

# Ndatola

(A feather head cover from the Mtakatoka area)



## Themes

1) Adultery & rape 2) Living off other people (community parasite) 3) Discipline & good behaviour  
4) Dishonesty, theft & robbery

## Etymology

**Ndatola** means, 'I have picked it up,' meaning, 'I have found it,' or 'I have made a profit.' This refers to the capture of property and initiates, who are subsequently exchanged for compensation.

## Description

**Ndatola** is the husband of another *gule* character called Kanchacha (refer to that entry). The character is ancient but has been performed only rarely since the 1970s, although his wife Kanchacha continues to enjoy popularity. Both belong to the Kapoli family. He resembles Kampini or Nanyikwi. Like them he does not usually wear a mask, but merely a head cover entirely made of feathers. This is the *chiputula*, the name of which derives from "*chiputu cha udzu*", referring to a bunch of grass which has roots deep into the ground. All the characters that wear such headgear

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are very ancient and come from the ground, which stands for the remote past. His costume consists of a small kilt, leglets and armlets made of vegetable matter or fertiliser bag laces. The body of the dancer is smeared with ashes. **Ndatola**'s appearance is linked to funeral and commemoration rites, during which he steals winnowing baskets, meat, chicken and any other village property, including children. He gathers them at the centre of the *bwalo* and forces people to pay for their return. He also collects initiates from house to house and brings them to the *tsimba* (the house of seclusion) for the initiation. This is interpreted as stealing them from their parents. While pretending to dance to the *chisamba* rhythm, he is busy pinching people's property. On the *bwalo* he dances with each female initiate, making her hold the stick that he presents to each one individually. He sings with a high pitched voice: 1) "*I have picked it up. (I have found it). I am picking it up. (I am making profit.)*" Then he sings: 2) "*Bang! Bang!*" ("*Gogodera*" is a musket used for hunting.) The song and gesture are interpreted as referring to sexual contact between him and each of the initiates. This conveys that the spirits are responsible for imparting fertility to their descendants. It is a symbolic defloration. He frenetically rotates his pelvis and the women continue with their own advice to the initiate: 3) "*This small initiate is proud, because she keeps insulting her mother, she is rude, this one, she is deaf!*"

Although **Ndatola** has a positive role as one who imparts fertility on the part of the spirit world, as a person, he remains a thief. Kanchacha has left him, or as some say, he left her for a younger woman. She was in any case ashamed of a husband who lives at the expense of others and takes away their property, money and even their daughters. The character of **Ndatola** admonishes people who do not respect property and live as parasites, profiting from other people's labour. The ancestors condemn such behaviour because it upsets the harmony of the village. They also condemn husbands who cannot remain faithful to their wives and abandon them and their children.

### Songs

- 1) "**Ndatola** ndikutola."
- 2) "Go go gogodera!"
- 3) "*Kanamwali aka n'kunyada koma katukwanatukwana amake, kali n'mwano, ikoka, kanambulunje!*"

### Source

Interviews in 2000 and 2011