

Makochezi

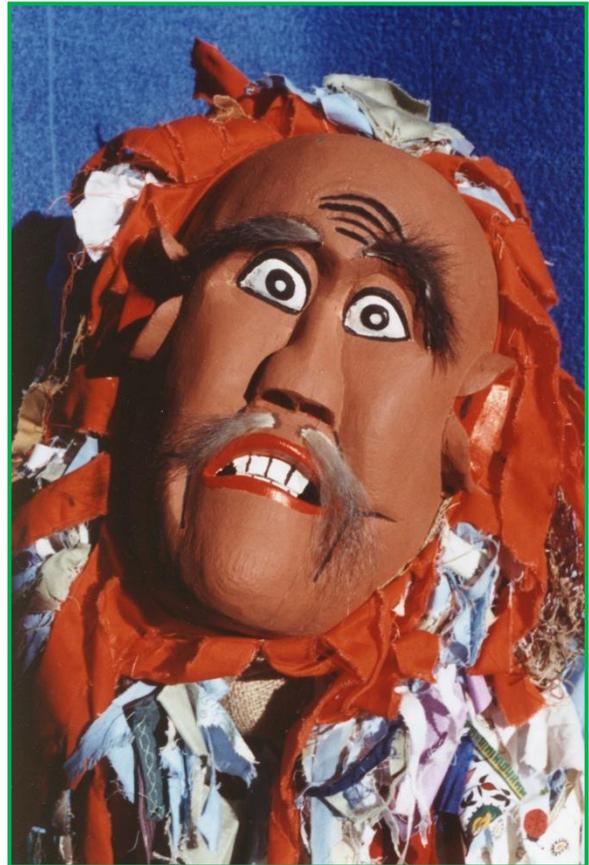
(A brown day mask from the Diamphwi area)

Themes

- 1) Kamuzu Banda's identity
- 2) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 3) Recent politics

Etymology

Makochezi refers to a deposit of plant material flotsam left on the shore of the lake by waves and winds. The word is used here also as a personal name to describe Kamuzu Banda and stresses his foreign origin.



Description

The character is portrayed with a 30 centimetre brown mask to signify that he is an African. The face shows no tribal marks, stressing that he is not Chewa but rather of foreign origin. **Makochezi** is an old man, completely bald and wrinkled. This is emphasised by the bushy eyebrows, the moustache and the deep labial lines surrounding the mouth. The eyes show discontent and anger. The nose is broad like that of an African. The grimacing mouth with missing teeth expresses surprise and deception. The strong chin accentuates determination and stubbornness; the ears are huge and pricked, as if he is eager to collect gossip. The headgear is entirely furnished by tatters with a predominance of red to highlight his foreign origin and his heated attraction for women. **Makochezi** wears a pair of smart black trousers, a white shirt, a tie and a clean jacket to convey that he is a prominent person. Moreover, he carries a staff and a flywhisk, the proverbial insignia of Kamuzu Banda. In the arena he likes to be surrounded by women (*mbumba*) and dances the *chisamba* with them, but shows little energy and waves his switch tail while walking about without real drive. The male choir explains: “*Mr. Flotsam, Mr. Flotsam kept saying, No, no! Today he has admitted that continuous drizzle (mvumbi) has washed down flotsam as far as the Lake. We have experienced a miracle! a miracle! Even the younger generations have seen it. Once again, to say the least, continuous drizzle has washed down flotsam as far as the Lake. He has lost face, Mr. Flotsam!*”

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The cryptic language of the song plays on the multiple meanings of **Makochezi** as flotsam brought by continuous rain and Mr. Flotsam as President Kamuzu Banda himself. The song talks of the defeat of Kamuzu Banda after the referendum of May 1993 in which Kamuzu Banda lost face and had to acknowledge defeat in favour of the United Democratic Front party. The song makes allusion to the weather conditions that brought change and allowed the miracle to happen. The reference to the continuous rain evokes the succession of events starting with the Pastoral letter of the Catholic Bishops in March 1992 through to the referendum of the 17 May 1993. This particular period had been characterised by political unrest, strikes, riots, demonstrations and the appearance of new political parties, which were to revolutionise the order of the day. A large portion of the Malawian population (particularly the youth) was to rally behind democracy and to reject the dictatorship of the Kamuzu Banda regime and the Malawi Congress Party. The expression “once again” refers to the fact that what is now Malawi had enjoyed multiparty politics once before, in the time of the Federation, before the MCP was formed and came into power.

The character of **Makochezi** was introduced in *gule* at that time when the political situation was getting hotter. **Makochezi** took part in a great variety of rituals, and particularly on the occasion of political rallies. The Diamphwi area seems to have been a strategic point for innovating *gule* characters that were extremely critical of Kamuzu Banda and showed a greater opening to change. The reason for a pro-change attitude remains obscure and unclear. **Makochezi** blames Kamuzu Banda’s defeat on his self-assurance and on his lack of ability to listen to others. The mask refuses to portray him as a Chewa because of his stubbornness and his foreign ways. Kamuzu Banda’s early education outside Malawi, in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, has turned him into a stranger. Moreover, his growing ambition after independence has left the Malawian population with the conviction that he is self-centred, greedy and unable to come to terms with the needs of the grass roots. The Chewa turned him into a worthless trailing of twigs and leaves along the lakeshore of Malawi.

Song

*“A **Makochezi**, tate a **Makochezi** amati: Ayi, ayi (2x) tate de! Lero avomereza kuti mvumbi ukakula ndi a **Makochezi** akaoneka ku Nyanja tate! Taonera mayere, mayere tate! Aona ndi ana omwe tate. Mvumbi n’pachabe, watsutsula **Makochezi** ndi mpakana ku Nyanja tate. Achita manyazi a **Makochezi!**”*

Source

Interview in 1993

Reference

Scott, D.C. (1892). *A Cyclopaedic Dictionary of the Mang’anja Language spoken in British Central Africa*. Foreign Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland: Edinburgh. p. 307

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