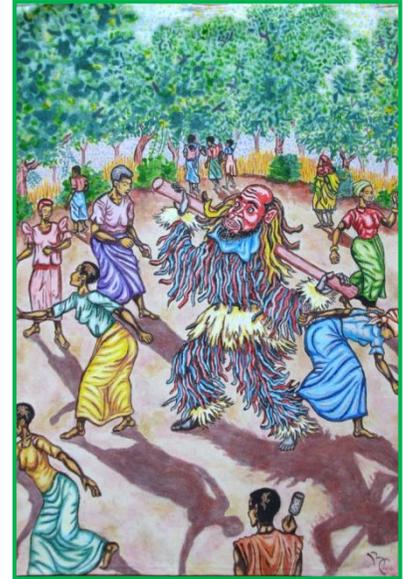


Ndaopa Achiwere

(A red day mask from the Mua area)



Themes

1) Chewa – Ngoni relations 2) Hypocrisy/split personality/duplicity 3) Jealousy/envy 4) Polygamy 5) Promiscuity 6) Witchcraft

Etymology

Ndaopa Achiwere means, 'I feared **Chiwere**.' **Chiwere** was a well known paramount chief of the Jere Ngoni group who settled at Mvera, near Salima around the 1880s. He raided and conducted war against the Chewa in the Dowa and the Salima districts. As a polygamist, he married a large number of Chewa women. He was greatly feared.

Description

This large red mask (60 cm.) features **Ndaopa Achiwere** as an intruder of note (red) into Chewa lands. He was originally associated with the subjugation of the Chewa people. The details of his face reveal

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him as cruel, aggressive and self-centred. The sternness of the mask shows his wicked character and that he is an unwelcome guest. Over time, **Ndaopa Achiwere**'s link to Ngoni history has been lost, and today, the *gule* members look at him as an unwanted stranger who commits dubious deeds. He acts with duplicity and is convinced of his own importance, but reveals himself as a greedy and self-centred person who has nothing to offer to the village as an *mkamwini*.

The face of **Ndaopa Achiwere** betrays seniority, foreignness and the absence of good qualities. He is portrayed as half bald, with a broad wrinkled forehead, a foreign nose, and a drooping wide mouth with aggressive teeth on the bottom jaw. The character has swollen cheeks, a heavy sinking chin (which suggests a case of mumps), bushy sideburns or a beard and a long moustache. His round eyes stress short sightedness, and the small ears emphasise deafness. The headgear of the mask is made of tatters and a combination of goat and monkey skins. He is a man who belongs to two worlds: the village and the bush. He is a person with a double identity and double standards. He appears to be an honourable person and wears a nice tatter suit. But nevertheless, he carries a large stick that resembles a pestle used by women. He holds it behind his head as a dangerous weapon to be used for subversive activities.

In the arena, **Ndaopa Achiwere** is rude and aggressive. He moves backward, swerving each foot alternately, and displays his discontent and hostility toward the crowd. He holds his long stick across the back of his big head and begins chasing the womenfolk as if he is possessed. They disperse in all directions. The male choir sing for him: 1) "**Chiwere** is promiscuous! No, **Chiwere**! When (my) husband is at another's house, you say that he is a nice person, **Chiwere**!" To this song the women comment: 2) "*When (my) husband is at another's house, you say that he is a nice person! Take him, and let him be yours. You will see his dark side, **Chiwere**!*" The songs complement each other. They voice the complaint of one of **Chiwere**'s wives, who believes that her husband is neglecting her. She also suspects that he is involved in antisocial activities. He is a hypocrite. In public, he presents himself as a model of respectability and attracts the envy of the neighbours and their wives. But the reality is totally different. He is promiscuous and unsociable. He has endless arguments and enjoys fighting (the stick). He is a thief and even assaults people at night in order to steal their possessions. **Chiwere** is selfish and greedy. He hides these vices behind his honest appearance. Though he is the envy of many, he is a fraud.

The character of **Ndaopa Achiwere** dissuades villagers, and women in particular, from accepting a gentleman at face value without knowing his true nature. Dissatisfied married women may envy the wife of **Chiwere**, but they are mistaken. One should not put one's hope in someone one does not know well. Concurrently, **Ndaopa Achiwere** discourages hypocrisy and double standards that will weaken the harmony and trust between people, and ultimately between people and the spirit world.

Songs

1) "*Chiwere*were toto de **Chiwere** (3x) **Chiwere** toto de! Mwamuna ali kwa mn'zako, kumati akhale okoma **Chiwere**!"

2) "*Mwamuna ali kwa mn'zako, kumati akhale okoma! Tamtenga atakhala wako, uchiona choipa **Chiwere**!*"

Source

Interviews in 1987 and 2007