



Fig. 2: Senior women who perform prior to the masked dancers include *Namkungwi*, chief's wives, and women who are chiefs themselves.

bridge, the ones on the female side closest to the senior males. Therefore, their placement relates to their superior role and their closeness to male knowledge and the male domain.

d) Women

The young girls, young women, and senior women follow in order, with those who are participating in the singing closest to the *Namkungwi*. Other women are arranged by age; the oldest near the senior women and the youngest furthest from the senior women. The women nearest the young boys are most often young women with very young children and babies, separating the youngest boys from the youngest girls in the circle. Women are deemed to have higher status by age, but also by levels of participation. Those women who have husbands who are prominent performers, or have accepted more responsibility for the preparing of food and brewing of beer, for example, will be accepted among other women of higher status who are more active in the Nyau events.

e) Children

Babies including children up to three years of age, are most often held by their mothers, wrapped on the mother's back. Older children are told stories about the masks which seem to mystify and frighten the children. Small children are taught to believe that the masks are indeed spirits, and not men in masks. The spirits are frightening things,

which may have been pulled out of a deep pool of water in some stories, or pulled literally out of the grave in others.

In initiation, the boys learn what they may have already begun to believe; that the beings are men, not spirits. Until then children are taught to run away from the masks for their own safety.

Among the Luvale, the arrival of the first mask is the sign to young girls and children to run away (White 1961: 4). Among the Chewa, small children approaching Nyau dancers may be hit with a switch for their impudence of coming too near. It is no great surprise, then, that young children, three to six years of age and some older ones, run away, sometimes in tears, when they see a large mask form moving towards them.

Young girls of an older age may run as well, but with another understanding as that of women. They are not permitted to come too near the Nyau for fear of being beaten or forced into the male initiation. The initiation for women caught revealing secrets or coming too close to Nyau to see secrets, seems to be a humiliating experience.

f) Adolescents/Young Adults

Young men and women of marriageable age have another perspective of the dance. The girls are of an age where they have undergone their own initiation, and are now singing with the women or attending the performance with the other young women. Their role is a participatory one; if not singing, they are responding to the gestures and teasing by some of the masked dancers. One of the