

# Bwandi

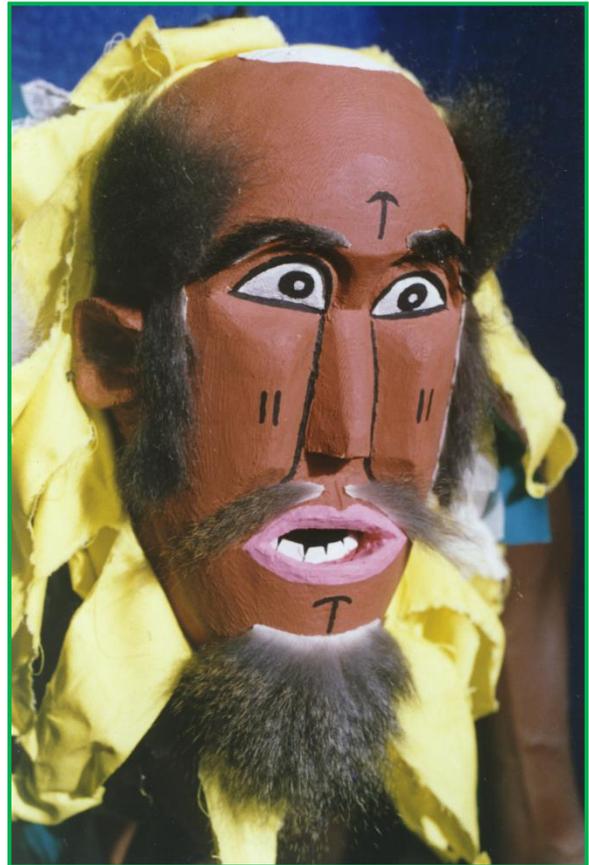
(A brown day mask from the Diamphwi area)

## Themes

- 1) Danger of ambition
- 2) Kamuzu Banda's identity
- 3) Limits & restrictions of *chikamwini* system
- 4) Manipulation/exploitation
- 5) Recent politics

## Etymology

**Bwandi** derives from the verb *kubwandira*, 'to grab'. **Bwandi** means, 'the grabber'.



## Description

The brown mask (30 cm.) portrays an old man with balding head, wrinkles and a moustache and goatee. A bit of grey hair (made from Samango monkey fur) borders the base of his skull and his head is topped with a white circle of paint that is spread down the sides to form two long bushy sideburns. The features are those of an African but not a Malawian. Tribal marks appear on his face and scarification on his cheeks. The nose is flat and the cheekbones salient. The big eyes stress ambition and the open mouth showing four teeth on the bottom jaw portrays meanness. The small ears express his unwillingness to listen to people's complaints. The headgear of the mask is made of sack cloth and tatters. **Bwandi** wears a heavy dark army coat over a white shirt and the outfit is completed with a black trousers. He carries a staff and a black flywhisk, as is common to chiefs.

In the arena, **Bwandi** dances like a madman or drunkard. He is uncoordinated and unpredictable. He wiggles his pelvis lewdly. He runs after the ladies and chases the men. He insults them and mimes beating them. His behaviour causes chaos throughout the arena. The male choir sings for him the following: "**Bwandi, Bwandi**, he keeps grabbing people as if they were his brothers and sisters. You are a stranger here! Where are you from? No one knows your home, you **Bwandi**, who keep grabbing! What is hidden will be revealed, so that everyone will know that you grab at the wrong place." The

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song accuses **Bwandi** of two anomalies. First **Bwandi**'s high position has been acquired through manipulation. He is seen as exploiting the population and enriching himself. He shows no pity and no mercy. The second issue discussed in the song deals with his foreign origin. **Bwandi** is not from this land. People question his right to the position he holds. They insinuate that he used manipulation to achieve his post and above all, his aim is to profit from the resources of the land. Our informant suggests that **Bwandi** is a stranger who lured a young woman. Despite her refusal, he raped her and forced her to marry him in order to have access to her wealth, and gained a high position in her family or village. **Bwandi** goes against the Chewa tradition by which important positions are passed through the mother and not through marriage. In the matrilineal system of the Chewa, the husband cannot have access to any status at all. He is considered a stranger and remains a stranger permanently. Secondly, he is not only a stranger but a foreigner from an unknown country. He should be a chief in his own home and not in a foreign land. He is accused of stealing the resources of his new home and smuggling them out to his country of origin.

The character of **Bwandi** is recent in *gule wamkulu*. It appeared in 1992 at the time of the political transition of the country to democracy. **Bwandi** performed at all types of rituals and particularly at political rallies of that period. Under the cover of the village set up, **Bwandi** portrays a fictitious chief who succeeded to power through deceiving a woman. This village story rings false and the real motive of the character **Bwandi** is to comment on the political situation of the country at the beginning of the 1990s. At this time the identity of Dr. Kamuzu Banda was under scrutiny and many incredible stories were rumoured about his origin and his being a foreigner. His closeness to the official hostess Mama Kadzamira appears under the theme of the 'lured lady'. At this time Banda's popularity was in rapid decline and the influence of foreign media had made the political situation in Malawi obvious to most Malawians. Kamuzu Banda ceased to be the wise leader and saviour of the 1960s. He had become the 'grabber', who exploits the population and its resources and enriches himself.

### Song

*"Bwandi Bwandi angobwandira anthuwa ngati abale awo! Mlendo uli iwe! Kaya ndiwe wakuti? Palibe amene akudziwa kwanu, iwe Bwandi Bwandi! Chobisika chidzaululika kuti chidziwika motero Bwandi Bwandi wabwandira padera."*

### Source

Interviews in 1992 and 1993