

Chaphulika

(A black day mask from the Pemba area)

Themes

- 1) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 2) Recent politics
- 3) Familiarity between brother- & sister -in-law (*chilamu*)

Etymology

Chaphulika means, 'It has burst out.'



Description

The black mask (25 cm.) portrays an old Chewa (tribal marks) who is bald, wrinkled and missing teeth in the top jaw. He has a crown of grey hair leading to two long painted sideburns, and a white goatee beard. His nose is aquiline and pointed. He frowns. The old man has accusing eyes and a protesting mouth. His expression is that of being 'caught' in his conspiracies, but he denies the accusations against him. Tatters complete the mask and stress its ancestral origins. He wears a smart western outfit of jacket, vest and trousers as a sign of prestige, and carries a whip or a flashlight to show authority and to demonstrate that he leads the way. He dances by jumping and swerving his feet with astonishing energy, showing that his hidden deeds have burst into the open. While he dances, the men sing a woman's complaint: *"Brother-in-law, brother-in-law, oh! Indeed it has burst out into the open. People of this village saw it, oh! What shall I do? I am fed up with covering (my pregnancy) with clothes. You say, No! Don't say it is me! No, I will speak all the same when people ask me, anyway, from whom the pregnancy came. It is from my brother-in-law. It has burst out into the open. Oh shame, shame, oh!"*

The song refers to the *chilamu* relationship between brothers- and sisters -in-law (qualified as a joking relationship). This is used as a metaphor for the political events of 1993, when the mask first appeared. In the Chewa matrilineal system, a brother- and sister- in-law are very close to one another. The *chilamu* relationship is familiar, affectionate, and characterised by humour including the sharing of racy jokes. If this relationship goes too far, however, it is a source of shame for the family. **Chaphulika's** song indicates that, in this case, things have indeed gone too far and that

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Chaphulika is responsible for the pregnancy of his sister-in-law. She has tried to hide the pregnancy for a while with loose dresses, but it is now at the stage where it can no longer be concealed and she openly implicates her brother-in-law, **Chaphulika**. His marriage will be ended by his failure to respect the family into which he has married.

With the character of **Chaphulika**, the parable of the brother-in-law and the pregnant sister-in-law is applied to relationship between Kamuzu Banda, the former President of Malawi, and the country. The character was created in 1993 and became popular during the period of transition when political rallies were frequent. The parable places Kamuzu Banda in the role of the brother-in-law, welcomed into the country in 1957. He became president in 1964 and thereafter ruled with an iron fist (the whip), all the while pretending to be the perfect ruler who was leading his people to prosperity (the flashlight). In March 1992, mild criticisms of his regime were publicly voiced by the Catholic Bishops through their Lenten Pastoral letter. In the months that followed, Kamuzu Banda came under increasing scrutiny, particularly regarding his human rights record. Kamuzu Banda's totalitarian state had grossly abused basic human rights, evident in the terrible condition of Malawian prisons, the frequency of so called 'car accident' assassinations, the repression of the press and media, the deportations and imprisonment of citizens and non-citizens, and the lack of common justice. Finally, these abuses made headlines throughout the world. Malawi was by then also experiencing strikes and demonstrations for the first time. Kamuzu Banda's credibility and popularity plummeted. The truth had 'burst out'. Kamuzu Banda's government was no longer the well-oiled ruling system that people thought it to be. Kamuzu Banda, who had portrayed himself as a brother and a saviour of the country, was now exposed. He had ruined the country and caused his people to suffer dearly, abusing the hospitality that was offered to him for more than thirty years.

The problem with Kamuzu Banda was that the misery which he caused to the country and to his people did not take only a few months to appear (as in the case of the pregnancy) but rather more than thirty years to burst out into the open. However, in 1993, as shown with the appearance of **Chaphulika**, it is clear that people felt it was time to evict him and to welcome another *mkamwini* (husband) into the household. Through the referendum of June 1993 and the general election of May 1994, the people chose their new leader, whom they hoped would work for the good of the country without taking advantage of his relationship of *chilamu*.

Song

*"Alamu alamu tate oh! **Chaphulikadi!** Achiona anthu a pa m'dzi pano oh! Nditani ine? Kubisa ndatopa nako m'nsalumo tate de! Inu mukuti: ai, usaulule kuti ndine toto ine! Ndiululabe nanga adziti ndani tate? Alamu **Chaphulikadi!** Chaonekera! Tate. Alamu **Chaphulikadi!** Oh manyazi, manyazi oh!"*

Source

Interview in 1993