

LANGUAGE OF MY SOUL

A BURIED LANGUAGE

A BURIED IDENTITY



THE MYRMIDONS presents in association with PUKU CHILDREN'S LITERATURE FOUNDATION a THE MYRMIDONS production 'LANGUAGE OF MY SOUL' music by AYANDA SITHOLE THEO TUGE edited by C.A. VAN ASWEGEN SAGE director of photography DAKAL MAGORO executive producers GREGORY MOLALE BONOLO MOLALE produced by GREGORY MOLALE directed by GREGORY MOLALE



national film and video foundation
South African Film and Video Foundation



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A buried language | A buried identity



LANGUAGE OF MY SOUL

Running Time	—	84 Minutes
Written and Directed by	—	Gregory Molale
Produced by	—	Gregory Molale Bonolo Molale
Production Company	—	The Myrmidons
Edited by	—	C.A. Van Aswegen S.A.G.E
Cinematographer	—	Dakalo Magoro
Composer	—	Ayanda Sithole Theo Tuge



A BURIED LANGUAGE, A BURIED IDENTITY

After hiding her San identity and language for forty-five years, the last speaker of the N|uu language is now 90 years old and she is haunted by the question - 'what will happen to my language when I die?'.

Directed by Gregory Molale, LANGUAGE OF MY SOUL is a celebration of an African elder who rediscovered her will to live when she decided to revive a language she was once ashamed of.

Born during a time when there was an official license to hunt, stalk and kill the San people, Katrina Esau abandoned her true identity and stopped speaking her language - N|uu, when she was a 17 year old in 1950. She then identified as an Afrikaans speaking Coloured person (term for people of mixed race in South Africa) until she was 67 years old in 1996.

LANGUAGE OF MY SOUL contrasts an era when the San were denied their humanity and a period when they were finally free to speak their language. This portrayal of the enduring consequences of imperialism and the disappointments of democracy, follows the struggles of a matriarch concerned about her legacy.

In collaboration with international award-winning editor - C.A. Van Aswegen S.A.G.E., Gregory employs his creative vision for a special salutation of an African elder who is at the intersection of race, gender and cultural exclusion.





KATRINA ESAU



Born during a time when there was an official license to hunt, stalk and kill the San, Katrina Esau abandoned her San identity and stopped speaking N|uu when she was a teenager in 1950. She identified as an Afrikaans speaking Coloured (term for people of mixed race in South Africa) from 1950 until 1996. When Katrina finally disclosed her true San identity, she was 67 years old and there were only 19 other N|uu speakers alive. Unfazed by her inability to read or write, Katrina embarked on a quest to save N|uu - the language she was once ashamed of.

Her mission to revive her language saw Katrina start a N|uu language school in 2002. She was at the forefront of the creation of the first ever N|uu book - !Qhoi N|a Tjhoi, as well as the first bilingual dictionary of N|uu. Amongst many other accolades, Katrina has been awarded the Order of the Baobab by the South African Presidency as well as an honorary doctorate by the University of Cape Town.



DIRECTOR PRODUCER AND EDITOR



A year after his graduation in Film and TV studies, Gregory Molale wrote, produced and directed the award winning Ziyawa La! (Best Original Idea - SAFTA 2008) for the South African national broadcaster. Since then, Gregory has been producing, directing and writing award-winning, flagship TV content. To fulfil his childhood dream, he took a shift from television to feature filmmaking in 2020.

For his first feature documentary, Gregory is already receiving praise for his unique voice as both a writer and director.



As a skilled editor and colorist, **C.A Van Aswagen** has 7 SAFTAs nominations (the South African equivalent of the Golden Globes) and has won multiple international editing awards. Vir Die Voëls (For The Birds) won Best International Feature Drama at the Edmonton International Festival, Stroomop (The River Within) won the Grand REMI Award for Best Feature Film at the WorldFest-Houston International Festival. Ellen: The Ellen Pakkies Story was South

Africa's official Golden Globes submission, an official selection at Rotterdam, Seattle and the Pan African Festival in LA and Opening Night Film at the Toronto Black Film Festival. Fiela se Kind was nominated for the Grand Prix at the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, and International Panorama Best Film at the Cairo International Film Festival.

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

N|uu is the last surviving member of the !Ui branch of the Tuu language family, with all other members of this branch being extinct. The Language is thought to be as old as 25000 years. Its speakers were the first people of today's Southern Africa. On average, languages have 20-30 distinct sounds; N|uu has 143. That's three times more than the English language. The complexity of N|uu is used to get precision of scientific information around the natural system and without the language, we don't have access to the San's biocultural heritage. The language is humanity's heritage and of global importance.

I met the last N|uu speaker - Ouma Katrina Esau, in 2019. What struck me from our first encounter was her immense warmth and the stately grace with which she articulates herself. Learning that for decades, Ouma Katrina abandoned her language and identified as an Afrikaans speaking persons of mixed-race pulled me into this story. I already had some understanding of what the San and Khoi experienced during colonisation, but as someone who is proud of their African heritage, I wanted to fathom the level of fear and shame that compelled her to deny her identity.

But the woman I met in 2019 was nothing like the fearful and abashed teenager I imagined Katrina was when she was a teenager. Her countenance was captivating. To chart the journey of an African elder who is celebrated for preserving a language she was once ashamed of, was a task I approached with a keen sense of purpose.

From the beginning, I felt that even though Ouma Katrina does not have the academic sophistication to unpack the socio-political occurrences that rendered N|uu a language of shame, the story had to be told from her point of view. It's very common for stories such as this one, to be told through an external and consequently intrusive point of view. I felt that imposing my own ideological leanings would rob the story of its integrity and immediacy.

Language of My Soul is an attempt to immerse the viewer into the psyche and worldview of Katrina and her people, a world full of contrast and contradictions. I relied on a combination of documentary storytelling elements, literary traditions and cinematic techniques to articulate the deeper meanings of these complexities. It was a fulfilling exercise and I hope the audience finds themselves somewhere in this story.

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