The Language Agenda in Post-Colonial African Music

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The peasantry and the urban working class threw up singers. These sang the old songs or composed new ones incorporating the new experiences in industries and urban life and in working-class struggle and organisations. These singers pushed the languages to new limits, renewing and reinvigorating them by coining new words and new expressions, and in generally expanding their capacity to incorporate new happenings in Africa and the world.

- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Decolonising the Mind (1986, 23)
Case Studies

• Miriam Makeba (South African, 1934-2008)
• Lazarus E. N. Ekwueme (Nigerian, b. 1936)
Scheufele’s Communication Theory

- Agenda Setting
- Priming
- Framing

Scheufele 2009
Agenda-setting

Process of selection in which certain information or subject matter becomes salient for the target consumer
Priming

• Preparing target audience to receive information
• Motivation
Framing

Packaging!
Common Agenda:

- Music to revitalize Language
- Language to revitalize Culture
- Post-colonial identity formation
I. Miriam Makeba (1932-2008) South Africa
MAKEBA: Priming as Motivation and the Impact of Colonial Agenda

- Colonial government
- Apartheid government
- Exiled from home
Makeba: Priming her audience

Makes introductions before performances.
In my native village in Johannesburg, there is a song that we always sing when a young girl gets married. It’s called the ‘click song’ by the English because they cannot say ‘Qongqothwane’.

-Miriam Makeba 1960 album recording
Makeba: Framing

- Native Xhosa (and other) Languages in Popular Music
- Traditional South African songs on entertainment stage and records
- Market as Singer while carrying out agenda of decolonization and promotion of language and culture
Impact

• Introduced Africa in a new way to the west.
• The voice of South Africa and Africa
• Sustained culture and language through recorded and performed songs
• Inspired other artistes
II. Laz Ekwueme (b. 1936) Nigeria
ADD A NIGERIAN MAP SHOWING LANGUAGE
• Creation of Nigeria through Amalgamation
• Introduction to Western education and Christianity
• Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970)
Ekwueme
Priming: Colonial Agenda and Impact

One of the resulting effects of the Reformation in the Christian Church has been the making of worship more relevant to the masses of professed Christians. It has meant the employment of a vernacular which will be understood by the congregation...It has also meant the use of tunes familiar to the worshippers, tunes in which they could join, whether in meek supplication, in holy adoration, or in hearty praise of the one who is, by faith, their Lord and Saviour”

• Ekwueme African Music in Christian Liturgy: The Igbo Experiment (1973/74,12)
Ekwueme: Framing with Glee Club Style
Ekwueme: Impact of his Musical Agenda

- Songs in functional use both in churches and schools all over Nigeria and the US
- Forum for Inculturation of Liturgical Music (FILM)-A movement of composers and university choirs
Thank You!