

Alimbanane

(A black day mask from the Dedza and Diamphwi areas)



Themes

- 1) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 2) Hypocrisy/split personality/duplicity
- 3) Injustice
- 4) Responsible leadership
- 5) Nepotism
- 6) Recent politics

Etymology

Alimbanane means, 'They struggle with me,' or 'They wrestle with me.'

Description

This small black mask (25 cm.) portrays a senior Malawian approaching the end of his life. He is bald and his forehead is wrinkled. He has jowls, white eyebrows, white side burns, white moustache and a goatee. His tribal marks emphasise his Chewa identity. Two horns protrude from his headgear, which is made of tatters. One horn is white with a black tip and stands upright; the other, completely black, droops downward to symbolise that he is falling into disgrace. His eyes are small and worried; he has lost his vision. His nose is flat and insignificant. His cheeks are salient. The mouth has grown wide, with teeth on the bottom jaw; old age has made him garrulous. **Alimbanane** wears a decent shirt, a smart pair of trousers and a white jacket. This outfit shows that he is wealthy and in a position of high leadership in the land. The white jacket suggests that he professes to be just and honest. He brandishes a flywhisk in order to convey his status to all.

In the arena, **Alimbanane** moves around slowly. Following the rhythm of the *chisamba*, he shakes like an old man and follows the womenfolk quietly. Since he is so old, he hardly swerves his feet but waves his flywhisk instead. As **Alimbanane** performs, the men voice the following for him: *"Leave them! Leave them, my friends! If it were a matter of discussing without dispute, my friends,*

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(I would have done it). *But leave them, those who wrestle with me. I do not want slander! Leave them, my friends, leave them! They are not strangers but my very brothers who wrestle with me, Alimbanane!*"

Alimbanane was introduced to *gule* in Dedza and Diamphwi in 1993, during the struggle for the referendum and the general elections. His appearance at rituals is rare and normally limited to political rallies. He predicted the downfall of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and of the government (the drooping horn). **Alimbanane** represents Dr. Kamuzu Banda as old and his power in decline. The song testifies that he can do little to prevent other parties disputing his power and assuming his position. The brothers mentioned in the song are not real blood brothers but members of the same political party (MCP) and office bearers of Kamuzu Banda's government, such as Bakili Maluzu and Chakufwa Chihana, who were responsible for the starting of new parties, namely UDF and AFORD, which competed with the MCP and Kamuzu Banda's government for the power which it had controlled for the last twenty-nine years. Such opponents were a threat to the old timers who had enriched themselves and practised nepotism for so long. They had snatched the land from the chiefs and their people and had given it to their relatives and friends to create farms and estates. While they were busy favouring their families they had no time to listen to the people's complaints. They forced fines and party cards on the citizens and extorted properties through tyranny. They let people rot in jail with no opportunity for justice. **Alimbanane** also confronts local leaders and chiefs who have been profiting from the Kamuzu Banda regime, executing similar injustices and hiding behind orders from above. The population has come to realise the evil and the cruelty of the one-party state. Democracy can only mean a brighter future.

Song

*"Oh taye eee ni, anzanganu, otaye eee nitu! Ine chikhala nkhani yochita kukamba, nagwirizana wopanda n'chitopola anzanganu, taleke awatu, **alimbanane! Alimbanane** miseche toto. Taye eee ni anzanganu, talekani! Asati alendo kwinaku amphwanga, amene kwinaku **alimbanane, Alimbanane!**"*

Source

Interview in 1993