

Musatida

(A pink day mask from the Diamphwi area)

Themes

- 1) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 2) Bribery
- 3) Limits & restrictions of *chikamwini* system
- 4) Injustice
- 5) Responsible leadership
- 6) Weak leadership
- 7) Manipulation/exploitation
- 8) Recent politics

Etymology

Musatida means, 'Don't blacken our name!'



Description

The character of **Musatida** is recent in Gule, dating from 1992. It was introduced at the time of great political changes in Malawi. At this time, the regime of President Kamuzu Banda underwent severe scrutiny. Discontent among the population reached its peak. **Musatida** was introduced to perform at various rituals but was most often seen at political rallies during that period. The character is not to be confused with another female *gule* mask called Msandida that dances with Mwalipeza (refer to that entry).

The face of **Musatida** is 35 centimetres long, pink, and displays tribal marks to camouflage the real identity of the person represented. The colour betrays him as a foreigner to this country. His painted crown of hair with long sideburns and his eyebrows are all black to emphasise that he is ageing. However, a black sisal hair lock overhanging his round forehead testifies to his vigour. The face does not show any moustache or goatee, to emphasise the ambivalence of his personality. The features are purposely feminine to stress how **Musatida** is under the influence of his wife. This is especially evident with the earrings on his round ears. The nose is long and straight; the eyes are small to appear defensive. The mouth shows a naïve, silly smile, and no teeth are seen. The cheeks are flat and the chin pointed. The headgear of the mask is made entirely of Samango monkey skins, reinforcing his foreign origin. **Musatida** wears a smart black jacket and a pair of jute trousers stitched with tatters. The combination of this outfit suggests that the position held by this man is at risk. His important status is highlighted with the flywhisk he waves. Paradoxically, he brandishes a whip, which indicates that he has to resort to violent methods in order to be obeyed.

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In the *bwalo*, **Musatida** makes one step forward, swerves his feet with obstinacy, then spins around twice becoming dizzy, and collapses. This is repeated. He has a predilection to fall where the crowd of women dances. The crowd roars with laughter. **Musatida** continues to fall to show that he has failed in his position and in his responsibility. This is emphasised in the song sung by the men as the drummers beat the rhythm of Mfumu yalimbira, the chief's rival: *"Who has given this judgment? The chief has noticed that his people will suffer. He says, (It must be) my assistants, my assistants! The chief denies, (saying) Me, I don't know anything! I am just hearing from those assistants of mine that this case went this way or that. Don't blacken our names, me and my wife! For me, no! Blacken the name of my assistants!"*

The song presents a weak Chewa Village headman who delegates his responsibility to his assistants (*anyakwawa*), who previously helped him to make wise and consistent decisions. The headman begins to hear from the people, and they are critical of his leadership. His authority comes under scrutiny because he defers too much of his work to his functionaries. Their selection is done according to the principle of affinity (same blood line). No one from outside can challenge their position. Anyone who attempts to do so is immediately identified as the chief's rival (Mfumu yalimbira).

In this song the *gule* members use the analogy of the village headman and his counsellors in order to convey their criticism of the political system during Kamuzu Banda's days. People resent that Kamuzu Banda gave too much power to the official hostess Mama Kadzamira (ironically called his wife) and to some favoured ministers, bypassing the rest of his cabinet. People suspect these ministers of devilish powers, responsible for all the injustices and irregularities attributed to the President. They accused them of telling lies or half-truths to the President in order to increase their power and income. It was suspected that many deeds and crimes were carried out on behalf of the President of which he was not informed. The same ministers are too often eager to proclaim publicly new legislation in the name of the President. In so doing they seek their own advantage, and discredit the very government they represent. As a result people are deprived of social and health services, their income is kept low and they suffer imprisonment without reason. At first, the reaction of the population is to accuse their leader of cruelty. As they realise that he is being manipulated, they tend to blame his assistants and to look at the chief as a stranger or a weak husband (*mkamwini*) (reflected in the red or pink colour of the mask).

The theme of the powerless husband is recurrent in Chewa culture. Husbands are forced to live under the strong grip of their wives and the wife's family. A village headman cannot be under the control of his wife and her relatives, since his own matrilineal line confirms his position and he is to serve their interests. If a chief or a leader is weak, he listens to the lies of his entourage and rules with partiality and injustice. When he feels threatened by the criticisms of his subjects, he first blames his assistants and collaborators and then declines responsibility, invoking the excuse that it is not his fault but that of his colleagues (the defensive eyes and the naïve smile of the mask).

Musatida teaches that the judgement of any ruler should not be based on gossip and rumours. There are people who manipulate the situation to promote themselves. When people realise that their leader lies, they feel that he is too weak to govern them. People desperately try to voice their anger and dissatisfaction. In the case of Malawi under Kamuzu Banda, where personal liberties were repressed for so long, such criticisms were almost impossible and even dangerous. People used concealed ways like *gule wamkulu* to inform others. By the beginning of the 1990s, Kamuzu Banda's popularity was sinking. News of the freedom that was being achieved in neighbouring countries was reaching Malawi. People became increasingly daring in expressing their discontent. A

large majority had lost faith in Kamuzu Banda and his party, and they were becoming open to the idea of entrusting the leadership of this country to someone else's hands, one who would show more concern for justice, honesty and truth.

Song

*“Walamula ndani de? Amfumu akuti anzake kuti avutike de, akuti nyakwawa, nyakwaka! Amfumu akukana kuti: Ine sindidziwa chili chonse tate! Ndingomva anyakwawa kuti kankhani kaja kayenda motere tate. **Musatida** ine ndi amai akwangawa! Toto ine! **Musatida** koma anyakwawa!”*

Source

Interview in 1993