

Senza

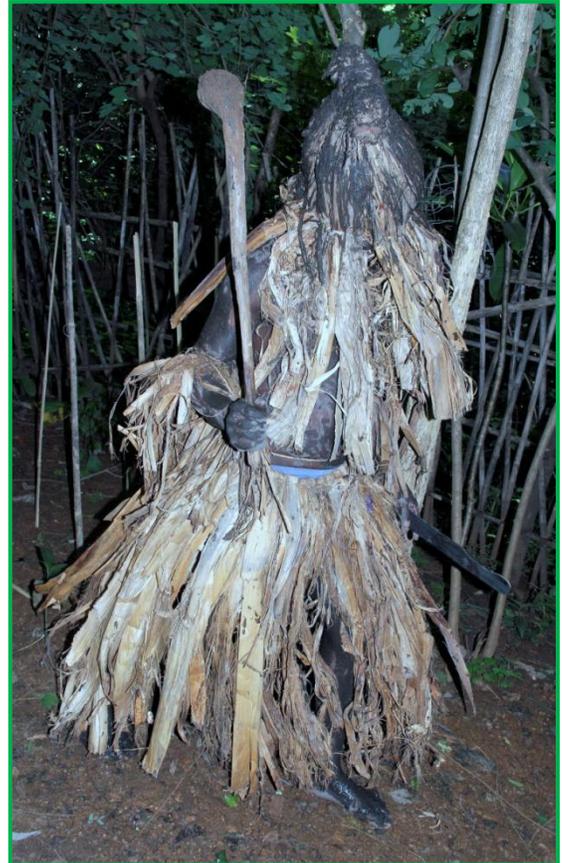
(A night mask from the Mua area)

Themes

- 1) Respect for the ancestors
- 2) Care of property
- 3) Role model for leadership
- 4) Sharing of beer

Etymology

Senza means, 'to carry'.



Description

The mask consists of a head-cover made of banana fibres bound loosely together and smeared with black sticky mud. It resembles the helmet of Kampini or Nyanyikwi, the messenger spirits who inspire fear. **Senza** wears a kilt made of banana leaves. His entire body is smeared with black mud. He carries a club as a weapon.

Senza is one of the very ancient characters of *gule* that disappeared from rituals toward the end of 1960s. Like Kampini, he is a messenger. He does not sing or dance. He only utters some guttural sounds that suggest, "Carry, carry!" He appeared during important rituals such as funeral or commemoration rites. The Kampini group roams around the village toward the end of the afternoon. After they depart, **Senza** makes his appearance and moves about like a tornado, inspiring fear. He grabs any household items that are anywhere near him. He collects items like mortars, pestles, pots and pans, winnowing baskets, chairs and hoes. He loads them onto his head or under his arms and carries them to the chief's house where the villagers must redeem them with cash or with items of equal value. The profit goes to **Senza** himself.

www.kasiyamaliro.org

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

Senza appears as a spirit in need. He comes to the villagers to grab what he lacks and the people allow him to take it. With the apparition of **Senza** in the village, the ancestors teach the community to take care of the poor and the needy. They emphasise the value of sharing. In a second lesson, **Senza** stresses the importance of caring for one's own property. Villagers should not neglect their belongings and leave them all over the place. Once they have reached the chief's house they are forced to redeem them with compensation. This gesture is an invitation to care for what they own and show an open heart in sharing their possessions with others. He also emphasises the importance of authority and the respect that should be given to the chief and the ancestors.

Song

"Senza, Senza!"

Source

Interview in 1990