

# Njonjede

(A night head cover mask from the Mua area)

## Themes

- 1) Infertility - impotence
- 2) Social stigma

## Etymology

**Njonjede** is a concatenated name. *Njo* suggests 'to stand up', *nje* 'to be soft, insipid, quiet', and *de* 'to brake'. Here, the combination of these sounds signifies a man who is capable of erection but is unable to emit semen.



## Description

The mask consists of a head cover made of dried banana leaves smeared with black mud (like M'tu wa nsomba). The dancer wears only a small kilt of vegetable fibres or fertiliser bag laces. His entire body is smeared with mud. His presence in *gule* is not linked to any particular ritual and is a recent creation, dating from 1990.

**Njonjede** circles the *bwalo* and pauses to rotate his pelvis lustfully and frenetically while the drummers beat the rhythm of the chisamba. The male choir responds: "*He cuts, cuts, Njonjede!*" The words used in the song – *dula dula* – apply to the shaking of the pelvis in the dance. It derives from *kudula*, 'to cut', suggesting also, 'to interrupt'. This combined with his suggestive movements can be interpreted as a *coitus interruptus* of sorts. Both the song and the pantomime reveal that **Njonjede** has married recently, but his wife finds to her dismay that despite his many attempts at having sex, **Njonjede** is not successful at procreation. This is the meaning of **Njonjede's** dancing in a circle, which expresses failure and frustration. **Njonjede's** wife and her family mock him with a series of concatenated sounds, *Njo, Nje, De*, meaning that he presents himself well but is inadequate in intimacy. **Njonjede's** private life becomes common knowledge in the village. **Njonjede** has lost face (thus the faceless character) and has been stripped of his dignity (the short kilt). **Njonjede** has lost his

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wife, his marital status and his honour. He now carries the social stigma of being known as an impotent. If he fails to be treated by a herbalist (*sing'anga*), the village contains no future for him. He can only disappear into the anonymity of the town.

**Song**

*"Aduladula Njonjede!"*

**Source**

Interviews in 1990 and 2007