

Chimbetete

(A red day mask from the Nathenje area)

Themes

- 1) Dishonesty, theft & robbery
- 2) Witchcraft to steal
- 3) Witchcraft harms the practitioner (*choipa chitsata mwini*)

Etymology

Chimbetete means, 'a kudu horn trumpet'.



Description

This large red mask (50 cm.) portrays a criminal. He is depicted with a pointed nose, swollen black cheeks, tribal marks, a sophisticated hair style of dyed sisal with painted sideburns, and a long drooping moustache. The red face conveys that he has become a stranger to his own people. The dancer wears the tatter suit of *gule* and carries a gourd of medicine and a club to carry out his mischief. He dances with great energy, swerving only one leg and jumping with the other. He circles around the ground while the men sing, "**Chimbetete**, *one doesn't do this... you will incur a spell! Yes, one doesn't do this, Chimbetete. One doesn't do this... you will incur a spell!*" These enigmatic words reveal that **Chimbetete** is a thief who uses force and witchcraft in order to steal and to acquire power. His dishonesty becomes as obvious and 'loud' as the kudu horn trumpet, which can be heard echoing over long distances. One day **Chimbetete** will have a surprise: his crimes will be rewarded with misfortune, sickness and death. "*Choipa chitsata mwini – Evil finds its owner.*"

The mask was created around the 1950s, when crimes like stealing and physical aggression at night were becoming more frequent in Chewa country, in part owing to political unrest.

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Song

*“A **Chimbetete** m’samatero de (2x), mungaone mayere! Inde m’samatero, m’samatero, m’samatero dede a **Chimbetete**. M’samatero mungaone mayere!”*

Source

Interview in 1992