

## Kufa n'kugona

(A grey day mask from the Mua area)



### Themes

1) Faithfulness to the *mwambo* 2) Faithfulness 3) HIV/AIDS & sexual diseases 4) Promiscuity

### Etymology

**Kufa n'kugona** means, 'to die is to sleep' (forever), and to wake up no more. This expression is used as a warning to the children, that when their parents have died they will have to struggle by themselves, without counting on the help of their parents. They will do well to listen to their advice when they are still alive.

### Description

**Kufa n'kugona** is a character only recently introduced to *gule* (2010).

It is featured with a grey mask of 30 centimetres depicting a senior person: a bald head with grey human hair stuck on the side, a frowning forehead displaying abundant wrinkles, and eyes which are portrayed as half asleep. The flat nose is that of a Malawian. The stern mouth does not display teeth. A heavy grey

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Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art, Mua Parish, P. O. Box 41, Mtakatika, Malawi

beard, made with human hair, underlines his sturdy chin. Two deep labial lines fall from the nose and give the mouth an expression of dread and sadness. The ears are pricked, suggesting that the person is ready to welcome advice. The headgear of the mask is made of tatters. The character wears a plain black or blue overall, conveying death. The character wears leglets and wristlets, enhancing his outfit. He holds a club and a knife in his hands, drawing attention to his role as an advisor, a custodian of the *mwambo*.

At the rhythm of *Ayemwe atsale adzamange*, a character warning against HIV/AIDS, **Kufa n'kugona** enters the *bwalo* during funeral and commemoration ceremonies, and starts chasing and threatening the audience with his weapons. He swerves his feet with belligerence, spinning around the *bwalo* with tenacity, as the men sing for him: 1) "*To die is to sleep, oh, to die is to sleep (forever)!*" The women interact with him and reply with the following: 2) "*Mr. Phiri is coming. I saw him at a distance.*"

**Kufa n'kugona** was introduced to the arena in 2010, during the funeral of a stranger from Mulanje who sold fish at the local market near Mua. He had left his home and family to seek employment in the area. He had "remarried" in one of the villages nearby. His mysterious and sudden death was interpreted by the villagers as caused by HIV/AIDS, resulting from his notoriously promiscuous life.

**Kufa n'kugona** presents himself in the *bwalo* as an elder, with half asleep eyes, who admonishes the younger generation, present at the event, that if a person is promiscuous and unfaithful to his/her partner, he/she will inevitably meet death prematurely. The message conveys a verdict on the cause of death. It is above all an appeal for caution! He warns the youth, who are more exposed, to avoid remarrying and taking a new partner for every new season. The *mwambo* is seen as the key to safety and a long life. It is an interesting phenomenon that the Mua community has been exposed in recent years to an intensive HIV/AIDS campaign run by *gule* members. Their motto seems to be: keep the *mwambo* and you will live! This is a positive sign that their advocacy concerning the pandemic has reached the local communities' consciousness, and that the taboo surrounding the disease has been overcome. The Chewa speak openly, though in a coded language, during funerals and commemoration rites: HIV/AIDS is a killer, especially among the youth.

## Songs

- 1) "**Kufa n'kugona e kufa n'kugona!**"
- 2) "*A Phiri akubwera, ndaonera m'mtundawo.*"

## Source

Interview in 2011