

N'dziferanji?

(A yellow day mask from the Kasumbu and Dedza areas)

Themes

- 1) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 2) Responsibility of family heads
- 3) Gratitude
- 4) Recent politics
- 5) Reciprocity

Etymology

N'dziferanji? means, 'Why should I kill myself?'



Description

N'dziferanji? appeared in 1992. Its appearance in *gule* is linked particularly to the political set up of that period, and the character was performed primarily during political rallies. The face of **N'dziferanji?** is yellow (an alternative colour to red for depicting a stranger). The mask (30 cm.) shows a very old man, the head of the family group. He is bald with a crown of grey hair, thick moustache and long goatee, all made of Samango monkey fur. Two black upright horns about 25 centimetres long sprout from the head. These horns are manifestations of power. The head is surrounded by a headgear of tatters. The broad forehead is wrinkled, emphasising advanced age. The eyes are questioning, and the inquisitive crooked mouth bears one tooth. The nose is angular and pointed; the cheeks salient and marked with scarification. The chin is round. Tiny pricked ears also symbolise inquisitiveness. **N'dziferanji?** wears a tatter suit and carries a flywhisk. Both his costume and insignia emphasise power and authority.

In the *bwalo*, **N'dziferanji?** walks like an old man. He carries a bag or a suitcase full of 'money'. (In fact, the bag contains stones.) He distributes this cash symbolically to the women. Through this gesture, **N'dziferanji?** shows that he loves his *mbumba*. The women welcome his gifts but do not value them and soon throw them away, showing him that his people are ungrateful. They do not appreciate his generosity and fail to be thankful for it. As **N'dziferanji?** distributes his wealth, he hardly moves his feet because he is too old. He just keeps waving his flywhisk following the rhythm of the *chisamba*. The womenfolk soon join him in a frenetic hip dance. Impressed by their performance, the old man shows his appreciation by distributing more tokens. As the mime goes

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on, the male choir comments, “Some are profiting from the family group (*mbumba*)! They are enjoying a small calabash of beer. They are sleeping it off. Why should I kill myself? Is it my responsibility to die for the family group alone? Why should I kill myself? Why should I kill myself without stop? (No one says:) Stop, uncle, come and sit down in this shelter, drink this water (beer)! Instead (they say:) No! No! We have had a small dispute at home. I don’t want to hear this (nonsense). Why should I kill myself?”

The song talks about the extended family (*mbumba*), which benefits from the service of their leader, the maternal uncle (*malume*) who carries all the responsibilities for its members. He settles their disputes without complaining. Yet the members of the family show no gratitude and fail to thank him for these services. They are only interested in receiving his assistance without giving anything in return. The maternal uncle starts questioning why he should ‘kill himself’ for these people when they do not show appreciation. They are only too eager to receive but have nothing to share, not even their beer.

At first glance the song talks about reciprocity within the family group and reminds the members of their duty to show their gratefulness, through sharing, with the head of the family group. The song also provides an allegory addressing the political scene of the time. The *malume* here is obviously Dr. Kamuzu Banda, who in 1992 was bitterly complaining about his lack of support and popularity amongst the Malawian population. The nation had failed him and was being ungrateful for all that he had done for it since his return in 1958. But then, why should Malawians show gratitude? After all, they had only received stones and nothing more!

Song

“Wena akudyera mbumba! Kamowa kumamwa. Ali pa chitulo tate ine. Nanga ine **N’dziferanji** tate ine? Kwanga n’kufera mtundu wokha tate? **N’dziferanji? N’dziferanji** wopanda? Imani njomba, tapatukani, khalani mwa anamu, mumwe madziwa! Ayi! Ayi! Koma tayambana ku nyumbako tate e. Ndikhale! **N’dziferanji?**”

Source

Interview in 1993