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
Chiha Beaded belt or vest of the Ngoni
Chiifula Language of the Akafula, which sounds like 'coughing'
Chihamwashini 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 chimbwanda 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
Chipongozzi 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
Chiwongo Clan name (inherited through father)
Dambale 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 tanga 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 Makezana, 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
Kudyama makanda Literally, 'to eat young girls'. To exploit minors sexually
Kudyera Greed; desire to exploit any opportunity for personal gain
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Kakhuzu  Mourning rites for funerals
Kakhcinama, kakhcinimina  Self-preservation; advancing one’s position using evil methods (witchcraft)
Kakuna  Manual enlargement of girls’ sexual organs (labia) for sexual enhancement
Kalodza  Casting of lots or magical spells using medicines
Kilongosola  Ritual re-engagement with sexual relations to end ritual coolness (redemption)
Kumangira nimba  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 timbwidza
Kusimba  To protect items with powerful medicine
Kayangala  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
Luapotera  Pre-Islamic initiation rite for Yao boys, now replaced by jando
Magawazawo  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
Makwini  Male head of the matrilineal extended family; the senior maternal uncle
Manjereneza  Ngoni bells worn on ankles
Manyumba  Councillors of the village chief; village elders
Mariye  Funeral house; house of deceased
Matsano  Young virginal maidens at Banda rain shrines
Mbulu  The leading (or ‘talking’) drum at a gule wamkulu event
Mbulu  The extended matrilineal family
Mchiliro  A non-lethal potion used to purify the taker from witchcraft
Mchiliro  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
Melome  Facial decoration of women made with cashew nut acid
Mhulo  The ‘cutting (or wasting) disease’, caused by breaking sexual taboos (when ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ meet)
Mdzuwakala  An undertaker
Mfiri (pl. afiti)  A witch; one who is antisocial, user of evil medicines, eater of human flesh
Mfiri mpherdina  An accomplished witch that kills for its own pleasure
Mfumu (pl. mafumu)  Chief of the village or village headman
Mitala  Polygamist marriage
Mkamtentena (pl. akamtentena)  Husband or son-in-law in the matrilineal Chewa society residing at his wife’s village
Mkwangali  Solemn girls’ initiation which can occur at initiation of a chief

Mkhulu wakumadzi  The same as wakumadzi
Mkhuluwulo  Medicine to protect children from mfulo
Mkweteka  Love potion/medicine
Mwagwa  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
Mpunyula  A period of ritual sexual abstinence (kudika) for a married couple; sexual rest
Mvchona (pl. mwatchona)  One who has lost connections with his home
Mwizwavi  Another term for malume
Mwazavi  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
Mwambwe (pl. miyambwe)  Code of moral values and behaviours set by the ancestors for the living, including rituals, traditions and rules of politeness
Mwambwe wa maliro  Funeral rites
Mwandoniwa pati  Akafu
Mwip العامبو  ‘Owner’ or ‘caretaker’ of the extended family; the senior uncle or malume
Mwipani (pl. mizimunzi)  Spirit or ancestor
Mwina (pl. mizinda)  ‘The village unit of Nyau and gule wamkulu; also meaning ‘town’
Mzilu  Small cap worn by Muslims
Mzimunzi  European/White person
Namkhungwe (pl. anamkhungwe)  Senior woman instructor
Namkhungwe wa ku chinamwali  Female instructor for girls’ initiation
Namkhungwe wa ku mizinda  Female instructor initiated into Nyau society
Namwali (pl. anamwali)  Initiate
Namwali wa kusamwali  Girl who is initiated into the village
Ndakalira  Funerary headband
Ndakolo  Literally, ‘I have picked.’ A type of Kapoli who collects (steals) initiatives 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
Ndiko  Relish to add to nsima
Ngayaye  Reed heads used in costumes
Ngona  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
Ngjedza  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
Nkhowe  Guardian of the marriage bond/women in a family; the malume
Nsima  Thick maize meal porridge. Staple of the Chewa diet
Nsipa  Gourd used to hold medicines
Nkhotho  Initiation cap of girls (also called timbwidza)
Nyakwawwa (pl. anyakwawwa)  Assistant to the village chief
Nyau  Secret societies of Chewa men, in which gule zwamkulu 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 ntheko
Tsenpho  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
Ujiti  Witchcraft
 Wakumadzi (pl. akumadzi)  Head of the dambe, who supervises the performance
Wali  Yao Muslim initiates
Zithumwa  Small bags of medicine
Ziwanda (sing. chiwanda)  Evil wandering spirits; the spirits of witches