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Decolonizing the Mind Through Song

From Makeba to the Afropolitan present

QUINTINA CARTER-ÉNYÌ & AARON CARTER-ÉNYÌ

¹ There are many male artists that have also championed singing in native languages on an international stage, like Youssou N'Dour, who sings in Wolof. However, we chose to focus on female artists.

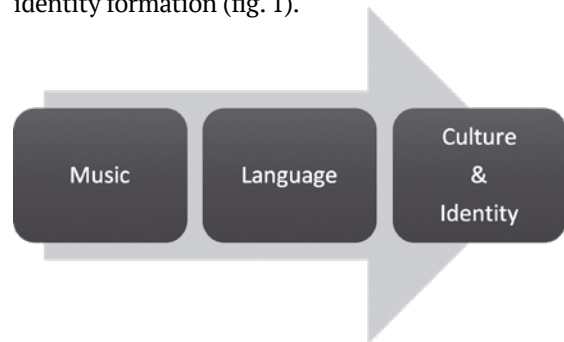
For many African musicians in the post-colonial era, singing in one's native language is more than creative expression. It is reclamation of indigenous culture and identity. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that musicians have resisted mental colonization by retaining indigenous musical practices while promoting innovation:

They 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. (1981:23)

In essence, musicians have used music as a tool for sustaining indigenous culture, including preserving and even revitalizing Africa's nearly 1,000 languages.

Africa emerged from colonization as a patchwork of different nations that reflect colonial domination more than indigenous civilization. Many people are now Christians and societies are increasingly urbanized and cosmopolitan, reflecting massive population growth and globalizing economies. Some have lamented the loss of 'traditional' indigenous culture, including prominent leaders such as Tanzania's first president Julius Nyerere: 'When we were at school we were taught to sing the songs of the Europeans.... It is hard for any man to get much real excitement from dances and music which are not in his blood' (Nyerere 1967: 186). Singing in African languages by internationally popular musicians may be viewed as a form of agenda-setting in communication, as theorized by Dietram Scheufele (2000). An early example of this is the performance practice of Miriam Makeba (1932–2008), known as 'Mama Africa'. Her conscious (and often publicly articulated) choice to sing in her native Xhosa language has since become a model for internationally touring African artists, including

prominent female artists Ònyékà Ònwénū, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Angélique Kidjo, Oumou Sangaré, Chiwoniso Maraire and Eno Williams.¹ The performance choices of these artists have had a significant impact on popular music, the robustness of African languages and cultural identity formation (fig. 1).



In his article 'Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited', Scheufele (2000) argues that these three concepts work hand in hand towards achieving a specific agenda in communication. Scheufele also states that agenda-setting, priming and framing are distinct concepts and deserve to be analysed individually. By *setting an agenda*, a certain subject matter is given salience through *priming* the audience and *framing* the communication. Scheufele describes priming as a way in which the media prepares audiences to receive targeted information related to the agenda that has been set (300). Through priming, 'memory traces' are developed that make concepts related to the subject matter more accessible (299). Written programme notes or verbal introductions or descriptions for a performance are commonplace within formal concert music (in the European tradition) but somewhat unusual for less formal popular music. However, many post-colonial African musicians have found it necessary to actively prime international audiences by providing details about the music to be performed. Framing constructs perspective on the communication

■ (right) Figure 1. Music-making as language revitalization and cultural and identity formation.

itself for the target audience. Together, priming and framing push the audience to engage in a certain way, focus on specific elements and better understand the context. This also may be a way of packaging the communication to be more conducive to reception. The same song or composition may be presented in many different ways: in the vernacular or translation; in a different key; with new instruments; with a different beat; played fast or slow; a short or a long version; and so forth. The twentieth century was full of reframing of musical practices as the recording industry emerged. An example is Miriam Makeba's Calypso-flavoured interpretations of Xhosa traditional songs. Scheufele's communication theory may serve as a prism for understanding the work of Makeba and artists since, who sustained African cultures, while at the same time creating new identities for a contemporary and future Africa.

Makeba was born in South Africa in 1932 during British colonial rule (which ended in 1934) and lived through the even harsher Afrikaner-led apartheid government in South Africa (lasting until 1994). She was introduced to American jazz and popular music through her brother, who was a saxophonist (Makeba 1988: 21). An appetite for cosmopolitanism is reflected in the groups she joined, including the Cuban Brothers and the Manhattan Brothers. These groups gained popularity in South Africa in the 1950s doing vernacular versions of swing and doo-wop, as well as writing their own material, which included harmonic influences of Zulu *isicathamiya* choral music. These musicians operated under an oppressive government. While not overtly political, their music conveyed a cosmopolitan and international mindset that reflected a longing for, and embrace of, the expressive freedom that was presumed to be found in the United States.

In order to limit the cultural impact of the British, the Afrikaners did not allow black South Africans to sing in English. This policy inadvertently encouraged singing in indigenous languages. After joining the Manhattan Brothers in 1955, Makeba started recording for Gallotone records. Her first solo recording was 'Lakutshona llanga' (in Xhosa) by Mankhekwe Dvushe. The 78-rpm record reached the United States, where

a songwriter wrote English lyrics for the tune: 'You Tell Such Lovely Lies'. Makeba was asked to record the new version. Because of the apartheid prohibition against Blacks singing in English, she was hesitant, but the Gallotone producers insisted and 'You Tell Such Lovely Lies' was released in 1956. It did not have the same meaning, and, according to Makeba, 'the new lyrics [were] terrible' (1988: 52). It was not a translation, but even a translation would not have had the same context for listeners abroad, as the original Xhosa lyrics of the song describe a man checking the hospitals and jails for his missing lover, presumably injured or arrested by the apartheid regime. The English-language version is incompatible with the Xhosa meaning and the sorrowful, lilting tune. This first experience of singing English versions of African songs seems to have left a sour taste in Makeba's mouth. Even after she had left South Africa, and its prohibition on singing in English was far behind her, she still chose to sing in Xhosa, Zulu, Swahili and other Niger-Congo languages. She did so despite the commercial demand for singing in English and any pushback from the record companies and tour managers.

The year 1959 marked a turning point in Makeba's career. She participated in the jazz-influenced musical *King Kong*, famous for its ground-breaking collaboration between black and white South Africans (Blacking 1980: 197). Fully integrating the audience challenged the apartheid policy of racial segregation. Makeba also appeared in *Come Back, Africa*, by American filmmaker and director Lionel Rogosin. Filmed without government permission, it exposed the harsh conditions for black South Africans living under the apartheid regime. Although she did not have an acting role, Makeba's appearance as a singer drew international attention at European film festivals. Her close-cut natural hair (later known as the 'Afro' hairstyle) was a novelty for fashion-forward festival-goers in Europe. Rogosin arranged for Makeba to leave South Africa to visit London. There, Makeba met Calypso singer Harry Belafonte, who took her to America (Sizemore-Barber 2012: 252).

Makeba arrived in the United States in November 1959 and soon performed on *The Steve Allen Show* for an audience of sixty million

■ Figure 2. Translation from Xhosa to English

Qongqothwane (The Click Song) ²	
Igqirha lendlela nguqongqothwane Seleqabele gqithapha nguqongqothwane	The diviner follows the road as a dung beetle It is very steep from here for the dung beetle

■ Figure 3. Transcription of opening melody and bass line of *Qongqothwane* (1960 album version).

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows the melody in the treble clef and the bass line in the bass clef. The melody is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The lyrics are: Ig-qir - ha - len-dle - la - ngu-qo - nqo-thwa - ne Ig-qir -. Below the melody, pitch contours are indicated: I (Do) for the first measure, II or V/V (Re) for the second measure, and (Re) for the third measure. The second system continues the melody and bass line. The lyrics are: ha - len-dle - la n - gu-qong-qo - thwa - ne. Below the melody, pitch contours are indicated: V (So) for the first measure and I (Do) for the second measure.

Americans (Makeba 1988: 84–5). In 1960, she planned to return to South Africa to attend her mother’s funeral but her passport had been revoked for appearing in *Come Back, Africa* (Feldstein 2013: 25). By then, the film was recognized as anti-apartheid activism. In exile from South Africa, Makeba remained in the United States in the midst of both racial oppression and civil rights activism. Makeba began to develop a new role as a South African entertainer on the international stage. She could now use her voice more freely. Starting with her 1960 album, *Miriam Makeba*, recorded with Harry Belafonte’s band and singers, Makeba made a conscious and deliberate effort to represent her cultural heritage and reject its marginalization.

The groundwork for the 1960 album was a series of performances at a renowned New York City music venue, the Village Vanguard, arranged by Belafonte, whom Makeba referred to affectionately as ‘Big Brother’. The audience at the first performance included Sidney Poitier, Duke Ellington, Diahann Carroll, Nina Simone and Miles Davis (Makeba 1988: 86). The set was short, consisting of four songs and an encore. One was ‘Qongqothwane’, a traditional wedding song in Xhosa. Her focus on English and Xhosa songs at the Village Vanguard performances eventually drew the ire of some audience members:

At the end of one show, two men come to see me ... they are Afrikaners ... One of them says, ‘We came here because we thought we’d hear music from home. Why don’t you sing any *lietjes*?’ ... ‘When you start singing in my language,’ I tell them, ‘I will start singing in yours.’ (Makeba 1988: 87–8)

The apartheid rulers knew the significance of language: it had been used as a form of control. But now, Makeba was beyond their reach.

‘Qongqothwane’ also appears on her first studio album, recorded and released only months later. There are two figures in the lyrics: the *igqirha* and *uqongqothwane* (see fig. 2). The first is the Xhosa word for a traditional healer or diviner (Fischer 1985: 168), or pejoratively ‘witch doctor’. They are more commonly known in South Africa as (*i*) *sangoma*, which is the word in Swazi and Zulu.³ In many African cultures, the diviner presides over marriage rites, providing incantations, directing vows and stating adages. The second term, *uqongqothwane*, is Xhosa for ‘knocking beetle’ (Fischer 1985: 50), also known colloquially as ‘tok tokkie’ because of the sound it makes to attract mates (see fig. 4).⁴ Xhosa oral tradition says tok tokkie leads lost children home. In the song, the *uqongqothwane* becomes a metaphor for the *igqirha*. The analogy has multiple layers. The *igqirha* initiates the marriage rite, like the tok

² Adapted from Makeba’s own translation in *The World of African Song* (1971) along with Fischer’s *Xhosa–English Dictionary* and a translation on the ‘penguinpowered piano’ blog (2018).

³ Although Makeba herself identifies as isiXhosa (based on her father’s lineage), she uses the term *isangoma* (the isiZulu word for traditional healer) in her autobiography to refer to her mother, who heeded the call to become a healer in later life. This may be because her mother is Swazi, not Xhosa, but also because of the more commonly known term.

⁴ A video of the ‘tok tokkie’ is available here: <https://bit.ly/2FnQ6nK>

■ (right) Figure 4: Male ‘Tok Tokkie’ beetle in South Africa (Wikimedia Commons, Author JMK, 2014)



tokkie sound precedes mating. The *igqirha* also leads the new couple to a new life, much as the *uqongqothwane* leads children home.

The framing of Makeba's music (and her ethnolinguistic agenda) on this 1960 recording was likely subtle to European and North American listeners but noticeable to black South Africans. Singing with Belafonte's band, his brand of calypso served as a frame for Makeba's rendition of the traditional Xhosa song. The calypso bassline provided a counterpoint to the complex syncopation of the Xhosa melody (see fig. 4).⁵ In the 1950s, calypso was popular among white Americans. Makeba's white audience could connect with this familiar aspect of the song's presentation, possibly increasing receptivity to the unfamiliar sounds of the Xhosa language and intricate African rhythms. This hybridization gave the world a small dose of Xhosa culture with a Calypso frame.

Several songs in Xhosa and Zulu appear on the album, but 'Qongqothwane' (Track 3, labelled 'The Click Song') is the only track in which Makeba offers explanation. Her use of priming is striking when she makes this introduction before singing:

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'.

This first introduction is fairly innocuous (as might be expected for a commercial recording for RCA Victor), poking fun at the inability of Europeans to pronounce Xhosa words but not directly citing apartheid. Over the decades, the introduction expands until it lasts longer than the song itself. This was the case when she performed at the Dutch TV studios in September 1979:

This next song ... it's a Xhosa wedding song. Everywhere we go people often ask me 'how do you make that noise?' It used to offend me because it isn't a noise, it's my language. But I came to understand that they didn't understand that Xhosa is my language, and it's a written language ... Now, I'm sure everyone here knows that we in South Africa are still colonized. The colonizers of my country call this song 'a click song' simply because they find it rather difficult saying 'Qongqothwane'.⁶

In this excerpt, we see a considerably more assertive Makeba, who has witnessed the hard-won progress made in the United States, but the



■ Figure 5: Makeba in 1969 (Source: Dutch National Archive, Public Domain)

persistence of apartheid in South Africa. She is no longer poking fun, but indicting white South Africans. In the 1960 introduction, she refers to 'the English', but in 1979 it is 'the colonizers'. She challenges her (Dutch) audience to not be offended or ignorant. Several live recordings of 'Qongqothwane' by Makeba available on YouTube include some variation of this introduction. A more impassioned version of the introduction is observed in a 1974 performance from Zaire (now DRC).⁷ By making these introductions, Makeba primes her varied audiences to hear her performance as a product of human language, not gibberish (note her emphasis that Xhosa is a written language).

In a cognitive study, Margulis found that written programme notes for classical music reduce enjoyment (2010). If this finding is applicable to spoken explanations, it may be audience members that intently heeded Makeba's call for observance and recognition were no longer able to experience the music as mere entertainment. Interviews suggest Makeba wants her audience to enjoy her performances, but she is also concerned with awareness. As Raymond Firth notes, 'songs, as a rule, are not composed simply to be listened to for pleasure. They have work to do' (2013: 171). At the time Makeba recorded her first US album in 1960, many African nations were gaining independence from colonial rule. Meanwhile, the US Civil Rights movement was working towards ending racial discrimination and segregation,

⁵ A musical analysis that shows the juxtaposition of the traditional melody of 'Qongqothwane' against a Calypso-style bassline may be viewed at: <https://bit.ly/2Y4WLe5>

⁶ Dutch TV studios, September 1979: <https://youtu.be/2Mwh9z58iAU>.

⁷ Zaire 1974: <https://youtu.be/vwhEkpCFrR4>.

producing both crises and ultimately dialogue. However, Makeba (as an immigrant) came under the coercive scrutiny of the US government when she married Black Panther Stokely Carmichael (Kwamé Ture) in 1968. Though modest in comparison to Carmichael's activism, the increasing intensity of Makeba's introductions to 'Qongqothwane' called for the South African resistance to align with the American Civil Rights and Black Power movements. They shared a common cause in fighting to stop the dehumanization of Blacks in the world, of which apartheid was the longest-lasting official system.

According to Paulla Ebron, 'audience studies cannot rest at the level of experience while neglecting to address the question of how sensibilities and predispositions are cultivated before the event' (2009). Drawing on Ebron's work, Sizemore-Barber studies the impact of Makeba on US and European audiences: 'The very incomprehensibility of her African songs to white audiences conspires to create a vision of Africa that is total and undifferentiated' (Sizemore-Barber 2012: 258). In 1961, Ken Goldberg, a music critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote in a review of a performance in California that Makeba sang 'Five African songs in unspecified languages, or perhaps all in the same language. The words do not matter' (qtd in Sizemore-Barber 2012: 258). Given this response to her music, it is clear why the introduction to 'Qongqothwane' becomes as prominent as the performance: for Makeba, the words *do* matter.

'Qongqothwane' is not gibberish or scat-singing: the lyrics are formed from language. Poetic combinations of Xhosa words produce a distinctive contour and rhythm along with a deep cultural meaning through use in wedding ceremonies. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa's nearly 1,000 ethnolinguistic cultures, singing is central to music and ceremony.

Without language, there would be no song; without song, African music would not exist. Language and music are thus tied, as if by an umbilical cord. No one who ignores its linguistic aspects can hope to reach a profound understanding of African music. (Agawu 2016: 113)

Everything is associated with song. If you are making a joke with somebody or telling a story, melody is often added to make it stick.

Niger-Congo languages are themselves 'musical' because they are tone languages. When singing in a tone language, the melody often follows the pitch contour of the spoken words (see Rycroft 1962; Carter-Ényì 2018). Because language and music are so tied in Africa, to divorce a melody from its lyrics (as was done with 'Lakutshona Ilanga') is to disfigure the music. Even if a song can be translated, the cultural idioms may not be preserved. It takes cultural knowledge to fully understand the meaning of proverbs and song lyrics. 'Qongqothwane' is a perfect example because people outside of southern Africa will not understand the cultural significance of a knocking beetle (in leading the way home) or a diviner as the officiant and guide to starting a good marriage.

The introduction helped Makeba's audience to understand some nuances of the lyrics. Equally important, she was concerned with positioning her performance within a cultural identity and rejecting colonialism. Her people have voices even if they are not allowed to express them. Even if one does not understand every word, recognizing the sounds as part of the language is itself important. In the case of Xhosa, the 'click consonant' phonemes of the language, such as *q* and *x*, are distinctive cultural signifiers in southern Africa, found in Khoi-San and Nguni languages. Makeba does not mind being the 'click-click' girl or singing the 'click song' because clicks are a proud aspect of Xhosa identity. Singing in Xhosa has a distinctive musicality and is challenging in vocal technique because the clicks might seem to disrupt smooth phonation. However, in Makeba's voice, the movement between vowels and clicks is seamless, as if she has two voices, not one. Even the specific vocables she intersperses – *hai-ya hee-ze he-lele* – are not 'nonsense' or 'gibberish' because they are specific to Xhosa music. Often, these are ideophones that enculturated listeners know means to dance or feel the music more in your body. Because there are many languages in sub-Saharan Africa, they are not known by everyone. There are bridge languages, like Swahili, but in general English, French and pidgins and creoles of European languages are the common languages. However, many Africans have a sympathetic ear for, and even sing in, each other's indigenous languages.

This affinity might be described as an aspect of Pan-Africanism or Afropolitanism. Makeba had many audiences: Xhosas, black South Africans, white South Africans, sub-Saharan Africans, black Americans, white Americans and European audiences with varying relationships to South Africa and the African continent. Still, language (including receptivity to music in other languages) more so than musical preferences, race or citizenship is the most distinguishing factor in the varied experiences of these different audiences to the same song.

Sizemore-Barber argues that the perception of Makeba's persona and the reception of her music in the West, particularly the United States, resulted in a stereotypical depiction, categorization and marginalization by popular media, who sometimes described her as 'exotic' or 'primitive' (2012:255). Makeba was neither oblivious to nor accepting of such portrayals and insisted on distinguishing herself and her culture. While Makeba might not be classified as outspoken (particularly in comparison to Stokely Carmichael), she persistently used her voice and music to humanize indigenous Africans. By singing in Xhosa, and portraying her traditions through her dress and hairstyle, Makeba encouraged awareness that Africans take pride in their culture and tradition despite systems of oppression. Makeba's introductions to 'Qongqothwane' are a reminder that Africans are people with cherished cultures that are not artefacts but rather are alive. Her marketable otherness brought her the popularity to spread her voice throughout the world, and she would not let the world forget apartheid. Makeba remained popular in Europe and with black South Africans. Throughout her career she often used the stage and interviews as opportunities to address government policies of apartheid in South Africa, which was law until 1991 (1994 was the first open election). Although Makeba does not take the time to translate and explain the cultural significance of the knocking beetle metaphor, her introductions are not only an acknowledgement that she is singing in a language, but they are also an invitation to learn more. This includes the exact meaning of the text, of which several people have contributed versions on the internet. Taken together with the understanding of African

music and language from Kofi Agawu – that they are 'tied, as if by an umbilical cord' – Makeba's pointed introductions suggest that Goldberg was wrong: the words (and the language) do matter in experiencing African music.

For many African singers since Makeba, singing in indigenous African languages has become an intentional act of decolonization and a recognizable signifier of Pan-African identity for African audiences. Arguably, Makeba is one of two icons of African music from the independence era, the other being Fela Kuti. Both became more active politically through interaction with the Black Power movement in the United States. But, Makeba and Kuti diverge significantly in their musical expression of social and political awareness and activism, specifically in language use. Additionally, Kuti returned to Nigeria and remained there for the rest of his life, but Makeba was not admitted to South Africa until June 1990. Makeba's use of Xhosa, Zulu and Swahili contrasts with Fela Kuti's manifestation of Black Power by singing exclusively in Nigerian Pidgin English (not Yoruba or English) from 1969 onward. Kuti believed that musicians singing in their native language were not cosmopolitan and were not embracing the Pan-African spirit (Olaniyan 2001), but perhaps he was wrong. The cultures and identities of African people are strongly connected to the languages of Africa, and many artists since the 1970s (when both Kuti and Makeba were at the height of their popularity) have followed Makeba's model, not Kuti's.



■ Figure 6: Eno Williams.
Source: Graham Perowne /
Merge Records

Artists active during Makeba's lifetime that followed her to various extents include: Ònyéka Ònwénù (Ìgbò of Nigeria, b. 1952), Angélique Kidjo (Yorùbá of Benin, b. 1960), Yvonne Chaka Chaka (Xhosa of South Africa, b. 1965), Oumou Sangaré (Mandinka of Mali, b. 1968) and Chiwoniso Maraire (Shona of Zimbabwe, 1973–2013). More recently, young artists like Àṣá (Yorùbá of Nigeria, b. 1982) and Eno Williams of Ibibio Sound Machine have brought their native languages to the music scenes of Paris and London respectively.

Eno Williams' lyrics move between English and Ibibio, her ancestral language. Ibibio Sound Machine's audience is largely outside of Nigeria, yet she sings mostly in Ibibio. Williams often gives her songs English titles, so the audience knows what the song is about. During a 2017 festival performance, Eno came out and sang in Ibibio for almost 10 minutes before addressing the audience in English. She does not explain in detail why or what she is singing, after a generic crowd call 'How ya feeling?', she asks them to participate:

Like my dear friend said, we are from Nigeria via
England and I'm going to teach you a little language,
Ibibio, are you ready to sing with me a little bit?
'Sem-semiya, sem-semiya, sem-semiya ...'⁸

Now, 'sem-semiya' is simpler phonetically than 'nguqongqothwane', but, in any case, the expectation that a predominantly white audience would sing along in Ibibio indicates that US audiences have come a long way since Makeba's first US tour in 1960–1 (at least at a reggae festival in California). For Eno Williams, singing in Ibibio does not require a preamble. However, she does emphasize Ibibio identity in interviews, stating that her lyrics are based on Ibibio storytelling and the 'language is very rhythmic and sing-song' (Maume 2017). 'Sing-song' likely refers to the presence of lexical tones. Ibibio Sound Machine is unique in bringing a minority language (with approximately five million native speakers) to an international audience. Xhosa has over ten million native speakers, Ìgbò over twenty million and Yorùbá over thirty million.

By singing in both English and African languages, these artists make their music accessible and push the boundaries of pop music.

They make nuanced choices about language use, and how to prime and frame their language agenda. This reflects Thiong'o's observation about musicians during the colonial era resisting colonization by using and even innovating African languages. These artists also move Africa into the future by embracing what Achille Mbembe calls Afropolitanism (see Mbembe and Balakrishnan 2016). Fela Kuti's decolonization was based on Pan-Africanism as a consolidation of cultural identity around being Black and African as interchangeable. This conception of Pan-Africanism aligns more with the racial identity of Blacks in Diaspora than the ethnic identities of many Africans for whom race is not a part of daily life (with the notable exception of South Africa). Kuti singing in Pidgin English is not compatible with Thiong'o's vision for decolonizing the mind through language. Others have identified Swahili as a candidate for cultural consolidation and Pan-African identity. Thiong'o chose his native Gikuyu as the language for his novels. However, Thiong'o's vision and practice (after 1981) are somewhat extreme, limiting the accessibility of his work. Music has the advantage of embodying the language agenda set forth in Thiong'o's proposal without excluding all but those who speak a given language. In song, language is carried with music. At first, the language may simply be part of the musical texture for non-speakers, but it can also be a spark. Increasingly, those who have enjoyed music in another language take time to learn more. Makeba demanded this special attention from her audiences. Artists today may expect greater cultural sensitivity and openness, and even audiences to sing along in a completely unfamiliar language (like Ibibio).

Afropolitanism rejects victimhood and attempts to change the narrative about Africa. Mbembe emphasizes music as a prime area for this paradigm shift. Afropolitanism also embraces the innate cosmopolitanism of Africa, as noted by Appiah (2010). Thiong'o observed that musicians naturally resisted colonialism through singing in their native language, but there are numerous other examples of musical polyglottism, and this has been the emerging trend in African popular music. The term 'Afropolitan' has only recently entered the popular lexicon in urban Africa.

⁸ From a video of a full performance at the 2017 Reggae on the River Festival in Garberville, CA. The prompt for the audience to sing in Ibibio is at 11:10: <https://bit.ly/2Ya9kEH>

Yet, it seems to embody these singers' musical progressivism more so than the consolidation of African identity (e.g. Pan-Africanism). Introductions may no longer be necessary for African singers to justify expressing their culture and identity on an international stage, but it takes constant and consistent effort to keep the world's many languages alive. We have gone from an estimated 12,000 to roughly 7,000 languages in the world (Simons and Fennig 2018), largely due to genocide and assimilation in the Americas. So far, Africa has not seen such a large loss, but there is widespread language endangerment. Generating awareness about individual ethnolinguistic cultures on stages around the world is secondary to the importance of focused intergenerational primary language learning. However, while it may be less intellectually impressive than Thiong'o's Gikuyu novels, singing in one's native language for all the world to hear has played and is playing an important role in decolonization. Thank you, Mama Africa!

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