

Ndatsaliranji?

(A brown day mask from the Linthipe area)



Themes

1) Supporting Kamuzu Banda/MCP 2) Role model for leadership 3) Recent politics 4) Witchcraft & old age

Etymology

Ndatsaliranji? means, 'Why have I stayed behind?'

Description

This brown mask depicts an old Chewa, indicated by the tribal marks, disguised as a capable young man. His bald head is hidden by a crown of black hair and painted sideburns, although wrinkles are visible on his forehead. His well-trimmed whiskers and goatee hide his aged chin and missing teeth. His large ears and eyes ironically suggest that a long time ago he was alert and sensitive to criticism. The headgear of the mask and the dancer's suit are made of tatters, in order to emphasise his claim to the support of the ancestral world. Despite attempts to look younger, he walks with a walking stick like an old man. In the arena, he is passive and has difficulty dancing to the rhythm of the *khunju*. He leans on his walking stick for support and is led by a crowd of women, who fail to revitalise him. As he staggers about the arena, the men sing, "People ask why I

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have stayed behind. They wonder why I have grown so old. My friends, I am really finished. Oh, this is their bad luck! I do not know if it is because of practising witchcraft. I do not know. God knows the good and the evil. But you ask the reason why I have stayed behind. Everything, everything is in the hands of God... I have stayed behind, Mr. Why have I stayed behind? Oh."

The song is a dialogue between the old man, disguised as a young man, and the crowd. The content is political. The old man represents Dr. Kamuzu Banda. **Ndatsaliranji?** appeared in *gule* around 1993, shortly before the referendum when Malawi was in the process of changing from a dictatorial one-party system under Kamuzu Banda to that of a multiparty democracy.

Ndatsaliranji? performed mainly at political rallies and showed allegiance to the ruling party, the current government, and the President for Life, Kamuzu Banda.

The song plays on a double meaning. It is first a plea in Kamuzu Banda's favour, reminding the villagers of the respect due to elders like the old Kamuzu Banda. One should not judge his performance critically, and one should continue to rally behind him. By 1993, this attitude was shared by a decreasing minority. The song protests against a foreign mentality that tends to disregard elders and to consider them as a burden to the rest of the community. In a second context, the song tries to disassociate old age from witchcraft. Old age is viewed with suspicion, particularly when most of the old man's generation has passed away and he remains alone. It is believed that he uses witchcraft and takes the lives of younger people in order to prolong his own lifespan. Old people can be feared and neglected because they are alleged to be responsible for deaths in the younger generation. Their neighbours and relatives secretly wish their end. The song, reflecting the Christian outlook, opposes this mentality by affirming that God is the only one who can prolong someone's days, and only God is the ultimate judge over each one's deeds. The way one treats others may well be the measure of how one will be treated tomorrow. The sympathy that **Ndatsaliranji?** shows to the old President appeals to a Christian ideal and to traditional wisdom. However the majority feel that the time has come for a change of leadership, which would reinstate justice and move the nation forward.

Song

*"Anthu akuti: Ndakhalitsiranji ine? Ati ndakalambiranji ine? Anzanga, ndatha kale tate oh e. Ilo ndi tsoka lawo, kaya n'kutamba? Kaya tate! Zonse adziwa n'Chauta tate n'zokoma n'zoipa tate. Inu mukuti: **Ndatsaliranji** tate? Zonse zonse ndi Chauta de... ndatsala, **Ndatsaliranji?** Oh. (6x)"*

Source

Interview in 1993