

# San Musical Futures

## Ethnographic Video 2: Framing Recognition

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What does it mean to be recognised?

For San communities, this is not an abstract question.

It is lived daily — in classrooms, workplaces, public spaces, and encounters with authority.

Recognition is often spoken about as inclusion or visibility.

But for many San youth, it is first encountered through its absence — through being overlooked, spoken over, or misunderstood. Theories of recognition remind us that acknowledgement is not a courtesy, but a condition of justice. Without recognition, equality itself is denied.

These accounts reveal how misrecognition settles into ordinary life:

in teasing that becomes exclusion,

in assumptions that quietly limit opportunity,

in silences where voices are expected to remain small.

At the same time, recognition from outside remains deeply contested.

San music may be celebrated on festival stages or branded as heritage for tourism, while the people themselves remain excluded from meaningful rights - from land, political representation, and material security.

The contradiction between a celebrated culture and a marginalised people lies at the heart of the San struggle. Culture is often welcomed —but only when it is legible, contained, or comfortable.

This tension — between dignity and legibility — shapes how youth decide what to share, what to withhold, and how to be seen.

Yet alongside these experiences, another process is unfolding.

San youth are not only responding to how they are seen from outside.

They are cultivating recognition from within.

Through music, language, and shared cultural practice, youth affirm dignity on their own terms.

This is not performance staged for approval, but a way of recognising themselves — and one another — as capable, valuable, and present.

Music becomes central here not because it attracts attention, but because it sustains confidence. Many youth describe performance as the moment they feel most grounded — most connected to who they are, and to those around them.

This is self-recognition — not as theory, but as lived practice.

In this sense, cultural expression becomes cultural capital. By valuing their music, language, and cultural practices, they affirm dignity from within, transforming recognition into an act of self-definition rather than something to be granted

Cultural expression becomes knowledge carried in the body: something that can be drawn on to claim space, in competitions, and in public life, to build solidarity, and endure.

San youth performances are more than cultural survival: they are acts of political presence. Each song, each step, each testimony insists that identity is not frozen in stereotype, but alive, proud, and self-defined.

The 2024 election of President Duma Boko marked a turning point in Botswana's politics of recognition. For nearly six decades, San communities lived under policies that celebrated national unity but erased Indigenous difference.

Within this landscape, recent political shifts have introduced new public language around inclusion and Indigenous presence.

San languages have appeared on national platforms, symbolic gestures of recognition have emerged, and restrictions on subsistence practices have begun to shift.

These developments matter.

They signal that San culture is no longer confined to the margins of tourism or research, but is beginning to enter the language of the state itself

Yet recognition articulated through policy does not automatically transform everyday life. Until these reforms translate into lived equality, they remain symbolic rather than structural.

For many youth, change remains something waited for — carefully, patiently, without certainty.

This film listens to how recognition is lived, rather than how it is declared.

It stays with hesitation, contradiction, and partial recognition — acknowledging that recognition itself unfolds unevenly, and often without resolution.

San youth also speak about recognition within research.

They question how they have been represented, who benefits from knowledge produced about them, and whether listening is treated as an obligation or an afterthought. Too often, academic study has spoken about them rather than with them.

Their call is not for visibility at any cost, but for engagement that is respectful, sustained, and accountable.

Recognition, then, is not a single achievement.

It is a process — shaped by endurance, negotiation, and care.

San youth cultural practice does not resolve injustice.

But through music, voice, and presence, it insists on dignity in spaces where recognition has long been denied.

As this video closes, the final words belong to the San themselves —

not as conclusions, but as reminders that recognition is lived before it is named - urging youth to stand proud in who they are, and reminding Botswana that recognition is not only a policy, but a shared moral responsibility.