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SAN MUSICAL FUTURES

Cultural Labour and Self-determination among San Youth in Botswana

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ABSTRACT

"When the San speak, they are ridiculed, yet when they sing, they are revered."

The San are an Indigenous people of southern Africa whose presence in Botswana predates the modern nation-state by several hundred years. Despite Botswana's reputation for stability and democratic governance, many San communities continue to experience structural marginalisation, including territorial dispossession, linguistic exclusion, educational disruption, and limited political representation. At the same time, San cultural expressions, particularly music and dance, are highly valued and prominently featured within national and international imaginaries.

Drawing on ethnomusicology, theories of self-recognition, and critical Indigenous and African heritage studies, this dissertation examines how San youth in Botswana mobilise performance to navigate this paradox. It explores how song and dance function as forms of cultural capital through which youth assert dignity, claim visibility, and articulate political presence within contexts where formal recognition remains uneven. Rather than treating performance as static heritage, the study approaches music as a lived and dynamic practice, embedded in schooling, tourism, digital media, and everyday social life, while attending to how these performances are interpreted, constrained, and negotiated within wider publics.

By centring youth perspectives, the dissertation identifies an emerging generational shift in how culture is mobilised to imagine futures beyond loss narratives and rigid notions of authenticity. San youth do not simply inherit tradition; they actively adapt, hybridise, and strategically deploy musical forms as modes of self-recognition and collective agency. In doing so, they demonstrate how political action may operate through quieter, relational forms, such as endurance, refusal, listening, and the strategic control of visibility, rather than through overt protest alone.

The dissertation also contributes methodologically through a practice-based approach that integrates ethnographic video as a mode of engaged listening. By foregrounding participant testimony, sustained duration, and ethical restraint in representation, the audiovisual component aligns research practice with the forms of agency enacted by San youth, emphasising voice, dignity, and selective visibility.

This dissertation comprises two interconnected components: a written thesis and six ethnographic videos, presented through an accompanying website. [https://www.sanmusicalfutures.org/]. Together, they reposition San youth music not as residual tradition, but as a dynamic, living

archive of political agency, one that sustains memory, generates dignity, and contributes to ongoing debates on Indigenous recognition and self-determination in contemporary Botswana.



Figure 1: With the Motsheganong traditional dance group, Grootlaagte, Botswana. A moment of shared music, performance, and community during fieldwork.



Figure 2: With Bammonye and his grandmother, Moxobotane, Botswana. An intergenerational moment shared during fieldwork.

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CHAPTER 1:

FRAMING THE FIELD: LAND, POLITICS, AND INDIGENEITY IN BOTSWANA

1.1 Introduction: Context and Framing

Botswana is situated in the heart of southern Africa and is widely recognised for its ecological richness, cultural diversity, and geopolitical stability. Unlike many of its neighbours, Botswana was not colonised in the same way but became the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885 through negotiations involving the British administration and Tswana paramount chiefs, including Khama III of the Bangwato, Sebele I of the Bakwena, and Bathoen I of the Bangwaketse (Parsons, 1998; Tlou and Campbell, 1997). Although Britain exercised significant influence over legal and economic structures, aligning governance with imperial priorities, this arrangement afforded the territory a degree of autonomy that would later shape its political trajectory.



Figure 3: Map of Southern Africa highlighting Botswana.

With a population of just over 2.6 million (Statistics Botswana, 2022), Botswana remains one of the most sparsely populated countries in the region. It is home to more than twenty distinct ethnic groups, including the Kalanga, Hambukushu, Herero, Yeyi, and San, although the Tswana constitute the largest group by a significant majority. Setswana therefore functions as the national language and lingua franca, widely used in everyday communication and parliamentary debate, while English operates as the official language of government, the courts, and higher education. This dual linguistic structure reflects and reinforces the enduring dominance of Tswana culture within Botswana's national identity.

Historically, this dominance has been institutionalised through the constitutional recognition of only the so-called "Eight Tswana Tribes", namely Ngwato, Ngwaketse, Kwena, Malete, Tlokwa, Kgatla, Rolong, and Tawana, each associated with a dialect of Setswana (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2008; Werbner, 2004). This framework established Tswana ethnicity as normative, marginalising other groups whose cultural and political claims have not been accorded equal recognition. Although constitutional debates in the 2000s introduced greater acknowledgement of ethnic plurality (Good, 2010), Tswana hegemony continues to shape social hierarchies and the broader politics of recognition.

Within this landscape, the San occupy a distinctive and contested position. Archaeological evidence situates hunter-gatherer presence in southern Africa within a deep historical timeline, while genetic research has identified Khoe-San populations as among the earliest divergent human lineages, with some studies suggesting deep ancestry extending beyond 100,000 years (Mitchell, 2002; Schlebusch et al., 2017). Though traditionally associated with the Kalahari Desert, San communities have long inhabited territories spanning present-day Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Angola. Today, the largest number of San reside within Botswana, distributed across multiple districts including Ghanzi, Kgalagadi, Kweneng, Kgatleng, Central, and the Northwest.

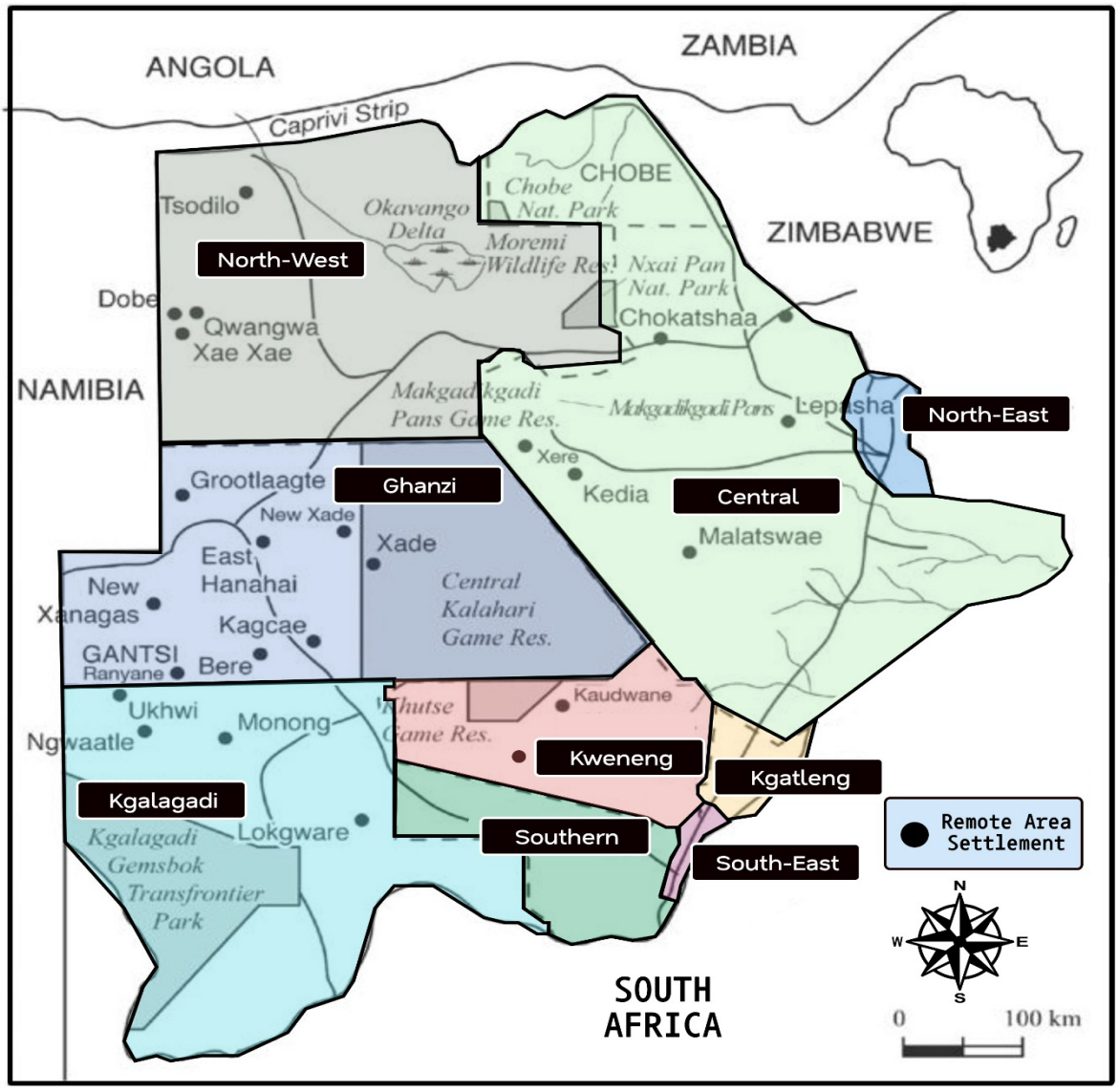


Figure 4: Map of Botswana highlighting regions discussed in this dissertation

Since achieving independence in 1966, Botswana has developed a reputation for democratic governance, political stability, and sustained economic growth. While this stability has contributed to the construction of a national image grounded in unity and development, it has not translated into equitable recognition across all communities. For the San in particular, inclusion within the nation-state has remained uneven. Their cultural expressions are frequently celebrated as part of Botswana's heritage, yet their social, political, and economic marginalisation persists.

This tension between cultural visibility and structural exclusion constitutes the central concern of this dissertation.

1.2 San as "First People" and the Politics of Recognition

As with other Indigenous groups worldwide, the designation "First People(s)" is often applied to the San, acknowledging their status as among the earliest known inhabitants of their territories, long predating the arrival of Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists and European colonial settlers (Saugestad, 2001; Gordon, 1992). The term situates the San within global Indigenous rights frameworks that emphasise historical precedence, land rights, and the principle of self-determination. As such, it carries significant political weight, shaping both national narratives and policy debates concerning entitlement to ancestral land and cultural recognition.

Despite this formal and symbolic recognition, the historical and contemporary reality of the San has been one of systemic marginalisation. In Botswana, prejudice remains deeply embedded in social and political life, frequently used to justify land dispossession, forced resettlement, and restricted access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunity (Good, 1999; Hitchcock, 2002; Saugestad, 2001). Recognition, in this context, operates unevenly – affirming cultural presence while limiting political and material inclusion.

This dissertation examines how San youth across multiple communities in Botswana navigate and contest these conditions. It explores how cultural practices, particularly music, dance and storytelling performances, are mobilised as forms of cultural capital through which youth assert value, visibility, and belonging, while negotiating the constraints imposed by longstanding structures of marginalisation.

At its core, the study is framed by a central paradox: when the San speak, they are often dismissed, yet when they perform, they are celebrated. This tension raises a broader question about the nature of recognition in Botswana today: what forms of expression are acknowledged, on whose terms, and with what consequences for Indigenous political agency.

1.3 Social Structure and Modes of Life

San social organisation has often been characterised as broadly egalitarian, with decision-making shared collectively and leadership exercised situationally rather than through fixed hierarchies (Barnard, 1992; Lee, 1979). Historically, many San communities lived in small, mobile 'bands'

of approximately 20–50 individuals, linked through kinship networks, seasonal movement, and practices of resource sharing. Livelihoods were largely based on hunting and gathering, supported by detailed ecological knowledge and mobility across extensive territories, while housing remained temporary and adaptable to a highly mobile way of life (Tanaka, 1980).

It is important to emphasise, however, that the San do not constitute a single, homogeneous group. Rather, they comprise multiple communities with distinct languages, histories, and social formations, all of which have adapted dynamically to changing ecological and political conditions. While egalitarian values continue to hold cultural significance, many communities today negotiate hybrid forms of social organisation shaped by settlement life, wage labour, formal education, and interaction with state institutions (Suzman, 2001; Sapignoli, 2018).

Over the past century, settlement patterns have shifted significantly. Many San communities now reside in permanent or semi-permanent settlements, often as a result of state relocation schemes or displacement linked to conservation and development projects. In Botswana, settlements such as New Xade and Xere in the Ghanzi and Kalahari regions exemplify these transitions (Saugestad, 2001; Hitchcock, 2002; Hitchcock, Sapignoli and Babchuk, 2011; Sapignoli, 2018). While such settlements provide access to schools, clinics, and welfare programmes, they also constrain mobility, disrupt foraging practices, and alter social systems historically grounded in flexibility and reciprocity (Hitchcock, Sapignoli and Babchuk, 2011; Suzman, 2001). Although practices of sharing persist in some contexts, these shifts have placed considerable strain on social cohesion and cultural continuity.

For the San, the Kalahari is not an abstract wilderness, but a lived environment imbued with deep spiritual, historical, and practical significance. Cultural identity remains inseparable from land, yet state land policies and conservation frameworks continue to restrict access and mobility. These tensions position land not only as a material resource, but as a central site of ongoing contestation over indigeneity and belonging.

San worldviews are grounded in principles of interconnectedness, in which physical, spiritual, and environmental realms are understood as inseparable (Biesele, 1993; Lee, 1979). Music and dance play a central role within this ontology, functioning not only as forms of expression but as mechanisms for maintaining social balance, transmitting knowledge, and engaging with spiritual forces. Practices such as healing dances operate simultaneously as therapeutic, social, and cosmological acts, reinforcing relationships between individuals, community, and environment.

Knowledge transmission within San communities is primarily experiential and collectively enacted. Learning occurs through participation, observation, and repetition, with elders and healers playing key roles in sustaining social and cultural continuity (Guenther, 1999). Song and dance are central to this epistemological system, encoding ecological knowledge, social values, spiritual practice, and survival skills. In contemporary contexts, youth continue to engage with these practices, adapting inherited repertoires across settings such as schools, festivals, and cultural tourism.

However, modern education systems, healthcare structures, and economic pressures often conflict with these knowledge systems, contributing to processes of cultural disruption. In Indigenous contexts, schooling can be especially complex when children are required or encouraged to leave home, family, language, and community in order to access formal education. O'Bryan's work on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students in Australia shows how residential schooling can create opportunities while also producing cultural dislocation, racism, loneliness, and pressure to adapt to dominant institutional norms (O'Bryan, 2021). At the same time, these tensions create spaces for hybrid approaches that integrate Indigenous and institutional frameworks. Education is particularly significant in this regard: recognising music and cultural practice as central rather than supplementary forms of knowledge has the potential to strengthen identity, continuity, and resilience (Battiste, 2002; Chilisa, 2020). In this sense, the preservation and validation of San epistemologies is not only crucial for cultural survival but also contributes to broader understandings of music as a resource for wellbeing, knowledge transmission, and social cohesion (Battiste, 2002).

1.4 Rights, Policy, and Cultural Revitalisation

Botswana is widely celebrated for its political stability and adherence to the rule of law, yet its democratic credentials are complicated by its limited protection of San society and culture (Taylor, 2002). For more than half a century, efforts to integrate the San into the modern nation-state have frequently produced adverse outcomes, intensifying poverty, vulnerability, and dependency (Saugestad, 2001; Cook and Sarkin, 2009; Sapignoli, 2018). Critics argue that such development programmes have rarely been designed with meaningful San participation, reflecting a form of hegemonic paternalism in which development is framed around the assumption that San communities lack the capacity to contribute to decision-making (Taylor, 2002). This approach not only erodes dignity but also perpetuates stereotypes of the San as "primitive" or "backward," thereby justifying coercive forms of assimilation under the guise of

progress and received wisdom about development and the environment (Leach and Mearns, 1996).

In response to these longstanding dynamics, there is growing consensus among scholars and San advocates that rights-based and participatory approaches are essential. This requires a shift away from top-down development models toward frameworks that enable San communities to define their own priorities and futures (Hall and Patrinos, 2012). In recent years, San leaders and youth activists have increasingly reclaimed cultural heritage with renewed confidence. Through language revitalisation, music, and diverse forms of performance, they are actively reshaping narratives of marginalisation into those of resilience, presence, and political agency (Biesele and Hitchcock, 2011; Saugestad, 2001).

San youth are central to these processes of cultural and political revitalisation. As this dissertation demonstrates, they articulate not only demands for recognition, but for respect: respect for land, culture, and the right to self-determination. Positioned between inherited traditions and contemporary pressures, youth act as both custodians and innovators, developing new strategies through which cultural practice becomes a resource for visibility, dignity, and political engagement.

Accordingly, this study explores how the voices, practices, and performances of San youth transform cultural capital into forms of political agency, illuminating the possibilities and limits of recognition within contemporary Botswana.

1.5 Historical and Contemporary Marginalisation

As with many Indigenous peoples worldwide, the San have endured long histories of exploitation and displacement. Early encounters with Bantu-speaking migrants introduced new pressures on land and resources, while later settler and colonial regimes imposed systems of labour exploitation and territorial dispossession (Wilmsen, 1989; Solway, 2002). With the consolidation of colonial and post-independence administrations in the twentieth century, these pressures intensified through the imposition of national borders, the expansion of mining and livestock industries, and the establishment of national parks (Good, 1999; Hitchcock, 2002; Suzman, 2001; Taylor, 2007). Such developments resulted in the systematic displacement of San communities from ancestral territories, significantly reducing access to land and natural resources, and undermining long-standing systems of cultural and economic sustainability.

While the Botswana government has formally acknowledged the cultural significance of the San and sought to integrate them into national socio-economic frameworks, outcomes have remained uneven (Saugestad, 2001; Hitchcock, Sapignoli and Babchuk, 2011; Sapignoli, 2018). State interventions, including the provision of schools and healthcare facilities within San settlements, have largely been delivered through universal development models that insufficiently account for the distinct histories, lifeways, and priorities of San communities (Saugestad, 2001; Suzman, 2001). As a result, these initiatives have often failed to address structural inequalities, contributing instead to ongoing forms of marginalisation and disempowerment.

1.6 Policy Gaps and State Narratives

Botswana's policies on Indigenous peoples lack a legal framework that recognises Indigenous-specific rights, particularly in relation to land tenure, cultural heritage, and intellectual property. Moreover, the state's position that the San are no more Indigenous than any other ethnic group effectively denies their distinct historical experience and the structural injustices they have endured (Minority Rights Group International, 2016; Solway, 2002). This uniform model of citizenship, while framed as inclusive, disregards distinctive lifeways, including subsistence practices, spiritual systems, and cultural production, and weakens mechanisms for addressing inequality (Biesele and Hitchcock, 2011).

This apparent inclusivity sits in tension with dominant state and public narratives that continue to frame the San through tropes of primitivism, cultural stagnation, and underdevelopment. While official discourse emphasises equality and national unity, these representations subtly reinforce hierarchical distinctions by positioning the San as in need of transformation or assimilation. In this sense, inclusion operates unevenly: formally asserted at the level of policy yet undermined through language and representation.

Such narratives play a significant role in shaping both public perception and policy direction. By framing the San as backward or culturally static, they help to rationalise exclusion from political influence and resource access, while legitimising development agendas linked to mining, conservation, and cultural tourism. These discursive and structural dynamics together reinforce the conditions that San youth must navigate in their pursuit of dignity, recognition, and political agency.

1.7 Self-Determination, Political Agency, and Cultural Sovereignty

As the preceding discussion shows, Botswana's policies toward the San have frequently been framed in terms of "upliftment" and integration, yet these initiatives have often reinforced dispossession and inequality. Understanding the contemporary dynamics shaping San political futures therefore requires situating their claims within broader struggles for self-determination.

For San communities, self-determination cannot be reduced to legal or political rights alone; it is also a cultural, economic, and epistemic process involving the exercise of cultural sovereignty and the ability to shape public narratives of identity and value. Historical processes of displacement, exclusion from governance, and assimilationist policy continue to constrain this pursuit. While international frameworks such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirm rights to land, culture, and self-determination, Botswana's constitutional framework offers no Indigenous-specific recognition, limiting the practical realisation of these principles.

Contemporary challenges persist across several interrelated domains, including land access, cultural preservation, economic participation, and political representation. While cultural tourism and performance offer potential opportunities, structural support remains limited and benefits are unevenly distributed. At the same time, youth-led initiatives in music, education, and digital storytelling have amplified San visibility and created new spaces for political expression.

Fieldwork conducted with San elders, youth leaders, and cultural practitioners revealed shared aspirations for forms of self-determination that balance cultural continuity with selective engagement in contemporary opportunities. Elders emphasised the importance of intergenerational knowledge transmission mediated particularly through music, as central to cultural sovereignty, while youth articulated visions that combine ancestral knowledge with education, entrepreneurship, and activism. Together, these perspectives underscore that self-determination is not only a political objective, but a lived and ongoing cultural practice.

1.8 Research Outline

This dissertation is structured around a central paradox observed during fieldwork: when the San speak, they are often ridiculed, but when they sing, they are revered. This disjuncture captures the ambiguous position San communities occupy in Botswana, where cultural expressions are frequently celebrated as emblematic of national heritage, while San themselves remain politically marginalised and socially silenced (Biesele, 1993; Biesele and Hitchcock, 2011; Saugestad, 2001).

The study examines how San youth across Botswana mobilise music and dance as forms of political agency within this context. While the San have endured long histories of dispossession and marginalisation, it is the younger generation that now stands at the forefront of negotiating these conditions. Youth are among the most affected by displacement, educational disruption, and economic exclusion, yet they are also actively developing cultural strategies through which to assert dignity, visibility, and socio-economic participation.

Focusing on youth enables the dissertation to explore processes of intergenerational transmission, adaptation, and innovation at a critical historical moment. While elders remain custodians of musical and cultural knowledge, youth play a central role in translating this inheritance into contemporary performance contexts, including schools, community groups, festivals, and cultural tourism spaces. Through these practices, inherited repertoires are not simply preserved but reworked as resources for political expression.

The analysis is informed by theories of recognition and cultural capital. As articulated by Taylor (1994) and Honneth (1996), recognition is foundational to identity and agency. In this study, self-recognition is understood as emerging through ongoing negotiation between systemic denial, expressed through land dispossession, educational exclusion, and limited political representation, and the affirmation generated through musical performance and public reception. This dynamic is further illuminated through Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital, understood here as embodied knowledge and performative competence that can be strategically mobilised to claim value, legitimacy, and political voice.

By centring youth cultural practice, the dissertation foregrounds the generation most directly implicated in the future of San cultural and political life. It argues that attention to youth musical practice is essential not only for understanding contemporary San experience, but also for contributing to broader debates on Indigenous rights, cultural heritage, and the politics of recognition in Africa and beyond.

1.9 Research Questions

This dissertation is concerned with the apparent incommensurability between San Indigenous identity and capitalist development, and with the ways San youth use music and dance performance to navigate the tensions and opportunities produced by this contradiction. It further examines the agency of music in order to understand how it "speaks" politically, socially, and spiritually within contexts of marginalisation and public visibility.

Situated at the intersection of ethnomusicology, critical Indigenous heritage studies, southern African political history, and the anthropology of tourism, the study draws on multiple interdisciplinary frameworks. Ethnomusicological approaches are used to examine how music functions in identity formation, community cohesion, and resistance (Merriam, 1964; Turino, 2008). Critical Indigenous and African heritage studies provide tools for analysing cultural commodification, preservation, and representation, including the politics of heritage production and display (Smith, 2006; Rassool, 2015; Sinamai et al., 2024). The anthropology of tourism offers insight into how San performances are shaped, circulated, and contested within cultural tourism economies in southern Africa (Bunten, 2008; Koot, 2013, 2016). Together, these frameworks enable an analysis of music and dance as both cultural practice and political action.

Guided by these perspectives, the dissertation addresses the following research questions:

1. How do San youth acquire, adapt, and transmit song and dance across home, school, and tourism contexts, and what does this reveal about changing systems of cultural transmission?

2. In what ways do youth performances function simultaneously as cultural preservation, economic survival, and political advocacy, and how do these roles intersect?

3. How do San youth convert cultural resources into political action, and how are their performances perceived by wider Botswana society?

4. How does the commodification of San music within cultural tourism shape youth agency, questions of ownership, and the sustainability of musical heritage?

5. To what extent does the mobilisation of music and dance by San youth contribute to the articulation of a collective Indigenous political voice and the pursuit of self-determination?

1.10 Research Context and Format of the Dissertation

This research was conducted during a period of political and social transition in Botswana, marked by the increasing visibility of San educators, artists, and youth leaders actively challenging long-standing inequalities. While the 2024 election of a new president associated with Indigenous rights advocacy signalled a potential shift, evidence to date suggests that structural transformation remains limited. The dissertation therefore situates San youth cultural

action within a longer historical trajectory of marginalisation, while remaining attentive to the uncertainties and possibilities of the present political moment.

This is a practice-based dissertation presented as a portfolio comprising a written thesis and a series of ethnographic videos. The written component develops the theoretical, historical, and methodological frameworks of the research and advances its core arguments, while the ethnographic videos function as co-constitutive sites of knowledge production. Through performance, interview, and observational footage, they enable participants to speak, perform, and interpret their experiences within their own temporal and expressive registers.

Together, these components form an integrated body of work through which San youth cultural practices are analysed as social, political, and aesthetic action. Rather than serving as supplementary illustration, the audiovisual materials are central to the research design, extending the analytical and ethical commitments of the study.

The six ethnographic videos are intended to be viewed in sequence, from Video 1 to Video 6, as each video builds thematically and analytically on the previous one. Importantly, they are not supplementary to the written text but are fundamental to the dissertation's practice-based research output. The written thesis provides the historical, theoretical, and methodological framing, while the videos carry forms of knowledge that cannot be fully transferred into written description, including song, rhythm, gesture, movement, humour, tone, language, and the affective presence of performance. Readers are therefore encouraged to engage with the videos alongside the written chapters, rather than treat them as separate or optional material.

Details of the practice-based methodology, including the production, structure, and ethical considerations of the ethnographic videos, are addressed in Chapter 3.

1.11 A Note on Terminology

Language is often implicitly linked to judgements about people, economic status, and race. This is especially evident in Botswana, a highly hierarchical society in which language has historically been used to sustain and reinforce hegemonic power relations (Biesele and Hitchcock, 2011). For the purposes of this research, I use *San* as a generic designation rather than applying the many and often intricately entangled names of the sub-groups represented in this study. This decision was made in close consultation with the San Research Centre at the University of Botswana, with which I have an academic affiliation.

Labels such as Basarwa and Bushmen are widely regarded as derogatory. Basarwa (sing. Mosarwa) is frequently used in ways that connote "primitive," "illiterate," or "uncivilised"; in some contexts, it may even imply a status of being less than fully human or socially deviant, and is often deployed by other groups, and at times within communities themselves, as an intentionally derogatory or insulting term. The term is commonly understood to derive from *ba ba sa rueng*, meaning "those who do not rear animals." In Setswana culture, cattle hold profound economic and symbolic significance, representing wealth, masculinity, and social status (Tlou and Campbell, 1997). As hunter-gatherers, that is, a non-livestock-rearing people, the San have historically been positioned at the lower end of the social hierarchy and continue to be perceived as economically and culturally inferior to Bantu-speaking cattle-rearing groups.

The Setswana language can also be manipulated in ways that further denigrate and dehumanise the San. For example, instead of referring to people as *Basarwa*, some speakers alter the first letter to *Masarwa* or *Lesarwa*, thereby shifting the grammatical form from "human being" to "it" in everyday discourse. Such linguistic practices effectively strip the San of personhood, normalising forms of symbolic domination that operate through everyday language and classification rather than overt force, what Bourdieu (1991) describes as symbolic violence.

It is important to note, however, that not all Batswana regard the term *Basarwa* as derogatory. Some elders in Kalahari communities understand it as deriving from *Baserwa*, meaning "those from the south" (*serwa* or *borwa* meaning "south"), without the pejorative implications the term has acquired in contemporary usage. Within San communities themselves, attitudes toward the term are complex and varied. While some San youth and community members use it as a matter of linguistic familiarity, others reject it because of its historical associations with inferiority and exclusion. As noted by Saugestad (2001) and Biesele and Hitchcock (2011), *Basarwa* is often linked to notions of backwardness and servitude, yet in some contexts it has also been partially reclaimed as a locally accepted designation. These nuances are explored further in Chapter 2 and in the accompanying ethnographic videos, where participants articulate both acceptance and rejection of the term in relation to their identities.

The English term *Bushmen* is equally problematic, implying that the San are people who belong to the bush, as animals do. This resonates with another, less widely used Setswana designation, *makgabisa naga*, meaning "decorations" or "ornaments of the wilderness." Such phrasing objectifies the San, reducing them to static cultural symbols rather than recognising them as dynamic social and political agents.

Finally, the terms *tribe* and *tribalism* remain widely used in Botswana, particularly in official discourse relating to government structures and the education system. While these terms are widely regarded as outdated and problematic in many international contexts, I use them sparingly and only where their local resonance is unavoidable: for example, when quoting interviews or official statements, or in the subtitles of the ethnographic videos, where preserving participants' voices and the integrity of their meanings is a central methodological commitment. Later sections of this thesis examine more closely how such terminology operates within broader systems of power, recognition, and exclusion.

CHAPTER 2:

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF SAN CITIZENSHIP AND A POLITICS OF COLLECTIVE RECOGNITION

2.1 Cultural Capital and the Politics of Recognition

This dissertation is grounded in a politics of self-recognition, a framework concerned with how identity, agency, and value are negotiated within unequal socio-political contexts. At its core, self-recognition refers to the process through which individuals and communities come to understand themselves as worthy of dignity, voice, and participation. This process is not merely symbolic; it is intrinsically tied to power, rights, and access to resources. In contexts where recognition is denied or unevenly distributed, marginalised groups such as the San are excluded from meaningful political and social participation.

Theories of recognition provide a critical foundation for this analysis. Taylor (1994) argues that recognition of cultural identity is not a matter of courtesy but a condition of justice: misrecognition constitutes a form of oppression that denies individuals and groups their full humanity. Honneth (1996) similarly positions recognition as essential to self-realisation, linking experiences of disrespect and marginalisation to broader struggles for social justice. While Taylor emphasises the politics of multicultural accommodation, Honneth foregrounds the ethical and relational dimensions of recognition embedded in everyday life. Together, these perspectives highlight that identity and dignity are formed through processes of social acknowledgment rather than existing as fixed or purely internal states.

Postcolonial and African scholarship extends these debates by situating recognition within histories of colonial domination and racialised power. Fanon (1967) demonstrates that misrecognition is not incidental, but structurally produced through colonial systems that deny colonised peoples their humanity and epistemologies. Appiah (1992, 2005) critiques universalist approaches to identity, advocating instead for analyses grounded in specific cultural and historical contexts, while Mbembe (2001, 2017) interrogates how postcolonial governance continues to reproduce hierarchies of race, power, and belonging. These interventions are particularly relevant to southern Africa, where recognition remains entangled with enduring colonial legacies and national projects that privilege dominant cultural identities while marginalising others.

Within the Botswana context, the politics of recognition illuminates the San's ongoing struggle for cultural recognition, land and resource rights, political representation, and socio-economic justice. Despite Botswana's international reputation for democratic stability, the absence of constitutional recognition of indigeneity has left the San vulnerable to systemic exclusion. Recognition, in this context, is therefore not merely symbolic but material, shaping access to education, livelihoods, land, and political participation.

A central distinction in this dissertation is between recognition and self-recognition. While recognition refers to acknowledgment by external actors such as the state, dominant society, or global audiences – self-recognition describes the internal and collective processes through which value and dignity are affirmed from within. This distinction is critical to the analysis of San youth performance. Rather than approaching cultural expression solely as a demand for external validation, this study understands performance as a practice through which youth actively reclaim, revalue, and assert their cultural identities as forms of political agency.

Self-recognition, in this sense, is not a purely psychological condition but a social and cultural practice. For San youth, it emerges through shared acts of singing, dancing, and performing forms of expression that affirm value internally before recognition is sought externally. This framing is particularly significant in contexts where overt political mobilisation is constrained, and where cultural practice becomes a primary means of sustaining dignity, presence, and continuity.

Recognition must also be understood in relation to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu conceptualises cultural capital as existing in three forms: embodied (skills, knowledge, performance), objectified (artefacts, instruments, recordings), and institutionalised (qualifications and formal recognition). For San youth, music and dance function primarily as embodied cultural capital, transmitted intergenerationally and mobilised across a range of contexts. However, cultural capital operates within social "fields" structured by unequal power relations (Bourdieu, 1990). The value assigned to San performance is therefore shaped by state agendas, tourism markets, and public imaginaries, which often celebrate Indigenous culture while marginalising the people themselves.

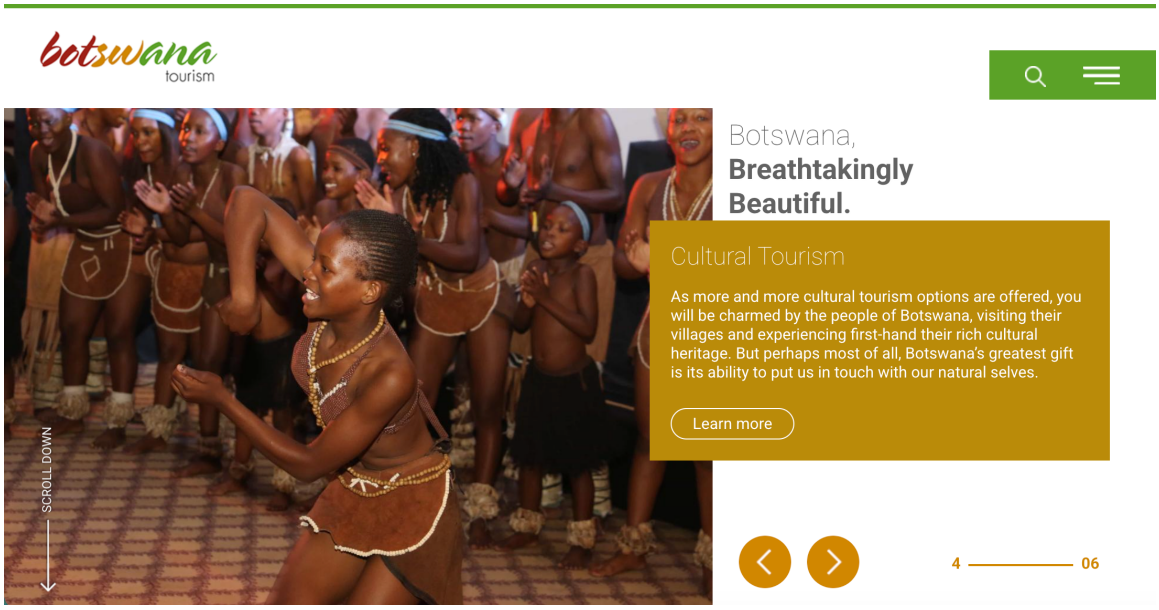


Figure 5: Screenshot from Botswana Tourism Organisation promoting cultural tourism through traditional dance.
The image illustrates how embodied cultural practices such as music and dance are mobilised within national tourism frameworks, where they are presented as expressions of "Botswana culture" and their value is shaped within broader systems of recognition.

Within these unequal fields, San youth mobilise music and dance as resources for dignity, visibility, and, at times, economic participation. Performance thus becomes a key site through which self-recognition is enacted and through which claims for broader recognition are articulated. By bringing recognition theory into dialogue with cultural capital, this dissertation examines both the possibilities and the limits of cultural expression as a means of political agency and self-determination.

2.1.1 Quiet Action: Performative Agency Under Constraint

In this dissertation, I use the concept of quiet action to describe understated, relational, and performative forms of political agency through which San youth assert dignity, visibility, and belonging under conditions of structural constraint. Quiet action does not refer to silence, passivity, or withdrawal from politics. Rather, it describes intentional action that operates through cultural presence, endurance, selective visibility, and the strategic negotiation of public space. In the context of this research, quiet action is most visible in the ways San youth use song, dance,

dress, language, embodied movement, and performance to communicate identity and political presence in contexts where direct political speech may be ignored, ridiculed, or experienced as risky.

This framing responds to wider debates about what counts as resistance. Hollander and Einwohner argue that resistance is conceptually contested, but that most accounts share two core elements: action and opposition. They also show that resistance varies according to intent and recognition, including whether an act is recognised by its targets, observers, or the actors themselves (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). Fakhoury similarly argues that resistance should not be reduced to activism, protest, or loud public confrontation, and differentiates resistance across four axes: individual or collective, private or public, local or global, and loud or quiet (Fakhoury, 2019). These debates are useful because they open space for understanding political agency beyond formal activism or direct confrontation.

Quiet action emerges from the central paradox that frames this dissertation: when the San speak, they are often dismissed, yet when they perform, they are celebrated. It helps explain how musical performance can become a means of being heard without necessarily taking the form of overt protest. Recognising the cultural power of San performance among wider Botswana publics, San youth strategically use performance to bring dignity, skill, cultural knowledge, and collective presence into wider visibility. These actions may not resolve structural inequality, but they can interrupt entrenched forms of misrecognition. They create spaces in which San youth reflect upon themselves, develop a sense of agency, and become visible to others as socially and culturally valuable.

The concept of quiet action draws on, but also differs from, James C. Scott's work on everyday resistance and hidden transcripts. Scott argues that resistance by subordinated groups does not always take the form of open protest, organised rebellion, or direct confrontation. Instead, resistance may appear through indirect, everyday, or hidden practices, particularly where public opposition is dangerous or unlikely to succeed (Scott, 1985, 1990). His concept of hidden transcripts is especially useful because it shows that critique, humour, refusal, knowledge, anger, and political meaning often circulate away from the direct gaze of power (Scott, 1990). Scott also cautions against assuming that domination produces complete consent. Even under hegemonic conditions, subordinated people find ways to contest the terms of their subordination, although these forms of contestation may not always be publicly legible.

This is relevant to the San context because many participants described direct political speech as difficult, risky, or ineffective. Several reflected that when San speak openly about rights, discrimination, land, hunting, or poverty, they may be perceived as aggressive, ungrateful, confrontational, or disruptive. Mangana Mangana, a San cultural practitioner, former government worker, and coordinator for the Kuru Dance Festival, describes in Ethnographic Video 2 how San attempts to speak openly about their concerns can be misread as hostility rather than understood as rights-based expression. Participants also frequently described San communities as generally non-confrontational, whether because of cultural values, survival strategies, or the effects of long histories of marginalisation and dependency. This restraint has often cost San communities politically, because silence or caution can be mistaken for consent. Quiet action therefore should not be understood simply as a chosen style of resistance. It is often the most sensible and strategically available form of action within conditions where more direct speech may be ignored, punished, misread, or made ineffective.

At the same time, quiet action differs from Scott's hidden resistance because the San youth practices examined in this dissertation are often public and performative. They take place at festivals, schools, tourism spaces, competitions, community gatherings, and in the ethnographic videos themselves. Their political significance lies not in being hidden, but in how they communicate under constraint through cultural forms that may appear non-confrontational or ceremonial while carrying deeper claims about dignity, language, land, hunting, ecological knowledge, and recognition. Quiet action therefore describes a form of public but understated political agency: not silent, private, or necessarily hidden, but expressed through embodied and culturally coded forms that manage risk while making San presence felt.

This concept also relates to Audra Simpson's work on refusal. Simpson shows how Indigenous peoples may reject the classificatory terms through which states seek to recognise, govern, or absorb them (Simpson, 2014). In many Indigenous contexts, refusal can operate as a direct challenge to state authority, particularly where communities decline recognition on terms that undermine their sovereignty. The San youth practices examined in this dissertation do not always take this form. Rather than simply refusing engagement with state, educational, touristic, or cultural institutions, San youth often enter these spaces strategically. They may appear to participate within existing systems, but they also use these platforms to reframe the terms through which San identity, cultural value, and political presence are recognised. Quiet action therefore involves strategic engagement as much as refusal. It shows how San youth may work within

public platforms while also challenging the assumptions through which those platforms define San culture.

The concept of quiet action also includes the insistence on cultural continuity itself. In this dissertation, San youth performance is not only political when it contains explicit lyrics, spoken statements, or direct narrative messages. It is also political when youth continue to identify through music, dance, dress, beadwork, gesture, language, and cultural aesthetics under conditions that have disrupted San land relations, subsistence practices, intergenerational transmission, and public recognition. In contexts where San indigeneity has been denied or misrecognised, the act of performing San identity becomes a way of saying "we are still here" without necessarily making that claim through direct political speech. This is especially significant where historical dispossession, relocation, the hunting ban, poverty, and restrictions on access to materials such as leather or ostrich eggshells have affected the very conditions through which San performance traditions are sustained. Continuing to perform despite these constraints becomes a form of self-recognition and self-affirmation, as well as a public assertion of cultural presence.

For this reason, quiet action is not only about hidden resistance or coded protest; it is about the political force of cultural continuity when a people's existence, identity, and knowledge systems have been repeatedly denied. In the context of this dissertation, continued San performance becomes a way of asserting presence, self-recognition, and cultural authority under conditions shaped by dispossession, relocation, misrecognition, and interrupted transmission. The political force of this action therefore operates not only through the messages carried by performance, but through the continued embodied practice of San cultural identity itself.

At the same time, quiet action has limited effects and should not be romanticised as a sufficient answer to dispossession, poverty, linguistic exclusion, land loss, or the absence of Indigenous-specific constitutional recognition in Botswana. Musical performance may create visibility, recognition, and moments of dignity, but it cannot by itself transform the structural conditions that continue to marginalise San communities. Its power lies instead in sustaining identity, creating social and political presence, and opening spaces of recognition within constrained conditions. In this sense, quiet action is best understood as a form of agency under constraint rather than a substitute for legal, economic, educational, or political reform.

By developing the concept of quiet action, this dissertation contributes to debates on Indigenous agency, ethnomusicology, and recognition politics by showing how performance can operate as a politically meaningful practice even when it is understated, affective, embodied, and non-confrontational. It also highlights the need to listen differently to Indigenous political expression, especially in contexts where voice is not always articulated through direct speech, but through sound, movement, presence, and the strategic control of visibility.

2.2 Literature Review

This section reviews key scholarly debates relevant to the study, focusing on ethnographic research on the San, ethnomusicological approaches to music and performance, policy and marginalisation, recognition theory, and the role of tourism in shaping cultural representation. Together, these bodies of literature provide the analytical context for understanding how San youth cultural practices operate within broader structures of inequality, while also highlighting gaps that this dissertation seeks to address.

2.2.1 Ethnographic Studies on the San

The San occupy a contested position within Botswana's nation-building narrative: symbolically celebrated as bearers of ancient cultural heritage, yet materially and politically marginalised. This contradiction provides the conceptual entry point for this dissertation and has been widely documented across anthropological and ethnographic scholarship.

The San are among the most extensively researched Indigenous populations in southern Africa, with a substantial body of work spanning over a century. Early and foundational studies by scholars such as Barnard (1992) provide detailed accounts of social organisation, kinship, and subsistence practices among Naro-speaking communities in the Kalahari. The long-term research of Lorna Marshall, John Marshall, and Elizabeth Marshall Thomas offers one of the most comprehensive ethnographic records of Ju/'hoan (!Kung) life, documenting everyday practices, ritual systems, and social structures over several decades. Megan Biesele's work further contributes to this corpus through its emphasis on language, gender, oral tradition, and expressive culture, particularly among Ju/'hoan communities in Namibia (Biesele, 1993). Similarly, Shostak (1981) provides an influential life-history perspective that foregrounds individual experience within broader social contexts.

More recent scholarship, particularly by Suzman (2001), has extended these earlier ethnographic insights into analyses of post-independence development, labour, and state policy, highlighting the profound transformations experienced by San communities under modern governance structures. Taken together, this body of work has established the San as a central case in anthropological debates on hunter-gatherer social organisation, kinship, and adaptation, while also shaping dominant narratives of San cultural continuity and change.

While this body of scholarship is extensive and foundational, it has tended to prioritise adults, elders, and collective social systems, with relatively limited attention to youth as distinct cultural and political actors. This dissertation builds on and extends this literature by centring San youth and by examining how performance practices function not only as cultural continuity, but as sites of political agency, recognition, and future-making.

The histories of dispossession and discrimination faced by San communities are central to this dissertation's analysis of music, performance, and self-recognition. San marginalisation in Botswana has not been produced only through social prejudice, but through material struggles over land, labour, mobility, and resource control (Saugestad, 2001; Hitchcock, 2002; Sapignoli, 2018). As hunter-gatherers and long-standing inhabitants of the Kalahari, San communities have historically held claims to extensive territories that did not fit easily within state models of fixed settlement, private property, conservation management, cattle-based land use, or mineral-led development. Their recourse to indigeneity has therefore been politically sensitive because it raises questions about prior occupation, ancestral land, hunting rights, and cultural sovereignty. In this context, denying or weakening Indigenous-specific recognition has enabled the state to frame San claims as matters of poverty, development, or rural welfare rather than as land-based rights claims (Solway, 2002; Cook and Sarkin, 2009; Sapignoli, 2018). Policies that restricted mobility, hunting, and access to ancestral territories therefore cannot be understood only as neutral development or conservation measures, but as part of a wider political economy in which San access to land and resources has been subordinated to grazing interests, conservation regimes, mining, and national development priorities (Hitchcock, Sapignoli and Babchuk, 2011; Sapignoli, 2018). These histories shape the contemporary struggles around schooling, hunting, language, poverty, and cultural visibility that participants described during fieldwork. For this reason, the youth performances examined in this dissertation are not approached simply as cultural expression, but as responses to historical and ongoing forms of dispossession through which San youth seek dignity, visibility, and a stronger sense of collective future.

2.2.2 San Music and Ethnomusicology

In contrast to the depth of anthropological research on the San, ethnomusicological scholarship on San music remains comparatively limited. Nicholas England produced some of the earliest sustained analyses of San musical practices across Namibia, Botswana, and Angola (England, 1995), while Emmanuelle Olivier's work on Ju/'hoan music in Namibia provides important insights into musical categorisation, vocal structure, performance contexts, and sociality (Olivier, 2001, 2007).

These studies draw on foundational ethnomusicological approaches that emphasise music as a social practice embedded in systems of meaning, identity, and community (Merriam, 1964; Blacking, 1973; Turino, 2008). However, while this work provides an important basis for understanding the cultural and social functions of San music, it has rarely examined music as a site of political recognition or as a resource for youth agency within contemporary Botswana.

San music and dance have long functioned as more than artistic expression. Ethnographic scholarship on San healing and trance shows that performance is closely tied to cosmology, social wellbeing, and relationships with the living environment (Marshall, 1976; Katz, 1982; Biesele, 1993; Low, 2004, 2007, 2015). I do not approach these practices as evidence of a single organised "San religion," since San communities are historically and culturally diverse. Rather, I understand music and dance as part of broader knowledge systems through which healing, community life, and relations with land are sustained. The youth performances examined in this dissertation therefore do not emerge from a cultural vacuum. They draw on older understandings of performance as spiritually and socially meaningful, while adapting these practices to contemporary struggles over recognition and self-determination. Although the dissertation acknowledges these cosmological and healing dimensions, its primary focus is on how San youth mobilise music and dance as forms of political agency within present-day Botswana.

Fieldwork conversations also showed that San spirituality is not separate from the religious and political histories through which San communities have been governed. In D'Kar, for example, Christianity forms part of the settlement's history, including its connection to church-owned farmland and missionary influence. Several participants identified as Christian or engaged with Christian institutions, while also maintaining strong connections to San ancestral knowledge and spiritual understandings of music. Isaac Sol, a linguist and advocate for Naro language inclusion, spoke about a youth project translating the Bible into Naro, while also reflecting critically on how

churches and Christian communities have often demonised San musical practices as demonic or idolatrous. He noted the contradiction that San dances may be condemned in religious terms, yet the same performances are later mobilised for tourism, income, or public cultural display when communities are struggling economically. This illustrates the complex position of San music within Botswana's religious and cultural landscape: it may be spiritually powerful, socially necessary, economically useful, and yet still morally misrecognised by dominant Christian frameworks.

This tension is significant in a national context where Christian prayer, the national anthem, and traditional dance often structure public events, including government meetings and visits. Traditional music and dance are frequently used to represent national culture, yet San participants repeatedly emphasised that San music cannot be fully understood through choreography, performance criteria, or external analysis alone. Participants described San music as connected to ancestral knowledge, healing, and forms of understanding that cannot simply be learned or reproduced by outsiders. As the chief of West Hanahai explains in Ethnographic Video 4, researchers and musicologists may analyse San music through particular interpretive frameworks, but these frameworks do not necessarily represent the intellectual and spiritual systems through which San music is created and understood by San themselves.

This recognition shaped the methodological approach of the dissertation. Informed by my familiarity with the cultural context and by the decolonial commitments of the research, I have sought to foreground emic perspectives: that is, the meanings and interpretations articulated by San participants themselves. Rather than treating San music as an object to be decoded primarily through external musicological or anthropological frameworks, the study attends to how participants describe its power, responsibilities, and significance. This does not remove the need for scholarly interpretation, but it requires that such interpretation remain accountable to participants' own knowledge systems and to the limits of outsider access.

Emerging Indigenous music scholarship offers critical tools for extending this analysis. Robinson (2020) critiques extractive modes of listening that render Indigenous sound available for consumption while disregarding its epistemological and political dimensions. He calls for forms of engagement that respect Indigenous sonic sovereignty, including the right to control how, when, and for whom music is performed and heard. This perspective is particularly relevant to the San context, where music is often celebrated as cultural heritage while its deeper meanings, constraints, and conditions of production are overlooked.

More recent San scholarship has complicated earlier ethnographic framings by situating San lives within contemporary struggles over land, education, language, development, and Indigenous recognition (Saugestad, 2001; Hays, 2016; Paksi and Pyhälä, 2018). While earlier studies remain important for documenting San social life, healing, subsistence, and cosmology, they can also contribute to an image of San as timeless hunter-gatherers or representatives of humanity's distant past. This risks obscuring the political conditions under which San communities live today. This dissertation builds on more recent scholarship by focusing on San youth as contemporary cultural and political actors who use music and performance to negotiate identity, visibility, and self-determination.

By bringing ethnomusicology into dialogue with recognition theory and Indigenous studies, this dissertation addresses a significant gap in the literature, positioning San youth musical practice as a site where cultural expression, political agency, and self-recognition intersect.

2.2.3 Policy, Indigeneity, and Marginalisation

Scholarship on San policy and rights in Botswana has been more sustained and critically engaged. Saugestad (2001), Suzman (2001), Solway (2002), and Sapignoli (2018) analyse relocation policies, citizenship, law, activism, and minority rights, while Hitchcock, Sapignoli, and Babchuk (2011) critique state-led development programmes such as the Remote Area Development Programme for failing to address Indigenous realities. Keitumetse (2016) highlights the precarious positioning of cultural heritage within African and Botswana development agendas, while wider scholarship on San rights and development shows how universal policy frameworks can obscure structural inequalities affecting San communities (Saugestad, 2001; Hitchcock, Sapignoli and Babchuk, 2011).

Scholarship emerging from within Botswana has also been critical in shaping understandings of San marginalisation and recognition. Bolaane's analysis of game reserve policy highlights the structural impacts of conservation and state policy on San communities, while other work on minority politics in Botswana provides important insights into the dynamics through which recognition and citizenship are negotiated at the national level (Bolaane, 2004; Nyati-Ramahobo, 2008).

State-led interventions framed as "upliftment" and "modernisation" have often deepened marginalisation by severing San communities from land-based subsistence practices and spiritual relationships with ancestral territories. These dynamics reflect a broader tension between

indigeneity and capitalist development that underpins this dissertation. A key issue in Botswana is that San marginalisation occurs within a national political framework that does not provide Indigenous-specific constitutional recognition. The state has often approached San communities through the language of remote area development, poverty alleviation, settlement, conservation, or national unity, rather than through a framework of Indigenous rights. This has important consequences for how San claims are heard and legitimised. When San communities make claims around land, hunting, language, cultural heritage, or political representation, these claims are often translated into broader categories of rural development or minority disadvantage, rather than recognised as Indigenous rights claims rooted in historical dispossession and cultural sovereignty. This legal and political absence shapes the forms of agency available to San youth. In this context, performance becomes one way of making San identity, knowledge, and belonging publicly visible, even when formal state structures do not fully recognise Indigenous status as a basis for rights.

2.2.4 Recognition, Misrecognition, and Youth

Recognition theory provides a critical framework for understanding how San youth seek dignity, visibility, and belonging within unequal social and political contexts. As Taylor (1994) and Honneth (1996) argue, recognition is foundational to justice and self-realisation, while African theorists such as Fanon, Appiah, and Mbembe foreground how misrecognition is historically produced through colonial and postcolonial power structures. In Botswana, scholars including Good (2003), Zips-Mairitsch (2013), and Nyati-Ramahobo (2000) demonstrate how language policy and citizenship regimes continue to reproduce exclusion.

Globally, Indigenous youth are increasingly mobilising culture, media, and performance as means of asserting rights, identity, and belonging, extending longer histories of Indigenous media as cultural activism and self-representation (Ginsburg, 1991, 1995; Robinson, 2020). Tuck et al. (2014) further remind us that such claims should not be separated from land, place, and relational responsibilities, while Wilson's (2008) concept of relational accountability is useful for understanding why cultural expression must be approached through responsibility, reciprocity, and respect. For San youth, music and dance operate first as sites of self-recognition, affirming dignity and value internally, and only subsequently as claims for external recognition.

Importantly, these forms of political expression do not always manifest as overt protest or confrontation. Rather, they are often enacted through cultural practice, presence, and the strategic

management of visibility, reflecting alternative modes of political engagement within constrained contexts.

The concept of hegemony, as proposed by Gramsci (1971) helps explain why San marginalisation is not maintained only through formal law, state policy, or economic exclusion, but also through ordinary assumptions that become normalised within wider society. Hegemony refers to forms of domination that are sustained through consent, common sense, cultural values, and everyday social practices, rather than through coercion alone. In the Botswana context, hegemonic ideas about modernity, development, citizenship, ethnicity, and national unity can make San claims appear backward or disruptive, even when those claims concern land, language, hunting, cultural authority, or basic dignity. Misrecognition is therefore not only an interpersonal problem of prejudice; it is also part of a wider hegemonic order in which San knowledge, identity, and political claims are repeatedly positioned as marginal to the nation.

Hegemony also helps explain why misrecognition cannot be understood only as something imposed from the outside. Several participants described how repeated experiences of discrimination, ridicule, servitude, and exclusion have affected the ways some San see themselves. Chiefs and community leaders, including the chiefs of Grootlaagte and West Hanahai, reflected that San communities have been looked down upon for so long that some people have begun to internalise narratives of inferiority. This does not mean that San lack agency or cultural pride, but it shows how deeply hegemonic ideas can enter the self-understanding of marginalised communities. When dominant society repeatedly presents San as backward, incapable, primitive, poor, or born to serve others, these ideas can shape confidence, aspiration, self-worth, and expectations of what is possible.

This is why the motivational and educational work of youth advocates such as Samuel Stanley and Isaac Sol is significant. Their visits to schools and engagement with young San respond not only to external discrimination, but also to the internal effects of misrecognition. By encouraging San youth to value their languages, histories, knowledge systems, and cultural identity, they challenge the internalised effects of hegemonic narratives. In this sense, quiet action is also directed inward: it is not only about changing how wider society sees San, but also about supporting San youth to recognise themselves as knowledgeable, capable, and equal members of Botswana's future.

This also connects to Scott's argument that domination is never total. Even where hegemonic ideas appear deeply normalised, subordinated groups continue to generate practices, interpretations, and hidden transcripts through which they contest the terms of their own subordination (Scott, 1990). This helps explain why quiet action matters. San youth performance can interrupt hegemonic common sense by making San presence, skill, knowledge, and dignity publicly felt. Music does not automatically overturn structural domination, but it can unsettle the assumptions through which domination becomes normalised. When audiences are moved by San performance, even temporarily, the performance creates a moment in which dominant perceptions may be disrupted and San may be recognised differently. Quiet action therefore operates not only against explicit exclusion, but also against the cultural, affective, and internalised dimensions of hegemony.

Self-recognition therefore becomes political because it challenges both external misrecognition and the internalised forms of inferiority that long histories of marginalisation can produce.

In this dissertation, such alternative modes of political engagement are understood through the concept of quiet action. Quiet action helps to describe how San youth mobilise music and dance as forms of political presence that are not always confrontational but are nevertheless deliberate and socially meaningful. Through performance, youth affirm identity, assert dignity, and make visible forms of cultural knowledge that are often dismissed in everyday social and political life. This framing is important because it resists the assumption that political agency must always appear as direct protest, formal activism, or explicit verbal opposition. In the San context, where speech may be ridiculed, ignored, or treated defensively, performance becomes one way through which recognition is pursued and self-recognition is enacted.

2.2.5 Tourism, Commodification, and Intellectual Property

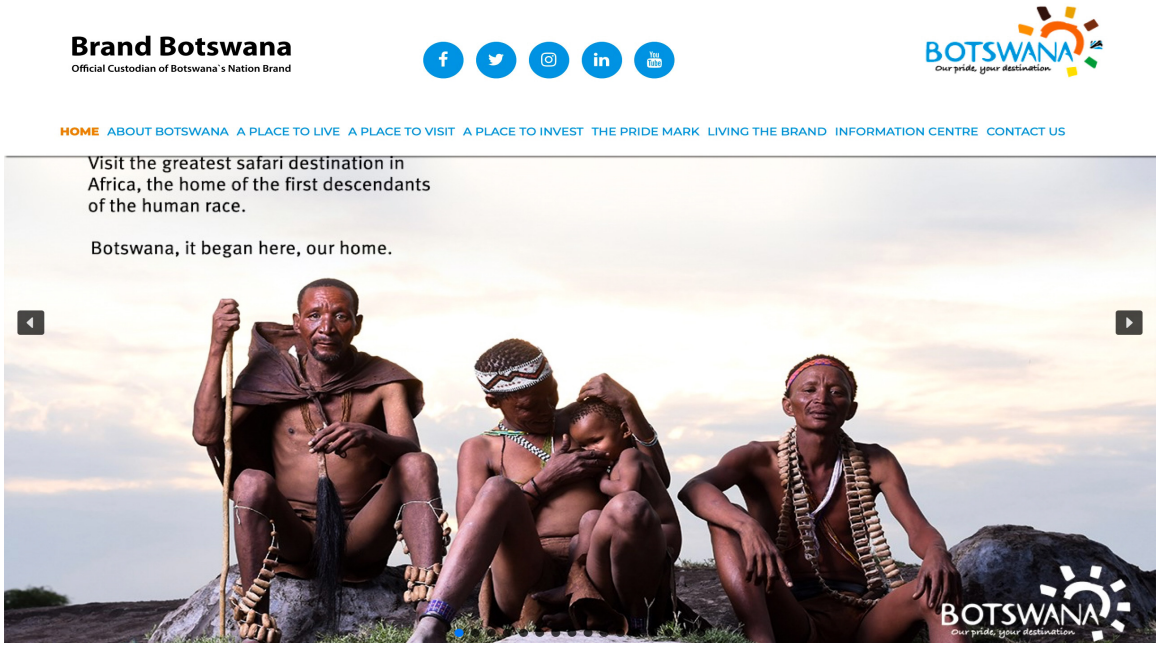


Figure 6: Screenshot from Brand Botswana promotional material depicting San imagery within national tourism branding. The image reflects the framing of Indigenous identity within narratives of origins, heritage, and global tourism appeal.

The anthropology of tourism provides critical insight into how Indigenous cultural practices are reshaped when they enter heritage, development, and market contexts. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) argues that heritage is not simply inherited, but actively produced for display and consumption. This is particularly relevant to San performance, where music, dance, dress, and hunting knowledge are often reframed as cultural attractions for external audiences.

Scholarship on San tourism in southern Africa has shown that these processes are deeply ambivalent. Tomaselli's work on cultural tourism and indigeneity demonstrates how San representation is often shaped by the expectations of tourists, researchers, filmmakers, NGOs, and heritage industries, producing tensions between visibility, stereotyping, and cultural authority (Tomaselli, 2012). Koot's work is particularly important for this dissertation because it shows how San/Bushman identity is produced and circulated within tourism as a branded form of cultural value, while San communities themselves often remain marginal to ownership, decision-

making, and long-term economic benefit (Koot, 2013, 2016). His analysis highlights the contradiction at the centre of San cultural tourism: San identity may be made highly visible and marketable, yet the people who sustain that identity may remain structurally excluded from the value it generates.

This contradiction is central to the youth performances examined in this dissertation. In Botswana, San imagery and performance occupy a prominent place within national branding, heritage, and tourism narratives, yet material benefits rarely accrue equitably to San communities themselves (Biesele and Hitchcock, 2011; Keitumetse, 2016). San youth therefore engage tourism and cultural events within an unequal but potentially useful field. These spaces may provide income, travel, visibility, and opportunities for public recognition, but they can also reproduce racialised expectations of authenticity and unequal control over cultural labour.

The relationship between tourism, cultural performance, and San agency is therefore neither simply exploitative nor straightforwardly empowering. Young performers may engage with tourism and cultural events because these spaces offer income and visibility, but they also try to retain authority over how San culture is presented, understood, and valued. In such settings, San performers may be rewarded for presenting culture in ways that align with outsider expectations of "traditional" or "primitive" indigeneity, while more contemporary, hybrid, or politically assertive expressions may receive less support. This tension is important because San youth performance cannot be understood only as commodification or only as empowerment. It sits between the need for economic survival and the desire for cultural control.

These dynamics also raise questions of intellectual property and cultural ownership. San performance traditions and associated knowledge systems may be circulated through tourism, festivals, recordings, national branding, and digital media, often without clear mechanisms for community control or benefit-sharing. This creates ethical questions about who has the right to perform, record, adapt, market, or profit from San cultural forms. In the absence of stronger protections for Indigenous cultural and intellectual property, San performers risk losing authority over the meanings and economic value attached to their own cultural labour.

For this dissertation, tourism is therefore treated as a contested field in which cultural capital, economic survival, authenticity, and self-determination intersect. San youth may use tourism and performance platforms strategically, but they do so within conditions shaped by unequal access to resources, external control over representation, and limited institutional protection for Indigenous

cultural knowledge. This literature provides a critical foundation for analysing how San youth navigate tourism, competitions, and cultural economies while seeking to maintain cultural authority and assert political presence.

2.3 Literature Review Summary and Research Positioning

Taken together, existing scholarship demonstrates that while the San have been extensively studied in relation to history, policy, and marginalisation, significantly less attention has been given to music and performance as sites of youth agency, political voice, and self-recognition. Much of the literature has focused either on structural critique or on heritage commodification, without fully accounting for how young San performers themselves actively negotiate these dynamics in everyday practice.

By bringing ethnomusicology into dialogue with theories of recognition, cultural capital, and indigeneity, this dissertation addresses these gaps and positions San youth not as passive inheritors of tradition, but as active agents shaping cultural and political futures.

These dynamics underscore the need for methodological approaches capable of engaging performance not only as representation, but as lived political practice – an issue taken up in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodological Framework

My research is grounded in a postcolonial methodological paradigm that prioritises relational epistemologies and collaborative knowledge production (Chilisa et al., 2017; Chilisa, 2020). Although Botswana's history as a British protectorate differs from settler-colonial contexts elsewhere in southern Africa, colonial administrative logics surrounding land, governance, and cultural hierarchy continue to shape post-independence state practices, with enduring consequences for Indigenous San communities.

These approaches challenge extractive research traditions by emphasising reciprocity, accountability, and the co-creation of knowledge with participants – particularly in Indigenous contexts where academic research has historically produced limited benefit for the communities studied. This framework is especially relevant for research with San communities, whose long engagement with external researchers has often reinforced patterns of knowledge extraction rather than mutual exchange.

In this sense, the study aligns with broader decolonial methodological commitments by treating Indigenous participants not only as subjects of research, but as contributors to knowledge production whose voices, interpretations, and performance practices shape the analysis.

3.2 Positionality

My positionality is central to both the methodological design and theoretical orientation of this dissertation. I am a singer-songwriter and music and film producer, born and raised in the Ghanzi region of Botswana. I speak English, Setswana, SheKgalagari, and have a working understanding of the San language, Naro. I spent much of my childhood living in the settlement of West Hanahai, a community composed predominantly of San. As a result, my earliest musical influences derive from San music, which continues to shape my artistic practice today.

Having grown up in a predominantly San community, I entered the field with a degree of insider access facilitated by language competence, cultural familiarity, and long-standing personal networks. These factors enabled me to navigate San territories with relative ease and to engage

with community leaders, elders, and youth in ways that respected local cultural protocols and supported sustained engagement rather than short-term, extractive encounters.

At the same time, I have lived in the United Kingdom for over twenty years and have travelled extensively. This dual positioning, rooted in intimate familiarity with San lifeworlds and shaped by prolonged exposure to global academic and cultural discourses, has enabled me to critically examine local practices through both an insider lens and an awareness of how the San are represented within international scholarly, policy, and advocacy arenas. It has also allowed me to translate San lived realities into analytical frameworks accessible to academic and institutional audiences, while remaining accountable to the communities themselves.

This positioning carries specific ethical responsibilities, intensified by my visibility as a professional musician. As Smith (2012) cautions in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, local and Indigenous researchers must carefully navigate their roles as cultural insiders and scholarly interpreters. In my case, this responsibility was further shaped by how I was received in the field. Some San youth already knew me as a performer, and some expressed expectations that I might assist in promoting their music internationally. I therefore had to negotiate these expectations carefully, making clear that my role was that of a researcher rather than a professional collaborator, while ensuring that any sharing of musical material was subject to consent, negotiation, and attention to the risks of appropriation.

Being a local researcher also exposed me to pressures not typically experienced by foreign researchers. San participants frequently articulated frustrations with a long history of engagement with external scholars that yielded little tangible benefit for their communities. As a Motswana researcher, I was therefore held to a heightened standard of accountability, with implicit expectations that my work should contribute in meaningful ways to San futures. Moreover, my positionality within Botswana is not neutral. My identity as a Mokgalagari carries historical and political resonances, as Tswana and Kgalagari groups have at times functioned as both neighbours and oppressors of San communities (Wilmsen, 1989; Saugestad, 2001). These dynamics shaped how I was perceived in the field and required constant critical reflection on how I interpreted and represented San voices.

While my childhood immersion provided unique access, I recognise that as a non-San Motswana I cannot fully apprehend San experience as it is lived. Although Bakgalagari communities have also experienced marginalisation, they have historically been complicit in San dispossession and

exploitation (Wilmsen, 1989; Saugestad, 2001). Citizenship and belonging in Botswana are therefore experienced very differently by San and non-San populations, and my insider position must be understood as carrying a degree of structural privilege. The relative scarcity of San scholars within academia further reflects enduring barriers to education that shape who can produce knowledge about the San.

In addition to textual analysis, the use of film has supported this methodological orientation and helped to address some of the ethical complexities outlined above. Film captures San voices, languages, music, and embodied practices directly, ensuring that participants articulate their own perspectives rather than being represented solely through my interpretive lens. This was particularly important given my visibility as a musician, as film foregrounded participants' own words and performances and mitigated the risk of me "speaking for" them. This audiovisual approach aligns with Smith's (1999, 2012) call for methodologies that privilege Indigenous voices and epistemologies, and resonates with Dovey's (2009, 2015) work on African screen cultures, representation, curation, and the politics of visibility. In this study, film therefore operates not only as documentation but as methodology, preserving the affective, rhythmic, and embodied dimensions of San music and dance that cannot be fully captured through text alone.

The research process was not only ethically demanding but also emotionally challenging. Engaging closely with San communities, and with experiences of marginalisation, displacement, and historical injustice, required sustained reflection and, at times, periods of withdrawal in order to maintain analytical clarity. The emotional weight of witnessing these realities, often on a daily basis during fieldwork, was not insignificant. There were moments in which the intensity of participants' experiences, and the proximity of my engagement, necessitated deliberate pauses, both during fieldwork and later in the editing process, where revisiting footage reactivated the affective dimensions of the research encounter.

At the same time, articulating this emotional dimension within academic contexts presents its own challenges. Feelings of distress or helplessness can be difficult to express, both because they may appear disproportionate when set against the lived realities of participants, and because academic conventions often privilege analytical distance over emotional transparency. As a result, aspects of the research process that are affectively demanding may remain under-acknowledged, despite their methodological significance.

As discussed in supervisory conversations, this process involved negotiating not only questions of representation and responsibility, but also the emotional labour of working within communities to which I hold long-standing personal and cultural connections. Recognising these dynamics formed part of the methodological approach, shaping the pacing of fieldwork, decisions around engagement and withdrawal, and the interpretive process itself.

These reflections also raise broader questions about the conditions under which Indigenous research is conducted. As highlighted by Leema Hiri of the San Research Centre at the University of Botswana (Ethnographic Video 3), efforts to support research with and by San communities are growing. However, the academy does not always adequately account for the specific emotional and epistemic demands placed on researchers working in close proximity to their own communities. For San researchers in particular, conducting research within contexts of ongoing marginalisation may involve an intensified form of emotional and ethical labour, requiring forms of institutional support that extend beyond conventional research frameworks. In this sense, recognising emotional engagement not as a limitation, but as an integral dimension of Indigenous and community-based research, becomes essential to developing more equitable and sustainable research practices.

In this sense, positionality in this study is not a static declaration, but an ongoing methodological practice shaped through relationships, responsibilities, and reflexive engagement in the field.

3.3 Fieldwork Strategies

Research for this dissertation combined ethnographic fieldwork with practice-based audiovisual research, using film as both a methodological tool and a mode of documentation. Fieldwork was conducted across three research trips to Botswana between 2022 and 2023, with a total duration of approximately five months.

The first fieldwork trip (2022) functioned primarily as a scoping exercise. During this period, I returned to my home region in Ghanzi District, renewed relationships with San communities, and sought formal permissions from relevant government offices and institutions. I engaged with the San Research Centre at the University of Botswana, introduced the research aims to local leaders and educators, and conducted preliminary observations to identify key sites, youth groups, and performance contexts for subsequent fieldwork.

The second fieldwork trip (2023) focused on sustained ethnographic engagement. Research was concentrated in the Ghanzi District, Kgalagadi District, and Ngamiland, where I attended cultural festivals, community performances, tourism venues, and conducted school visits to observe how San music and dance circulate within educational environments. During this phase, I conducted the first round of semi-structured interviews and group discussions with San youth, elders, teachers, traditional dance groups, tourism practitioners, and local officials.

Participant observation formed a central component of the research. While my participation in singing and dancing was often limited due to the practical demands of filming, interviewing, and observation, moments of engagement occurred where culturally appropriate. This participation was not undertaken to acquire musical knowledge or analytical understanding, as my familiarity with San music is grounded in childhood immersion and long-term lived experience. Rather, participation functioned as a relational and ethical practice that acknowledged and reciprocated San norms of hospitality and inclusion. As described by participants themselves, San social life is structured around practices of sharing, invitation, and collective participation: for example, in Ethnographic Video 2, Greg Losibe reflects on the cultural expectation that visitors are welcomed into dance, meals, and everyday social life. My participation in these contexts therefore operated as a culturally informed response to these practices, signalling respect, gratitude, and relational accountability, while enabling a more grounded understanding of how such interactions shape musical and social experience.

The third fieldwork trip (late 2023) prioritised audiovisual documentation and follow-up research. This phase involved focused filming of performances and interviews, follow-up conversations with key participants, and the refinement of emerging themes. Across all fieldwork periods, I worked in sixteen villages and towns, visiting schools and engaging with San youth groups in most of them.

In addition to community-based research, I spent substantial time in Gaborone, conducting archival and secondary research at the Botswana National Museum, the San Research Centre, and relevant government offices. This work provided historical and policy context for the ethnographic material and ensured that the research was grounded in regionally produced scholarship that is often inaccessible outside Botswana. I also attended San Research Centre seminars (online), which offered insight into ongoing debates and facilitated engagement with San scholars and activists.

Ethnographic methods included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and group discussions, complemented by audiovisual recording using non-intrusive equipment to minimise disruption to natural performance contexts. Audiovisual methods were informed by sensory ethnography approaches (Pink, 2015), by scholarship that recognises film as a valuable means of documenting embodied, affective, and performative dimensions of cultural practice, and by Dovey's work on African film, representation, and curation (Dovey, 2009, 2015).

All fieldwork was conducted in accordance with ethical protocols approved by SOAS, University of London, and the San Research Centre at the University of Botswana. Attention was paid to safeguarding children and vulnerable participants through informed consent procedures conducted in local languages and explained orally where literacy was limited. Anonymity was ensured when requested, and participants retained the right to withdraw at any stage. The research was further guided by the Society for Ethnomusicology's *Ethics Statement* (Society for Ethnomusicology, 2018) and the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth's *Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice* (Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth, 1999), which emphasise reciprocity, accountability, and respect for research participants, community protocols, and cultural values.

3.3.1 Field Sites and Research Contexts

Because the research was multi-sited, it is important to briefly outline the main fieldwork locations and the different kinds of cultural, political, and institutional contexts they represented.

Fieldwork was carried out across several locations in Botswana selected for their relevance to San cultural performance, youth agency, political marginalisation, and changing cultural economies. These locations were not treated as interchangeable field sites. Rather, each was approached as a socially and historically specific context shaped by particular community histories, institutional relationships, linguistic dynamics, and forms of cultural activity. A full list of fieldwork locations is included in the appendix, while this section provides a brief overview of the main sites that shaped the analysis.

Ghanzi District formed the central fieldwork region for the project. In this dissertation, I use "Ghanzi" to refer to the district, while "Gantsi" refers to the town within the district. This distinction is important because the fieldwork extended beyond the town itself to include several settlements and communities across the wider district. The distinction is also linguistically and historically significant, as participants noted during fieldwork that local place names can carry

traces of San presence, environmental knowledge, and later processes of linguistic adaptation, colonial administration, and the erasure of San place-based knowledge. This district is significant because of its long San presence, its relationship to San cultural organisations, tourism economies, traditional dance groups, youth cultural initiatives, and histories of marginalisation. It is also personally significant to my positionality, as I was born and raised in the Ghanzi region and spent part of my childhood in West Hanahai. Fieldwork in this region included Ghanzi, Grootlaagte, West Hanahai, Nex Xanagas, D'Kar, and New Xade, among other locations. These sites provided insight into how San youth and community leaders negotiate performance, identity, recognition, cultural transmission, and economic survival.

D'Kar was important because of its role as a well-known centre of San cultural production, language work, education, and institutional activity. The settlement is associated with Kuru institutions, Naro language advocacy, Christian mission history, and cultural initiatives involving music, visual art, schooling, translation, and performance. Participants connected to D'Kar included young cultural workers, linguists, musicians, artists, school communities, and traditional performers. At the same time, D'Kar occupies a complex position within wider San diversity in Botswana. Because Naro language and D'Kar-based institutions are nationally and internationally visible, some participants from other San communities expressed concern that D'Kar is sometimes treated as more representative or more resourced than other San areas. This made D'Kar useful not only as a site of cultural activity, but also as a site through which internal differences, uneven visibility, and questions of representation could be examined.

New Xade was significant because of its association with relocation from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve and with wider struggles around land, hunting, recognition, and state policy. Fieldwork there provided important context for understanding the political and historical consequences of displacement and the ways San communities continue to negotiate belonging, cultural continuity, and self-determination in resettlement contexts. In this dissertation, New Xade is therefore not treated only as a location, but as a site through which broader questions of land, memory, governance, and Indigenous recognition become visible.

Grootlaagte, West Hanahai, Nex Xanagas, and related settlements in the Ghanzi region were important for understanding community-based performance, leadership, healing, and youth cultural action. These sites offered insight into traditional dance groups, community healing practices, intergenerational transmission, and the role of San leadership in sustaining cultural identity. West Hanahai was also important to the personal and methodological grounding of the

research because of my childhood connection to the area. Across these locations, performance emerged not only as staged cultural display, but also as part of community life, social repair, identity affirmation, and local political voice.

Xere, although outside Ghanzi District, was included because of its connection to CKGR relocation histories and because of the cultural festival documented during fieldwork. The festival provided an important context for examining youth performance, hunting ban narratives, cultural visibility, and public expressions of San identity. Xere therefore helped connect the dissertation's analysis of music and dance to broader debates about land, subsistence, conservation, and state recognition.

Additional fieldwork was conducted in areas including Moxobotane, Khwai, Nata, Maun, and sites connected to the Okavango region. These locations expanded the geographical scope of the research beyond Ghanzi and enabled attention to San diversity across Botswana. They also helped show that San cultural performance, marginalisation, and youth agency cannot be understood through one settlement or one linguistic group alone. The inclusion of multiple sites allowed the research to examine both shared concerns and local differences across San communities, including differences shaped by language, region, access to institutions, tourism, relocation histories, and cultural economies.

Together, these field sites provided a multi-sited basis for analysing San youth performance as cultural labour, political expression, and a form of self-recognition. The aim was not to produce a complete ethnography of each site, but to understand how different San communities and youth groups use performance to respond to the specific social, economic, and political conditions they face.

3.4 Practice-based Research



Figure 7: Researcher setting up audiovisual equipment during fieldwork in D'Kar, Ghanzi District, Botswana, 2023

Practice-based research integrates creative production with scholarly inquiry, positioning artistic outputs as both process and product of research. In this study, film, audio recordings, and an accompanying website are not supplementary materials but central methodological tools for generating, interpreting, and communicating knowledge.

Incorporating film into an ethnomusicological study of San musical action is particularly significant given the oral traditions and embodied nature of musical performance. Film enables the documentation of musical events, rituals, and everyday practices in ways that written text alone cannot capture, preserving sound, movement, gesture, and spatial context. This aligns with Chion's (1994) argument that sound and image together produce forms of perception that are sensory and affective, allowing for deeper engagement with cultural meaning.

Smith's (1999, 2012) work has been central to shaping my use of film as a research method. She argues that Indigenous research must privilege Indigenous voices, epistemologies, and forms of expression. This principle guided my approach to filming, which provided participants with a platform to speak in their own languages and cultural forms, thereby minimising the extent to which their perspectives were filtered through my interpretive framework. Film also functioned

as a medium for playback analysis, in which some participants reviewed footage, offered clarification, and contributed to shaping the narrative direction of the project, reinforcing their agency in the research process.

This methodological approach extends beyond filming into the editing process itself, which is treated as a critical site of knowledge production. Rather than following conventional documentary practices that prioritise narrative compression or emotional intensification, editing was guided by an ethical commitment to non-extractive representation. As detailed in *Appendix A*, decisions regarding structure, pacing, and sound design were developed to preserve narrative integrity, conversational rhythm, and participant agency. Editing therefore functioned not as a purely technical stage, but as a continuation of the research method – one grounded in attentive listening, duration, and accountability to participants.

During fieldwork, participants also described experiences of linguistic exclusion within institutional and everyday settings, particularly in relation to language proficiency and accent. San speakers are frequently ridiculed for not speaking Setswana in ways that conform to dominant norms, and linguistic difference is often interpreted as a lack of intelligence or education. This dynamic extends beyond everyday interactions into formal institutions. Participants described how the education system, which operates primarily in Setswana and English, places San children at an immediate disadvantage, as many encounter these languages for the first time in school. In some cases, this has contributed to punitive classroom experiences and early disengagement or withdrawal from formal education.

These patterns are not new. Public discourse has long reflected similar dynamics, including the widely documented ridicule directed at San activist Roy Sesana during the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) court case, where his use of Setswana was frequently mocked in public and media spaces. Such examples underscore how language operates not only as a means of communication, but as a marker of legitimacy, intelligence, and social worth within Botswana's linguistic hierarchy. English, in particular, carries strong associations with education and prestige, further reinforcing the marginalisation of those who do not speak it fluently.

Participants also recounted instances of linguistic erasure within institutional settings, including concerns around naming practices in hospitals, where San names were reportedly replaced or altered on the basis that they were difficult to pronounce, record, or socially acceptable within

dominant linguistic frameworks. While not the central focus of this study, such accounts point to the broader marginalisation of San languages within formal systems of recognition.

These experiences informed a heightened awareness of how linguistic hierarchies operate in everyday life, shaping my approach to translation and subtitling in the ethnographic videos. In particular, I avoided standardising or correcting participants' use of English or Setswana in ways that might reproduce the very hierarchies through which San speakers are judged or marginalised. Instead, subtitling was approached as a means of preserving voice, allowing linguistic variation, accent, and expression to remain visible as part of participants' lived realities.

This understanding is informed not only by participant testimony, but also by my long-term familiarity with the region and its linguistic dynamics.

Scholars such as Dovey (2009, 2015) demonstrate how African film and film curation are deeply implicated in questions of representation, visibility, authorship, audience, and cultural power. In dialogue with Indigenous and decolonial methodological scholarship, this supports my use of film not only as documentation but as methodology: a dialogic space for co-creating knowledge and negotiating representation. Certain representational absences within the audiovisual material are therefore best understood not as omissions, but as outcomes of ethical judgement exercised in situ. Decisions about what to film, how long to remain with particular scenes, and when to prioritise testimony over visual illustration were shaped by ongoing reflection on dignity, consent, and the risks of reproducing familiar visual tropes of marginalisation. Rather than seeking to render all aspects of San life visible, the research privileges forms of representation that allow participants to speak for themselves and to retain control over how their lives are encountered. In this sense, selective visibility becomes an ethical practice aligned with broader Indigenous concerns around representation, rather than an oppositional claim to refusal or resistance.

Here, duration refers not simply to the length of recordings, but to an ethical commitment to staying with voices, performances, and silences without compressing them into extractive or narratively efficient forms. Allowing participants to speak at length, to repeat themselves, or to move between reflection and performance became a way of respecting Indigenous temporalities and asserting dignity within the research encounter.

This methodological emphasis on listening rather than extraction anticipates later analytical discussions in the dissertation, where duration, attentiveness, and selective visibility are understood not merely as research techniques, but as ethical and political acts. Impey (2018)

further informs this approach by demonstrating how musical practices are deeply embedded in landscapes of memory, displacement, and environmental change. She emphasises listening as a critical methodological practice through which relationships between music, land, mobility, and lived experience can be understood, highlighting how sound functions not only as cultural expression, but also as a means of navigating histories of dispossession and place. In contexts where San youth action does not take the form of overt protest, the capacity to speak at length, to be heard without interruption, and to control what is shared becomes itself a form of agency. The research method therefore mirrors the quiet cultural strategies through which San youth navigate recognition in everyday life.

These methodological commitments were further reflected in the conduct of interviews and group discussions.

Interviews and group discussions in this study were conducted using a flexible, participant-led approach rather than a rigidly structured format. While the overall focus of the research was explained, participants were not directed to respond to a fixed set of questions. Instead, they were encouraged to shape the direction of conversations based on their own experiences, priorities, and perspectives.

This method was adopted in order to minimise extractive research practices and to allow participants to represent themselves on their own terms. Individuals were given space to speak about personal experiences, cultural practices, and community concerns without pressure to conform to predefined categories or to speak on behalf of others. Where participants chose to speak more broadly about their communities, this was done voluntarily rather than as a requirement of the research process.



Figure 8: Musician and community leader Xgaiga Qhomantca during an interview in D'Kar, Botswana, 2023
This image illustrates the participant-led interview approach adopted in this research, situating dialogue within everyday community environments.

I adopted a listening-oriented approach, prioritising attentiveness over intervention. Interviews were conducted in ways that minimised interruption, avoided imposing external interpretations, and created space for participants to articulate their perspectives in their own time and manner. This aligns with Indigenous research methodologies that emphasise respect, relationality, and the validity of diverse knowledge systems.

Rather than privileging formal or academic knowledge, the research treated experiential, cultural, performative, and intergenerational knowledge as equally valuable. Participants included musicians, youth, elders, and community members, each contributing different forms of insight into San musical life and cultural practice.

I took particular care to reduce potential power imbalances between myself and participants, especially in contexts involving marginalised or vulnerable individuals. This included adopting an informal conversational approach, allowing participants to guide the pace and direction of discussion, and ensuring that participation did not feel evaluative or extractive. The aim was to create an environment in which participants felt comfortable, respected, and able to speak freely, while maintaining attention to dignity, accountability, and ethical responsibility throughout the research process.

Audiovisual methods also extend the reach of the research beyond academic audiences. Documentary segments and short films enable San perspectives to circulate within local, national, and international contexts, fostering dialogue and critical engagement. Importantly, this circulation is not treated as advocacy per se, but as a means of ensuring that San voices and expressive practices are represented in forms that retain their affective, embodied, and cultural specificity.

This dissertation adopts a dialogic approach between written text and ethnographic video, in which each film broadly corresponds to and extends the arguments developed within a written chapter. Rather than functioning as supplementary illustration, the videos operate as co-constitutive sites of analysis, where ideas are explored, tested, and refined through audiovisual engagement. This dialogic strategy enables a reciprocal relationship between forms: written analysis is informed by the temporal, embodied, and relational dimensions captured in video, while the videos themselves are shaped by the conceptual frameworks and questions developed in the text. In this sense, video is not treated as a passive record, but as an active analytical partner, contributing to the production of knowledge through processes of observation, reflection, and interpretation.

A small number of supplementary visual materials were incorporated and are fully acknowledged in *Appendix F*.

3.5 Decolonising San Research

Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that “research” is “probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (Smith, 1999: 1). Her statement captures the historical burden that research carries for many Indigenous communities, including San communities whose knowledge, images, languages, music, and bodies have often been studied, classified, represented, and circulated through externally imposed categories of meaning. This section explains how decolonial thinking informs the methodological and ethical foundations of this research. It aligns with scholarship that calls for a reconfiguration of how knowledge about Indigenous peoples is produced and represented, based on listening, relational accountability, participant voice, and the recognition of San musical practice as knowledge. This perspective is important because the San have often been represented through anthropological, development, tourism, and policy discourses that have treated them as objects of study, heritage, targets of poverty alleviation, or cultural display rather than as contemporary knowledge holders and political actors.

At the same time, decoloniality has limits. Naming a project as decolonial does not make film, translation, editing, academic theory, institutional assessment, or researcher interpretation innocent. This dissertation is produced within a UK university and remains shaped by my authorial decisions as researcher-filmmaker. For this reason, I approach decoloniality here as a contested and reflexive field rather than as a simple moral claim. It is used as a way of asking whose knowledge is centred, how representation is mediated, how San agency is recognised within the research process, and how the project can remain accountable to the risks of speaking for or about others.

3.5.1 Decoloniality and San Knowledge Production

As discussed in Chapter 2, the San have been the subject of extensive ethnographic research, including influential studies by Marshall, Biesele, Katz, Hitchcock, Barnard, and Suzman. While much of this scholarship is methodologically rigorous and ethically engaged, it has also been shaped by outsider modes of interpretation. San voices have frequently been mediated through non-Indigenous epistemologies, at times reinforcing representations of the San as timeless or primordial rather than as contemporary political and cultural actors. Foregrounding San youth voices in this study therefore responds to inherited anthropological frames that have often prioritised elders, ritual continuity, or narratives of loss over Indigenous futurity. As Barnard (2007: 139) observes, "the image of the Bushman as both prototype hunter-gatherer and exemplar of early humanity has been recycled at several points in the history of anthropology."

My research draws insight from Smith (1999, 2012), who emphasises that decolonisation is not achieved simply by inserting Indigenous or local researchers into existing paradigms, but by challenging the epistemological assumptions that structure research itself. Santos (2014) similarly advocates for an "ecology of knowledges" that recognises Indigenous epistemologies on their own terms, rather than subordinating them to universalising frameworks. In this dissertation, these arguments support a methodological commitment to listening, relational accountability, participant voice, and the recognition of San musical practice as knowledge.

However, this understanding of decoloniality also requires engagement with critical debates about the limits and uses of the term. Of particular relevance is Táíwò's (2022) caution against treating decolonisation as an unquestioned moral vocabulary or as a simple rejection of all external, Western, or modern forms of knowledge. In his book, *Against Decolonisation*, he argues that contemporary uses of decolonisation can become overextended, reducing African agency by

framing African intellectual and political life primarily through colonial injury rather than through the capacity of African thinkers and communities to select, adapt, critique, and transform ideas on their own terms. His argument is not a denial of colonial violence, but a warning against forms of decolonial discourse that recognise African agency only when African people choose what others regard as culturally authentic or properly anti-colonial.

Táíwò's critique carries relevance for this dissertation in two related ways. First, the project cannot claim to stand outside the structures it analyses. It is produced within a UK university and is shaped by academic theory, audiovisual editing, translation, digital publication, institutional assessment, and my own interpretive authority as researcher-filmmaker. Decoloniality is therefore not used here as a declaration that the research is free from power, nor as a rejection of all non-San, non-African, or academic frameworks. Rather, it is used as a reflexive methodological orientation: a way of asking how San voices, performances, and interpretations can be foregrounded while remaining honest about mediation, authorship, institutional assessment, and the risks of representation.

Second, Táíwò's critique is useful for thinking about San musical futures because it cautions against treating hybridity, adaptation, or engagement with contemporary institutions as evidence of cultural loss or colonial contamination. This research explores how San youth engage contemporary instruments, popular music, digital platforms, formal education, Christian institutions, tourism spaces, and political advocacy while continuing to assert San identity and cultural continuity. To read these hybrid practices only as cultural loss would reproduce another form of misrecognition: one that recognises San indigeneity only when it appears traditional, remote, visually legible, or untouched by external influence. Táíwò's critique therefore helps this dissertation avoid treating decoloniality as a politics of purity. Instead, decoloniality is understood here as an ethical and methodological orientation that centres San agency, including the agency to select, adapt, refuse, combine, and transform cultural forms on their own terms.

At the same time, Spivak's (1988) question of whether the subaltern can speak remains important because San agency in this research is inescapably mediated through structures of power, including filming, translation, editing, academic assessment, tourism, and state recognition. Read alongside Táíwò, Spivak's critical conundrum about the role of the researcher in speaking for the subaltern lies at the heart of this dissertation. While I have used audiovisual media as a platform to enable San participants to speak, sing, dance, and interpret their own experiences, I am nonetheless conscious that their voices are still shaped by the conditions through which they are

selected, recorded, subtitled, sequenced, and framed. The ethical task, then, is not to claim that the research has achieved complete representational innocence, but to make these forms of mediation visible and accountable. In this sense, the project uses decoloniality not as a declaration that power has been overcome, but as a reflexive practice of listening, foregrounding San interpretation as much as possible, recognising the limits of authorship, and remaining attentive to the risks of speaking on their behalf.

This orientation is pursued through methodological practice rather than through claims of epistemic authority. This includes conducting interviews in San languages where possible, collaborating with San linguists in translation, and drawing on long-standing relationships within San communities in the Ghanzi region. These approaches enabled attention to inter-group distinctions, everyday humour, and the nuanced ways in which San youth and elders negotiate identity in contemporary contexts. Rather than treating "the San" as a singular or homogeneous subject, the research foregrounds diversity across languages, settlements, generations, and lived experiences.

Conducting research on San agency also required critical reflection on San agency within the research process itself. During fieldwork, participants frequently questioned the potential benefits of academic research, reflecting a broader scepticism shaped by histories of extractive scholarship. As articulated by Mr Jumanda, a San political leader and councillor of New Xade, featured in Ethnographic Video 3, research has rarely translated into tangible improvements for San communities. Such critiques informed my methodological choices and reinforced the importance of accountability, transparency, and reciprocity. They also reminded me that participants were not passive subjects of study, but active interpreters of the research encounter, capable of questioning its value, challenging its assumptions, and shaping the ethical direction of the project.

3.5.2 Representation, San Identity, and the Limits of Visual Recognition

This decolonial concern with mediation, authority, and recognition also shaped how I approached visual representation in the ethnographic films. A further representational issue concerned the possibility that some San participants may not be immediately recognised as San by viewers. This is significant because San identity is often judged through narrow visual, racialised, linguistic, and cultural expectations. Most of the speakers in the ethnographic videos are San, but some do not fit the stereotypes through which San have historically been imagined. Some have darker skin

tones, some are formally educated, some speak confidently in public, and some participate in hybrid musical forms rather than only in performances that are easily recognisable as "traditional." Participants themselves spoke about the discrimination and misrecognition they experience when their indigeneity is questioned because of appearance, education, language, confidence, or contemporary cultural practice.

The films deliberately resist the expectation that San must look, sound, or perform in particular ways in order to be recognised as Indigenous. This connects directly to the decolonial discussion above. If decoloniality becomes a demand for cultural purity, it risks reproducing the same visual and cultural stereotypes that have historically limited San recognition. An audiovisual approach informed by this concern cannot only reproduce familiar images of San identity that are already legible to outsiders. It must also engage with the current realities of San life, including mobility, education, musical hybridity, multilingualism, political speech, and changing forms of cultural expression. Including San youth who challenge older stereotypes was therefore part of the methodological argument of the project. It allowed the films to show San identity not as a fixed visual type, but as a lived, changing, and contested identity shaped by history, marginalisation, creativity, and self-recognition.

This is particularly important in relation to the broader argument of the dissertation. San youth cultural expression is not only about preserving older forms of performance, but also about negotiating what it means to be San in the present. Youth who use popular music, speak in public forums, attend university, engage with political language, or move between rural and urban spaces may be misread as less "authentic" because they do not conform to expectations of cultural purity. Yet these are precisely the conditions through which contemporary San identity is being negotiated. By including such voices, the audiovisual material challenges the idea that San indigeneity can only be recognised through older anthropological images of remoteness, simplicity, or cultural stasis.

A further representational issue concerns gender. In the filmed material, men appear more frequently as political representatives, activists, chiefs, public commentators, and speakers on constitutional recognition, institutions, marginalisation, political history, and future reform. This reflects not only dynamics within San communities, but also wider patterns in Botswana, where formal leadership and public political roles remain strongly male-dominated. During fieldwork, I interviewed one female San leader, Kgosi Tsaxlae Xao of Grootlagte, whose reflections on the challenges she faces as both a San chief and a woman chief are recorded in my field data. Her

account highlights the gendered dimensions of leadership within both San and wider Botswana contexts.

The relative absence of women as political representatives in the filmed material should not be read as an absence of women's agency. During my fieldwork, women were highly visible in community-based spaces of cultural labour, especially in traditional dance groups, school environments, discussions on healing-related contexts, cultural transmission, and everyday practices of preservation. To reflect this in the documentary videos, I foregrounded women in community traditional dance groups, where they often acted as spokespersons and carried significant responsibility for sustaining performance, identity, and intergenerational knowledge.

These dynamics suggest that San women and men often occupy different but interconnected spaces of cultural and political labour, working toward shared community goals through complementary forms of agency. Although gender could not be explored fully within the scope of this dissertation, these intersections point to the need for further research on gender, representation, and the different forms of authority through which San musical futures are imagined and sustained.

3.5.3 Audiovisual Method, Editing, and Ethical Representation

Film plays a central role in addressing these concerns around mediation, visual recognition, and participant authority. While written analysis inevitably interprets and frames participant voices, film enables San individuals to speak and perform in their own languages and expressive forms. In this sense, film supports the dissertation's attempt to work against extractive representation by allowing participants' speech, performance, language, and embodied musical knowledge to remain central to the analysis. While the films do not remove my interpretive role as researcher-filmmaker, they help preserve dimensions of San musical knowledge that cannot be fully conveyed through text alone. This approach aligns with Smith's call to privilege Indigenous forms of expression and with Dovey's wider work on African screen cultures, representation, and the politics of visibility.

The audiovisual form was especially important because some knowledge was communicated more clearly through performance than through direct verbal explanation. In several fieldwork contexts, participants did not only describe the importance of performance; they demonstrated it through song, movement, language choice, humour, and embodied interaction. Audiovisual documentation therefore allowed the research to hold together speech, sound, embodiment, and

place as interconnected forms of knowledge. This was particularly important in a project concerned with music and performance, where meaning is often carried through tone, rhythm, repetition, silence, and the body.

My positionality also shaped how interpretation worked in the research. As discussed earlier in this chapter, I did not enter the field as an outsider with no prior relationship to San communities or to the Ghanzi region. My childhood in West Hanahai and my longer social proximity to San communities meant that many of the issues discussed during fieldwork were not entirely unfamiliar to me. However, this proximity did not give me authority over San meanings, experiences, or interpretations. Rather, it created an ethical responsibility to listen carefully, avoid assuming that familiarity was the same as knowledge, and allow participants to define the meanings of their own music, histories, identities, and political concerns. In this sense, participants did not simply provide material for analysis; they deepened, specified, and expanded the knowledge through which the analysis was formed.

Final interpretive and editing decisions remained my responsibility as the researcher-filmmaker, but these decisions were shaped by participant testimony, translation support, field conversations, and ongoing attention to ethical risk. This was especially important in relation to sensitive questions of indigeneity, spiritual knowledge, political speech, relocation, disability, and public identification. The project therefore did not remove my authorial role, but attempted to make that role accountable to the people, knowledge systems, and political conditions represented in the research.

One editing decision illustrates these tensions clearly. During an interview with a powerful and influential participant who had held office in San territories for many years, the participant made a statement suggesting that San may no longer exist, and that indigeneity could therefore no longer be claimed. I considered the risks of including this statement in the public-facing films. While it was important evidence of the kinds of denial San communities face, including it directly risked making the controversy around that individual statement the centre of attention, rather than allowing the wider San discussions in the films to remain central. It could also have created unnecessary public conflict around the participant, the research, and the communities involved.

To mitigate this, I did not foreground the statement as spectacle. Instead, I raised the broader issue with several San participants by asking their opinion on the issue raised about San existence and indigeneity. This allowed San participants to respond to such narratives in their own voices,

explain their understandings of identity and continuity, and challenge denial directly. In this way, the editing decision kept San voices central while still addressing the politics of misrecognition that the original statement revealed. It also reflected the wider methodological aim of the project: not simply to record what powerful outsiders or officials say about San, but to create space for San participants to interpret, challenge, and respond to those narratives themselves.

A second example concerned a San participant who spoke critically about the existence of the San Research Centre at the University of Botswana. The participant suggested that the centre may have been established to control San narratives, maintain the political status quo, or silence San voices. This critique is significant because Botswana has several cultural groups, yet San communities are unusual in having a specific research centre attached to them in this way. At the same time, I recognised that including the participant's criticism directly in the public-facing films could expose him to risk, especially because he had also spoken about previous experiences of victimisation after raising San issues in public spaces. I therefore decided not to identify him in the films or foreground his comments as a direct personal critique. Instead, I treated the issue as part of the broader politics of San representation, research governance, and institutional control.

To address this concern ethically, I also interviewed a representative of the San Research Centre, allowing the Centre to explain in its own words why it was formed, who controls it, what it has achieved, and how San involvement is understood within its work. This enabled the research to acknowledge the concerns some San participants have about institutions established in their name, while also allowing the institution itself to articulate its purpose and position. This approach reflects the wider ethical principle of the project: to avoid turning sensitive disagreements into spectacle, while still recognising the political tensions that shape San research, representation, and self-determination.

3.5.4 Translation, Consent, Public Visibility, and Reciprocity

The above-mentioned methodological limits discussed above were also visible in the multilingual nature of the fieldwork. The research involved several languages, including Setswana, Shekgalagari, Naro, and other San languages. In some cases, translation depended on community members, local assistants, or participants themselves, which meant that meaning was negotiated rather than simply transferred from one language to another. Some concepts did not move easily into English, and some forms of knowledge were communicated more clearly through performance, humour, gesture, or storytelling than through direct explanation. This resonates with

Conquergood's (2012) argument that embodied, performative, and subjugated knowledge practices often exceed textual capture, and with Santos's (2014) insistence that different knowledge systems cannot simply be reduced to one universal mode of explanation. This shaped my methodological approach by reminding me that listening was not only a verbal practice. It required attention to the conditions under which people spoke, performed, withheld, translated, corrected, laughed, or chose silence.

Consent was treated as an ongoing process rather than a single signed moment. Before filming or documenting interviews and performances, I discussed the research, its aims, and my methodology with participants. I explained that the material would form part of a doctoral portfolio project involving written analysis, ethnographic videos, and a public-facing research website. Participants were informed that they had the right to decline participation, to choose what they wished to share, and to withdraw consent even after interviews. Consent forms were signed using the standard forms required by the Botswana ministry that issued the research permit. In fieldwork settings, I also discussed the purpose of filming, the intended use of interviews and performances, and the possibility that edited material could later appear online as part of the research output.

Because of the scale and multilingual nature of the project, participants were not all able to view the final edited versions of the videos before submission. The fieldwork involved multiple communities, long interviews, performances, and several languages. For this reason, I treated consent not as a single completed event, but as an ongoing ethical responsibility that continued into the editing and public-facing stages of the research. Where politically sensitive, personally vulnerable, or potentially harmful material appeared, I made conservative editing decisions, including limiting identification, avoiding unnecessary exposure, and not foregrounding statements that could place participants at risk or turn conflict into spectacle.

At the same time, consent in audiovisual research is complex because participants may agree to be filmed in one context, while the meaning of public visibility can shift once material is edited, subtitled, circulated, or viewed by audiences beyond the original setting. For this reason, I approached consent as relational and situated. In some cases, participants were enthusiastic about visibility because they wanted San culture, language, music, and youth perspectives to be seen and heard more widely. In other cases, visibility carried greater risk, particularly where participants discussed displacement, discrimination, disability, poverty, government policy, exploitation, or fear of consequences. I therefore considered not only whether consent had been

given, but also how edited material might circulate beyond the original fieldwork context. These tensions shaped what was included, what was omitted, and how sensitive material was contextualised in the written thesis and videos.

By combining text and film within a portfolio format, the dissertation seeks to situate San voices at the centre of both analysis and representation. Following examination, the films will be made accessible through the accompanying research website, allowing participants to view, reflect on, and critique the outputs. This partially responds to critiques of extractive research and affirms the project's commitment to accessibility and accountability. The public-facing nature of the website also required careful attention to identification. Some participants are named and visible because their public roles, performances, or advocacy work form part of the research and because they consented to being filmed. However, the website should be understood as one form of return rather than a complete solution to the ethical and practical questions raised by audiovisual research.

Questions of access and reciprocity were also central to the public website. While the website allows San youth performance and testimony to circulate beyond the thesis, it still depends on internet access, digital literacy, and the ability to engage with English-language academic framing. However, internet access and digital content are becoming more available in many communities and, for many people in Botswana, audiovisual material is more accessible than academic text. For this reason, the website should be understood as one form of return, but not a complete solution to the problem of reciprocity.

Because I was affiliated with the San Research Centre at the University of Botswana during fieldwork, I intend to present the research to the centre and provide copies of the outputs where appropriate, in order to facilitate local access. I will also seek guidance from the centre on the most ethical, practical, and sustainable ways to distribute the outputs to participants, communities, and wider Botswana society. This may include direct sharing with participants, community screenings, offline copies, or future collaborative uses that are not limited to academic audiences. These plans recognise that public access must be handled carefully, particularly when research outputs involve identifiable participants, politically sensitive material, and community knowledge.

3.5.5 Cultural Continuity and Chapter Transition

Finally, this study links decoloniality to cultural continuity and political agency. Music and dance are approached not as static folklore, but as living knowledge that underpins San strategies for survival, recognition, and self-determination. As Saugestad (2001) and Biesele and Hitchcock (2011) demonstrate, expressive practices are deeply entangled with political voice and resilience. By documenting how San youth adapt and mobilise these practices, the dissertation shows how performance operates simultaneously as cultural transmission and political strategy, contributing to broader struggles for recognition and collective empowerment.

Foregrounding San youth voices thus operates as both an ethical and analytical intervention, positioning musical practice as a site where Indigenous futures are actively negotiated and imagined rather than passively inherited. It is in this sense that decoloniality in this dissertation is best understood as an ethical and methodological orientation rather than a completed achievement. It guides the project's commitment to listening differently, foregrounding participant voices, valuing performance as knowledge, and challenging extractive modes of research. However, following Táíwò's caution, this does not require a rejection of hybridity, academic theory, audiovisual technology, or institutional frameworks as inherently anti-African or anti-Indigenous. Rather, it requires attention to how these tools are used, who benefits from them, and whether they support or undermine San agency. The dissertation therefore uses decoloniality not as a declaration of innocence, but as a framework for remaining accountable to the tensions, responsibilities, and limits of researching San musical futures through audiovisual and written forms.

CHAPTER 4:

SAN MUSICAL FUTURES: USING ‘OLD’ TO FORGE NEW YOUTH NARRATIVES

4.1 Introduction

This dissertation examines the use of song and dance by San youth – encompassing school children, community traditional dance groups, young musicians and bands, and youth engaged in cultural arts, advocacy, research, and community development. It draws on the experiences of young people whose lives are shaped in different ways by cultural transmission, displacement, and marginalisation.

Music and dance are central to San identity and epistemology. For the San, music-making is not mere entertainment, but a practice through which knowledge, relationships, and wellbeing are sustained. Song and dance operate as embodied forms of learning and communication, carrying spiritual, social, and ecological meaning. Performance thus functions simultaneously as cultural transmission, a medium of healing, and a means of forging and reaffirming social cohesion.

4.2 Performance Ethnography

While San history, languages, and cultural practices have been extensively documented, far less attention has been given to how San youth themselves describe, experience, and mobilise performance in their everyday lives. Rather than offering formal musical analysis, this section examines San performance practices as they are understood and articulated by participants, focusing on how youth learn, perform, and use song and dance for cultural continuity, social cohesion, and political recognition.

This choice reflects the dissertation’s broader commitment to treating performance not as an object of technical scrutiny, but as a lived practice through which youth articulate belonging, dignity, and political presence. It aligns with the dissertation’s emphasis on local epistemologies and lived experience, privileging how San participants themselves explain the meanings and effects of their performance practices.

4.3 Vocality and Performance Aesthetics

The voice lies at the centre of San performance practice. Singing is typically organised as dense polyphonic interweaving, often using largely non-lexical or semi-lexical vocables that allow

multiple voices to overlap and interact. To an unaccustomed listener, these textures can initially appear unstructured, as though each singer is producing something different. Yet within San communities, this vocal interplay is understood as deeply relational, producing harmonies that are collectively felt rather than individually authored.

During interviews and filmed conversations, participants repeatedly described the voice as the most immediate sonic marker of San identity. As one young San linguist and activist, Isaac Sol from D'Kar, explained in an interview featured in Ethnographic Video 4:

"Nothing says San more than music. Even if people don't understand the words, they feel it. Our voices tell them who we are."

Other participants echoed this sentiment, emphasising that San vocal practices communicate feeling, belonging, and shared history beyond language. Mr Mangana Mangana, a cultural practitioner from Kuke residing in D'Kar and part of the team hosting the Kuru Dance Festival, similarly described San singing as something that "comes from inside the body" and connects people across different San languages (Ethnographic Video 4).

Ethnographic and historical accounts help contextualise these descriptions. Marshall (1976), Katz (1982), and Low (2015) describe how singing often takes place in the early evening, with community members gathering around a fire. Women typically sit in a semi-circle, clapping rhythmic patterns, while men dance around them, moving in and out of the circle. Singing, clapping, and dancing are inseparable processes: sound and movement co-produce the musical event. Drawing on my own upbringing among San communities, these descriptions closely align with practices I observed during fieldwork, where participation is less about performance for an audience than about sustaining collective presence.

Participants also stressed that while non-San performers may imitate San vocal styles, such renditions often lack what they described as spiritual or emotional depth. Although I learned San music in childhood and continue to perform it, I recognise that my own renditions do not carry the same resonance that San musicians attribute to their singing. This distinction highlights that San performance is not simply a technical skill, but an embodied form of knowledge inseparable from lived experience, spirituality, and collective history (Turino, 2008).

4.4 Rhythm, Dance, and Instruments





Figure 9: Dongo (setinkane in Setswana) *Figure 10: Leg rattles (matlhoo in Setswana)*
The images highlight the interplay between embodied and instrumental sound production in San music, where rhythm emerges through movement (matlhoo) and melody through manual interaction (dongo/setinkane). This combination reflects the layered structure of performance and the integration of bodily and material forms of musical expression. Images by author, taken in New Xade and Gantsi, Botswana, 2022-2023.

Rhythm and movement are integral to San performance practice. Hand-clapping patterns, footwork on sand, and bodily motion are understood as part of a single expressive system rather than separate components. Although terminology varies widely across San languages, participants commonly refer to this interlocking style of clapping, singing, and dancing as *tsutsube* – a term often used by children and youth to describe versions of San song and dance practices performed primarily in recreational and social contexts. This distinguishes it from Tswana dance forms that may share surface similarities but differ in structure and intention.

Movements frequently draw inspiration from animals and the natural environment. While some ethnographic literature has interpreted such movements in relation to totemic or symbolic associations, participants in this research described them more directly in terms of observation, embodiment, and lived engagement with the environment.

In trance contexts, however, movement takes on a different significance. The body is understood as a conduit through which healing energy flows, and trance is not described as an abstract state but as an intensely physical and experiential process. Participants emphasised that reaching trance often requires prolonged periods of singing and dancing, sometimes lasting several hours. This

process is frequently described as physically demanding and, at times, painful, involving deep emotional and bodily exertion.

In the Ghanzi region, trance is often referred to as *bixona*, a term used among Naro-speaking San and Bakgalagari communities. While the precise linguistic origins of the term remain unclear, its usage reflects a locally grounded understanding of trance as a lived and embodied experience rather than a fixed or externally defined category.

San musical instruments, though less widely known than vocal practices, are equally distinctive and closely tied to local environments and materials. During fieldwork and filming, musicians demonstrated a range of instruments, including the *segaba* (bowed string instrument), *dongo* – also referred to as *setinkane* in Setswana (lamellaphone), mouth bows, *zoma*, and rattles crafted from seed pods locally referred to in Setswana as *matlhoo* and *dakaraderr* (Ethnographic Video 4).

While some instrument names circulate in Setswana or regional usage, performers emphasised that instruments are often identified through practice rather than fixed terminology, with knowledge transmitted orally and situationally. For example, one musician demonstrated how the same lamellaphone may be referred to differently depending on context, with identification emerging through how it is played, who teaches it, and the setting in which it is used, rather than through a single standardised name.

Youth musicians also expressed concern that certain instruments and techniques risk disappearing as elders pass away. Members of the Xaxase group from New Xanagas, musician DT from New Xade, and the chief of West Hanahai all reflected on the fragility of this knowledge in their filmed testimonies (Ethnographic Video 4), emphasising the importance of documentation as an act of intergenerational responsibility rather than heritage preservation for external audiences.

Importantly, youth also carry vocal aesthetics into contemporary musical forms. In Ethnographic Video 5, groups such as Obligatto and Original Stars demonstrate how elements of San vocal practice, such as layered vocal textures, rhythmic emphasis, and forms of vocal interaction, are adapted within contemporary genres. While these performances may at times resemble call-and-response structures, they remain grounded in the interwoven and overlapping vocality characteristic of San performance practice. In this way, vocality and rhythm remain indexical of San identity even in hybrid musical contexts.

While these aesthetic and embodied features shape how San performance is structured, they are inseparable from the environments in which they are produced, experienced, and understood, pointing to the central role of place in shaping musical meaning and practice.

4.5 Music, Place, and Agency

San music is inseparable from place. Songs and dances are learned, practiced, and performed in close relation to the environment, and participants frequently described music as something that "comes from the land" rather than something composed in abstraction. Healing songs, in particular, are understood as extensions of the natural world, embodying relationships between people, animals, ancestors, and landscape. Music therefore encodes ecological knowledge alongside spiritual meaning, reinforcing a worldview in which culture, land, and survival are inseparable.

For San youth today, this connection to place is especially significant given histories of displacement and resettlement. Music becomes a means of re-establishing continuity with land even when access to ancestral territories is restricted. Youth adapt songs and dances to new settings, including schools, festivals, settlements, and tourism venues, while retaining the embodied intensity that gives the music its transformative effect. The power of performance is maintained not by replicating a fixed "traditional" form, but by preserving the relational dynamics of collective singing, clapping, and movement.

San youth also use music deliberately to bridge linguistic and social divisions between subgroups. Botswana's San population consists of multiple groups who speak distinct languages and do not necessarily understand one another. Music provides a shared expressive medium that does not rely on linguistic comprehension. Youth described how shared rhythms, vocal styles, and performance structures allow them to recognise one another as San, even across linguistic difference. In this way, music becomes a tool of unification, enabling youth to build solidarity where state homogenisation and uneven NGO engagement have historically deepened internal divisions.

Through these practices, music is not only preserved but actively reworked to meet contemporary needs. Youth adapt repertoires, contexts, and performance settings while maintaining the embodied intensity that gives San music its affective force. This capacity for adaptation allows music to retain its healing, unifying, and mobilising power even as social conditions change.

Rather than static heritage, San music emerges here as a living practice: an archive of ancestral knowledge, a means of restoring dignity, a resource for survival, and a platform for collective agency. Its reverence among both insiders and outsiders reveals its capacity to temporarily disrupt entrenched social hierarchies, even as it exposes the contradictions of a society that celebrates San culture while continuing to marginalise San lives.

4.6 Music in Cultural and Social Contexts

San music is performed in a wide range of settings, including healing ceremonies, initiation rituals, seasonal celebrations, and contemporary contexts such as schools, festivals, and community events. Across these spaces, music consistently functions as a mechanism for social bonding and emotional regulation.

At D'Kar Primary School, for example, San students from different subgroups – many of whom do not share a common spoken language, use singing as a way to form solidarity within an unfamiliar boarding-school environment. Children from surrounding settlements and cattle posts who reside in boarding facilities are often socially separated from those based in D'Kar itself. Music, however, brings these groups together, enabling them to bond, form friendships, and develop a shared sense of belonging. Teachers also noted that music plays a crucial role in retaining learners, particularly those who struggle academically, by providing a space in which they can excel and feel valued. As one teacher explained, "They may not share the same words, but when they sing together, it is as if they understand everything." Another teacher observed that students who were often withdrawn became "confident leaders" during music practice (Ethnographic Video 4).

At Grootlaagte Primary School, I filmed the case of Dao, a young girl frequently ridiculed for learning difficulties and low academic performance yet widely admired for her dancing. Her teacher, Mrs Olaotse, explained: "Dao struggles in class, but when she dances, the whole school and the villagers are in awe. Music is where she shines" (Ethnographic Video 5).

Similarly, during a youth-organised litter-picking event in D'Kar, members of a San youth dance group used collective singing to sustain energy under extreme heat. Speaking as a group, participants explained:

"We sing so we don't give up. The songs make us strong together" (Ethnographic Video 5).

These examples illustrate how music generates confidence, collective resilience, and a sense of social grounding in contexts where San youth often experience marginalisation.

During my own fieldwork, I repeatedly witnessed music operating as a unifying and restorative force in both institutional and community settings. At D'Kar Primary School, a predominantly San boarding school, children from different subgroups, many of whom speak distinct San languages and do not easily understand one another, came together through song. Teachers described music sessions as moments when linguistic difference mattered less, because participation was enabled through shared melodies, rhythms, and movement rather than through spoken language. In these contexts, singing created a practical form of common ground, allowing children to connect socially and emotionally in an otherwise alienating environment away from families and familiar lifeworlds (Ethnographic Video 4).

In the recently resettled community of New Xade, established following forced relocation from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, music groups similarly emerged as purposeful initiatives for restoring dignity and morale. Here, collective performance helped families adapt to dislocation by reaffirming shared identity and reinforcing social bonds. In both cases, music functioned as a healing mechanism in practical and symbolic senses: it sustained relationships, mitigated emotional distress, and fostered a sense of continuity under conditions of rupture.

I also observed how music was deliberately mobilised to address internal community divisions. At Dqãe Qare San Lodge in the Ghanzi District, a cultural tourism establishment previously managed by San leaders, prolonged disputes had eroded trust. Following the centre's closure, a community music session was convened. Although I was not permitted to film the event, interviews with leaders revealed how the performance was understood as both a spiritual invocation – calling on ancestral presence and a deliberate act of reconciliation intended to repair fractured relationships.

4.7 Healing and Spiritual Dimensions



Figure 11: Youth performing the healing dance in Grootlaagte, Botswana in 2023, photographed by author.
The image illustrates the collective and embodied nature of San musical practice, where rhythm, movement, and social interaction are integrated within performance, reinforcing both cultural continuity and communal participation.

Music is not understood by participants as merely aesthetic. Ethnographic literature documents how trance dances enable healers to channel energy to extract illness and restore balance (Biesele, 1993; Low, 2015). Youth participants in this study expand this understanding, describing healing in contemporary terms such as “making us proud again” or “helping us heal from shame.”

Ethnographic scholarship has long documented the intimate relationship between San music, spirituality, and social life. In her research with the Ju/’hoan in Namibia, Biesele (1993) highlights how healing dances sustain communal health by addressing illness, emotional distress, and social imbalance. Similarly, Low’s work on Khoisan healing emphasises that dance, bodily movement, sensory awareness, and relationships with the environment are central to understanding healing practice (Low, 2004, 2007, 2015). Across this body of work, Low shows

that healing cannot be separated from sociality, embodied knowledge, and wider Khoisan understandings of health, personhood, and the living environment.

While practices vary across communities, healing dances are widely described as collective evening gatherings, often held outdoors and organised around a fire. Women's singing and handclapping provide a steady rhythmic foundation, with voices layering and interweaving as the event intensifies. Men, and in some contexts younger participants, dance in relation to this sonic centre, circling, entering and exiting, and increasing movement as the singing gathers momentum. Children observe, learn, and sometimes join in; elders guide protocol and repertoire. In these settings, song and dance do not accompany healing – they enact it. Healing emerges through the force of collective participation: the interweaving of voices, the synchronisation of rhythm and movement, and the shared affect generated through performance.

Low's more recent media review of *SanDance!* reinforces this understanding. He describes the film as a documentary that centres San dance culture and the continuing importance of dance for San communities (Low, 2024). He also notes how dancers describe the practice as emotionally sustaining and protective of communal wellbeing. This perspective aligns with the argument advanced here: that San performance functions as a dynamic resource through which communities, and particularly youth, navigate contemporary challenges.

The healing dimensions of song and dance are not confined to elders or to contexts framed as 'traditional'. Youth participants consistently articulated music as central to their identities and sense of belonging. Mr Isaac Sol, a young San scholar, linguist, and activist from D'Kar – a well-established settlement outside Gantsi known nationally through institutions such as Kuru for its role in San cultural production, stressed that "nothing says San more than music." For Sol, music represents a primary site of identity and cultural pride: a practice that has sustained San culture through centuries of adversity. His testimony, included in Ethnographic Video 4, underscores the centrality of music to youth agency and broader processes of cultural survival.

These spiritual dimensions were also visible in youth performance contexts. Several participants explained that San music can shift beyond staged performance into deeper healing or trance-related states, even when groups are performing in public spaces such as competitions, festivals, or cultural events. This creates tension because such events often require performers to follow external criteria, time limits, or staged formats, while San musical practice may carry meanings that exceed those frameworks. Some participants described the importance of identifying young

healers, nurturing their gifts, and protecting them from forms of commercial consumption that might reduce healing knowledge to entertainment. This shows that San youth performance is not only a matter of cultural display or artistic skill. It is also connected to spiritual responsibility, community wellbeing, and the careful transmission of knowledge across generations.

At the same time, participants' relationships with Christianity were not always framed as simple rejection or acceptance. Some San participants identified with Christianity or drew emotional strength from Christian scripture, particularly in contexts of displacement, poverty, and reduced access to ancestral knowledge systems. Yet this did not necessarily mean abandoning San spirituality or identity. Rather, fieldwork conversations suggested that some participants navigate overlapping spiritual worlds, adopting aspects of organised religion while continuing to value ancestral knowledge, healing practices, and San musical identity. This complexity is important because it prevents a simplified opposition between Christianity and San spirituality. It also shows how San communities negotiate belief, survival, and identity within histories of missionary influence, marginalisation, and cultural resilience.

Botswana's San population comprises multiple groups with distinct languages and cultural histories. These differences can limit communication across communities. Many participants, however, emphasised that shared approaches to singing, rhythm, and dance operate as a common cultural idiom that transcends linguistic boundaries. Youth initiatives increasingly draw on performance to bridge these differences, building solidarity that supports collective advocacy for recognition and rights. This process of unification, articulated by several participants as "coming together through music," was repeatedly described as healing in itself, countering divisions shaped by state categorisation and uneven NGO or private-sector engagement.

In this sense, healing should be understood not only as a spiritual practice, but also as a social and political resource. For San youth, music supports pride, dignity, belonging, and self-worth, while also sustaining forms of knowledge that remain central to cultural continuity and collective agency. This supports Saugestad's (2001) argument that cultural practices with healing dimensions can affirm agency and help marginalised communities resist structural inequalities.

4.8 Music, Schooling, and Disrupted Transmission

This section examines how San musical knowledge is transmitted under conditions of structural disruption. Rather than treating cultural transmission as a stable or uninterrupted process, it focuses on how children and youth learn song and dance through family, peer groups, and

community practice in contexts shaped and often fractured by state integration policies, particularly the boarding school system.

Since independence in 1966, Botswana's approach to integrating San communities into the nation-state has included restrictions on subsistence practices and the widespread placement of San children in boarding schools, frequently located far from their home communities. Although this policy is currently under review under the new government, its long-term effects continue to shape everyday life. Separation from family and land interrupts intergenerational knowledge transmission, leaving many children emotionally and culturally disconnected from kin, language, and senses of place.

In Gantsi town, in Ghanzi district, teachers and community members interviewed for this research described numerous cases in which children fled abusive boarding school environments, sometimes losing contact with their families altogether. Many struggled to access welfare support due to lack of documentation. Within these contexts of dislocation and precarity, music emerged repeatedly as a critical survival resource rather than a supplementary cultural activity.

Teachers in San-majority schools consistently emphasised the importance of music in sustaining children's sense of self. One headteacher at D'Kar Primary School observed: "Even when they are struggling in other subjects, the children hold on to their music. It is what keeps them connected when everything else feels broken" (pers. comm., D'Kar, 2023). Another teacher explained that music was often the only area of school life in which San children "take the lead instead of following" (pers. comm., D'Kar, 2023). He described a June 16 commemoration event in which students took full initiative over their performance. While he initially assumed they would choose a contemporary piece, the students insisted on performing *tsutsube*, directing the performance themselves and demonstrating cultural agency within the school setting (Ethnographic Video 4). In these institutional contexts, performance becomes a rare site of dignity and agency within otherwise alienating educational structures.

San youth articulated similar experiences. Ditshego Domi (DT), a young musician from New Xade who was forcibly relocated from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, described music as a form of emotional restoration: "We don't have many things here, but when we sing together, it feels like home again" (pers. comm., New Xade, 2023). Following relocation, DT experienced cycles of alcohol abuse and later survived a violent attack that left him permanently disabled. In his filmed interview (Ethnographic Video 5), he reflected on how songs sung by his grandparents

in the CKGR functioned as both memory and medicine. His aspiration is to record and preserve these songs so that future generations can access the knowledge that sustained his family through hardship.

DT's account illustrates how cultural transmission operates not only in idealised ritual contexts, but within the everyday struggles of youth facing displacement, poverty, and disability. Music becomes a vessel of both remembrance and aspiration, enabling young people to imagine futures rooted in continuity rather than loss. This resonates with Koot's (2016) analysis of San communities and structural inequality, which emphasises how the capacity to envision a future is closely tied to access to cultural continuity under conditions of structural constraint.

In Botswana, musical practice in schools is commonly referred to under the umbrella term "traditional dance," a category that encompasses singing, clapping, and embodied movement as an integrated whole. While music is largely absent from formal curricula, traditional dance is often encouraged as an extracurricular activity. In practice, this creates informal spaces in which San children teach one another songs and dances outside classroom hours. In several predominantly San schools, I observed students forming singing groups during breaks. These groups were primarily San, though in some cases non-San children joined and learned San songs. Such peer-led learning illustrates how musical enskilment persists even within environments designed to disrupt cultural continuity.



Figure 12: San youth practicing traditional dance within a school setting. Gantsi Senior

Secondary School, Gantsi, Botswana, 2023. Photograph by author
The image reflects the ongoing transmission and adaptation of cultural practices among San youth, demonstrating how traditional music and dance are sustained within contemporary institutional spaces such as schools.

Some forms of musical transmission remain gender specific. Elderly women interviewed described continuing to train girls informally in songs associated with first menstruation and womanhood, despite the decline in formal ceremonies due to resettlement and assimilation pressures. Members of the Valley Traditional Dance Group in West Hanahai also noted tensions between these practices and formal schooling, as initiation processes often require girls to be temporarily withdrawn from school – something that schools are frequently unwilling to accommodate. This reflects a broader friction between formal education systems and Indigenous knowledge transmission.

In sum, for San children and youth, music is not an optional activity or a recreational supplement. It is a vital means of sustaining cultural identity, restoring dignity, and negotiating marginalisation. Whether in schools, resettlement villages, or informal peer networks, song and dance remain central to how young people learn who they are and how they belong. Foregrounding San youth voices further disrupts inherited anthropological frames that have prioritised elders, ritual continuity, or loss narratives over Indigenous futurity.

4.9 Youth Musical Futures in a Globalizing Botswana

The impact of globalisation on musical heritages worldwide is well documented, shaping cultural expression in ways that are both enabling and constraining. San music is no exception. While this research demonstrates a strong commitment among San youth to maintaining musical traditions, it also reveals that these practices are undergoing significant transformation. These changes are not simply the result of external pressures, but reflect deliberate, strategic responses by youth to shifting political, economic, and social conditions.

Across fieldwork sites, San youth consistently described music and dance as central to identity formation and community cohesion. Performance is not understood merely as artistic expression, but as a lived framework through which belonging is asserted and social position negotiated. Youth inherit songs and dances through family networks, peer groups, schools, and community initiatives, adapting them to diverse contexts including boarding schools, festivals, resettlement villages, tourism venues, and political gatherings.

While musical learning begins in childhood, during youth this process takes on heightened urgency, as performance becomes a conscious resource for affirming identity, fostering solidarity, and sustaining cultural pride in the face of persistent marginalisation.



Figure 13: Bammonye performing with guitar while incorporating San musical aesthetics. Photograph by Author

The image reflects the hybrid musical practices explored in this chapter, where San youth navigate continuity and change by integrating contemporary instruments with embodied cultural expression, challenging fixed distinctions between tradition and modernity.

4.10 Conclusion: Music as Lived Practice

Taken together, the examples presented in this chapter demonstrate how San youth mobilise music not simply as cultural expression, but as a vital resource within contexts of structural inequality and disruption. Across schools, resettlement sites, community initiatives, and performance spaces, music functions simultaneously as heritage, pedagogy, healing practice, and social infrastructure. Through collective participation, youth sustain relationships, restore a sense of worth, and maintain continuity with cultural knowledge even where access to land, language, and intergenerational transmission has been fractured.

Rather than reproducing fixed traditions, San youth actively rework musical practices in response to changing conditions. In doing so, they convert cultural knowledge into forms of visibility, belonging, and opportunity, while navigating the constraints imposed by education systems, tourism economies, and broader state structures. These processes reveal both the possibilities and the limits of cultural capital: while music enables recognition, cohesion, and resilience, it does not in itself resolve the structural inequalities that shape San lives.

Crucially, this chapter has shown that San music is best understood as a lived and embodied practice. Its power lies not only in sound, but in the relational dynamics of performance: voices layered together, bodies moving in synchrony, and communities gathering in shared affect. It is through this collective force that music becomes a means of healing, unification, and continuity, allowing youth to negotiate displacement, marginalisation, and social fragmentation in everyday life.

Within wider African scholarship on popular culture, music, and politics (Barber, 1997; Phuthego, 2005), these findings demonstrate how expressive culture operates as a dynamic site of social action. For San youth, performance is not merely representational but generative: it produces identity, sustains community, and creates the conditions through which new possibilities can be imagined.

Building on this foundation, the following chapter shifts from music as lived practice to music as political action, examining how San youth mobilise cultural performance as a means of self-recognition, visibility, and engagement within Botswana's public sphere. The practices discussed in this chapter show that San music and dance are not only aesthetic forms, but embodied practices through which knowledge, spirituality, memory, healing, and social belonging are sustained. Chapter 5 therefore examines how these musical and cultural practices become strategies through which San youth articulate dignity, challenge misrecognition, educate audiences, and claim cultural authority in wider public spaces.

CHAPTER 5

YOUTH CULTURAL ACTION AND THE POLITICS OF SELF-RECOGNITION

5.1 Introduction

I recall vividly a childhood experience that exposed a paradox that has stayed with me throughout this research. At a public cultural event in Botswana, most performers received polite applause. However, when San musicians began to sing and dance, the audience surged forward in a near-stampede. Already familiar with San music from childhood, I was nonetheless startled by the intensity of the response. During my later fieldwork, I witnessed similar reactions repeatedly among non-San audiences, as well as within San communities themselves – where pride, emotional release, and collective excitement were unmistakable. At D'Kar Primary School, for example, children began singing spontaneously as they walked toward the hall for a performance, their anticipation and excitement palpable.

The question this raises is not whether San music moves people, but why it does so with such force. Based on both lived experience and ethnographic observation, I argue that the impact of San music lies in a combination of sound, embodiment, and sociality. It is not produced through unison singing or linear musical progression, but through the dense interweaving of voices, rhythms, and movement. Singing, clapping, stamping feet into the sand, and dancing in synchronised but non-identical patterns generate a powerful collective force. The coordinated layering of sound and movement draws listeners and observers into the performance; one cannot remain detached. The music does not simply communicate – it envelops.

Ethnographic testimony reinforces this understanding of San music as an enveloping and affective force. In Ethnographic Video 4, Isaac Sol describes how San music compels connection, suggesting that its deeply spiritual qualities resonate beyond cultural boundaries. He reflects that, as one of the world's oldest continuous cultural traditions, San musical practice may evoke a shared human origin, producing responses that exceed linguistic or cultural familiarity. He recounts witnessing individuals from other cultural groups, including Bakgatla participants, moved to tears during San performances, despite not understanding the words.

A similar intensity is described by Mothusi Molemele, a poet and cultural performer, who recounts his first encounter with San healing dance at the Kuru Dance Festival. Listening to elderly San women sing, he describes an overwhelming sensory and emotional experience,

explaining that he repeatedly felt compelled to look behind him, as though something unseen were present. He characterises the moment as both unsettling and liberating: an encounter with what he understood as the spiritual force of the music. These accounts suggest that the power of San performance lies not only in its structure, but in its capacity to produce deeply embodied and affective responses that are experienced as relational, spiritual, and at times transcendent.

This force is amplified by the fact that San music is deeply relational. It is generated through collective participation rather than individual display, and its affective power emerges from people moving, sounding, and breathing together. In this sense, reverence is not produced by spectacle alone, but by the visceral experience of collective expression. This helps to explain why San may be ridiculed in everyday social life yet revered in moments of performance: music temporarily suspends dominant hierarchies, allowing San presence, skill, and dignity to be felt rather than judged. This paradox is not incidental, but foundational to understanding how San youth mobilise culture as a form of political voice and agency.

This chapter examines how San youth construct political voice and agency through cultural action. While music, dance, storytelling, and dress can open pathways for empowerment, entrenched power imbalances and social hierarchies continue to limit the extent to which recognition is translated into structural change. The central argument developed here is that San youth are not merely performers of inherited traditions; rather, they actively rework cultural forms into deliberate statements of belonging and public presence.

Building on Chapter 4, which examined musical transmission, spiritual meaning, and performance contexts, this chapter shifts focus from how music is made to what it does politically. The emphasis is not on musical aesthetics as such, but on how San youth understand performance as a means of affirming identity, claiming dignity, and asserting citizenship. Through ethnographic examples and filmed testimony, the chapter demonstrates how performance functions as an act of self-recognition: a process through which youth affirm the value of their own culture as a basis for seeking recognition within Botswana's public sphere and wider Indigenous rights discourses.

This chapter adopts a dialogic approach between written analysis and the accompanying ethnographic videos. Rather than treating the audiovisual material as supplementary, the videos are engaged as primary sites of knowledge production that actively shape the argument. Their editing reflects a methodological commitment to non-extractive representation, preserving

narrative continuity, conversational pacing, and the integrity of participants' speech. Rather than fragmenting testimony into rhetorically efficient excerpts, the videos allow ideas, hesitations, and relationships to unfold over time.

In this way, video functions not as passive documentation but as an analytic partner to the written text. By directing the reader to specific scenes, performances, and testimonies, the chapter creates an active dialogue between audiovisual and textual forms of evidence. This approach enables a closer examination of how San youth embed messages of identity, dignity, and political presence within embodied practice, and how cultural action operates in lived, sensory, and relational contexts. The following section therefore briefly situates selected participants whose life histories help ground the chapter's analysis of cultural labour, performance, and political voice.

5.1.1 Situated Life Stories, Performance, and Cultural Labour

The individual stories of participants are central to this chapter, but they are not all reproduced in the written text in the same way. As discussed above, the ethnographic videos function as primary sites of knowledge production, and Ethnographic Video 5 in particular provides a fuller space for named participants and clusters of experience to emerge through voice, gesture, pacing, emotion, and relational context. The written discussion therefore does not attempt to reproduce every participant's life story or rank participants according to importance. Instead, it offers selected biographical contexts that help clarify how personal histories, cultural labour, performance, advocacy, education, and economic survival intersect in San musical futures.

This approach reflects the ethical commitments of the project. I am cautious about turning participant life histories into spectacles of hardship or resilience, particularly in research involving Indigenous communities that have often been represented through poverty, suffering, or cultural loss. For this reason, the life-history details included here are not presented as trauma narratives or as evidence of individual exceptionalism. They are used to show how musicians, performers, teachers, cultural organisers, youth advocates, and community workers are socially situated actors whose cultural work is shaped by family histories, community responsibilities, education, mobility, discrimination, aspiration, spirituality, and political consciousness. The aim is to give enough biographical grounding for the analysis without reducing participants to examples of deprivation or romanticised resistance.

The examples discussed in this section are therefore selective rather than exhaustive. They are not included because their stories are more important than those of other participants, but because

they illuminate different pathways through which San cultural action operates across the project. Some participants appear as musicians, dancers, and performers, while others appear as teachers, cultural organisers, youth advocates, tourism workers, language activists, or community leaders. This broader framing is important because the dissertation does not treat San musical futures as the work of performers alone. Rather, it understands music, dance, language, education, tourism, advocacy, and cultural coordination as connected forms of cultural labour.

Samuel Stanley, from Chobokwane village in Ghanzi District, represents a form of San youth leadership that moves between law, cultural performance, climate advocacy, and Indigenous rights work. At the time of this research, he was a final year Law student at the University of Botswana and had also undertaken training in paralegal studies and rock art site documentation. His work demonstrates how San youth cultural action is not limited to performance alone, but extends into legal awareness, heritage preservation, environmental advocacy, and international Indigenous rights spaces. As Director of the Indigenous Ink Network, Chairperson of the Ncoa Khoe traditional dance group, a District Climate Change Champion, and African Focal Point of the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, Stanley's work connects local San concerns to wider conversations about Indigenous recognition, climate justice, food systems, and youth leadership.

Mangana Mangana offers another important example of San cultural action across educational, governmental, festival, and tourism contexts. As a cultural worker connected to the Kuru festival, and through his experience of government work and involvement with Dqãe Qare Game Farm, he represents a generation of San cultural actors whose lives move between community cultural practice, state institutions, tourism economies, and cultural enterprise. His reflections on education and boarding school also show how formal education has been both a pathway of opportunity and a site of difficulty for San individuals navigating systems that were not designed around their languages, identities, or community realities. His story is therefore relevant not only because of his cultural work, but because it shows how San cultural leadership is shaped by schooling, labour, institutional negotiation, and community responsibility.

Qoma and Xene, teachers who returned to West Hanahai after navigating difficult education pathways, show another dimension of San cultural futures. Their stories connect education, return, and community responsibility. Rather than treating education only as assimilation or cultural loss, their experiences show how formal schooling can also become a resource that some San individuals bring back into their communities, even when the process of moving through boarding schools and mainstream education systems has involved hardship, dislocation, and

cultural pressure. Their return to West Hanahai is significant because it shows how education can be redirected towards community life, local leadership, and the strengthening of San futures from within.

Bram Bruce, founder of *Unique Naro Boys*, represents a pathway through which San youth use music to respond to marginalisation through contemporary and hybrid forms. His emphasis on music as a fast and powerful way of transmitting messages shows how popular music can become a tool for communication, self-recognition, and youth confidence. His work is important here because it demonstrates that San cultural continuity does not only depend on preserving inherited forms unchanged. It can also involve adapting language, rhythm, and identity to contemporary sound worlds in order to reach younger audiences and wider publics.

Isaac Sol's work as a linguist, cultural advocate, and participant in Naro language projects offers a different but connected example. His engagement with language, Christianity, ancestral knowledge, and San musical identity illustrates how cultural action can operate through translation, education, religious debate, and linguistic inclusion, as well as through performance itself. His contribution is especially significant because language sits at the centre of recognition. When San languages are excluded or treated as peripheral, San cultural knowledge is also pushed to the margins. His work therefore connects linguistic advocacy to cultural continuity and self-recognition.

Groups such as Obligatto and Original Stars show how collective youth music-making can be a form of social commentary, cultural pride, and political expression. Their work reflects the realities of young San musicians who use performance to negotiate language exclusion, limited employment, public visibility, and cultural survival. Rather than treating them only as performers, this dissertation understands them as cultural-political actors whose songs, choices of language, and public performances carry social meaning. The more detailed analysis of their strategies, including the political significance of songs such as "Ripuo Jecho," is developed later in this chapter.

The Grootlaagte traditional dance group offers another important example of collective life histories and intergenerational cultural work. Their performances are connected to cultural pride, healing, community wellbeing, and the transmission of knowledge between elders and youth. The group's reflections show that traditional dance is not simply a staged display for audiences, but part of a wider social world in which music, movement, spirituality, memory, and community

responsibility are connected. Their work demonstrates how San youth and elders use performance to sustain belonging and dignity, while also creating opportunities for income, travel, recognition, and public cultural visibility.

Tiroyaone Jacob's reflections in Ethnographic Video 5 on performing internationally show how San performers experience recognition differently across local and global contexts. His accounts of audiences responding with fascination to San music and attire reveal both the possibilities and the tensions of cultural visibility. International performance may generate pride and recognition, but it also raises questions about how San identity is interpreted, consumed, and valued by outsiders. His story therefore helps illuminate the ambivalent position of San performers who may gain visibility through cultural display, while still having to navigate the risk that audiences read San culture through exoticising or stereotypical frames.

Robert Camm's reflections in Ethnographic Video 6 offer a perspective from within the cultural tourism sector. His work with San cultural groups shows how performance becomes entangled with questions of employment, training, cultural ownership, and economic survival. His comments about the need for San to control and benefit more fully from cultural tourism are important because they connect individual life histories to structural questions. They show that the issue is not only whether San performers can access performance opportunities, but whether they can shape the terms under which their cultural knowledge is presented, valued, and remunerated.

Taken together, these life histories and participant examples deepen the analysis of San youth cultural action. They show that performance is not an abstract symbol of identity, but is connected to lived experiences of schooling, displacement, language politics, labour, spirituality, advocacy, tourism, and community responsibility. They also show that San musical futures are produced through many kinds of cultural labour, including singing, dancing, teaching, translating, organising festivals, leading youth networks, working in tourism, preserving heritage, and speaking in political spaces. The purpose of including these examples is therefore not to privilege some participants over others, but to show how individual and collective experiences give shape to the broader arguments of the dissertation.

5.2 A Global Context for Indigenous Youth Agency

Across the world, Indigenous movements have linked self-determination, cultural revitalisation, and political recognition to questions of land, governance, education, and institutional authority

(Cornell, 2006; Tuck et al., 2014; Simpson, 2017). These movements frequently involve the reclamation of language, ceremony, and expressive culture as responses to histories of dispossession and erasure. Increasingly, Indigenous youth mobilise digital platforms, international forums, and transnational advocacy networks to connect local struggles with global Indigenous politics, extending longer histories of Indigenous media as cultural activism, self-representation, and challenges to ethnographic authority (Ginsburg, 1991, 1995).

San youth in Botswana share this broader trajectory. They mobilise cultural capital: songs, dances, oral histories, dress, and linguistic heritage, not only for cultural preservation but also for economic survival and political participation. While such dynamics are well documented in studies of music, identity, and racialised belonging (cf. Turino, 2008; Adhikari, 2005), more recent scholarship has also emphasised the role of expressive culture as a site of Indigenous resurgence and political articulation (Simpson, 2017; Robinson, 2020). This chapter demonstrates how these strategies are articulated and enacted by San youth within Botswana's specific political, historical, and cultural landscape.

5.3 Youth Cultural Action in Practice

What marks San youth cultural action as politically significant is the conscious embedding of messages about identity, rights, and dignity within performance. The forms of political agency examined here do not align with conventional models of protest or confrontation. Rather, they operate through the strategic use of cultural presence, embodied expression, and controlled visibility in contexts where overt resistance may carry significant risk. These practices move beyond symbolic representation to become deliberate forms of political communication. This builds directly on Chapter 4's argument that San performance operates as a lived and embodied practice, and is particularly evident in how San youth mobilise music and performance to respond to contested political issues, including the criminalisation of subsistence hunting.

These examples show how quiet action operates in practice. San youth do not always announce political claims through direct statements; they often carry them through the structure and staging of performance itself. Song texts, gesture, dress, language choice, storytelling, and movement become ways of making arguments about San identity, ecological knowledge, hunting practices, language rights, and belonging. In this sense, performance works as embodied advocacy, allowing youth to educate audiences, contest stereotypes, and assert cultural authority without reducing their political claims to formal speech alone.

Quiet action is not limited to performances with overt political lyrics or explicit storytelling. It is also present in the continued performance of San identity itself. Under conditions of displacement, hunting restrictions, material scarcity, and disrupted transmission, the decision to continue singing, dancing, wearing San cultural attire, using beadwork, performing hunting gestures, and appearing publicly as San carries political meaning. These practices assert continuity in the face of erasure and allow youth to recognise themselves and be recognised by others as part of a living San cultural future.

This is particularly evident in how San youth mobilise music and performance to respond to the criminalisation of subsistence hunting. Performances at festivals and community gatherings frequently address the hunting ban, using song, dance, gesture, and storytelling to demonstrate deep ecological knowledge, respect for animals, and the sustainable principles underpinning San hunting practices. Within dominant political narratives, San hunting has often been associated with poaching, including the illegal killing of protected animals such as elephants and rhinos. Youth performances challenge this framing by telling a different story of San hunting histories: what was hunted, how hunting was conducted, how much was taken, and how these practices were shaped by Indigenous conservation knowledge and environmental restraint. By framing hunting as cultural and ecological knowledge rather than criminality, these performances counter state narratives that have long delegitimised San lifeways. This is significant because the hunting ban is not only a conservation issue, but also a question of recognition. When San hunting practices are framed primarily through criminality or environmental threat, San ecological knowledge is excluded from public understandings of conservation and land stewardship. Youth performances therefore challenge not only the policy outcome of the hunting ban, but also the assumptions through which San relationships with land and animals have been misunderstood, regulated, and politically marginalised. In doing so, youth position themselves as cultural and environmental knowledge holders, extending the politics-of-recognition framework introduced earlier in the dissertation and illustrating how performance operates as a vehicle for visibility, advocacy, and rights-claims.

San youth performances addressing the hunting ban must be understood within a longer history of criminalisation of San subsistence practices. Hunting – central to San lifeways for millennia, has frequently been reframed within state discourse as poaching, with San communities accused of participating in the illegal hunting of protected species such as elephants and rhinos. Participants in this research consistently rejected these representations, emphasising their deep ecological knowledge and long-standing role as custodians of the environment. As several youths explained,

San hunting practices are governed by principles of sustainability: knowing which animals to hunt, when to hunt, and taking only what is necessary for subsistence rather than accumulation or commercial gain.

In this context, performance becomes a critical site through which these misconceptions are challenged. At the Xere Cultural Festival, documented in Ethnographic Video 6, particularly in the festival performance sequences, youth groups stage songs and dances that enact subsistence practices through movement and gesture, allowing viewers to observe how ecological knowledge is communicated non-verbally. Through embodied demonstration, performers communicate forms of knowledge that are often misrepresented or erased in public discourse. These performances do not simply represent culture; they actively intervene in dominant narratives by showing, rather than stating, what San lifeways entail.

This representational strategy is further articulated by Samuel Stanley in Ethnographic Video 5, who explains that San youth have increasingly incorporated elements of acting and narrative performance into their repertoire in order to communicate more effectively with diverse audiences. As he notes, these adaptations allow even those who do not understand San languages to grasp what is being expressed through movement and gesture. Stanley explicitly frames performance as a political tool, stating that music and performance have become central to how youth engage within the political arena.

Rather than positioning performance as a direct influence on state policy, these practices are better understood as contributing to broader processes of public education and perception-shifting. By making visible the realities of San subsistence practices, youth performances challenge the narrative that equates hunting with criminality and instead assert it as a legitimate cultural and ecological practice. In doing so, they reclaim both identity and authority over representations of their way of life.

This process is closely tied to ongoing struggles over indigeneity. As San communities continue to face denial or erasure of their identities and lifeways, youth actively resist pressures to assimilate into dominant cultural norms. Performance becomes a means of refusal: a way of insisting on continuity with hunting identities and ancestral knowledge. Through song, dance, and storytelling, youth assert who they are, not as a static heritage, but as a living and contested identity.

These dynamics extend beyond local contexts into global arenas. During fieldwork at the University of Botswana, Samuel Stanley described preparing to attend the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York, where he would participate in discussions addressing San marginalisation, including the hunting ban. He carried a bow and arrow as a cultural symbol, noting how such objects attract public curiosity and create opportunities to educate others about San identity. Here, cultural expression operates not only as performance but as a portable and strategic form of advocacy.

Similar patterns of reception emerge in international contexts. In Ethnographic Video 4, Tiroyaone Jacob reflects on performing abroad, describing how audiences in countries such as Brazil responded with fascination to San music and traditional attire. Although not all such moments are captured in the videos, multiple participants including community leaders and youth musicians, described experiences of being admired and respected when presenting San culture internationally. These encounters reveal how performance can generate recognition in global spaces even as marginalisation persists locally.

Youth musicians working in hybrid genres further extend these political possibilities. Groups such as Obligatto and Original Stars, featured in Ethnographic Videos 4 and 5, explicitly embed political messages within their music. Their song “Ripuo Jecho” (“Our Languages”), performed in multiple San languages, directly addresses ethnic discrimination, linguistic exclusion, and the marginalisation of San linguistic diversity. Unlike the hunting ban performances, where critique is often carried through embodied storytelling and gesture, “Ripuo Jecho” makes its intervention through lyrics that confront cultural hierarchy and place San languages at the centre of public musical expression. At the same time, group members expressed caution about overt political expression under previous political conditions, highlighting the risks associated with speaking too directly. Their concerns were not abstract. Some members described fear of serious consequences, including personal safety concerns under the previous administration, as well as fears of economic exclusion or being denied access to government-related performance platforms and cultural opportunities. This caution is significant because it demonstrates that San youth cultural action is shaped not only by creativity, but also by political calculation. Their performances may carry political messages, but these messages are often embedded within song, language, rhythm, and cultural expression rather than framed as direct confrontation. As one member stated, “People think a musician can’t be a politician, but a musician is a politician” (Ethnographic Video 5). This statement captures the logic of quiet action: political work may be carried through cultural forms that appear non-confrontational, while still shaping public meaning

and challenging exclusion. Through music, San youth musicians interpret social conditions, transmit collective concerns, contest marginalisation, and create spaces in which their communities can be heard. In this sense, they function as cultural-political actors whose work contributes to public discourse, even when their interventions are expressed through performance rather than formal political speech.

Other artists similarly articulate music as a powerful communicative tool. Bram Bruce, founder of Unique Naro Boys, described music as the most effective way to transmit messages because of its speed and reach, while San scholar Kuela Kiema emphasised that music exceeds conventional political instruments, arguing that it can travel further than both "bullets and ballots" (Ethnographic Video 4). Kiema further reflected on how San music is actively reshaping public perception, reducing stigma and influencing how other ethnic groups engage with San culture.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that San youth cultural action operates across multiple scales: from local festivals to international forums, and through multiple forms from traditional performance to hybrid musical production. In each case, performance functions not only as expression, but as a strategic intervention into narratives, perceptions, and power relations. These practices can be understood as forms of embodied advocacy, in which political claims are articulated through performance rather than formal political speech.

At the same time, the impact of these performances remains shaped by structural constraints, including limited control over representation, economic precarity, and unequal access to decision-making platforms. This limitation is explicitly articulated by Keikabile Mogodu, Secretary General of the Indigenous Peoples Network of Southern Africa, who in Ethnographic Video 6 highlights the persistent absence of San representation in positions of political influence. He argues that without meaningful inclusion in decision-making structures, particularly within government, San communities continue to face marginalisation and lack of recognition. Mogodu further notes that even when San individuals attain positions of influence, many feel compelled to conceal their identity due to fear of discrimination, while those who openly identify as San are often met with disbelief regarding their education or professional success.

In this way, San youth cultural action does not simply express identity, but actively reshapes how that identity is understood, valued, and negotiated within both local and global arenas. Through performance, youth not only assert who they are, but challenge the conditions under which

recognition is granted, revealing both the transformative potential and the structural limits of cultural action as a pathway toward justice.

5.3.1 Reception, Recognition, Appropriation, and the Limits of Solidarity

The political significance of San youth performance is not located only in what performers express, but also in how audiences receive, interpret, and respond to that expression. Across fieldwork, San music and dance repeatedly generated strong reactions among San and non-San audiences alike. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, I had observed from childhood that San performances could produce unusually intense responses at public cultural events. During fieldwork, similar moments appeared in school performances, festivals, community gatherings, and filmed testimonies. Audiences often moved closer, watched with fascination, joined emotionally, or described feeling affected in ways they could not easily explain. These responses matter because they reveal that San cultural expression already carries a form of public power, even in social contexts where San continue to face marginalisation, ridicule, and discrimination.

San performers and cultural workers are aware of this power. Their use of music, dance, dress, gesture, language, and storytelling is not simply an instinctive continuation of tradition, but often a strategic engagement with how San culture is seen, heard, and felt by others. Participants repeatedly described performance as a way of reaching audiences who may not understand San languages or political claims in formal terms. This awareness is central to the quiet action analysed in this chapter. San youth do not always confront audiences through direct political statements. Instead, they often harness the affective force of performance to create moments of recognition, curiosity, and emotional openness. Through song, movement, humour, acting, dress, and embodied storytelling, they invite audiences to feel the presence and dignity of San culture before asking them to interpret it politically.

This does not mean that San performers simply perform for approval from outsiders. Rather, it shows how reception itself becomes part of cultural strategy. For example, when hunting practices are represented through dance and gesture, performers are not only preserving memory or displaying culture. They are also using the audience's attention to challenge assumptions that equate San hunting with criminality or poaching. By staging hunting knowledge as ecological knowledge, performers redirect the gaze of the audience from suspicion to understanding. Similarly, when youth musicians perform in San languages, or when groups such as Obligatto and

Original Stars place linguistic pride at the centre of their music, they use the affective and social appeal of music to make language exclusion audible as a political issue. In these moments, reception becomes part of the work of recognition.

The emotional responses of non-San audiences therefore have political importance, but they must be interpreted carefully. Moments of admiration, fascination, or emotional connection can interrupt everyday hierarchies and allow San culture to be valued in public. They can also create openings for dialogue, solidarity, and education. Kuela Kiema's reflections suggest that the increasing imitation or adoption of San music and dance by other groups may indicate that San culture is no longer being dismissed in the same way. In this sense, copying or adaptation can appear to signal admiration, influence, and a shift in perception. However, admiration is not the same as justice, and cultural influence is not the same as cultural authority.

This distinction is important because participants also described more troubling forms of reception. San music and dance may be admired, copied, and incorporated into wider representations of Botswana culture, while San performers themselves remain excluded from the opportunities, recognition, and remuneration attached to those representations. Groups from other Botswana cultural communities sometimes incorporate San imagery, movement, vocal style, dress, or performance structures into their own repertoires and may go on to represent Botswana nationally or internationally using adaptations of San cultural forms. Participants described this as a painful contradiction: wider society may want the culture, but not always the people who carry it. In such cases, San performance becomes a resource for national cultural display, while San performers themselves remain marginalised.

This concern resonates with Baracchini's recent work on the institutionalisation of *Tsutsube* in Botswana's national arts competition context. Baracchini shows how the naming, circulation, and regulation of this San dance form can enable a transfer of expertise beyond its communities of origin, producing feelings of cultural dispossession among Naro performers and raising new questions about ownership and authority over the practice (Baracchini, 2025). This scholarship helps situate participants' concerns within a wider cultural politics of appropriation, competition, and institutional control. It also supports the argument that San dance cannot be understood only as heritage or entertainment. It is also a contested field in which questions of ownership, naming, expertise, representation, and benefit are actively negotiated.

These tensions are especially visible in competition contexts, where San performers may be required to adapt their music and dance to external criteria. Participants spoke about being asked to change aspects of their performance, shorten or standardise practices, or fit their music into formats that do not reflect the structure, purpose, or spiritual meaning of the performance itself. This creates a form of cultural policing. San performers are invited to perform their culture, but only within terms set by institutions, adjudicators, festivals, or audiences who may not understand the knowledge systems embedded in the performance. At the same time, participants insisted that San music cannot simply be copied. Even where other groups imitate San dance or musical forms, San participants argued that the deeper knowledge, feeling, spiritual force, and embodied understanding of the music cannot be reproduced in the same way by those outside the culture.

The politics of reception are also shaped by labour and remuneration. The perception of San as cheap, available, or informal labour affects how performances are paid for and how remuneration is negotiated. If San performers are valued mainly as cultural attractions rather than as skilled cultural workers, their labour can be underpaid, treated as supplementary, or expected for free. This links the reception of San performance to longer histories of labour exploitation and social hierarchy. Being admired on stage does not necessarily mean being paid fairly, given control over representation, or recognised as an owner of cultural knowledge. In this sense, cultural reception cannot be separated from economic justice.

The relationship between San communities and wider Botswana society therefore remains deeply challenging. Although there are now stronger public conversations around constitutional review, institutional reform, Indigenous recognition, and inclusion under the new government, the repair of relationships between San communities and wider society remains under-discussed. Legal and policy reform are necessary, but they do not automatically address the everyday social relations through which San have been treated as inferior, servile, or less fully human. This point emerged powerfully in Ethnographic Video 2, where council chairman Stephen Lekgobero reflected that he only came to understand San as people like himself in adulthood, despite growing up among San as a Mokgalagari. In the same discussion, Noah Salakae, Member of Parliament for Ghanzi and Minister of Transport and Infrastructure, and Shane Kebadile, council chairperson of Ghanzi, reflected on growing up in a regional context where many families had “their own” San person or family attached to them and where San were widely perceived as born to serve others. These reflections are difficult, but they are important because they name a history of social relations that cannot be fully captured by the softer language of poverty or marginalisation alone.

This language is also echoed in Ethnographic Video 6 by Lawrence Ookeditse, Member of Parliament for Nata-Gweta, who argues that the broader system has turned San into "slaves." He links this condition to the denial of San ways of life, including restrictions on hunting and gathering, which have contributed to forms of dependency in which many San are pushed into farm labour and service for dominant groups. Ookeditse therefore calls for a major overhaul of the entire system, rather than minor adjustments that leave the underlying structures of marginalisation intact.

The term "slavery" is politically and ethically sensitive, and I use it cautiously here. However, participants and local leaders described forms of inherited servitude, dependency, ownership, and domestic or farm labour relations that continue to shape San marginalisation in Botswana. These relations are not limited to one ethnic group, although they are often discussed in relation to San-Bakgalagari histories in the Ghanzi region. They point to a wider national problem in which San may be valued for their labour, healing knowledge, cultural performances, or environmental expertise, while still being socially devalued as people. This contradiction is central to understanding the limits of recognition.

The contradiction is especially striking in relation to healing knowledge. Several participants noted that non-San communities, including Bakgalagari communities, have long recognised the power of San healers and San healing music. Mothusi Molemele also reflected on the force of San healing dance and the ways people seek San spiritual knowledge in moments of illness or crisis. This suggests that San knowledge has often been used, sought after, and respected in practice, even while San themselves have been discriminated against in everyday life. The wider society may therefore recognise the power of San music, healing, and cultural knowledge without fully recognising San personhood, land rights, language rights, or political authority.

For this reason, admiration must be distinguished from solidarity. Non-San emotional responses to San music may create moments of connection, but solidarity requires more than being moved. It requires listening to San claims, recognising San knowledge systems, supporting linguistic and cultural rights, challenging discrimination, ensuring fair remuneration, and addressing the structural conditions that shape San marginalisation. Performance may open the door to such solidarity, but it cannot guarantee it. The limits of solidarity are visible in the gap between affective recognition and material transformation.

The significance of San youth performance lies partly in this gap. San youth and cultural workers understand that their music has the capacity to move audiences, and they harness that capacity as part of quiet political action. Yet they also remain aware, implicitly or explicitly, that being admired is not the same as being empowered. The power of performance lies in its ability to create moments of recognition, but its limitation lies in the fact that such moments must still be translated into rights, resources, fair compensation, cultural authority, policy change, and meaningful participation in public life.

5.3.2 Authenticity, Hybridity, and the Ethics of Cultural Adaptation

The discussion of reception and appropriation raises a further question about authenticity, hybridity, and cultural authority. In contexts where San music and dance are performed for schools, festivals, competitions, tourism spaces, political gatherings, and international audiences, questions often arise about what counts as "authentic" San performance and who has the authority to decide. These questions are important, but they also need to be approached carefully. If authenticity is judged only by external observers, adjudicators, tourists, researchers, or heritage institutions, then San performers may once again be placed in a position where others define the terms of their culture. In this dissertation, authenticity is therefore not treated as a fixed standard imposed from outside, but as something negotiated by San performers, elders, youth, and communities in relation to context, purpose, responsibility, and audience.

Fieldwork conversations complicated my initial expectation that elders would necessarily oppose youth hybridity or contemporary musical experimentation. In many cases, elders and San leaders expressed support for youth performances across different contexts, including school, social, tourism, and public cultural spaces. Elders in Grootlaagte, for example, recognised that young people perform in different styles depending on where they are and what the performance is meant to do. Rather than seeing this as a threat, they described their role as teaching youth what they understood as the deeper or more "real" forms of San music and dance when they are at home, so that knowledge can be preserved and passed on. This suggests that, for many participants, hybridity is not automatically understood as cultural loss. It can also be part of youth agency, adaptation, and survival, provided that connections to deeper cultural knowledge are maintained.

San performers often move between different performance contexts that require different forms of expression. A school performance, a tourism presentation, a cultural competition, a community

healing context, and a political advocacy space do not carry the same expectations or responsibilities. Some forms of San music, especially those connected to healing, trance, and spiritual force, were described by participants as painful, demanding, and not easily entered into. Participants emphasised that such music is not simply entertainment and is not necessarily available to everyone. It may involve chosen individuals, spiritual responsibility, emotional intensity, and forms of knowledge that cannot be reduced to staged display. This means that adapting or creating different versions of performance for tourism, education, or entertainment can be understood not only as commodification, but also as a practical and ethical strategy. It may allow San performers to engage public and economic spaces while protecting more spiritually sensitive forms of knowledge from being consumed casually.

Isaac Sol's reflections in Ethnographic Video 4 are useful here because they do not reject hybridity, but warn against careless adaptation. He expressed concern about the remixing of healing songs for entertainment purposes, suggesting that such practices can be dangerous because they involve powerful emotional and spiritual material. His concern was not simply that San music should never change. Rather, he emphasised that musical adaptation must remain respectful of the spiritual potency of San performance. His comments complicate any simple opposition between "tradition" and "modernity". The question is how San music is adapted, who adapts it, for what purpose, and whether the deeper meanings of the music are respected.

This also complicates debates about cultural tourism and staged performance. It is easy to criticise tourism for rewarding stereotyped versions of San culture, and this criticism remains important. However, the fieldwork suggests that San performers are not always passive victims of tourist expectations. They may also understand the cultural tourism market and make strategic decisions about which forms of performance to present in those spaces. If San performers curate particular styles for tourism while protecting other forms as sacred, private, or community-based, then this should not automatically be dismissed as inauthentic. It may represent a form of cultural agency within unequal economic conditions. The ethical problem is not that San performers adapt their culture for income. The problem arises when external audiences, tourism operators, adjudicators, or institutions control the terms of adaptation, reward stereotyped representations, or deny San performers authority over their own cultural labour.

For this reason, the question of authenticity is also a question of power. When outsiders demand that San performers appear "traditional," "ancient," or "untouched" in order to be recognised as authentic, they risk freezing San identity in the past. At the same time, when San youth create

hybrid music, perform in contemporary styles, or use popular genres, they may be judged as having moved away from "real" San culture. These contradictory expectations place San performers in a difficult position: they may be rewarded for performing versions of culture that satisfy outsider imagination, but questioned when they adapt culture on their own terms. This reveals that authenticity is often less about cultural truth and more about who controls representation.

Christian frameworks also shape these tensions. As discussed earlier, Isaac Sol and other participants reflected on the ways San music and dance have sometimes been demonised as idolatrous or spiritually dangerous within Christian contexts. During fieldwork, I also observed the presence of missionary and evangelical activity in some San communities, including attempts to separate people from ancestral belief systems and spiritual practices. This creates another layer of pressure: San music may be condemned as demonic in one context, celebrated as national culture in another, and commodified for tourism in yet another. Such contradictions reveal the unstable position of San music within Botswana's wider religious, cultural, and economic landscape. It may be spiritually powerful, socially stigmatised, culturally admired, and economically exploited at the same time.

Internal tensions also emerged around opportunity and recognition within traditional dance groups. Because performance opportunities are limited, certain groups may become more visible or more frequently selected, particularly when they are able to conform to external performance criteria. Groups that attempt to perform closer to what they understand as traditional practice may be misunderstood, penalised, or seen as less suitable for staged or competitive formats. These tensions are not only about artistic style. They are also about access to platforms, income, travel, and recognition. Competition systems can therefore create pressure to standardise San performance, even when the music and dance are rooted in practices that do not easily fit fixed time limits, judging categories, or external expectations.

At the same time, the fieldwork also showed that music can create connection across San communities despite linguistic, geographical, and stylistic differences. Participants repeatedly described performance as a space through which different San groups could recognise one another, share knowledge, and build collective pride. This does not erase internal tensions, but it shows that disagreement and solidarity can exist together. San cultural action is not a unified or uncomplicated field. It involves negotiation between elders and youth, sacred and public

knowledge, preservation and adaptation, tourism and community responsibility, spiritual potency and entertainment, competition criteria and cultural authority.

These tensions do not weaken the argument of this dissertation. Rather, they show why San youth performance must be understood as a complex form of cultural labour and quiet action. San performers are not simply choosing between authenticity and hybridity, or between tradition and modernity. They are navigating layered questions of survival, respect, spirituality, audience expectation, economic need, and cultural authority. Their strategies show that cultural adaptation can be both risky and powerful. It can expose San music to misunderstanding, appropriation, and commodification, but it can also allow San youth to claim visibility, educate audiences, generate income, and keep cultural knowledge alive in changing social conditions.

5.4 Self-Recognition and Collective Agency

Framed through the politics of recognition (Taylor, 1994; Honneth, 1996), these practices demonstrate that recognition is not only demanded externally but also cultivated internally. By affirming the value of their own cultural expressions, San youth enact self-recognition, which becomes the foundation for political visibility and collective agency.

This process is articulated powerfully by San scholar and activist Isaac Sol in Ethnographic Video 2. Reflecting on the role of music in San identity, he states: “Nothing says San like music. Music has single-handedly preserved our cultural identity.” He goes on to describe a striking paradox: when the San speak, they are often ridiculed, yet when they sing, their expression is celebrated as beautiful and meaningful. In this context, music becomes what he describes as the primary medium through which San are heard and recognised.

Sol further emphasises that music operates as an everyday marker of identity, noting how young girls walking home from school sing and clap, making their San identity immediately recognisable through sound and movement alone. As he explains, music is not simply performed but lived – “it is in the blood.” This framing positions music as both an embodied identity practice and a form of cultural continuity that persists across generations.

Similar perspectives emerge across multiple testimonies. In Ethnographic Video 6, Keikabile Mogodu describes music as the one cultural form that has endured despite historical marginalisation, suggesting that it holds transformative potential not only for recognition but also for broader empowerment and economic development. Likewise, traditional leaders including

Kgosi Molaodi Moipolai (Xere) and Kgosi Khaxoo Xase (West Hanahai), in Ethnographic Video 2, as well as Kgosi Tsaxlae Xao (Grootlaagte) in Ethnographic Video 1, explicitly encourage youth to embrace self-recognition as a necessary foundation for collective advancement.

Music also plays a crucial role in overcoming internal divisions. San communities are linguistically diverse, a factor that has historically fragmented collective advocacy. Yet participants consistently emphasised that music operates as a shared idiom that transcends these differences. As Sol notes, “Music has no linguistic barrier – it unites” (Ethnographic Video 2). Through shared rhythms, vocal textures, and performance practices, youth build solidarity across subgroups, enabling more cohesive forms of cultural and political engagement.

This emphasis on self-recognition is echoed by law student Samuel Stanley, who states in Ethnographic Video 2: “We have to recognise ourselves before we gain recognition from elsewhere.” His statement captures the core argument advanced here: self-recognition is not a precursor to politics, but a political practice in itself. Through this process, San youth turn cultural expression into a basis for public presence and collective claim-making.

At the same time, participants remain acutely aware of the limits of recognition within broader structures of inequality. While self-recognition is widely understood as necessary, it unfolds within contexts shaped by enduring marginalisation, limited access to decision-making, and hegemonic power relations. It is precisely within this tension that San youth cultural action takes on its political significance.

In this sense, self-recognition operates not merely as an internal affirmation of identity, but as a collective and strategic practice through which San youth convert cultural expression into political presence.

5.5 Dimensions of Youth Cultural Action

San youth themselves describe their cultural engagement in terms that reveal four interlinked dimensions. These dimensions are not discrete categories but overlapping practices through which music and performance operate simultaneously as economic, social, cultural, and political resources.

- Economic survival. Participation in tourism and competitions is often pursued for modest income yet framed tactically—as a way to sustain repertoires while navigating limited livelihood opportunities. In Ethnographic Video 6, Mogotsi Robson, leader of the Disaitsaneng Cultural Group, describes music as their full-time work, emphasising that without it, survival is not possible, particularly in the context of rising youth unemployment in Botswana. This perspective is reinforced by Keikabile Mogodu, who suggests that San music and culture hold significant untapped economic potential, arguing that investment in these practices could contribute not only to community livelihoods but to broader national development. Robson similarly equates the value of San music to that of diamonds, noting that while the potential exists, opportunities remain limited. Regional politician Greg Losibe further observes that San youth increasingly recognise their worth, insisting on fair compensation when invited to perform.

  At the same time, participants remain aware of the constraints that shape these opportunities. Members of the Xaxase Traditional Dance Group from New Xanagas described how, despite their dedication and resilience, earnings from competitions are often insufficient to cover preparation costs. In this sense, performance operates within an uneven economic field, where cultural labour sustains livelihoods but rarely guarantees stability.

- Social bonds. Ensembles commonly include siblings, cousins, and peers, reflecting the deeply relational nature of San musical practice. Singing and dancing together are frequently described as healing practices, particularly in contexts of displacement and marginalisation. In Ethnographic Video 6, cultural tourism practitioner Robert Camm describes how music brings together San groups across linguistic differences, fostering forms of connection that extend beyond everyday communication. He notes instances in which participants enter trance and speak across languages, suggesting a profound level of collective unity.

  This relational dimension extends into broader forms of social support. In Ethnographic Video 5, members of the Grootlaagte Traditional Dance Group explain how, in times of bereavement, the group mobilises to provide both emotional and financial support to affected families, regardless of formal membership. In contexts marked by poverty, displacement, and social challenges including alcohol abuse, participants emphasised that involvement in music groups provides structure, purpose, and an alternative to harmful

environments. In this sense, community performance groups function as forms of social infrastructure, sustaining both individual wellbeing and collective cohesion.

- Cultural identity. Performance functions as a counterweight to internalised stigma, enabling youth to reclaim pride in their heritage. As one participant noted, “When we sing, people listen; we remember who we are” (interview, New Xade, September 2023). In Ethnographic Video 6, Mogotsi Robson adds another dimension, describing performance as a moment in which he feels entrusted with a form of power that must be returned to the audience. He emphasises a sense of responsibility to represent his community with dignity and to generate respect through performance.

  This transformation is also visibly embodied. Participants who may appear reserved in everyday interactions often adopt more confident and expressive personas during performance, suggesting that music provides a space in which alternative forms of selfhood can be enacted. In this way, performance becomes not only a reflection of identity but a site in which confidence, pride, and self-worth are actively produced.

- Political solidarity. Performing publicly as San asserts presence within a polity that often celebrates San culture symbolically while marginalising the San materially. Through collective performance, youth articulate shared experiences and align themselves within broader struggles for recognition, rights, and inclusion.

  This solidarity is also expressed through moments of tension and resistance. Participants frequently described challenges within competitive performance environments, where their practices are judged according to criteria that do not fully recognise San aesthetics or spiritual dimensions. In response, some groups described making deliberate choices about how far to adapt their performances, balancing the desire for visibility with the need to preserve the integrity of their cultural practices. These decisions reflect a form of political positioning: an insistence that recognition should not come at the cost of cultural erasure. In this sense, even moments of constraint become sites of negotiation, where youth assert control over how their culture is represented and valued.

  This stance is also recognised beyond San communities themselves. In Ethnographic Video 2, Noah Salakae, Minister of Transport and Infrastructure and Member of Parliament for Ghanzi, observes that while San are often perceived as “backward,” they

> remain deeply principled when it comes to their cultural interests and are unwilling to compromise their integrity. He describes San communities as highly cooperative, yet firm in protecting what matters to them. This perspective is echoed by Keikabile Mogodu, who notes in Ethnographic Video 6 that San youth are increasingly assertive in defending their identity, particularly in digital spaces. He explains that when condescending or misinformed representations of San circulate on platforms such as Facebook, youth now respond forcefully, challenging such narratives and asserting their identity and challenging the terms under which it is represented.

Taken together, these dimensions demonstrate that San youth cultural action cannot be reduced to a single function. Rather, performance operates as a multi-layered practice through which economic necessity, social cohesion, identity formation, and political expression are continuously negotiated and intertwined. In this way, San youth cultural action does not simply express identity, but actively reshapes how that identity is understood, valued, and negotiated within both local and global arenas.

5.6 Digital and Hybrid Futures

Despite extensive scholarship on San history and cosmology, little research has examined how San youth performance practices are changing. Much existing literature continues to essentialise the San, judging authenticity by proximity to an imagined past. Clifford (2013) shows that indigeneity is continually negotiated through survival, return, renewal, and transformation rather than fixed in a timeless past. Tuck and Yang's (2012) insistence that decolonisation must remain tied to Indigenous land and life also cautions against treating San cultural futures as merely symbolic or metaphorical.

For San youth, these debates are deeply personal. Many described being denied recognition or rights because education, urban residence, or digital engagement rendered them "inauthentic" in the eyes of outsiders. Such claims were forcefully rejected by youth leaders, who framed them as familiar strategies of erasure. Through hybrid performances, traditional, popular, and digital – San youth assert continuity rather than loss, refusing confinement to static roles.

Fieldwork revealed that hybridity is not only a stylistic choice, but a generational strategy for navigating contemporary realities. For example, Bram Bruce's fusion of hip-hop with the Naro language has become a source of inspiration for younger San audiences. During a visit to Ghanzi Senior Secondary School, I observed students engaging with this influence directly. In

Ethnographic Video 5, one student performs a rap in Naro, explaining that he is inspired by Bram to embrace modern musical forms while remaining rooted in his cultural identity. This moment is particularly significant in the context of boarding school environments, where many San youth are physically separated from their families and cultural practices. Within these spaces, hybrid performance offers a means of negotiating new possibilities without severing connections to identity and heritage.

Hybrid practice also reflects forms of aspiration and self-determination. The band Obligatto, whose members come from different San groups and regions, exemplifies how youth mobilise music as a shared project of continuity and future-making. Rather than waiting for external sponsorship, the group organises its own performances, sustains its activities independently, and actively pursues opportunities to perform on global stages. Their work reflects both ambition and agency, demonstrating how hybrid musical forms can open routes into wider cultural economies while maintaining a strong commitment to San identity.

At the same time, hybridity is closely tied to questions of preservation and continuity. In Ethnographic Video 5, Ditshego Domi (DT), a young musician from New Xade, describes teaching himself to play instruments such as guitar and keyboard despite living with disability. He expresses concern that the music he learned as a child in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, particularly from his grandfather, risks disappearing as older generations pass away. For DT, digital tools and contemporary musical forms offer a way to preserve this knowledge, while also acknowledging the complexities surrounding copyright and intellectual property in relation to San music. While DT does not explicitly theorise these dynamics, his concerns about cultural loss and his turn toward digital tools suggest an awareness that traditional knowledge must be adapted to contemporary systems in order to be sustained. In this sense, hybridity can be understood as a strategic response, not only to questions of identity and expression, but to the practical challenges of safeguarding cultural knowledge within modern legal and technological frameworks.

Together, these examples show that global and digital forms are not substitutes for tradition, but part of the contemporary conditions through which San youth work to sustain it. Rather than signalling cultural loss, hybridity becomes a means of carrying cultural knowledge across changing social, technological, and economic contexts. It allows youth to remain connected to inherited practices while reshaping how those practices are expressed, protected, and transmitted across generations.

At the same time, youth engagement with hybrid forms is not without tension or internal debate. While many participants embraced adaptation as a necessary and strategic response to changing social and economic conditions, others expressed concern about the limits of such transformations. Isaac Sol, for example, supported musical innovation but cautioned against the recording or remixing of certain sacred healing songs, noting that these practices carry spiritual significance and may have unintended consequences if removed from their original contexts (Ethnographic Video 4). Similarly, members of the Xaxase Traditional Dance Group described how individuals identified as potential healers are often withdrawn from performance contexts such as competitions and recreational music, as continued participation may be considered spiritually inappropriate. These perspectives highlight that hybridity is not an unrestricted process, but one that is actively negotiated within communities, shaped by ethical, cultural, and spiritual considerations.

These tensions further underscore that decisions about cultural adaptation ultimately remain situated within community-based systems of knowledge and authority, rather than external frameworks of evaluation.

Youth engagement with hybrid musical forms is shaped by significant structural and economic constraints. Producing music within contemporary genres often requires access to recording equipment, studio spaces, digital technologies, and training – resources that remain largely inaccessible to many San youth in rural areas. Participants highlighted the difficulty of competing with urban-based musicians who have greater access to infrastructure, industry networks, and platforms for distribution. These inequalities are further compounded by entrenched social hierarchies, where San performers may face challenges in negotiating fair remuneration or recognition due to persistent perceptions of inferiority.

Hybridity therefore emerges not only as a creative strategy, but as a complex and precarious negotiation. While adapting musical forms can open pathways to visibility and economic opportunity, it also carries risks of misrecognition. Several participants expressed concern that engaging with contemporary styles may lead to their indigeneity being questioned, as they no longer conform to dominant expectations of what it means to be “authentically” San. At the same time, youth must navigate tensions between their own cultural values and the norms of a global music industry shaped by commercial, aesthetic, and cultural frameworks that do not always align with San worldviews. These dynamics underscore that hybridity is not simply a matter of innovation, but a site of ongoing negotiation between identity, survival, and representation.

Taken together, these dynamics highlight that hybridity in San youth musical practice is neither a simple embrace of modernity nor a departure from tradition, but a carefully negotiated process shaped by cultural responsibility, structural inequality, and lived experience. Rather than signalling a loss of authenticity, these practices reflect how youth actively navigate complex social, economic, and spiritual terrains in order to sustain identity on their own terms. In this sense, hybridity becomes not a dilution of culture, but a site of agency through which continuity, adaptation, and self-definition are simultaneously enacted.

5.7 Cultural Capital, Tourism, and Structural Constraints

San cultural production plays a significant role in Botswana's tourism economy, yet the benefits derived from this engagement remain unevenly distributed. Youth performers frequently navigate exploitative arrangements, limited training opportunities, and evaluative frameworks that misunderstand or devalue San aesthetics.

The cultural tourism sector and government-led music and dance competitions therefore operate as key arenas in which San youth negotiate both opportunity and constraint. While these platforms offer visibility and potential income, they are also structured by external expectations that reshape how San cultural expression is performed, evaluated, and rewarded.

Traditional healing songs and dances, embedded in sacred and communal contexts, are often reframed as entertainment or educational display for external audiences. Many young performers are acutely aware of the compromises this entails yet continue to participate because such platforms provide limited but necessary economic opportunities. At the same time, participants consistently expressed frustration at being underpaid, unpaid, or excluded from decision-making processes, reflecting the uneven power relations that structure heritage and tourism economies in which Indigenous culture is displayed, consumed, and commodified (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Bunten, 2008; Koot, 2013, 2016).

Government competitions present similar contradictions. While they offer recognition and potential financial reward, judging frameworks frequently fail to account for the aesthetic, relational, and spiritual dimensions of San music. Across interviews and filmed testimony, participants described being required to alter repertoire in order to conform to Tswana or Western-derived criteria. Members of the Valley Traditional Dance Group in West Hanahai (Ethnographic Video 4) expressed frustration at being forced to "change their songs," noting that their performances no longer felt like their own. Similarly, members of the Xaxase Traditional

Dance Group described such demands as a form of disrespect toward their culture (Ethnographic Video 4).

Robert Camm, who manages San cultural groups within the tourism sector, explained that he deliberately avoids entering his groups into competitions, as their commitment to performing "what their grandfathers did" would likely be misunderstood and penalised (Ethnographic Video 4). At the same time, he articulated parallel concerns about exploitation within the tourism industry, arguing that San performers are often positioned as cultural attractions while external operators retain the majority of economic benefit. This critique is echoed by Patrick Thupe, founder of Wachona Cultural Village in Ghanzi (Ethnographic Video 6), who emphasised the need for greater community ownership and empowerment within the cultural tourism sector.

This tension between economic survival and cultural control was visible in the ways participants spoke about tourism, festivals, and cultural events. These spaces offered important opportunities for income, travel, visibility, and recognition, especially in contexts where employment opportunities were limited. At the same time, they also required performers to navigate expectations about what San culture should look and sound like. Traditional dress, hunting songs, trance dance movements, bush walks, and performances of "authentic" San identity could create opportunities, but they could also place pressure on performers to present culture in ways that satisfied external audiences. For this reason, participation in cultural economies cannot be understood simply as exploitation or empowerment. It involves negotiation. San youth may use these platforms to earn income and make their culture visible, while also trying to protect the meaning of their songs, dances, languages, and histories from being reduced to entertainment.

Camm also raised important questions about ownership and control within San cultural tourism. He questioned why San themselves are often not the ones running these businesses, especially when San cultural knowledge, music, dance, and environmental knowledge are central to the tourism product. He linked this to wider barriers faced by San communities, including limited access to training facilities and skills needed for the tourism industry, such as business management, administration, marketing, and knowledge of employment rights. Even when San performers are hired by tourism establishments, many are not familiar with labour laws or employment rights, which can leave them vulnerable to exploitation, poor pay, or unclear working conditions. These inequalities are also shaped by longer histories of San labour being undervalued, which can make it difficult for performers to negotiate fair remuneration or employment terms. In this sense, the economic value of San cultural performance in tourism has

not yet been fully explored or fairly established, and communities are not benefiting from it as much as they potentially could.

Tourism therefore remains one of the most promising but also one of the riskiest areas for San economic participation. Some of the ethical concerns often raised in relation to research with San communities, including extraction, unequal benefit, and outsider control, are also visible in the tourism sector. The power imbalances are significant. Clive Eaton, a businessman in the Ghanzi tourism sector who employs many San workers, argued that there is potential for San to earn more through tourism than through farm work, especially in hunting-related tourism because of their knowledge and skill in that area. At the same time, he also noted that the effects of marginalisation and displacement have contributed to social challenges, including alcohol abuse, which can affect the sustainability of employment and the use of tourism income. My own observations also suggest that some tourism businesses prefer to work with less formally educated San performers, particularly those who may be less aware of the value of their cultural labour. This can reproduce a troubling pattern in which performers are expected to perform "primitiveness" for tourist consumption while receiving little financial benefit. Several San working in tourism indicated that they were sustained more by tips from tourists than by wages.

These examples show that the economic gains available to San youth through cultural expression remain limited, grassroots, and unevenly supported. Yet the potential is clearly recognised by participants. In Ethnographic Video 6, Keikabile Mogodu argues that, in the current economic climate where Botswana is actively seeking diversification, San cultural economies could contribute significantly if properly supported. This is important because San performance should not only be understood through the lens of poverty or exploitation. Even where economic opportunities remain limited, San youth groups such as the Grootlaagte traditional dance group are highly aware of the wider value of their performances. They spoke not only about income, but also about community healing, development, mental health, cultural pride, and identity affirmation. This suggests that San youth cultural performance carries economic potential, but its value cannot be measured only through money. It also supports forms of belonging, wellbeing, cultural continuity, and self-recognition that are central to San futures.

These dynamics reflect Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital: song and dance function as embodied resources that can be converted into recognition or income, but only within fields structured by external hierarchies that devalue San aesthetics. Cultural capital thus emerges as both a resource and a site of struggle. As recent Indigenous scholarship has argued, cultural

expression must also be understood beyond extractive frameworks of value, as relational and grounded in Indigenous epistemologies (Robinson, 2020).

Within these constraints, San youth do not passively accept imposed conditions but engage in what may be understood as a form of quiet political negotiation. Through moments of adaptation, refusal, and selective compliance, they navigate unequal cultural fields strategically rather than confrontationally, sustaining visibility without surrendering dignity.

Comparable dynamics are evident globally. Māori performing arts demonstrate how song, dance, language, and embodied performance can sustain Indigenous identity and cultural continuity under conditions of language loss and colonial disruption (Ka‘ai-Mahuta, 2008), while Indigenous musicians in North America use public performance, festivals, and contemporary musical forms to assert cultural presence, identity, and pride within wider settler-colonial contexts (Diamond, 2008). Situating San youth within these wider debates underscores how Indigenous performers across contexts negotiate visibility, authenticity, and economic survival.

These dynamics also extend into broader arenas of cultural policy and diplomacy. In Botswana, cultural policy has historically privileged Setswana-speaking groups as the foundation of national identity. Although recognition has expanded in recent years, San expressive culture continues to be appropriated as national heritage while remaining detached from the communities who sustain it.

As Koot (2013, 2016) demonstrates in his work on Bushman/San tourism in Southern Africa, cultural tourism frequently reproduces structural inequalities, positioning Indigenous performers as cultural resources rather than rights-bearing agents, with benefits accruing unevenly to external operators. The dynamics observed in this research resonate with these patterns, while also highlighting how San youth actively negotiate and respond to such conditions through performance. San music and dance are widely deployed in tourism branding and international cultural diplomacy, yet San communities derive limited material benefit. This reflects broader global patterns of cultural commodification, in which Indigenous heritage is celebrated symbolically while excluded from decision-making and revenue (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Smith, 2006). Such processes risk what Guttman (2000) describes as a “cultural freeze,” where living traditions are valued only in static and externally legible forms.

San activist Roy Sesana, a central figure in the legal struggle against the forced relocation of San communities from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, captures this tension through widely

circulated statements that frame San identity and culture as immensely valuable. Similar expressions appear across both public discourse and participant testimony, where San cultural knowledge and artistry are frequently likened to resources such as diamonds or other forms of national wealth. While such metaphors affirm the significance of San culture, they also raise important questions about how value is understood. Recognition grounded primarily in economic or symbolic worth risks reinforcing forms of objectification, in which San identity is appreciated for what it offers rather than recognised as an inherent expression of human dignity.

At the same time, participants in this research were acutely aware of the value of their cultural practices and actively asserted this in their engagements with performance and tourism economies. Their marginalisation cannot therefore be understood as a lack of self-recognition, but rather as the result of structural inequalities that shape how cultural value is distributed and controlled.

Youth actively resist the pressures of commodification and cultural "freezing" through ongoing innovation. Hybrid musical practices such as those demonstrated by groups like Disaitsaneng and artists such as Bammonye Dabae, combine San vocal aesthetics with contemporary forms, enabling performers to maintain cultural continuity while engaging new audiences and economic possibilities. These practices reflect not a departure from tradition, but a strategic negotiation of changing cultural and economic conditions.

At the Xere Cultural Festival, documented in Ethnographic Video 6, youth performances further illustrate these dynamics. In the festival sequences, storytelling is embedded within movement and performance, allowing viewers to observe how ecological knowledge and everyday practices are communicated non-verbally. In this sense, performance operates not only as cultural expression but also as a form of Indigenous media practice, through which meaning is produced, embodied, and circulated across diverse audiences (Ginsburg, 1991, 1995). Rather than presenting nostalgia, performers articulate a commitment to preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge to future generations, demonstrating how performance functions simultaneously as cultural continuity, communication, and political expression.

At the same time, the impact of these practices remains shaped by structural constraints, including limited control over representation, economic precarity, and unequal access to decision-making platforms, as reflected in ongoing concerns about the absence of San voices within positions of political influence (Ethnographic Video 6).

In this way, San youth cultural action does not simply express identity, but actively reshapes how that identity is understood, valued, and negotiated within both local and global arenas.

5.8 Conclusion: Cultural Capital in Action

San youth-led performance demonstrates that culture is not static heritage but a living political practice. Through song, dance, dress, and media circulation, youth assert identity, contest marginalisation, and claim space within Botswana's cultural and political life. By enacting self-recognition through performance, they transform cultural capital into political agency, revealing both the possibilities and the limits of recognition as a pathway toward Indigenous justice.

Across the chapter, this process has been shown to operate through multiple, interconnected forms: embodied performance, strategic visibility, hybrid musical innovation, and participation in both local and global arenas. Through these practices, San youth do not simply inherit culture but actively rework it, embedding messages of identity, ecological knowledge, and belonging within performance. The ethnographic videos, engaged here as co-constitutive evidence, further demonstrate how these meanings are not only spoken but enacted, revealing performance as a site where cultural expression and political action converge.

At the same time, the chapter has highlighted the structural constraints that shape these processes, including unequal access to economic resources, misrecognition within institutional frameworks, and limited representation within decision-making structures. These conditions underscore that while cultural capital enables visibility and agency, it does not in itself resolve the broader inequalities that continue to define San experiences.

Building on the analysis of music, identity, and social action developed in Chapter 4, this chapter situates San youth cultural action within broader African debates on music and politics (Barber, 1997; Phuthego, 2005). San youth performance emerges not as an isolated case but as part of a wider pattern in which expressive culture becomes a vehicle for belonging, resistance, and the imagining of alternative futures.

While San culture is frequently described as highly valuable, often through metaphors such as diamonds, this chapter has also highlighted the need to critically consider how such value is framed. Recognition grounded primarily in cultural or economic utility risks reproducing the very forms of marginalisation it seeks to challenge, particularly when value is detached from questions of agency, dignity, and self-determination.

In this sense, the significance of San youth cultural action lies not only in its capacity to generate visibility, but in its ability to reshape the terms under which recognition is granted. Through performance, San youth assert not only what their culture is worth, but who they are – on their own terms.

The discussion of tourism and cultural economies also shows that San youth cultural capital does not automatically translate into secure economic agency. Although San performance traditions and associated knowledge systems hold clear value within tourism and public cultural events, this value is often controlled by others. Young performers may gain public exposure, travel opportunities, and occasional income, but they continue to operate within unequal structures shaped by limited training, weak bargaining power, external ownership, and long-standing assumptions about San labour. This makes tourism a deeply ambivalent space. It can create openings for cultural pride and economic participation, but it can also reproduce dependency and exploitation when San performers do not control the terms of representation or benefit. For this reason, the economic potential of San cultural performance must be understood alongside questions of ownership, fair remuneration, cultural authority, and structural support.

These economic limits also point to the wider limits of quiet action. The framing of San youth performance as quiet action should therefore not be understood as a romanticisation of constraint or as a claim that cultural performance can substitute for structural change. While performance creates important spaces for self-recognition and public education, it does not in itself resolve the structural conditions that continue to marginalise San communities, including land dispossession, poverty, linguistic exclusion, educational inequality, and the absence of Indigenous-specific constitutional recognition in Botswana. Rather, its significance lies in how San youth sustain agency within unequal conditions, using music and performance to challenge misrecognition, preserve cultural authority, and create openings for political voice where more direct forms of engagement may be limited. Quiet action is therefore best understood as agency under constraint: meaningful, strategic, and politically significant, but not sufficient on its own.

Building on this analysis, the final chapter draws together the key arguments of the dissertation, reflecting on the implications of San youth cultural action for Indigenous recognition, cultural sustainability, and future policy and practice.

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter brings together the analytical, methodological, and political threads developed across the dissertation in order to clarify its central contributions and implications. It begins by reframing San youth cultural action as a form of quiet political practice, grounded in self-recognition and the strategic reworking of visibility rather than overt protest. From this foundation, the chapter outlines the dissertation's contribution to knowledge and situates its findings within wider debates on recognition, cultural capital, and Indigenous agency.

It then draws together the key analytical insights of the study, before turning to the contemporary political context in Botswana and the constraints and possibilities introduced by digital futures. Building on this, the chapter reflects on the broader implications of the research for how youth agency, indigeneity, and knowledge production are understood in Indigenous studies, ethnomusicology, and policy contexts. It concludes by addressing questions of cultural preservation and intellectual property, presenting a set of thematically structured recommendations, and offering final reflections on the ethical and political stakes of recognising San youth not only as performers, but as cultural leaders and agents of self-determination.

The arguments developed here extend the methodological commitments outlined earlier in the dissertation, showing how practices of listening, duration, refusal, and selective visibility also operate as political strategies through which San youth negotiate recognition, dignity, and agency.

6.2 Bringing the Threads Together

This chapter draws together the central findings of the dissertation, situating them within wider debates on indigeneity, self-recognition, youth agency, and cultural capital. It reflects on how San youth mobilise music, dance, and storytelling not only as inherited cultural practices, but as deliberate strategies for navigating marginalisation, asserting dignity, and claiming visibility within a political and social landscape that has long rendered them invisible. These practices are not static traditions, but dynamic and contested forms of action that challenge essentialised representations of San culture and articulate alternative pathways to Indigenous agency.

This dissertation has shown that San cultural capital, particularly music and dance, operates simultaneously as cultural preservation, economic strategy, and political communication. Youth embed messages of identity, ecological knowledge, and belonging within their performances, transforming expressive culture into a mode of advocacy and self-assertion. In this sense, music functions not merely as aesthetic expression, but as a living archive of memory, knowledge, and endurance: a medium that sustains continuity with the past while enabling youth to imagine and enact new political possibilities.

At the same time, recognition remains profoundly uneven. San music and dance are implicated in national branding, tourism, and cultural diplomacy, yet these forms are frequently detached from the people who sustain them. Symbolic recognition of culture continues to coexist with the political, economic, and social marginalisation of San communities. The dissertation therefore argues that recognition must move beyond visibility and celebration to include structural reform in education, cultural policy, tourism, and governance. Without such change, San expressive culture risks being continually commodified as "heritage" while its custodians remain excluded from meaningful benefit-sharing and decision-making.

Rather than proposing a formal analytical "model," this research offers an alternative lens through which to understand San youth cultural action: one that recognises performance as a site where self-recognition precedes and enables political recognition. This perspective foregrounds how cultural practice operates within unequal fields of power, where youth strategically shape the terms of their own visibility, even when more overt forms of resistance remain constrained.

The emphasis on San musical futures is not intended to suggest an uncomplicated optimism or to minimise the severity of San marginalisation. Rather, it reflects an ethnographic finding: many San youth, cultural workers, teachers, musicians, and advocates are actively thinking about, imagining, and working towards futures that are not defined only by loss, poverty, or disappearance. Their aspirations should not be dismissed as unrealistic simply because the structural conditions they face remain severe. To do so would risk reproducing the very assumptions that have historically limited San political and intellectual authority, namely that San are objects of development, heritage, or rescue rather than thinkers and makers of their own futures.

This future-oriented agency can also be unsettling to those who have benefited from San marginalisation, or to those accustomed to recognising San only through narratives of

vulnerability, servitude, or cultural preservation. The empowerment of San youth challenges inherited social hierarchies because it asserts that San communities are not merely surviving the past, but actively shaping what comes next. Elders and community leaders in this study did not generally frame youth ambition as a threat to culture. Rather, many encouraged young people to learn, adapt, travel, speak, perform, study, organise, and use cultural knowledge as a foundation for self-determination. In this sense, the futures described in this dissertation are not abstract hopes imposed by the researcher. They are grounded in participant testimony, musical practice, educational aspiration, cultural labour, and the intergenerational encouragement of youth agency.

Quiet action is one way through which these futures are made visible in the present.

6.3 Quiet Action, Self-Recognition, and the Politics of Visibility

A central contribution of this dissertation is its rethinking of what political action looks like in contexts of long-term marginalisation. Dominant theories of resistance often privilege visibility through confrontation, protest, or insurgency. By contrast, this research shows that San youth action is frequently quieter, relational, and strategic. It does not typically take the form of public protest or direct confrontation, but rather the deliberate reworking of presence, dignity, and identity in environments that have historically denied them legitimacy.

Building on the theoretical clarification offered in Chapter 2 and the ethnographic examples discussed in Chapter 5, quiet action should be understood here as a situated form of agency under constraint. Its significance lies not in replacing overt protest, legal advocacy, or institutional reform, but in showing how San youth create political presence through performance, self-recognition, and the strategic management of visibility. Quiet action names the forms of cultural-political work that occur when youth use music, dance, language, dress, gesture, and storytelling to assert dignity and contest misrecognition within unequal conditions. It is therefore politically meaningful, but not politically sufficient: it opens spaces of recognition and public feeling, while leaving intact the need for land rights, constitutional recognition, economic justice, and meaningful participation in decision-making.

For many San youth, continuing to sing, dance, and take pride in their cultural identity in the face of persistent discrimination constitutes a form of political action in its own right. These practices enact self-recognition: the affirmation of value from within, which becomes the necessary foundation for demanding recognition from others. Music and dance allow youth to occupy

public space, to be seen and heard on their own terms, and to assert continuity in a society that has often framed San culture as either vanishing or obsolete.

This understanding of action emerged not only through performance, but also through the conditions under which knowledge was shared during fieldwork. Interviews frequently extended far beyond their initial scope, not because of prompting, but because participants rarely encountered spaces where they could speak at length without judgement. Listening itself became an ethical and political encounter, revealing how silence around San experiences is actively produced in the present, even as narratives of historical resolution are promoted. In this context, the joy, pride, and collective energy generated through music cannot be dismissed as symbolic or decorative; they function as mechanisms of endurance and affirmation in conditions where more confrontational forms of resistance may carry significant risk.

Importantly, this framing does not romanticise suffering or portray San youth as passive victims. Rather, it highlights their agency in navigating constrained circumstances, showing how cultural practice becomes a means of survival, connection, and strategic visibility. These forms of action may appear subtle, but they are no less consequential: they sustain identity, counter internalised stigma, and create the conditions under which political voice can emerge.

Across this research, San cultural expression is repeatedly described by participants, public figures, and wider society, as possessing immense value. Metaphors such as “diamonds” or “manna from heaven,” as articulated by figures including Greg Losibe and echoed by participants such as Mogotsi Robson (Ethnographic Video 6), reflect a widespread recognition of the significance of San music, artistry, and Indigenous knowledge. San participants themselves are acutely aware of this value and actively assert it in their engagements with tourism, performance, and broader cultural economies.

At the same time, this research foregrounds a critical ethical tension in how such value is framed. While these metaphors affirm importance, they also risk reproducing forms of objectification in which San identity is recognised primarily through what it can offer: economically, culturally, or symbolically, rather than as an inherent condition of human dignity. As Isaac Sol emphasises (Ethnographic Video 2), recognition should not be contingent on cultural contribution or utility, but grounded in the fundamental acknowledgment that San, like all others, are entitled to dignity and inclusion.

This tension reflects a broader paradox identified throughout the dissertation: San culture is often intensely celebrated, while San lives remain marginalised. Addressing this contradiction requires moving beyond recognition grounded solely in cultural or economic value, toward approaches that centre agency, self-determination, and equitable participation in decision-making processes. In this sense, the question is not only how San culture is valued, but on whose terms, and to what ends.

6.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This dissertation contributes to scholarship on Indigenous music, youth agency, and the politics of recognition by rethinking how San expressive culture functions in contemporary Botswana. While there exists an extensive body of literature on San history, cosmology, and ritual life, much of this scholarship has tended to frame music and dance primarily as heritage practices, spiritual technologies, or remnants of a precolonial past. This study has shifted the analytical focus from what San music is to what it does in the lives of San youth today.

First, the dissertation advances an original conceptual framing of San youth performance as a form of quiet political action grounded in self-recognition rather than overt resistance. Drawing on theories of recognition and cultural capital, it demonstrates how song, dance, and storytelling operate as strategic practices through which San youth assert dignity, visibility, and belonging in a socio-political context that routinely marginalises them. Rather than understanding political agency only through protest, confrontation, or formal activism, this research shows how controlling the terms of cultural visibility, deciding when, where, and how San identity is made legible, constitutes a powerful, if understated, mode of political engagement. Conceptually, this dissertation contributes the notion of quiet action as a way of understanding how Indigenous youth may enact political agency through understated, embodied, relational, and performative forms of cultural practice rather than through overt protest alone. In the context of this research, quiet action refers not only to coded political messages or indirect resistance, but also to the political force of cultural continuity when a people's existence, identity, and knowledge systems have been repeatedly denied. It extends debates on everyday resistance, refusal, recognition, and Indigenous agency by showing how music, dance, dress, language, gesture, and embodied presence can carry political meaning without always taking the form of direct confrontation. This contribution is especially important in contexts where political expression is shaped by risk, misrecognition, economic dependence, and unequal access to formal decision-making structures.

Second, the dissertation recentres San youth as agents of cultural futurity rather than passive inheritors of tradition. In contrast to much San scholarship that privileges elders, ritual continuity, or loss narratives, this research foregrounds how youth actively adapt musical practices across schools, resettlement contexts, tourism, elections, and digital platforms. By examining how youth blend ancestral repertoires with new genres, technologies, and performance spaces, the study contributes a temporally grounded account of Indigenous cultural innovation that challenges essentialised notions of authenticity and static indigeneity. The dissertation also contributes to debates on cultural capital by showing that San youth performance can generate visibility and economic possibility, but that this only becomes meaningful economic agency when linked to fair remuneration, cultural authority, and structural support.

Third, the dissertation contributes methodologically to ethnomusicology and Indigenous research through its practice-based audiovisual approach. Film is not treated as a supplementary illustration to written analysis but as a central mode of knowledge production that enables participants to speak, perform, and theorise their own experiences. By prioritising listening, collaboration, and ethical restraint, particularly in avoiding extractive representations of poverty, the research demonstrates how audiovisual methods can support a decolonial methodological orientation in practice, rather than merely invoking it in theory. This contribution also shows both the value and the limits of such an approach: film can foreground San voices, languages, and embodied knowledge, but it remains shaped by editing decisions, translation, public visibility, institutional requirements, and the ethical risks of representation.

Finally, the dissertation offers an empirically grounded intervention into debates on cultural policy, heritage commodification, and Indigenous rights in Botswana at a moment of political transition. By situating San youth cultural action within the post-2024 political landscape, the research shows how expressive culture anticipates, challenges, and at times exceeds formal policy reform. In doing so, it provides insight into the limits of symbolic recognition and underscores the need for structural change if cultural visibility is to translate into material justice.

Taken together, these contributions reposition San youth music not as residual tradition but as a living archive of political agency: one that sustains memory, generates dignity, and opens pathways toward Indigenous self-determination in contemporary Botswana.

In foregrounding these dynamics, the dissertation further demonstrates that questions of authorship, preservation, and ownership are not technical afterthoughts, but central to understanding how Indigenous youth assert cultural authority within unequal cultural economies.

6.5 Methodological Contribution: Ethnographic Video, Listening, and Refusal

In addition to its conceptual contributions, this dissertation advances a methodological intervention through its use of ethnographic video as a form of practice-based research. Rather than functioning as supplementary illustration, the audiovisual materials are used as co-constitutive sites of knowledge production, enabling participants to speak, perform, and interpret their own experiences within their own temporal and expressive registers.

As demonstrated throughout the thesis, this approach prioritises listening, duration, and participant-led narration over narrative compression or visual spectacle. This orientation reflects an ethical commitment to non-extractive representation, particularly in refusing to reproduce dominant visual tropes that frame marginalised communities primarily through poverty or lack. Instead, extended interviews and performance contexts are foregrounded, allowing meaning to emerge relationally rather than being imposed through editorial framing.

In this sense, the audiovisual approach aligns with the dissertation's broader argument: just as San youth strategically negotiate visibility through performance, the research itself operates through selective visibility, privileging voice, dignity, and contextual integrity over spectacle. The videos therefore function not as documentary artefacts, but as methodological spaces in which listening becomes both an analytic practice and a political stance.

6.6 Analytical Contributions: Music, Recognition, and Youth Agency

Drawing together the empirical and theoretical strands of the dissertation, the study offers five key insights into how San youth performances function as cultural and political action:

• Music as political communication
San youth embed messages of identity, ecological knowledge, and justice into their repertoires, transforming performance into a strategic medium of communication that addresses both internal community audiences and wider public and political spheres.

• Self-recognition as foundational
By affirming the value of their own music and dance, youth enact self-recognition as a political

practice, establishing the basis from which claims to recognition, dignity, and rights are articulated within broader social and institutional structures.

• Multiplicity and diversity of strategies
Youth performances vary across subgroups and contexts, ranging from ritual-centred practices to hybrid forms that engage global genres and digital platforms. This diversity challenges essentialised portrayals of the San as static or homogeneous, foregrounding indigeneity as dynamic and contextually negotiated.

• Persistent structural inequities
Despite the visibility of San culture within tourism and national imagery, performers continue to face exploitation, misrecognition, and exclusion from decision-making processes, underscoring the limits of symbolic recognition in the absence of structural transformation.

• Youth as agents of transformation
In the face of systemic constraints, San youth actively reframe cultural practice as a resource for resilience, advocacy, and political participation, forging pathways for Indigenous agency grounded in expressive culture.

Together, these insights demonstrate that music and dance are not peripheral to political life, but central to how San youth negotiate belonging, dignity, and visibility in contemporary Botswana.

6.7 Political Context, Digital Futures, and Ongoing Constraints

The political transition of 2024 marked an unprecedented moment of possibility in Botswana, with Indigenous rights entering national discourse in new ways. For San youth, this shift generated cautious optimism, particularly in light of symbolic recognition of past injustices and renewed discussions around land, culture, and representation. The election of Duma Boko as president – ending decades of uninterrupted Botswana Democratic Party rule, held particular significance given his prior legal advocacy on Indigenous rights, including his involvement in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve case. Symbolic gestures, such as his presence at the delayed burial of elder Pitseng Gaoberekwe in the CKGR and renewed commitments to review the hunting ban, were widely interpreted as signals of potential change.

At the same time, early indications suggest that leadership transition has not yet translated into comprehensive structural reform. Deep-seated cultural hierarchies, bureaucratic inertia, and the

continued absence of constitutional recognition of indigeneity still shape the limits of policy transformation. Governance is not enacted by a single leader alone, and without sustained institutional reform and meaningful San participation in decision-making processes, political gains risk remaining fragile. In this sense, the current moment represents both opportunity and uncertainty: it enables renewed demands for justice while underscoring the need for continued, community-led forms of advocacy. This post-2024 moment creates an important opportunity to reconsider the relationship between San communities, the state, and Indigenous recognition. Given the new administration's public association with human rights and previous legal advocacy around San land rights, this political transition may create new openings for dialogue around land, language, cultural heritage, and representation. However, these possibilities should not be overstated. A change in government does not automatically resolve the structural conditions that have historically shaped San marginalisation, nor does it guarantee Indigenous-specific constitutional recognition or meaningful participation in decision-making. For this reason, San youth cultural action remains significant not because it replaces legal or political reform, but because it keeps questions of dignity, visibility, cultural authority, and self-determination in public circulation. The post-2024 moment therefore strengthens the relevance of this research, while also underlining the continuing need for structural reform, policy change, and sustained attention to San voices in Botswana's national future.

A further question raised during fieldwork concerned the possibility of public acknowledgement, apology, and repair. When I asked some government officials about historical wrongs against San communities, the question was often met with defensiveness, particularly where officials appeared committed to maintaining the narrative that the state had acted appropriately and therefore owed no apology. This defensiveness is significant because it shows how state recognition is not only a matter of policy change, but also of historical accountability. If past removals, hunting restrictions, linguistic exclusion, educational disruption, and social discrimination are framed only as development challenges or administrative mistakes, then the moral and political dimensions of San marginalisation remain unresolved.

The post-2024 political moment may create new possibilities for more honest forms of acknowledgement, especially as some political leaders have begun to speak more openly about historical injustice and the need to address San marginalisation. However, informal acknowledgement is not the same as a meaningful public apology or a process of repair. For many San communities, recognition would need to involve more than symbolic statements. It would require listening to San accounts of harm, acknowledging state and societal responsibility,

and linking apology to practical measures around land, language, education, livelihoods, cultural authority, and participation in decision-making. In this sense, apology should not be understood as a purely symbolic gesture, but as part of a wider process of restoring dignity and rebuilding relationships between San communities, the state, and wider Botswana society.

The possibility of alliances with other marginalised groups, including Bakgalagari communities, is also important in this post-2024 context. Such alliances may offer potential for broader pressure around land, language, cultural rights, rural development, and constitutional reform. However, they cannot be assumed to be straightforward. Fieldwork discussions showed that San relationships with neighbouring and dominant groups are shaped by long histories of hierarchy, labour dependency, discrimination, and unequal recognition. In the Ghanzi region, San-Bakgalagari relations in particular cannot be understood only through shared marginalisation, because they are also marked by histories in which San were treated as servants, labourers, or people born to serve others. This means that alliance-building requires more than shared political interest. It also requires acknowledgement of historical harm, repair of social relations, and a willingness to confront the everyday forms of inequality that continue to shape San experiences within wider Botswana society.

For this reason, San youth cultural action may contribute to alliance-building by creating moments in which wider audiences encounter San dignity, knowledge, and political voice. Yet performance alone cannot repair these relationships. The possibility of solidarity depends on whether admiration for San culture can be transformed into support for San claims, including land rights, language inclusion, fair remuneration, cultural authority, and meaningful participation in decision-making. In this sense, the post-2024 political moment creates openings for wider coalitions, but also highlights the need for deeper social repair between San communities and the broader society.

Within this shifting political landscape, digital platforms present both new possibilities and ongoing constraints. Digital technologies are not neutral; they reproduce existing inequalities in access, ownership, and representation. However, when used strategically, they offer San youth tools to circulate music, document cultural knowledge, connect with global Indigenous movements, and engage audiences beyond traditional gatekeeping structures. With appropriate investment in infrastructure, training, and intellectual property protections, digital media has the potential to function as a critical space for cultural continuity, economic participation, and political expression.

Although this dissertation does not provide a full study of San youth digital activism, the public-facing website and the increasing circulation of music, dance, and testimony through video and social media point to important future possibilities. Digital platforms may allow San youth to share performance, language, political concerns, and cultural knowledge beyond local festivals, schools, tourism spaces, and government events. In this sense, social media, online video, and mobile communication may extend the reach of quiet action by allowing San youth to speak across geographical distance and to connect with wider Indigenous, African, and international audiences. However, these possibilities should not be overstated. Access to digital platforms remains shaped by internet costs, rural infrastructure, language barriers, digital literacy, and uneven access to equipment. Digital visibility may also expose San performers to new forms of appropriation, misrepresentation, or extractive circulation. For this reason, digital media should be understood as an emerging possibility for San youth agency, rather than an automatic solution to structural exclusion.

Importantly, these digital and cultural initiatives should not be understood as substitutes for structural reform. Rather, they operate alongside and often in the absence of institutional redress. As this dissertation has demonstrated, San youth cultural action continues to navigate and respond to these conditions, sustaining forms of agency that remain shaped by, but not reducible to, the constraints of the broader political and economic landscape.

At the time of writing, developments within Botswana's political landscape suggest that some of these questions remain actively contested. Ongoing discussions surrounding the establishment of a constitutional court have been received with particular interest among San leaders, many of whom view constitutional recognition as a foundational requirement for meaningful inclusion. As reflected throughout this research, participants consistently emphasised that without recognition in the constitution, other forms of intervention risk remaining symbolic. While such developments indicate potential shifts in institutional frameworks, they also reveal continued tensions, including resistance from dominant groups and the slow pace of structural transformation. These dynamics underscore the central argument of this dissertation: that while political change may open new possibilities, the realisation of justice for San communities remains contingent on sustained structural reform and meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

6.8 Future-Facing Implications: Rethinking Youth Agency, Indigeneity, and Knowledge Production

By reframing San youth cultural practice as a form of quiet political action grounded in self-recognition, this dissertation opens a set of future-facing implications for scholarship, policy, and Indigenous research practice. These implications are not concerned with identifying gaps to be filled, but with challenging assumptions that must be reconsidered if San youth agency is to be recognised on its own terms.

First, this research highlights the risks of persistent misreading when youth cultural action is evaluated through narrow or externally imposed frameworks of resistance, authenticity, or tradition. San youth are often rendered politically invisible because their actions do not conform to dominant expectations of protest, confrontation, or overt mobilisation. At the same time, they are rendered culturally suspect when they adapt musical practices through hybrid forms such as hip-hop, popular genres, or digital circulation. The irony, repeatedly articulated by participants, is that the same discourses that justify San marginalisation in the name of "modernisation" are then mobilised to deny San youth indigeneity once they engage with modern forms. If Indigenous youth are recognised only when they remain static, ritualised, or premodern, then cultural survival becomes conditional on self-erasure. This dynamic mirrors wider Indigenous critiques of authenticity policing, where modernity is treated as disqualifying rather than constitutive of Indigenous presence (cf. Tuck and Yang, 2012; Robinson, 2020).

This paradox has significant implications for how indigeneity is theorised in both academic and policy contexts. The findings of this dissertation suggest that indigeneity cannot be meaningfully assessed through aesthetic purity, stylistic continuity, or distance from global forms. Instead, it must be understood as a relational and political condition, continuously negotiated within unequal and often hostile fields of recognition. When San youth blend ancestral vocality with contemporary genres, they are not abandoning tradition; they are asserting continuity under conditions of constraint. Failure to recognise this risks reproducing the very logics of exclusion that Indigenous research seeks to dismantle.

Second, the research raises critical questions about the future of decolonising San research itself. While calls to include Indigenous researchers are increasingly visible, far less attention has been paid to the epistemic and emotional conditions under which such research is conducted. San researchers – and Indigenous researchers more broadly, are often expected to produce

academically credible work while simultaneously carrying the emotional burden of researching ongoing dispossession, poverty, and historical trauma within their own communities. At the same time, their experiential knowledge may be subjected to heightened scrutiny or dismissed when it challenges established scholarly narratives. This creates a double bind: Indigenous researchers are invited into the academy, yet their authority remains conditional on alignment with frameworks not designed with their realities in mind.

The implications of this are particularly acute for research on youth futures and cultural innovation. When San youth narratives complicate dominant representations through aspiration, experimentation or hybridity, they may be judged as insufficiently "authentic," even as non-Indigenous scholars continue to define the boundaries of legitimate San identity. This dissertation suggests that decolonising San research requires more than inclusion; it demands epistemic humility, institutional support for emotionally demanding scholarship, and a willingness to allow Indigenous youth narratives to disrupt inherited categories of tradition, resistance, and loss. This tension has been widely noted in Indigenous methodologies, where researchers are expected to translate lived trauma into academically legible forms while maintaining emotional restraint (Smith 1999; 2012).

Finally, the findings invite reflection on how policy makers, NGOs, and researchers might inadvertently undermine San youth agency when cultural action is overlooked or misinterpreted. When music and performance are treated as heritage decoration, leisure activity, or symbolic inclusion, their political function is neutralised. When youth cultural labour is celebrated without accompanying structural reform, recognition remains symbolic rather than transformative. By contrast, recognising cultural action as a mode of political presence allows for more nuanced engagement with Indigenous futures that do not depend on spectacle, crisis, or confrontation.

Taken together, these implications position San youth not as figures awaiting development, rescue, or representation, but as agents of their own survival. Their cultural practices articulate a form of political intelligence attuned to constraint, risk, and possibility. By attending to these practices on their own terms, this dissertation contributes not only to knowledge about San music and youth, but to a broader rethinking of how indigeneity, agency, and knowledge production might be understood in the present and how they might be sustained into the future.

6.9 Music Preservation, Intellectual Property, and Cultural Justice

The preservation of San music raises urgent questions about ownership, authorship, and protection. San musical traditions are collective, orally transmitted, and spiritually grounded, often resisting the individualised frameworks assumed by international copyright regimes. Youth who seek to record, circulate, or monetise their music therefore encounter structural barriers, including limited access to legal expertise, digital infrastructure, and publishing platforms, as well as legal models that fail to recognise collective cultural authorship.

Preservation, in this context, is not merely technical or archival. It is deeply political. Throughout this research, San youth repeatedly articulated a dual concern: that elders' musical knowledge may be lost without documentation, and that documentation itself carries risks of misrepresentation, extraction, and dispossession. This tension positions preservation as a site of ongoing ethical negotiation, where decisions about what is recorded, how it circulates, and who controls it are inseparable from questions of power, recognition, and justice.

The challenge of protecting San music is further complicated by the nature of musical authorship itself. Much San music is not composed through fixed lyrics, named composers, or stable repertoires, but emerges collectively through feeling, participation, and moment-specific social contexts. Songs may be shaped spontaneously in performance, carried by group vocality rather than individual authorship, and sustained through repetition rather than ownership claims. In such contexts, prevailing copyright models: premised on individual creators, fixed works, and legal ownership, are not only ill-fitting but culturally misaligned.

For many San youth, asserting ownership over music is additionally constrained by structural marginalisation: limited access to legal knowledge, unfamiliarity with intellectual property regimes, and long-standing histories of dispossession that undermine confidence in claiming value. Several participants expressed ambivalence and even guilt around monetising music they regard as sacred, fearing accusations of "selling out" from both outsiders and within their own communities. These tensions suggest that the issue is not simply the absence of legal protection, but the ethical burden placed on Indigenous musicians who are asked to commodify cultural practices without control over the frameworks that define value, legitimacy, or ownership.

These concerns resonate strongly with Robinson's (2020) critique in *Hungry Listening*, in which Indigenous sound is consumed through settler-colonial expectations of access, transparency, and affective availability. Robinson argues that dominant listening practices often demand Indigenous

music be made legible, shareable, and emotionally consumable, regardless of whether such circulation aligns with Indigenous protocols, meanings, or desires. Within this framework, preservation risks becoming another mode of extraction, where recording, archiving, or showcasing Indigenous music primarily serves external audiences.

San youth experiences echo this critique. Many expressed unease about being expected to perform sacred or emotionally significant music within shortened formats, tourist itineraries, competitions, or documentary contexts. From their perspective, preservation is not about making everything audible or visible, but about retaining the right to withhold, to control pacing, and to determine context. Cultural justice, therefore, lies not only in protection from exploitation, but in sustaining Indigenous authority over when music is shared, when it is refused, and how it is understood.

The ethnographic video approach adopted in this research responds to these concerns by prioritising extended listening, participant-led narration, and contextual integrity over narrative compression. Rather than rendering San music more accessible for external consumption, it seeks to create space in which participants can speak, perform, and remain silent on their own terms.

Reframed in this way, preservation becomes future-facing rather than archival. It is not about fixing San music in time, but about supporting the conditions under which youth can carry musical knowledge forward – selectively, strategically, and with dignity. By aligning preservation with cultural justice rather than unrestricted access, this research suggests how Indigenous music can remain a living resource for continuity, political voice, and youth futures, without being made vulnerable through exposure alone.

6.10 Recommendations

The recommendations that follow emerge from San youth testimonies, ethnographic observation, and the audiovisual work undertaken in this study. They are not presented as a hierarchy of priorities, but as interconnected interventions addressing education, cultural recognition, and economic justice. Together, they respond to a central finding: that San youth are already exercising agency through cultural action, yet structural conditions continue to limit the transformative potential of that agency. Meaningful change therefore requires closer alignment between youth-led cultural practices and institutional reform.

6.10.1 Children's Rights, Education, and Cultural Continuity

Education has been one of the most persistent sites of cultural disruption for San communities. Boarding school systems, relocation policies, and curricula that marginalise Indigenous histories have fractured intergenerational transmission and contributed to alienation, shame, and loss of identity among San youth. Policy interventions must therefore explicitly safeguard cultural continuity as a child's right, rather than treating culture as an optional or extracurricular concern.

Schools serving San communities should integrate critical and respectful teaching of San history, languages, and expressive cultures, developed in collaboration with San elders, youth, and educators. Greater investment is also needed in training and employing San teachers, whose presence has been shown to improve both educational outcomes and cultural confidence. Education policy must recognise that for many San children, music and performance are not peripheral activities but core modes of learning, belonging, and self-worth. Protecting cultural identity within schooling environments is essential not only for educational success, but for dignity, wellbeing, and long-term citizenship.

This research further suggests the need to reconceptualise education systems in ways that recognise cultural practice not as supplementary, but as foundational to learning and identity formation. For many San youth, music and performance are not extracurricular activities but central modes of knowledge transmission, socialisation, and potential livelihood. Integrating music and cultural education more substantively within school curricula would enable children to engage with their cultural heritage as both a source of identity and a viable professional pathway. This requires closer collaboration between schools and communities, including the active involvement of elders and Indigenous knowledge holders as recognised contributors to educational processes.

At the same time, the structure of formal education, particularly the early separation of children from families through boarding school systems, has contributed to high dropout rates and experiences of alienation among San youth. Many parents, themselves shaped by histories of educational exclusion and trauma, remain marginal to their children's schooling. Addressing this requires not only policy reform, but targeted programmes that support parental engagement and recognise families as essential partners in education.

Greater flexibility is also needed to accommodate culturally significant practices. For example, rites of passage such as initiation ceremonies for young girls represent critical forms of cultural

education that cannot be easily substituted within formal schooling. When such practices are excluded or penalised, students are forced to choose between cultural continuity and educational participation. Education systems must therefore move toward models that respect and accommodate Indigenous knowledge systems rather than displacing them.

Finally, there is an urgent need for culturally informed training for teachers and professionals working with Indigenous communities. Without an understanding of cultural contexts, histories, and ethical responsibilities, well-intentioned interventions risk reinforcing misrecognition and exclusion. Embedding cultural competency within teacher training and institutional practice is essential if education is to function as a site of inclusion rather than disruption.

In this sense, education becomes not only a site of instruction, but a key arena in which the conditions for cultural continuity, self-recognition, and future agency are either enabled or constrained.

6.10.2 Cultural Tourism, Training, and Community Ownership

Cultural tourism continues to be one of the few economic spaces in which San cultural knowledge is visibly valued, yet it remains deeply unequal. While San youth and families contribute labour, expertise, and heritage, they are frequently confined to roles as guides, performers, or casual workers, with little access to ownership, decision-making, or fair remuneration. Across fieldwork sites, youth repeatedly questioned why they remain positioned as cultural labourers rather than recognised as partners or proprietors, despite being the custodians of the very knowledge on which these enterprises depend. Without structural reform, cultural tourism risks reproducing extraction rather than enabling sustainable community livelihoods.

This research strongly supports the establishment of San-run training centres in cultural tourism and heritage management as a response to these constraints. While many youths expressed clear aspirations to establish or co-manage cultural villages and tourism initiatives, others described uncertainty about how to approach partnerships, pitch proposals, negotiate contracts, or assess the economic value of their cultural capital. These gaps do not reflect a lack of ambition, but long-standing exclusion from business education, capital access, and industry networks. Training centres should therefore equip youth with skills in business development, marketing, financial management, contract negotiation, and intellectual property awareness, enabling them to move from participation to ownership.

Cultural tourism can only function as a pathway to sustainable futures if San communities are supported to control representation, labour conditions, and benefit-sharing on their own terms. Comparable initiatives elsewhere, such as !Khwa ttu in South Africa, demonstrate the potential of San-led cultural tourism and training centres to support skills development, heritage preservation, and economic participation. While contexts differ, such models offer useful points of reference for how similar approaches might be adapted within Botswana.

6.10.3 National Symbols, Musical Inclusion, and Citizenship

A concrete and symbolically powerful intervention lies in the reimagining of national musical symbols, particularly the Botswana National Anthem. National anthems are not neutral artefacts; they are sonic expressions of belonging, citizenship, and collective identity. They articulate who is imagined as part of the nation and who remains marginal to it.

In Botswana, this question carries particular weight for San communities. The term *Motswana* operates with a double meaning: it denotes both a citizen of Botswana and, in everyday usage, a Tswana-speaking person. For many San youth interviewed during this research, this linguistic and symbolic slippage reinforces a sense of exclusion, where citizenship is formally granted but culturally withheld. Music, however, offers a unique mechanism for addressing this contradiction.

This potential is reflected in ethnographic material generated through this research. In response to a discussion on the possibility of translating the national anthem into San languages, San musician and founder of the Disaitsaneng Cultural Group, Mogotsi Robson, expressed strong support for the idea, noting its significance not only for younger generations but also for elders, who would welcome the opportunity to engage with national symbols in their own language. This perspective was further enacted through a collaborative performance, in which members of the group recorded a version of the national anthem in Shuakhwe, a San language spoken in the Nata region (see Ethnographic Video 6).

Such moments illustrate how linguistic inclusion within national symbols may extend beyond representation to foster intergenerational recognition, enabling both youth and elders to experience citizenship as culturally meaningful rather than abstract or externally defined.

Recording the national anthem in multiple languages, including San languages, would represent a significant act of symbolic recognition. Comparable models exist elsewhere in southern Africa,

most notably South Africa, where the national anthem incorporates multiple languages as a sonic acknowledgment of historical plurality and political inclusion. In the Botswana context, such an intervention would not merely celebrate diversity; it would directly confront the long-standing exclusion of Indigenous identities from the nation's symbolic core.

The anthem's existing lyrical themes – unity, land, inheritance, and collective responsibility, resonate strongly with San histories and struggles for recognition. Rendering these lyrics in San languages would affirm San belonging without requiring cultural assimilation. For San youth, who frequently experience marginalisation within educational and civic institutions, such an act would signal that their languages, voices, and histories are not peripheral but foundational to the nation.

Importantly, this proposal is not about cultural tokenism. Throughout this dissertation, music has emerged as a primary site through which San youth experience dignity, recognition, and political visibility. Singing the anthem in San languages would extend this principle from community and performance spaces into the symbolic architecture of the state itself. It would represent a form of institutional self-recognition by the nation: an acknowledgment that Botswana's cultural and political future cannot be built on a singular linguistic or ethnic identity.

As demonstrated in this research, San youth already use music as a quiet but powerful strategy of political presence. Incorporating San languages into national musical symbols would amplify this strategy at a structural level, aligning cultural expression with citizenship, and symbolism with justice. Such an intervention would also be consistent with the current administration's stated commitment to moving beyond "one-size-fits-all" governance and recognising the specific rights and histories of Indigenous peoples.

6.10.4 Digital Platforms, Media Sovereignty, and Youth Futures

These recommendations respond directly to the ethical tensions outlined earlier in this chapter, where the collective, affective, and situational nature of San musical creation sits uneasily within dominant copyright and commodification frameworks, often placing disproportionate moral and emotional burdens on youth performers.

Digital technologies present both new risks and unprecedented opportunities for San youth. While online platforms can reproduce existing inequalities and expose communities to appropriation,

they also offer powerful tools for self-representation, advocacy, and economic participation when used on Indigenous terms.

This dissertation demonstrates that San youth are already engaging with digital media through music video production, social media, and community-based documentation, as a means of controlling their visibility and narrating their own experiences. Policy and NGO interventions should therefore prioritise training in media production, digital storytelling, and intellectual property protection. Supporting San-owned digital environments and archives would enable youth to circulate cultural material without surrendering control to external intermediaries.

Digital tools are particularly important for youth whose talents lie outside formal education pathways. For some young people, especially those marginalised within the schooling system, digital economies offer viable alternatives for income generation and creative expression. However, without access to training, infrastructure, and legal protections, these opportunities remain uneven. Investment in rural connectivity, media literacy, and culturally appropriate IP frameworks is essential if digital participation is to function as empowerment rather than exploitation.

Beyond questions of representation, digital platforms raise material issues of labour, access, and cultural ownership for San youth in a context of widespread unemployment and structural marginalisation. Several participants in this research explicitly articulated awareness of sustained global interest in San music, languages, and cultural knowledge, alongside frustration that such attention rarely translates into tangible benefit for San communities themselves. In an era where cultural content increasingly circulates as economic value, platforms such as YouTube, streaming services, and social media present potential, though uneven, pathways for income generation that do not rely exclusively on physical tourism or external intermediaries.

Realising this potential, however, requires careful structural support. Access to reliable internet, appropriate recording equipment, digital literacy training, and legal knowledge around intellectual property remains unevenly distributed, and without intervention, digital participation risks reproducing existing inequalities rather than alleviating them. Current youth development frameworks in Botswana, which often prioritise agricultural, manual, or vocational skills, rarely recognise cultural production or digital media as viable forms of labour. Expanding these frameworks to include training in digital media production, platform monetisation, and online

safety – particularly within Indigenous communities, would acknowledge the contemporary realities of cultural economies while supporting youth agency in ethically sustainable ways.

Importantly, this is not a call for the uncritical embrace of digital markets. As this dissertation has demonstrated, visibility without control can intensify extractive dynamics and expose cultural producers to new forms of misrecognition. Rather, digital platforms should be approached as contested sites of potential cultural sovereignty, where San youth can experiment with self-representation, sustain livelihoods, and engage global audiences on terms they help define. When supported by appropriate infrastructure and protections, digital participation extends the quiet politics of self-recognition identified throughout this research, translating cultural presence into material possibility without surrendering authority over meaning, ownership, or value.

6.10.5 Policy, Constitutional Recognition, and Institutional Accountability

Finally, these recommendations must be situated within broader structural reform. San youth repeatedly articulated the need for constitutional recognition of Indigenous rights, increased representation in leadership, and accountability mechanisms within institutions that serve their communities. Cultural recognition without political and legal backing risks remaining symbolic.

Policy reform should include culturally informed training for teachers, health workers, and civil servants working in San communities, as well as meaningful inclusion of San representatives in decision-making processes. Recognition must move beyond consultation toward shared authority. Without such reforms, the burden of transformation continues to fall disproportionately on youth cultural action, rather than on the institutions responsible for addressing historical and ongoing marginalisation. These recommendations do not seek to prescribe solutions, but to align institutional structures with forms of agency that are already being enacted by San youth.

6.11 Concluding Reflections

This dissertation has argued that San music and dance are not remnants of a disappearing past, but dynamic forces of cultural resilience, political expression, and youth agency. Through performance, San youth enact self-recognition, transforming cultural capital into a means of endurance and political voice. These acts may be quiet, but they are not insignificant: they sustain identity, generate dignity, and create the conditions for future recognition and justice.

Ensuring that these practices are safeguarded, valued, and led by San voices is not only essential for Botswana's future, but also contributes to wider global conversations on Indigenous rights, heritage, and self-determination. In this sense, San music endures as both a cultural archive and a living practice: carrying memory forward while opening new possibilities for agency, recognition, and self-determined futures.

This research has also called for a reorientation of how agency is recognised within both scholarship and policy. San youth action does not always conform to dominant expectations of protest or confrontation. Instead, it operates through endurance, refusal, and the careful negotiation of visibility within unequal and often hostile fields. Choosing when to sing, what to share, how to perform, and when to withhold are not passive acts; they are deliberate strategies shaped by long histories of external representation and misrecognition.

Recognising such practices as political requires scholars, institutions, and audiences to learn how to listen differently: to value presence without spectacle, and dignity without demand. In this way, the research process itself reflects the forms of quiet action traced throughout the dissertation, foregrounding listening, consent, and careful representation rather than extraction. Ultimately, the future of San music cannot be separated from the broader question of Indigenous recognition: both depend on whose voices are heard, on what terms, and with what consequences.



Figure 14: Young dancer Bao performing within a community gathering in Grootlaagte, Ghanzi District, Botswana, 2023. Photograph by Author

The image captures music as a living, communal practice through which cultural knowledge, identity, and future possibilities are carried forward.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Video Production and Editing Methodology

This research adopts a practice-based approach in which audiovisual production functions not as supplementary material, but as a central mode of knowledge generation and representation. The ethnographic videos are therefore integral to the research process, shaped by ongoing ethical reflection and methodological intention.

The filming process prioritised participant agency and non-extractive representation. Recordings were conducted in ways that allowed musical, social, and conversational interactions to unfold with minimal intervention, enabling participants to speak in their preferred languages and engage in forms of expression meaningful within their own cultural contexts. In some cases, participants also contributed to decisions about what should be recorded and how particular moments should be represented.

Editing was approached as a continuation of the research process rather than a purely technical stage. Decisions regarding structure, pacing, and sound were guided by an ethical commitment to preserving narrative integrity and participant voice. Rather than prioritising narrative compression, the ethnographic videos retain extended forms of speech, repetition, and pauses, recognising these as meaningful elements of communication.

Duration was treated as an ethical consideration. Allowing participants to speak at length, to move between reflection and performance, and to inhabit silences without interruption formed part of a methodology grounded in attentiveness and respect for Indigenous temporalities.

Pacing and structure were shaped by the rhythms of interactions and performances as they unfolded in the field, rather than by a predetermined narrative framework. This supports the coexistence of multiple voices without imposing a singular interpretive perspective.

Sound was treated as central to the research, with care taken to preserve the integrity of musical performances, environmental soundscapes, and spoken language. Recordings were used with minimal alteration in order to retain their original sonic context.

Subtitles were used to support accessibility while maintaining fidelity to participants' voices. Translation prioritised meaning, tone, and context, rather than strict word-for-word equivalence. Subtitling decisions were guided by an ethical commitment to preserving voice and minimising interpretive distortion.

Decisions about what to include or exclude were made with attention to consent, dignity, and the potential risks of misrepresentation. In this sense, selective visibility forms part of an ethical approach to audiovisual research, ensuring that participants retain a degree of control over how their lives and experiences are represented.

Appendix B: Ethnographic Video Catalogue

Access to videos is provided via the accompanying research website: www.sanmusicalfutures.org (password-protected for examination)

Ethnographic Video 1: Context and Conditions

Duration: 18:51

Description:
This video situates San youth cultural practice within the historical and political context of Botswana, examining the tensions between national narratives of development and the lived realities of marginalisation, displacement, and exclusion experienced by San communities.

Key Themes:
– Indigenous marginalisation and state policy
– Historical displacement and land dispossession
– National development vs uneven inclusion
– Cultural expression as response to structural inequality

Ethnographic Video 2: Framing Recognition

Duration: 36:22

Description:
This video explores recognition as a lived and contested process, examining how San youth

experience misrecognition in everyday life while simultaneously cultivating self-recognition through music, language, and cultural practice.

Key Themes:
– Politics of recognition and misrecognition
– Self-recognition and cultural affirmation
– Visibility vs marginalisation
– Cultural expression as political presence

Ethnographic Video 3: Listening, Refusal, and the Ethics of Representation

Duration: 21:33

Description:
This video reflects on the ethics of research and representation, foregrounding San perspectives on research practices and positioning listening, collaboration, and participant agency as central to decolonial methodology.

Key Themes:
– Decolonising research methodologies
– Listening as ethical practice
– Representation, refusal, and authority
– Participant agency and co-creation of knowledge

Ethnographic Video 4: Using the Old to Forge the New: San Youth, Music, and Cultural Agency

Duration: 35:34

Description:
This video examines San musical practices as living, adaptive systems, exploring how youth sustain cultural continuity while innovating within changing social, economic, and institutional contexts.

Key Themes:
– Cultural transmission and continuity
– Music as embodied knowledge

– Tradition, adaptation, and hybridity
– Performance, tourism, and cultural economies

Ethnographic Video 5: Youth Agency: Case Studies in Cultural Action and Futures

Duration: 45:40

Description:
This video presents a series of case studies highlighting diverse forms of San youth agency, including education, music, caregiving, cultural labour, and advocacy, demonstrating how futures are negotiated under conditions of constraint.

Key Themes:
– Youth agency and lived experience
– Cultural labour and economic aspiration
– Education, recognition, and inequality
– Collective responsibility and future-making

Ethnographic Video 6: Beyond the Frame: Music, Dignity, and the Work That Continues

Duration: 46:12

Description:
This concluding video draws together the central arguments of the research, reflecting on music as a form of political practice through which San youth sustain dignity, negotiate recognition, and maintain cultural futures.

Key Themes:
– Music as political practice
– Dignity, recognition, and citizenship
– Cultural survival and structural inequality
– Ongoing labour and future possibilities

Appendix C: Ethics Approval

This research was conducted in accordance with institutional and national ethical guidelines governing research involving human participants.

Ethical approval was granted by the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. As part of this process, the researcher successfully completed required ethics and research integrity training, including *Research Involving Human Participants* (Certificate No. M0679010390) and *Research Integrity: Core* (Certificate No. 0679010383).

In Botswana, the research was conducted with the necessary governmental and institutional permissions. A research permit was obtained from the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sport and Culture Development, authorising the conduct of the project at a national level. Additional permission to conduct research in educational settings was granted by the Ministry of Education, recognising the inclusion of schools within the fieldwork.

Formal academic affiliation was established with the San Research Centre at the University of Botswana, which approved the research project and supported its implementation. This affiliation facilitated access to research sites, academic resources, and institutional guidance.

Site-specific permission to conduct research in the Ghanzi District was granted by the Office of the Member of Parliament for Ghanzi North Constituency, Honourable Johane L. Thiite.

All research activities were conducted with attention to informed consent, participant dignity, and cultural sensitivity. Given the multilingual and oral context of the research, consent procedures were adapted where necessary, including the use of oral consent in situations where written documentation was not appropriate.

Appendix D: Participant Information and Consent Procedures

Participants were informed about the research through direct, in-person engagement prior to any recording or interview. The purpose of the study, the nature of participation, and the intended use of audiovisual materials were explained clearly, with opportunities provided for questions and

clarification. Participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage without consequence.

Written informed consent was obtained where appropriate using a standard consent form. In cases where participants were unable to read or write, consent procedures were adapted to local practices. Participants were given the option to provide oral consent, and in some instances, identity document numbers were used in place of written signatures, reflecting common administrative practices within Botswana. These approaches were used to ensure that consent processes remained inclusive and culturally appropriate.

Given the multilingual context of the research, participant information and consent discussions were conducted in languages accessible to participants, including Setswana, Shekgalagari, and, where possible, relevant San languages. This ensured that participants could fully understand the nature of the research and make informed decisions about their involvement.
Where minors were involved, consent procedures followed a dual process. Parental or guardian consent was obtained alongside assent from the child, ensuring that participation was both authorised and voluntarily agreed. Child-friendly assent forms were used to communicate the study in accessible terms, emphasising that participation was optional and could be discontinued at any time.

All consent procedures were guided by principles of respect, transparency, and participant autonomy. Particular care was taken to ensure that participants understood their rights, including the right to decline participation, to withdraw, and to request that specific material not be included in the research outputs.

Appendix E: Interview Guide and Discussion Themes

Interviews and group discussions in this study were conducted using a flexible, participant-led approach rather than a rigidly structured format. Participants were informed of the general focus of the research but were not required to respond to a fixed set of questions. Instead, they were encouraged to guide the direction of discussions based on their own experiences, priorities, and perspectives.

This approach allowed participants to represent themselves on their own terms and to contribute in ways that were meaningful within their cultural and social contexts. Interviews were conducted in an informal, conversational manner, enabling participants to speak freely and at their own pace.

While no fixed questionnaire was used, discussions commonly engaged with the following themes:

- Cultural practices and musical traditions
- Youth engagement in music and performance
- Language, identity, and cultural transmission
- Experiences of marginalisation and recognition
- Education and access to opportunities
- Cultural tourism and economic livelihoods
- Community responsibilities and intergenerational knowledge
- Aspirations for the future and development

These themes emerged organically through participant contributions and were not imposed in advance, allowing the research to remain responsive to local priorities and perspectives.

Appendix F: Archival and Supplementary Media Sources

The majority of audiovisual material included in this research was recorded and produced by the researcher during fieldwork conducted between 2022 and 2023.

A small number of additional images and video clips were incorporated for contextual and illustrative purposes. These materials were sourced from publicly available platforms and are used here for academic, non-commercial research purposes. All efforts have been made to acknowledge original creators where identifiable, including within the audiovisual outputs themselves.

Sources of supplementary materials include:

- Duma FM (Botswana)
- Botswana Television (BTV)

- Botswana Government media platforms
- Botswana Investment and Trade Centre (BITC)
- Brand Botswana
- Botswana Tourism Organisation
- San Research Centre (University of Botswana)
- Anthropos Africa
- Office of the President (official social media platforms)
- Kuru Dance Festival (official media and social media platforms)
- Online news platforms (including *Mmegi*, *The Voice*, *Sunday Standard Botswana*, and *Botswana Gazette*)
- Harvard Law Bulletin (online)
- Journeyman Pictures
- Survival International
- Community-based social media pages and archives

Where specific authorship could not be determined, materials were used in accordance with fair use principles for research and educational purposes.

Appendix G: Fieldwork Sites

Fieldwork for this study was conducted across multiple districts in Botswana, encompassing urban centres, rural villages, and San settlements. This multi-sited approach reflects the geographic and cultural diversity of San communities and the varied contexts in which musical and cultural practices take place.

Ghanzi District

- Gantsi
- West Hanahai
- Grootlaagte
- Chobokwane
- New Xanagas
- D'Kar
- New Xade

- Charles Hill
- Ghanzi Farms

Northwest District (formerly Ngamiland)

- Maun
- Khwai
- Nata

Central District

- Xere
- Moxobotane
- Rakops

Kgalagadi District

- Kang
- Tshane
- Ukhwi
- Kanaku
- Additional San settlements within the Kgalagadi region were also visited during fieldwork

Southern District

- Gaborone

Fieldwork engagements across these sites included interviews, group discussions, musical performances, observational research, and audiovisual recording. The diversity of locations reflects the range of social, economic, and cultural contexts within which San youth cultural practices are situated.

Appendix H: Note on Language and Translation

This research was conducted in a multilingual context, involving English, Setswana, Shekgalagari, and a range of San languages spoken across different regions of Botswana. These included Naro and other San languages encountered in fieldwork sites in Ghanzi, Ngamiland, Central, and Kgalagadi districts.

Given the diversity and fluidity of San languages, and the absence of standardised orthographies for some, language names and spellings are used here based on participant usage and local conventions where possible. Variations in spelling may therefore occur, reflecting broader linguistic realities rather than inconsistency.

Translation was undertaken with attention to meaning, tone, and cultural context rather than strict word-for-word equivalence. Interviews and conversations were conducted in languages accessible to participants, with the researcher working across English, Setswana, and Shekgalagari, and drawing on local knowledge to support understanding in San languages.

Subtitles in the ethnographic videos were used to support accessibility while preserving participant voice. Translation decisions prioritised clarity without erasing linguistic variation, accent, or culturally specific forms of expression.

Translation support was provided by local collaborators, including VIP Obligatto and his assistants, who contributed to interpretation and clarification of language where required. Their input was particularly valuable in ensuring that meanings were accurately conveyed across languages and cultural contexts.

Overall, language and translation were approached as integral to the research methodology, requiring sensitivity to issues of representation, power, and voice.