A hobbyist looks at Zulu and Xhosa songs

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Abstract

My interest in Bantu songs was that of the singer. I wanted Bantu songs to sing and to teach others to sing. I have not developed the ethnologist’s interest in Bantu songs. I have, in other words, not concerned myself with the folklore aspect of Bantu songs. It was development from the primitive to Bantu songs of today that intrigued me. I have, for myself, made three very interesting discoveries. The first is that the language of the Southern Bantu, particularly Xhosa which I have studied, is a wonderful language of song. I have come to regard it as second to none in this respect. I shall return to this point presently. My second discovery was the range of Bantu songs from the point of view of development, or should I say, levels of development. My third discovery follows on because it concerns the host of Bantu song-writers in the Eastern Cape, particularly. I was amazed to find so many educated Xhosas and Zulus, trying their hand at song writing.
Senzenina (Zulu/Xhosa). Senzenina Sono sethu ubumnyama Sono sethu yinyaniso Sibulawayo Mayibuye i Africa. What Have We Done? Trying to figure out which language it was in, I looked up the words to this song, and found some of them in a Zulu dictionary and some in a Xhosa dictionary. On further research I found in the Encyclopedia Britannica: “The Zulu and Xhosa languages are similar enough to be considered dialects of one language, but speakers of Zulu and Xhosa consider them to be separate languages.” (FYI They are both Southeastern Bantu languages.) Many thanks to Élodie Chebat for contributing and singing this beautiful song! Mama Lisa. Zulu, Xhosa, and other languages related to them have had clicks only for a few hundred years. They belong to the group of Niger-Congo languages broadly called Bantu (except in South Africa, where the designation Bantu was used in racist policies). They are completely unrelated to the Khoisan languages; the Niger-Congo languages originated in and around present-day Nigeria and spread as their speakers spread. Scholars have long thought that Zulu, Xhosa, and related languages borrowed clicks from Khoisan languages through intermarriage. Around 1990, a linguist named Robert Herbert actually looked at the societies in question closely enough to spot a much more likely — and much more interesting — cause: a thing called hlonipha. Hlonipha is a kind of “respect” speech. The question of Xhosa girls being gold diggers and Zulu men being stingy... this is one of the reasons you hardly find these type of couples. It’s not about personalities being compatible, or cultures clashing, but rather the lifestyle in which each tribe chooses to live. I did a little investigation in this matter too, just so I hear from the Xhosa girls and how they take the allegations. Another question that arose to me was; does culture/tribe influence how a person looks at finances? These are some crazy assumptions and stereotypes that need to be addressed, for not only South Africa, but Africa as well, to be more peaceful and united. This is not the only tribal feud in the history of Africa, there are many more – the Rwandan genocide being the most brutal to be recorded in African history.