

Kadanga

(A red day mask from the Mua and Golomoti areas)



Themes

- 1) Living off other people (community parasite)
- 2) Drought, famine & food security
- 3) Laziness
- 4) Muluzi/UDF
- 5) Recent politics



Etymology

Kadanga is a type of grass often growing in the fields or on the roadsides. It produces small red grains that can be milled to produce a small quantity of low quality flour for porridge. The porridge made of *kadanga* was a substitute for maize, millet and cassava during the famine of 2001 – 2002.

Description

The red 30 centimetre mask portrays a Chewa man (tribal marks, Bantu nose) of middle age with a wrinkled forehead, long drooping moustaches and receding hairline made of black goat skin. The face is emaciated by famine and has salient cheek bones. Other features include a protruding chin and deeply set, languishing eyes that are lifeless and dull. The open mouth reveals clenched teeth to show that he is a hungry man. The smallish ears convey **Kadanga's** deafness to the problem of food security. The red colour of his skin portrays hunger. As people say, "*Njala n'chilombo – Hunger is like a wild beast*" (a carnivore that eats people). The face is covered with white spots, which refer to the

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kadanga grain: it requires thorough pounding or the consumer may suffer from constipation (*kamatira*). The headgear of the mask is tattered to reflect the concern of the spirit world over the food security issue. **Kadanga** wears the conventional tatter suit of *gule* and carries a ragbag for collecting the *kadanga* seeds.

Kadanga is a recent character dating from January 2003. It became part of any type of ritual after the latest Malawian famine of 2001 – 2002. His pantomime consists of imitating the behaviour of a person who has faced famine for several days or weeks. He staggers in the arena, appearing very weak, although he does not fall. He swerves his feet with little energy. His left leg, which shows signs of feebleness, cannot follow the right one. The men's song states: "*Without **Kadanga** (grain), I would have died!*" **Kadanga** dramatises the famine of 2001 – 2002, which hit the lakeshore region very hard. During this period, the rainy season did not follow its normal pattern. For two years rainfall was patchy and the maize failed. There were food shortages across the country, and the situation was further exacerbated because the maize reserves in the government stores had been sold to neighbouring states. When President Bakili Muluzi returned from a state visit abroad, he commented that there was no such thing as famine in this land. People were incensed because they were depending on *kadanga* for lack of a better alternative. Small quantities of maize were being imported but at an exorbitant price. Rescue from donor countries arrived late. Villagers experienced famine and malnutrition over a relatively long period. The *kadanga* grain had become one of the few options for survival.

The character of **Kadanga** first addresses the villagers on the issue of food security. It warns the community and individuals that it is extremely risky to sell a large quantity of their food supply in order to meet other needs. **Kadanga** invites them to plan and to budget. It is also wise to keep a food reserve for the time of famine, as the weather pattern is changing in the country. One has to resist the temptation to satisfy needs that are less essential than those of food security. It is also an invitation to fight idleness, to work harder and to produce more food. One has to take advantage of better methods of farming and of the introduction of cash crops as an alternative to selling one's own food supply.

In his second capacity, **Kadanga** accuses the government and the ruling United Democratic Front party of having failed as guardians of the nation in a critical situation like that of the 2001 – 2002 famine. The very denial of the food crisis and the clandestine sale of food reserves demonstrated that political leaders had failed to keep the welfare of their people as their first priority. Self-interest and attention to personal needs were seen as the politicians' priority. **Kadanga** dramatises the suffering of the country, and the ancestors of the people grieve over the victims of the famine and the countless villagers and children who suffered from malnutrition. They disapprove of the inequality between the leaders and the population. The leaders act out of self-interest and have become insensitive and blind to the suffering of their tribesmen and countrymen. It will be interesting to see how the *mizinda* will deal with the poor harvest of the season 2012 – 2013. Rains have been patchy,

and were close to absent when the villagers' crop was flowering. The results were disastrous in many areas, and the harvest was below average for many families. This was coupled with the massive devaluation of the Kwacha. It will be interesting to know who will be blamed for this state of affairs,

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and whether new characters will emerge from the *dambwe* to convey the ancestors' comment on the suffering of the people.

Song

*"E e ndakapanda **Kadanga** ndidakafa ine!"*

Source

Interviews in 2002, 2003 and 2007