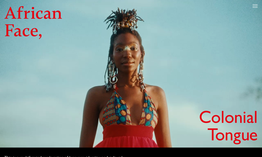
African Face, Colonial Tongue



This is a multifaceted exploration of language, identity, and cultural heritage in the post-colonial world. At its core is a 2024 short film inspired by Sarah Mkatsa's powerful steep of the same name. Through this project, we delve into the rich tapestry of human connection, not only minute the foundational pause but also stays in this visual interpretation. The film artfully canvases Mkatsa's dual linguistic identities, delving into the complex interplay between her African heritage and colonial linguistic legacy.

Our project extends beyond the screen, encompassing the original steep and a thought-provoking podcast series. These additional mediums provide a deeper dive into the themes of language and identity, broadening the conversation sparked by Mkatsa's work. Through this website, we invite you to engage with all aspects of our project: watch the film, read the essay, listen to our podcasts, and explore behind-the-scenes content. Join us in this journey of reflection on the intricate tapestry of modern identity and the languages that shape our understanding of the world.

About Serati

Sarah Mkatsa is a [illegible] of Cape Town, South Africa. Her work explores the intersections of culture, identity, and language, with a focus on the lasting impact of colonialism. Mkatsa's short film "African Face, Colonial Tongue" is a poetic exploration of her own linguistic journey, blending personal narrative with broader societal observations. The film, which has garnered critical acclaim for its nuanced approach to complex cultural issues, serves as a mirror for many who find themselves navigating between multiple cultural spheres and linguistic traditions.

Mkatsa's work often delves into the intricacies of post-colonial identity, particularly in the context of South Africa's diverse linguistic landscape. Her film skillfully weaves together personal anecdotes with broader commentary on the lasting effects of colonialism on language and cultural identity. The film's title itself hints at the duality of her experience, suggesting that her tongue may be colonial in nature, but her face remains African, underscoring the complex interplay between external influences and internal self-perception.

Mkatsa's approach to filmmaking is characterized by a blend of poetic imagery and direct storytelling, creating a powerful emotional resonance that has prompted viewers to reflect on their own relationships with language and cultural heritage. Her work has been screened at various film festivals and has sparked discussions among academics and cultural practitioners alike, particularly regarding the ongoing process of decolonization in contemporary South Africa and beyond.

The Essay

African Face, Colonial Tongue

By Sarah Mkatsa

"What would you do if you had two tongues in your mouth? Again the poem she were working in [illegible] Mkatsa's short film "African Face, Colonial Tongue" begins with this question, which sets the stage for a profound exploration of language and identity. The film, which has been screened at various film festivals and has sparked discussions among academics and cultural practitioners, delves into the complex interplay between Mkatsa's dual linguistic heritage, a theme that resonates with many who find themselves navigating between multiple cultural spheres and linguistic traditions.

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While cross-cultural marriages have long been a common phenomenon in South Africa, the impact of these unions on linguistic diversity and cultural preservation has been a subject of growing concern. Mkatsa's film touches upon this issue, exploring how her own family dynamics have shaped her linguistic landscape. The film suggests that these unions can lead to a blending of languages and cultures, but also raise questions about the preservation of indigenous languages in the face of dominant colonial languages.

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The impact of colonialism on language is a topic that has been widely discussed in academic circles for decades. The imposition of colonial languages has often resulted in the marginalization of indigenous languages, leading to a loss of cultural diversity and traditional knowledge. Mkatsa's film adds a personal dimension to this discussion, illustrating how these linguistic shifts can manifest in the lives of individuals and their families.

It is noteworthy that while Mkatsa's film focuses on her own family dynamics, the issues it raises are applicable to a wider context. The phenomenon of cross-cultural marriages is not unique to South Africa, but the specific historical and cultural context of South Africa adds a layer of complexity to the discussion. The film's exploration of these issues can serve as a starting point for broader conversations about language preservation and cultural identity in other contexts.

Mkatsa's work also raises questions about the role of language in the process of decolonization. While the imposition of colonial languages has been a tool of oppression, the reclamation of indigenous languages can be a powerful form of resistance and cultural revitalization. The film suggests that the blending of languages in her family can be seen as a form of resistance, a way of creating a new linguistic space that is neither purely colonial nor purely indigenous.

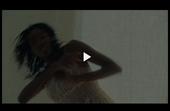
It is worthwhile to consider how this blending of languages might be a form of decolonization in itself. By creating a new linguistic space that is neither purely colonial nor purely indigenous, the speakers of these languages are challenging the dominant narratives of language and identity. In this way, the blending of languages can be seen as a form of resistance, a way of creating a new linguistic space that is neither purely colonial nor purely indigenous.

The Podcast

0:00 / 1:36

You can also listen to the Podcast on Apple Podcast or Spotify

The Film



The Stills

Explore the photography stills captured by Sarah Mkatsa.

The Stills

The Team

Film Team

Producer	LUKAZI KUZI
Co-producer/Producer	CHARLIE WHITE
Co-producer/Producer	HANLE BRACKEN
Director	SARAH MKATSA
Music	LEWIS SCHWAGER
Post-Production Manager	LEONELL VERWOERD
Sound Recordist	GARY RUNDLE
Grading Artist	CHRISTIAN PETRUSE
In 3d	LEWIS SCHWAGER
Lighting	MARCEL MARAIS
Gaffer	JP DU PREEZ
Berta Pro Lighting	CHIBUZOR MYSONDA
Tech	MOHAMED ZAID LAGARDIEN
Catering	KITCHEN REPUBLIC
Camera Rental	MAXIMUSION CAPE TOWN

Podcast Team

Host	SIMON MABANDLA
Sourcing	ALYA LEYMAN
Music Composer	OTHAN MOLEBA
Produced by	JESSE GAGA

The Prospect

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