

Ganthi

(A brown day mask from the Pemba area)



Themes

1) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change) 2) Deafness to advice/stubbornness 3) Recent politics 4) Thirst for power

Etymology

Ganthi means, 'Mr. Deaf', from the Chewa word '*gonthi*', referring to a deaf person.

Description

The brown oval mask (35 cm.) portrays a Malawian. His tribal marks show he is Chewa/Ngoni. His pierced ears suggest his Ngoni ancestry. The wild animal skin headgear and two drooping black horns reveal that he is a fearsome and dangerous person, but that his power and strength are in decline. His face betrays signs of decrepitude. Wrinkles etch his forehead, and his cheeks have jowls. More wrinkles surround his thick nose, his scornful mouth and his slanting chin. He has glaring eyes. Long teeth protrude from his mouth, giving him a dangerous and cruel appearance. The mouth is curved into an open but devious smile. The character displays eyebrows, moustache and a long wild animal fur goatee to compound his look of ferociousness. Small ears show that he is deaf to his neighbours and unable to accept people's comments and criticism. The dancer wears a clean shirt, a smart pair of trousers and a fancy jacket. He carries a short stick as a weapon.

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Ganthi was introduced in *gule* in 1993, and his function was to enhance political party meetings. This was the period when the multiparty pressure groups and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) were campaigning and competing in the 1993 Referendum and 1994 General Election.

Ganthi enters the *bwalo* with gusto. He spins around rapidly and without interruption, following the rhythm of *chisamba*. He behaves like a person who has lost his senses. He mimes both deafness and blindness. The male choir sings: "**Ganthi** (the deaf one), *you who do not listen, alas! We try to convince him now and again (but) he does not wish to resign, as if he were going to the grave with his position. This is one who is really deaf, who does not listen when we address him, when we reprimand him with sarcasm. You, deaf one, you will rule up to the grave, **Ganthi**, the deaf one! Will you carry the position of power (the throne) with you to the grave...? You are really Mr. Deaf!*"

The song advises senior politicians of the MCP that it is time to retire and leave their place to a younger generation. **Ganthi** also addresses chiefs and leaders (political or others) that they should not necessarily hold their positions of authority for life. In the Chewa hierarchical system, chiefs retire when they become too old and leave the leadership to younger men. Their term of service depends on their performance and the quality of service that they render to the population. Their office requires above all the ability to listen to their people and to be attentive to people's complaints and criticism. Ignoring the very people who have chosen them and neglecting public grievances render such leaders unpopular and undesirable. People's patience soon wanes, and the population is forced to put pressure on them to leave their positions to others. In Malawi, general dissatisfaction became obvious, particularly during the period of 1993 to 1994, when the population showed that it was ready to vote for change in national politics.

Song

*"**Ganthi** uyu kusamva dee (2x)! Ogo otate ye dee. N'kuyesera kumunenera umu, sachoka konse pa malopo, tate ngati adzanka napo ku manda iyeyu tate yo. Ichi n'chigonthe chosamva m'kuchiiza, chosamva m'kuchijeda tate. Iwe, **Ganthi**, udzatenge malowo dee mpaka ku manda ye de tate ye **Ganthi, Ganthe**. Iwe udzatenge popita ku manda...? Ndiwe **Ganthi!**"*

Source

Interview in 1993