

Ziyenda m'manja

(A red mask from the Mua area)

Themes

- 1) HIV/AIDS & sexual diseases
- 2) Dangers of modernity
- 3) Promiscuity

Etymology

Ziyenda m'manja means, 'They are carried in the hands' (referring to the male and female sexual organs). This suggests that things that were done previously in privacy are now done in the open.



Description

The small red mask (25 cm.) depicts a handsome young man with a smart face, neat moustache and nicely parted hair made of baboon fur. Rags hide the neck of the dancer. The character wears a *gule* tatter suit and a large belt. He does not have armllets or leglets, showing that he is a modern man. He carries a dandy's handkerchief or a flywhisk.

Ziyenda m'manja is a character that dates from the 1940s but is seldom seen today. His performance is not linked to any specific ritual. In the *bwalo* he jumps about, full of energy. He swerves one foot after the other with pride and ostentation as the men sing, "*You there, they* (the male and female sexual organs) *are carried in the hands!*" The character portrays the youth of both sexes who have abandoned the ancestors' advice and have turned toward foreign values (the colour red). They show no shame in adopting provocative immodest fashion trends. These new fashions invite the villagers to adopt promiscuous life styles, turning to prostitution. Boys can easily, with a bit of money, solicit any girl. Girls may lack self-respect in their manners, conversation and dressing code. They provoke boys who have no self-restraint and are eager to seek their favour. Uncontrolled and free sex provides the ideal climate for sexual diseases to develop and to spread. Money seems to be the only value that counts.

Through the character of **Ziyenda m'manja** the Chewa react against the invasion of modernity that results in the loss of their culture and values and that destroys their very identity. Modernity even

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challenges faith in the ancestors. Recently, this loss of culture and identity has had more dramatic effect in taking the life of the younger generations.

Song

"Iwe tate (2x) Ziyenda m'manja (2x)!"

Source

Interview in 1999