

## Nsikidzi njiru or Mwale

(A black day mask from the Mtakatika area)

### Themes

- 1) Infertility - impotence
- 2) Social stigma

### Etymology

**Nsikidzi njiru** means, 'Jealous bedbugs'.

**Mwale** is a clan name.



### Description

The black mask is the colour of the night. It has a square-ish shape and shows a man with a fat face and deprived of masculinity. His headgear is made of soft vegetable matter to create the effect of hair. His eyes are small and made of silver tobacco paper to suggest stupidity. The nose is straight and the mouth a narrow slit with no teeth. The bald head is created with patches of white paint and the face is beardless. The dancer appears in an outfit that leaves the top of his body bare, suggesting that bedbugs have bitten him. He dances on the occasion of funeral rites. He displays backward movements as if he is running away. He keeps scratching, seeking relief from the bites of the bedbugs. The song the men sing for him explains: 1) *"You jealous bedbugs, let your friend do this work (for you). Jealous bedbugs!"* (He cannot have sexual intercourse. We all know why he fails to have sex, even if he pretends that he spends his time fighting bedbugs.)

This character originally came from Kasiya, Mchinji and Kasungu, and portrays an impotent man who is looking for an alibi to hide his handicap. Analogously, he might have thought to spray pesticide under his mat or to take the mat outside on the veranda where there are no bedbugs. Another song runs: 2) *"Mwale (his Kasungu name) fails, fails to do his work. A night without sleeping! He does not sleep because of bedbugs, because of bedbugs, yes! A wakeful night! A wakeful night! Mwale fails to do his marital duty by himself! He fails because of bedbugs! Yes, yes, yes!"* **Nsikidzi njiru** is another of the *gule* characters that ridicule the impotent man (*gocho*) and make fun of his handicap.

[www.kasiyamaliro.org](http://www.kasiyamaliro.org)

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

## Songs

- 1) "**Nsikidzi njiru**, taleka anzako atagwira nchito iyi (2x). **Nsikidzi njiru!**"
- 2) "O **Mwale** olephera olephera kugwira nchito, usiku osagona! Kusagona nsikidzi, nsikidzi eae! Mchezo! mchezo! Olephera okha o **Mwale** kugwira nchito yopanga banja! Olephera nsikidzi! Eae eae eae!"

## Source

Interviews in 1992