

N'dzalira (Mua)

(A night bark head cover from the Mua and Ntchisi areas)



(Ntchisi)



(Mua)

Themes

- 1) Fairness to *mkamwini*
- 2) High mortality

Etymology

N'dzalira means, 'I will mourn.'

Description

N'dzalira is a type of Kapoli which is very seldom seen today. **N'dzalira** appears in a great variety of facial disguises. It can have a head cover made of cloth topped with a bunch of feathers or a headgear made entirely of bark strings smeared with mud or with white sisal tied into a kind of tail on top so as to fall backward.

N'dzalira's costume and dance is that of Kapoli. The character differs solely in terms of the special songs that he sings. These normally have to do with the mourning of the bereaved: 1) "*In this village I stay only because I (am strong enough to) endure. If I beget a child, they eat it (kill it). If I buy a cloth for (my wife), it is used instead as a shroud at the funeral! (Maybe) the curse of God is on me!*" This song voices the complaint of the *mkamwini* who has lost his child because of the hatred or lack of care of his wife's relatives. They siphon off everything that he owns: 2) "*Whom can I hold to? (My child) has left me (he died) when I was getting ready to redeem him.*" The song explains that the *mkamwini* was about to resume relations and to redeem a child after a long period of sexual abstinence, but the child died before the prescribed date. The funeral and the mourning for the child will add another long period of sexual abstinence. The despair of the *mkamwini*, who has lost a child and can have no intimacy with his wife, is manifested here in the meaning of the name **N'dzalira**, 'I will mourn.' The husband is often abused by his wife's relatives and does not own his own children, compounding his angst.

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The high mortality rate among Chewa children and their complex way of explaining these deaths often pushes the *mkamwini* to despair and gives him a sense of failure in his role as a father. The mask of **N'dzalira** sympathizes with the husbands and advises the female relatives to be less harsh on them.

Songs

1) *"Pa'dzi pano n'khalira kupirira! Ndibale mwana, angondiyera! Ndigule nsalu, n'yofunditsa maliro! Ngati Chauta wada ine!"*

2) *"Ndigwira yani ine? Wandisiya ine! Gule ali ng'ang'ang'a!"*

Source

Interviews in 1991 and 1992