

Mwamtenganji alendo?

(A female character from the Mua area)



Themes

1) Faithfulness 2) Marriage, preparation & instructions 3) Avoidance of an early (illegitimate) pregnancy

Etymology

Mwamtenganji alendo? means, 'Why did you welcome a stranger?'

Description

This masquerade belongs to the store of visual aids that women display on the occasion of the *chinamwali* ceremony. Such rituals are commonly combined with funeral rites and commemoration ceremonies (*mpindira*). Two *anamkungwi* in disguise erupt from a special *dambwe* that is used for the girls' initiation. One – an undefined character – is dressed as a woman and carries a basket on her head. The second is disguised as a man, and is obviously a stranger. This is **Mwamtenganji alendo?** He

www.kasiyamaliro.org

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

is wearing a pair of trousers and a jacket. The sleeves of the jacket are elongated and padded with grass inside, lengthening the arms. Sharp thorns (*kankhande*) are attached to the sleeves in order to threaten the audience. He also brandishes a long knife. **Mwamtenganji alendo?** wears on his head a faceless cover, a wig and sometimes a hat. As the dance progresses, both characters reach the area surrounding the funeral house. **Mwamtenganji alendo?** starts threatening the mourners, and chases the men as if to hit them with the thorns. He stands for the *malume* as the owner of the *mbumba*. As the men disperse, the two characters enter the funeral house (*masiye*). While the chase is on, the *anamkungwi* sing, “*Why did you welcome a stranger, with a big knife in his hand?*” The song provides an explanation for the pantomime and the chase. The message of the *mwini mbumba* is clear. The initiates are told not to welcome a stranger in their *bwalo* after their coming of age. Otherwise they will find themselves pregnant and unable to be properly married in the future. The chase of the men is to stress that no playboy should be allowed near the quarters of young girls who have reached sexual maturity. Besides, *chinamwali* is exclusively a women’s affair, which does not concern men.

Inside the funeral house filled with women, the dancers change their outfits, which they had concealed in the basket that one of them carried. After their transformation, they reappear as Chiwekuweku and Kanamwali kayera. These two characters and their messages are described in detail in other entries.

The character of **Mwamtenganji alendo?** reinforces the importance of sexual education and of the *mwambo*. Young maidens should be watchful after their initiation. They have grown up and are not to fraternize with boys and strangers. Soon they will become engaged and be married. They should not welcome strangers in their *bwalo* or flirt ‘in the bush’ before the marriage procedure starts.

Mwamtenganji alendo? reminds them through reverse imagery of the importance of faithfulness in marriage and mimics the dangers that can damage this union and their future. One has to listen to the *mwambo* and to follow the ancestors’ advice as taught by the *namkungwi*. Today, the pantomime of **Mwamtenganji alendo?** rarely occurs as part of the *chinamwali*. Two reasons explain his disappearance. First, the initiation rites have been condensed because of economic reasons. Second, the secrecy concerning women’s matters has been relaxed with the advent of a more westernised lifestyle. Ironically, **Mwamtenganji alendo?**’s advice on sexual responsibility may be more pertinent now as the traditional family structure disintegrates and customs fade.

Song

“*Mwamtengeranji alendo (2x) chimpeni chili ku manja?*”

Source

Interviews in 1991 and 2007