

Wena alira

(A black mask from the Mua region)

Themes

- 1) Discouraging evil spells & wishes
- 2) Witchcraft

Etymology

Wena alira means, 'Some will mourn.' These words are an abbreviation of a well known curse, 'You will see and some will mourn.'



Description

Wena alira is a variety of Kapoli that appears with a carved mask. **Wena alira's** face is black to imply dishonesty. It has a shifty appearance, looking sideways. A high narrow forehead slopes like that of a monkey. The exaggerated nose is broad and flat. A protruding crooked mouth with teeth on both jaws displays an evil, dishonest smile. There is neither moustache nor beard. His head is covered with baboon skins for hair and his headgear is made of various coloured tatters. The dancer wears the tatter suit and carries a bamboo stick and a club to the arena.

Since he is a type of Kapoli, **Wena alira** sings one of Kapoli's songs, "**Wena alira, Why are you staring at me! What did I do? We are all (as good as) dead.**" **Wena alira** reaches the climax of the and swerves his feet backward, with his arms crossed on his chest to emphasise sorrow.

This character appeared in the Mua region in 2000. It was copied from Salima (Gwirize village), where the character had been differentiated from the Kapoli characters a few years earlier. **Wena alira** was introduced to the Mua area on the occasion of the funeral and commemoration rites of some important members of the community. This character provides mourners with a popular interpretation of the cause of death. A person was the victim of a spell. He refused to comply with the request of one of his neighbours who happened to be an expert in the art of witchcraft. His refusal met with anger, which found its expression in a common curse, "You will see." Once these magic words have been pronounced, villagers believe it to be a death sentence.

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Wena alira wants to deter the Chewa from applying such a curse as it is believed to be effective and is seen as an irrevocable cause of death. Through this character, the ancestors teach that it is wrong to wish the death of another. The teaching of the ancestors meets with that of Christianity on this particular issue.

Song

*“Wena alira, mundiyang’ana chia? Ndatani? Tonse ndife maliro! **Wena alira.**”*

Source

Interview in 2001