

Lingagwe!

(A yellow day mask from the Mua area)



Themes

1) HIV/AIDS & sexual diseases 2) Beware of luring appearances 3) Dangers of modernity

Etymology

Lingagwe! means, 'It is bound to fall!'

Description

This character was born around the 1920s, after the first young men of Nyasaland returned from work abroad after labour migration. **Lingagwe!** represents a smart, clean and well-dressed young man who comes back home after having adopted the western life style. He was either employed in the mines of Northern and Southern Rhodesia or was called to the First World War, where he earned money and tasted European life. His western clothes show this influence. His hairstyle has a cowlick, rendered in the mask (25 cm.) with a high tuft of feathers (*tumba*). This portrays his eccentric taste and his liking for modernity and foreign things. The cowlick became a symbol for masculinity and male potency. This young man, dressed in his best tatter suit and equipped with western manners presents himself to the village, after a long absence, with a big smile, as if to say: 'I am back, look at me, don't you recognise me, I have

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seen the outside world, and I am modern!’ As he dances in the arena, with all his energy and skill, he points with his finger at the different directions he comes from and from where he has borrowed his new personality. His friends look at him amazed and pretend that they do not recognise him. His behaviour and looks are so different and foreign to them. They look at the cowlick and sing: “*It is bound to fall!*” meaning that his false manners, insincere behaviour, his showing off and precarious wealth will not last. They know that he will use his false appearance to impress their daughters and even seduce them. They are afraid that their daughters will be lured and cheated by him and become the victim of his sexual prowess. That is why they have warned their daughters, saying that he will soon become impotent and they themselves infected with sexually transmitted diseases. If they associate with **Lingagwe!** the girls will have no future. “*Be aware of Lingagwe – It is bound to fall!*” **Lingagwe!** carries a whip, the sign of castigation from the spirit world for those who deviate from the traditional morality.

Song

“*Lingagwe e tate eyere Lingagwe, Lingagwe oh, Lingagwe e tate e Lingagwe iwe tate de Lingagwe!*”

Source

Interviews in 1973, 1985 and 1989