

Ngalu or Chingalu

(A night structure from the Mua area)



Themes

1) Adultery & rape 2) Dishonesty, theft & robbery

Etymology

Ngalu or **Chingalu** is the crowned (crested) crane.

Description

This one metre high night structure is made on a bamboo frame with palm leaves woven in a zigzag pattern. Only one dancer performs it. Its shape is stylised but clearly portrays a crowned crane. It resembles an inverted funnel. The neck of the funnel features the bird's neck, head and beak. The bottom of the funnel resembles the outspread wings seen during the bird's dance. The wings are decorated with the palm zigzag pattern.

This bird structure is performed for any ritual. It enters the *bwalo* and gyrates imitating the crane's dance, as the men sing, "*You, crowned crane, dance a dance from your own home! You, crowned crane, show (us) how you dance, crowned crane!*" The words of the song applied to the crane are

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commonly addressed to a thief who is caught red-handed. The crowned crane is a bird from the lake or marshes that normally feeds on small animals, reptiles and insects. When it comes to the field and feeds on grain the bird is perceived as a thief. It is not uncommon to see them in pairs, like lovers. They make a trumpeting high call when breeding, which could be misinterpreted for running away with someone else's partner.

The crowned crane in *gule* portrays a thief. The character was invented a long time ago to discourage theft. When a robber is caught, people who have been robbed force him/her to sing a song and perform a dance from his own home before returning the stolen property. If the thief does not dance, he may be beaten. The villagers make fun of him and mock his behaviour by smearing his body with buffalo beans, which will cause severe itching.

With the decline of the *dambule*, the ceremony for the dead, a number of structures have fallen into disuse, while retaining only a few essential ones like Kasiya maliro, Njovu and Mdondo. A great number of secondary ones are no longer constructed. **Ngalu** fell into oblivion in the Mua area around the 1940s. Sometimes, funeral and commemoration rites of an important senior member of the community can justify its revival. **Ngalu** reappeared in one of the villages around Mua in September 1999, after nearly sixty years of absence.

Song

"Ngalu (2x), Ngaluyo tate (2x), tavina cha kwanu! Ngaluyo m'mene avina Ngaluyo!"

Source

Interview in 1994