

Gocho ali n'zzeru pogona

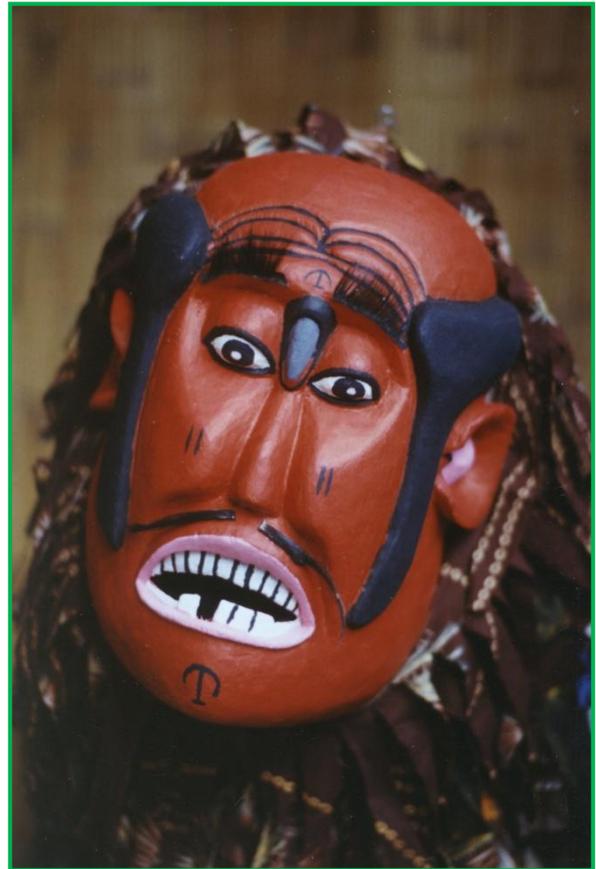
(A red day mask from the Dedza area)

Themes

- 1) Infertility – impotence
- 2) Desire for a child
- 3) Caution against infertility in marriage/infertile people should not marry
- 4) Separating husband & wife (dangers of)

Etymology

Gocho ali n'zzeru pogona means, 'The impotent man is clever at bed time.'



Description

Impotence and infertility are perceived by Chewa society as shameful and conveying a terrible stigma. This attitude encourages the victims to hide their condition.

The impotent **Gocho ali n'zzeru pogona** is portrayed with a fat face and a wide, shiny, bald head. His eyelids are swollen and his eyes express surprise or sickness (such as *tsempho*). His forehead is wrinkled. He has a small, thin moustache and long painted side burns. His face shows local tribal marks. His mouth looks to groan, revealing gaps between missing teeth. He has a heavy, pointed chin and a pierced ear decorated with a wooden plug. A dark grey protrusion hangs down between his eyes. It is meant to manifest his handicap (a miniature penis at rest). The red colour of the mask (30 cm.) highlights that he is an outcast. He wears a jute kilt and a jute vest without sleeves, leglets and armlets. The rest of his body is smeared with red clay to match his face.

In the arena, he swerves his feet to the rhythm of the *chisamba* while the men sing, voicing his wife's complaint: *"The impotent man is clever at bed time. He keeps snoring while awake, so that I may think he is asleep. It's a pity that I am poor and that (I don't have) a chicken to send him back to his parents. I am the one who is tired, my friends! My friends, as if I didn't have an he-goat (a man)! For me, no! I am the one who will go away (from my home)! To the chief I can go (to put a court case), to the paramount I can go (to put a court case)! I will also give back the cheque for my betrothal! I am the one who is tired (because) I want a child (desperately)! The impotent man is clever at bed time."* The song talks about an impotent husband who pretends to sleep as soon as

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he goes to bed in order to avoid the sexual demands of his wife, who desperately wants a child. Our man knows that he cannot grant her what she wants, so he goes to sleep early.

The character mocks impotence or barrenness and discourages those who are in this situation from getting married. The wife of **Gocho ali n'zeru pogona** seems to have known that her future husband had this problem before marriage, but she overlooked the issue. Now that she is married and sees her married friends with children of their own, she realises how unfortunate she is to be childless. That is why she has now changed her mind and she is ready (as is shown in her song), to send him back to his parents and to divorce him officially. Either she divorces him and remarries or she has to choose a life of secret promiscuity, risking her reputation and even her life, from sexual diseases. Any child she could bear would be considered illegitimate and would probably never be accepted fully by her husband. Life together in these circumstances would lead to endless quarrels and to insoluble problems.

Infertility among the Chewa is perceived to be a curse. The victims of infertility are also the brunt of mockery and scorn. The only option for them is to disappear into an urban centre, where they attempt to hide in the anonymity of the crowd.

Song

“Gocho ali n'zeru pogona tate; angoliza mkonono, ali maso toto ine kuti n'dziti agona tate. Ndangosowa ndine tate nkhuku yokatulira kwa eni ake tate. Ndatopa ndine anzanga tate, anzanga ngati ndilibe toned. Ine toto! Ndingochoka ndine! Kwa mfumu kulipo, kaya kwa mkosi kulipo! Nkhuku ndikaperekanso mitulo n'kaperekanso tate! Ndangotopa ndine tate... ndikufuna mwana tate! Gocho ali n'zeru pogona.”

Source

Interview in 1992