

Nthipe

(A day structure from the Khwidzi area)

Themes

- 1) Caution with strangers
- 2) Troublemaking
- 3) Unity & harmony

Etymology

Nthipe is a Chewa word for the cormorant.



(miniature model)

Description

The **Nthipe** is a one metre long and high structure made of a bamboo frame woven with maize husks. It appears as a bird from the lake, the cormorant. It has a long fixed neck, elongated tail and sometimes wings are added. The dancer slides across the arena like the bird floating on water. In the past, this structure was exclusively performed for funerals and commemoration ceremonies. The men sing for it, "*The cormorant, the bird from the lake, the cormorant makes a mess!*"

The Chewa from the Khwidzi area look at the cormorant as a stranger that comes from the lake into the rivers, where it damages their nets and fish traps, and steals their fish. Then the cormorant disappears. **Nthipe**'s behaviour is a metaphor for the village setup, where a stranger comes to live in the village and is given a place to stay. He may be a temporary worker or a husband who has come to marry into one of its families. Once welcomed, this person shows his true nature. He may be a person of loose sexual behaviour, flirting with married women, and leaving discord, jealousy, pregnancies and sexual diseases. A quick-tempered person leaves behind quarrels and disharmony. A thief steals. An antisocial person causes misfortune and death through witchcraft. The cormorant represents any type of troublemaker who makes a mess and slips away, never again to be seen in the village. Through the character of **Nthipe**, the ancestors warn the village to beware of strangers who join the village community for a short time and leave a mess behind.

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Song

*"Mbalame ya ku Nyanja, **Nthipe** (2x) n'yoononga!"*

Source

Interview in 1992