

# Mpendadzuwa

(A pink day mask from the Mchanja area)

## Themes

- 1) Danger of ambition
- 2) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 3) Faithfulness to the *mwambo*
- 4) National interests

## Etymology

**Mpendadzuwa** (35 cm.) is a sunflower that turns following the position of the sun. The image of the sunflower shifting position is used to comment on the political rule of the 1960s to the 1990s.



## Description

**Mpendadzuwa** portrays a senior man with thick eyebrows and heavy moustaches (made of Samango monkey skins). He is half bald, with a bit of fur on the temples. The head slants sideways to represent the sunflower following the movement of the sun. The features are slightly atrophied on the right side. The large pricked ears are eager to collect any gossip or piece of information. The small eyes convey introspection and shrewdness. The long nose with its narrow bridge gives him the appearance of a foreigner. The cunning smile, showing no teeth, exposes an evil intention. His chin starts round but converges into a sharp angle. The headgear of the mask is made of Samango monkey skins and a piece of pink cloth, which covers the neck. **Mpendadzuwa** wears a tatter suit, which is embellished with kilt, leglets and armlets of white fertilizer bag laces. He holds two flywhisks to announce his chiefly or political status.

The character was introduced in *gule* (around Mua) toward the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. It could be older in other regions of Malawi. It started after the arrest of Albert Muwalo Nqumayo, the secretary general (1973-1976) and the administrative secretary (1965 – 1976) of the MCP and the chairman of the security services. Muwalo held three portfolios at the

[www.kasiyamaliro.org](http://www.kasiyamaliro.org)

Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art, Mua Parish, P. O. Box 41, Mtakatata, Malawi

time of his arrest on 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1976. The character of **Mpendadzuwa** describes the unpredictable changing moods of Dr Kamuzu Banda at the beginning of his reign as the first president of Malawi. The changes in his attitude were marked by a series of clashes dating back to 1962, before Kamuzu Banda became president, culminating in Muwalo's arrest in 1976 and his death by hanging on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1977.

The character of **Mpendadzuwa** found ever more reasons to be critical of Kamuzu Banda after Muwalo's execution until Kamuzu Banda lost the referendum in June 1993. When the reign of Kamuzu Banda was over, **Mpendadzuwa**'s popularity started to decline and he became a mere witness to past history. By 2000 **Mpendadzuwa** was rarely seen in the arena and had been replaced by more contemporary characters such as Wamkulu ndine and Abingu.

**Mpendadzuwa**'s message forecasts a gloomy future for the Malawi nation, since its president, unfortunately a Chewa, has an inclination to change moods and manifests a tendency to autocracy, dictatorship and cruelty. Kamuzu Banda failed to comply with the Chewa preference "to discuss and come to an agreement" in order to solve the political conflicts of the country. Instead, he showed that his agenda could not be modified and that no one could interfere with his personal ambition of becoming the only supreme ruler. Anyone who competed with him had to be eliminated. This was to prove contrary to the good of Malawi's citizens. That tendency was already well known to the Chewa in events such as: the sudden tragic death of Dunduzu Chisiza which allowed Kamuzu Banda to become Prime Minister in 1962, the downfall of Aleke Banda (the former secretary general of the MCP), the cabinet crisis in July / August 1964, the aborted coup and the exile of Masauko Chipembere in 1965, the deposition of the Chewa chief Mwase of Kasungu and his miserable death in 1973, the religious intolerance toward sects like the Jehovah's Witnesses from 1973 to 1975, the open war and brutality against the stooges who had proved traitors in the struggle for Independence, and the imprisonment and the deportation of many valuable men and women, such as Chipembere, Kanyama Chiume and Orton and Vera Chirwa. The case of Albert Muwalo was one of many; and it was followed by more mysterious deaths: Aaron Gadama, Dick Matenje, Twaibu Sangala, David Chiwanga and Orton Chirwa. People were persecuted all over the country by the Malawi Young Pioneers because they did not own an MCP party card.

Such wretched news leaked out via the "oral newspaper" into the villages: it gave the character of **Mpendadzuwa** one more reason to deliver its key message to the nation and to pave the way to a better future. **Mpendadzuwa** proclaimed his message at party meetings (even when Kamuzu Banda was present), at initiation ceremonies and even at funerals of important members of the community. The male singers introduced him with the following song: "**Mpendadzuwa, Mpendadzuwa has come! The people are really happy!**" With this note of sarcasm **Mpendadzuwa** danced like Mandevu, the colonial ruler who showed no respect for the people. He flapped his two flywhisks to manifest his absolute power and control. **Mpendadzuwa**'s ever changing moods and policies "in the heat of the day" warned the population that their supreme chief had sacrificed the

[www.kasiyamaliro.org](http://www.kasiyamaliro.org)

Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art, Mua Parish, P. O. Box 41, Mtakatika, Malawi

wellbeing of his people to his own personal ambition. **Mpendadzuwa** forecast the wrath of the ancestors and consequently a gloomy future for the people of this country, unless the situation would change and people would choose a better leader who cared for the population.

### **Song**

*“Mpendadzuwa, Mpendadzuwa wabwera! Anthufe takondwera!”*

### **Source**

Interviews in 2012