

Titani?

(A brown day mask from the Pemba area, Dedza)

Themes

- 1) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 2) Recent politics
- 3) Welcome of strangers

Etymology

Titani? means, 'What shall we do (in this situation)?'



Description

The mask resembles that of Lambwe (refer to that entry) with its single white horn (35 cm.) erected on top of the head. However the horn is tipped with red, representing 'the light shining in darkness', a reference to the motto of the 1992 political campaign favouring change.

The brown face (35 cm.) is that of a senior man with tribal marks. He is wrinkled, bald and toothless and has a crown of hair, moustache and goatee. His expression is perplexed and the eyes look lost at the prospect of change. The face has jowls and a round slanting chin. The ears are small, signifying people's inability to cope with change. The reddish tone of his skin hints that he may be a stranger despite the tribal marks on his face. Similarly, the nose, though it is flat and broad, betrays a stranger. Despite his apparent signs of decrepitude, the apex of his head is crowned with a short hair lock, made of dyed sisal, signalling his vigour and potency. The mask is adorned with tatters to show that he is sent by the spirit world. The character wears a jute suit to indicate that he is a respectable person who aspires to a high rank. He carries a flashlight or a lamp to lead the way. In addition, the horn that tops his head signifies that he alone can lead the country to salvation.

Titani? appears in the *bwalo* with tremendous vigour in swerving his feet. Women surround him, impressed by his dynamism. The male choir sings for him, "*Come in, Titani? (Mr. What shall we do?), in darkness such as this! Shed some light! Let it be light, my friends! Let light shine so that we*

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*all may see! What shall we do in darkness such as this? Let it be light, so that we all may see, even those who are blind! **Titani?** (Mr. What shall we do?) Let it be light! Let it be light!"*

Titani? first appeared at political rallies held in 1992. He is one of the many innovative characters of *gule* that were introduced during the political transition of Malawi. The song, through the metaphor of escaping from darkness, proposes a new political identity to the rural Chewa who are reluctant to change. Many remain blind to the new choice which is offered to them through a multiparty system (the lamp). The song evokes the Chewa proverb, "*Mlendo anadza ndi lumo lakuthwa – The stranger came with a sharp razor*" (with new ideas, technology and sets of values). One should not mistrust a stranger simply because he comes from elsewhere in the country. He may bring new ways that will benefit people and enhance their future. Someone who has left the village for a period may look like a stranger on his return but his remarks and criticism may be of value for the village and the villagers should listen to him instead of being sceptical. This is applied here to the political scene in Malawi.

Song

*"Tabweramo **Titani** de mundima woterewo tate? Tate de unikani! Kuyere anzathunu! Kuwale de kuti tonsefe tione de eee. **Titani** ndi ndima woterewo tate? Kuwale kuti tione onse, onse osaona tate ye. **Titani, Titani** tate de? Kuwale, kuwale!"*

Source

Interview in 1993