

When Animals Sing and Spirits Dance: Gule Wamkulu: the Great Dance of the Chewa People of Malawi

Claude Boucher (Chisale)



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When Animals Sing and Spirits Dance is an introduction to the diversity and drama that is the *gule wamkulu*, the 'great dance,' of the Chewa people of Malawi. Covering 200 characters bedecked in mask and costume or woven structure, the book reveals not only the physical variety of the characters but also analyzes their songs, dances, and often codified messages that are delivered through word and action. It is through the dancers of the *gule wamkulu* that the ancestors communicate with the living and give instructions on how to abide by the code of moral conduct, the *mwambo*. It is also through the great dance that we can glean intimate insight into the values and worldview of the Chewa.

Illustrated throughout with color photographs and original artwork, *When Animals Sing and Spirits Dance* is a lively interpretation of the great dance, told very much in the voice of the Chewa themselves. The songs are interpreted in both Chichewa and English, with appropriate recognition that direct representation is often impossible.

The *gule wamkulu* was declared a masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2005. This book is a worthy entrée to the majesty, spectacle, and spirituality that is the great dance.

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