

Sayinani

(A red or pink day mask from the Thete region, Kaphuka)

Themes

- 1) Kamuzu Banda's identity
- 2) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 3) Deafness to advice/stubbornness
- 4) Recent politics

Etymology

Sayinani is the Chewa form of the English expression, 'Please sign.'



Description

The character of **Sayinani** appeared during the period of political rallies of 1993. The performances were directly related to the referendum and the general election the following year. **Sayinani** invites the sitting President, Kamuzu Banda, to sign his resignation letter.

The red or pink mask (30 cm.) portrays Kamuzu Banda as an old man, wrinkled and bald with a long face. The eyes, deep set under the brow, and a very large protesting mouth, full of protruding teeth, emphasise stupidity and vociferousness. The character's expression of concentration contrasts with a narrow slanting forehead that suggests a limited brain. The nose is straight and angular and trails down to thin moustaches surrounded by deep labial lines that encircle the mouth. The chin ends abruptly and is hardly noticeable except for a black goatskin goatee. The ears are large and attentive as if he is eager to listen, but he fails to do so. The headgear of the mask is made of tatters and a crown of black goatskin is present to suggest a receding hairline. **Sayinani** wears a fancy shirt and a smart pair of trousers. He performs with a book and a pencil in his hand.

In the *bwalo*, his movements are uncoordinated as if he were intoxicated. He is clumsy and his choreography is exaggerated and foolish. The swerving of his feet shows his indecision, which is also reflected in his mime: he moves to sign the book that he holds, but then changes his mind and proceeds somewhere else in the arena, where he repeats the same actions. Ultimately, he does

not sign, and the women who surround him chase him out of the arena with the words, "Go away, Go away!"

While **Sayinani** is in this state of mind, the male choir voices a dialogue between the old man and the population: "(People say:) *Sign, sign, sign!* (The old man answers:) *Myself, I have already signed. Yes, alas! I did not know that those people were acting in this way, my friends! To dig out my secrets and to spread lies, saying that here is not my home! How can I sign? You lie, you children, in saying this! Remember. Here was a jungle without even one good road. Leave me alone! I have already signed so that you can choose the leader you want!* (People say:) *Sign, sign, sign, the old man, keep on signing, keep on signing!*"

The dialogue between Kamuzu Banda (the old man) and the people emphasises that it is not good to contradict the will of the people. A leader should listen to the concerns and criticisms of the people instead of imposing his own will and holding power by force and coercion. The population has had enough of him and wants him to resign. The song clearly refers to the referendum and possibly to the general election. The nation has been given a choice between a one party system and a multiparty state. For the people this meant dictatorship or democracy. Kamuzu Banda accuses the population of criticising him and spreading lies. Among the various accusations made against Banda during the period of 1992 and 1993, the most serious for Kamuzu Banda seemed to come from those who questioned his identity and origin. Other masks also dealt with this issue (such as Mtchona and Siwathu: refer to those entries). People refused to believe that Kamuzu Banda was truly a Chewa because during his thirty years of rule he never addressed them in the Chewa language but chose rather to communicate in English. Moreover, his dress code of smart clothes and suits and a bowler hat identified him with the Western world. Lastly, his ideas and his way of thinking and doing differed considerably from those of a typical Malawian. Many were convinced that Kamuzu Banda came from West Africa and had bought the clan name of Banda or that he was the son of a black American slave. Kamuzu Banda was seen as an opportunist who had come to grab the land and to rule the people. It is interesting that the mask shows the tribal marks of a Chewa, but the face is red to portray a stranger or an outsider. The song also makes reference to Kamuzu Banda's official speeches, in which he inevitably professed that before his coming and before he became President, the country was backward. He suggested that people were literally naked, and that nothing existed before he came to Malawi. However, the character of **Sayinani** shows that, despite thirty years of brainwashing, the people doubted his truthfulness, his sincerity, and even his native origins, and began to demand his resignation. Even the spirit world could not back up his stubbornness and stupidity.

Song

*"Sayina sayina sayina tate e! Ndasayina kale ine! Inde ogo tate sindimadziwa kuti iwo atero ogo de anzanganu! Ine kundikumba, kundinena tate... n'kuti sikwathu kuno! Ndisayina bwanji? N'kunama ana inu, kumeneko ede! Panali pa tchire pano, popanda khwalala labwino lomwe tate! Mundileke ine tate! Ndasayina kale, kuti anzanga musankhe cha kukhosi tate! **Sayinani, Sayinani** andala, tate sayina, **Sayinani!**"*

Source

Interview in 1993

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