

Kalinyeke

(A pink day mask from the Mua area)



Themes

1) Chewa – Ngoni relations 2) Drought, famine & food security 3) Foresight 4) Polygamy

Etymology

Kalinyeke is the name of a village and its chief atop the hills near Bembeke. *Nyeki* also refers in the Ngoni language to a pretty young girl, a junior wife taken by a husband who prefers her to his first wife.

Description

The medium sized pink mask (35 cm.) portrays a man who has escaped famine because of his foresight. His planning and his ability to store provisions enabled him to help others who were not so wise. The colour pink identifies him as a stranger: an Ngoni who lives in the hills close to Bembeke as opposed to the Chewa who live down on the plain (Mua). The mask features a middle aged man with

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a wrinkled forehead. His sly and cunning eyes look out sideways and give a warning that there is drought and famine. His nose is slightly curved and is that of an African. His mouth has teeth missing and a smile of satisfaction at having hoarded food and avoided the famine. His enormous ears stand up in order to listen to what people say about the availability of food supplies. **Kalinyeke** displays a painted moustache and sideburns, and a goatee on his pointed chin. His headgear is made of rags and European-like hair. **Kalinyeke** wears the usual outfit of *gule*, the tatter suit. A large belt adorns his waist. Neither kilts nor armlets and leglets are added to his costume. He carries two flywhisks to mark his standing and status.

In the arena **Kalinyeke** shows assertiveness by throwing one leg at a time forward, changing direction quickly and moving with persistence in the opposite direction. He then starts swerving his feet and moves sideways with full vigour, flapping his flywhisks on the ground to show that he is determined to escape hunger. As he dances the men sing: 1) "*Nyeke, (a junior wife,) has come, **Kalinyeke!***" To this song the women answer: 2) "*Someone is crying! Why are you staring at me? What have I done? We are all dead!*" This character performs for any ritual and at party meetings. It is recent, having been introduced to the Mua area in 1994. The years 1992 – 1993 were marked by drought and famine. The rains were too short, and the population did not harvest a sufficient crop. People had to climb the hills above Mua to find some food. The village of Kalinyeke was renowned for supplying the food they were lacking. Despite being weak and frail from starvation, people had to reach the top of Dedza plateau and then to carry their heavy bags of food back on their heads down to the plain. This was a long and exhausting journey. Moreover they had to buy the food at a very high price since Kalinyeke had a market monopoly. People from Mua remember vividly this difficult journey of 1993. The *Nyau* members of the community reflected on this traumatising episode and drew a lesson for the future.

People from Kalinyeke did not have to go elsewhere for food because they had kept reserves, and they were even able to help others. The character of **Kalinyeke** teaches that those who have foresight and do not waste food will not experience hunger and famine. They do not live with the trauma and fear of dying or losing a child or a relative to hunger or malnutrition. They should not have to climb the plateau nor descend to the depths of despair. It is cheaper economically to foresee and to make provision than to be forced to cope with the tragedy and the expense of famine. In Malawi, genuine philanthropy is rare. People tend to profit from others' misery in order to enrich themselves and prosper (the cunning look of **Kalinyeke**). **Kalinyeke** can both make monetary profits and have success with attractive, but starving, women. In reflecting both the sufferer and the supplier, the character of **Kalinyeke** suggests that strangers (Ngoni) show more foresight than the Chewa themselves. The Chewa should pay more heed to the ancestors' advice and plan for the future rather than vacillate like a weather vane to the four winds. Moreover, the mention of a nyeke (a junior wife) suggests that one should not live beyond his means. It is not wise to entertain a second wife when one cannot cope with a single wife and children.

Songs

1) "*A Nyeke e wabwera **Kalinyeke.***"

2) "*Wina alira eae! Mundiayang'ana ndatani? Eae tonse ndife maliro.*"

Source

Interview in 2000