

Tawakondadi or Takonda

(A pink mask from the Dedza area)



Themes

1) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change) 2) Recent politics 3) Welcome of strangers

Etymology

Tawakondadi means, 'We really love him.'

Takonda means, 'We prefer him,' implying in an election, 'He is our best choice.'

Description

Tawakondadi is another political character that was introduced to *gule* in 1993, when Malawi was undergoing its transition from dictatorship to democracy. Soon after Independence, Kamuzu Banda and the only existing party, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), had begun to enhance political rallies with *gule wamkulu*. This practice continued throughout the period of transition and new parties also made use of *gule* to draw crowds to their rallies. The character of **Tawakondadi** is one of the many new characters that were created to pass on political messages.

Tawakondadi (35 cm.) personifies a stranger with a pink face. He is of unknown background and seems to come from the bush, as suggested by the monkey skin that forms the headgear of the mask. His features are European. They show the characteristics of a senior man with greyish hair,

www.kasiyamaliro.org

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

eyebrows, sideburns, moustache and goatee. The colour white seems to emphasise something other than maturity. Among the Chewa, white is often identified with coolness or purity and is associated with the ancestors. Similarly, the mouth has beautiful white teeth, suggesting that the man speaks the truth. The identity of the man is unknown and without prominent status, as shown by his simple jute outfit. He carries a walking stick and a white handkerchief.

As the drummers beat the rhythm of Chisamba, **Tawakondadi** enters the *bwalo* holding his stick and waving his handkerchief. He circles the *bwalo* with vigour and rotates at high speed like a whirlwind. Toward the climax of his performance, he ties the handkerchief to the stick like a flag and raises it high like a leading torch, leaving the dancing ground in triumph. The meaning of this pantomime is obvious: he invites people to follow the light, as explained by the song of the male choir: *“Those who are my enemies, let them be! There are judges (to settle any case). As far as we are concerned, **Takonda**, we prefer him, he is our best choice! Those who seek, let them find one who may be to their hearts’ content. He is our best choice! He is our best choice! We want someone who is going to be loved by all. We love him. He is our best choice! Light has shone into the deep pit. We love him. We prefer the light. We love him. We really love him!”*

The song introduces a stranger who is received with suspicion by the conservative milieu, but acclaimed with great joy by the majority. The stranger brandishes the flag of freedom and tolerance, rare values in a land of mistrust. People have lived for so long with harassment, coercion and fear that they find it hard to believe that their country is changing. In a short period, things have changed beyond recognition. They appreciate the altered atmosphere and wish this new mood to continue after the referendum. They invite their compatriots to follow the light, which symbolises a multiparty system. People should seek new parties, new government and even a new president, if they want to escape the past. Their appetite for change has been whetted.

Song

*“Ozonda azonde! Ozenga mlandu de alipo! Tate ye chikhala ife **Takonda Takonda**. Ofuna afune chakumtima chomwe akonde de, **Takonda, Takonda!** Tikufuna **Takonda** tonse tate ye! **Takonda, Takonda** tate ye **Takonda!** Kuwala n’kuona chipompho tate ye ee! **Takonda, Takondadi** kuwala tate ye! **Takonda, Tawakondadi!**”*

Source

Interview in 1993