

Anzeru zawo

(A black mask from the Diamphwi area)

Themes

- 1) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 2) Greed
- 3) Leadership from the mother's line
- 4) Recent politics

Etymology

Anzeru zawo means, 'the man of crooked plans'. (The expression is related to "nzeru za yekha – the quality of someone who abides by his own ideas instead of following community rules".)



Description

The black mask (25 cm.) portrays an old man, bald, with white eyebrows, white moustache, missing teeth and goatee. His features suggest a Malawian and even a Chewa because of his tribal marks and his broad nose. His close-set eyes show duplicity and shortsightedness. The open mouth reveals large teeth and expresses craftiness, false talk and hidden meaning in his words. The tiny ears emphasise deafness. The mask attachment is made of jute and red tatters. He dresses smartly with a black jacket but his trousers are made of dirty sackcloth. The striking contrast between the jacket and trousers makes him look somewhat ridiculous. Instead of carrying a chiefly walking stick, he holds a whip. In the arena, instead of moving with the dignity that befits an old and wise person, he behaves like a madman or a drug addict. He swerves his feet insanely, wiggles his hips obscenely and provokes the women as if requesting their sexual favour. He runs after the audience with open arms, affecting friendliness. People flee in all directions, suspicious of his motives. His entertaining pantomime is accompanied by the following song: "*The man who makes crooked plans with his father-in-law, how is it possible to give the land (the country) to his father-in-law without informing the owners of the land, without informing his people, that he wants to give the chieftainship to his father-in-law? Alas! Alas! He is spoiling the grass already cut! His father-in-law will snatch the chieftainship, oh oh! The man of crooked plans has failed! He seized on a child without pubic hair (a child not yet mature). (He gave the chieftainship to an undesirable.) The chieftainship follows its own rules of succession, you, the man of crooked plans!*"

The song reminds the village of its hierarchy: the chief (*mfumu*), his assistants (*anyakwawa*), his counsellors (*manyumba*) and the ritual positions (*namkungwi* and so on) that support his authority. Amongst the Chewa, chieftainship passes through the matrilineal line and succession goes to a nephew or a niece of the chief on the mother's side, normally the child of his eldest sister. The chief cannot favour his own children or anybody else who does not meet this requirement. **Anzeru zawo** plans to pass on the succession to his wife's relative. This plan goes against all Chewa rules of succession. Why would he do a thing like that? The villagers deduce that he is motivated by greed and self interest. He wants to continue profiting from the economic advantage (*kudyera*) of being chief. In this way, he makes sure that the position remains in his immediate family through marriage. He bypasses the village structure and overlooks completely the tradition that is more democratic. Authority should be exercised for the service of the community and people feel that they should have a say when it comes to choosing their leaders. This free choice is also expected when it comes to the running of the country and to political leadership. It is a crime to ignore the people and the elders as stated in the song. The power of decision should not be left in the hands of one person alone. When this situation happens in the village, people suspect greed and self interest as the motivation. They withdraw their support. A leader of this calibre shows no true interest for his people but is only too eager to take advantage of his position. People conspire to remove him and choose someone else who qualifies in terms of bloodline and has the interests of the people at heart.

The character of **Anzeru zawo** is recent, appearing at various types of rituals and particularly on the occasion of political rallies in 1993. **Anzeru zawo** pretends to deal with the issue of succession at the village level. However, a few clues (from the song and from the general attitude of the character) reveal a second and obvious political content. The case of the chief and his father-in-law provides a metaphor to criticise then President Kamuzu Banda. Kamuzu Banda's public appearances with Mama C. Tamanda Kadzamira were commonly interpreted by the population as an informal marriage. Mr. John Tembo, Mama Kadzamira's maternal uncle, was obviously fitting the shoes of the father-in-law. The 1990s saw a decrease in the popularity of Kamuzu Banda. His very advanced age strengthened the rumours of senility. The direction of the Malawi Congress Party and the wise leadership of the country had to be passed to more capable hands. John Tembo had been at the right hand of Kamuzu Banda for more than a quarter of a century. His close involvement with the ruling government had become more obvious in the last decade. He was the official translator of Kamuzu Banda's public speeches. There was a widely held perception that Kamuzu Banda would pass on the leadership of the country to Tembo. However, by 1993, the political scene was changing in Malawi. The referendum in May 1993 and the general election in June 1994 were returning to the population the right of choosing their chief and his counsellors.

Song

"Anzeru zawo zawo ndi apongozi awo, kodi ati kupatsa dziko apongozi, mzika osadziwa, anthu awo osadziwa kuti ufumu apatsa apongozi? Ogo! ogo! Ataya udzu omwetamweta! Agwawo ena azula ufumu oh! oh! Zakanika nzeru zawo, agwira pa mwana opanda bweya! Ufumu uli ndi eni ake, Anzeru zawo!"

Source

Interview in 1993

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