

San Musical Futures

Ethnographic Video 6

Beyond the Frame: Music, Dignity, and the Work That Continues

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Opening: Drawing Threads Together

This concluding ethnographic video brings together the journeys traced across this research — not to summarise them, but to consider what they make visible.

Across these ethnographic videos, San youth have shown that music is not simply cultural expression. It operates as a means of sustaining dignity, maintaining continuity, and holding open possibilities for the future — even within environments structured by inequality and uncertainty.

What emerges is not a single narrative, but a set of practices — quiet, deliberate, and ongoing — through which young people assert presence in a society that has often denied them recognition.

What This Research Has Attempted to Show

In this research, I have attempted to show how San youth transform cultural expression into self-recognition — building dignity in contexts where misrecognition persists.

Music appears not as heritage alone, but as action: a way of sustaining identity, negotiating visibility, and shaping possibility under constraint.

Continuity, here, is not the opposite of change — it is its foundation. In the hands of young musicians, tradition is neither static nor nostalgic. It is adaptive, inventive, and alive — a dialogue between generations that keeps memory in motion.

Across these ethnographic videos and the written thesis, a shared argument emerges: self-recognition is not a preliminary step toward political life. It is already political. It shapes how presence is negotiated, how dignity is maintained, and how futures are imagined.

State Recognition and Everyday Life

State recognition may shift over time. What remains constant is the labour required to sustain dignity in everyday life.

The practices documented here do not wait for policy to stabilise. They operate within and beyond it — in classrooms, cultural economies, and community spaces where belonging is continually negotiated.

Recognition is not secured in a single moment. It is worked through repeatedly, often quietly, in contexts that do not always reward it.

Social Perception and National Responsibility

Beyond policy, participants returned to something more difficult to legislate: social perception.

Many spoke of the prejudice they continue to encounter — of being perceived as less capable, less modern, or less fully belonging. These attitudes are not abstract. They shape classrooms, workplaces, friendships, and everyday interactions.

Decolonisation, therefore, is not only a matter for government. It is a matter for citizens. It requires confronting inherited hierarchies that continue to organise how people see one another.

Music does not resolve inequality. But it creates encounters — moments where people meet differently, listen differently, and are invited to reconsider what they thought they knew.

In this sense, cultural practice becomes a form of public pedagogy — not through instruction, but through presence.

Cultural Protection and Structural Justice

This research also argues that preserving San music requires more than documentation. It requires legal and institutional frameworks that protect its creators.

Cultural preservation and economic justice must move together.

San youth are already working toward this — recording, organising, and asserting control over how their creative labour circulates. Cultural survival, here, is not passive. It is structured, strategic, and ongoing.

Music as Political Practice

This research has also reflected on how national symbols themselves can include or exclude.

One symbolic yet significant gesture would be the translation of Botswana's national anthem into Indigenous languages, including San languages.

Sung only in Setswana, the anthem reflects a particular history of nationhood. Sung in the many languages of Botswana's people, it could become a more inclusive act of belonging.

This proposal reflects the core argument of this research. It is not offered as resolution, but as illustration: music is not merely expressive. It is political practice — a space where dignity, recognition, and citizenship are enacted through sound.

The Cost of Quiet Action

What these ethnographic videos also make visible is the cost of quiet action.

Endurance requires labour. Dignity demands restraint. Cultural responsibility is often carried without guarantee of recognition or reward.

San youth are frequently expected to be articulate, patient, and composed — even as structural inequalities remain unresolved.

Quiet action, here, is not freely chosen. It is shaped by constraint.

The Question of the Academy

This research also raises a further question about the academy itself.

While San communities have long been researched, far fewer San scholars are positioned to produce academic work about their own lives and histories.

The barriers are not intellectual — they are structural: unequal schooling, limited access to higher education, financial precarity, and institutions that often struggle to accommodate knowledge rooted in lived proximity rather than distance.

Research that is close to home carries emotional weight. It requires navigating responsibility to community alongside academic expectation.

Decolonising scholarship, therefore, is not only about changing methods. It is about transforming who has sustained access to academic space — and how knowledge shaped by lived experience is recognised and valued within it.

Researcher Reflection

Conducting this research has been both a privilege and a responsibility.

Having grown up among San communities, I entered this work with familiarity — and with accountability.

Throughout the project, I have tried to remain attentive to the limits of my position — resisting the impulse to speak over what is already being spoken, and allowing complexity to remain where it could not be neatly resolved.

Like the practices it documents, this research remains unfinished.

Closing: The Work That Continues

The work documented here does not end with this ethnographic video. It continues in classrooms, in rehearsal spaces, in community gatherings, and in negotiations that rarely reach national headlines.

The practices traced across this research — teaching, performing, organising, remembering — are ongoing.

They are not symbolic gestures. They are forms of political life.

The future is not guaranteed.

It is maintained — deliberately, collectively, and often quietly — through everyday acts of cultural labour.

In this sense, dignity is not granted.

It is practiced.

And it continues.