

Tsoka lidaya

(A brown day mask from the Dedza, Linthipe and Diamphwi areas)

Themes

- 1) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 2) Evil reaps its just desserts (*choipa chitsata mwini*)
- 3) Lies, trickery & deception
- 4) Recent politics
- 5) Rivalry for authority

Etymology

Tsoka lidaya means, 'Bad luck darkens (or befalls) its owner.'



Description

The brown mask (25 cm.) portrays a prominent, aged leader or politician who protests against the arrival of competitors. The tribal marks on the mask indicate that he is a Chewa. He is bald, with long grey hair, a moustache and a goatee all made of sisal dyed grey. His age emphasises that he has been in his position of authority for a long period. Painted eyebrows and long sideburns confirm that his prospects of remaining in power for longer are very good. The large eyes stare outward and convey hostility and opposition. The triangular nose shows determination. The wide-open mouth is full of teeth and expresses anger and protest. The round ears lie flat against the head to stress the character's deafness to people's complaints. The headgear incorporates tatters under the grey sisal wig. **Tsoka lidaya** wears a tatter suit characteristic of the high position he holds and brandishes the insignia of power: a staff and a flywhisk.

Tsoka lidaya made his entry into *gule* in the 1990s and appeared on any occasion. The character was prominent at political rallies, which were becoming more frequent with the arrival of the multiparty advocates. In the arena, **Tsoka lidaya** imitates the movement and the rhythm of Mfumu yalimbira, the chief's rival. He swerves his feet with supreme determination and then throws a leg forward and swings across, brandishing his flywhisk. This movement suggests that he is occupying and defending

the entire *bwalo* space in order to prevent others from intruding. This dancing style is clearly reinforced by the words of the song sung by the men, which voices the population's protest: *"Alas! Some, some refuse to listen to their fellows! They say: They should not come in, even if it is their home! Where do they think they will stay? Here is their home! Bad luck befalls its owner, befalls those who oppose their fellows, saying they refuse their brotherhood. Bad luck befalls its owner!"* The song incriminates despotic leaders who breed animosity and intrigue to force their competitors aside. They oust their rivals, demote them to junior positions or invent false accusations to tarnish reputations. The song describes the political situation of the 1990s where new political parties and multiparty advocates were trying to gain a voice among the local communities. The song focuses on Kamuzu Banda and the government's opposition to their presence on the political scene. **Tsoka lidaya** exposes the power struggle of that period and provides a glimpse of hope for change. Under the cover of village politics, **Tsoka lidaya** discusses issues that could not be spoken openly. This is particularly true for the central region, which had been the stronghold of the Malawi Congress Party and the close collaborators of Kamuzu Banda himself. The parable of the chief and his assistants focuses on a village headman who is enthroned despite his dubious pedigree. Furthermore, he is disliked by his subjects because of his inequitable and ruthless leadership. Villagers show their discontent and wish secretly to replace him with a person of better qualities who would have the villagers' interests at heart. The unpopular old village headman opposes their wishes. Accustomed to the tributes and the financial advantages of his position, he uses defamation to defile the reputation of the candidate put forward by the population. **Tsoka lidaya**, under the cover of the village set-up, accuses the totalitarian regime of Kamuzu Banda and the MCP of closing the door to change by preventing the advocates of multiparty democracy from operating in the country.

The character of **Tsoka lidaya** was short lived in the *gule* arena. It rarely appeared after the mid 1990s. The general election of 1994 brought the struggle to an end. **Tsoka lidaya** had proved that bad luck was capable of darkening the old political order and was empowering the newcomers to rule the land and talk openly to their people.

Song

*"Yerere tate de aye de, wena, wena amakana zonena anzawo! Kuti ati: asabwere tate, koma kuli kwawo tate ye! Kodi amati nanga akhale kuti? Kuno kuli kwawo tate! **Tsoka lidaya**, lidaya tate lili ndi yemwe akukaniza anzake kuti ati safuna ubale wawo, tate! **Tsoka lidaya.**"*

Source

Interview in 1993