

Za mwana

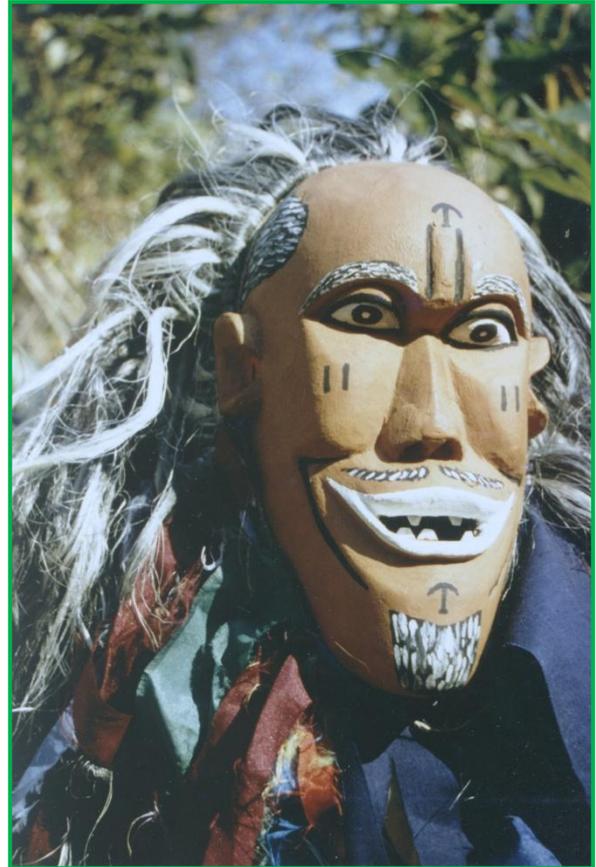
(A brown day mask from the Diamphwi area)

Themes

- 1) Supporting Kamuzu Banda/MCP
- 2) Recent politics
- 3) Thirst for power

Etymology

Za mwana means, 'childish behaviour'.



Description

The mask (25 cm.) is brown and has local tattoos that identify the person as a Chewa. The features show the signs of old age such as greyish moustache and beard, a crown of hair at the temples, wrinkles on the forehead, staring eyes, white lips, some missing teeth, swollen cheeks, salient chin, African nose and white headgear made of sisal. The character wears a tatter suit, a wide belt made of skin and carries a club. His appearance in the *bwalo* is chaotic. He shows tremendous power by swerving his feet and ends his performance by beating people and threatening them with his club.

The character is recent and seems to have appeared around the period of political change in the lead-up to the second republic. No precise occasion dictates his presence in the arena but the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) political rallies provided an ideal opportunity for his appearance. The male choir sing for him, "*The capacity of a child and grown up (differ)! The qualities of a grown up are wisdom and experience. The village is blessed with elders, my friend. What a child does is childish! Yes, my friends! He just keeps babbling nonsense, what will not happen! This is what the behaviour of a child is like! It is childish! Oh, oh!*"

The song contrasts two types of leadership, the old and the new. The apparent rural village set-up provides a disguise for the political scene rarely discussed in those days. The song considers the Kamuzu Banda / MCP government that was in power (1964 – 1994) and the growing opposition

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advocating multiparty democracy on the eve of the referendum. The song shows a strong conservative bias and favours the ruling party and its government. This conservatism reflects the Chewa view of authority, just as the song says: the village (the country) is 'blessed with elders' who have 'wisdom and experience', but criticism and the desire for change are 'childish'. The character of **Za mwana** portrays the instigators of change as 'adult children' in order to mock their purpose and to deride their intentions. The tone of the song suggests that they are only interested in economic advantage. Their involvement in politics is out of jealousy and envy for the wise and experienced elder. They wish to usurp his position and to upset the social order. These younger troublemakers can lead the country only to chaos and civil war. Changes are unnecessary and hasty changes very unwise. The younger generations do not have the wisdom and the dedication of the old. They cannot maintain harmony and peace in the country since they lack the 'divine mandate' that Kamuzu Banda and his government purported to possess. The character of **Za mwana** is a clear case of the early alliance between the MCP and *gule wamkulu*, preceding the advent of democracy.

Song

*"Mphamvu **Za mwana** ndi za wamkulu tate ye, za wamkulu n'zanzeru de ndiponso za luso de. Pamudzi pakoma ndi wamkulu, ana inu de eya eya anzanganu, zochita **Za mwana** de, **Za mwana** de angochuluka kunenanena chabe n'zosachitika tate ye **Za mwana. Za mwana. Oh oh.**"*

Source

Interview in 1993