

Masks and Transformation among the Chewa of Eastern Zambia

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Masking, spirit possession and sorcery seem to be independent of each other, and have long been treated as such. What I observed in Chewa society, however, demands a reconsideration of this preconceived picture.

Among the Chewa, there exists a semi-secret masked association. The phenomenon of spirit possession can be found throughout their territory. In addition, it is believed that sorcerers are transformed into animals.

The masked association as well as a masker is called *nyau*. The *nyau* masks are broadly classified into two groups: those portraying the dead, and those portraying wild animals. Of the two, the latter are considered to be more important than the former. The major function of the *nyau* is to perform masquerades at funeral rituals.

The incidence of spirit possession has become remarkably diversified in recent years. One such is believed to have existed in Chewa society since the early times: it is the possession of women by the python spirit. The women who are possessed become capable of regulating rain. Moreover, they used to be in charge of the girls' initiation ceremony called *cinamwali*.

Sorcerers are said to change themselves into animals, such as lions and hyenas. It is also believed that those who habitually resort to the technique will be transformed into these same animals after their own death.

Thus, masking, spirit possession and sorcery are all, in some sense, considered as means of transformation of humans into animals. Furthermore, the three are all understood as forms of "spirit possession" in the broad sense of the word, though they may differ in detail.

The differentiation is straightforwardly expressed in the fact that the masker, the spirit medium, and the sorcerer avoid one another. And, what is more important, the three are in marked contrast to one another in various aspects. For example, the three differ in the state of their consciousness during the transformation. The masked dancers are fully conscious of their own acts. On the other hand, the spirit medium is unconscious while being possessed by the spirit. The answer to the question of sorcerer's consciousness of their behavior remains ambiguous; it depends on whether one takes the standpoint of the accuser or the accused.

Also noteworthy is the distinction of the species of animal into which the three transform themselves. The animals that are important to the *nyau* are antelopes, which are harmless and edible, while the animals into which sorcerers turn are lions and hyenas, which are dangerous animals that eat humans. The animal that possesses the medium is the python, which neither

eats nor is eaten by humans.

There are also distinctions between the three regarding gender. Whereas the *nyau* is a men's association, all mediums are women. Yet both men and women can be sorcerers.

These distinctions between the *nyau*, the spirit medium, and the sorcerer, in effect, correspond to the differences in role the three play in the Chewa view of life and death.

By taking part in the girls' initiation ceremony, the medium has charge over the birth of humans, while at the same time directly controlling the maintenance of human life by regulating rain. The sorcerer, by contrast, is regarded as virtually the only cause of death. On the other hand, the *nyau* is in charge of turning the spirit of the deceased into that of the ancestor so as to ensure its reincarnation in the future. In this way, the three are respectively running different phases of the cycle of life and death. The masker, the spirit medium, and the sorcerer do not merely constitute a tripartite set of transformation. They also constitute a single cosmological system.

INTRODUCTION

There is probably nothing quite so strange to the Western imagination as the idea that one can be transformed into someone else, or that one can be oneself and at the same time someone else. The question of personal identity is a dominant concept in modern thought at least since the time of Descartes. *We* find it difficult to believe that identity can be shed by virtue of covering the face with an artifact, a mask.

Like masquerade, the phenomenon of spirit possession is similarly difficult to comprehend. It is considered by psychopathologists to be a kind of schizophrenia. From *our* modern point of view, the "I" should be indivisible, self-contained, incapable of penetration by the "other".

In many ethnographies, including those concentrating on European legend, tales of metamorphosis caused by sorcery and witchcraft are familiar. There are a few societies where transformations from human beings into animals and vice versa are endorsed. For *us*, who have faith in personal identity, such a belief is no less incomprehensible than that of transformation through masks and spirit possession.

However, *we* sometimes speak of *ourselves* in such terms as: "I have acted out of character", or "I have lost and would like to regain my true identity". This means that what one considers oneself to be does not necessarily coincide with what one really is. It might safely be said that *we* live *our* life changing social masks according to circumstances. When *we* say "I have acted out of character", *we* are confronted with an intimate contradiction which is inherent in the notion of personal identity.

A number of scholars have made the assertion that to perceive the ego to be a unique conscious unit is nothing but fantasy. For example, Lacan writes as follows:

Only the antidialectical mentality of a culture which, in order to be dominated by objectifying ends, tends to reduce all subjective activity to the being of the ego, can justify the astonishment of a Van den Steinen when he confronted by a Bororo who says: "I'm an ara (parakeet)". And all the sociologists of "the primitive mind" busy themselves around this profession of identity, which, on reflection, is no more surprising than declaring, "I'm a doctor" or "I'm a citizen of the French Republic", and which certainly presents fewer logical difficulties than the statement, "I'm a man", which at most can mean no more than "I'm like he whom I recognize to be a man, and so recognize myself as being such". In the last resort, these various formula are to be understood only in reference to the truth of "I am an other". [LACAN 1966: 118]

The profession that "I'm an ara" is a typical example of what is called totemism. The conclusion drawn by Lévi-Strauss from the general discussion on totemism corresponds to Lacan's view. It is well known that Lévi-Strauss has considered totemism to be "the set of systems of classification which postulate a homology between natural distinctions and cultural distinctions". Moreover, he asserts that such systems of classification are not only "the manner in which primitive peoples conceptualize their world", but also "the very one demanded in the case of an object whose elementary structure presents the picture of a discontinuous complexity" [LÉVI-STRAUSS 1962: 355]. Thus he has overcome the distinction between "the logical mentality of the civilized" and "the pre-logical mentality of the primitive", which were made by Lévy-Bruhl [1910]. Lévi-Strauss sums up the matter in the following words:

From this point of view it seems not untrue to say that some modes of classing, arbitrarily isolated under the title of totemism, are universally employed: among ourselves this "totemism" has merely been humanized. Everything takes place as if in our civilization every individual's own personality were his totem. [LÉVI-STRAUSS 1962: 284-285]

Thus, in terms of totemism, he suggests that the ego in Western culture is also subject to the incipient conditions of being "another".

Thus we might say that the indivisibility of personal identity is a problem quite peculiar to Western culture. Recognizing this fact, we can understand various phenomena related to transformation through masks, spirit possession and sorcery as a matter of universal human nature.

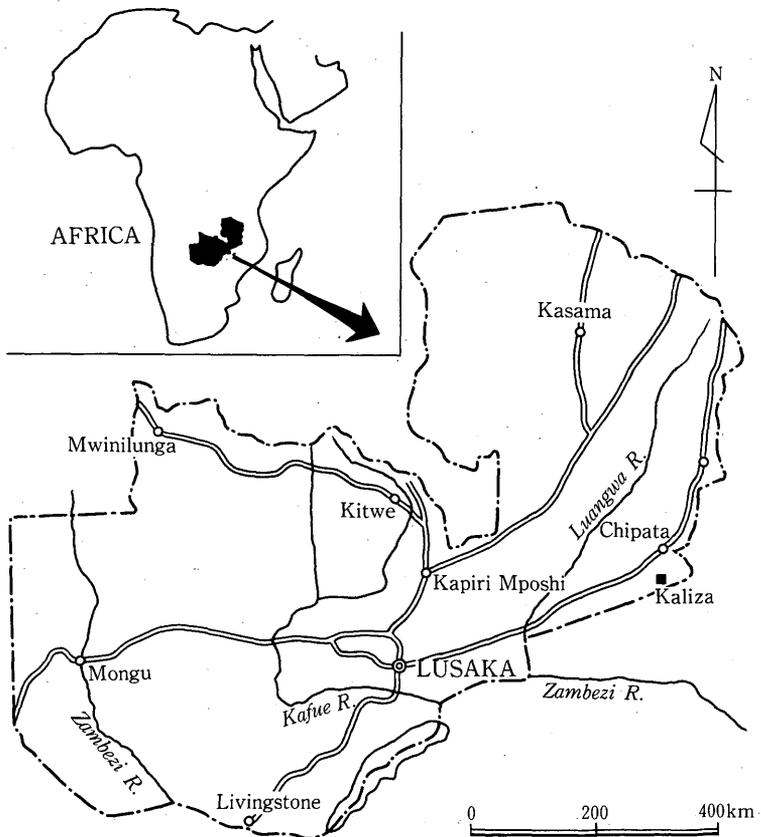
The following account concerns the masking tradition and belief in transformation of the Chewa of Eastern Zambia. It might seem unfamiliar to us; it is, however, not only an exercise in understanding "another culture", but it is also an attempt to illuminate something prevalent in human cultures.

Masking, spirit possession and sorcery seem to be independent of each other, and have long been treated as such. But what I observed in Chewa society demands a reconsideration of this preconceived picture.

As discussed in the classic work by Max Marwick, the Chewa people are well-known for their strong belief in sorcery [MARWICK 1965]. The Chewa, however, also deserve to be noted for their rich masking tradition. In addition, the phenomenon of spirit possession can be found throughout the territory.

Among the Chewa, there exists a semi-secret masked association called *nyau*. The term *nyau*, however, refers to masked dancers as well as masks. The *nyau* masks are broadly classified into two groups: those portraying the dead, and those portraying wild animals. Of the two, the latter are described as "*nyau yaikulu*", ie "big *nyau*", and are considered to be more important than the former.

The incidence of spirit possession has been remarkably diversified in recent years. One such is believed to have existed in Chewa society since early times: it is the possession of humans by the python spirit. This kind of spirit possesses only women. A woman possessed by the spirit suddenly falls (*u-gwa*) onto the ground and, after picking herself up, behaves and talks in a strange manner. Once she becomes capable of controlling the possession, she serves as a medium called *mgwetsa*, meaning "the one who falls".



Map 1. Research Area

Sorcerers (*nfiti*) are said to create various creatures and dispatch those creatures as their familiars. They are also said to change themselves into animals such as lions and hyenas for the purpose of attacking their relatives or stealing the property of others. Moreover, it is believed that those who habitually resort to this technique will be transformed into these same animals after their own death.

The Chewa use a verb *u-sanduka* for all forms of transformation above mentioned: to disguise oneself as an animal with a mask, to be possessed by an animal spirit, and to change oneself into an animal by means of sorcery. In fact, the verb *u-sanduka* is a term which refers to any change of visible state. To claim that masking, spirit possession and sorcery constitute a closed category of "transformation" in the minds of the Chewa simply because they use the verb *u-sanduka* to refer to all of the three would be complex. Nevertheless, as seen above, masking, spirit possession and sorcery are, even so, all considered as in some sense instances of transformation of humans into animals. What is more important, the Chewa claim that the masker (*nyau*), the spirit medium (*mgwetsa*) and the sorcerer (*nfiti*) avoid one another. In this sense, the three may be said to form a single set.

In this article, following Chewa thinking, I take masking, spirit possession and sorcery as distinctive yet related modes of transformation of humans into animals, and consider the relationship among the three. The purpose of the article is to reveal the sustaining principles of masquerade among the Chewa, and to elucidate how the practice, together with spirit possession and sorcery, influences and organizes people's experience of daily life. It seeks to offer fresh insight into the relatedness of masking, spirit possession, and sorcery or witchcraft.

The following description is based on factual data and observations collected between 1984 and 1986 in and around Kaliza village in the area of Chief Mwangala, Chadiza District, Eastern Province, the Republic of Zambia (Map 1).

1. THE CHEWA SETTING: THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

At its most basic, the Chewa are the people who refer to themselves as Chewa (Achewa pl.). They live in the area lying across the borders between Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. Their language, *Cichewa*,¹⁾ is one of the Bantu group of languages, and has the largest number of speakers within the linguistic group generally called Nyanja. The total number of Cichewa speakers, however, is not exactly known. It must be well over one million, of which those residing in Zambia was estimated at approximately 150,000 in the 1969 census [CENTRAL STATISTICAL

1) Chewa words are written in italics, and nouns are given in one form, usually the singular. The spelling of Chewa words follows the convention prevailed in Zambia. Notable departures from the usual English pronunciation are limited to the following: c is pronounced as in church; h in ph, kh, or th, adds an extra puff of breath to p, k, or t respectively.

2) Since 1969, the census of the population of each ethnic group in Zambia has not been published with the aim of preventing so-called tribalism.

OFFICE 1973].²⁾

The area the Chewa live in is a plateau some 1300 meters above sea level, covered with so-called *miombo* woodland, where the dominant trees are *Brachystegia* and *Julbernardia*. The annual rainfall in the area is about 1000 mm, most of which falls in a rainy season between November and April. The other part of the year, the dry season, can be divided into two parts: a cool dry season from May to July and a hot dry season from August to October. Various rituals, including masked ceremonies, usually take place during the hot dry season following the harvest.

The Chewa are, above all, peasant farmers, growing mainly maize, with some livestock. Traditionally, slash-and-burn horticulture has been carried out to cultivate the same crop, but, owing to the government policy of agricultural modernization, chemical fertilizers and iron ploughs pulled by cattle are now becoming widely used. Cattle are relatively recent additions to Chewa culture. It was not until Chewa territory was conquered by the pastoralist Ngoni in the 19th century that the Chewa took to raising cattle on a large scale; other livestock that they have had for a long time include goats, pigs, fowls and pigeons. Hunting, which will be discussed in some detail, continues to be sporadically conducted only by a limited number of people.

The basis of the Chewa social system has been and still is matrilineal lineages. Normally, residence is uxorilocal. As pointed out by Marwick, even after marriage, husband and wife will not change their lineage affiliation [MARWICK 1965: 169-170]. Children are affiliated to the group of their mother and mother's siblings instead of the group of their father, and are usually looked after by their mother's brothers. Consequently, although a man in this society has great power over the members of his own matrilineage, he has only a limited voice in matters concerning his wives and children. It is even said that husbands are nothing but those who sow the seeds of children inside their wives. However, owing to intermarriage with the Ngoni, who trace patrilineal descent and practise virilocal residence, as well as to the government's policy of modernization, many a newly joined couple nowadays settles in the husband's home village provided a payment called *uthakula* is made. Be that as it may, the children born to the couple are usually kept by their maternal grandmother at her home village. Even in the midst of drastic social change, the matrilineal principle persists in Chewa society.

Before the advent of colonial rule, Chewa society was organized into several kingdoms, the most powerful of which was Undi's. Today, the Chewa in Zambia, with the exception of those in Lundazi District, are under the supreme authority of a paramount chief named Gawa Undi, the successor to Undi's kingship. Under him, there are a number of regional chiefs, *mambo*, each of whom holds political authority over his allocated region. Many of these chiefs now act as members of the District Councils. Each chief's region contains hundreds of villages with respective headmen, *mfumu*. The size of village differs considerably. Many villages accommodate some 100 people, but there are villages with a population of over 300. A village is composed of one or more lineage segments. Kaliza village,

where we lived, had a population of about 150 and consisted of five lineage segments.

2. THE CHEWA AND THE ANIMAL WORLD

As has been noted, masking, spirit possession and sorcery are all considered by the Chewa as techniques by which humans are transformed into animals. It is crucial, therefore, to identify the images that the Chewa have of the animal world before we go on to study these three forms of transformation. In this chapter we will discuss the relation between the Chewa and animals from both the epistemological and ecological viewpoints.

1) The Taxonomy of Animals

Each animal sharing the world the Chewa occupy is given a specific name. Animals are also classified into different groups under broader, more generic

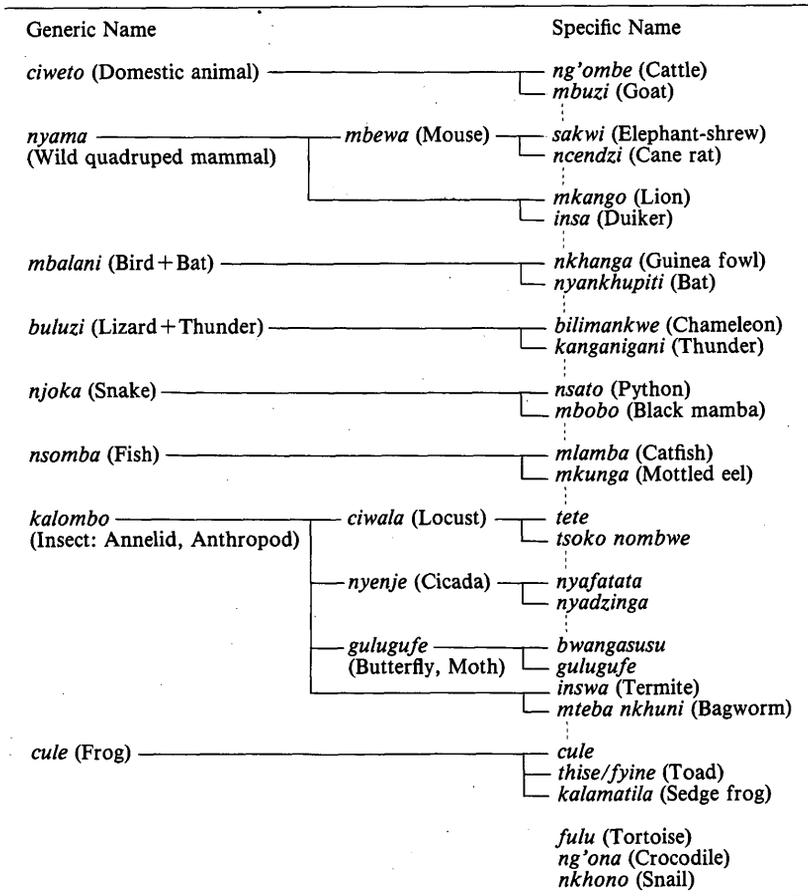


Figure 1. Animal Classification of the Chewa

names. The specific names mostly correspond to scientifically identifiable biological species, especially for those animals of higher orders. The classification is summarized in Figure 1.

In the Chewa language, there is no word to denote the entire animal world shown in the table. However, in fairy tales, for what we might describe as "all animals gathered", the Chewa use the expression "*nyama zonse zinabwera*". While the term "*nyama*" originally refers to wild quadruped mammals alone, birds, snakes, and tortoises are also included in the word "*nyama*" used in fairy tales. Nevertheless, the Chewa do not refer to a bird or a snake they see in actual life as "*nyama*". In other words, the term "*nyama*" not only denotes wild quadruped mammals, but also connotes other animals, and hence, invokes an image of the animal world as a whole in a wider conceptual sense.

The wholeness of the animal world is indicated in another respect too. All of the animals shown in the table are thought to have "*nyama*" inside when they are cut in cross section. The term "*nyama*", which also is the word for wild quadruped mammals, is used in this context to mean "flesh". The word, however, is not employed to refer to the core or flesh of plants or fruits. The Chewa see that it is only what we call animals that have "*nyama*" inside.

The Chewa therefore do recognize, albeit implicitly, the world of animals as a whole. The following discussion examines the way in which they classify animals.

First of all, all domestic animals and fowls, such as cattle (*ng'ombe*), goats (*mbuzi*), pigs (*nkhumba*), chickens (*nkhuku*), pigeons (*nkhunda*), dogs (*galu*), and cats (*cona*), are called by a generic term *ciweto*.

By contrast, as mentioned above, all quadruped mammals in the wild are called *nyama*. Being quadruped is important here, for bats (*nyankhupiti*), along with birds, are placed in a separate category of *mbalani*. To distinguish *nyama*, "wild quadruped mammals", from *nyama*, "flesh", the expression "*nyama ya m'chire*", meaning "the *nyama* in the bush", is used to refer to the former. Among the many animals included in *nyama*, 22 species of rodents are grouped into a sub-category named *mbewa*. It must be noted that domestic animals, like cattle, goats, and pigs, are never called *nyama* when alive. The word *nyama* is employed for these animals only when they are killed and become meat.

Birds and bats are together called *mbalani*.

Lizards are called *buluzi*, and it is interesting to note that thunder (*kanganigani*) is included in this category. The Chewa say that thunder is shaped like a lizard, and it thunders when the lizard runs to some particular location.

Njoka is the generic term for snakes.

Fish are called *nsomba*.

So-called "insects", including annelids and anthropods, bear the generic name *kalombo*. While *kalombo* means a "small creature that bites", the term is also used to denote insects that do not bite. Of those belonging to *kalombo*, locusts, cicadas, and butterflies and moths, are respectively classified as *ciwala*, *nyenje*, and *gulugufe*. Within the category of *kalombo*, the larva and imago of the same kind

are often separately classified under different names.

As for frogs, two or three species are distinguished. They are generically called *cule*.

These are the major categories of the animal world. There are also several animals which do not belong to any of the categories, such as tortoises (*fulu*), crocodiles (*ng'ona*), and snails (*nkhono*).

Apart from the above mentioned classification, large animals which bite other animals and humans, like lions (*mkango*), leopards (*kaingo*), hyenas (*fisi*), jackals (*nkhandwe*), snakes (*njoka*), crocodiles (*ng'ona*), and domestic dogs (*galu*), are generically referred to as *cilombo*, meaning "large creatures that bite". While this word is morphologically similar to the word *kalombo* for insects, it is safe to say that in the minds of the Chewa *cilombo* is understood as a category of a different order, as only *kalombo*, but never *cilombo*, is given as an example of a category of the same level as *nyama* and *mbalani*.

As far as the distinction between edible animals and inedible ones is concerned, domestic animals (*ciweto*) and wild quadruped mammals (*nyama ya m'chire*), except carnivores generally called *cilombo*, are edible. The meat of cattle, goats, and antelopes are special favorites of the Chewa. On the other hand, the reason why they don't eat carnivores is explained as follows: animals (*nyama*) which eat other animals (*nyama*) are like sorcerers (*nfiti*) who eat other persons. For the same reason, they don't eat birds of prey. None of the lizards (*buluzi*), snakes (*njoka*) and frogs (*cule*) are eaten. As for fish, though only a few species are known to the people in the area where the research was conducted, all of them are thought to be edible. Among insects generically called *kalombo*, various kinds of larvae together with cicadas (*nyenje*), locusts (*ciwala*) and termites (*inswa*) are eaten. The other insects are not edible.

Mary Douglas pointed out that any living being which falls outside the classification is apt to be untouched or inedible [DOUGLAS 1957: 48-51, 1966: 41-45]. It is true that there are some animals, such as crocodiles and snails, which fall outside the classification and are not eaten by the Chewa. But that principle cannot explain all aspects of Chewa food behaviour. The reason why neither snakes nor lizards are eaten, why there is a distinction between edible insects and inedible ones cannot be elucidated by means of the principle. In my view, what is important to Chewa food behaviour is not the classificatory status of a given animal, but the food behaviour of the animal itself. Generally speaking, the Chewa avoid eating those animals which mainly eat food other than plants. To take the term *nyama* to mean the animal world as a whole, the people's claim that *nyama* which eats *nyama* cannot itself be eaten is able to explain almost all aspects of their food behaviour.

2) Animals as Sources of Protein

In the previous section, the manner in which the Chewa classify the animal world was considered. The following section examines how important the meat of such animals is in their diet.

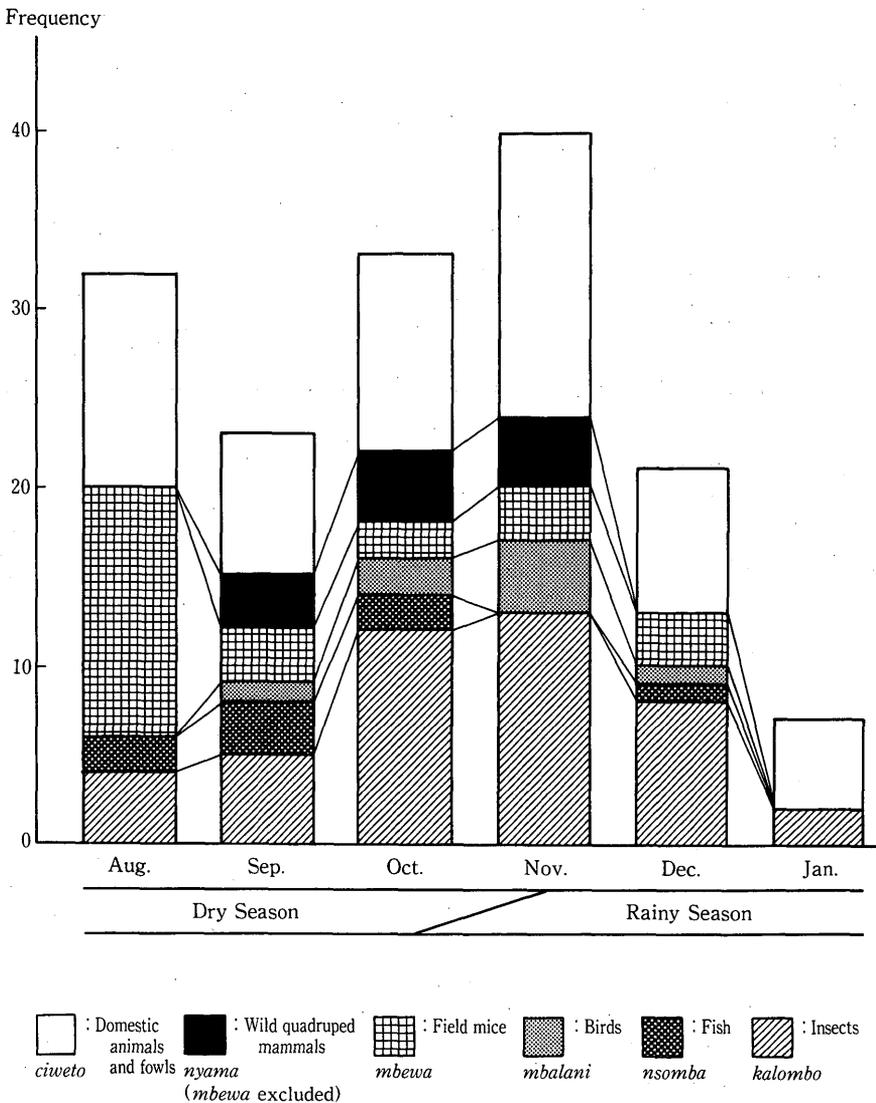


Figure 2. Animal Products Consumed (monthly)

Figure 2 shows the frequency with which various kinds of animal food are consumed by a family in Kaliza village. The study took place during the period of six months from August 1985 to January 1986. While there may be shortcomings in data which does not cover one whole year, the figures do illustrate the major difference between diet in the rainy and in the dry season.

First of all, the figure indicates that the Chewa diet is highly dependent on domestic animals and fowls. Throughout the period of investigation, more than half of the animal food consisted of the meat of domestic animals and fowls.

The beginning of the rainy season, between October and December, is the time

for termites to emerge. Except for its temporary increase during the period, the proportion of insect-based food remains fairly constant.

In contrast with this, the proportion of wild quadruped mammals and birds, both of which are game for hunting, greatly varies from one period to another. Field mice (*mbewa*) are, however, constantly captured and frequently consumed. Especially in August, when the harvested maize is stacked up in the fields, a large number of field mice flocking to the maize are captured by children who set traps or dig holes in the fields. Adults rarely engage in capturing this kind of animal.

Wild quadruped mammals other than field mice, which are indicated on the figure by dark blocks, are hunted by adults using rifles and nets. The main game is antelopes such as duikers (*insa*) and impalas (*mphala*), wild boars (*kaphulika*, *nguluwe*), and hares (*kalulu*). But the meat of these animals is eaten only between September and November, and it accounts for merely 10% of the total animal food consumed during the same period. The proportion is even lower for birds.

Hunting, including that of field mice, is in fact performed only between August and December as indicated in the figure. Due to farming, people are rarely engaged in hunting at times other than during those three months. Such being the case, it is difficult to imagine the meat of wild quadruped mammals and birds being served except between August and December. Therefore, it is likely that the proportion of domestic animals and fowls in the Chewa diet increases during the period between February and July which could not be analysed. In conclusion, though the Chewa have a good knowledge of the animal world, nowadays hunting is of little importance for them as a means of obtaining animal protein.

3. NYAU, THE MASKED ASSOCIATION OF THE CHEWA

1. Nyau as a Semi-Secret Association

Among the Chewa, almost all boys who have reached the age of between 12 and 15 are initiated into a masked association called *nyau*. A male is not considered a fully-fledged member of society with due rights and duties, until he joins the *nyau*. While membership of the *nyau* association lasts for life, the principal activities are in fact mainly carried out by men under 40. To perform masquerades at funerary rituals is the major function of the association.³⁾

Today, the *nyau* association is organized at either a single village or a group of adjacent villages. Membership gained at one place holds good at any other in Chewa land. In the past, however, the *nyau* association seems to have existed only in particular villages, each of which served as a ritual centre in a certain region. The present widespread availability of the association probably goes back to the colonial period when the *nyau* was banned by the colonial authorities and missionaries and was forced to conduct its activities underground. It was only

3) Few reports have been written on the masking tradition of the Chewa. These include Hodgson [1933], Rangeley [1949, 1950], Marwick [1968], Blackmun and Schoffeleers [1972], Schoffeleers [1976], Mapopa [1980] and Faulkner [1988].



Plate 1 *Nyau* with feathered masks



Plate 2 *Nyau* with wooden masks

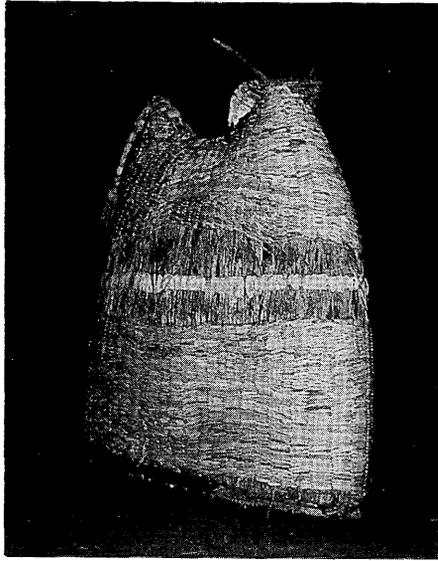


Plate 3 *Nyau yolembe*

after the independence of Zambia in 1964 that the *nyau* association was finally allowed open performances.

Nyau masks are divided into three types. The first type is a feathered net mask which covers the whole head of a masker (Plate 1). The second is a wooden face mask (Plate 2). Maskers with masks of these two types may be simply called *nyau*, although they could be further divided into more than 50 characters, each of which has its own name, songs, ways of dance, mask and costume.

The third type of *nyau* mask is a large zoomorphic structure which covers the whole body of the dancer (Plate 3). Because many of these structures dance by turning round and round, they are collectively called *nyau yolembe*, “nyau which draw (circles)”. There are a large variety of *nyau yolembe*, and the greater part of them portray wild animals.

Needless to say, it is men who disguise themselves as *nyau* by wearing these types of masks. However, the fact that men disguise themselves as *nyau* is concealed from women and children, who are not members of the association. Women and children are taught that *nyau* are dead persons (*muntu wakufa*) who have been revived, and that *nyau yolembe* are real wild animals (*nyama ya m'chire*). Even when they ask men what the *nyau* is, men just give a simple answer, “*nyau ni nyama* (the *nyau* is an animal)”. They don't say the *nyau* is a dead person, because they consider *nyau yolembe* to be more important than the other *nyau*. In any case, the existence of masks is kept secret.

For almost one year after settling in the Chewa village, I was treated in the same manner as women and children. The men did not tell me anything that had to do with masks. The secret was revealed to me only after I was initiated into the association and became a member of it on 25 May, 1985.

The heart of the secret adamantly kept by the members of the *nyau* is the fact that the *nyau* is a man in disguise. They have devised various means of keeping this secret.

First, *nyau* use falsettos and nasalized voices.

Second, *nyau* masks and *nyau yolembe* are made in the bush distant from the village.

Third, the materials and tools used for making masks including *nyau yolembe* are called by special names different from their usual Chewa names. By using such a secret vocabulary, men try to conceal the content of their conversation from women and children.

Fourth, there are many questions and answers in the form of riddles shared by the members of the *nyau*. These riddles are used to determine whether a newcomer is really a member of the association or not.

A member of the *nyau* is not supposed to reveal anything he sees or hears to anyone outside the association while he is engaged in the *nyau* activities, including the special vocabulary and the riddles. If he should reveal the secret, it is said that he would be cursed by a *nyau* instructor (*namkungwi*) and bleed from the nose to death.⁴⁾ Even if there was a case of homicide within the association, it would not be brought before either the traditional chief's court or the government court. This is why the *nyau* is appropriately referred to as a secret or semi-secret association.

Nevertheless, in reality, there are always men who try to seduce women by offering to reveal the secret. Moreover, it is quite common for a husband to disclose the secret to his wife. Thus, in practice, women do at least know the fact that the *nyau* is a man in disguise. But, if this disclosure of the secret between a man and a woman is discovered by any third party, the party to the affair is punished, regardless of their gender, not perhaps by death but severely enough, as they are required to surrender substantial numbers of cattle. In addition, the woman concerned is forced to join the *nyau*. For this reason, women pretend to the last that they do not know what the *nyau* actually is. It may safely be said that Chewa society as a whole connives in constructing a pretence concerning the reality of *nyau*.

However, in saying this, I do not mean to imply that the *nyau* dance is a mere performance. *Nyau* dancers believe that they are possessed by the spirits of the dead or of the animals portrayed by the masks which they wear during their performances. They say "we feel hot and light when we dance". This indicates that their bodies have born some attributes of the spirits which are incorporeal and are thought to be hotter than human beings. This type of spirit possession differs from that which causes trance, for it is said that the dancer in this condition is still able to recognize every movement of the audience. This, however, does not mean that it does not involve a genuine form of spirit possession. At any rate, because of

4) As I have obtained permission to reveal part of the secrets for educational purposes, I believe that the *nyau* instructor at kaliza village will not curse me.

such beliefs, appealing to *nyau* is considered equivalent to appealing to the spirits of the dead embodied in *nyau*. This is the reason why *nyau* perform their masquerades at funerary rituals.

In addition to the funerary ritual, the *nyau* used to have a role in the girls' initiation ceremony called *cinamwali*. Today *nyau* are rarely invited to such a ceremony, whereas they still play a leading role at the funerary ritual. The following section discusses in detail activities of the *nyau* at the funerary ritual.

2) Process of the Funerary ritual

The funerary ritual of the Chewa starts with the burial rite (*utaya*), which is followed after one or two months by the rite of "washing hands" (*cisamba manja*) and completed by the rite called *bona* held after the harvest of maize in the subsequent year.

Of the three rites, the burial rite today is largely Christianized. The Bible is read and prayers offered, even at the burial of a non-Christian. Although it is said that *nyau* used to carry the corpse on a stretcher from the village to the graveyard and bury it in the grave, at present, *nyau* have no role to play in the burial, except that the task of burying the corpse is still granted only to members of the *nyau* association who in this context do not disguise themselves as *nyau*.

The *cisamba manja*, the rite of "washing hands", is said to be a ritual for purifying those who were directly involved in the burial. This rite is basically performed in the same format as the *bona* rite. The major difference between *cisamba manja* and *bona* is that *nyau yolemba* built in the forms of animals are thought to be indispensable only to the latter. To provide the fullest description, the procedures of the *bona* alone, and not the *cisamba manja*, are presented here.

The rite of *bona* marks the end of mourning. This rite is performed along with beer brewing. It takes place after the harvest of maize, because large quantities of maize are needed for brewing beer. Of the period of one month required for the beer brewing, the first two weeks are used in soaking the corn of maize in water and having it germinated. The germinated corn called *cimera* is used as the fermenting agent. When the *cimera* is finally ready, people start brewing beer. It takes about a week for beer to be brewed. This single week constitutes the central part of the *bona* rite. Each day of the week is identified in reference to the process of brewing.

Day 1	<i>ulusula</i>	"putting corn flour into water" (for preparation)
Day 2	<i>ugadutsa</i>	adding <i>cimera</i> to the water and "putting it on the fire"
Day 3	<i>utandala</i>	"rest"
Day 4	<i>cimera</i>	adding " <i>cimera</i> " again
Day 5	<i>cale</i>	the name for beer a day short of maturing
Day 6	<i>wapsa</i>	The beer "has matured"
Day 7	<i>mirala</i>	the name for over-fermented beer
Day 8	<i>ogowogo</i>	an onomatopoeic way of expressing the "rotten" state of beer

Except for Day 3, *utandala*, when there are no special tasks to be undertaken, *nyau* come to the village every day during the week and perform masquerades.

It is difficult to describe the *bona* in general, because the details of the ritual, including the procedures and the types of *nyau* which appear, differ from one *bona* to another. The present description centres on a *bona* rite which took place at Lavu village in Chief Mlolo's area for 13 days between September 26 and October 8, 1985. The particular ritual was performed for a person named Welani who served as an advisor (*induna*) to the paramount chief, Gawa Undi. It was said that he was killed by means of sorcery enacted by one of his relatives in the previous year. The ritual was organized by his younger brother. Because of his social and economic status, the ritual was significantly larger in scale than other *bona*. This *bona* ritual was thus to an extent atypical. Most of the range of elements of the *bona*, however, were included in the ritual. To that extent, the ritual serves as a good basis for understanding the *bona* rite in general.

(1) PREPARATION (SEPT. 26–SEPT. 30)

i) The Beginning of the Ritual and the Intiation Ceremony to the *Nyau* (Sept. 26)

On the night of September 26, several groups of *nyau* danced on open ground called *tambwe* on the outskirts of the village under the light of a bonfire. In front of those who gathered there, a *nyau* leader (*lumbwe*) declared the commencement of the ritual, saying:

“Tomorrow, women will start pounding corn in the village (*mudzi*), and men will open a *dambwe* in the bush (*thengo*)” (Plate 4).

Dambwe is the name for the secret place where men make *nyau yolemba*.



Plate 4 Masquerade held at night

Women are habitually told that men fish up *nyau* at the *dambwe*. Starting on the day after the declaration, men and women engage in different tasks: men proceed with making *nyau yolembe*, and women continue brewing beer in the village.

On the same night, the initiation ceremony for the boys to be newly admitted to the *nyau* began in the bush. In principle, the initiation is performed along with a funerary rite, especially the *bona*.

The boys who are to become members of the *nyau* are called *namwali*. While *nyau* were dancing on open ground, the *namwali* led by an instructor called *namkungwi* left the village and headed for the dark depths of the bush. They were taken to the place called *liunde* where men disguised themselves as *nyau*.

As the group approached the *liunde*, the instructor shouted to the distant darkness:

“*Tilubwera uko ni maliro uyo*”

“We are bringing the dead”.

“The dead” signifies the *namwali*. Upon hearing the instructor, the members of the *nyau*, some of whom were masked and the others not, shouted back in falsettos:

“*maliro awa, maliro awa, ayi, ayi, ayi, wo, wo, wo*”

“The dead, the dead, ayi, ayi, ayi, wo, wo, wo”

No sooner had they shouted back these words than they attacked the group of



Plate 5 A *nyau* is admonishing the *namwali* (novices)

namwali and relentlessly beat the *namwali* with whips made of torn branches. What followed next was an exchange of whipping between the *nyau* and the instructor trying to protect the *namwali*. After the whipping, the *namwali* were gathered in one place. The *nyau* members stood in front of the *namwali* in turn and admonished each by recounting their past wrong doings and whipping them severely. At this point, the fact that *nyau* are neither the dead nor animals, but are actually men of the village in disguise, was disclosed to the *namwali* (Plate 5).

"Today, you have seen us at the place of *nyau*. From now on, stop being childish. Never again step inside the bedroom of your mother and father. Never touch cooking pots used by women. Stop your childish behaviours. You sneaked into your uncle's field and stole some sweet potatoes, didn't you? Never do that again. Otherwise, you will die and relieve your bowels".

The whipping repeated many times during the initiation ceremony is said to be intended to chase away the soul (*ciwanda*) of a child and attract the soul of an adult. For the same purpose, *namwali* are also urged to bathe every morning in the river. Moreover, they are compelled to pay absolute obedience to elder members and are required to keep their head down (*u-jolika*) all the time except when they are engaged in some task. This posture is the same as that of the mourners at the funerary ritual.

On the same night, the instructor appointed a tutor (*phungu*) for the *namwali*. From that time on, the *namwali* had to lodge together with the tutor, and in the daytime they were to stay in the bush with the men preparing for the funeral. In this way they learned the secret *nyau* vocabulary and riddles as well as the way to make masks including *nyau yolembe*. It is said that the *namwali* should never be seen by women or children while they are going through the initiation.

The first riddle taught in the initiation was:

"*nyau ni ciani?*" "*nyau ni muntu*"

"what is the *nyau*?" "The *nyau* is a human".

For the boys who had been taught until then that the *nyau* is an animal ("*nyau ni nyama*"), and had been subjected to severe punishment should they use any other word but *nyama* to describe the *nyau*, the new teaching implies a complete reversal of their view of the world. Many of the other riddles shared within the association have to do with the making of *nyau* masks including *nyau yolembe*.⁵⁾

It is customary for every *nyau* member to make his own feathered or wooden mask and to continue to wear it on appropriate ritual occasions as long as it lasts. While someone might commission a mask from a man with a well-known talent for carving, there are no professional carvers as such. *Nyau yolembe*, on the other hand, are jointly made by members of the *nyau* every time there is a *bona*, and are burnt when the ritual is over. The method of making *nyau yolembe* is as follows. First, an outline of the bottom part is drawn on the ground, and long twigs are

5) To avoid any disclosure of the secrets of the *nyau* not directly required for the purpose of exposition, the other secret riddles and confidential vocabulary are not presented here.

planted along the outline at equal intervals. By tying crosspieces to the twigs, a sort of basket is made to serve as a frame. The frame is then covered with grass which is tied to it by passing strings made of bark crosswise and lengthwise. So far, the method is an application of techniques used by men in roofing. Finally, husks of maize are placed between the pieces of strings to cover the entire structure. It takes at least three days to make a single *nyau yolembe*, most of which is spent on tucking husks between the strings.

ii) Brewing Beer and *Nyau*

While the men were involved in making *nyau yolembe* and educating the novices in the bush, the women were working on beer brewing in the village. Every time the brewing process reaches a new stage, a small number of *nyau* called *kansinja* appear in the village and help the women (Plate 6).

Kasinja wears a mask which is a loose net covered with the feathers of guinea fowls (*nkhangwa*) and chickens (*nkhuku*), and puts on a short skirt made of torn bark around his waist. This *nyau* is said to embody "the spirit of the deceased" (*ciwanda*). The Chewa believe that the spirit of the deceased stays on the earth even after the burial of the corpse and roams in and around the village. The use of the feathers particularly of guinea fowls and chickens, both of which are ground birds, corresponds to the elusive but earthbound nature of the spirit of the deceased.



Plate 6 *Kasinja* is pounding maize with an old lady

When *kasinja* came to the village, the women who had already gathered began singing:

(Song 1) *Mwanipela amai*
 kuti muziti ni cauta
 wantu ali pano

You have killed my mother
 but you dare say that it was caused by God
 It is these people here who killed my mother

This song says that the mother's death was caused by sorcery. Irrespective of its precise content, any song can be sung as long as it has something to do with a dead person.

Having helped the women for a while, a *kasinja* found a woman taking a rest and started ridiculing her:

Kasinja: "Why are you so long-faced?"
 Woman: "I am not feeling too well".
Kasinja: "Is there something wrong with your pussy?"
 People: (burst into laughter)
Kasinja: "You have probably hurt it by making love too much with your husband".
 Woman: "No I have a stomach ache. Hey what about your balls?"

Excited women started singing:

(Song 2) Women: *Anayambana macende ni ambolo*
 pokwatana ee
Kasinja: *Anayambana nyini ni ambolo*
 pokwatana ee
 Women: *Taona mbolo*
 unaduka
Kasinja: *Taona nyini*
 inagona

Women: A dick and balls had a fight when making love
Kasinja: A pussy and a dick had a fight when making love
 Women: Have you seen the dick?
 That's why the tip of it is broken off and round
Kasinja: Have you seen the pussy?
 That's why it is stretched and flattened

Whenever *kasinja* came to the village, such exchanges continued for hours.



Plate 7 *Kangwingwi*

For the Chewa, referring to the genitals of another person is the greatest insult. In every day life, the mere use of such words would stir up public discussion. However, such an insult is considered acceptable between relatives in a joking relationship, especially that between cross cousins (*cisuweni*). The cross cousins of opposite sexes are regarded as the most suitable mates for marriage. Therefore, the insulting between *kasinja* and women provokes the image that the living represented by the women, and the spirit of the deceased embodied by *kasinja*, have entered into a very close relationship similar to that of joking partners. This is then supposed to console the spirit of the deceased.

During the period of brewing, *nyau* named *kangwingwi* also appeared in the village occasionally. Whenever they came to the village, they chased away women and children, stole livestock for the men staying in the bush, and collected husks of maize for making *nyau yolembe* (Plate 7). At times, a *kangwingwi* even brought with him a group of *nyau* called *wembe* whose bodies and faces were covered with bark cloth (*nkhwende*). They all devoted themselves to raiding the village. While the appearance of *kangwingwi*, which also embodies the spirit of the deceased, is exactly the same as that of *kasinja*, the former is characterized by his high voice and fierce behaviour. The fierceness of *kangwingwi* is also evident in his other functions. As *nyau yolembe* head for the village, a *kangwingwi* is in charge of leading them and chasing away women and children. In addition, after the initiation ceremony, it is his duty to accompany and whip *namwali* (novices) on their way back to their parents.

Every time *nyau* came to the village to help women brew beer, *nyau* masquerades performed on the night of the same day on open ground on the outskirts of the village. However, there seemed to be no precise rule as to the

sequence in which *nyau* should appear.

iii) Sending Back the *Namwali* (Sept. 30)

In the five or so days since the beginning of the initiation process, the *namwali* (novices) had already acquired a fair amount of knowledge of *nyau*, including the secret vocabulary and the riddles. At that point, it was decided to send the *namwali* back to their parents. In the nature of things, the sending back of the *namwali* is supposed to take place at the end of the funerary ritual. It was explained that the decision to send them back on that particular day was made as a matter of convenience, especially in view of the fatigue the participants would experience if the ritual were pursued to the end. For this reason, the administration of medicine which would normally precede the sending back of the *namwali* was only partly performed, the remainder of the ritual being postponed until a later date.

The *namwali* were taken to their parents accompanied by the instructor (*namkungwi*) and a *nyau* named *kangwingwi*. After visiting the houses of their relatives, they were finally taken to their parents. At each *namwali*'s home, the parents say to their child in turn:

"Today, you have grown up. From now on, you should not step into the bedroom of your parents. You should build your own house and live there on your own. Also, you should never touch cooking pots. That is the business of women. Watch your manners (*ulemu*). You have grown up. From now on, you take part in the funerary rituals as a full-grown man".

The last line, "You take part in the funerary rituals as a full-grown man" means that the boy has been officially accepted as a member of the *nyau* whose activities are mostly performed at the funerary rituals. Many taboos previously imposed on the *namwali* were lifted. The initiation, however, did not end here. The education of the *namwali* in the bush would continue. From the night of that day on, the *namwali* had to sleep in a house (*mphala*) only for bachelors and commute from the house to the *dambwe* in the bush everyday.

(2) DAY 1: ULUSULA (OCT. 1)

Ulsula is a term for the act of adding corn flour into boiling water to make corn gruel (*phala*). When the gruel cools down, *cimera* (flour of germinated corn) is added to it. This constitutes the initial preparation. The job was again assisted by *kasinja*.

On the night of Day 1, two newly completed *nyau yolembe*, one of a hyena and the other of a tortoise, appeared for the first time at the place where masquerade is performed.

The hyena's (*fisi*) repeated movement of stretching its body up and forward.

(Song 3) *Fisi mwamuona?*
 Waona nyama ya nkhumba

Hyena, have you seen it?
He saw the meat of a pig

The tortoise's (*fulu*) kept shaking its body from side to side.

(Song 4) *Fulu nunda mayo*
 Bwera uzaone

Mother, it's a tortoise with a big shell
Come and see it

In addition to the *nyau yolemba*, *nyau* named *nyata* and *cayaka moto* also appeared.

The *nyata* dancer covered his head and cheeks with bark cloth and wore a loincloth. Mud was smeared (*u-nyata*) on his whole body. It is said that *nyata* portrays either a dead person or a sorcerer who has eaten the flesh of a dead person. The dancer danced around in the open ground hitting two pieces of wood in his hands against each other. This masquerade is one of those which often provoke roars of laughter among those who watched the masquerades.

(Song 5) *Nyata ee nyata*
 Waiona nyata

Nyata, hey *nyata*
Have you seen *nyata*?

Cayaka moto means "that which is on fire". The dancer attached strings to many parts of his body, lit them, and ran around in the dark. This *nyau* is said to portray a sorcerer who has concealed himself in flames.

(Song 6) *Cinkhuni ca m'tsala*
 Cayaka moto

Large firewood in the old field
That which is on fire

(3) DAY 2: UGADUTSA (OCT. 2)

The gruel prepared the previous day was "put on the fire" (*u-gadutsa*). This was performed only by the women with no help from the *nyau*.

A *nyau yolemba* called *nswala* which was in the form of an impala appeared at night and danced in front of the place of brewing. Until then, masquerades had not been performed exactly in the village itself, but on open ground (*tambwe*) on the outskirts of the village. *Nyau* had not entered the village except to assist the

women in brewing beer. This was, therefore, the first time that *nyau*, especially *nyau yolembe*, came to the village.

Nswala dances the typical dance of the *nyau yolembe* (*nyau* which draw circles). It tirelessly repeats the rotating movement.

(Song 7) *Mowa wa nswala, mowa wa nswala*
 Tikayendele nswala
 Tikayendele

Beer for the impala, Beer for the impala
 Let's go and have a look, impala
 Lets' go and have a look

It is said that *nswala* has been sent to the village by the dead with a mission to examine the quality of beer. Therefore, when *nswala* danced in front of the place of brewing, the women served it with beer. The beer was shared among the dancers and later with the audience.

(4) DAY 3: *UTANDALA* (OCT. 3)

Utandala means to rest. Although the men continued to make *nyau yolembe*, no particular work associated with the brewing of beer was done by the women on this day.

(5) DAY 4: *CIMERA* (OCT. 4)

The job of adding flour of germinated corn (*cimera*) to the newly made sweet beer (*tobwa*) was performed by *kasinja* and the women. The beer made in this way is also called *cimera*.

At night, *nswala* appeared again, along with other *nyau*, at the place where masquerade was performed. Having danced in front of the place of brewing, *nswala* danced for a while in front of the house of the deceased as well.

(6) DAY 5: *CALE* (OCT. 5)

i) Administering Medicine to the *Namwali*

On this day, at the *dambwe*, *nswala* which danced in front of the house of the deceased the previous night was burnt and its ashes were given to the *namwali* as a medicine.

As might be understood from the above description of the initiation ceremony held along with the funerary ritual, the *namwali* were treated like the dead. This particular state of the *namwali* is referred to by the Chewa as being "cold" (*u-zizira*). The Chewa, who also describe the corpse of the dead as being "cold", consider the spirit that has come out of the corpse as being the "hottest" entity on the earth. There are many other hot-and-cold dichotomies in Chewa thought, and what is more noteworthy, it is believed that when the "hot" and the "cold" are in

contact, the "cold" suffer from an illness called *mdulo*. *Mdulo* is a disease which exhibits symptoms similar to those of tuberculosis.

This fact poses a critical problem to the members of the *nyau* who embody the spirits of the deceased in dancing and are directly involved in burials, for as long as the living are "colder" than the spirits of the deceased, they are always exposed to the danger of catching the *mdulo* illness. Therefore, they have to make themselves as "hot" as the spirits in advance. It was precisely for this purpose that the ashes of *nswala* were administered to the *namwali*, the newly admitted members of the *nyau*. Not only *nswala*, but any other *nyau yolembe* that has danced in front of the house of the deceased is believed to become as "hot" as the spirit of the deceased. Until they take the ashes of such *nyau yolembe* and become as "hot" as the spirit of the deceased, *namwali* are not capable of handling the deceased. The initiation into the *nyau* is always held along with the funerary ritual, as the funeral is the only occasion for boys to obtain the quality of "hotness" matching that of the deceased.⁶⁾

It must be added here that *namwali* are supposed to take the ashes before being sent back to their parents. In the present case, because the *namwali* had been sent back home in advance, they had to wait until the *nyau yolembe* danced in front of the house of the deceased and was burnt before they received its ashes.

ii) The All-Night Masquerades

On the night of *cale*, which is the second last day of brewing, a special place is set inside the village for an all-night masquerading. On that night, various types of *nyau* available in the region concerned appear and dance one after another.

At this point I may break off in order to say something in general about the *nyau* dance. Five drums (*ng'oma*) are used for the *nyau* dance. The drums are played by members of the *nyau*, who do not wear masks. *Nyau* appear in turns in groups of one to six, and identify songs of their choice in falsettos before starting their dance. Many women surrounding the open ground then begin to sing the songs. Different types of *nyau* perform different types of dance, though each is a combination of several basic movements, such as rotation (*uzungulira*), skating (*uyenda*), stamping (*uponda*), kicking to right and left (*upalasula*), and backwards and forwards movement of the waist (*utopola*). Specific combinations of these movements characterize the dances of respective *nyau*.

The *nyau* and *nyau yolembe* which appeared that night are shown on Table 1. The *nyau* which appeared most frequently were *kasinja* and *kangwingwi* both wearing feathered masks. In addition, there were also *nyau* wearing wooden masks, like *kampini* and *makanja*.

6) In recent years, there has been an increasing number of cases where masquerades are performed independent of the funerary ritual, with some initiation ceremonies conducted along with them. However, the boys who are initiated into the *nyau* through ceremonies unconnected with the funerary ritual are not considered fully qualified members of the association until they take the ashes of the *nyau yolembe* which has danced in front of the house of the deceased in the *bona*.

Table 1. Nyau which appeared on the Night of Cale

1 <i>nyolonyo</i>	18 <i>fulu</i>	35 <i>kangwingwi</i>
2 <i>kasinja</i>	19 <i>kasinja</i>	36 <i>kasinja</i>
3 <i>galimoto, ng'ombe</i>	20 <i>makanja</i>	37 <i>nswala</i>
4 <i>kasinja</i>	21 <i>ng'ombe</i>	38 <i>kampini</i>
5 <i>kasinja</i>	22 <i>galimoto</i>	39 <i>kasinja</i>
6 <i>kasinja</i>	23 <i>pedegu</i>	40 <i>katumbiza</i>
7 <i>kasinja</i>	24 <i>mkango</i>	41 <i>kasinja</i>
8 <i>cayaka moto</i>	25 <i>nswala</i>	42 <i>kasinja</i>
9 <i>kasinja</i>	26 <i>kampini</i>	43 <i>kasinja</i>
10 <i>kasinja</i>	27 <i>nyamgomba</i>	44 <i>kangwingwi</i>
11 <i>kasinja</i>	28 <i>kasinja</i>	45 <i>kasinja</i>
12 <i>mtsita mphepo</i>	29 <i>kasinja</i>	46 <i>kasinja</i>
13 <i>kasinja</i>	30 <i>mwalika</i>	47 <i>kangwingwi</i>
14 <i>kasinja</i>	31 <i>kasinja</i>	48 <i>kasinja</i>
15 <i>kangwingwi</i>	32 <i>kakaka</i>	49 <i>nswala</i>
16 <i>kasinja</i>	33 <i>kangwingwi</i>	
17 <i>kangwingwi</i>	34 <i>kasinja</i>	

nyau yolembe are printed in bold type.

Kampini is said to portray an old man who died long ago and has appeared in front of the living looking the same as he did when he was alive. *Kampini* wore a wooden face mask on his head, had a piece of pelt tied around his waist, and held an axe (*kampini*) in his hand. His appearance was designed to resemble that of a typical Chewa male elder. This is the song to which he danced:

(Song 8) *Amdala kodi mwagona?*
Mwagona tulo?
Ukani kwaca
Tambala walira
Amdala lire lire

Elder, have you fallen asleep?
 Have you fallen asleep?
 Wake up! It's morning
 The cock has already crowed
 Elder, cry, cry

The *nyau* called *makanja* dances on stilts (Plate 8). The dancer continues to jump and stamp with his feet tied to the stilts 1 or 1.5 meters high. Much training is required to dance in this manner. While the *makanja* is supposed to wear a wooden face mask, there are many *makanja* wearing feathered masks which are used by *kasinja*. Many of the Chewa who report having seen ghosts of the dead often say, "the ghost was so tall that I had to raise my eyes to see it". Some,

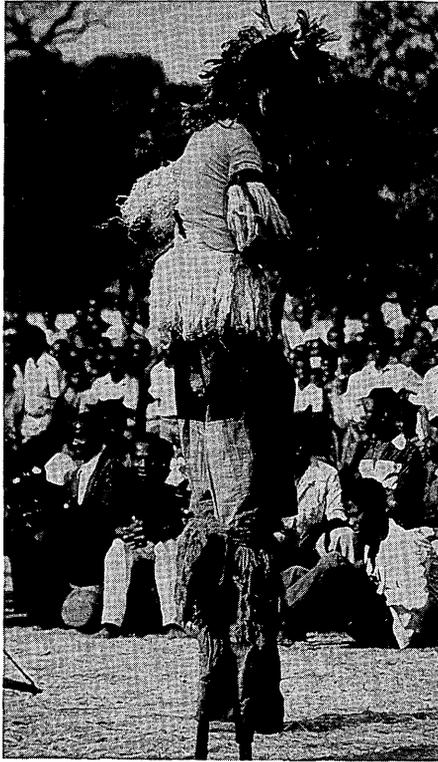


Plate 8 *Makanja*

therefore, consider that the *makanja* portrays the height of the ghost. Others, on the contrary, say that the *makanja* portrays a kind of waterfowl with long legs, because he sometimes dances to a song in which a water fowl is mentioned. The *makanja* that appeared that night, however, danced to the following song which had nothing to do with the dead or the waterfowl.

(Song 9) *ABetibe ucenjera, aBetibe*
 ABetibe alanda amuna wena

Mr. Betibe is cunning, Mr. Betibe
 Mr. Betibe steals (their wives) from other men

Along with these *nyau*, there also appeared various kinds of *nyau yolembe*. The men had spent many days in the bush to construct *nyau yolembe* for that particular night. To praise the effort the men made to construct them, every time a *nyau yolembe* appeared on the scene, the *nyau* leader (*lumbwe*) made an announcement such as this:

"*Macete, macete!*

iyo, iyo, iyo, iyo, nyama iyo!
Yacokera m'mudzi wa Lavu.
Ndiye mtima wa Joseph, mwana wa aDienji”.

“Be quiet, be quiet!
 This, this, this, this, this animal.
 This one has come from Lavu village.
 It is the heart of Joseph, a son of Mrs. Dyenji”.

Then, the women responded:

“aaaa, aJoseph.
Alemera, pakamba,
aJoseph, aJoseph, eeee”

“aaaa Mr. Joseph,
 That’s great, in his house.
 Mr. Joseph, Mr. Joseph eeee”.

The leader thus announced the name of the central person involved in the making of the *nyau yolembe*. Although to the members of the *nyau*, the line, “It is the heart of Joseph” meant “it is Joseph who made the *nyau yolembe*”, the women were supposed to interpret the same sentence as “it is Mr. Joseph who has caught hold of the animal”. That’s why they answered, “That’s great (to keep such a big animal) in his house”.

The *nyau yolembe* which appeared that night included: the lion (*mkango*), the hornbill (*nyamgomba*), the tortoise (*fulu*), the cow (*ng’ombe*), the impala (*nswala*), and the motor car (*galimoto*) as well as *mtsita mphepo*. Because *nyau yolembe*

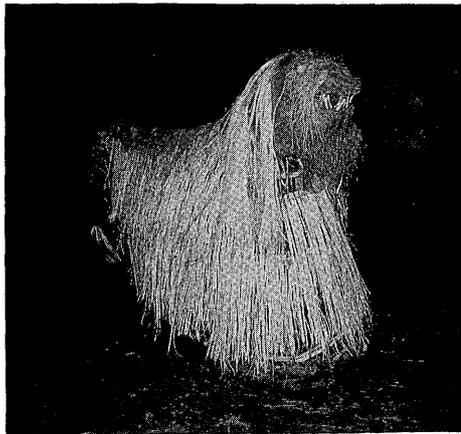


Plate 9 *Mkango* (lion)

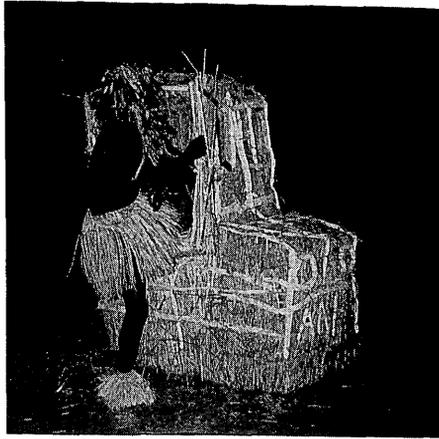


Plate 10 *Galimoto* (motor car)

were incapable of singing songs themselves, the women sang appropriate songs of their choice for them. The following song was the one sung when the lion (*mkango*) appeared. The lion repeated its up-and-down movements to this song (Plate 9):

(Song 10) *Cilombo cinidya*
 Calowa m'khola mwa abambo

The fierce animal is going to eat me
 It has entered the cattle kraal of my father

The motor car (*galimoto*) appeared on the assumption that the deceased who used to drive a car when he was alive would again come back from the grave to the village by the car. *Kasinja* which embodied the spirit of the deceased was inside the car and came out occasionally to perform his dance (Plate 10). It is reported that in some other areas, this type of *nyau yolembe* appears together with a *nyau* portraying a European [MAKUMBI 1963: 60; FAULKNER 1988: 31].

(Song 11) *Galimoto lindire*
 Ukanitule patali

Motor car, please wait
 Take me far away

Another *nyau yolembe* worth noticing is *mitsita mphepo*. *Mtsita mphepo* means "wind shelter". The name is given to this *nyau yolembe* because it is large enough to shield those standing by it from the wind. It is indeed a huge *nyau yolembe*, extending 10 meters long and accomodating some 25 men inside. What it

actually portrays remains uncertain. Some said it was a millipede (*cigololo*) and others said a whale (*wacekawaceka*). In either case, though its body was abnormally long, its head and tail were shaped in the same form as those of impalas (*nswala*). Judging from this, *mtsita mphepo* is probably imagined as a wild animal living in the bush.

A *nyau yolembe* which is considered the most important for the *bona* rite but did not appear during the particular ritual I am describing was the one named *kasiya maliro*, meaning "that which abandon the deceased". This *nyau yolembe* which is built in the form of an eland is hard to distinguish from *nswala* in appearance. Normally, *kasiya maliro* is taken into the house of the deceased and left there for a night. As the all-night masquerades come close to the end at dawn, *kasiya maliro* comes out of the house, dances in front of the people, and returns to the bush. After returning to the bush, *kasiya maliro* is immediately burnt. The house of the deceased may be also destroyed soon after.

As I mentioned earlier, the Chewa conceive that "the spirit of the deceased" (*ciwanda*) stays on the earth even after the burial and roams around the village. For this reason, many people say that they have actually seen the ghosts, and rumours get about that some have seen the deceased transformed into an animal. In contrast with this, it is believed that "the ancestral spirits" (*mzimu*) invisible like wind, are freely moving around the world. *Kasiya maliro* is kept in the house of the deceased in order to capture the spirit of the deceased staying on the earth. When *kasiya maliro* is finally burnt in the bush and its smoke disappears into the wind, it is considered that the spirit of the deceased has also disappeared into the wind and become an ancestral spirit. As for the ritual I am describing, the bereaved expressed their wish to keep the house. Accordingly, no *kasiya maliro* was taken into the house, and the house remained intact. Instead, *nswala* danced



Plate 11 *Nswala*

over and over again in front of the house to the following song. It was believed that the dance would enable *nswala* to absorb the spirit of the deceased (Plate 11).

(Song 12) *Iwe edee*
 Wakwenyerera
 Suuja umakana kale

You!
 You have finally come close,
 though you always said you didn't want to

The spirit of the deceased was thought to have become an ancestral spirit when *nswala* was burnt the next morning at dawn.

(7) DAY 6: WAPSA (OCT. 6)

This was the day when the beer became mature. The people, who had danced and sang all night, drank the beer all day. Masquerading was resumed shortly after noon. Throughout the *bona*, this was the only occasion on which organized masquerades were performed during the day. It was supposed to be an opportunity for the dead to return to this world to welcome their newly joined member, that is the deceased for whom the *bona* was held. *Nyau* called *mbiya zoodooka* appeared in association with this particular occasion (Plate 12).



Plate 12 *Mbiya zoodooka*

Mbiya zodooka means "a broken pot". It portrays a dead person who has come out of the grave holding a fragment of a pot which was buried with him. Red earth peculiar to the graveyard was smeared on the entire body of the dancer. The dancer supported the broken piece of pottery on his head with his right hand. While maintaining that posture, he quickly repeated a series of movements which involved taking one short step back for every one step forward. The movement itself was fairly simple.

(Song 13) *Singa telo kwanu ku manda*
 Mbiya zodooka

It is absurd to say that your house is a grave
 A broken pot

The remaining beer was distributed to the men of the *nyau* and the women, and the daytime masquerading was brought to an end.

(8) DAY 7: *MIRALA* (OCT. 7)

Although "the discarding of ashes" (*kaole dothi*) had been scheduled for the seventh day, it was postponed until the following day because both the men of the *nyau* and the women were extremely fatigued.

(9) DAY 8: *OGOWOGO* (OCT. 8)

Kaole dothi, "the discarding of ashes" was performed on the last day of the ritual. The ashes produced by brewing were discarded by *kasinja* at a dump (*dzaala*) outside the village. The term *dothi* means not only "ashes" or "soil" but also "impurity". Therefore, "the discarding of ashes" also signifies the discarding of all the impurity associated with the deceased. The women continued to sing this song as they watched *kasinja* discard the ashes in the bush:

(Song 14) *Tikaole dothi*
 m'nyumba mwa nyamkwana
 Tikaole dothi ee

Let's discard ashes
 from the house of the headman
 Let's discard ashes

Having completed the job, *kasinja* led the singing women and visited each of the relatives of the deceased:

(Song 15) *Maliro ni kulirana*
 Kulira naye

Gule wa maliro

The funeral is an occasion for us to cry together
 Let's cry together
 The Dance of the funeral

The female relatives wailed when *kasinja* arrived. *Kasinja* danced in front of them for a while and received a small amount of money. This visiting of the relatives by *kasinja* is called *utambitsa*. It was considered that the spirit of the deceased was actually visiting the relatives to say good-bye. After visiting all the relatives, *kasinja* vanished into the bush. The women were not told that the *nyau yolembe* with the spirit of the deceased had been burnt. For the women, the moment *kasinja* embodying the spirit of the deceased disappeared signifies the departure of the deceased from the earth.

3) Logic of the Funerary Ritual

In the previous section, I have described the process of the funeral ritual. The explanation of the ritual behaviour mentioned in the text is that given by the Chewa themselves. The present section will study, again on the basis of their own explanation, the logic which underlies such ritual behaviour.

(1) INTERPRETATION OF MASKED CHARACTERS

As we have seen, various types of *nyau* appear in the funerary ritual and perform their dances. To what extent then do the Chewa agree about what is being portrayed by each of those *nyau*? In fact, there is not always a unanimous agreement even among the members of the *nyau* as to what each *nyau* portrays. This, however, is not true of *nyau yolembe*.

In the case of *nyau yolembe*, except for the huge *mtsita mphepo*, all of the members are unanimous in their view of what each portrays. Each *nyau yolembe* is built in the form of a specific animal with some of its characteristics exaggerated, and are in fact called by the name of that animal. There is little room for disagreement.

By contrast, while the members unanimously agree that *kasinja* and *kangwingwi* embody the spirit of the deceased, when asked about the other *nyau*, they often answer, "Although I know they portray the dead of old, I don't know why they look as they do". Moreover, as was exemplified by *nyata*, which some claimed to be a portrayal of a dead person, and others, of a sorcerer, there are often disagreements as to what a certain *nyau* portrays. It must be noted, however, that even though there are disagreements, the choice is still confined to a prescribed set of alternatives, namely, the deceased, the dead of the more distant past, wild animals, sorcerers, or Europeans. Thus the interpretations of masked characters provided by the *nyau* members are not completely arbitrary. In sum, many *nyau* are widely understood to portray either the deceased, a dead person of old, a wild

animal, a sorcerer, or a European; but as for the other *nyau*, disagreement occurs about which entity of the alternatives they portray.

In the *nyau* association, there is no official teaching of what each *nyau* portrays. The members of the *nyau* can only infer this from the name of the *nyau*, the songs sung when the *nyau* dances, and from the general notion, “*nyau* are dead persons who have been revived; *nyau yolembe* are wild animals”, which they were already told before becoming a member. The form of the mask a *nyau* wears is not always helpful in identifying the character, because, though some *nyau* are said to have wooden masks of specific forms, dancers are quite free to replace them with feathered masks.

The varied yet limited interpretations of the *nyau* characters can be explained by the fact that the inferences made separately by each individual are in fact based on the common set of data: the names, the associated songs, and the general notion of *nyau*. What should be noted here is that the information available to men in interpreting *nyau* characters is also common knowledge to women and children. It can be said that the knowledge about the *nyau* characters is in effect widely shared by both men and women in Chewa society.

(2) INTERPRETATION OF THE FUNERARY RITUAL

The central part of the funerary ritual is the all-night masquerades in which a number of *nyau yolembe* appear.

The reason *nyau yolembe* in the form of wild animals appear on the occasion was explained by an elder, who is also a herbalist, as follows:

“God (*mulenga*) originally created humans and animals. Humans and animals therefore lived happily together in the very old days. Even when humans got hungry, they only had to look up in the sky and say, ‘*shomo mulenga*’ (‘God have mercy’), and animals would die of their own accord and provide meat. However, because humans started feeling jealous of one another and began using sorcery, God became angry and separated animals from humans. Since then, it has become necessary for humans to chase and hunt animals when they get hungry. Animals, on the other hand, started running away from humans, and if they encountered humans by chance, they began hurting them or causing them illness. But even today, during the *bona* rite, that is, when the deceased return to God, animals remember the old days and come back to the village. Then, they cry for the deceased together with humans”.⁷⁾

This mythic narrative recalls the lyrics of Song 12 sung when a *nyau yolembe* appeared in the village—“You have finally come close, though you always said you

7) Collected from Mr. Sebeliano Phiri in Lavu village, 2 Oct. 1985. Similar narratives are also quoted by Marwick [1965: 22] and Schoffeleers [1972: 98].

didn't want to". It is supposed that when the spirit of the deceased which has roamed on the earth finally returns to the place "where it originally came from", that is, to God, the world itself is also restored to its original state. The Chewa have an image of an original world in which humans and animals lived in harmony. This is the very reason why *nyau yolembe* in the form of wild animals are instrumental in sending the spirit of the deceased back to God.

This idea of returning to an original state is also implied by the way space is organized for the ritual. Throughout the period of brewing beer, men remain in the bush and women brew beer in the village. The distinction between bush (*thengo*) and village (*mudzi*), or inside (*mkati*) and outside (*kunja*) the village, is rigorously observed during the period. In particular *nyau yolembe*, constructed in the bush, never enter the village until the very last stage of the ritual. Before then, if some *nyau yolembe* perform their dances, it is on open ground (*tambwe*) on the outskirts of the village.

There are, however, some *nyau* that commute between the bush and the village almost every day throughout the period of brewing. They are *kasinja* and *kangwingwi* which embody the spirit of the deceased. As already noted, it is believed among the Chewa that while the corpse of the deceased is buried in the graveyard beyond the bounds of the village, the spirit once separated from the corpse keeps on returning to the village and causes calamities for the living. This commuting by *kasinja* and *kangwingwi* between the bush and the village corresponds to this belief. *Kangwingwi* which come to the village and recklessly steal things from the villagers can be said to display aggressive qualities associated with the spirit of the deceased, whereas *kasinja* appear to show its friendly aspects.

The other *nyau*, which are said to portray the dead of old, animals, sorcerers or Europeans, dance in the open ground together with *nyau yolembe*, but they do not play major roles during the brewing period. The members of the *nyau* explicitly say that at the beginning they had few types of *nyau* and that they have created many new types since then. The functional difference found among *nyau* might be the result of a historical proliferation of *nyau* characters.

In considering the whole context of *nyau*, —besides *kasinja* and *nyau yolembe*—the women who brew beer with *nyau* and sing songs for *nyau* must also be taken into account. *Nyau* is incomplete without the women, representing as they do those who live in the village. The world of *nyau* consists of three parts: *nyau yolembe* (or wild animals) standing for those which live outside the village, *kasinja* and *kangwingwi* (or the spirit of the deceased) which enjoy dual existence both inside and outside the village, and the women standing for those who live inside the village (Figure 3).

On the night of *cale* when the site of masquerading is moved and *nyau yolembe* appear inside the village, the distinction between "inside" and "outside" is lifted. On that night, *kasiya maliro* enters the house of the deceased, takes in the spirit of the deceased, and returns to the bush the next morning. The spirit of the deceased that violates this distinction is absorbed by a wild animal and removed from the

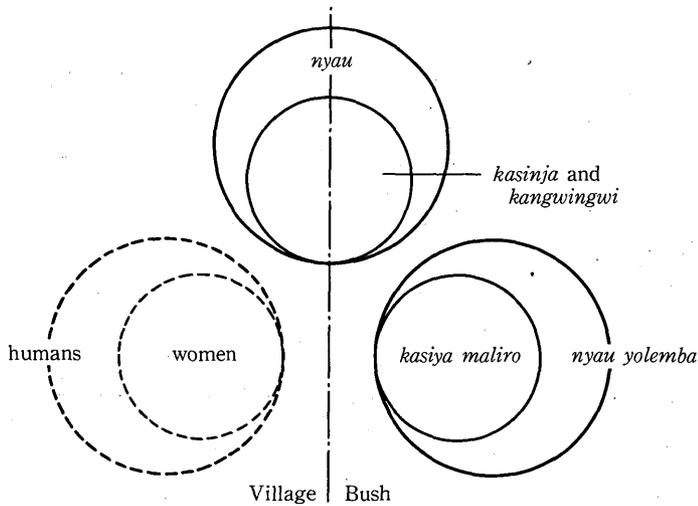


Figure 3. The world of Nyau

village. The spirit taken out of the village in this way is then separated from the earth in fire and smoke and turns into an ancestral spirit. The funerary ritual is, when considered with respect to the deceased, a means of transforming the spirit of the deceased into an ancestral spirit; and when considered with regard to the living, it is a process for redefining the border between inside and outside the village which has been infringed by the spirit of the deceased.

This then explains why there are exceptions to the general definitions of *nyau* and *nyau yolembe*. Among *nyau yolembe*, which are said to portray only wild animals, are those portraying cattle and motor cars. Again among *nyau*, which are said to portray the dead, are portrayals of sorcerers and Europeans.

The members of the *nyau* themselves say that cattle and motor cars portrayed by *nyau yolembe* are "things which originally did not exist in the Chewa villages". Indeed, cattle were not introduced to Chewa society until the end of the 19th century when the Chewa were conquered by the pastoralist Ngoni. As far as the distinction between inside and outside the village, or between village and bush, is concerned, cattle and motor cars are of outside the village, that is of the bush, and hence they belong to the same category as wild animals. The same applies to the sorcerer portrayed by a *nyau* called *cayaka moto*. Since sorcerers are regarded as those to be ousted from the village, and thus belong rather in the bush, they are classified with wild animals. This also applies to the way in which Europeans are regarded. In sum, any *nyau* that do not fit either of the prescribed definitions that "*nyau* are the dead who have been revived" or that "*nyau yolembe* are wild animals" are classed as exterior to the village.

The creation of *nyau* characters is always based on the distinction between inside and outside the village, or village and bush. This is precisely why the *nyau* is eclectic. The introduction of Europeans and motor cars into the range of *nyau*

characters, a modern occurrence, does not, for all that, signal the destruction of traditional culture by modernity; it is rather to be understood as a development quite in accord with inherent principles of *nyau* tradition.

There remains one question. It is the issue of why, of all *nyau yolembe*, the one built in the form of an eland is called *kasiya maliro*, "that abandon the deceased", and is, in accordance with the name, in charge of turning the spirit of the deceased into an ancestral spirit, the ultimate purpose of the funerary ritual. In reality, as we have seen, there are some cases where *kasiya maliro* does not appear. In those rituals, *nswala*, shaped in the form of an impala, serves as a substitute. To my knowledge, *kasiya maliro* is never substituted by any other *nyau yolembe*. Therefore, it is likely that the task of turning the spirit of the deceased into that of the ancestors is regarded as a responsibility of antelopes, such as the eland and the impala. Why then are antelopes, in particular, selected for performing such an important task?

Unfortunately, I have not been able to obtain any answer to this question from the Chewa themselves. However, considering the position of the antelope in the Chewa taxonomy of animals, the answer can to an extent be deduced. What is at issue here can be summarized as follows: while the antelope is a wild animal living in the bush, it is edible, and moreover, it provides a large quantity of meat which is considered most delicious. As was stated above, taking a *nyau yolembe* into the house of the deceased, having it bear the spirit of the deceased away, and burning it in the bush, is a process in which the spirit that violates the border between inside and outside the village is removed from the village by being entrusted to an animal living outside the village. Therefore, the animal to take charge of this task must be, above all, the one that lives outside the village, or in the bush. In addition, since it must invite the spirit of the deceased into itself, the animal ought to be of the kind the spirit would be willing to approach. In other words, the animal to be selected for the task should be of a kind to attract the spirit. Furthermore, it must be remembered that the ashes of the *nyau yolembe* which bore the spirit of the deceased is taken as a medicine by the novices of the *nyau*. The members of the *nyau* refer to the custom as "eating" (*kudya*) the ashes. That is to say, the *nyau yolembe* is to be eaten later on. This being so, the animal portrayed by the *nyau yolembe* must be an edible one. From these observations, it follows that the animal most suitable for bearing the spirit of the deceased and turning it into an ancestral spirit is the antelope which lives deep in the bush and is difficult to capture, but whose meat is considered as delicious as that of cows and goats. The antelope would easily attract the spirit and take it to the depths of the bush.

Among the Chewa, it is said that the deceased will be reincarnated, but it is also said that if the deceased are merely buried, they cannot be born again, being tied to the earth. The spirit of the deceased can be reincarnated only when it leaves the earth and returns to God to become an ancestral spirit. The role played by the *nyau* at funerary rituals is to turn the spirits of the deceased which are tied to the

earth into ancestral spirits which can be reincarnated in the bodies of their descendants. Among many dances performed by the Chewa, the *nyau* dance is distinguished from others by being called "*gule wamkulu*", meaning "the great dance". In the context of the funerary ritual, it is also called "*pemphero lalikulu*", "the great prayer". As we have seen, the actual words of prayer are never uttered by the participants in the dance. The *nyau* dance is nevertheless called "the great prayer" precisely because it is considered the most effective means of controlling the spirit of the deceased.

4. THE OTHER FORMS OF TRANSFORMATION

The preceding chapter examined the *nyau* masks within the context of the funerary ritual in which they are used. Through the examination, it became clear that among the Chewa masks play a central role in turning the spirit of the deceased into an ancestral spirit and ensuring its reincarnation after death. However, the discussions so far explain neither why the masks appear especially in the scene of death, nor why membership of the masked association is limited to men. To answer these questions, the masks must be considered not only within the context of the ritual in which they are used, but also in relation to other concurrent cultural phenomena within the society.

What should be noted here is that in Chewa society spirit possession and sorcery are considered, along with masking, as means of transformation of human beings into animals, and that the masked *nyau*, the spirit medium, and the sorcerer avoid one another. From this, it can be assumed that masking, spirit possession, and sorcery constitute a single set of beliefs about transformation in Chewa thought. In the present chapter, spirit possession and sorcery will be investigated separately, and then in the last chapter the mutual inter-relationship of all three will be examined.

1) Spirit Possession and the Girls' Initiation Ceremony

(1) SPIRIT MEDIUMS IN CHEWA SOCIETY

The Chewa people recognize the existence of various spiritual beings. These include the souls of the living (*ciwanda*), the spirits of the deceased (*ciwanda ca muntu wakufa*), the spirits of the ancestors (*mzimu*), and the spirits of animals (*ciwanda ca nyama*). In recent years, the Christian Holy Spirit, which is called *mzimu ya mulungu*, is also increasingly acknowledged.

All these spirits, including the Holy Spirit, are believed to possess the living. In many cases, the soul or consciousness of the person possessed by a spirit remains intact. The spirit takes possession of only the body of the person and causes him/her illness. There are, however, spirits which displace the souls of people by possessing them and put them into trance: the python spirit (*ciwanda ca nsato*), the lion spirit (*ciwanda ca mkango*), and the Holy Spirit (*mzimu ya mulungu*). When the person possessed by a spirit is able to control the possession,

he/she becomes a spirit medium with special powers the character of which are related to the type of spirit. Thus, the medium of the python spirit gains the power of rain-calling, the medium of the lion spirit, of divination, and the medium of the Holy Spirit, of divination and healing. Of these spirit mediums, only that of the python spirit seems to have originated in Chewa society. As will be discussed in the concluding section, the mediums of the python spirit are found solely among the Banda clan who are identified by many scholars as the original inhabitants of the region. Also the mediums speak in Cichewa during possession. By contrast, the mediums of the lion spirit are limited to those of the Phiri, the conqueror clan, and are said to speak the Ndebele language.⁸⁾ Since the 1970s in Chadiza District the mediums of the Holy spirit called *amizimu* have become widespread, replacing the mediums of the lion spirit. They speak the Shona language while being possessed. In the following sections, the discussions will be limited to those on the mediums of the python spirit which are considered to be indigenous to Chewa society.

(2) *MGWETSA*, THE MEDIUM OF THE PYTHON SPIRIT

The python spirit possesses only the women of the Banda clan. When possessed by the spirit, the woman first starts feeling her entire body heavy and loses her appetite. After such initial symptoms, she suddenly becomes unconscious and "falls" (*u-gwa*). The woman possessed by this kind of spirit is thus called *mgwetsa*, meaning "one who falls". After a while, *mgwetsa* gets up and begins speaking or singing in a strange voice. In many cases, the possession by the python spirit is verified by the words uttered or the lyrics of the song sung by the possessed. When she comes back to her senses, *mgwetsa* does not remember what happened during the possession.

A. The Curing Ritual

After its initial occurrence, the spirit possession takes place on a regular basis. The fit (*ubwebweta*) that is engendered by the possession is considered a type of illness which can be cured each time by making an offering to the python spirit. To dance abandoning oneself to the spirit is also considered part of the treatment. Nevertheless, once possessed by the spirit, the person will never be freed from it until she dies. *Mgwetsa* remains a vegetarian throughout her life. Moreover, every year she must offer some of the newly harvested crops to the python spirit before she eats them herself. As in the curing ritual, *mgwetsa* performs dances for the occasion. In fact, it is only after she completes such a ritual of offering that she regains her appetite. The following is a description of a curing ritual performed by a *mgwetsa* who came down with a serious illness because she was late in making the prescribed offering.

8) That the Banda clan is an indigenous group of the people who deserve to be called the Proto-Chewa, and that the Phiri clan are the descendants of those who conquered the region in the 14th century on, is endorsed by many scholars, notably Hamilton [1955: 21], Marwick [1965: 22], Phillipson [1974: 18-19] and Schoffeleers [1979: 150]. See below, p. 267-269.

The particular ritual I am describing lasted for 2 days. On the night of the first day, the husband of *mgwetsa* and his colleagues started beating the drums (*ng'oma*) in front of the house of *mgwetsa* in the village. The drums employed were the same as those played for the *nyau* dance. After a while, *mgwetsa* began breathing hard and yelled, "*ciwanda cabwera*", meaning "the spirit has come". She said afterwards that she did not remember anything that had happened after that. In a while, *mgwetsa* fell into a fit of convulsions and started singing a song. The women of the neighbourhood who gathered there then began singing with her:

(Song 16) *Iwe dee de*
 Muitana alendo wo
 Iwe dee de
 Ng'oma iyi musamaimba

Hey, you!
 You invite the guest
 Hey, you!
 This drum is not something to be always played

"You" here refers to the players of the drums. This song means "The way the drums are played is only for calling the python. Please do not play them otherwise". It is always sung at the beginning of the dance by *mgwetsa*. *Mgwetsa* then shook hands with each of the drummers. It was considered that the python spirit itself was thus greeting the villagers. Having shaken hands with the drummers, *mgwetsa* started dancing. She moved quickly with short steps back and



Plate 13 *Mgwetsa* dancing to the drums

forth, and turned round and round once in a while (Plate 13). This movement was supposed to correspond to the movement of the snake.

After a while, *mgwetsa* began to sing another song:

(Song 17) *Ku nyanja kwalembalemba*
 Ku nyanja kwalembalemba
 Pansi pali uta bwanga
 Nikakafa mukani tolole

At the lake, it is formed
 At the lake, it is formed
 There exists my bow on the earth
 When I die, please take over the bow from me

The "bow" means the rainbow, which in turn alludes to the python (*nsato*). In Cichewa, "*ciutaleza*", meaning "the large bow of thunder", is the word for rainbow. This is because the rainbow appears in the shape of a bow when the thunder rolls. In addition, it is believed among the Chewa that there always lies a python under the rainbow: the rainbow is said to be the breath of the python. Thus, the "bow" signifies the python as well as the rainbow. In the above song, *mgwetsa* asks someone to take over her python spirit after her death. As a general rule, the python spirit is passed on from one *mgwetsa* to another through the maternal line.

The dance of *mgwetsa* remained the same even when the songs changed. Each song was always initiated by *mgwetsa* herself and was taken over by the women. Only the first song is fixed; the remaining songs can be sung with no special order observed. *Mgwetsa* continued dancing to the songs. After several hours of dancing, the drummers stopped playing, signalling the end of the possession.

That night, the newly harvested crops were placed at the head of *mgwetsa's* bed. Her husband stayed the night elsewhere, as it is believed that the python would visit the house and spend the night with *mgwetsa*. It should be noted that once she is possessed by the python spirit, *mgwetsa* loses her ability to bear children.

On the following morning, the crops placed at the head of *mgwetsa's* bed were offered up by a child related to *mgwetsa* at the foot of a *msolo* (*Pseudolachnostylis maprouneifolia*) tree outside the village. These words were recited as the offering was made:

"It is all right for you to come to the village, for the person you left is here. However, when you come, please be quiet. Please watch your manners (*ulemu*). Then, we will welcome you by playing the drums. Please have this food and remove the illness from her."

I was told that the offering should be made by a child because children are "cold" (*u-zizila*) and consequently effective in pacifying the anger of the python spirit. I was also told that the offering should be made at the foot of a *msolo* tree,

which is capable of "drawing out" all kinds of spirits, including those of the python, of the deceased, and of the ancestors. The name "*msolo*" is associated with the verb "*u-solela*" meaning "to draw out". The illness will, it is said, immediately be cured once this ritual is performed.

B. The Rain Ritual

On the one hand, possession by the python spirit causes *mgwetsa* a sort of illness; on the other hand, *mgwetsa* provides the ability to foresee the future as well as to control rain by intentionally attracting the spirit and making use of its power. The python is considered a messenger (*wamthenga*) of God, which in this context of rain-calling is called *cauta*, "the being that forms the rainbow". Of the black and white pattern covering the body of the python, the white part is said to invite the white clouds that appear on clear days, and the black, the rain clouds that bring rainfall. The notion that the rainbow appearing after a rainfall is the breath of a python stems from the same belief. *Mgwetsa* brings rain by appealing to God through the python spirit.

When there is a drought, people first of all build a small shrine called *kaimba* under a *msolo* tree standing on the bank of a river in the bush.⁹⁾ Then, on a set date, all visit the *kaimba* together, with *mgwetsa* dressed in black leading the group. It is believed that the black cloth recalls black clouds and is helpful in attracting rain.

On arriving at the *kaimba*, the drummers start playing the drums. The people sing songs beating time with their hands. This is a song sung for the occasion:

(Song 18) *Ansato patsani madzi*
 Ku mtima kwauma
 Kalole kokwe
 Kalole kokwe

Python, give me water
 My heart is dry
 Fall, to the full
 Fall, to the full

Being possessed by the spirit, *mgwetsa* dances to the song. After the dance has gone on for some time, people stop singing and chant prayers:

"We came here with her (*mgwetsa*) because it doesn't rain. We would think you are hungry. So, we brought you some food. Please eat this and give us rain".

After that, the people pour on to the *kaimba* the corn gruel (*phala*) they

9) As far as the area where my research was carried out is concerned, there has not been any serious drought. Therefore, the rain ritual has not been performed in recent years. Unlike the description of the curing ritual above, the following account of the rain ritual is based on interviews.

brought with them. It is believed that the gruel will reach the python spirit through the *msolo* tree.

Mgwetsa remains seated on the ground while there is no singing. She gets up and resumes her dance as the people start singing again. After a while, *mgwetsa* begins walking towards the village. The people follow her still singing.

Having arrived at the village, *mgwetsa* dances to the drums once more. It is supposed to start raining by the time this dance is completed.

An account of the rain ritual performed on the occasion of drought in 1948 has been published by Bruwer. According to his report, the villagers, but not *mgwetsa* (or *cauta* as Bruwer calls her), went to a waterhole in the bush and sacrificed a black goat; meanwhile an equal number of black and white dots were painted on the body of *mgwetsa* who remained in the village. Bruwer does not directly mention the relationship between the dots and the python. Nevertheless, he says that *mgwetsa's* husband is a python and that the white dots are compared to sunny days, and the black to rainy days [BRUWER 1952: 180]. This is precisely the same explanation I obtained nearly 40 years later from my informants regarding the pattern on the body of the python.

It is worth noting that the spacial division between village and bush again plays an important role in the activities of *mgwetsa* as described so far. In the rain ritual, an appeal to the python spirit is made first in the bush and then repeated in the village. On the other hand, in the curing ritual, *mgwetsa* first dances abandoning herself to the python spirit in the village, and the next morning she makes an offering to the same spirit in the bush. The rain ritual, it can be said, introduces the power of the python living in the bush into the village; the curing ritual removes the same power from the village to the bush.

(3) CINAMWALI, THE GIRLS' INITIATION CEREMONY

Rangeley states on the basis of oral traditions that in the old days the girls' initiation ceremony, *cinamwali*, used to be held at the shrine of a medium of the python spirit called *makewana*. He also says that it was customary for *makewana* and a male priest called *kamundi* standing for the python to perform ritual intercourse at the end of the ceremony [RANGELEY 1952: 33-34]. In addition to this, Schoffeels, without specifying a particular region, states, "the final stage of the puberty ceremonies coincided with the time of the great rain prayers and seems to have been part of them" [SCHOFFEELS 1979: 154]. Nowadays, no medium of the python spirit is present in the *cinamwali* ceremony. However, elements suggestive of its linkage with the python spirit are found in many parts of the ceremony.

The *cinamwali* is a ceremony in which a girl who has had her first menstruation is secluded in a house for a certain period of time and is taught the manners and accomplishments necessary for a grown-up woman. The girl to be initiated is called *namwali*, the same term as used of novices of the *nyau*. The participants in the *cinamwali* are limited to women who have already gone through the ceremony.

Moreover, just as knowledge about *nyau* masks is kept secret from women, so the teachings given in the *cinamwali* are kept secret from men. It can be said that the group constituted by women who are entitled to take part in the ceremony take on some of the characteristics of a secret association. For this reason, the data on the *cinamwali* was mostly collected by my wife, Mariko Yoshida. First, she received the necessary education privately from an elderly woman of the village of Kaliza, and then she participated in the ceremonies held in the neighbouring villages. The proceedings of the ceremonies were all, with permission, recorded on tape, and I am responsible for the translation and analysis of the collected data.

The *cinamwali* has undergone great changes. Even apart from the stage at which spirit mediums took part, the process of change within the structure of the ceremony can be divided into 3 phases. In the oldest phase, it is said that *nyau* always appeared in the ceremony. When the *nyau* were banned during the colonial period, *cinamwali* without *nyau* became common. This constitutes the second phase. After Independence, some features of another girls' initiation ceremony held by the neighbouring Nsenga people were introduced into *cinamwali*. The girls' initiation ceremony (*cisungu*) of the Nsenga,¹⁰⁾ full of dramatic elements, appealed to women who had been dissatisfied with holding *cinamwali* without *nyau*. The *cinamwali* which we see today is of this third type. In this section, I examine the contemporary structure of the ceremony, taking account of its former character.

When a woman notices that a girl has had her first menstruation, the girl's grandmother is immediately informed of that fact. The grandmother at once takes possession of one of the houses in the village and secludes the girl there. At the same time, she selects from among the adult women in the village someone to serve as tutor, *phungu*, of the girl. The *phungu* educates and takes care of the girl throughout the ceremony. From this first day on, the girl, now called *namwali*, stays inside the house provided (*nyumba ya namwali*) throughout the day except when she washes herself at the dump before dawn and after sunset avoiding the eyes of others. During this period she is taught the various requirements of a grown-up woman.

The first word said to the girl after she has been secluded is "*mwakula*", meaning "you have grown up". Following this, the girl is taught how to use a piece of cloth for menstruation and told never to let the cloth be seen by men. The girl is also warned not to reveal to men any of the things she will learn in the *cinamwali*. The content of the teachings given in the *cinamwali* can be classified into two types: training of womanly manners and practical instruction in sex life and childbearing. Most of the teaching is given in the form of songs and dancing. There is no set order in which the teaching is arranged. This is an example of the song which teaches womanly manners.

10) As the work by Audrey Richards has made clear, the Bemba of Northern Zambia also call their girls' initiation ceremony *cisungu* [RICHARDS 1956]. This type of ceremony is widely practised among the so-called Eastern and Southern Bantu.

(Song 19) *Tiyeni ku munda*
dundundu musunama
Tiyeni kwa alume
lewelewe matako

Let's go to the field
 (When I say so) You complain and get sulky
 Let's go to a man's place
 (When I say so) You run swinging your hips

The lyrics of the song are in the Nsenga language. It is a song which censures a girl who does not work and flirts with boy friends. The girl is made to dance to the song. She holds her hands in front and thrusts out her waist backward and forward, right and left. It imitates the movement of the waist during sexual intercourse.

In periods between singing and dancing, the girl is taught manners in the following words:

"When called by your husband, immediately go to him, kneel down and ask what he wants".

"Do not talk in the street to a man other than your husband. The husband should also avoid talking in the street with a woman other than his wife. Otherwise, the spouses of those talking will become suspicious of the relationship".

"Do not enter the bedroom of your parents. When called by your parents, kneel down at a place a little way from them and ask what they want. Never talk harshly to your parents. Even when your parents abuse you, you should never express your anger".

There are also songs and dances for instructing the girl in sex life:

(Song 20) *ASai aSai poyowa njinga*
ASai woniwamija
Olo ine woniwamija aSai
poyowa njinga
Njinga yawo ni motobeki

Mr. Sai, Mr. Sai, when riding a bicycle
 Mr. Sai makes me enraptured
 Mr. Sai really makes me enraptured
 when riding a bicycle
 His bicycle is just like a motorcycle

This modern song also is sung in the Nsenga language. Riding a bicycle alludes to sexual intercourse in which a woman is on top of a man. The song says

the man is so potent that he is more like a motorcycle than a bicycle. The girl (*namwali*) and the tutor (*phungu*) face each other and dance in a squatting position. They make their waist move backward and forward forcefully, which is a blunt imitation of intercourse.

In addition to these songs and dances, the tutor gives practical training in sex life having the girl play the husband's part. According to Chewa custom, before having sex, the wife must apply a kind of vegetable oil to her genitals from a small earthen vessel called *njondo*. After teaching how to apply the oil, the tutor demonstrates various sexual postures. Moreover, she shows how husband and wife wash each other and shave each other's pubic hair. An earthen vessel called *kate* is used for this purpose together with *njondo*. These are made individually for each girl during her *cinamwali* ceremony. The vessels are treasured by the girl, and she is never supposed to show them to anyone except her husband.

These types of education are given to the girl on a one-to-one tutoring basis. Furthermore, every day between such private lessons, the women of the village visit the girl one after another to check how many songs and dances she has mastered and to teach her yet more songs and dances. The duration of the *cinamwali* ceremony, that is to say the period of the girl's isolation, depends on how fast she learns and how well she behaves. If the girl is badly-behaved, the women who have come to see her point out her shortcomings and chastise her by sitting on her head or stepping on her feet while they dance. If the girl does not reform even after the chastisement, *nyau* are sometimes invited to whip her. When the girl is considered to have been sufficiently educated, the village women throng to the house where the girl is kept, and dance throughout the night. On that final night, the girl is expected to perform all the songs and dances she has learned.

The content of the education provided for the girl during her seclusion is more or less the same as that of former times. In the past the *namwali* were taught the same lessons: the knowledge necessary for a grown-up woman and instruction in basic behaviour between wife and husband, including the method of shaving pubic hair. However, the songs that accompanied such lessons were different. Firstly, all the songs used to be sung in Cichewa. In addition, many secret references used only in the *cinamwali* were woven into the lyrics of the songs. The dances accompanying the songs were also quite different from those of today.

Moreover, in the past, the *phungu* (tutor) used to take the *namwali* to the bush on the morning of the last day of the ceremony. Clay figures (*vilengo*) were made in the bush, and the *namwali* was taught to dance around those figures. We asked two elderly women in Kaliza village to reproduce them after a break of about 40 years (Plate 14).

Among the subjects portrayed by the figures were: a python (*nsato*), a snake called *tunga*, a crocodile (*ng'ona*), a tortoise (*fulu*), a vessel for drawing water (*kacifulu*), a hare (*kalulu*), and a male and female couple (*wanjala*). The majority of the figures have something to do with water. The method of making these figures is an application of the method which women ordinarily employ for making



Plate 14 *Vilengo* (clay figures)

pottery.

Every figure was decorated with black and white dots coloured using corn flour (*ufa*) and soot (*mwaye*). Sometimes red dots were added using red clay (*katondo*) from an anthill to make the figures more pleasing in appearance. These dots were designed to imitate the dotted pattern of the python. Thus, of all clay figures, the one of the python was considered the most important. The *phungu* sang the song and performed the dance peculiar to each of the figures. The *namwali* followed the *phungu*. This is a song associated with the figure of the python:

(Song 21) *Nsato yalemba ambuye, yalemba*
 Yalemba pakati pa ambuye
 Yalemba nsato, yalemba

A python glides, grandmother, it glides
 It glides through the central part (genitals) of the
 grandmother's body
 A python glides, it glides

The manner of dancing was rather restrained in comparison with that of *nyau*. The *namwali* and the *phungu* knelt down with their knees touching and made their shins and waist move backward and forward. No clear explanation as to the purpose of this dance could be obtained from the elderly women of the village, even those who made the figure, whereas the song obviously refers to sexual intercourse between a woman and a python.

When the songs and dances were completed, the clay figures were immediately



Plate 15 A group of women walking a *namwali* home

buried underground. At the same time, the body of the *namwali* was decorated with black, white (and red) dots just as the clay figures were. The dots were again designed to resemble the pattern of the python. After being decorated, the *namwali* was sent home.

In today's *cinamwali*, no such clay figures are made. On the morning after the all-night dance, the women go to the river, decorate the body of the *namwali* with black, white (and red) dots, and take her back to her parents (plate 15). It is unanimously said that the dots on the body of the *namwali* imitate the pattern seen on the body of the python.

When the *namwali* gets close enough to her home, she is carried either on the shoulders or back of the *phungu* and cheered with a song by the other women. It is the most ostentatious moment in the life of a Chewa women. The song is sung in Cichewa:

(Song 21) *Dzaone nanga dzaone*
 Namwali dzaone
 Ukaone cili kumbuyo
 Cati mwanga ngati nsato
 Dzaone nanga dzaone

Look, hey look!
 It's the girl who has grown up, look!
 Look at the one on the back
 She has the colours and pattern of the python
 Look, hey look!

Having arrived home, the *namwali* shows the dances she has learned to the accompaniment of a drum played by two women. Then, the *phungu* and another woman perform a skit employing women's daily necessities—mortars, pestles, pots, and ladles—again to teach the manners required of a grown-up woman. In many cases, the skit has a plot in which an insolent girl is scolded by her mother for her misbehaviour. After the skit, the head of the *namwali* is shaved. While the *namwali* is shaved, each of her relatives stands up in turn and admonishes her:

“Respect your parents!”

“Respect the elders!”

“Say ‘Yes’ and do immediately what you are asked to do!”

Having been shaved, the *namwali* is bathed in water, dressed in new clothes, and taken home. This marks the end of the ceremony.

It is said that in former times *nyau* used to take the *namwali* back to her home. In those days, it was customary for a girl to get married before her first menstruation. Therefore, *nyau* took the *namwali* back to her husband's house, and not to her parents'. It is also said that the *namwali* used to have sexual intercourse with her husband on that night. It constituted the first intercourse for the girl after her first menstruation, or, in other words, the first intercourse with some possibility of the girl becoming pregnant. Furthermore, since pregnancy was, and still is, considered a process through which the spirit of a certain ancestor is reincarnated in the embryo, the intercourse was regarded as the first opportunity for the girl to receive the spirit into herself. It is hardly mere coincidence that *nyau* portraying the spirit of the deceased which had been removed from the village to the bush returned to the village on that particular night. The appearance of *nyau* at the end of the *cinamwali* could be regarded as suggesting the return of the deceased, or the reincarnation of an ancestor.

If this view is essentially correct, we can understand the reason why *nyau* ceased to appear in the *cinamwali*. Until now it has been said that *nyau* disappeared from the *cinamwali* because it was banned by the colonial government and the missionaries [SCHOFFELEERS 1976: 65; MARWICK 1968: 5]. However, this does not explain why the *nyau* did not resume its activities in the *cinamwali* even after the ban was lifted after Independence. In my view, it is more significant that girls gave up marrying before their first menstruation, ie before *cinamwali*, as the result of the western values and the educational system imposed on the Chewa in the course of the colonization. Under the circumstances, the ceremony could not serve as an occasion for the girls to have sex with their husband or to receive the reincarnated ancestral spirits. It is, therefore, safe to say that as the custom of marrying before the *cinamwali* disappeared, so did the logical foundation on which the appearance of *nyau* was previously based.

(3) *MGWETSA* AND *CINAMWALI*

As we have seen, no mediums of the python spirit (*mgwetsa*) appear in the

cinamwali ceremony today. Nevertheless, there are many elements in the ceremony which suggest its connection with the python or the medium of the python spirit. First, until relatively recent times, the women used to make a clay figure of the python and danced around it. The dance alludes to the sexual intercourse with the python, which reminds us of the ritual intercourse performed between a medium and a representative of the python spirit on the last day of the girls' initiation ceremony that was reported by Rangeley. Moreover, although the women stopped making the clay figures, they still decorate the body of the *namwali* returning to her parents with dots which are designed to resemble the pattern on the body of the python. This kind of body decoration is the same as that of the medium who was engaged in the rain ritual described by Bruwer. However, we need not interpret these customs as the girls metaphorically becoming the spirit mediums or as their incorporating the python into themselves. In fact, it is difficult to interpret in this way because the girls have no real experience of being possessed by the python spirit. What is important here is that the girls who have acquired powers of reproduction are initiated into a condition connected with the python which is thought to be in control of the fertility of the land and human beings. In terms of the association with the python or the fertility, the mediums of the python spirit and the girls who go through the *cinamwali* ceremony still constitute a single cultural complex.

2) Sorcery and Transformation

(1) ONE EPISODE

In early July of 1984 in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, I was informed by several of my friends of the following "incident" reported some days earlier in a newspaper issued in the same city.

One day in July, a Chewa woman living in the Flower Compound (made-up name) in Lusaka died and her body was taken to the morgue of a hospital for an autopsy. Later on at night when two nurses brought in another corpse, they saw in the morgue a hyena which was about to finish eating the corpse of a child left there for some time. As the nurses rushed to escape, the hyena said in Cichewa, "Please don't run away. I ask you a favour. I am the one brought from the Flower Compound a while ago. Although my body has been transformed like this, please ask the police to take me back to the Compound". The nurses immediately called the police who then took the hyena to the Flower Compound. The woman was known as a witch (sorcerer).

I did not actually see this article. Since I got the story at second hand, there might be some mistakes in the above description. Besides, I do not know in which part of the newspaper the article appeared. The article might have been published in a column titled "Hearsay in the Town", or something of that nature. Nevertheless, even if the story was merely based on a rumour, what is noteworthy is the fact that the rumour did spread in the modern city of Lusaka and that the "heroine" of the story was a Chewa.

Table 2. Causes and Severity of Illnesses

(Subjects: 146 villagers)

Cause \ Severity	God	Human (sorcery)	Animal spirits	Ancestral spirit	Spirit of the deceased	One's own fault				Heredity	Indef.	Total
						taboo	injury	venereal disease	damage from medicines			
(1) Sick, but able to walk	42	4	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	2	21	71
(2) Confined to bed	26	5	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	—	22	56
(3) Believed to be fatally ill	15	28	1	2	—	2	—	2	1	1	15	67
Died	—	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8
Total	83	45	1	2	—	2	3	4	1	3	58	202

* Of the severe—ie level (3)—cases, the percentage of those believed to have been caused by sorcery is: 53.8% (28/52)
(excluding cases of indefinite causes)

Of the death cases, the percentage of those believed to have been caused by sorcery is: 100.0% (8/8)

[Based on a survey of clinical history of the Kaliza villagers for the year 1985]

While living in the Chewa village, I heard many times that sorcerers become hyenas after death. Hodgson claims that any corpse which has started decomposing is regarded by the Chewa as being in the process of turning into an animal [HODGSON 1933: 156]. This, however, does not fully explain the idea of the transformation of the sorcerer, for the Chewa also believe that sorcerers turn into various animals and do evil things even when they are still alive. During my stay in the Chewa village, I had no chance to observe actual cases of such transformation. Therefore, I cannot affirm or deny the actuality of the transformation of the sorcerer. However, such a belief should not be treated as a mere superstition. To my way of thinking, there is no wide gap between the belief in the unlimited potential of science and that in the transformation of the sorcerer. What sort of experience and ideas have given rise to this belief in the transformation of the sorcerer? I will now discuss this point.

(2) SORcery AS A CAUSE OF MISFORTUNE

Table 2 shows how heavily sorcery weighs in Chewa theories of the causation of illness. It summarizes the results of interviews I conducted in January 1986 with all the residents of Kaliza village where I stayed, asking them about the illnesses they had suffered from during the entire year of 1985. The table is arranged to demonstrate the relationship between the seriousness of an illness and the alleged cause. The degree of seriousness is divided into three levels. This is a direct application of a system employed by the Chewa in describing illnesses, which classifies the degree of seriousness into three grades:

- (1) "Sick but able to walk" (*yoenda nayo*);

- (2) "Confined to bed" (*yogona*);
- (3) "Believed to be fatally ill" (*yodetsa nkhawa*).

Included in the column of causes is a category "indefinite", to cover cases where the informant answered, "I have never thought of the cause", or "I don't know the cause, for I have not yet asked a doctor about it". Therefore, some of the "indefinite" cases might eventually be attributed to other causes listed in the table.

In investigating through interviews, there is always a possibility of informants concealing or having forgotten some of the important facts. However, in the case of this particular investigation, all the informants were those with whom I lived together throughout the period under investigation. In addition, I had confirmed and recorded most of the serious cases classified as (2) "Confined to bed" or (3) "Believed to be fatally ill", for it was I who had taken most of the seriously ill patients to hospitals, clinics and traditional doctors by car. In general, there is little possibility of the villagers intentionally concealing their contraction of illnesses from me. For the cases that had led to the death of the patient, however, unless there had been chances to directly interview the patients before they died, I could not but adopt as data the views shared by the relatives of the patient.

As shown in the table, most of the relatively mild cases such as those belonging to level (1) and (2) were classified as *matenda ya mulungu*, "the illnesses of God". According to the explanation provided by the Chewa, "the illnesses of God" are the illnesses that come on their own, or the illnesses that can only be attributed, if ever, to God, the ultimate cause of everything. On the other hand, for more serious cases of level (3) "Believed to be fatally ill", the majority are classified as *matenda ya wantu*, "the illnesses of humans". "The illnesses of humans" are literally those caused by humans through the means of sorcery. Moreover, the cases which had led to the death of the patient were all considered to have been caused by sorcery. The general pattern is clear: the Chewa tend to ascribe the mild cases to God, and the serious cases to sorcery.

Another noteworthy point observed in table 2 is that there are very few cases diagnosed as having been caused by the ancestral spirits or the animal spirits. Indeed, there is not even a single case of illness attributed to the spirit of the deceased. The figures are remarkably low in comparison with those for the Teso in Kenya reported by Nagashima [NAGASHIMA 1983: 325] and those for the Xhosa in Republic of South Africa by Hammond-Tooke [HAMMOND-TOOKE 1970: 30]. The findings are also in strong contrast to Kakeya's observations among the Tongwe of Tanzania; he reports that "many of the illnesses which temporarily show severe symptoms and cure themselves after a while are often considered to have been caused by the nature spirits or the ancestral spirits" [KAKEYA 1977: 396]. Chewa theories of the causation of illness could be characterized by the fact that they put great emphasis on sorcery in diagnosing the causes of serious illnesses and deaths. In fact, every time there is a case of serious illness or death, people get together and discuss by whose sorcery it was caused, and they go to a traditional doctor called *ng'anga* both to identify the source of sorcery and to have the victim

cured.

(3) TWO TYPES OF SORCERERS

I use the term "sorcery" in this article to translate the Cichewa word "*ufiti*". *Ufiti* refers to a kind of skill which is employed to harm other people; it involves the manipulation of substances that are believed to have special power, ie medicines (*mankhwala*), and the uttering of a curse (*utemberera*). Those who are believed to exert such skill are called *nfiti*, or "sorcerers".

The distinction between "sorcerers" and "witches" has been a familiar one in the field of anthropology since Evans-Pritchard published his classic work on the Azande [EVANS-PRITCHARD 1937]. Schematically, sorcerers are those who try to harm others by using medicines and reciting spells, being motivated by malice or envy. This type of technique can be practised by anyone who has aquired the knowledge necessary for it. Witches, by contrast, do evil unconsciously through some mystical power inherent in their personality without using any substance or spell. In this respect, it is inappropriate to translate *nfiti* as "witches", since *nfiti* always harm others by using medicines and curses, and the skill is thought to be something that can be either bought or learned from senior *nfiti* and some traditional doctors.¹¹⁾ For this reason, in this article, *nfiti* is translated as "sorcerers", though whether *nfiti* are conscious of their own acts still remains a question.

The Chewa divide *nfiti* into two types according to the difference in motivation: *nfiti yamphera njiru* (the sourcerers who kill for malice) and *nfiti yodyeratu* (the sorcerers who eat humans). The former category covers those who kill through motives of malice, envy or revenge. The latter, on the other hand, are believed to kill merely for human flesh. It is said that they dig up the corpse from the grave at night, and share out among each other the human flesh thus obtained. Each of those who have been treated to human flesh is then obliged to kill his/her own matrilineal relative and share the flesh with his/her colleagues. There is no other way to reciprocate the favour than to pay back with "his/her own possessions". For this reason, once one has eaten human flesh, one will have to continue to kill one's relatives on a regular basis.

As far as the question of their consciousness is concerned, "the sorcerers who kill for malice" are obviously well aware of their own behaviour. In contrast, "the sorcerers who eat humans" are believed to be unconscious of what they are doing. Because they habitually eat human flesh, this latter kind of sorcerer is said to become eventually possessed by the spirit (*ciwanda*) of the hyena or the lion which has the same habit as they do; their brains (*nzeru*) or hearts (*mtima*) are said to be taken over by hyenas or lions. This idea of spirit possession provides an excuse for those accused of sorcery. They can say, "Although I might have cursed someone, I

11) Traditional doctors, including herbalists and diviners, are said to have detailed knowledge of techniques of sorcery under the necessity of counter-attacking sorcerers.

was not aware of it". The accuser, on the other hand, nevertheless does not fail to warn the believed sorcerer by saying, "Never do that again, or else you will be severely punished". People believe that such a warning is still to an extent effective in controlling "the sorcerers who eat humans" and who claim to have been unconscious of their act while performing it. Thus, it is difficult to determine the degree of consciousness of "the sorcerers who eat humans", for the opinions about it vary between accused and accuser.

It is natural for one to bear a grudge against others. In that sense, any person may become "a sorcerer who kills for malice". By contrast, only a limited number of individuals within each village community are considered as "sorcerers who eat humans". Generally speaking, a person who is so fond of meat and so self-centred as to monopolize all the meat available, or who often abuses others when drunk tends to be regarded as "a sorcerer who eats humans".

"*Mudzaona*" meaning "you will see" is the typical curse among the Chewa. If one utters this word to another person under the influence of beer, and if the person falls ill afterwards, one is considered to have exercised sorcery against him regardless of whether or not one has actually used medicines for the purpose. If one repeats the same act on different occasions, one comes to be labelled "a sorcerer who eats humans". As for accusations of sorcery in Chewa society, Marwick has pointed out a general pattern on the basis of statistical data collected in the 1950s. According to him, if a supposed attack by sorcery is preceded by a quarrel, it is almost certain to be attributed to the sorcery of the quarrelsome opponent of the attacked (64 of 65 cases, or 98.5%). And if not, it is mostly attributed to the sorcery of "a sorcerer who eats humans" who belongs to the same matrilineage as the attacked (19 of 25 cases, or 76.0%) [MARWICK 1965: 102]. This tendency was confirmed by my own data collected between 1984 and 1986.

(4) THE IMAGES OF THE SORCERER

There are various ways in which the sorcerer is believed to cause illness in others. Among these, the most commonly described among the Chewa is the method in which the sorcerer draws a line (*mkwekwe*) with medicines on the path of a prospective victim so that the victim, upon stepping on the line, unwittingly picks up an intrusive kind of insect (*kalombo*) called *kayowera*. The *kayowera* is an invisible creature created by the sorcerer to imitate some animal, and made from a part of that animal together with other medicines. The type of illness caused by the *kayowera* depends on what that particular *kayowera* imitates. It is said that when a *kayowera* imitating the warthog (*kaphulika*) is inside one's body, one would fall to the ground in a dead faint just as a warthog often falls to the ground while running. A *kayowera* imitating the rat (*nkhoswe*), on the other hand, is believed to cause a severe headache which feels as if the inside of one's head was being scraped by the nails of a rat.

As the methods of causing illness can be either bought or learned from others, there is no clear distinction between those of "the sorcerers who kill for malice" and

of “the sorcerers who eat humans”. Of “the sorcerers who eat humans”, however, many weird and mystical stories are told. They are believed to have many other powers than that of causing illness. This is the type of sorcerer that the Chewa call “the genuine sorcerer” (*nfiti yenyeni*).

For example, “the sorcerers who eat humans” are said to be fond of incest. They are also believed to prowl about in their village naked at night and make those who are asleep work unconsciously. They may even take the head of someone who is asleep and play football with it in the graveyard. It is said that if one has a stiff neck on waking up in the morning, that means one’s head has been used by the sorcerer during the night for that purpose. Finally, the ability to turn into wild animals is also thought to be available only to “the sorcerers who eat humans”.

First, “the sorcerers who eat humans” are said to create various kinds of animals on their own and use those animals as their familiars. To create an animal familiar, the sorcerer of this class, it is said, first makes a wooden figure of the animal. Medicines are then added, including a part of the animal, and a spell is chanted. Further details of the procedure remain unknown. The animals that can serve as familiars include: birds such as African barn owls (*kadzidzi*), spotted eagle owls (*shololo*), guinea fowls (*nkhanga*); quadruped mammals such as lions (*mkango*), leopards (*kaingo*), hyenas (*fisi*), jackals (*nkhandwe*), elephants (*njobvu*), yellow baboons (*mkhwere*), wild boars (*nguluwe*), mole rats (*citute*); snakes such as black mambas (*mbobo*) and cobras (*mamba*); crocodiles (*ng’ona*), and thunder (*kanganigani*) which is believed to be a type of lizard (*buluzi*).

Of the animals listed above, the barn owl and the eagle owl are used as spies that survey the homes of prospective victims at night. The elephant, yellow baboon, wild boar, mole rat, and guinea fowl are sent to steal grain from fields belonging to others. This particular type of sorcery is called *fumba*. The snakes, the crocodile and thunder are employed to attack enemies directly. The lion, leopard, hyena, and jackal are not only used for direct attack on enemies but are also dispatched to steal others’ livestock. The hyena is also known as a means of transportation for “the sorcerer who eats humans”. It is said that the sorcerer riding on a hyena can travel any distance in a night. Incidentally, the sorcerer of this kind is said to be even capable of flying in the air on a basket (*licero*).

Besides sending these animals, “the sorcerers who eat humans” are also known to transform themselves into lions, hyenas, jackals, yellow baboons, snakes or crocodiles to attack their human prey and steal livestock. As a rule, it is said, the sorcerers transform themselves into animals and attack the target as long as it is considered safe to do so. On the other hand, if there is any danger of being found out and counter-attacked at their destination, the sorcerers are said to dispatch their familiars instead. Under certain circumstances, especially when they come near to being caught in the graveyard, they are said to turn into animals such as hares (*kalulu*) and duikers (*insa*) which are rather common animal species in the region. Although it is said that in turning into an animal the sorcerers use a part of the animal (that is, a part of lion for becoming a lion, and of a snake for becoming a

snake, etc.) as a medicine together with a mask, no further information could be obtained.

“The sorcerers who eat humans” are known to turn not only into animals but even into stumps, trees and mortars at times. When they go around at night, they may emit fire to hide themselves. Tornadoes (*kavulumvulu*) are also believed to be generated by the sorcerers who are at the centre of the vortex.

According to traditional doctors (*ng'anga*), including herbalists and diviners, the transformation of “the sorcerers who eat humans” is a kind of trick (*matsenga*) detectable only by those who are in possession of a special medicine like themselves. Because the sorcerers would immediately come up with countermeasures if the composition were found out, the contents of the medicine owned by each traditional doctor are generally kept secret. The medicine revealed to me by a herbalist contained as many as 27 different substances, most of which were obtained from the plants used for curing diseases caused by sorcery, but some of which were derived from those used for the poison ordeal, such as *mwavi* (*Crossopteryx febrifuga*) and *cinkundu* (*Erythrophloeum africanum*). Since these plants have the power to “discover” (*u-kumika*) sorcerers, it is believed that they can also “discover” the tricks played by sorcerers.

Finally, it is said that “the sorcerers who eat humans” turn into hyenas, lions, and crocodiles after death. The sorcerers are known to habitually create or transform themselves into those animals for the ultimate purpose of eating human flesh. As a result, it is thought, they become possessed by the spirits of the animals while they are alive; upon death, they turn into the animals. The kind of animal into which a particular sorcerer is transformed after death depends on which animal he habitually creates or transforms himself into—that is, which animal parts he regularly uses as his medicine in attacking enemies.

(5) THE TRANSFORMATION OF SORCERERS AND ANIMAL CLASSIFICATION

As suggested in the above, three types of transformation of “the sorcerers who eat humans” can be identified:

- (1) The first, (which may not be a kind of transformation “of” the sorcerers in the true sense of the word,) comprises sorcerers creating animals as their familiars by the use of medicines.
- (2) The second is the transformation of sorcerers themselves into animals by means of medicines.
- (3) Lastly there is the transformation of sorcerers into animals after death.

The kinds of animals created by the sorcerers to serve as their familiars include: lions, leopards, hyenas, jackals, yellow baboons, wild boars, mole rats, crocodiles, snakes, thunder (a kind of lizard), barn owls, eagle owls, guinea fowls, etc.. They consist of the so-called *cilombo* (“large creatures that bite”, ie the beasts of prey), the nocturnal raptors, and herbivores that damage the crops in the fields.

The kinds of animals into which the sorcerers transform themselves are the same as those listed above except for the mole rat and birds such as the barn owl,

eagle owl, and guinea fowl. In other words, they are composed of medium and large-sized harmful animals. However, if some of the highly favoured edible animals, such as the hare and the duiker, appear in the graveyard, they may be considered to be sorcerers in disguise. The mole rat and the birds, on the other hand, are never regarded as disguised sorcerers, perhaps because of their small size. Animals that are too small in size when compared to humans are excluded from the group of animals into which the sorcerers are believed to turn themselves.

After death, the sorcerer turns into either a lion, leopard, hyena, jackal, crocodile, cobra or a black mamba. These are the animals generically called *cilombo*, which are known to attack humans and other animals.

In sum, the animals considered suitable for the transformational or creative acts of sorcerers either "attack humans and other animals", "damage the crops", "prowl about in the graveyard", or "go around at night". That is to say, they are the animals whose behaviour is similar to that of sorcerers. However, the animals common to all of the above three types of transformation (or creation) are limited to beasts which attack humans and other animals. While the sorcerers may both transform themselves into, and create as their familiars, animals that damage the crops, they do not turn into such animals after death. As for those animals which simply prowl about in the graveyard and hardly harm humans, they are merely regarded as the disguised sorcerers trying to deceive the eyes of others. Moreover, the barn owl and the eagle owl that come to the village and hoot at night are thought to be nothing more than the familiars created by the sorcerers. In conclusion, the types of animals the sorcerers create or turn into are differentiated according to the degree of their harmfulness.

What must be noted here is the fact that even if a particular animal is harmful to humans, it does not mean that all the animals of the same kind are conceived as those which the sorcerers have created or turned into. According to the Chewa, every kind of animal on the earth can be classified into two types: *nyama ya mulungu* "animals of God", that is, real animals created by God, and *nyama ya wantu* "animals of humans", that is, animals made by sorcerers. The distinction is explained as follows:

"The wild animals created by God do not come close to people. The animals which attack people, damage the crops in the fields, prowl about in the graveyard, or come into the village are made by sorcerers".

The Chewa also affirm that "sorcerers never make domestic animals". The belief that wild animals created by God do not come close to people is expressed in the mythical narrative related in Chapter 3. The fact that a harmful beast has appeared in places people are present is taken as strong proof of the transformation of the sorcerer.

Thus, the belief in the transformation of the sorcerer is based on the recognition of the similarity between harmful animals and sorcerers as well as the idea that real wild animals do not come close to people. We should recall here that only "the sorcerers who eat humans" are thought to turn into animals. This type of

sorcerer is accused when a misfortune is not preceded by any quarrel, or when no rational cause of a misfortune can be found. It is necessary to create an image of evil which can be blamed. The beliefs in the avoidance of people by wild animals, and the similarity between harmful animals and sorcerers thus yield the belief in the transformation of the sorcerer. In the light of such beliefs, it is natural that the hyena which appeared in the hospital was interpreted as a transformed sorcerer.

5. MASKS, SPIRIT POSSESSION AND SORCERY

The discussion so far dwelt on each of the three forms of transformation: masking, spirit possession and sorcery. In this final chapter, the relationship between the three will be examined. It is important to emphasize at the beginning that the masker *nyau*, the spirit medium *mgwetsa*,¹²⁾ and the sorcerer *nfiti* (especially the real *nfiti*, "the sorcerer who eats humans") are interdependent.

To begin with, it is necessary to confirm the similarities of all three. As was mentioned earlier, wearing a mask, being possessed by the python spirit and exercising sorcery are, at most, all considered as means of transformation of human beings into animals. Of course, in addition to *nyau yolembe* portraying animals, there are other *nyau* which portray the dead. Nevertheless, it is *nyau yolembe* in the form of animals that are called "*nyau yaikulu*", ie "big *nyau*", and considered the most important. This is also suggested by the very fact that the answer to the general question, "What is the *nyau*?" is: "The *nyau* is an animal". As for sorcerers, while they are also known to be transformed into trees and mortars, their commonest transformation is into animals, and it is only into animals that they are transformed after death. Thus, masking, spirit possession and sorcery are all, in principle, means of transformation of humans into animals.

Another point common to the three is that all of them are understood as forms of possession. Chewa can refer to all of them equally in saying "*ciwanda cilowa m'muntu*", "a spirit enters a person". Masking, mediums' spirit possession and sorcery are all considered to involve "spirit possession" in the broad sense of the word, though the three may differ in detail.

The differentiation is straightforwardly expressed in the fact that the masker *nyau*, the spirit medium *mgwetsa*, and the sorcerer *nfiti* "avoid one another" (*uthawana*).

First, sorcerers are not supposed to get near *nyau*. However, since all of the men in Chewa society are expected to join the *nyau*, and some of the men are sorcerers, it follows that the membership of the *nyau* must include some sorcerers. The men explained this apparent contradiction as follows:

"Sorcerers are not always sorcerers. They 'change into sorcerers' (*asanduka nfiti*) when they use sorcery. And while they are using sorcery, they do

12) Among all types of spirit medium, only the medium of the python spirit (*mgwetsa*), which is thought to be the original medium of Chewa society, has this sort of relationship with the masker and the sorcerer.

not get near *nyau*".

Next, it is said that though the main function of *mgwetsa*, the medium of the python spirit, is to control rain, she is also capable of capturing any sorcerer that gets close to her. Therefore, understandably, no sorcerer tries to get near mediums. Furthermore, it is considered absolutely impossible for a sorcerer to be possessed by the python spirit and to become a medium. In this sense, to be possessed by the python spirit is regarded as proof that the possessed is free from sorcery.

Third, the spirit medium and the *nyau* do not see each other's dance. In addition, no *nyau* are invited to the funeral of the medium. However, there is again the possibility of the same individual serving as both a medium and a member of the *nyau*. While mediums are all women, there are cases where a woman is compelled to become a member of the *nyau* because she has accidentally found out the secret of the *nyau*. If a woman gets possessed by the python spirit before she is initiated into the *nyau*, she will at all costs avoid *nyau*. In this case, it is unthinkable for that same person to get into a situation where she would be forced to join the *nyau*. Moreover, even if the woman did get into such a position, it is said that she would not join the *nyau*. On the other hand, if a woman gets possessed by the spirit after becoming a member of the *nyau*, she will completely stop taking part in the activities of the association and will never even go to see the *nyau* dance. In general, the medium avoids anything that has to do with death.

In this way, the *nyau*, the spirit medium and the sorcerer form a mutual avoidance relationship (Figure 4). That is not all. The three are in marked contrast to one another in various aspects, as summarized in Table 3.

As regards the method of transformation, while the *nyau* dancer transforms himself by wearing a mask, the sorcerer employs various tricks (*matsenga*) as well as masks. The specific details of such tricks, however, are veiled in mystery. In contrast to these two, the medium does not transform herself in appearance, but is internally transformed being completely possessed by the spirit.

The three differ not only in the methods of their transformation, but also in the state of their consciousness during the transformation. The *nyau* dancers are fully conscious of their own acts and well aware of the surroundings even when they are masked and dancing. On the other hand, the spirit medium is unconscious while being possessed by the spirit. As to the state of consciousness of sorcerers, much remains unknown, just as their method of transformation was shrouded in mystery. Although sorcerers are said to be unaware of what they are doing, people often try

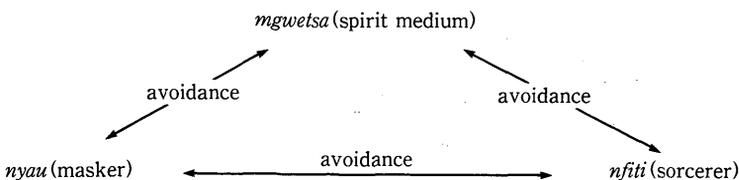


Figure 4. The Relationship between the Masker, Spirit Medium, and Sorcerer

Table 3. The Three Forms of Transformation (Masking, Spirit Possession, and Sorcery)

	<i>nyau</i> (Masker)	<i>mgwetsa</i> (Spirit medium)	<i>nfiti</i> (Sorcerer)
Methods of transformation	Masks	Spirit possession	Tricks
Consciousness during transformation	Conscious	Unconscious	Ambiguous
Form of transformation	Animal in appearance, human inside (at heart)	Human in appearance, animal inside (at heart)	Animal in appearance, animal inside (at heart)
Subject animals for transformation	Virtually all animals (most important: eland, impala)	Python	Beasts of prey (lion, hyena), animals that damage crops (baboon, boar)
Transformation after death	—	—	Beasts of prey (lion, hyena)
Gender	Male	Female	Male, Female
Space of activity	Bush	Village	Bush/Village
Taboos	Avoids having sex during rituals, otherwise leads normal sex life	Avoids having sex during rituals. Pregnancy and child-bearing impossible	Engages in incest
Fire and water	Fished out of water, burnt in fire	Regulates water	Conceals oneself with fire
Handling of corpse	Buries it in a grave	Does not get near graves	Digs it up and eats it
Cursing	Only instructors curse those who revealed the secret.	Does not curse anyone	Curses others (sorcery)
Diet	Omnivorous (regular diet)	Vegetarian	Meat, particularly human flesh
Succession of membership	Geographically arranged	Matrilineal lineage	No restriction
Functions	To turn the spirit of the deceased into an ancestral spirit (and bring back the ancestral spirit to this world)	To control reproduction and maintain life (through girls' initiation ceremony and rain calling)	To kill people

to control sorcerers by warning them "Never repeat such behavior again". The answer to the question of sorcerers' consciousness of their behavior, therefore, remains ambiguous; it depends on whether one takes the standpoint of the accuser or the accused.

These forms of transformation could be summarized in the following words, which were suggested by some informants: *nyau* are animals in appearance, but humans inside, or at heart (*mtima*); spirit mediums are humans in appearance, but animals inside; in the case of sorcerers, they become animals both in appearance and at heart, and they are the only ones that are transformed into animals after death.

Also noteworthy is the distinction of the species of animal into which the three

transform themselves. As for *nyau*, they can theoretically transform themselves into any animal that lives in the bush, since there is no restriction with regard to the species of wild animals portrayed by *nyau yolemba*. However, when it comes to the *nyau yolemba* indispensable in the funerary ritual, the species of animal portrayed are strictly limited. It is the *nyau yolemba* built in the form of an eland or an impala that plays the crucial role in the funeral. The eland and the impala are wild animals that provide most delicious meat in quantity.

Sorcerers, by contrast, transform themselves into the animals generically referred to as *cilombo*, "big creatures which bite", such as lions, hyenas, jackals, crocodiles, cobras and black mambas, as well as animals that damage crops, like yellow baboons and wild boars. Sorcerers only turn into animals called *cilombo* after death.

Mediums are possessed by the spirit of the python, which is conceived as the messenger of God who brings rain. Among the snakes generally thought to be venomous and to bite humans, the python is considered an exception and known as an animal which has good manners (*ulemu*), in that it is harmless to humans. The reason the python is believed to be the messenger of God is not only because it is thought to inhabit the waterside, but also because it is regarded as an anomalous animal in terms of feeding.

In sum, the animals that are important to the *nyau* are those which are harmless and edible, while the animals into which sorcerers turn are mainly dangerous animals that eat humans. The animal that possesses the medium is the python which neither eats nor is eaten by humans. In this way, the appropriate animals to act as vehicles of human transformation are designated on the basis of dietary behaviour—that is, whether humans eat the animal or vice versa.

Apart from the modes of transformation, there are many other respects in which the masker, the spirit medium and the sorcerer are clearly differentiated. Another is gender. Whereas the *nyau* is a men's association, all mediums are women, yet both men and women can be sorcerers.

There are also distinctions between the three regarding the use of space. It is said that "the *nyau*'s home is in the bush", and *nyau* come from the bush to the village every time there is a funeral. The initiation ceremony into the *nyau* is also performed in the bush. In contrast, the house of a spirit medium is located inside the village. The medium dwells in the village and goes to the bush only when she takes charge of a ritual. In some cases, the medium could even stay in the village while other people perform rituals in the bush. The girls' initiation ceremony associated with the medium is also held in a house found within the village. In other words, while the *nyau* lives in the bush, and the medium, in the village, both of them come and go between the two domains as occasion demands. It is through these activities that causes of misfortune, such as the spirits of the deceased or the untamed power of the python spirits, are eliminated from the village and discarded in the bush. By contrast those which are beneficial to humans, such as rain and the reincarnating spirits of the ancestors are brought back from the bush and

incorporated into village space. The house of a sorcerer is also located in the village. The sorcerer, however, from time to time turns into animals and infringes the border between village and bush. Moreover, once convicted of sorcery, the sorcerer is ousted from the village and forced to live in a corner of the bush, or else, to go to the land of another ethnic group—which is also considered as the bush within the village-bush dichotomy.

The attitudes towards sex taboos also differ between the three. The members of the *nyau* are not permitted, in principle, to have sex while engaged in the activities of the association, though they lead normal sex lives when there are no *nyau* activities. The medium also avoids having sex when she shows signs of spirit possession, but she is otherwise free to have sexual intercourse. However, once possessed by the spirit, the medium loses her ability to conceive children, for she is considered to be a wife of the python spirit first, and that of a man (her husband) second. At the other extreme is the sorcerer. The sorcerer habitually breaks the most serious sex taboo, that is the prohibition on incest.

The connections the three have with fire and water also deserve examination. The medium of the python spirit that brings rain is directly connected with water. On the other hand, sorcerers are believed to conceal themselves with fire when they do evil. *Nyau* are related to both fire and water. While *nyau* are said to have been fished out of water, they are burnt in fire in the end.

The three are contrasted even in their ways of handling the corpse. The *nyau* buries the corpse in the graveyard. The sorcerer, it is said, digs up the corpse and eats the flesh. The two thus handle the corpse in opposite ways. The medium, on the other hand, never even gets close to the graveyard itself.

Contrasts between the three can also be found with regard to their use of cursing. Needless to say, the sorcerer exercises sorcery which entails a curse. The medium, by contrast, never curses anyone. The position of the *nyau* on this matter is located somewhere between the two, for only the instructors (*namkungwi*) of the association are granted the power to curse those who have disclosed the secret of the *nyau*. The instructor, therefore, issues curses in his capacity as an official of the association.

The kinds of food the three eat are also different. It is said that sorcerers are abnormally obsessed with the lust for meat, especially human flesh. On the other hand, mediums are pure vegetarians. The members of the *nyau* are ordinary men who eat anything which conforms to Chewa food customs.

Finally, differentiation between the three is also evident in the ways in which the membership or the special ability is passed on. The *nyau* association is organized within each village, and thus membership is arranged geographically. The python spirit that possesses the medium is inherited within her matrilineage. As for the ability to use sorcery, no particular system of succession has been identified.

As stated above, there are some clear patterns in the relationship between the

masker *nyau*, the spirit medium *mgwetsa* and the sorcerer *nfiti*. In some respects, the *nyau* and the medium stand opposed to each other with the sorcerer somewhere in between. In other respects, it is the medium and the sorcerer who are in the position of exact opposites, and the *nyau* displays ambiguous properties. The three thus form a multi-layered structure of opposites and similarities.

Generally speaking, when matters of morality are at issue, the medium and the sorcerer stand opposed to each other, and the *nyau* remains neutral. In situations relevant to death, the *nyau* and the sorcerer are contrasted, with the medium being the outsider. When gender comes into question, the *nyau* and the medium are in the position of opposites, while the sorcerer stands in between.

The medium and the sorcerer are highlighted when matters of morality are at issue, probably because the former is regarded as the representative of God, and the latter, as that which destroys the order created by God.

The sorcerer and the *nyau* are contrasted in situations relevant to death, as the sorcerer causes deaths and the *nyau* takes care of the deceased. The two thus have different roles to play in the sequence of events before and after death.

To explain the reason why the *nyau* and the medium are set in the position of exact opposites with regard to gender, some additional remarks are needed. Above all, I must mention what the men of the *nyau* say about the *cinamwali*, the girls' initiation ceremony. Comparing their own activities with those of the women in the *cinamwali*, men say, "Because women make a secret of birth, we make a secret of death".

The line, "women make a secret of birth" refers to the fact that men are rigorously excluded from scenes of birth and are never told how a child is born. Only women who have completed the *cinamwali* can be present at the moment of birth and come to know the way of giving birth. On the other hand, that men "make a secret of death" means that funerary rituals are controlled by men of the *nyau*, and that the process of turning the spirit of the deceased into an ancestral spirit is concealed from women. While women are biologically destined to be in charge of giving birth, that men are in charge of death is nothing but a cultural invention.

What is interesting in this respect is a legend about the origin of the *nyau* related by its members. According to the legend, the *nyau yolemba* in animal form were originally created to imitate the clay animal figures made by women at the *cinamwali* ceremony. In addition, men of the *nyau* proudly say, "the women's figures do not move, but the *nyau yolemba* we make can be worn and be made to dance".

It is difficult to tell whether the legend suggests the historical process by which men started making *nyau* masks. However, considering the men's pride in their masks, it may be said that by making masks and controlling funerals, men are still trying to emulate women whose role in childbirth is an established reality.

In Chewa society where people trace matrilineal descent and have uxorilocal residence, men's position is quite unstable. Children born to a couple belong to

their mother, not their father. Children are usually looked after by their mothers' brothers. Therefore, even if their father was absent, children would not face much trouble. Under the circumstances, extramarital affairs and divorces occur frequently. Moreover, since a married couple is expected to live with the wife's family, the men who get divorced and remarry many times in their lives cannot but move from one place to another. Although a man has a strong voice in matters pertaining to his sisters' children, since the children do not live with him but with their mothers, the opportunities for him to exercise influence on those children is at best temporary and sporadic. During my stay in Kaliza village, I often heard stories about a wife and her mother eating well while depriving the husband of his share of food. It has been pointed out by some scholars that the *nyau* provides married men with a means of self-expression in their wives' villages [LINDEN 1975: 32-33; SCHOFFELEERS 1976: 60; 1979: 151; MAPOPA 1980: 118 etc.]. It is as if men, who are in a far more unstable position than women, establish themselves in the cosmological cycle of life and death by making *nyau* masks and organizing the *nyau* association.

It is worth while recalling here that the method employed by women to make the clay figures is an application of the method for making pottery, which is a female occupation, and that the technique used by men to build *nyau yolemba* is an application of the technique used in roofing, a man's task. In other words, the distinction between the making of the clay figures by women in the *cinamwali*, and that of *nyau* masks by men is based on the sexual division of labour. The *nyau* and the *cinamwali* reflect an existing opposition between men and women in Chewa society.

Of course we have moved to discuss the relationship between the *cinamwali* and the *nyau*, and not that between the spirit medium and the *nyau*. However, since the *cinamwali* ceremony used to be held with the direct involvement of the medium and still retains some connections with the medium, the relationship between the *cinamwali* and the *nyau* also holds true of that between the medium and the *nyau*. That the medium, who controls birth and maintenance of life, exhibits properties in sharp contrast to those of the *nyau*, again reflects the opposition between men and women in Chewa society.

As we have just seen, the medium and the sorcerer are contrasted because the former represents God, and the latter destroys the order established by God. Next, the sorcerer and the *nyau* are distinguished in that the sorcerer brings death, and the *nyau* handle the deceased. Finally, the medium and the *nyau* are in the position of exact opposites, for mediums are women who are also in charge both of birth and life, and the *nyau*, men, are in charge of life after death. This being so, the distinctions between the *nyau*, the spirit medium and the sorcerer, in effect, correspond to the differences in role the three play in the Chewa view of life and death.

By taking part in the girls' initiation ceremony through the python, the medium has charge over the birth of humans, while, at the same time, directly

controlling the maintenance of human life by regulating rain. The sorcerer, by contrast, is regarded as virtually the only cause of death. On the other hand, the *nyau* is in charge of turning the spirit of the deceased into that of the ancestor so as to ensure its reincarnation in the future. Moreover, it used to be another responsibility of the *nyau* to bring the reincarnated spirits of the ancestors to women who are ready to conceive. In this way, the three are respectively running different phases of the cycle of life and death. The masker *nyau*, the spirit medium *mgwetsa*, and the sorcerer *nfiti* do not merely constitute a tripartite set of transformation. They also compose a single cosmological system.

We are now in a position to understand the apparently unnecessary attributes assigned to each form of transformation. Why does the medium of the python spirit who is linked with fertility become sterile herself? For what reason does the medium avoid eating meat? Why does the sorcerer not only kill people but also dig up the corpses from the graves afterwards? And, above all, why does the masked association have to be composed of only men? Satisfactory answers to these questions can be obtained only by properly understanding the relationship between the masked association, the spirit medium and the sorcerer.

In a sense, it can be said that the masker, the spirit medium and the sorcerer together produce a complete story of the cycle of life and death. However, the fact is that such a story is never narrated by the Chewa themselves. The customs associated with masking, spirit possession and sorcery are all actually put into practice. People do not merely talk about them, but carry them out. Through these practices, people are involved in the relationship formed by the three, and hence, their experience comes to be arranged in a certain order. The relationship between the masker, the spirit medium and the sorcerer enables one to organize one's experience of life and death within the systematic image of the world.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, the interdependence of the masker, the spirit medium and the sorcerer have become clear. In this concluding section, I would like to examine these three forms of transformation from a diachronic point of view. Since I have collected only a few oral traditions concerning Chewa history in Zambia, the following discussion is mainly based on oral traditions collected among the Malawian Chewa as well as archaeological and linguistic materials.

Gezane Phiri, an elder in Kaliza village, related to me the tradition that the first men and animals descended from the sky at a hill called Kaphirintiwa, which is located near the border between Malawi and Mozambique, leaving their footprints on the rock. A similar myth was also collected by Ntara [1945: 4], Rangeley [1952: 39], Marwick [1965: 22], and Schoffeleers [1979: 180]. On the other hand, the Chewa have another tradition that they came from Luba country in Zaire. It was Hamilton who first resolved the conflict between these two accounts of the origin of the Chewa. He wrote as follows:

The traditions contain myths of tribal origins in the region (at the hill Kaphirimtiwa) as well as the "migration" accounts, and it seems reasonable to suppose that traditions of incoming chiefly groups and long established lineage-organized peoples are here superimposed. [HAMILTON 1955: 21]

This hypothesis has been endorsed by many scholars since then. For example, Marwick and Schoffeleers assert that this dual tradition of origin accords with the division of authoritative function between the two main Chewa matrilineal clans, that is the Banda and the Phiri. As has been noted before, the Banda is the only clan which turns out mediums of the python spirit (*mgwetsa* or *makewana*), who have the power of rain-calling and which is thus responsible for the fertility of the land. By contrast, the Phiri is the clan to which the paramount chief and almost all regional chiefs belong. Under the circumstances, Marwick and Schoffeleers consider that the Banda, who have a close relationship with the land, are the "long-established" group of people, and that the Phiri, who have the political power, are the descendants of those who left Luba country and conquered the region from the 14th century on [MARWICK 1965: 22; SCHOFFELEERS 1979: 150]. Some Chewa traditions relate how Phiri kings struggled to control Banda rain shrines using both aggressive and conciliatory measures, which also supports their assertion [SCHOFFELEERS 1979: 152, 156; LINDEN 1979: 194]. The hypothesis otherwise seems to be plausible.

It is widely held that the Bantu speaking people commenced their expansion from the mountainous area of Cameroon [GREENBERG 1963; EHRET 1972; DALBY 1975 etc.]. In view of archaeological evidence, the Bantu speakers seem to have established an Early Iron Age culture in the region west of Lake Malawi by around the third or fourth century A.D. [PHILLIPSON 1976: 208, 1977: 133; OLIVER and FAGAN 1975: 93-99]. The penetration of that region by Bantu speakers may have been a process composed of different phases through the succeeding centuries [PHILLIPSON 1976: 208-214, 1977: 229-230]. It is worth noting here that among the Bantu languages in Eastern Africa there are many loan-words from the Central Sudanic languages which are today spoken in the northern Central African Republic and the south-western Sudan. Ehret, who most intensively carried out loan-word studies, pointed out that Cichewa terms such as *nsato* (python), *nfiti* (sorcerer), *mankhwala* (medicine), *ng'ombe* (cattle), *nkokwe* (granary) are Central Sudanic loan-words [EHRET 1973: 35-39, 54-59]. He explained this phenomenon by suggesting that grain-cultivating, cattle-herding peoples speaking a Central Sudanic language occupied the area around Lake Tanganyika and in Malawi and Zambia during the first millennium B.C. [EHRET 1973: 24]. However, as he himself admitted, no archaeological evidence supporting his hypothesis has been found [EHRET 1973: 25]. It is far more likely that the Central Sudanic words were introduced into Bantu languages when the early Bantu speakers passed in the course of their expansion the area where Central Sudanic languages are still spoken [PHILLIPSON 1977: 218-220]. Since these lexical items are shared with peoples who have no trace of incoming chiefly groups of Luba origin [EHRET 1973], it is almost

certain that these words were not brought by Phiri migrants. The "long-established" group of people whom Phiri migrants found in the region must have been Bantu-speaking who had already adopted a smattering of Central Sudanic words. It is they who are represented by the Banda clan. Following the terminology proposed by Schoffeleers, I will call them the Proto-Chewa [SCHOFFELEERS 1973].

One of the characteristics of Proto-Chewa culture is, as was stated above, the possession cult in which mediums of the python spirit are vested with the power of rain-calling. Some of important shrines of this cult located in mountainous areas are said to be inherited from early hunters and gatherers known by the name *akafula*. However, as Schoffeleers writes, it seems unlikely that the Proto-Chewa inherited the cult itself from the *akafula* population, in view of the fact that it is conceptually tied up with the agricultural mode of subsistence rather than the hunting and gathering mode of life [SCHOFFELEERS 1979: 153].

The belief in the sorcerer also seem to have roots in Proto-Chewa culture, because the term for the sorcerer, *nfiti*, is thought to be derived from Central Sudanic languages.

As for the *nyau*, Schoffeleers provides a further interesting piece of information. According to him, in the northern part of the Lower Shire Valley, where members of the Banda clan are dominant, there is vigorous *nyau* activity, whereas there is a complete absence of *nyau* in the southern part of the Valley where the Phiri clan has a far larger population than the Banda; this suggests that the *nyau* were in origin Pre-Phiri, that is to say a Proto-Chewa institution [SCHOFFELEERS 1979: 150]. Schoffeleers furthermore asserts, "the root of *nyau* may well have to be sought in a culture of hunters and gatherers dating back to the Late Stone Age" [SCHOFFELEERS 1976: 63]. Indeed the *nyau* performance has much to do with wild animals and hunting rather than crops and agriculture. However, we have to take into account that none of the existing hunters and gatherers in Africa have masking traditions. In my view, the references to hunting made in the *nyau* performance might derive from the hunting culture which is also inherent in Bantu society.

The conclusion thus seems inescapable that the *nyau* association, possession by the python spirit, and belief in sorcery were already established when the chiefly Phiri clan invaded the region west of Lake Malawi. In the light of the fact that the mediums of the lion spirit, which seems to have originated from the conquering clan of Phiri, have been almost completely replaced in the field of divination by the newly risen mediums of the Holy Spirit, it is remarkable that the beliefs and customs concerning the *nyau*, the mediums of the python spirit and sorcerers have survived the great changes of conquest by the Phiri, occupation by the Ngoni, colonization by the British, and the process of modernization after Independence. This may well be attributed to the fact that these three forms of "cult" compose a single cosmological system; at least it is true that the mediums of the lion spirit which were not incorporated in the system have virtually disappeared. It is, of course, conceivable that the system have been becoming ever more elaborated in order to counteract the devastating pressures. Subsequent to this study, detailed

examination of changes of the system should be conducted.

Masking traditions are found in relatively limited areas. In Africa, masks are mainly made and used in the agricultural societies of the region stretching from the Guinea Coast of West Africa to Mozambique in East Africa through the Basin of the Zaire River of Central Africa. The Chewa are located at the eastern end of this region. The beliefs in spirit possession and sorcery (witchcraft), on the other hand, are almost universally found among the agricultural societies in Africa though there may be differences in their degree of importance. It follows that almost all of the societies that have masking traditions also share the beliefs in spirit possession and sorcery. Among the Chewa, within the framework of "spirit possession" in the broad sense of the word, masking, spirit possession involving a state of trance, and sorcery are differentiated and functionally systematized. It is likely that similar phenomena also exist in other societies. For example, similar differentiation has already been pointed out with regard to the binary relationship between masking and spirit possession in the Senufo [GLAZE 1981], between masking and sorcery in the Lega [BIEBUYCK 1973], and between spirit possession and sorcery in the Gusii [LEVINE 1963, LEWIS 1970]. How widely the relationships observed in Chewa society are applicable elsewhere also is an important issue to be examined in subsequent studies.

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