

Mulodza

(A red day mask from Salima)

Themes

- 1) Responsibility of family heads
- 2) Owls as familiars of witches
- 3) Thirst for power
- 4) Witchcraft
- 5) Witchcraft to maintain/enhance one's position (*kukhwima*)

Etymology

Mulodza means, 'the spell caster'.



Description

This red mask (35 cm.) features a wicked witch. This is a senior person with sad and dull eyes, and an aquiline nose like an owl's beak, typical of witches. **Mulodza** has wrinkles on his forehead and his bald head, which is surrounded with dark goatskins. The domestic animal skins suggest that the witch comes from within the family group and is a male. This last detail is emphasised by the cowlick made of chicken feathers on his forehead. His maleness is stressed by the heavy sideburns, a thick goatee and thin moustache. His mouth is small and mean. His dishonest smile unveils three scattered teeth in the mouth. His ears are full of long hair, like an old man. The character of **Mulodza** wears the regular tatter suit of *gule*.

He comes into the arena with a flywhisk and a cow horn full of medicine that he places in the centre of the dancing ground. He then swerves his feet energetically, jumping on one leg. As soon as he has finished his performance he grabs his horn and splashes the audience with his medicine. While this goes on the men sing for him: 1) *"What kind of bird shrieks on the roof of the house at night time? This is a bad omen!"* The women answer: 2) *"The day before yesterday, yesterday... we were together, my husband and I. My friends, come and see, come and witness this! This one is bad luck! This one, when he comes, he has a hidden agenda, this uncle of mine! It is yesterday that he visited! Today let us go to deliver the message (that my husband is dead)! This one is bad luck!"*

The character of **Mulodza** originates from the Salima area at the end of the 1960s. It is performed for funeral rites accompanied by initiation. The wearing of this mask must be protected with the observance of sexual taboos. The men's song refers to a member of the community who has changed into an owl, an omen of death in the village. The women's song voices the complaint of a wife who has lost her husband, killed by a witch. She suspects her maternal uncle (*malume*) has caused his death. The maternal uncle holds the highest position of authority within the Chewa matrilineal group. He is the person responsible for the well being of his sisters and their children. Because of this position and his seniority he is endowed with power and is credited with wisdom. He often plays the role of advisor and settles family conflicts. He can also be reputed for his knowledge of plants and medicine that can benefit his own family group. Ironically, our song implies that **Mulodza** has transformed into a killer witch. The Chewa see witchcraft as a way of achieving power or control within the family group. People in position of authority are often suspected of using witchcraft in order to maintain their positions (*kukhwima*).

The character of **Mulodza** was created in order to explain sudden death. People in authority, like the chief and the maternal uncle, are often perceived to abuse their position to maximise power for themselves, thus strengthening their authority. They use spells to cripple and to kill their family members. Their selfish behaviour is believed to be motivated by hatred, jealousy, pride and ambition. People with such inclinations are forced to look at themselves in the mirror of *gule*; the character of **Mulodza** reflects their ugly image. Their success in achieving power and control is built on eradicating their relatives or rivals and remaining alone. Witchcraft makes them outcasts, pariahs to their own kind.

Songs

1) "*E tate, mbalame yotani yolira pa denga ndi usiku? Awa n'Malodza!* (2x)"

2) "*Dzana, dzulo, tinali awiri ndi abambowa. Anzanga dzandionereni, dzandionereni! Yawa n'Malodza! Yawa kuyenda, sayendera chimodzi, a malumewa! Ndi dzulo anabwera, lero tipite tikanene mthenga tate de! Yawa n'Malodza!*"

Source

Interviews in 1992 and 2000