

## Jefule

(A red day mask from the Golomoti area)



### Themes

1) Caution with strangers 2) Marriage for money 3) Short-lived marriages 4) Avoidance of an early (illegitimate) pregnancy 5) Promiscuity

### Etymology

**Jefule** is a corruption of the English name Geoffrey. The name seems to have been chosen at random for portraying a person of promiscuous behaviour.

### Description

**Jefule** appears to be the Golomoti version of Bwindi, but brings a more refined message. The red colour of the mask (27 cm.) reveals a stranger, in his middle age, although he displays no beard and no moustache. He has no tribal marks. His face is dominated by a wide deceitful smile, cunning eyes and a foolish look. His tattered headgear emphasises the castigation of the spirit world. **Jefule** is not a

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member of the village. His residence in the village community is motivated by his short-term work contracts. This is reflected in his clothing of tattered shirt and plain trousers. **Jefule** presents well at first sight, but his behaviour leaves much to be desired. **Jefule** is hot (also the colour red)! He shows no manners and he engages in actions that are regarded as improper.

As **Jefule** steps into the *bwalo*, he immediately pursues the women, moves his pelvis erotically, swerves his feet outrageously and stretches out his legs. He tries to seduce and to force the women against their will. The ladies scatter in all directions and hide from him. **Jefule** does not desist but continues his chase. This behaviour reveals that he is totally consumed by sexual heat. Confusion and laughter fill the arena. The male choir unveils **Jefule's** secret deeds: "*Jefule, who has married a young (chicken)? Listen, Jefule! Listen! Who has married a young (chicken)?*" **Jefule** is an unsettled middle-aged man. He has left his home and his family, and is seeking fortune and satisfaction along the roadside. We might say that he is enduring a mid-life crisis. He accepts short-term jobs at the local market, employed by private individuals or companies, but he does not persevere for any time. Wherever he takes temporary residence, he exploits naïve young girls. He seduces them with his appearance and his pretensions to wealth. He makes many promises, but leaves them disappointed and pregnant.

The character of **Jefule** was created toward the end of 2001 when the food crisis was at its peak in the Golomoti area. At that time, Malawi was experiencing a major maize shortage owing to the sale of food reserves to neighbouring countries. **Jefule** is not bound to any specific ritual. His performance is the source of great entertainment, though his message provides a bitter social criticism. Through him, the members of *gule wamkulu* target two specific categories of people within the village community. First, he addresses strangers who profit from people's poverty and misery and only leave behind greater problems. Such irresponsibility and selfishness is criminal and needs to be punished severely. Secondly, **Jefule** warns young, naïve and inexperienced girls and their parents against the danger of consorting with strangers and ruining their future. The misery and desperation of the girls and their parents might compel them to accept gifts and tokens from strangers who are perceived as being wealthier. In their naivety, they believe in empty promises. By the time they realise their mistake it is too late. The girls find themselves pregnant and their so-called husbands have vanished. The parents have not profited from this liaison and have failed to advise their daughters properly. They are left alone, in greater misery than they were before their acquaintance with men like **Jefule**. Their future is ruined forever. Then they easily become the prey to prostitution and sexual diseases in order to survive economically.

In a period of rapid social changes such as those affecting Chewa rural life, the value of marriage needs to be strongly reaffirmed by the ancestors. Marriage should not be based on appearances or money. Poverty alleviation does not lie in sacrificing one's own dignity and pride. Is money the only way out of destitution? In the character of **Jefule**, one can recognise the call of the ancestors, inviting people to set their hearts on the *mwambo* and on the wisdom of their forefathers. As the Chewa proverb says: "*Kuthamanga sikufika – One does not reach by rushing,*" nor by trusting blindly in strangers who appear from nowhere. In the choice of marriage partner, it is better to put one's hope in a person well known to the family group, although that person is poor. It is better to rely on good behaviour and hard work rather than on wealth and its trappings.

## **Song**

*“Jefule, ndani wakwata mwana? Tamvera, **Jefule!** Tamvera! Ndani wakwata mwana?”*

## **Source**

Interviews in 2002 and 2007