

Tikuonere

(A yellow day mask from Kasumbu)

Themes

- 1) Abuse of power
- 2) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 3) Hypocrisy/split personality/duplicity
- 4) Recent politics
- 5) Thirst for power

Etymology

Tikuonere means, 'Let us see (what he is going to do).' The name uses a Chewa form reserved for children.



Description

This yellow mask (37 cm.) without tribal marks portrays a stranger. Deep wrinkles on the forehead, jowls framing the nose and high cheekbones emphasise his old age. A long grey goatee made of dyed sisal, a clean moustache and long sideburns made of Samango monkey skin show him to be a foreigner. Despite his foreign look, the mask portrays him as a person of this country. The round forehead, the broad, flat nose and the thick lips reveal his African identity. The mouth is disdainful, expressing arrogance and aggression, as do the recessed fiery eyes. Teeth line both jaws. The ears are large and pricked to express his over-sensitivity to criticism. Black and white plastic strips make up the headgear. The plastic material reveals that the character is recent. The black and white colours emphasise evil intentions disguised under a virtuous appearance. The character wears a pair of black trousers and a clean shirt of any colour. He carries a walking stick like an old man and flywhisks.

He swerves his feet vehemently and jumps fiercely on one leg. He also runs after women in the *bwalo*, seeking their company. He moves his arms and shakes his flywhisks threateningly to chase people away from his land. For **Tikuonere**, all land is his. He performs at any ritual except initiation ceremonies, and is most common at party meetings. The men sing, "Let us see him, let us see him, let us see him, my friends, what he is going to do here! Let us see him, let us see him!"

Despite the odd disguise, the intent and the behaviour of the character are familiar. The Kasumbu *Nyau* has in mind Dr. Kamuzu Banda, the first President of Malawi. **Tikuonere** appeared at the end

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of 1992 when Kamuzu Banda's leadership was being challenged by the opposition and the multiparty activists. The song expresses the population's doubts about Kamuzu Banda's empty promises. Challenged by the opposition, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) pledged to change and to show a more human face, something they had failed to do for the preceding thirty years.

Tikuonere confronts the selfishness and lack of compassion shown by the MCP and the President toward the people. He highlights the tyrannical leadership that prevailed in those days at all levels of public life. Though a Malawian, their leader behaved like a stranger (the yellow colour) because of his inhumanity. He and his party exhibited more greed and thirst for power than the colonials had done. They misled the population by appearing honest (white), when in fact their regime was one based on injustice and terror (black). The prospect of political change appeared as good news. Kamuzu Banda and his party had been in power (the walking stick) long enough to show what they could have done. It was now time for younger politicians to prove themselves.

Tikuonere also challenges village leaders and local employers to show more respect and consideration for their subalterns and employees. Mistakes should not always be punished with harsh penalty, imprisonment, suspension or dismissal. Such strict and excessive measures encourage the community to rejoice over the leader's downfall. Whenever the population is oppressed, the spirits of the ancestors will inevitably side with their suffering.

Song

"Tikuonere! (2x) Tikuonereni anzathu tate chomwe chiti chigwe apa, apa tate de! Tikuonere, Tikuonere!"

Source

Interview in 1993