

Dziko labwino

(A brown day mask from the Diamphwi area)

Themes

- 1) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 2) Role & powers of the chief
- 3) Recent politics

Etymology

Dziko labwino means, 'the beautiful country', referring to a wonderful place to live. Following Chewa pedagogy, the name is ironic and in fact means, 'It is an awful place to live in.'



Description

The near-circular 30 centimetre mask portrays an old man with bald head, wrinkled forehead, long painted sideburns, a moustache, a goatee that is touching the lower lip and deep labial lines. The flat nose and the tone of his skin characterise him as a Malawian. The eyes are cruel and vengeful. The mouth with its aggressive teeth is grimacing, vociferous and unmerciful. The white lips betray hypocrisy. The pricked ears painted white on their inner surface indicate a tendency for selective hearing. The mask purposely displays no tribal marks. The headgear is made of any skins and conveys ferocity. **Dziko labwino**'s features express wrath and resentment. He wears a vest, a white mini kilt, leglets and armlets. He carries a whip or a flywhisk or both. The costume and the insignia he parades reveal ambiguity of character and position. Is he a ruler or a killer?

Our character is recent. He was appearing at any function by the beginning of the 1990s. He could even be seen at political party meetings. The character moves with supreme obstinacy as he swerves one foot at a time, betraying that he is an old man. He strikes his flywhisk or whip with discontent. His movements are brusque and loaded with anger. The male choir reveals his identity: *"Let us see! Let us see, as he used to say, this beautiful country of old! this beautiful country! The country, if you treat it badly and slander its people without reason, it cannot be yours anymore, yours anymore, the beautiful"*

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country! (He complains:) *No! No! Today, you have dropped me, my friends.* (The people reply:) *No! No! The reason is to be found in your reign of terror, Mr. Beautiful country!*" The song suggests a fictional dialogue between the nation and its leader. The leader resents that the population has stopped supporting him. His rule was autocratic, and his inclination to cruelty alarmed the population. The leader of the 1990s, who is portrayed in this dance, is obvious to the audience. The song recalls that Malawi used to be a beautiful country before his ascent to power. The country has been disfigured by Kamuzu Banda's crimes, committed to strengthen his grip on power. Injustice, cruelty, murder, plunder and abuses of all sorts became commonplace. With his complete disregard for human rights, how can he pretend that the country remains beautiful? When citizens are treated with respect, their rights acknowledged and their criticisms or complaints given attention, then it can be called a beautiful country! This was not the case for Malawi by the 1990s.

With Kamuzu Banda's decline in popularity after 1992, people were considering other options. The referendum of 1993 was to offer a glimpse of hope... the hope of becoming the beautiful country and the beautiful people they used to be. By the 1990s, the people were becoming politicised and radicalised, and encouraged to open their eyes and see. **Dziko labwino** was one of the many *gule* characters promoting political change. Kamuzu Banda's greed, cruelty and thirst for power had denied him the Chewa tribal marks, as if he had made himself unworthy of being one of them. He had, by his deeds, stripped himself of his own dignity (the vest and the mini kilt). He had become obsessed with revenge, eager to whip anyone he suspected to be responsible for his failure. Kamuzu Banda had lost sight of the *mwambo* and had betrayed the wisdom of the ancestors.

Song

*"Tione tione (2x)! Paja ankati labwino tate de dzikoli! dzikoli! Dziko ukalikhallira udyo, nuda anzako, popanda zifukwa de e; silako, silako tate ye a **Dziko labwino!** Lero akuti ayi, anzanganu de e mwanditaya ine. Ayi ayi tate ye, ili ndi khalidwe lanu tate ye, **Dziko labwino.**"*

Source

Interviews in 1993