

Glossary of Chichewa terms

- Akafula/Batwa* Original inhabitants of Malawi prior to the settlement of Bantu-speaking peoples. A hunter-gatherer society
- Akunjira* The novice master, who welcomes the initiate and supervises the initiation
- Ankhoswe* (sing. *nkhoswe*) Guardians of the marriage bond
- Anthumba* Captives (of war)
- Atsabwalo* The *Nyau* member responsible for the *bwalo* (dancing arena)
- Bwalo* Arena for the performance of *gule wamkulu* and other rituals; 'centre' of the village
- Chamba* The drug hemp; marijuana
- Chatuluka* Retired village chief
- Chibiya* Ngoni kilt
- Chihata* Beaded belt or vest of the Ngoni
- Chikafula* Language of the Akafula, which sounds like 'coughing'
- Chikamwini* Uxorilocal marriage system where the husband moves to live in his wife's village
- Chikhuthe* Shelters where beer is brewed for rituals
- Chilale* Palm leaves, commonly woven to form outer skin of structures
- Chilamu* Joking, light hearted relationship between brother- and sister-in-law
- Chiliza* (pl. *ziliza*) A tomb-stone or cement construction erected on the grave of the deceased two years after burial. Also a bamboo fence which is erected around the grave the day following burial
- Chilombo* (pl. *zilombo*) Wild animal. A way of referring to *gule* characters
- Chinamwali* Girls' initiation ritual; coming of age
- Chinamwali cha chimbwinda* Initiation ceremony for girls already pregnant
- Chingoli* Cry produced by the male initiate when he presses his throat at the same time emitting a sound
- Chipapa* Winnowing basket. Also associated with witches as a vehicle
- Chipongozi* Avoidance relationship between husband and mother-in-law and wife and father-in-law
- Chiputula* Feather headgear (as worn by Kapoli). The word comes from 'chiputu cha udzu', a clump of grass with roots difficult to trace
- Chisamba* A dance of the women, for pregnancy or *chinamwali*. One of the oldest of the Chewa dances
- Chitengwa* Taking a wife to live in the village of her husband (cf. *chikamwini*). Such a wife is called *ntengwa*
- Chitenje* (pl. *zitenje*) Brightly coloured printed wrap worn by the women
- Chitopole* (pl. *zitopole*) A type of scarification on the forehead, often seen as a way of beautifying the body and establishing tribal identity
- Chiwongo* Clan name (inherited through father)
- Dambule* Major commemoration for the dead (the ancestors), held annually by a village or villages (now rare)
- Dambwe* The secret place where *gule* characters are made and where dancers transform into animals and spirits (cf. *chilombo* and *mzimu*). Normally located near a graveyard
- Dona* A European lady
- Dzala* Rubbish pit. A liminal area where some of the instruction takes place during girls' initiation and where some *gule* anoint themselves with ashes in order to associate themselves with the dead
- Fisi* Literally, 'hyena'. A surrogate husband for the purpose of ritual intercourse (to awaken sexually an initiated girl who does not have a husband) or for generating a child in a childless marriage
- Galu wanga chimbwala* A mini-structure of a dog that fails to follow its owner and is seen as unfaithful
- Gocho* Term of derision for an impotent man
- Gule wamkulu* The 'great dance' of the Chewa, involving masked and costumed dancers and structures
- Inyago* Carved and costumed characters of the Yao. Moulded clay figures used for teaching facts of life during male initiation
- Jando* Initiation rite for Muslim boys including circumcision (Yao)
- Kachipapa* Small winnowing basket. Once used to dig and refill graves
- Kafunde* Series of riddles related to the female menstrual cycle
- Kalolo* Small structure representing a young girl who is pregnant before marriage
- Kalonga* King of the Malawi/Phiri people who came to dominate the Banda clan
- Kamundi* Consort of spirit wife *Makewana*, from Mbewe clan
- Katondo* Red clay used to decorate some *gule* dancers
- Kazukuta* A Chewa dance performed during the night vigil preceding the enthronement of leaders, by which village headmen and elders are instructed into their new role as leaders; it is also performed during beer parties to remind the community of the *mwambo*
- Kholowa* A sweet potato leaf dish
- Khunju* A dance originating amongst captives of the Ngoni
- Kudika* Literally, 'to wait'. Ritual abstinence from sexual relations
- Kudula maliro* To interrupt (cut) the transition of the deceased's spirit to the spirit world
- Kudya makanda* Literally, 'to eat young girls'. To exploit minors sexually
- Kudyera* Greed; desire to exploit any opportunity for personal gain

- Kukhuza* Mourning rites for funerals
- Kukhwima, kukhwimira* Self-preservation; advancing one's position using evil methods (witchcraft)
- Kukuna* Manual enlargement of girls' sexual organs (labia) for sexual enhancement
- Kulodza* Casting of lots or magical spells using medicines
- Kulongosola* Ritual re-engagement with sexual relations to end ritual coolness (redemption)
- Kumangira mimba* Ceremony to assist women to have a successful childbirth
- Kupana* Literally, 'to trap'. Castigation, notably from the ancestors
- Kupisira anamwali* Ritual intercourse by chief and his wife to release fertility of the girl initiates
- Kusempha* Literally, 'to miss'. Putting life at risk through failing to follow sexual taboos
- Kutchona* Verb related to *mtchona*
- Kutsirika* To protect items with powerful medicine
- Kuyangala* Special dancing step used as the *gule* character terminates its dance to show reverence to the audience
- Liunde* Gathering point ('backstage') for *gule* dancers near the *bwalo*
- Lupanda* Pre-Islamic initiation rite for Yao boys, now replaced by *jando*
- Magawagawa* Disease involving ulceration of the limbs. It can now refer to HIV/AIDS
- Makewana* Literally, 'mother of children'. Banda spirit wife of the Msinja rain shrine
- Malume* Male head of the matrilineal extended family; the senior maternal uncle
- Manjerenjeza* Ngoni bells worn on ankles
- Manyumba* Councillors of the village chief; village elders
- Masiye* Funeral house; house of deceased
- Matsano* Young virginal maidens at Banda rain shrines
- Mbalule* The leading (or 'talking') drum at a *gule wamkulu* event
- Mbumba* The extended matrilineal family
- Mchape* A non-lethal potion used to purify the taker from witchcraft
- Mchili* Medicine buried close to the sacred tree where village headmen will judge court cases and where *gule wamkulu* will be performed. This medicine is buried in order to ensure the villagers' protection
- Mchome* Facial decoration of women made with cashew nut acid
- Mdulo* The 'cutting (or wasting) disease', caused by breaking sexual taboos (when 'hot' and 'cold' meet)
- Mdzukulu* An undertaker
- Mfiti* (pl. *afiti*) A witch; one who is antisocial, user of evil medicines, eater of human flesh
- Mfiti mpheru njiru* An accomplished witch that kills for its own pleasure
- Mfumumu* (pl. *mafumumu*) Chief of the village or village headman
- Mitala* Polygamist marriage
- Mkamwini* (pl. *akamwini*) Husband or son-in-law in the matrilineal Chewa society residing at his wife's village
- Mkangali* Solemn girls' initiation which can occur at initiation of a chief
- Mkulu wakumadzi* The same as *wakumadzi*
- Mkulumulo* Medicine to protect children from *mdulo*
- Mkweteku* Love potion/medicine
- Mozwa* Beer brewed from maize and millet. A staple at many rituals
- Mphini* Cuts on the body or face in which protective medicine has been inserted
- Mpindira* Initiation ceremony at the funeral of a senior member of the community
- Mpumulo* A period of ritual sexual abstinence (*kudika*) for a married couple; sexual rest
- Mtchona* (pl. *matchona*) One who has lost connections with his home
- Mtsibweni* Another term for *malume*
- Mwabvi* The poison ordeal used in the past to identify witches. A witch would die while an innocent would vomit the poison
- Mwali* Banda spirit wife of the Mankhamba rain shrine
- Mwambo* (pl. *miyambo*) Code of moral values and behaviours set by the ancestors for the living, including rituals, traditions and rules of politeness
- Mwambo wa maliro* Funeral rites
- Mwandionera pati* Akafula
- Mwini mbumba* 'Owner' or 'caretaker' of the extended family; the senior uncle or *malume*
- Mzimu* (pl. *mizimu*) Spirit or ancestor
- Mzinda* (pl. *mizinda*) The village unit of *Nyau* and *gule wamkulu*; also meaning 'town'
- Mzuli* Small cap worn by Muslims
- Mzungu* (pl. *azungu*) European/White person
- Namkungwi* (pl. *anamkungwi*) Senior woman instructor
- Namkungwi wa ku chinamwali* Female instructor for girls' initiation
- Namkungwi wa ku mzinda* Female instructor initiated into *Nyau* society
- Namwali* (pl. *anamwali*) Initiate
- Nang'omba* A ground hornbill. The mother of children
- N'dakalira* Funeral headband
- Ndatola* Literally, 'I have picked.' A type of Kapoli who collects (steals) initiates from their homes and dances suggestively with each one, presenting the stick that stands for his sexual organ. He has a reputation for being promiscuous
- Ndiwo* Relish to add to *nsima*
- Ngayaye* Reed heads used in costumes
- Ngoma* Ngoni celebratory dance with men and women in a large circle. Men wear elaborate costumes and head dresses
- Ngwetsa* Rain dance performed at Banda rain shrines
- Njedza* Opening dance of a major *gule wamkulu* performance, usually performed by Kalulu and leaders
- Nkhono* A snail whose trail reminds us that evil follows its owner
- Nkhoswe* Guardian of the marriage bond/women in a family; the *malume*
- Nsima* Thick maize meal porridge. Staple of the Chewa diet
- Nsupa* Gourd used to hold medicines
- Ntheko* Initiation cap of girls (also called *timbwidza*)
- Nyakwawa* (pl. *anyakwawa*) Assistant to the village chief

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- Nyau* Secret societies of Chewa men, in which *gule wamkulu* is the major pedagogical tool
- Nyoni* (*kanyoni*) Literally, 'a small bird'. Ngoni headgear. Also a secret word to talk about a structure made of feathers
- Phata* Root of a tree or the oldest member of a family
- Phungu* (pl. *aphungu*) Tutor to initiates
- Silambe* (pl. *zilambe*) Rattle used to rouse the ancestors and guide the *gule* dancer, made of a tin tube with stones or seeds inside
- Sing'anga* Traditional herbalist and/or diviner of witches
- Timbwidza* The same as *niheko*
- Tsempho* The same as *mdulo*
- Tsiku losambula* Day when ferment is added to the beer being brewed for a ritual
- Tsimba* Seclusion house for initiates
- Tsumba* Tuft of feathers on head or forehead
- Ufiti* Witchcraft
- Wakumadzi* (pl. *akumadzi*) Head of the *dambwe*, who supervises the performance
- Wali* Yao Muslim initiates
- Zithumwa* Small bags of medicine
- Ziwanda* (sing. *chiwanda*) Evil wandering spirits; the spirits of witches