another kind of significance besides the role of 'afflicted' mother.

In the case of Kachipapa, the old basket for ash is an unkind reference to the woman as explained in Chapter Three, but the ash is also a reference to the cooling of the spirits. The mask, then, may also be a reminder of the dead spirits, and a cooling of these spirits, a soothing of their power to do harm. The old basket is also associated with the work of straining beer, which is considered a food or offering to the spirits to appease them. Beer, or fermented maize sprouts, are consumed as part of the funeral ritual. The old basket, then, is not just any basket, and the work of straining and taking up the ash is the work of the community, of most people.

Kasinja, (to pound maize or other grains),³⁷² represents common everyday tasks and implements, as does Kachipapa. Kasinja is the father of the afflicted family, and yet he is associated with a primary female preoccupation, pounding. Kasinja also means to split the maize kernels by the force of the pestle. I suggest the long wooden ram used to split the hard kernels may be interpreted as the maleness which is thrust into the womb-like mortar, splitting the seed. Kasinja, then, is masculine, and in his role, helps in the production of maize flour for the abundance of food needed in the emergency feeding of the community for the funeral.

Another common name for a range of masks consisting of a profusion of feathers, and whose wearers 'speak' in the Gule Wamkulu, are Kapoli, meaning to stand erect. Kapoli is the mask form which commonly 'snatches' the body from the house of the deceased. These masked ritual performers, as described earlier, enter the house, chasing the kin outside, leap over the deceased twice, and then place the body on the stretcher, and carry it off to the grave.

The opposite of Pola refers to the stooping, the position

of hoeing and farming, the way most Malawians earn a living. The act of hoeing is the universal occupation of villagers. Even Chiefs work in their gardens.³⁸ Kapoli is to stand up from hoeing, which people do when they stop their work and come to the dance or ritual ceremony.³⁹

As identified in their names, these masked performers of ritual are close to the people, do the work they do, have problems and difficulties in their various afflictions, can be absurd in some dance performances, but are also, as in the funeral ritual, powerful leaders of the community. They are, in a sense, the people themselves, pulling together and working together in the face of the tragedy of death. These are the masked forms consoling and leading, pushing and teasing, singing and dancing, and actually talking. Compared to the silence of Kasiyamaliro, these masks are the humanity of the people.

This humanity is poured out in song. The Kapoli speaks of death, and fear of being killed in his songs. The first song he sings, is the song which tells about the purpose of the dance...God my mother is gone, God please give me another. The masked dance is then, a ritual of renewal, of the taking of one, and the plea to give another.

He speaks also for protecting the young, to keep them from the wild animals, not to throw them away, but protect them, too. In this he is emphasizing again the fearfulness of the Kasiyamaliro and of all the nyau masks in their appearance for the ritual of death, but also the need to protect the young in the face of this death.

The messenger Kan'gwin'gwi has a more ominous name, meaning to have shooting pains, and is more associated with the fearfulness of nyau, and indeed, this mask is not included in the family of Kachipapa and Kasinja, but is considered to be in another group of masks which rarely perform in dance. Others in this category would be Duli, a soldier or fighter, and also a messenger; and Pwanyanya, the masked

being which stands outside the graveyard during the funeral, an ominous presence with the reputation for doing harm. Pwanya is to break and smash, which this mask form may do, breaking and smashing pots and chickens, and maybe even people.

These masks are often seen lurking near the village on the day of the funeral. Part of their role is to keep outsiders from the funeral area. In villages where there are common footpaths going past the graveyard, 'gates' or barriers of grasses are erected to stop the unaware person from stumbling on to the funeral proceedings. The unaware or insensitive person who continues normal activities is a possible target for the grief of the bereaved, and for the masked figures which lurk in the area. It is the presence of these fearful masks whose owners may do actual harm to unwary trespassers, which keeps the ritual boundary of the funeral place.

Duality, Twice, and Twos in Ritual

The use of two, of pairs and duality, in the ritual is also of significance relating to the masks. There are two girls chosen for initiation, the Kapoli leaps over the deceased twice, the girls are circled around the body on the stretcher twice, there are two funeral fires, and so on. This duality refers again to the insistence that all things come in pairs.

It is not by chance that the leading roles are Kachipapa and Kasinja, female and male. Throughout the masking complex, the gender of the masks persists beyond the obvious observance of the mask forms, names, costumes, song and movements. Others are clearly male and female, but this is not always the case and not necessarily so.

Yet the need for man and for woman to be present in the implicit understanding of pairs seems to be an underlying concept of nyau. Gendered pairings make possible the

creation of new human life, and this is also implicit in the ritual and in the masked gendered identities. For the funeral ritual is also a ritual of hope and renewal from the depths of death. It is the youthful promise of two young girls initiated into the adult society, at the time of losing the senior woman. It is the re-cycling of the Namkungwi's name in the young woman who is of child-bearing age. It is in the young men who wear the mask of Kapoli who leap over the deceased and carry the body to the grave. It is in the song of Kapoli asking God to give another life, another mother, since this one has been taken.

Initiation Ritual Analysis

Mircae Eliade⁴⁰ clearly describes the death and rebirth ordeal which occurs in initiations across Africa. The initiate undergoes a death of his youth in order to be reborn into a mature person.⁴¹ Without this ritual death being eaten or swallowed by the wild animal, no man or woman can achieve maturity or rebirth in Chewa terms.⁴² Further, Bloch and Parry (1982 p.2,5) write that "killing can be a rite of fertility and renewal", and that there is a "relation between death and fertility symbolism". I suggest this is well-illustrated among the Chewa in nyau rites and in rites of other peoples nearby.

Indeed, among the nearby Ndembu, Turner notes that "boys and girls are said to 'die' during initiation, but this merely means that they pass symbolically from childhood to adulthood."⁴³ One stage of life ends in death, and a new entrance. After some time, perhaps only moments, the initiate emerges from the 'belly of the beast', completing the initiation process, and is declared a new member, no longer a youth or in the liminal status of initiate, but a fully matured member. The matured person is referred to as being ku kulu or kula:⁴⁴ growing to fullness and stature, ripeness as a fruit ripens to its fullness.⁴⁵

The 'killing' or burning of the mask form Kasiyamaliro,

which was the primary instrument of rebirth into maturity, is repeated in the initiation ritual of the Ndembu and Luvale, as the Luvale 'behead' the mask and find a man underneath⁴⁶, and the Ndembu initiates strike the mask form Kavula dead. As Turner (1962. p.90,) writes of the conclusion of this ritual ordeal among the Ndembu, there is the sense of renewed life, "symbolized by the sprouting grain." "Ndembu do have the feeling that rebirth and renewal of the personality imply an acceptance that one must pass through ordeal and death." (Turner 1962. p. 91)

This same idea of death is again present in the destruction of the clay figures resembling Kasiyamaliro made for the initiation of girls. The figures are destroyed after use, I suggest, with the same significance as in the boy's destruction of Kasiyamaliro in burning. The figure of clay is returned in death to the soil, leaving the now-mature woman with the knowledge to create new life.

CONCLUSION

As Bloch and Parry (1982) discuss, the funeral ritual is closely tied to rituals of initiation. They write that "death and reproduction are inextricably related." (p.9) For example, the story of the nyau mask forms being fished out of a pond with eggs as bait (in Chapter One), combines images of birth and new life with the masked images of spirits of the deceased in the place of the dead, the graveyard. As Bloch and Parry suggest, images of birth and fertility abound in funerary rituals, and refer to the work of Bachofen (1967) who looked at the "significance of eggs" in Roman tombs.⁴⁷

Funeral rites and initiation rites are linked, according to Bloch and Parry,⁴⁸ especially in the recurring symbols of procreation and fertility. Thus, in Chewa initiation, the girls grasp the tusks of the elephant and the boys enter the womb of the antelope, signs of sexuality and procreation. In initiations, the young may also be said to

have undergone a rebirth, from one status of life to another. This rebirth is also a signal that the young men and women are now ready to create new lives, to procreate and begin their own families.

Duality, then, as in the two fires, two girls, two leaps by masked dancers, and the circling of the body twice, are all suggestive of the duality of gender, of fertility, of procreation and therefore the renewal of life. The death of the Namkungwi is followed by the hope of new life, new birth. This hope is compounded by the initiation of two young girls, and the naming of another all of whom are likely to bear new life.

The selection of the young woman to be named after the Namkungwi, can be likened to what Bloch and Parry describe as "recuperating from the deceased what it had given of itself, and regrafting it on to another host." (1982. p.4) In other words, citing Hertz, Bloch and Parry assert that the position and seniority of the deceased, (in this case the Namkungwi), is more than "a biological individual" but is also a social being, with an important social role which needs to be renewed. (1982. p.4) As the funeral song of Kapoli indicates, society is asking for another person to take their mother's place.

It is, perhaps, in the ritual roles, that the masks are at once more human, more social, as well as being associated with death. Especially the masks of Kasinja and Kachipapa in the funeral rites, are more close to the mourners, and at the same time are reminders of the fact of death and the metaphysical world. The presence of the masks signifies that death is present among the people in the village, all night and all day. The masks linger, not confined to the bwalo or the graveyard. They have joined the living community in the village, with the fact of death in the community. In no other ritual is this relation between death and life so clear.

CHAPTER ENDNOTES

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- 1 These descriptions are the ones provided by nyau members as described in the first Chapter.
- 2 This funeral occurred in June 1992, for a Namkungwi in the Linthipe area. For detailed examples of other events, see Yoshida 1991, 1993, and Schoffeleers, 1968.
- 3 Wakunjira is the title of a senior man in the nyau organization, chosen by active nyau members by consensus. He is the coordinator of the nyau dancers and nyau events, and will recruit and instruct the dancers in the proper proceeding for the funeral event.
- 4 This translation is an older one, taken from Scott and Heatherwick's dictionary of 1929. p.386. It is not in common use today, as no one could give me an interpretation of what the word meant. This is true of other mask names, and indicates an antiquity in language which may relate to antiquity of the masks, with only the memory of the nyau name, the ritual name, attached to the mask today.
- 5 Chimkoko literally is the big (Chi) bunch of bananas (Mkoko). In nyau, Mkoko is a secretive word meaning the maize leaves.
- 6 The making of a coffin is still not universal among the Chewa villagers. In the past, the deceased were wrapped in bamboo mats and even now may be wrapped in cloth without a coffin.
- 7 Fire is interpreted by Maxwell 1983. p.30, as a central metaphor of community, symbolizing "the life of the people", and "a metaphor of life's continuity with the ancestors," among the Bemba. Fire is also interpreted as a life force, by White 1961. p.25, who sees a relationship between fire and life. Further, White 1961. 19, notes that Gluckman 1949, referred to ritual fires as male and female fires, known as male and female njamba, (elephant), another reference to ever-present gender.
- 8 Much is referred to here which will be explained more fully in Chapter Seven.
- 9 I would suggest that this inclusion of the very young in the funeral of a respected elder may also be interpreted as linking the new menstrual blood of the initiates to the passing blood of the Namkungwi. The young girls initiation is part of the cycle of life acknowledged in ritual by the masked event; and so the ritual of initiation and new life is combined with the ritual of death as a continuation of the cycle.
- See Bloch and Parry. 1982, p. 1-45 for discussion of funeral rites and symbols of birth and fertility, as referred to in this ritual among the Chewa.
- 10 In this funeral rite, the Kasiyamaliro was not yet completed, so it did not appear the first night. It was finished the next day, and was used for its intended

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- ritual roles thereafter. If one is already available, I was told it would, indeed, appear. More interestingly, the mask is attributed with having appeared even though the mask form was not yet made.
- 11 The neighboring Yao people share this belief in the separation of body and spirit, (Henckel. 1935 p. 14).
 - 12 Metcalf and Huntington. 1991. p.115-116 describe similar sexual insults and behavior among the Bara of Madagascar. They assert that "the sex and sex-related activities of the funeral nights are symbolic...of the human condition."
 - 13 The color dark blue is associated with the coming of storm clouds, and the coming of rains, according to Schoffeleers. 1992. p.293. footnote 23. In my experience, I have seen another cloth of lighter blue, and a cloth of white used as funeral cloths, but cloth is a luxury in most cases. A coffin is also a luxury. Without these things, the body would be wrapped in a mat, which is considered white. I might also note that dark blue is generally not a color of choice in women's dress, and may bear the significance attributed to the color by Schoffeleers, though this is not conclusive.
 - 14 Dambo is the term for a low-lying area which is marsh-like in the rainy season. In the dry season it is used for grazing cattle. This funeral was in the dry season, June 1992
 - 15 In other funerals, this dramatic moment is not stopped for speeches, but continues as the four masked men pierce through the group of female mourners and chase the women from the house. They then proceed to leap over the body as was done in this funeral, lift the body on to the stretcher, and run with it out of the house and to the grave. The action is swift and powerful, snatching the body by force and carrying it off to the graveyard, followed by a slow procession of mourners.
 - 16 CMN White. 1961. p. 55, writes that a living relative must inherit the name and responsibilities of the deceased.
 - 17 Roberts. 1993. p.66 describes white among the Tabwa as "enlightened, the auspicious, the beneficent, the pure, the good."
 - 18 The choice of male or female Kasiyamaliro form is up to the maker of the mask for the funeral proceeding. Either male or female is acceptable for a senior person, and I have seen a female one for the burial of a male, and a female one for the remembrance of a female and as male one for the funeral of a woman. The choice, I was told in various communities, is up to the artist, to make the most attractive one possible. The only time the gender truly matters, I believe, is in the initiation rite of boys, when they enter a female mask form.
 - 19 Pwanyanya is translated as one who breaks and smashes things, and as one who is a spoiler, as in one who does not leave for a journey at the appointed time, causing

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- trouble to others. In another funeral event, two Pwanyanya lingered outside the village in the bush between the village and the graveyard from morning until after the burial. They did not enter the village, but threatened anyone who passed by with their sticks. The masks are simple burlap bags, but have fierce jagged, red mouths with sharp teeth painted on to them. The body is covered in ash, and is nearly nude with brown rags around the hips and buttocks.
- 20 The number of days vary depending upon the seniority of the person, and the relation of that person with nyau. The death of a group Chief who was a great supporter of nyau took five full days to bury, while the death of a man who left his village to work in the city years ago took only the night before, and the day of burial itself.
- 21 The burning of the hut of the deceased was practiced by the Bemba, Maxwell. 1983. p. 29, who had entered Malawi during the last century of upheavals, and were driven back into Zambia, according to Young. 1932. p.170.
- 22 See Schoffeleers 1968. p.335 to 373, for example of procedure of boy's initiation into nyau among the Mang'anja. Also see Stannus 1910, Hodgson 1933, Makumbi 1955, and Yoshida 1991 for more details of boys initiations among the Chewa.
- 23 This connection of the death of initiates to be reborn recurs in White (1961), Turner (1977), and Maxwell (1983). Specifically, the Luvale see the initiates as enduring ritual, or "killing the novice" in the "place of the dying", White. 1961. p. 19
- 24 The number of objects may vary slightly from one location to another, depending on the knowledge of the teacher and the length of the initiation, but the key objects are the same. After this lesson, the new initiates will have a stock of secretive names to prove his initiation from one village area to another.
- 25 A list of some items and the secretive names have been published by Van Breughel. 1985. p 502. and Schoffeleers 1968. p.357
- 26 Descriptions of certain riddles and the treatment of boys are recorded in Makumbi. 1955. p. 8-11.
- 27 This is a translation of Makumbi 1955. p. 8-11. According to Scott and Heatherwick's dictionary, 1929. p.299 and other translations by nyau members, mimba refers to the large swollen stomach, to big-bellied animals, to the womb, conception and pregnancy.
- 28 This is not as simple as it may appear. Members maintain that prior to initiation they truly did not know a man was inside the mask. They say they truly believed the masked forms were spirits, the dead, coming from the graveyard, and that the large Kasiyamaliro was a spirit form. This assertion is important in interpreting understanding of the masks as spirits in the final conclusion.
- 29 The Luvale initiates, on the other hand, cannot witness

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- the burning of the lodge in the graveyard for the same fear of going mad. White. 1961. p. 12
- 30 The eating of the ash is important in the understanding of the mask in the following Chapter. The 'rib' is the curved branch in the front and back of Kasiyamaliro. For another example of the use of ash in initiation, see CMN White 1961. p.8-10 for a description of the Luvale initiation in Zambia.
- 31 For descriptions of Chewa female initiations and nyau, see Stannus. 1910, Hodgson. 1933, Schoffeleers. 1968, Van Breughel. 1976, and Yoshida. 1991.
- 32 Note song in this Chapter about the woman who threw away her baby in fright when running from the nyau.
- 33 The use of the phallus in the girl's initiation and learning of the opposite sex seems to be true throughout the region, having observed portions of initiations, and spoken to women from different areas. The boys initiation has been written in Makumbi. 1955, and in discussions this particular taboo is present and prevalent in various village areas. Men do eat only their own wife's cooking in the village as a general rule, substantiated by discussions with them for reasons of fear of poisoning, and also as custom. If the husband does not eat his meal at home, the wife may wonder if there is a marital problem.
- 34 See Schoffeleers 1992.
- 35 The Mbona cult is detailed by Schoffeleers. 1992.
- 36 For more detailed description see Birch. 1988. p.28-31
- 37 Kasinia is photographed pounding maize with a woman in the village in Yoshida 1991. p.221
- 38 More than once I have gone to meet a Chief and have waited for him to return from the gardens, or have gone and found him immersed in work in the garden.
- 39 Another mask name is Kasapoli, 'sa' being the negative form, signifying one who does not stand up from hoeing to come to the ritual performance (as in Chapter Three). One such Kasapoli is the mask of a Presbyterian missionary. Members of the church are not permitted to attend masked events and may be refused communion for three years if caught attending a performance. This penalty was related by a Christian member who does attend dances, particularly funeral rituals for relatives who have died.
- 40 See Eliade. 1958. p.35
- 41 See Turner. 1969. p. 28. for association between the tomb and the womb, between the grave and procreation in Isoma ritual.
- 42 See Turner. 1967. p.72
- 43 See Turner. 1962 p.85
- 44 Ku-kula is also used for 'maturation' among the Ndembu, according to Turner 1967. p.72.
- 45 This translation is partly how it was translated to me by assistants during field research, but also a more

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- full translation is given by Scott and Heatherwick.
1929. p. 205, 206.
- 46 See White 1961, p.9
- 47 See Bloch and Parry. 1982. p. 1-45, and quote on
Bachofen, (1859) in Bloch and Parry. p.1
- 48 See Bloch and Parry. 1982 p.4

FUNERAL PROCESSION OF NAMKUNGWI

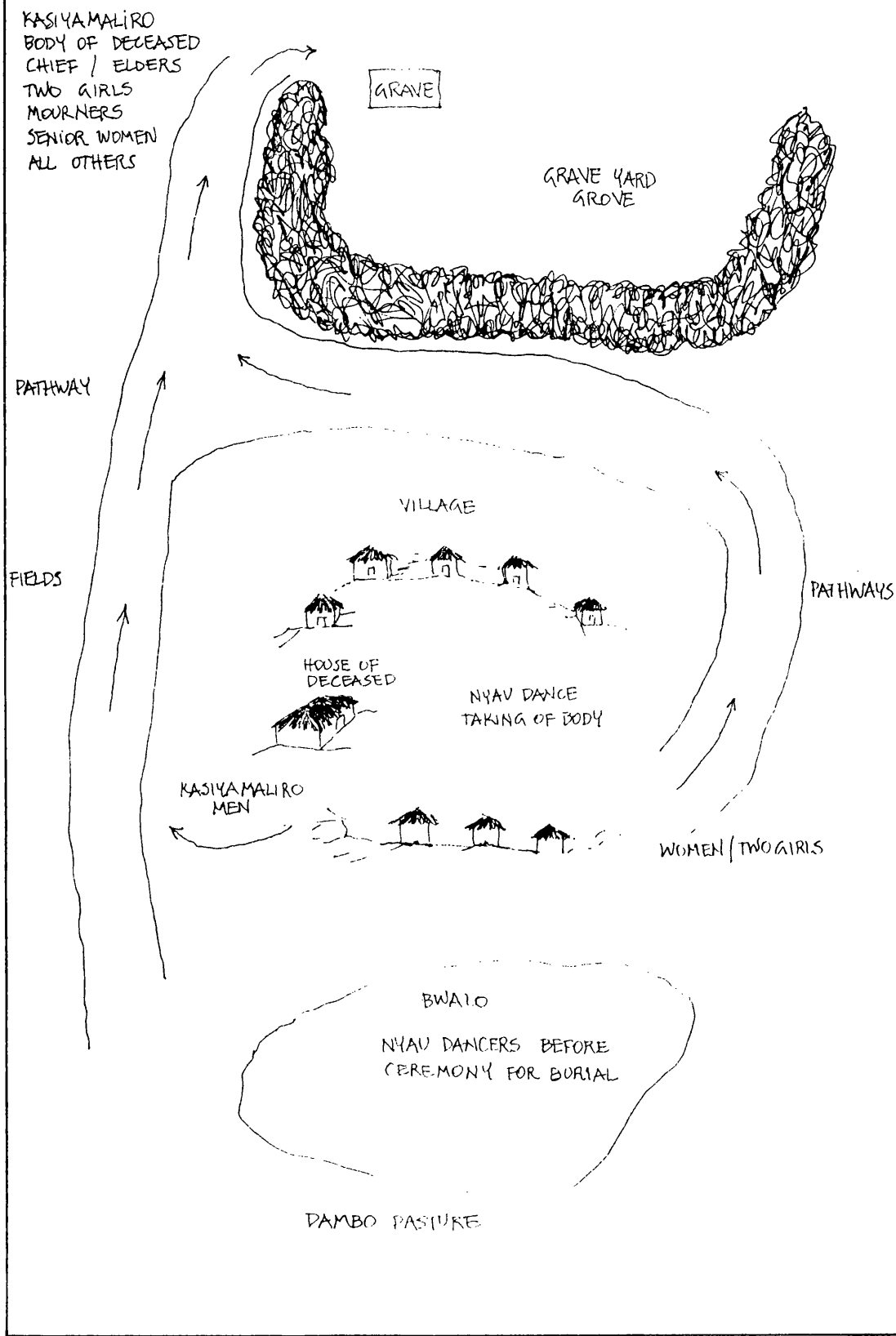


Fig. 20



Fig. 21

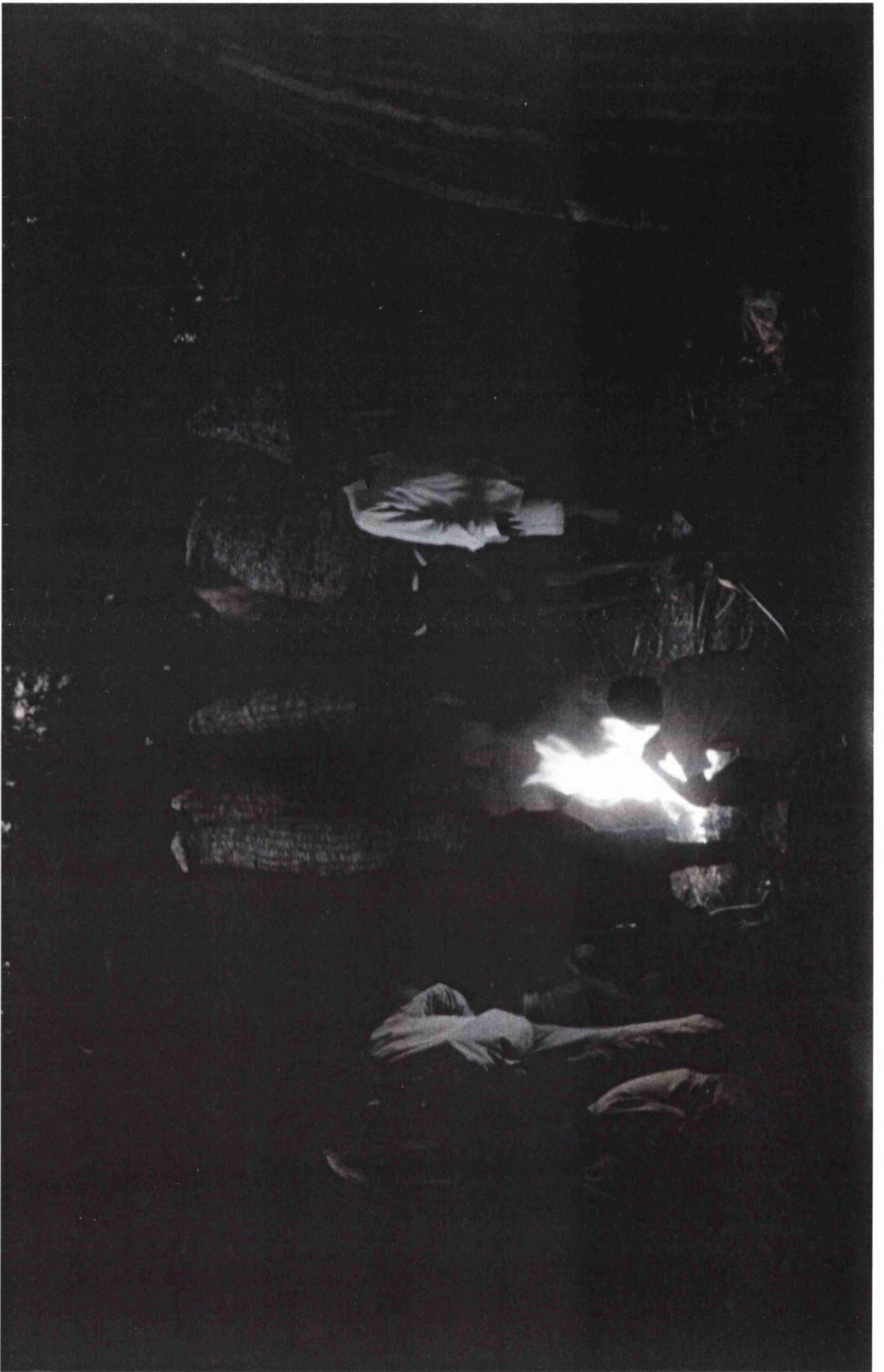


Fig. 22



Fig. 23

CHAPTER SEVEN: Masks, Knowledge and Cosmology

"In these high mysteries of religion and poetic insight we have seen as direct presentations of the act-of-being as it is possible for human beings to grasp." "...a direct confrontation of man with mystery itself."

Turner 1962. p.96

In previous Chapters, interpretations have been centered around carved wooden masks, as in families, historical experience and portraiture, and the various feathered, hide and cloth masks in families and ritual. The large animal constructions have been referred to throughout, particularly in ritual roles and in terms of the mythical experience of the past rather than specifically historical experience. In this Chapter, it is the large animal constructions, and most importantly Kasiyamaliro which are interpreted as embodying nyau beliefs; a metaphorical construction of nyau cosmology.

Reasons for interpreting Kasiyamaliro as a synecdochal representation of nyau cosmology are many. This mask form, more than any other, is a recurring motif in the nyau society's ritual. As indicated in the previous Chapter, this ten foot tall mask is of primary importance in funeral rituals, the rebirth in initiation, and the remembrance dance for those senior people who have died.

Kasiyamaliro is the mask of the village as a whole, unlike the masks made of carved wood, cloth, feathers and hide, which are owned individually. Kasiyamaliro forms are re-created in rock paintings, as images of the large antelope and zebu cow forms.¹ In more recent innovations, cement gravemarkers are painted bright white, and some bear the form of Kasiyamaliro in cement. The forms of Kasiyamaliro and other large constructions are also echoed in small figures of clay made by women for the initiation of girls. In all these recurring forms, the antelope figure of

Kasiyamaliro is most prominent in the ritual representations of nyau. Differences between the masks of carved wood, feathers and hide described in earlier Chapters, and the Kasiyamaliro masks of woven maize husks are made clear in the associations with supernatural understandings; the religious and cosmological beliefs of nyau.

Mzimu and Chirombo

Masks may be said to be categorized as two spirit forms, Chirombo and Mzimu, which reside in the graveyard and become present in the masks and masked figures in the dance ceremonies and rituals. The dichotomy between the two kinds of spirits is artistically interpreted into two very different traditions of mask forms.

The different spirit forms are, I believe, the basis for distinguishing between two different categories of masks, and two distinctive art forms between the carved face masks and the large animal constructions. Or, in other words, the differences between the realistic images in human-like forms made of carved wood and feathered, hide and cloth masks; and bamboo, grass and maize leave images, Mafano, of large animal-like forms. Neither tradition has remained concretely the same without exceptions², but the basis for the difference lies, I believe, in the understandings between the two spirit forms.

Mzimu,³ is the word for spirit, and more specifically, ancestor spirit, or spirit of a deceased person. The Gule Wamkulu, or 'day' masks as a whole are referred to as Mzimu, as spirits as described in Chapter One. These spirits are manifested in ancestor remembrance, of remembering the deceased, especially those who were aged and senior members of the community.

These revered members of the community were the most respected, and the most likely to be remembered in the portraiture of a mask, as explained in Chapter Five. The ancestor masks are carved into likenesses of actual faces, and of actual individuals known in the community. This realism in the carved art is a reflection of the nyau understanding of the ancestors as real people, as relatives who have died.

So much of the discussion of masking involves the association with spirits, the embodiment of spirits, of masked dancers actually being the dead.⁴ The masks of Mzimu, spirits of the dead, do indeed represent specific people who have died. However, as shown in previous Chapters, the knowledge of who that person is becomes less important after the making of the mask. The mask continues to have importance as representing familial relations, community social roles, and ritual roles.

Thus, other masks are also spirits of people who have died. The variety of hide, cloth and feathered masks are all considered spirits of the deceased. The body and form of the masked dancer himself portrays the humanity of the mask, the spirit of a once-living person who has died.

Characterizations of peoples, the vain girl, the drunken man, all kinds of people, are meant to be seen, to be visible, to be known and acknowledged as depicting behavior of mankind. Portraiture of certain masks, and the actions of the masked dancers, increases the visibility and recognition of the Mzimu masks as resembling humanity and society as it is.

As indicated by nyau members, only these most senior and respected people become Mzimu after death. All people have a single spirit, a Mzimu or ghost, but only certain ones have the powerful Mzimu which returns to the village in its visible form of the carved mask. The ancestors are important spirits who can be called upon for help by the

living, but are not the creators of life as in the concept of God or deity. Rather, it is their lives which are recreated as Mzimu after death and burial in the soil of the grave, and in the home of the Chirombo.

Chirombo means 'wild animals', but a few nyau leaders say the Chirombo in the context of nyau, are also translated as 'common deities', and 'common gods' of the large animals, differentiated from spirits of people. Chirombo, as wild animal spirits, are invisible and imaginary; they are recreated into masks as Mafano, the word given for these large animal deities. Fano is the Chewa word for image, and was described as the making of an image taken from imagination; from that which is unseen.

The art of Mafano resembles certain wild animals, but the actual making of the masked forms is intended to be imaginary; not realistic. The form of Kasiyamaliro is like an antelope; it does not look like an actual antelope. It is created from the imagination, since it is an unseen being with an invisible existence.

Chirombo masks as a category or type of mask, have no known history, and no attachment to individual people in the community. Their actions are indiscernible, as the Kasiyamaliro dreams of the death, knows without being told, and comes without necessarily being seen. Motivations and communication are invisible. Kasiyamaliro is outside humanity transcending the spirit world; as opposed to the visibility of the face, the songs and the actions of the Mzimu masked dances.

Kasiyamaliro, a Chirombo and Mafano, is an imaginary being, an invisible spirit which resides in the wooded grove of the graveyard. Kasiyamaliro is a kind of presence which permeates all things.⁵ This wild animal spirit is characterized by its ever-presence, and its permeability almost as air. It is likened to the wind, and the rustling of leaves in the graveyard; expressed by a Chief and mask-

maker as a whistling sound as they extended a finger, circling in the air. Everything in the graveyard is filled with these spirits; the trees, the people, and the masks.

Chirombo Forms in Nyau Cosmology

In understanding how these Chirombo forms of masks relate to Chewa knowledge, another distinction between the two traditions of masking must be made clear. Through this spirit form Chirombo, nyau creates the primary rituals related to creation, death and regeneration of life. All the masks as a whole are part of the spirit world, but I suggest the Chirombo masks are the ones representing the spiritual power to regenerate life. In a sense, the deceased are given renewed life as mzimu through the ritual presence of the Chirombo masks.

Chirombo becomes a visible image in the form of Kasiyamaliro, and once this image is created, Kasiyamaliro becomes the focus of ritual. This ritual object performs in key passages of youth to maturity, and in death, remembrance of the deceased, and ultimately in the ritual signification of renewal, as exemplified in the previous Chapter.

Chewa Creation Mythology and Nyau Cosmology

J.M. Schoffeleers and Roscoe (1985) relate a creation myth based on an historic site in the Dzalanyama mountain range, known as Kaphirintiwa.⁶ This myth was also remembered by Chief Mkuzi, now deceased, who related it to me in 1992. This site is renowned for its imprints or fossils in stone resembling footprints, animal tracks, and various objects such as a winnowing basket, hoe and mortar. Kaphirintiwa is also known as the site of an early rain shrine, which coincides with the beginnings of the Maravi Empire in the region, and the immigration of large numbers of people from

the northwest, some of whom are predecessors of the present-day Chewa people.

This myth relates the beginning of life, from the God in the sky looking upon the earth without water and without life. As in other creation mythologies,⁷ life began with the cataclysmic storm, the coming of thunder and lightning and the subsequent rains. In the Chewa myth, the first rains brought the first people, who landed on the barren earth, now covered with waters. The site of first life is specific: the top of Dzalanyama mountain at the site of the prime rain shrine Kaphirintiwa.⁸ The earth became a place of harmony, a kind of 'garden of Eden' with abundant plants and trees with fruits to eat. Mankind and animal and God all lived together on earth.

Man one day began playing with two sticks, a soft one and a hard one. He twirled them together and created fire. He was warned by all to stop playing with this fire, but man ignored them. By accident, man set the grasses on fire, causing great fear and confusion. Some animals, the goat and the dog, ran to man for protection. The elephant, the lion and other animals fled full of rage at man. The chameleon went to the top of the tree and called to God, and the spider spun a web for God to climb. In this way, God escaped back to the sky.

In the myth, man went beyond control, after ignoring warnings by the community. He set fire to the grasses, and the flames were uncontrolled, causing the separation of man and wild animal, and most importantly, separation of man and God. From then onwards, man was forced to die on earth to rejoin God in the sky.

Man played with fire, which is hot, and potentially very dangerous. Fire is associated also with sexual intercourse, which like fire, must be controlled and channelled properly or it can consume a community in its heat.⁹ Heat and sexuality are combined again in the

rubbing of the two sticks, the hard one and the soft one together, creating a flame. This may be interpreted as the hard stick, the male, rubbed with the soft stick, the female in sexual intercourse, producing the flame, which creates the child.¹⁰ In another context, Maxwell writes that "a burning fire brand is thrown out of the nuptial cottage as a sign of potency and successful unity of marriage" (1983 p.29).

This myth is described by Schoffeleers as the charter of Chewa creation and of Chewa death. It is also the explanation of the two seasons, the rains of life and the dryness of death.¹¹ In Chewa society today, man remains separated from wild animal and from God, and lives through a season of rains (and life) and a season of dryness (and death), which is cyclical. Man dies in order to be reunited with God.

Through masked ritual, nyau knowledge, and associations between that knowledge and mask forms, lies an interpretation of how these varied elements, God, wild animal and man, come together. The key concept uniting the masked ritual, mythology and nyau knowledge, I would argue, is the potential of life after death. This transcendence from death to life again at once gives the masks their power and their ritual dread. As will be demonstrated in this Chapter, masked ritual re-enacts this myth as life and death hang in the balance; the horror of death and the hope of regeneration of life. The ritual event itself is a unity of both life and death, of the living and the spirits, of man and wild animals, of the community of man and God.

The bwalo becomes the ritual space where, in the Gule Wamkulu, man, animal, living, dead, domestic and wild, male and female, all encounter the presence or believed presence of the supernatural, of spirits and God. God was not articulated by nyau members as a being which can be described, but as an invisible and distant force which

communicates with man through the spirits.¹² Thus, the mask forms as spirits may be interpreted as the powerful envoys of God, the interpreters of God's wishes to man through the songs and characterizations of nyau.

Further, maize and all living things which are 'born' in the soil sustains life but not without the hard work of man. Man's actions caused the fires in the creation myth. Man must now act to bring about the miracle of new life. He cannot be idle, or he will starve without new life coming after him. There is, in the agricultural cycles, an efficacy of man, which Maxwell cites as a tenet of Bemba religion.¹³ It is also apparent among the Chewa that man acts to assure the coming of new life.

God and Gender in Nyau

The concept of God among the Chewa seems to be a dualistic one. Gender, as presented in previous Chapters, is a constant theme in masking. It should not be surprising then, that this theme recurs in the construction of nyau cosmology including belief in God, presented in this Chapter.

According to the creation myth, there is one God which created man and animal and all living things on earth. This God is in the sky, known variously as Chauta, Chiuta, Mulungu and Leza.¹⁴ He is distant, apart from the concerns of daily life. This God seems to be male, having brought the terrific storm clouds which covered the earth and produced rains with lightning. His creation of rains softened the soil hardened from dryness, which then produced new life, all the fruits of the earth.¹⁵

But when asked where God is, among nyau members the consistently repeated answer was that God is in the soil, where all living things are made. God is referred to as being in heaven, using the English word. After agreeing

that this was the Christian point of view, I asked for the place of the nyau God. The reply was that nyau people say God is in the soil, not in heaven. All living things come from the soil, which is made fertile as a womb and gives birth to new life. This God in the soil is a concept recognized among the Bemba as Lesá,¹⁶ the female God of the soil, and Linden asserts the Chewa acknowledge both a 'male God' in the sky and a 'female god' in the pool of water, in the earth.¹⁷ Though the nyau members did not give me a different name for this female concept of God, they invariably insisted God was in the soil, and this God was considered female.¹⁸ She is the life force which gives birth to all the new life emerging from the soil, which sustains all other animal and human life, as the womb which gives birth.¹⁹

So, the two forms of God among nyau members in the central region may be said to be male and female.²⁰ I suggest the male God of the sky and creation mythology created all life, and the female God in the soil gives birth to new life over and over again. One is the first Creator from the sky, the other is the ongoing creation of life, earth-bound, near to the people. The first creator is distant and only referenced in relation to the myth, but the God in the soil is commonly recognized as the ongoing, creative source of life in nyau.

Masked rituals may suggest the creation of life and re-creation of life from the soil. From dust to dust, so the nyau members say we came from the soil, and return to the soil. Since the time the first men and women in creation mythology first came from the sky in the thunderous rainstorm to the soft earth, those who followed came from the soil. The ones who died went to the earth, and the earth re-created life, giving birth again to all plant life, and as food, to all animal and human life as well.

This view differs from, but I think is also complementary to, Schoffeleer's work among the Mang'anja nyau in southern

Malawi. God in this region refers to the male God in the sky, associated with lightning and rains, (1968 p.210). Schoffeleers does refer to a male-sky/female earth polarity, (1968 p.238) as sky as Chief and earth as Chief's wife, representing marital relations. In this sense, according to Schoffeleers, the Mang'anja male God sends the spirits to earth in rain, also likened to God's semen, which fertilizes the earth, (p. 238). Schoffeleers asserts the rains wash away the ashes covering the soil and the earth is said "to conceive like a woman's body." (p.204).

In his writings about the Bemba, Hinfelaar (1989. p.4) also notes that divinity and life are in the "womb" of the earth. He further notes that to be godlike or divine meant to "imitate the Feminine", and fertility is the mixing of the divinity of the earth and the God of the cloud, thunder and lightning which bring rain. (p.4)

Among the Chewa nyau members in the central region, I suggest, the immediate life-giving God is the female one in the soil, which is complementary to Schoffeleer's description of the male Mang'anja God in the sky. Both are needed for fertility and renewal of life, and both are present in divinity.

Throughout Chewa masking, there is this theme of duality as in gendered masks, and constant interplay between the spatial domains of men and women. Male maskers playing the role of females, cross between the male and female funeral fires outside the deceased's house. Women collecting stones for the grave are teased by male masked dancers. Women spy on the men and create figures from the soil resembling men's masks.

Even the cloths worn by nyau dancers are purchased from the women. Particularly, nyau dancers remarked to me that they were told they must wear strips of cloth across the forehead of the mask which were purchased from the Namkungwi on behalf of the senior women. Among the

Mang'anja, Schoffeleers notes that the cloth worn by masked dancers must have been worn by a woman first, preferably the dancer's wife, (1968. p.343).

The clay figures worn on the heads of girls are shaped as the animal-like imaginary Chirombo in red, black and white clay, striped and spotted. Each clay figure is held together by a small sliver of wood inserted inside the figure, and embedded in the clay base. The pieces of wood are taken from the ribs of the Kasiyamaliro,²¹ by the senior female Namkungwi in secrecy. She then takes them for use by the women in preparing the initiation of the girls.

This linkage between the male nyau and female nyau is one example of the integral role of women in masking as part of the society. For the women's own successful initiation into nyau, the men's mask form reappears in the form of clay made by women, but also the two are linked with the material use of the wood in both.

The linkage is stronger as the ritual roles of the Niobvu and Kasiyamaliro are characterized in initiation by the assuming of the other sex, the learning of the other to become mature and whole, to encompass understanding of both maleness and femaleness.²² A whole person in Chewa society completes this knowledge from initiation with the union of man and woman in bearing fruit; in bearing children. This knowledge is presented at the end of initiation by the girls grasping the masculine tusks of the elephant, and the boys entering the womb of the antelope, as in Chapter Six.

This interplay between sexes may be seen as part of the cosmological structure. Nyau is about the procreation of life, of producing the fruits of life without which one dies without the hope of continued life. Sexual intercourse and giving birth to new life are regarded as an assurance of the renewal of life after death, of having borne fruits in this world which assures one's own renewal.

This renewal carries on past one's own death into remembrance as an ancestor, of the living regarding the mzimu ancestor spirits as being close to living man.

The mature tree in the center of the ritual space, the bwalo, may be interpreted as another metaphor of procreation.²³ To live and be remembered is to bear fruits after maturity, as the mature tree bears fruits before it dies. Without the bearing of fruits, nyau members explained, the tree will not live again, and so they say, that human life will not live again.

In the funeral of an unmarried man with no children, the Kasiyamaliro carried the man's spirit to the grave, still with the same hopes of renewal of life. But the speeches about the man commented on his lack of marriage and family, and the touch of sadness in the way he was declared not to be forgotten for the good he has done in life. In Chewa belief, the man has died without having borne fruit, and will likely remain dead after those living now who remember him also die, without the chance of renewed after-life.

Procreation is an expectation of the initiates in Chewa social practice. The assuming of the other sex, or assumption of knowledge about the other to become a whole person is part of the initiation training, so it might be said that gender, then, has no hierarchy. Both are required, one by the other, in gendered pairings to achieve fruitful life which in turn produces fruitful death.

Gender is necessary, integral and complementary, one not complete without the other. The female God in the earth needs the rains from the male God in the sky. The male initiates wear the female mask, the female initiates wear the nyau mask forms on their heads, nyau masked performance requires the support of women, and women need the support of men for the community rituals to succeed.

Kasiyamaliro and Cosmological Parts

In the making of the wild animal Kasiyamaliro, nyau initiates are taught how it is constructed by learning the parts, the materials used to make it. The parts are displayed on the ground before the initiates, in a row. The initiates memorize each part, and memorize a nyau name for each part.

The Soil

The row of parts begins with a small mound of earth, the soil. This small mound indicates that all of life comes from the soil, the place of creation for all things; plants, animals, iron and man. As described previously, according to nyau, all things in life come from the soil. In interviews it was explained that the soil has procreative powers, female powers, which give birth to new life as the woman's womb gives birth to new life.²⁴

Softness of the earth is an indication of the first rains. Chewa farmers hope for early rains which will make the hard work of hoeing the gardens easier, followed by the coming of rains for planting. The softening of the earth, particularly the hard red clay over much of the central region, is the time of preparing for new life, the regeneration of maize. In the creation myth, the earth was first hard and then softened with the rains of life. In the changing seasons, the earth hardens in the dry season, and needs the softening of rain before seeds will penetrate the surface.

The consistency of this metaphor of clay surface which softens is carried through by the neighbors of the Chewa. The clay earth which hardens on Kaphirintiwa in the Dzalanyama mountains is re-created among the Yao of the central region of Malawi, who believe "the first footsteps of man and animal can still be seen in the rocks of Kaphirintiwa"²⁵ This Kaphirintiwa, though, is not the site of the flat mountain top. It is a flat space forming an

island in Lake Bangweolo, which is submerged in the lake during the rainy season, and becomes visible and dry in the dry season.

Signs of agriculture which in the myth are imprinted in the stone, as they are imprinted in the Dzalanyama mountain top of Chewa creation mythology. These imprints, I suggest, are also metaphors of sexuality, and creation of life. The mortar is representative of the woman, as the pestle is of the man. The hoe stands for conjugal rights between husband and wife in Chisungu initiation.²⁶ The winnowing basket is the sifter of seeds and grains, of new life and the sustaining food of life.²⁷ The footprints of people and animals are also imprinted in the earth, indicating the first men and women on earth, and the first animals, who descended in life together.

Ash

In each rendering of the row of parts learned in initiation I witnessed, the mound of soil was followed by a mound of ash. As more than one elder explained, 'without mafuta, (the nyau word for ash), there is no Gule Wamkulu'. Mafuta is the Swahili word for oil, and in a sense, the mafuta of Chewa ash may be interpreted as the substance for the anointing of an object which moves it from the realm of the ordinary to the realm of the sacred, or from the realm of daily village life to the realm of the graveyard spirits. Ash, it seems, transforms all things from the soil.

Ash is associated with the appeasement, or cooling of the spirits. During a funeral, the ash from funeral fires from the night before are placed at the junction of paths near the graveyard.²⁸ The ashes from the brewing of beer for funeral events are heaped up near the graveyard on the last day of the funeral ritual.²⁹ Ash is created by the burning of ritual objects, and the burning of structures associated with ritual.³⁰

Ash is also the material which masked dancers use to cover

their skin, to transform themselves from life to spirit of the deceased.³¹ The significance of the ash, it seems, is that all that comes from the soil may not be in its refined form. Ash is the ritual oil, mafuta, which transforms the things from the soil, such as iron and clay. Iron and clay, I suggest, are also transformers, thought to be metaphors of birth, of recreating substances giving birth to new ones. Both iron-making and pottery-making include transformation from fire and ash.³² Ash, then takes one form of soil, clay or iron ore, and through the death of fire, the soil takes on a different form of life, in its birth lying in the bed of ash.

Thus, ash may be said to transform man into mask, and mask into man. Ash also transforms the life of Kasiyamaliro as the wild animal in husks, into the new growth of maize in the spring. The ash from the burning of Kasiyamaliro is the ash which transforms its life. The Kasiyamaliro, in turn, may be said to have transforming powers in carrying the spirit of the deceased to the grave. In this sense, ash may be interpreted as a mediator between life and death, and a continuity of life between the living in the village and ancestors, who are deceased. Through the fire and the ash, there are two kinds of life; that of the living, and those unformed in death, waiting to be reborn.

Ash was a fundamental component of making the face masks. Before the use of enamel paints, the color of the mask was made with pigments. Each pigment color of red, black or white was mixed with the mafuta, the ash.³³ The masks are burned with iron rods to make the holes for eyes, nostrils, mouth and along the forehead to sew on the hide, feather and cloth materials. Ash, again, whitens the skin of the dancers, a transformation associated with the color of whiteness and closeness to the spirits, as in Kasiyamaliro.

Ash also relates to the agricultural seasons of life and death. The time of dances begins well after the end of rains, in June. It is the beginning of the time of

collecting seeds for the future plantings.³⁴ Initiations are conducted in this season of dryness and coolness, from June to September. Dances continue until the first rains, in mid-November. Before the rains, in the hottest part of the season of dryness, farmers set the grasses on fire, to prepare the fields for planting.³⁵ Some fires can be seen at night for miles, raging uncontrolled.³⁶ Others are carefully contained, burning the bush, and leaving the ash on the ground.

Among the Bemba, A.D. Roberts (1973) notes:

"In October, at the end of the dry season the branches (of cleared trees) are fired, leaving a bed of ash in which the seed is broadcast after the first rains have softened the ground."³⁷

In this quote, Roberts sees literally what myth and mask portray metaphorically. The ash is the bed of new life, the death of the trees, of the mask, of man, all transformed into another form through ash. Seed of new life is planted with ash at the first rains. The first rains re-live the first coming of life as the rains brought all living things and softened the earth, imprinting footprints and the signs of agriculture. The fires of the creation myth may be assumed to die down, leaving ash over the grasslands. From this ash came new life, the growing of cassava, maize and millet.

In other words, ash may be described as a common ingredient to render common day objects apart from the ordinary understanding, and become objects of nyau. I further interpret this as ash being a transforming substance; a substance which creates objects as ritual objects, and which transforms the raw earth into life-giving forms.

Shapes and objects

Following the mound of ash are other objects. These include pieces of branches in specific shapes, a feather, maize husk leaves, grasses, sisal strips, and metal tools

used to make the masks. Each of these objects is dead; the maize leaves are dried, not green. The grasses, sisal, bamboo and small branches have been cut with the metal knives, and the feather had been plucked from the dead body of a chicken.

The branches are combined in particular shapes used in the construction of Kasiyamaliro. The piece of metal is often the final object in the row of objects. Metal is transformed from earth through fire and ash, and is formed into tools to carve the masks and cut the sisal. These are the ingredients; the shapes, parts, objects and forms which create the large Kasiyamaliro forms, and all the masks in the Chirombo repertoire.³⁸

Within the construction of Kasiyamaliro are the various branch forms learned in initiation: the oval form at the base, the cross as the horizontal and vertical branches intersecting one another in the frame, the crescent forms shaping the horns and front and back of the construction, parallel lines as the straight handles inside for the dancer to grasp and lift the mask, and the form of the letter 'U' as the swayed back of the female Kasiyamaliro.

The branches which were tied together at angles and bent into horizontal curves in the front and back of Kasiyamaliro are described in initiation lessons as the ribs of the animal, part of the strong frame. The grasses covering the branches are the blood of the animal, and the maize husk leaves woven on the surface is the animal's skin. There in the graveyard, the animal was given life, with the spirit inside which moves the animal being man...the primary secret of nyau, revealed in initiation.

Within the construction, each part is relevant to the creation of the whole of the art form, and also a more whole understanding of nyau beliefs. The piece of grass in the row of objects is described as the blood of the animal, Kasiyamaliro. Schoffeleers has also documented the use of grass in the legend of Mbona from the 16th century among

nyau-practicing peoples in the southern region of Malawi.³⁹ In his recent book, Schoffeleers (1992) relates the story of Mbona, in which the legendary hero who brought rains told his enemies they could kill him with a blade of grass after they tried unsuccessfully to kill him with knives. They cut his throat with the piece of grass, and Mbona's blood spilled out, filling a deep well or pool, and becoming a river.⁴⁰

Sisal, usually tied in a knot is also in the row of objects. Sisal is white-like in color and is used as a tough string around which the maize husks are woven. The sisal covers the grasses in the construction of Kasiyamaliro, holding them in place. Nyau members referred to the need to be careful in constructing the Kasiyamaliro mask, not to break the sisal string.

Among both men and women, the sisal knot was identified as the female virgin knot. The breaking of the white knot causes the menstrual blood to flow. The knot is called nkhole, a term used by men and women within nyau, naming the knotted sisal, and a word which is in a song by women in the initiation of girls.⁴¹ Nkhole holds in the blood of a virgin girl, but also holds in the blood during pregnancy, and should not be broken before the baby is ready to be born.

Twigs from the chabzero bush are formed into specific shapes which may be interpreted as signs in the cycle of life. Common forms in initiation lessons, said to be learned in some areas in both male and female initiations, are described below. While each of these shapes are likely to be plurivocal, in the sense of Ricoeur, I am suggesting the following interpretations which recur as central themes of initiation. The numbers correspond with the diagram following:

1. Oval base: This is the open base of the Kasiyamaliro, also the opening of the womb; the place of entry to the mimba for rebirth. As such, it is a feminine emblem, as the sharpened stick used to kill the chicken in the boy's initiation is a masculine emblem.

2. Cross, two intersecting sticks: This is the union of man and woman, the tying together of two sticks. The Kasiyamaliro frame is built into horizontal and vertical branches, tied together where they intersect.

3. Two parallel bars: These are the two heavier branches on either side of the frame, about one or two feet above the oval opening, used by the dancer to grip and lift the mask frame. These two bars are the male and the female, lying side by side.

4. Two curves: The large vertical curve of the form in front and in back, forming a beginning and an end. Both are arcs, as in the rising and setting sun.

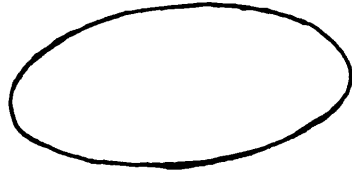
5. Tail: This is the long, loose tail of the animal, with frayed sisal at the end. The frayed sisal is also evident hanging from the horns, referred to as decorations which are feminine. It is sisal string, the nkhole, which has been broken and frayed, or in other words, allowing an opened entry to the womb.

6. U-shape, with string: This form is either the U-shape of the curved back of Kasiyamaliro, or inverted upside down to strengthen the frame. The upturned 'U' is reminiscent of the rubbish heap or the grave, with the string across as the level of earth. The reverse is the womb, still tied with the nkhole string.

7. Double and single crescents: Crescent shapes are present in the horizontal curves of the 'ribs', front and back of the Kasiyamaliro, in the shape of some horns, and in the slight curves on either side of the oval base. These

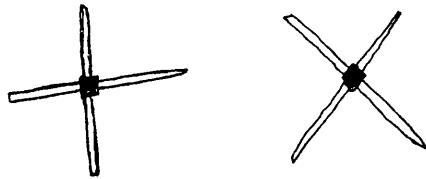
FORMS IN KASIYAMAHIRO

1.-



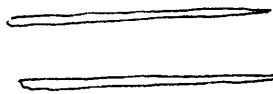
OVAL BASE

2.-



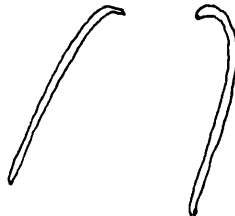
INTERSECTING STICKS TO BUILD FORM

3.-



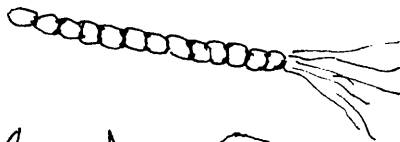
PARALLEL BARS

4.-



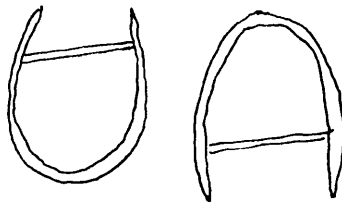
FRONT AND BACK VERTICAL CURVES

5.-



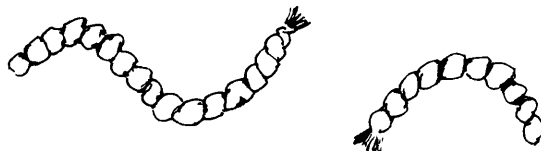
TAIL OF KASIYAMAHIRO

6.-



SHAPE OF BACK INVERTED BACK IN FRAME

7.-



CRESCENT - HORNS

8.-



ADZE, KNIFE METAL OBJECTS

curves are again referred to as rising and setting sun, or the crescent of moon. The double crescent is tied with string, marking the level of earth or water, referring to the mountain or deep pool, and the cycle of life.

8. Metal tools: These are the tools which create the masks, cuts the sisal and the branches, and may be used to re-enforce the more delicate necks of the antelope forms. These are the Namkungwi, the teachers of the mask-making. They are also the iron born of the earth and transformed in fire and ash into a new form. They have undergone rebirth.

The earth, refined through fire and ash in the earthen oven of the iron forge, produces the tools used in making the carved wooden masks. The adze, known by mask-makers as Nsompfo, and the scraper, Nchelelo, were described as the first mask-makers, the teacher and the student. The Namkungwi or instructor in initiation is also described by mask-makers and nyau leaders as Nsompfo, and the initiate, Nchelelo. Riddles are learned in initiation including who is the father of Chadzunda, the answer being Nsompfo.

The eyes, nostrils and mouth are burned through with ash residues, by using heated iron tools. Animal hides, (now more often only cloths), are sewn into burned holes around the mask forehead with a metal needle. Metal rods are also used to strengthen the long, sometimes slender neck of Kasiyamaliro inside the construction. These metal tools are the tools of the mask-maker, the artist who creates the masks.

The parts are incorporated in nyau teachings, as signs depicting wholeness in the union of woman and man, of procreation to perpetuate life, of life and death in a continuous, season-like cycle, of a beginning and an end, of the rubbish pit as womb and tomb and of the male and female sexual organs.

Kasiyamaliro in the Cycle of Life

In initiation, boys are taught that Kasiyamaliro begins its life in the garden, in the field of maize. It is the sprouting seed, and the emerging young green growth. Kasiyamaliro matures in the field, forming fruits, the ripening maize cob. Once it is fully matured, it is cut off from the stem or in other words, it is harvested. The mature, ripe maize is stored in the granary for a period of time, and then it is taken out of the granary for husking. The old skin of the ripened maize is removed, revealing the ripe kernels of corn. The grain and the seed are taken to be eaten and replanted, and the old outside layers of husk are thrown away into the rubbish heap.

The rubbish heap is a hole in the ground where, when enough rubbish is collected, the contents are burned. The rubbish pit may also be interpreted as the tomb, or place of death of the husks, waiting for burning. In another sense, it is the womb, the place which allows the dead to be re-created anew.⁴² From this rubbish pit, the young male nyau members steal the maize husks at night, and take them into the wooded graveyard. The life of the Kasiyamaliro is then renewed again, re-created by nyau into a mythical beast, Chirombo, a wild animal from the graveyard. It is taken from death, from the womb and tomb of the rubbish pit, and brought back into life in a beautiful new form.

This beautiful antelope-like animal then transforms the lives of boys into mature men in initiation, in its ritual role described in Chapter Six. The same mask form collects the spirit of the deceased in funerals, and signifies the time to leave the funeral behind in rendering death into ancestry in funeral remembrance, and appears in the night dances, shining white in the faint light of the moon in the night dances.

After its ritual roles and performances in its life as a

beautiful antelope-like image, it is taken back to the graveyard, and, at the end of the dance season, in the heat of October before November's cooling rains, it is burned. For initiation, the ash of the curved rib burned with maize, is eaten by the young initiates.

Life Cycle of Kasiyamaliro in Initiation Lesson

Garden to Granary

Granary to Rubbish Pit

Rubbish Pit to Graveyard

Graveyard to Wild Animal Form

Animal To Dance

Dance to Graveyard

Graveyard to Death by Burning...to Ash...leading to the mysterious re-creation of sprouting maize again in the garden.

 Through the learning of the parts of Kasiyamaliro, the coming from the soil, and the transforming and cooling quality of ash, nyau cosmology also emerges. Kasiyamaliro represents nyau cosmology, incorporating metaphors of death and new life, the cycle of life, creation and death in mythology, the necessity of fire and burning in order to bring the coming of life with rains.

The rubbish pit is the rounded hole, the womb, but also the tomb, the place of death and burning. The Kasiyamaliro has been reborn out of the rubbish pit into the graveyard, another place of the dead. There, in the most unlikely place for life, Kasiyamaliro is transformed into a wild animal, as the boys in initiation are re-born into maturity

in the place of the dead.

It is in the form of wild animals, separate from man, but reunited in the dance, and reunited in death in the graveyard. It is the image which has emerged from the clear, pure waters of rains and life,⁴³ into the form of the dried maize husks of death and the dry season. The Kasiyamaliro dies by the fire of man, leaving its ashes on the earth. Again, there is an implied metaphor of renewal of life, in the death of Kasiyamaliro in the chaotic burning of the grasses. After the burning, there is a return to another season of rains and life.

The Making of an Image of Life and Death

In Art and Illusion, Gombrich writes about the task of the artist to create an image which embodies thought. "The artist who wants to 'represent' a real (or imagined) thing does not start by opening his eyes and looking about him but by taking the colours and forms and building up the required image."⁴⁴

In this case I suggest the forms referred to by Gombrich are the various parts of the Kasiyamaliro learned in initiation. Each part, the soil, ash, maize leaves, sisal, grass, bamboo and wood; and each form, the crescent, oval, 'U' shape, parallel lines, and the cross are the forms and parts the artist has to work with in creating the 'required image'. These elements are present within the form of Kasiyamaliro, even if they are not visible outside the mask. Each of the shapes learned in initiation are present within the construction of the Kasiyamaliro as part of the 'required image' in nyau.

The artists, members of nyau, have built up these forms into the image of an antelope-like animal form. Kasiyamaliro is the representation of an imagined thing, the appearance of an antelope but in an imagined form. This corresponds with its role as Mafano, an image of an

invisible, unseen wild animal spirit. The Chewa artist is said to create the image from his own mind, using the materials and forms of nyau. This image, which was once perhaps new, has become well known and accepted as the required image of Kasiyamaliro, with all of its variations from one individual mask to another.

The selection of the antelope animal form is also part of the required image. The antelope, as pointed out by Yoshida, (1991. p. 239) and myself, (1991. p. 44), is an animal which is edible and is hunted. It is also an animal which does not harm man, but rather is used by man. Among the Chewa there seems to be agreement that the antelope is also a beautiful form, especially beautiful in its artistic rendering of Kasiyamaliro.

Of all the animals, the antelope is also described by nyau members as one of the large, big-bellied animals. As a big-bellied animal, the antelope is a possible choice for its important ritual role in boy's initiation, as entering the womb, the mimba which then gives birth to the mature young man. The antelope is named by elders, chiefs and mask-makers as a senior animal with a strong spirit, included with the elephant and the python. Thus, I suggest, the required image embodying Chewa cosmology becomes the antelope for the Kasiyamaliro form.

In the quote above, Gombrich refers to both 'the colours and the forms'. The colors of nyau are incorporated in the image as well as the forms of twigs learned in initiation.

Color Symbolism in Nyau Cosmology: Kasiyamaliro

The colors of Kasiyamaliro are the colors of all the other masks, and relate to the colors universally found in this region of Africa⁴⁵. Among the nyau members, the colors are described in similar terms to Victor Turner's depiction of color.⁴⁶ Associations of color were described to me by both male and female senior nyau members. As described

previously in the thesis, the primary colors of carved masks are black and red, black being considered more dangerous and ominous⁴⁷ than red, though both colors were considered dangerous and fearful, (cho-opsya).

The color of Kasiyamaliro is the color of the dried maize husks, which is considered to be bright and white-like. Woven into the white-like husks are the purple-tinted husks creating the color red, which is also part of the required image. Mud, the soil which is black, is often inside the mask, or daubed on either in clearly visible motifs such as the daubing of the centers of circles with black mud or may be represented in weaving black plastic pieces in a line of maize husks across the side.⁴⁸

Black as in soil, may not be visible on the surface, being daubed into the mouth, or the oval base, or inside the construction. Feathers which are black and white, and at times a rusty red, are occasionally used as well, in the mouth or on the head of Kasiyamaliro. White-like sisal strips form the vertical lines on which the maize husk leaves are woven. Bamboo is considered white-like, and the flexible, slender branches of the chabzero bush are split and are white inside.

As I was told by Chewa men and women alike, black is associated more directly with the mud of the grave, the soil of the graveyard, and with death itself. Red is more ambivalent.⁴⁹ It is the passage of life, the pouring and flowing of life as in menstrual passing of blood. Red is the reminder of life passing by, leading to the black of death.

Redness of menstruation is also the redness of the potential of life. As potential and as passing of life, the color is again ambivalent, depending upon the emphasis placed on the use of the color. Black is less ambivalent in its insistence of the reality of death. The nyau forms with the blackness of the soil on them indicates the

blackness of the grave. The black soil is the place of God, again the giver of life, but the experience of death is attached to the blackness making black ambiguous in light of the soil's creative, transforming possibilities. Ash, the transforming substance, is black but also white when rubbed on the dancer's skin.

Antelope-like forms are white from the maize husks, while the elephant is black, covered with the mud of the river bed. The python animal construction, Ndondo, is spotted with mud and clay; white, red and black. Another python form is vertically striped one black with mud and one covered in white maize husks. The ten-foot long Ndondo, python-like mask, is made of a flexible wood, allowing it to wrap itself round the center bwalo tree in the dance.

According to Broster and Bourn (1982. p. 17) "colour has religious significance", and describe color used in ritual in relation to the spiritual world. Color in nyau ritual may be interpreted similarly, as is presented in Kasiyamaliro. The whiteness of the Kasiyamaliro, in contrast to both red and black, was interpreted by nyau men and women as life itself,⁵⁰ as being without death and without tears, to be at one with the spirits and to be in the happiness of life.⁵¹ As Turner asserts about Chihamba of the Ndembu, "It [white] is absence presented, invisibility made visible." (1962. p.96). The mafano, the unseen imagined as Kasiyamaliro, is whiteness. In the funeral remembrance, the whiteness seems to be especially associated with remembrance of one's ancestors. Red and black, part of the color triad, are added to Kasiyamaliro as tokens to the other representations, of the fact of death in black, and of the passing of life's blood in red.⁵²

The whiteness of Kasiyamaliro is again significant in its role in funerals and remembrance. Members of nyau have said over and over again, they believe the Kasiyamaliro 'dreams' of the death of a community member. In funeral ritual, the

Kasiyamaliro is often the first sign of death in the village...the first to come to the house of the deceased. On the day of the funeral of a senior member of the community and of nyau, it is the Kasiyamaliro which circles the house and leads the funeral procession into the graveyard. The height of the antelope-like horns rising above the heads of the people is part of the dramatic procession of the funeral rite, as described in the previous Chapter.

Ironically, it is the image of the 'absence of death' which leads the funeral procession of the dead. An image thought to rise from the clear, pure waters, to be near holiness, which evokes happiness, absence of tears, absence of grief, the present day life and living, is the same image which carries the deceased's spirit, and leads the dead body to be buried in the black grave. It is the same image which dreams of the death and visits the house of the deceased. The same singular image of Kasiyamaliro embraces both death and life.

Kasiyamaliro: Interpretation of Life and Death

In the initiation of boys into maturity, I have already interpreted the female gendered Kasiyamaliro as a metaphor of birth, with young initiates going into the womb of the female mask form and emerging as in being born again. The boys emerge and are proclaimed mature, ku kulu, as in ripening maize. The image of the fresh, young ripening youth and green maize contrasts sharply with the dead, dried and withered husks covering the Kasiyamaliro. Yet, it is this image with the dead, dried leaves which gives birth to this new phase of life.

This recurring metaphor of life transformed through death to a new form of life is not limited to the Chewa. The Luvale initiates are invited to 'behead' the masked

character which had frightened them so in the initiation process.⁵³ As they untie the knots attaching the mask to the clothes, and force the mask off all together, they are confronted with the living man underneath. The 'killing' of the spirit form reveals the life of a man.

The Ndembu ritual of Chihamba the white spirit also has the 'killing' of the masked or hidden form Kavula. Kavula is known to be in the form of a person, described by Turner as a 'demi-god'.⁵⁴ Kavula is an inverted mortar hiding a razor and an axe inside, covered with cloth made white by the spreading of cassava flour over the surface.⁵⁵ Again, the mortar is a female sign, and the refined metals may be interpreted as the learning of Chihamba, the making of objects which require transformation with ash.⁵⁶

The Ndembu refer to this bundle of metal tools as mpang'u, or the mystery.⁵⁷ I interpret this as the mystery of the birth of these objects from the blacksmith's furnace, the mystery of the knowledge of life, and re-creation of life. I also interpret this as the mystery of transformation from one form to another, from the soil to refined metal tools, and from the living to the mystery of life beyond death.

At one point in the ritual, the initiates are all asked to strike Kavula. Kavula is struck, and ritually 'killed'. The initiates are then given handfuls of cassava flour and are anointed with oil.⁵⁸ The initiates and Kavula are believed to be transformed, to begin a renewal of new life. Kavula went from human form to "become the germinating seed and sprouts". "Before he (Kavula) was a person; afterwards he becomes a potency for growth." ⁵⁹

This cosmological construct of life after death, of renewal of agricultural growth, is revealed to the boys through these metaphors of masking. But the greater secret of life revealed to them as they enter the womb of Kasiyamaliro, or behead the masked figure of the Luvale is: they find that a living man is inside.

Then, all have in common the great secret of nyau...that man is inside the mask. The masked form dies, and assumes another form of life, transformation from one form to another form. In Luvale and Chewa initiations, the spirit is uncovered, revealing man inside. In the Chirombo, it is man which drives the masks, man is the life inside the nyau. Man is the life of nyau, but it is the transformed life...only revealed in the death of another form.

The significance of this is not so simple. In initiation the act of revealing the man inside the Kasiyamaliro was presented as something which is profound, yet it is not explained. The sudden realization of man inside the womb, of man as the life of the mask comes as a revelation to new initiates. Man is the living force; behind the spirit's mask of the deceased is human life.

This revelation, I would suggest, is a grasping of the understanding of life behind death, of life behind the spirit of the deceased, of man behind the mask. As Turner (1962 p. 96) suggests,

"It is as though, whenever men attempt to represent the act-of-being, they have an innate propensity to use the same symbolic form, unsullied whiteness."

In revealing man inside Chirombo, initiates become aware of life within even the most fearful images. These images include the most frightening masks, mzimu, ready to drag unsuspecting young boys to the graveyard. These most horrible images of the deceased themselves have the life of man beneath. There is life even in the image of death itself.

As one man explained to me, the secret is that the thing which makes this move, which gives it life, is man. The importance of the secret is that the spirit from the graveyard is given life only through man. This may be interpreted further in light of the creation myth, that

God, the creative force, gave this life to man. In the face of the horror of death, of the burning of the world, God still gave man life, and man must suffer the horror of death to be reunited with God in another life.⁶⁰

This larger understanding encompasses a primary significance of the ritual and of the image of Kasiyamaliro ...the re-uniting of man and animal, man and spirits, man and God. After the dance, the spirits and wild animals withdraw again, in separation from man. Through the spirits, represented by the Kasiyamaliro and all of the nyau masks performing in the bwalo, man has achieved a renewed sense of unity, of communion and oneness with his community and with the entire world, transcending this life to the next, in a complete cycle of life.

Adaptations in Nyau Cosmology: Biblical Re-interpretation

The strength of this connection between the image of Kasiyamaliro and the regeneration of life is demonstrated in the adaptation of the life cycle of Kasiyamaliro from the creation mythology, to the Biblical story of Moses. The absolute necessity to create, perform and ritually burn Kasiyamaliro is currently being interpreted by certain nyau Chiefs as a command from God through the story of Moses.

In this interpretation, explained explicitly by three different chiefs in three different village areas, Kasiyamaliro was made in the time of Israel, and danced for the people there. God revealed his word to Moses on the mountain, and Moses came down to the people in Israel, to tell them to burn their idols. In each of the separate discussions, each chief insisted this story of Moses meant it was God who commanded the burning of Kasiyamaliro. It is this commandment from God through Moses that means the people must continue to create and burn Kasiyamaliro...with the implied purpose being the hope of salvation for keeping God's commandments.⁶¹

I would further suggest that this is an indication of religious significance⁶² in nyau ritual, and the specific role of Kasiyamaliro as an emblem of rebirth and transformation from death to the revelation of life.

Kasiyamaliro and Cosmology

Kasiyamaliro is presented in this Chapter as a form which encompasses the cosmology of nyau, of being a metaphor of the knowledge of the world as understood in nyau. In linking the myriad threads of knowledge in this one mask, Kasiyamaliro, the cosmology of nyau is also linked. If cosmology is defined as the construction of social, natural and supernatural orders,⁶³ then Kasiyamaliro and all the masks in nyau as a whole may comprise a total cosmological construction, or worldview.

As I was told over and over again, the people of nyau revere God, but do not believe in the Bible. Initiation into nyau is the learning of the nyau world, both this world and the metaphysical one. I suggest it is about the renewal of life after death; it is knowledge of the eternal cycle of life.

Social Order

The cycle of life of Kasiyamaliro and the interpretation of the parts which make up the image of Kasiyamaliro also relate to the social order. The rituals of Kasiyamaliro and the masked events are community events, social events, including the acknowledgement and participation of a community of related peoples and neighbors. Rites of passage, transitions from one stage of life to another are marked by ritual events which are social events. Further, the life cycle of Kasiyamaliro may be interpreted as the cycle of human life, with each passage as part of the social order.

This cycle begins and ends in November, with the beginning of the rains. November to June, this season of rains is suggested by the Chewa as the time it takes for a baby to be conceived and born. This is the cycle of the season of life, the time of planting and work in the fields.

Importantly, the season of rains is also about nine months, the length of time for a child to be born.

When the seedling child grows to maturity, the child becomes an adult in an event which is marked by ritual with the presence of Kasiyamaliro. Both young men and young women have been initiated into the particular knowledge of their community, and are now expected to behave as mature persons, with full knowledge of proper behavior and acceptable action.

As these young people marry and have children, they are seen to become more full members of the community. I would suggest that they are likened to the bearing of fruits, the yielding of maize kernels on the maize stalk. As the maize ripens, so the people age, and assume greater positions of authority and responsibility within the community.

The maize is harvested, in all its richness and fullness, and stored in the granary. Thus, I suggest the person of age and wisdom has become rich and full, and this wisdom is kept in all its fruitfulness. During the dry season until the first harvest, the husks have been discarded and the fruits eaten. This is the death of the husks and the maize, and consequently, I suggest, the death of the valued aged person. Again, this event is ritually marked by the funeral ceremony, with the coming of Kasiyamaliro.

The Kasiyamaliro, attractive and pleasing in its clothes of agriculture and its form of antelope as good to eat, attracts the spirit and carries the spirit to the grave. In this role, the Kasiyamaliro may be interpreted as taking the discarded spirit from the rubbish heap and into the

graveyard with the hope of a new transformation.

The aged, senior person in the community is believed to have their own mzimu, or spirit, apart from the spirits of all people. In the next phase of the cycle, the mzimu of the deceased is in the grave, or also said to be under the water. It is still close to the community and potentially dangerous. Only after the passage of time, and then in the following dry season, Kasiyamaliro appears embodying the transformation of life, and returns again to the bwalo for the funeral remembrance ritual.

These rituals are marked in the dry season, in the time of the dead, and the time of social communion. This is the season when people are free of work in the fields, and a time of plenty after the harvest of maize.

In short, the cycle of life and death in the double crescent form of Kasiyamaliro is also the human cycle of life; the germinating seed as the baby in the womb. The germinating seed is below the ground, in darkness, until the first rains. The seedling is the newborn baby emerging from the darkness of the womb, as the seedling emerges from the darkness of the life-giving soil, growth to maturity as in maturity and procreation, maturity of maize to yield fruits, the ripening of the fruits as the children grow, and the parents age.

The parents may then ripen fully and become leaders in their community. The harvest is the death of the plant, but a plant which has yielded multiple fruits, as the harvest is the death of an aged person who has produced fruits. The granary is the grave, waiting for the final transformation. The discarded husks then go into the rubbish heap, having given up its fruits. This is its final death for the mzimu of the most senior people. The rubbish pit of the husks is the grave and the final death for the aged person, who is now remembered in an

anniversary dance, freeing the spirit to be transformed from its grave.

The aged person who becomes a mzimu, may return to the village as a spirit in the form of the mask, and also in dreams. In this new form, the spirit comes to the bwalo to perform, as the Kasiyamaliro performs in the season of death, the dry season. The image of Kasiyamaliro, which took the spirit of the deceased to the grave, now reappears in the funeral remembrance ritual. At the end of this dry season of dance, Kasiyamaliro is burned to ash, in the expectation of the new germinating seed below the ground which becomes a seedling after the first rains.

Natural Order

The same cycle of life can be explained as an understanding of the natural order in nyau society. The cycle of agriculture, and particularly maize as the primary food crop, is a metaphor for the cycle of life and death. The death of a mask form, the burning of Kasiyamaliro, is understood in nyau as the transformation through the burned ashes of the new growth, the green shoots of maize rising from the death of ash. This new, green life is described as the birth of Kasiyamaliro, and its growth, maturation and harvesting as the natural order of the garden, which provides the food for the living.

In the time of dryness, the death of the dry season and the death of the agricultural plants, the dead husks are transformed into new life as a wild animal. The dry season is the season of hunting, and the wild animal form of Kasiyamaliro is a desirable, edible animal. Even in its first death, Kasiyamaliro is still sustaining the living, as a food source of meat or nyama.

The parts which make up the Kasiyamaliro are all taken from natural objects, with the exception of the iron implements which are specifically transformed from natural materials. Each object relates to the sustenance of life, that all

life comes from the soil and that even the birds, animals and man survive from the produce of the garden.

The natural order of rising and setting suns, of cyclical seasons of dryness and rains, of day and night, of mountain and deep pool, are all present in the interpretation of the shapes of twigs in the making of Kasiyamaliro. Nature's cycle is also metaphorically linked to the process of creating human life, the natural rhythms and cycles in procreation, pregnancy and birth.

Kasiyamaliro is sometimes described as rising from the pure, radiant waters, white and bright. The deep pool is on the underside, the depths of the world, of darkness of womb and grave, the place where the sun hides after setting, the place of the moon during day. In the season of dryness, it comes from the rains, and performs in the white, pale moonlight of the nocturnal dance, and in the brilliance of sun in the day. The bright white light is said to shine on the white-like maize husks as a vision of life even in the clothes of its own dead husks.

Supernatural Order

Kasiyamaliro is more than the image of a wild animal, of the natural cycle of planting or the transitions in human life. It is also described as sacred, as having a spiritual and religious significance in that it is considered a kind of supernatural phenomenon separate from man. It is an image, a Mafano, of the invisible supernatural world. As such, the Kasiyamaliro returns to the village and the bwalo under specific ritual conditions, otherwise remaining in the home of the spirit world, the graveyard.

Through its form, Kasiyamaliro is charged with the capability of transforming life, of agency in the re-creation of life from one form to another. Thus, boys are transformed from youth to maturity, and the deceased's

spirit is captured by the attractive wild animal form to be transformed into new life as mzimu. The spirit of the deceased is taken by Kasiyamaliro and placed in the soil of the grave. This ritual is repeated as Kasiyamaliro circles the house of the deceased and returns to the graveyard.

The mzimu is considered potentially dangerous in this transition time in the graveyard, and only is seen to be at rest after Kasiyamaliro appears again, another life cycle later, to commemorate the death. Only then is the funeral left behind, the grief left behind, and the mzimu is believed to return to the bwalo in the form of the human masked dancer.

The supernatural order of life followed by death, followed by new life is embodied in the cycle of Kasiyamaliro. In its death by fire, the ash of Kasiyamaliro begins the next cycle of life. Man has the chance, the hope, the promise of new life after death, in this cycle of life. What this new life is, no one could say he or she knew. However, there is this belief that there is a life form after death for those who have produced fruits in this life.

Conclusion

This, then, is the cosmology of nyau, of a belief in life after death, in a cycle of life encompassing the social, natural and supernatural orders. This belief is present in the form and image of Kasiyamaliro, in the rituals of masked events, and the many metaphors in mask and ritual.

Kasiyamaliro may be said to evoke themes of change in life and seasons, of interplay between different worlds, of existing in more than one world in the same space, at the same time. The implicit significances in the visual imagery of Kasiyamaliro are evident in the various ritual roles of transition, rites of passage, change; life, death

and rebirth; death and renewal, seasons of rains and fire, and mythical creation. All these themes interrelate, and all these ritual texts interrelate, bounded together and focused by one distinct mask: Kasiyamaliro.

In summary, the Kasiyamaliro is a triumphant work of art, disclosing a totality of nyau cosmology within one singular form. The powerful imagery of Kasiyamaliro, as the mask emerges from the boundary of wild trees to the bwalo on the village edge, encompasses life passages from birth, youth, maturity, death, and hope of renewal and rebirth. Within its form are the unity of man and woman, of dry and rainy seasons. Kasiyamaliro, in all its parts together, signifies union with this world, the spirit world, and the after-world, a complete unity in this present time and in the times of myth; the Kasiyamaliro is a symbol of re-union and oneness with all.

CHAPTER ENDNOTES

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- 1 See Schoffeleers and Lindgren 1975. p.25 and 26
 - 2 One notable exception is the mask form known as Chilembwe, which is a large animal construction, but is not in the tradition of Kasiyamaliro or other mafano masks, as is explained in the historical interpretation of the mask.
 - 3 See Colson. 1962. p.1. The word Muzimu is the ancestral spirit, but also "reflects the ideal organization of Tonga social structure". Muzimu, as the spirits of former living people, are differentiated from the spirits of animals, masabe and from God, Leza. p.4-5. These differentiations are very much like the nyau distinctions between animal spirits in the image of Chirombo, and the social structure of the Mzimu.
 - 4 Turner 1962. p.6 The Ndembu makishi masked dancers are called Mufu...dead people.
 - 5 Mafano was described to me in an interview with Chewa mask-maker Mr. Kambani and Chief N'gombe, 1992.
 - 6 See Scott. 1892. p.403 for a description of God, Mulungu, as related to the same creation myth, and representation of God.
 - 7 Schoffeleers and Roscoe (1985. p.17) relate another creation myth which also begin with the cataclysmic storm in Malawi.
 - 8 Kaphirintiwa is translated as the mountain or hill with a flat top, or flattened area. Thus, the site of Kaphirintiwa is the flat top of a mountain in the Dzalanyama range.
 - 9 See Maxwell. 1983. p. 31
 - 10 Among the Bemba, the hard stick is the little man and soft stick is the little woman, and the two twirled together produce a little child, the flame. Maxwell. 1983. p. 30
 - 11 See unpublished Research Report, Department of Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1992, Birch Faulkner
 - 12 See Scott 1892. p. 416, and Scott and Heatherwick. 1929. p.359 for reference to ancestor spirits as communicating to the living for God. See also Schoffeleers. 1968. p. 232 to 238 for discussion of God, particularly p. 238 for spirits as mediators between God and community.
 - 13 Maxwell. 1983. p.22
 - 14 Chiuta, Chauta and Leza all refer to the big bow in the sky, the rainbow. Mulungu is the Chewa term for God as translated for Christians in Malawi.
 - 15 This God is characterized in the creation myth of Kaphirintiwa, and echoed in similar myths among neighboring peoples.
 - 16 Maxwell, op cit p. 103 refers to the work of Ong. 1967.p. 206 and 1977.p 143 in reference to the male sky

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- god and mother earth god. Quotation from Maxwell, p. 104
 17 Linden 1978. p. 201
 18 Linden. 1978. p. 201

Linden describes the male sky God and the female earth god among the Chewa. This was reinforced in field research as the source of creation was described as being in the soil, as if in the womb, to give birth to new life. This is juxtaposed with the creation mythology, and with the references to God in heaven.

- 19 This was gathered in field research, repeated by various nyau leaders from different parts of the central region, including Kasungu, Nkhoma, Lilongwe, and Bunda areas. It is reflected in the initiation lessons, and in the literature about neighboring peoples, particularly the Bemba.
- 20 While reference to the creation myth and the God in the sky was not consistent from one place and person to the next, nyau members consistently referred to God as being in the soil, and as being female. Schoffeleers 1968. p.188 notes that Bruwer 1952. p.179-180 referred to a female God "as a representative of the earth, and as such contrasted to the sky" among the Chewa in the central region. Hinfelaar. 1989. p.3. writes that among the Bemba the "Divine Being" is both feminine and masculine. I also recognize this dualistic concept differs from other discussions of the concept of the Chewa and Mang'anja God in the literature, such as Schoffeleers. 1968. p.182, and Scott and Heatherwick. 1929. p.348.
- 21 The ribs of the Kasiyamaliro, as described in the male initiation ritual in Chapter Six, are the part of the mask which is burned and its ashes eaten by the young male initiates, again tying the Kasiyamaliro to both male and female initiations.
- 22 This concept is described by Hinfelaar. 1989. p.3 in his work among the Bemba women, and is addressed in Chapter Six.
- 23 Metcalf and Huntington (1991) write that the Bara of Madagascar liken the man and woman to the tree, "which puts forth new seeds, and although dying itself, lives on through progeny." p. 130
- 24 MacGaffey 1986 p.45, quotes Laman 1962. p.15 , "The old conceive the land of the dead to be in 'kalunga' (in the womb of the earth..", referring to the BaKongo of Zaire.
- 25 Henckel. 1935. p. 14
- 26 Maxwell. 1983. p.55
- 27 The winnowing basket is the flat, round basket used for sifting flours, seeds and foods. Turner also refers to its significance by diviners as sifting truth from falsehood, 1962. p.5
- 28 Note from informant explains that ash and a broken pot are placed at the junction of two paths leading to the graveyard to warn passersby that there is a funeral. He

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- added that the ash 'cools' the spirits. Also, CMN White 1961. p. 82 states that the Luvale also heap the ashes at a crossroads. After the burial, the ash is rekindled into a new fire at the crossroads.
- 29 Yoshida. 1993. p.40. notes this.
- 30 Ash is created by the burning of the deceased's hut, in some cases. Maxwell. 1983. p.30. suggests that fire "symbolizes the life of the people" and is a "metaphor of life's continuity with the ancestors." He adds that when fires are extinguished, the "ashes are thrown to the west." The Luvale, according to CMN White. 1961. p. 25, also see fire as a "life force", as the "warmth of life" as opposed to the "chill of death". Burning of huts and Kasiyamaliro, and the funeral fires among the Chewa are referred to in Chapter Six.
- 31 The rubbing of ash over the skin, the legs and arms of dancers is described by dancers as part of becoming the spirit, the character of the mask. It is also described as a disguise to cover the skin, but in a transforming sense...from one's true identity to another being and identity separate from the first.
- 32 Much work has been done on the transforming qualities of blacksmith's iron and potters clay. I refer to the work of Sterner and David. 1991. p.355-369 in particular.
- 33 This process was described by mask-makers, though all of them say they now use paints instead of ash mixed with pigments.
- 34 Hinfelaar. 1989. p. 13 Bemba women collect the seeds in the cold season, as do the Chewa. This is also the time of creating the mask forms and the performing of initiations.
- 35 Gamitto noted that Maravi women piled grasses together, dried them, and burned them for ash as fertilizer in September and October. 1831. p.31
- 36 Brush fires are common in the hot dry season before the planting for the first rains. The sides of hills may be seen blazing throughout the night in the darkness by anyone travelling through the central region of Malawi.
- 37 Roberts. 1973. p.xxvii
- 38 My own initiation lasted three days, in which I learned the nyau language for naming these objects. At least in some areas, the girls learn about the same objects in their own initiation as well, according to a Chief's wife who knew these secrets.
- 39 Schoffeleers, 1992. p.251.
- 40 See Schoffeleers 1992 for more information on the Mbona cult. Whether there is a direct relation to the Mbona legend and the grass in the initiation lesson was not verified in field research. However, in field research, nyau members said the grass is specifically intended to represent blood in the making of Kasiyamaliro.
- 41 This was recorded in field research in 1988, and re-affirmed in 1992 by male and female nyau members.
- 42 I refer again to Turner in his use of womb and tomb

1969. p.28 as described in Chapter Five.
- 43 This metaphor of coming from pure, clear waters was told to me by a nyau member in describing why the color white was important. This origin differs from the detailed life cycle of the masked form taught in initiation. Rather, it is a story or belief metaphorically explaining the purity and beauty of the mask and the whiteness and clearness of its color.
- 44 Gombrich, E. 1960, reprinted 1991. p. 332
- 45 Turner 1967 p. 60-90
- 46 Turner 1967. p.49-59
- 47 Roberts. 1993. p.71 refers to multivocality of color but importantly suggests black is "sign of evil revealed" among the Tabwa.
- 48 An example of this more recent practice is in the collection of Chewa masks in the Museum of Mankind.
- 49 See also Roberts. 1993. p.71
- 50 See again translation of "yera", white, in previous Chapter as 'close to holy'.
- 51 Black being associated with death is not the finality of death. Rather, it is the ritual death of passing a stage of life, even the passage of life to actual death, but death as "reaching of terminus in the cycle of life." p. 71, CMN White. 1961. p. 74 White, in relation to red, is to be right in relation to the living and the dead" ...which "is to be whole and hale in oneself." C.M.N. White in studying the Luvale, also refers to white as the water which cleanses away ritual danger. p.25. Broster and Bourn. 1982. p.18 describe white as a "symbol of light that reflects the omniscience of the ancestral spirit." Maxwell. 1983. p.28 writes that white clay signifies spiritual cleanliness among the Bemba.
- 52 This description of colors holds true for both male and female sides of nyau, in separate initiation training.
- 53 CMN White 1961. p. 9
- 54 This mask is clearly noted as being male by Turner 1962. p.77
- 55 Turner 1962. p.30
- 56 This exegesis is my own and relates to the nyau word for metal tools, Namkungwi, or a senior teacher. The word applies to both men and women as teachers of nyau. Thus, the knife and the needle, the axe and the hoe blade are all Namkungwi, and are all transformed from the earth in blacksmithing.
- 57 Turner 1962. p. 28
- 58 Turner 1962. p.41
- 59 Turner 1962. p.84
- 60 In Schoffeleer's and Roscoe's interpretation of the creation myth of Kaphirintiwa, because man created chaos by playing with fire and setting the grasses alight, man must die, and then rejoin God in the sky.

Also, Scott 1892. refers to Mzimu ancestor spirits as

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- believed to be close with God, and even envoys of God to man on earth.
- 61 Three chiefs from two different areas, totally separate from one another asserted this same story was the reason Kasiyamaliro was so important, and why the custom must be maintained. The men were aged about fifty, and only one man knew the creation mythology of Dzalanyama. The myth had been replaced with the story of Moses, yet the custom has remained the same. I suggest that the ultimate understanding of Kasiyamaliro has also remained the same, while the form of revelation has changed with missionary teachings.
- 62 Schoffeleers. 1968. p.319 also notes that the root issue of nyau is the "religious significance" and "spiritual aspects" of nyau performances.
- 63 Seymour-Smith. 1986. p. 55. This dictionary of anthropology defines a cosmology as "A theory of, or set of beliefs concerning, the nature of the universe... [including] postulates of the structure, organization and functioning of the supernatural, natural and social worlds." Cosmologies may be "coherent and complex," and others may be "incoherent, contradictory or apparently incomplete" and yet still be considered a cosmology.

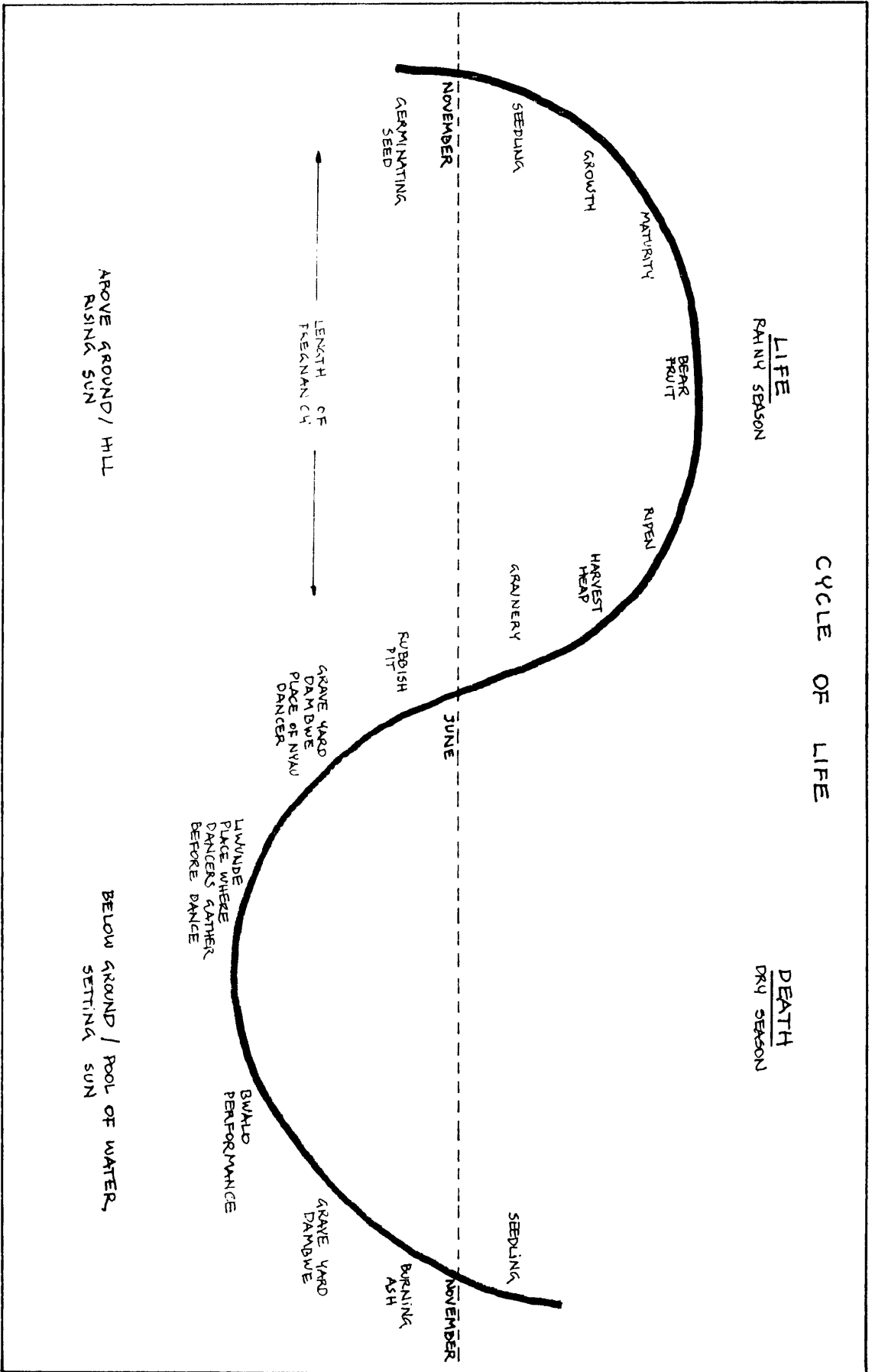
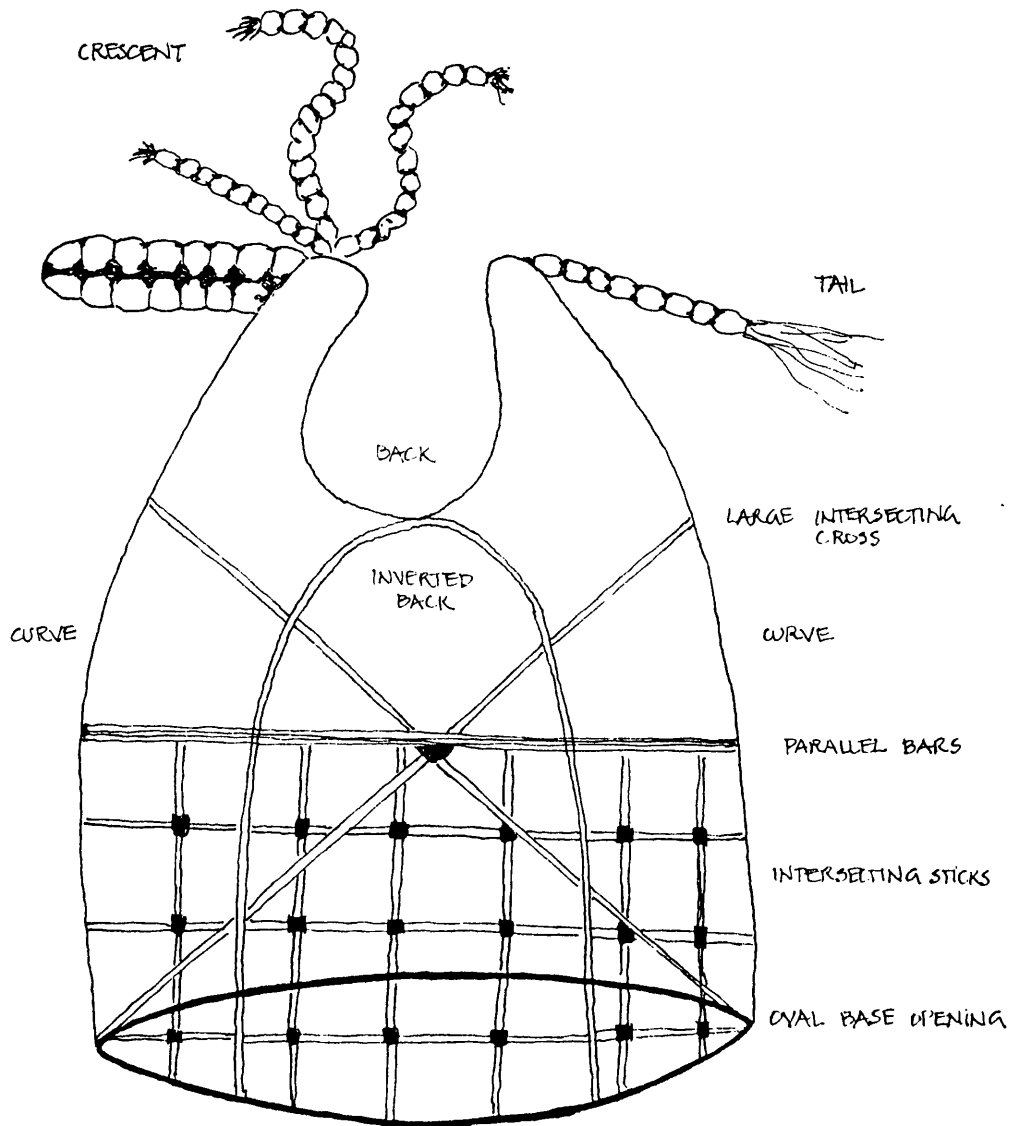


Fig. 24

KASIYAMALIRO FORM
FRAME FROM ONE SIDE



- GRASSES COVER STICKS
- SISAL IN VERTICAL LINES OVER GRASSES
- MAIZE HUSK LEAVES WOVEN ON SISAL STRIPS
- OPTIONAL: MUD DAUBED ON FRAME, FEATHERS ON HEAD OR IN MOUTH, METAL ROD STABILIZING

Fig. 25



Fig. 26

CHAPTER EIGHT; Interpretation of the Whole

FINAL CONCLUSION

"...the eye rests on the whole and on the parts and sees how the parts have conspired to make the whole..."

-Umberto Eco (1989 p.639)

In this final Chapter, I think it is important to look back to the first Chapter, and the discourse about the masks and nyau. Most importantly the understanding of mask as spirit, as a supernatural presence stated in the most common discourse of masks and emphasized in the ethnography throughout the thesis, I believe, remains elusive. This issue will finally be addressed theoretically uniting the first Chapter's discourse with interpretations in all the other Chapters.

In Summary

We began in the beginning, with the public performance of the Gule Wamkulu, the spatial relationships of graveyard, village and bwalo, and the consistent comments and explanations heard over and over again about the sacred nature of masks as spirits. Nyau members repeatedly referred to the mwambo of nyau: custom, wisdom of the ancestors, and their religion. Outsiders spoke of nyau in hushed tones of fear, secrecy, evil and witchcraft. These two disparate views shared one component: both referred to nyau and the masks as being very powerful, of fearing them, hiding from them, running from them, and having great respect for them.

Fear was described in the thesis as being opsya, translated as not only fear but dread. I would relate this as being a fear of the dead, of ghosts and spirit forms, of dying and death. It is also expressed among nyau members as a ritual dread, a facing of the dead and the spirit world, which seems to be a very humbling and frightening experience. As a further explanation I would refer to the poem by Okri at

the beginning of the thesis...the masks in performance possess ritual dread, which the secular West removes when purchasing a mask. It is a dread we in the West have difficulty understanding since we have no related experience of facing the dead among us. Yet it is a dread which must be appreciated, since the Chewa refer to it over and over again. This is an important part of the interpretation in this concluding Chapter.

The present and ongoing understandings of masks were then further developed with the understanding of masks as incorporating an account of the past. Masks were associated with historical events and processes, as part of the memory and the re-telling of the past within a community. Masks otherwise not related in the community structure were identified as 'outsiders', and as part of the experience of mankind, of the range of humanity. As outsiders are present in the experience of communities, they are present in the masked dance.

Masks presented in historical experience are also part of the present. Masks are implicitly understood as forming social relationships and fulfilling social roles. Mask forms were paired, and were described as part of families, and part of the larger community with various relationships and responsibilities. Certain mask genres are expected to perform certain social roles, such as Chadzunda fulfilling the role of a Chief in society.

The role of a mask in society is also the role of the mask in the society of those who have died. The world of the dead appears as the world of the living, except that the dead are seen only through the covering of the mask which ironically reveals humanity even in its portrayal of death. The portraits of the deceased worn by the dancers emphasize this realization ever more, that the masks and the dance are the dead returning to show the living their own world. The masks and the underlying unarticulated organization of

masks in families and pairings point out the facts, faults and flaws of the living community.

The community of people surrounding the bwalo were then shown to be arranged according to social position, or a hierarchy of people in the community. It was shown that these same relationships and hierarchies of masks, with all of the inherent conflicts and differing values, were the same values and hierarchies present in the diverse community of people surrounding the bwalo.

These mask hierarchies are not always fixed, just as social the relationships of people are not always fixed. Members agree that, taking all the values inherent in masking together, certain mask forms are more important than others, consistently agreeing to the same hierarchy presented in the thesis. However, when asserting one value only, masks are re-interpreted in other hierarchies, which change depending upon the value being asserted.

The assertion of one value, over all others in specific contexts, such as fear of being attacked, results in diverse hierarchies, related to divergent explanations about masks in discourse. Each mask is feared, but in different ways, on different levels depending on the immediate circumstance of the occasion and the specific mask. One man will say the mask is very frightening, and then laugh heartily during the performance. Another will say masks are very respected, then join people teasing with the dancer.

These seeming contradictions are coherent in the larger understanding of nyau. All masks are feared, on one level. All masks are respected, and some even more than others, and some are more respected during ritual, for example, than at other times. The point is that each explanation: mask is feared, mask is respected, the mask is humorous, that mask is a 'little' one...not much feared or respected, the mask is a dead person's face, the mask is a living

person's face, the mask is of a foreigner, the same mask is of the mask-maker's son and the Chief's son; the mask is the face of a spirit; it is no one's face at all: all these explanations about any one mask may be simultaneously true.

These complex relationships of masks and community are then compounded by the complexities of the individual; the individual person in society and the individual mask. There is a transition from the larger community to the specific interpretation of individual masks by individual mask-makers. There is also a transition in the thesis from the mask in society as in the mask-maker's role and individual masks, to the mask in a larger cosmology of nyau. The individual masks themselves were analyzed in light of the materials and colors which make up these masks, the intended portraiture and characterization of the masks, and the changing identities of the individual mask from creation to performance and re-creation over its individual life history.

Secretive elements in the making of the masks and the secretive movements of the mask-maker relate to the discourse about nyau in the first Chapter. Things are done under cover of night, in the marginal places of society, with bits of rubbish and parts of dead animals. It is in this context that we find the condemnation of nyau by Christians and other outsiders as being about witchcraft, sorcery or divination. Yet these transactions in the night and in the graveyard are explained by nyau members over and over again as being 'dangerous' and again 'dreadful' activities because they place mask-makers and nyau dancers and nyau leaders in situations where they are vulnerable to attack by sorcerers and witches. In the presented ethnography, it is noted that charms are placed in some masks to protect against witches, and a stone is thrown in the graveyard before digging the grave to chase away witches.

The interpretation of masks as individuals, as Chewa communities, and as experiences related to the community

are then layered with another dimension: the ritual and cosmological. Masks are shown to assume the roles of ritual leaders and become ritual objects, as the human form Kasinja presides over the grave during the burial as a ritual leader might, and the Kasiyamaliro becomes the ritual womb by which boys are born into maturity. These roles are interpreted in the thesis as another dimension of society and of masking, built upon the understandings of masks presented in the previous Chapters.

Nyau cosmology or construction of the world is then demonstrated in the making of the Chirombo mask forms, those in the highest position of hierarchy. The passing down of wisdom (mwambo as described in discourse) includes the learning of shapes and objects used in mask-making. These shapes and objects, combined with color and materials re-presented in this context, are now the symbols of the cycle of life, rites of passage, and nyau understanding of life after death. One mask form was shown to embody nyau cosmology or worldview, including the concept of God, creation myth, spirit forms, the natural order of agricultural seasons and the passages of social life.

As Turner explains, the Ndembu "trust in the cyclical regenerative power of the Cosmos" and "Kavula represents simultaneously, ...the whole cycle" (1962 p.96) the same can be said of nyau beliefs in the cycle of life, and Kasiyamaliro as representing that entire cycle, simultaneously. In the exegesis of Kasiyamaliro, I found what Turner described so well as the "high mysteries of religion and poetic insight." That through Chihamba and I think Kasiyamaliro, there is a "direct confrontation of man with mystery itself." (Turner. 1962. p.96). This, I think, is true of the mwambo of nyau.

Return to the Dance Performance

The Gule Wamkulu is the coming together of the arts of the people. Music, song, reciting proverbs, rhythm of drums,

singing voices and clapping hands, the cries of nyau dancers, are all sounds associated with the dance. Visually, the costumes, choreography of dance and the artist's own creativity in the creation of mask forms invite an array of color and movement. The performance itself combines the skills of actors, acrobats, comedians, dancers and the organization of a performative event. All the senses are stimulated in the Gule Wamkulu: visual, audio, textures of mask and costume, the taste and smell of the clouds of red earth thrown in the air by the dancer's feet, and the sensation of bright sun in the day and the coolness of the night under a moonlit bwalo.

The gathering of peoples, a community of friends and rivals, neighbors and relatives who have returned for an event, is part of the importance of the Gule Wamkulu. These people have gathered together, sometimes to celebrate with a new Chief, and sometimes to console the bereaved. In the most important gathering, the funeral, the women from neighboring villages help prepare the communal meal for all those who have come to mourn. The men dig the grave and prepare the ritual performance. Once the meal is eaten, and the grave is prepared, the people gather all together before the house of the deceased, filled with mourners.

The Gule Wamkulu dance begins, and for brief moments, the people laugh, 'feel' fear, find adolescent attractions, and follow the stories and antics of the variety of dancers. I would suggest that the reality of death is suspended in performance, creating another fictional reality of normal life, an inversion of the occasion, the potential reality of present mirth at the same time as the reality of a death and the reminder of the future reality of one's own death.

Kapoli with its feathers from the rubbish pit, ash whitening legs and arms, begins the performance, followed in succession by a range of mask forms. The poor woman, Kachipapa, (ash basket) who has stayed up all night with the women by the fires, now dances one last dance before

returning to the graveyard. Then follows an array of red and black masks of portraiture, as well as the variety of foreigners, intermixed with cloth and feathered masks of all descriptions.

Experience from the past in the Ngoni warrior performs before the mask of Charlie Chaplin, seen in a film by a local artist. Maria and Simoni appear in their various forms as young and old, Christian and nyau, male and female. The mask of a deceased Chief performs, with furrowed brow and blackened face, carrying a fly whisk. Makanja steps over the crowd and runs along the circle of people, reminding them of the dreaded tall warriors from another country. In a large dance, the Chilembwe will bound into the dance space scattering young ones, its swaying sisal fringe oiled to a deep brown with knotted mane along the long pole of its neck.

The masks are the reflection of the people, humanity in all its forms watched by the community of peoples gathered together for a common purpose: the funeral ritual. The mourning is suspended as the community watches itself in all of its folly, beauty, fierceness and sexuality of life. Performance suspends the death and reminds people of other events and other people: the foreigners who have passed through the community, the songs of the earthquake from two years before, the Chief who is powerful and yet weak, the woman who sits with the men, the man who is lustful and silly, the face of a deceased relative re-appearing in the dance as if in life again.

Each dancer is a reminiscence of society, of familial ties, lineage and power, characters depicting various good and bad, funny and pitiful behaviors. Even within this inverted reality of humanity, each dancer is also a reminder of the dead themselves, of death and the proximity of the world of the dead. The performance is both relief from the solemnity and sadness of the occasion, and a

metaphor of death itself.

Suddenly, feathered nyau spirit forms rush from the graveyard, carrying a stretcher of bamboo coming to a point at the front. At once the moments of laughter, of joking and of the normal condition of humanity is disrupted by the real purpose of the event; that death has come and is real and present at this moment. The singing and dancing end, and solemnity begins again with tears and mourning.

The feathered nyau figures pierce through the ring of gathered peoples, and enter the house of the deceased, forcing the women inside to leave the house and abandon the dead one to the spirit world. The body is taken from the house, the home, by the nyau spirits. For an aged, senior person, the Kasiyamaliro comes to the house. This shining white image of life, this beautiful, tearless, griefless, deathless form attracts the spirit of the deceased which enters the womb, the mimba, of the nyau form.

Kasiyamaliro, the wholeness and union of man and spirit, man and woman, man and animal, 'leaves the funeral behind' as its name suggests, and carries the spirit to the grave. The body follows, carried by the nyau spirits, followed by the whole community of peoples.

In the graveyard, the Kasiyamaliro lingers briefly by the grave and leaves. The nyau spirit form Kasinja, the poor man, the man with no rank or position in society, the man with a family who is part of the community, stays with the people in the graveyard for some time. He has preceded them to the grave, and stays with them till the burial is complete, and then the world of the spirits separates again from the world of the living.

As described in the thesis, the masked event for the funeral remembrance begins with the appearance of the mythical antelope-like constructions. With the total interpretation, the event assumes more depth and

understanding. The metaphors of spirit and man, of image and resemblance to a wild animal, and the embodiment of nyau beliefs are now understood to be present in this one form. At once, the cycle of life, the image of knowledge and rebirth, the depiction of mythical time of the ancestors and the creation of the world, are all present in the remembrance. It is a remembrance of that day of the death of a member of the community, a relative, a person known by all present. The same image came to carry the spirit of the deceased to the grave just a year before. This same image may carry their own spirits to the grave. In this solemn occasion, people have gathered from several villages to commemorate this moment in song, dance, performance, music and the art of the masks.

All of these Chapters then culminate through performance, in the knowledge of nyau, and the cosmology of the society...a totality of society itself. As the parts of Kasiyamaliro are shown to represent cosmological constructs of the supernatural, social and natural orders, the previous Chapters combine to show the social order of the community as a whole. The interpretations of all the parts of all the Chapters, building one upon the other, results in an interpretation of Chewa society itself, incorporating all of the parts inscribed herein. As Sydney Kasfir asserts, as noted in the introduction, masks and the masking complex are society, not its symbolic parallel.

Theoretical considerations

Throughout these Chapters certain themes and topics recurred over and again, in different contexts and with different interpretations. The rubbish pit, the graveyard, color, gender, ash and soil are a few examples. Each of these is described, explained and interpreted in light of the ethnography presented in each Chapter. For example, soil refers to the grave in one Chapter, and to God in another. Color is shown to be emblematic of the whole; an interpretation of a larger cosmology. Gender is shown to

be present in familial, lineage and community ties, also in the historical appropriation of Maria from Christianity, in the understanding of hierarchy, in male and female initiations, in spatial and social divisions in Chewa society, and in nyau cosmology. Ash is described in its several references and the rubbish pit recurs in the making of a mask and in the more cosmological understanding of death and rebirth.

Masks evoke different interpretations in discourse depending upon each of the different contexts: performative, historical, social, hierarchical, individual, ritual and cosmological. Without each of these different interpretations, part of the larger understanding would be lost. And, while these are not the only contexts and interpretations, these are important and valid ones according to the discourse of nyau members and my own field research.

The myriad details, the parts of masking in each Chapter, are construed, or analyzed, or examined, and re-interpreted in a larger totality in each of the Chapter conclusions, according to the interpretive methodology described in the Introduction. Each ethnographic detail, such as the placement of Chadzunda above Kasinja in mask hierarchy, and the nyau member's insistence on age and social role as important values, was then construed to be part of a larger understanding of masks and humanity sharing an hierarchical structure. Also, the fact that Kasiyamaliro is described as being a mask in the oldest tradition in Chapters One and Four, placed above all human mask forms in Chapter Four, described historically as in 'mythical' times before known time in Chapter Two, and shown to play major ritual roles in Chapter Six, sets the stage for the mask's embodiment of the larger cosmology in Chapter Seven.

As the cosmological understanding of nyau emerges from the texts, answers to some of the more puzzling questions regarding Chewa masked events also emerges. These

questions include:

Why masks and masked events are considered to have tremendous power? What is that power and where does it come from? How is it both awful and dangerous and fearful and secretive and at the same time respected and well-attended and enjoyed, and occupies such importance in community life? How does the discourse about the masks and nyau actually lead to an exegesis, an understanding, of these issues?

In answer to the above questions, nyau is described by members in a context where identifications with such things as political structure, matrilocality and control through fear are actually secondary and marginal compared to the more insistent identification with God, spirits, and the ultimate sense of life after death. Without these cosmological components, nyau becomes a strange and mysterious and unknowable society mistakenly mixed with politics or witchcraft and, as is often stated in the literature about nyau, centered on only half the people, the men.

The answer must be that it is not a marginal, mysterious enterprise, but a deeply emotional experience involving the entire community, women and men. Without the acceptance of the hope, the promise of rebirth through the masked spirit's agency, nyau has no real power.¹ This power comes from belief; that the masks' presence is the naked confrontation of every person with death itself, with relatives who have died as friends and foes, and with God.

As the association which organizes the masked events, the creation of masks, the dancing of masks and the proper rules to be followed, nyau is much more than a political power, or method for integrating married men into the community. Nyau is the ritual center of the community, exemplified in masks. Through nyau the values, knowledge and beliefs of the society of people are passed on, re-

affirmed, and re-created. Power in nyau comes from its supernatural representations; its ability to move people and evoke emotion convincingly, binding people more closely to ritual and belief.

Nyau Masks and Metaphor

Elizabeth Tonkin asserts the mask is a 'metaphor-in-action', and an enigma; something ambiguous and necessarily so. This concept of 'metaphor-in-action' I see as an attempt to understand what Ricoeur has called 'symbolic action'; a way to understand the linguistic device of metaphor in relation to the visual image and action of masked performance. Recognizing this problem, Tonkin has then left the mask as an enigma, without the fuller understanding made possible in Ricoeur's work. I wonder, to whom is the mask an enigma? Is it not ourselves, as outsiders, who ask questions to which answers are not really clearly understood? Is it not ourselves as outsiders who have not grasped the special kind of reality in the metaphor of masks?

I contest the assertion that masks, by their very nature are ambiguous in the sense of vague, indistinct, and inexplicable. If by ambiguous, Tonkin means more than one interpretation is possible, then perhaps the more appropriate word is that the mask is plurivocal or polysemic. It is not ambiguous or vague to the initiated member of nyau who has seen the masks perform throughout his or her lifetime. This is evident in an example from Moore (1986 p.119),

"the ability of ash to refer across many 'universes of meaning' is not the result of an inherent ambiguity of meaning, but the product of the fact that meaning is context-dependent."

Tonkin's assertion that "imagination ...implies ambiguity" p.238, is also contrary to Ricoeur's assertion that

imagination opens the way to seeing, picturing or 'imaging'. In fact, Ricoeur asserts that metaphor is "the solution to enigma".

In wrestling with this same kind of problem, Tonkin also asserts, and rightly I believe, that

"the mask often claims life over death...to die is to live; the greater the knowledge the greater the secret...these are all themes of mask events." p. 242

These themes are not ambiguous, however, but offer an exegesis about masks and masked events; a specific role and purpose, a reason for existing at all.

Elizabeth Tonkin (1979. p.24) also writes that "A totalising analysis" reveals more than a divided analysis, and turns to Leiris and Delange, 1968, for the idea that masks "constitute an iconographic compendium of all beliefs of a particular society". This totality is also present in Ricoeur's interpretation of text. And, each of the masks we have seen in the thesis is linked in its relationship to the totality of nyau society and nyau cosmology. For nyau is the purpose behind creating the masks, dancing and performing with masks. Nyau is the reason for the ritual of masks; the underlying structure from which the masks emerge. Nyau, among the Chewa, constitutes that 'compendium of beliefs', and 'totalising analysis' noted by Tonkin.

Therefore, the masks cannot be understood without the cosmology of nyau...which is, after all, the beliefs of the people who participate in the ritual, the creation of masks, dancing of masks, the performance organization, all that happens in the rituals of life and death, of youth to maturity, of creating life, of death and remembrance, and of hope of renewal after life: religious beliefs.

In the interpretive methodology, seemingly conflicting and inchoate discourse becomes more credible; more understandable in relation to the totality of nyau society.

Discourse about masks are interpretations which refer to a specific context, so the same Chief may interpret the same mask in several different ways depending on the context, as demonstrated in the various interpretations presented in each of the Chapters. Each interpretation...all divergent answers transcending specific contexts ...are all true. As Turner (1963.p.82) writes about the ritual form Kavula:

"One might argue...that Kavula represents the ultimate unity of Ndembu society, transcending all its contradictions of principle and value" including "mystical death and rebirth" in "Ndembu religion."

To explain this further, let us begin with the underlying concept that the masks are spirits. Literally, the masks are not the faces of spirits but masks worn on the faces of real living men. A man 'drives' the Kasiyamaliro, and a man is hidden 'inside the nyau' or inside the carved mask with the likeness of a deceased Chief. Yet, the masked dancers are called spirits; the dead returning to the village.

Through the initiation process of both boys and girls, common objects are re-created into sacred objects. In the secrecy of the graveyard, these collected objects are transformed from the everyday; they are imbued with ritual meaning through the teachings in initiation. In other words, the specially collected objects and the masks from which these are made are believed to be permeated in the graveyard with the divine, the world of the spirits who are closest to God, as the Chewa themselves say.

The spirits are present in the graveyard, and, as explained by the Chewa, permeate all things in the graveyard. The trees in the grove are filled with the spirits, and the maize husks, feathers and sisal once collected in the danger of the night, are also permeated with the spirit world. These objects are no longer the common everyday objects, but now are metaphors of the spirits, touched and permeated by the spirits. Through the ritual of re-naming and a process of trans-substantiation, the maize husk is

transformed; the bit of soil, ash, and grass are all imbued with new meaning.

The mask-maker as he makes the mask, is surrounded by spirits. He is engaged in a ritual task, not a common task. The dancers who go to the graveyard to don the masks are entering into the presence of the spirit world. The masks, emerging from the secrecy of the graveyard to the ritual space of the bwalo, emerge from the place of the spirits, for the ritual moments of performance. Through the nyau leaders, the masked dancer is imbued with ritual meaning separate from the everyday reality.

Perhaps the discourse of nyau members (nyau is religion) and non-members (nyau is evil; witchcraft) represents a dichotomy which is prominent in the literature attempting to explain magic, witchcraft, sorcery and religion. Over and over again, clear distinctions are made in the literature between the realm of witches and sorcerers and the realm of religion; between the realm of spirits, divinity and God, and the realm of evil.² As Cosmos (1969. p.71) suggests, religious practice and witchcraft may seem to be one and the same, though they are distinctly separate. Further, CMN White (1961. p.62) seems to agree with the ethnographic presence of witchcraft as in this thesis, writing that initiates into a masking society guard against the dangers of witchcraft. He adds that circumcision among the Luvale is also "dangerous" because the same materials used in initiation "may also be sought by sorcerers." Mair (1969. p.121) writes that "the envy of a bad dancer when he sees the success of a good dancer [is] believed to motivate witches," which indicates again the 'danger' in masking and the need for protection of dancers from witches.

The recurring discourse about 'dread' and 'fear' may also be part of the dichotomy suggested above. Witchcraft is translated by various sources as a form of evil in the world, including the evil of those who resort to sorcery out of jealousy as indicated by Mair above and as described

by nyau members. Nyau performance, as presented in the thesis, includes both good and bad behaviors, and all that is present in humanity. This would include the portrayal of evil-doers and potential evil-doers in the characterizations by masked performers, with, possibly, associated 'feelings' (as in the sense of Ricoeur) of fear.

Besides this portrayal of evil in some of the masked forms, there is the real perceived danger of witchcraft and sorcery present in society. This real fear is emphasized during funerals, when there is the presence of death and evil, and when the masked rituals occur. However, the 'ritual dread' during funerals and in Okri's poem (p.1 of thesis) has no counterpart in the western secular world. We do not have the common, shared experience of 'ritual dread' described in Chewa discourse, and therefore it is difficult to relate this experience easily in western terms. This dilemma is, perhaps, present in the dichotomy of witchcraft and religion in the literature, and may partially explain the continued fascination of westerners with witchcraft as something 'exotic'.

To consider what nyau members say seriously, we must seek an understanding of the religious insistence recurring throughout the ethnographic description and explanation. This insistence includes 'ritual dread', and the fear of masks as spirits must be accepted. Masks are spirits whose song, dance, and behavior in ritual are guided by the senior members of nyau, the keepers of the cosmological knowledge, and the most likely protectors against witches.

Once this is understood, even if it is never fully articulated in actual discourse, I believe the mask ceases to be such an enigma. The exotica with which African masks have, at times, been surrounded, begins to disappear. Secrecy, associations with the graveyard and strange spirits, what women do or do not actually know, the exotic behavior surrounding these secrets, become part of a larger cosmological understanding.

Interpretation of the Whole

Masks may be interpreted thematically in numerous ways. Masks, masked events and masking societies may be studied as political manipulation, economic income generation, psychological transformations in the masked dancer and in the community, or gender relations, as others have denied the presence of women as part of nyau in any serious way.

These functional separations fail to reach beyond one kind of interpretation, which does not over-reach into a broader understanding of the phenomena of masks and masking. In searching for an approach which encompasses a larger understanding, I turned to what seemed to recur over and over again, the most common explanations which actually bear the greatest insights. These comments are presented in the first Chapter, with the insistence of nyau as religious, as representing the ancestors and as being traditional as opposed to associations with witchcraft, sorcery or secular concerns such as money and politics.

With this interpretation of masks as being the presence of spirits, all other aspects, the knowledge of masks, the space in the graveyard, the rituals and displays of good and bad behavior in performance; are now endowed with a divine power. The masked rituals reveal that presence of the spirits, and communicate or reveal nyau cosmology to the people. In essence, the many explanations by nyau members about the masked rituals all together may be the revelation of the spirit world, deemed closest to the life-creating God. As Geertz (1968 p.403) writes about religion in social science and the analysis of symbolic forms,

"Perhaps the most straightforward strategy...is merely to accept the myriad expressions of the sacred...to consider them as actual ingressions of the divine into the world."

This religious sanctioning of nyau songs and masked dance from the ritual leaders including the Chiefs, combine to create a well-ordered ritual performance which is

ultimately sanctioned by the participation of the community as a whole. It is more than entertainment; it is the revelation of life in all its humanity, of the fear present in death, and the hope of regeneration of life.

As Parkin (1987.p.53) suggests, "the very way we perceive our subject matter is subtly shaped by that core metaphor" so each Chapter imparts different layers or dimensions of understandings of the masks, each with different kinds of information and interpretations. Within each interpretation is this 'existential perplexity' this recurring reality, the overarching understanding by which all masks have been interpreted.

As throughout the thesis, each part of the masks, each process in masking revolves around death, funerals, funeral remembrance, death and rebirth into maturity, new life present in the funeral of the dead, spirits of the dead, the masked dead mirroring the living community, and the image of life and death, of a cycle of life in nyau belief. This was inescapable in descriptions about the masks themselves and their parts, in the performance, in the discourse about the masks, in the visual imagery and use of materials.

This theme or core metaphor of mask simultaneously resembling life and death, was not randomly chosen, but was suggested by the people themselves, as information about masks was unfolded to me over several years. Or so it seems to me, that it happened this way, rather than imposing this on the material. While other themes or core metaphors may have been chosen, I believe this one illuminates the deeper understandings of masks which answer a few difficult questions about masks. This is not, nor could it be, a final definitive answer. Yet in writing the thesis, this core metaphor explained such divergent and seemingly inexplicable answers to questions, that I believe this is the single most important theme of Chewa masking.

The 'depth-interpretation' of Ricoeur requires a relation to an 'existential perplexity', and the recurring theme echoing throughout the ethnography is that of life, death

and the hope of rebirth. This attachment to a universal predicament forces a deeper interpretation from the 'surface' interpretations, of which, I would suggest, the explanations by outsiders largely consist.

It is this attachment to larger human predicaments that motivates an entire community, a willingness and motivation which political force alone cannot generate. Every person dies, and this reality is present in the mask, and in the multivocality of each of its parts. Evocations of this awareness of death are ever-present in the masks and masked dance, involving each and every person in the community. Initiation, procreation, elderly status, death and the promise of new birth affect each and every person in the village, and is visually present through the creative artistry of masks.

CONCLUSION ENDNOTES

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- 1 By "power" I refer to the efficacy of masks and masked events in evoking strong emotions and reactions, and being described as possessing some kind of power, strength, purpose and hold on people to enforce nyau's own code of behavior. People fear the masks, and respect them, and even revere them, saying masks are very powerful, meaning, I think, the entire aura of masked ritual is very powerful.
- 2 Middleton (1963 p.271) asserts that "witches and sorcerers are evil" and "inverted" from "the immanent aspect of Divinity." CMN White (1961. p.61) writes of the Luvale that the world of the living "forms a continuum with an invisible world occupied by similar groups of ancestral spirits...", separating witches as another dimension, "an unnatural world" outside social organization. Reynolds (1963. p.9,10) separates religious beliefs (High God and ancestral spirits) from magic (divination and witchcraft) among the Barotse, noting that ancestral spirits are represented by masks in mukande initiation. Gluckman, in the foreword of Marwick (1965) describes sorcerers as "evil-doers", and Marwick (1965. p.222-239) clearly separates the teachings of nyau and the "evil" activities of sorcerers. Middleton. (1967. p.viii) makes a case for separating magic and religion. Cosmos (1969. p.71) notes difference between uchawi (magic) among the Bantu, and religion. Mair (1969 p.15) writes "Witchcraft ...is unambiguously evil", referring to the problem of evil and "unmerited suffering" (p.11) in the world. Wilson (1970. p.254,255) notes that the leading defender of the Nyakyusa village against witches is the village headman, and also notes that the Pondo believe "A homestead is defended against witches by its ancestors." (NOTE: In nyau villages, the headman is also a nyau leader, and the masks represent ancestor spirits). Mayer in Marwick (1970 p.51-52) describes ancestor spirits as always right and witches as always wrong. Gelfand (1976. p.12) cites difference between good and evil, as spirits (good) and witchcraft (evil), among the Shona. Broster and Bourn (1982 p.18) also clearly separate witchcraft and sorcery from Amagqirha religion, adding "The ancestral cult is perhaps one of mankind's oldest religions." Offiong (1991. p.32 describes magic and witchcraft of the Ibibio as clearly separated from religious practices and beliefs. Yoshida (1991. p.203) asserts that nyau "maskers and sorcerers avoid one another" among the Chewa in Zambia.

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