The Kalahari Desert Festival:
Music and Dance as a Celebration of Heritage and Identity Amongst the ǂKhomani San

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PGGESH001

A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Music

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Eshcha Delvina Adams **Date: 11 October 2023**

Signed by candidate

To the memory of my friend, the remarkable Hennie Swart

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Abstract

The Kalahari Desert Festival is a significant annual festival, which provides a platform for local ǂKhomani San and related regional communities to celebrate their heritage and identity through music, dance and other art forms. Held on indigenous lands in South Africa's Northern Cape Province, I discuss how the festival emerged as an important site of San cultural sustainability and appreciation since its establishment in 2013. To contextualise my discussion, I discuss the various ways indigenous people in southern Africa have been historically marginalised as a direct cause of colonialism and apartheid, and the subsequent scholarship on various San cultural practices including music and language, which have disproportionately been framed through dominant western scholarship. Within this context, I explore emerging decolonial scholarly literature and approaches which have been undertaken by black, indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) scholars in South Africa. By employing a method of historical reconstruction gleaned from interviews, proposals, news articles, footage and in-person experience at the Kalahari Desert Festival, I provide a detailed historical outline of the festival during its seven-year run between 2013–2019. Furthermore, I position the festival as a platform and catalyst for the celebration of heritage and identity, highlighting the significance of a cultural festival which is geographically 'on the margins', by intentionally centring historically marginalised people. By presenting several emerging concepts and themes centred around cultural sustainability, I discuss how the festival can be seen as a catalytic space which promotes heritage and identity in various symbolic ways – helping local communities claim dignity, pride and agency towards self-determination as indigenous people within a post-apartheid socio-political South African climate. The Kalahari Desert Festival has, until my current discussion, never been the focus of any academic research studies. Being relatively new, I believe it is a significant research focal point, as I explore ideas of heritage, identity, cultural sustainability and artistic expression amongst the ǂKhomani San and beyond.

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The Kalahari Desert Festival In Context

1.1 Introduction

The wind blows gently over the red sand dunes known as the Red Dune Route. The landscape is open, honest, and expectant of what is to erupt over the next three days. The South African San Institute and its partners have worked tirelessly to present the Kalahari Desert Festival – a new, exciting, and ground-breaking venture which will centre the local ǂKhomani San peoples' cultural expression. Many festivalgoers travel from far and wide to experience the 'magic' of the Kalahari Desert in the Northern Cape. Young and old alike brim with excitement - expectant for what is to come. The various tents, stages, food stalls, and children's entertainment stations have been prepared for the arrival of the festivalgoers. The venue, //Uruke Bush Camp, is just south of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, forming part of the ǂKhomani-owned land within the region. Over the next three days the Kalahari landscape will be transformed into a flurry of jubilant activities as music, dance, language and delicious food take over the space. The revellers partake in this stellar event with great enthusiasm – an occasion which is a source of pride to locals and an annual highlight for many.

Since 2013, the South African San Institute and San Council have hosted the Kalahari Desert Festival (KDF), a cultural celebration held in and around Askham, a small town in South Africa's Northern Cape Province. The annual festival has become an important aspect of San cultural sustainability[1] and appreciation in recent times, acting as a means to "restore pride in ancient (San) traditions" by promoting "cultural exchange" through music, dance, drama, poetry, storytelling, art, craft and film (KDF website, 2019). By providing a platform of expression for artists and cultural practitioners, the festival contributes towards the sustainability of local cultural forms, primarily through the mediums of music and dance.

Held annually for nearly seven consecutive years,[2] until the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily paused all operations in 2020[3], KDF (as it is affectionately known) has been integral to the development of cultural awareness and sustainability in the wider Kalahari region. The festival

[1] I define cultural sustainability as the importance of sustaining and expanding cultural life, cultural history, and creative human practices, I unpack this term in depth later in this dissertation.
[2] The festival took place every year between 2013 and 2019, except for 2017 due to issues with funding.
[3] The festival resumed in 2023, after I had submitted this dissertation for examination.

welcomes hundreds of guests and participants from Askham and its neighbouring towns and cities, as well as international guests from various indigenous communities (A. Swart 2021, Kruger 2021). KDF has become an important celebration of culture and heritage for local communities – with festivalgoers travelling from Upington (the Northern Cape's largest city, situated 200 kilometres away along the famous Red Dune Route) and beyond to partake in festivities (H. Swart 2019).

Organised by the South African San Institute (SASI) and San Council[4] in a "joint venture" with local communities, KDF is described as being "hosted by the people of the Kalahari and beyond" (KDF website, 2019). In this dissertation I discuss the importance of the festival within the community by situating its role in cultural sustainability and revival amongst the San who have been South Africa's most historically marginalised group. Before progressing into this larger discussion, I will provide a brief history of the festival's establishment, context and aims.

1.2 Brief Background to Kalahari Desert Festival

Inspired by *Festival au Désert*, an annual festival in Mali which showcased Tuareg music,[5] the organisers of the Kalahari Desert Festival set out to reimagine what a "desert-related" festival would look like in southern Africa – one that is contextually located in the Kalahari and for the people of the Kalahari (H. Swart 2019). Having taken place in several venues near Askham, since its inauguration in 2013, KDF takes place in the southern region of the Kalahari Desert, near South Africa's northern border with Botswana and Namibia.

1.2.1 The Significance of Location

The festival's location is significant in many ways. Firstly, the idea of having a festival in a desert is somewhat of a contradiction. The landscape, comprising a vast arid area just below the Kgalagadi Transfrontier National Park (KTNP) is sparsely populated with festivalgoers having to travel long distances to the remote location. The set up – comprising of several massive tents, hundreds of chairs, a large stage, lighting rigs, jumping castles, food stalls and massive subwoofers - requires a logistical array of four-wheel-drive *bakkies*[6] and trucks travelling over desert sands to make the event happen. Nonetheless, when one overcomes these challenges, the desert landscape itself erupts in beauty marked by the Kalahari's striking red sand dunes, colossal salt pans, indigenous flora and fauna, and common sightings of springbok, gemsbok, kudu, and other southern African antelope.

[4] The San Council joined the organisational team in 2016.
[5] See Amico (2013, 86) and the *Festival au Désert* website for more information: http://www.festival-au-desert.org.
[6] An informal South African term which refers to a pick-up truck or vehicle.

Apart from the notion of a desert-festival being a contradiction (something I expand on later), KDF's location is of particular significance when one uncovers the history of the land. The region within and around the Kgalagadi Transfrontier National Park, where the festival takes place, forms part of the traditional[7] lands and cultural landscape of the ǂKhomani San – a grouping who, as part of the wider San peoples,[8] were southern Africa's first inhabitants and land custodians (H. Swart 2019). This area was famously reclaimed by the ǂKhomani, after centuries of marginalisation, in an historic land claim of 1996, under a new constitution in post-apartheid South Africa (Chennels 2004, 211).[9]

Although the ǂKhomani San received this political acknowledgment and reparation a quarter of a century ago, they are nonetheless still largely on the margins of South Africa's contemporary cultural landscapes – geographically, politically and imaginatively. The Kalahari Desert Festival is thus ground-breaking in many ways. Funded by the South African Department of Sport, Arts and Culture and hosted by the ǂKhomani San, on their lands, the festival has become an important means of celebration for the Kalahari region and for its people, who have often been marginalised in South African political imaginations.

Considering the festival's location and the desire from organisers for it to be *for* the people of the Kalahari, it naturally embraces and locates ǂKhomani San culture as central (H. Swart 2019). This is made more pertinent when one considers the complexities and politicisation of indigeneity in a post-apartheid South Africa, which is yet to fully recognise San or Khoe ancestries (Mitchell 2020). This issue of recognition as the indigenous population of South Africa is "far from resolved"- displayed, for example, in the fact that no San or Khoe languages are included as part of South Africa's eleven official languages to this day (Mitchell 2020).

The location of the Kalahari Desert Festival on geographical margins, far from South Africa's major metropolises (Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban) – is thus symbolic of the San's

[7] My use of this term refers to the historical land of the ǂKhomani.
[8] Much has been written about the first people of southern Africa under the umbrella term "San". The terms "San" and "Bushmen" are both historically problematic and derogatory – "San" meaning "thief and vagabond" and "Bushmen" implying savage, akin to animals (Gordon and Douglas 1992, 6–7 and Barnard 1992, 7–11). Although the term "Bushmen" may be considered derogatory, I have observed that it is still in common usage within certain San communities. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this dissertation, I shall use quotation marks when using the word.
[9] For clarity, I will use the term ǂKhomani when referring to the particular group of southern San who reside on their traditional and historical lands in the Kalahari. There are two other prominent San groups in South Africa, the Khwe and !Xun who upon arriving in South Africa, resided in the tent settlement of Schimdsdrift, before being granted council housing at Platfontein, five kilometres outside of the city Kimberley, in the Northern Cape (Soskolne 2007, 22).

historical marginalisation within South Africa. As a means of further contextualising the seminal nature and importance of the festival, I will briefly discuss the history of the San – a people who have been marginalised throughout history, continuing into the present, in various ways.

Northern Cape hybrid physical and political map with a blue arrow indicating where Askham is.
Source: SA-Venues website
https://www.sa-venues.com/maps/northerncape/physical.php

1.3 Historical Context of the San: A History of Marginalisation

The ǂKhomani, who host the Kalahari Desert Festival, form part of the larger group of San who were southern Africa's first inhabitants (Schlebusch *et al.* 2016, 2). Historically, the San once resided in various areas throughout southern Africa – in vast lands known today as the nation states of South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Angola – with some authors suggesting they lived as far north and east as Congo and Tanzania (ibid. and Mellet in Shackley 2018). As nomadic hunter-gatherers, research suggests they have called these lands home since as far back as 70 000 years ago (Laband 2020, 47).

Over the last few hundred years, the San way of life has been transformed in many ways as a result of, what Pickrell *et al.* describes as, "three major waves" of "genetic, cultural and technological immigration" into today's southern Africa (2014, 2). These were the respective arrivals of Khoe

herders, Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists[10] and European colonial agro-pastoralists (ibid.). Each group brought major changes to the lives of the San peoples, and each have contributed towards their marginalisation in different ways (ibid.).

1.3.1 Khoe Contacts

The Khoe (alternative spelling Khoi) are often erroneously merged with the San, with the term "Khoisan" (or "Khoi-San"), combining Khoe and San peoples, still widely used in public discourse (Mitchell 2020). Recently, however, this merging is increasingly the cause of "tension and controversy" – particularly amongst some San communities, who are "beginning to assert a distinct identity, encouraging the use of "Khoe and San" as opposed to "Khoisan" in official references (Mitchell 2020).

The problematic nature of the term arises from its origins, with the term being coined by Nazi German scholar Leonhard Schultze in 1928, who decided it would be convenient to use as a "collective category" in reference to the early hunter-gathering and herding peoples of South Africa (Mitchell 2020). Trained as a zoologist, Schulze "passed himself off" as an anthropologist because there were "too few animals to study in Namibia" (Mellet in Shackley 2018). Historian and heritage activist Patric Tariq Mellet has gone as far as to say that the term "Khoisan" actually transgresses into the realm of "Crimes Against Humanity", under the "crime of assimilation of one people into another…for political purposes" – continuing that one cannot simply "create a people that never existed before Schultze (1928) invented the term" (Mellet in Shackley 2018).[11] Mellet also points out elsewhere that Schultze, framing his opinions through the violence of German race theories, "argued for (Khoe and San) extermination" (Mellet 2020, 22).

The term Khoisan is historically incorrect (Mellet in Shackley 2018). San history is both "different and much older" than that of the Khoe as archaeological evidence suggests that the San settled at the Cape 20 000 years ago (Deacon 1982, 42). Khoe peoples emerged in south-western Zimbabwe, as a result of a coming together of "herders of East African descent with Nile Basin (Nilotic) roots" and the Tshua, a group of Zimbabwean San (Mellet in Shackley 2018). Scholars date this emergence as sometime between 200 BC and 300 AD, with Khoe peoples migrating further south and west into

[10] I should point out that the term Bantu developed negative connotations during apartheid, when it was used to classify black Africans. Nevertheless, it is commonly still used in reference to language – such as in this instance, in identifying Bantu languages as belonging to a sub-branch of the Niger-Congo language family.

[11] Whilst the term "Khoisan" is still in common usage, I do not use it in this dissertation, for the reasons already given. I make distinctions between the two, Khoe and San, at every point – except on occasions when I quote sources directly.

lands previously occupied by San groups such as the !Kwi, !Xun, /Xam and Nju (ibid.).

Khoe migration into South Africa was marked by the occupation of coastal areas and the areas around major rivers including the !Garib River, known today as the Orange River (Pickrell *et al.* 2014, 2). The Khoe are presumed to have reached the Eastern Cape by 650 AD, later reaching the Western Cape by around 1050 AD (Mellet in Shackley 2018). Although evidence suggests that cultural exchange occurred between the hunter-gathering San and herding Khoe, Mellet has recently pointed out what he describes as an "uncomfortable but true historical fact" that the San were persecuted by "all the Khoe groups" who migrated into their lands (ibid.). The author argues that this marginalisation took form via "acts of genocide", with San people being "pushed off their traditional coastal habitats", thus being forced to move inland, or further north into today's Northern Cape and beyond (ibid).

1.3.2 Bantu Migrations

The second major wave of influence which affected San way of life was via contact with Bantu-speaking agriculturalists who journeyed south from Central and East Africa into the lands occupied by the San (Laband 2020, 41). These peoples, who would later become prominent South African tribes such the Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana and Sotho, spoke languages which scholars have termed the "Bantu" family of languages, named after "ntu" (the common root word for "person") and "ba" (the common plural prefix) (Laband 2020, 41).[12]

After entering Southern Africa around 1800 years ago, a significant migration of Bantu-speaking groups occurred around 800 years ago (Pickrell *et al.* 2014, 3). They soon encountered the San, forming, what historian John Laban describes as, a "symbiotic relationship" (2020, 49). This was particularly the case with the amaXhosa, the southern-most Bantu-speaking group, who absorbed elements of San languages, such as the hallmark click consonants, into their own (ibid., 49). San and amaXhosa people also intermarried[13] and traded, with the former offering products of hunting such as ivory, feathers and eggshell beads for the latter's iron, grain and, eventually, tobacco (ibid., 49).

[12] Ethnographers have divided South African Bantu-speakers into two main groups, Sotho/Tswana and Nguni, as well as two smaller groups, Venda and Tsonga (Laband 2020, 47). After settlement in different areas of southern Africa, "linguistic and cultural" disparities occurred yet, they have in common "the same basic culture" despite various "local differences" that have developed over time (Laband 2020, 48–49).

[13] Genetically, many South Africans have DNA that demonstrates intermarriage with the first peoples of southern Africa (Barbieri *et al.* 2013, 3). This reflects imaginatively today with increasing numbers of so-called Coloured, Griqua, Zulu, Swati and Xhosa South Africans beginning to identify with their San, as well as Khoe, heritage (Ellis 2012, 27).

Nonetheless, although extensive cultural interactions between the San and Bantu-speaking migrants took place, their "ways of life were essentially irreconcilable", with the herding practices of the Bantu-speaking groups impinging intrusively on the San's hunting grounds (ibid., 49).[14] Deprived of sufficient game to hunt for survival, as they did with the herding Khoe peoples, the San were forced to raid livestock, leading to warfare over resources (ibid., 50). Whilst, by many accounts, the San were "not easy to combat" with their poisoned arrows and intimate knowledge of the terrain, they were eventually "relentlessly squeezed out" and driven further north (50). The Bantu-speakers are described as having sometimes done "their conscious best to exterminate" the small bands of San people, whilst also "sometimes incorporating them" into their communities (50). Like the "acts of genocide" conducted by Khoe peoples, this occurrence at the hands of Bantu-speaking migrants led to even further marginalisation of the San (Mellet in Shackley 2018). Truly, a mark of things to come.

1.3.3 The Impact of Colonialism

The meeting of San with Khoe and Bantu-speaking peoples could be described as one of "fruitful interaction" between different African peoples which, although various cultural exchanges took place, eventually led to San marginalisation, and subjugation, due to "irreconcilable" lifestyles and battles over resources (Laband 2020, 49 and 60). The impact of European colonisation, which began in the 17th century, however, had a far more deleterious impact on South Africa's indigenous populations, as it was framed through the violent and dehumanising "doctrine of discovery".[15] The Khoe, who were the first South African people to encounter Europeans first met the Portuguese, with Vasco Da Gama and his crew arriving in 1497, with other European voyagers, namely the Dutch following suit (Adhikari 2010, 19).

Patric Mellet's excellent and ground-breaking book, *The Lie of 1652: A Decolonised History of Land*, argues that the narrative of Jan Van Riebeeck landing in the Cape in 1652 and founding the Port of Cape Town is actually based on a lie that "runs very deep and skews most versions and perspectives on South Africa" (2020, 95). Whilst I cannot go into detail here, Mellet essentially argues that there were 180 years of "vibrant multicultural interaction" in Cape Town before Van

[14] Whilst outside the scope of this discussion to go into detail, significant connection between Khoe and Bantu-speaking AmaXhosa occurred – with Khoe languages, which had been greatly influenced by the San, thus leaving a "profound mark" on the click consonants of isiXhosa (Laband 2020, 60). There was some cultural exchange in terms of words used to describe geographical features as well as elements of religious belief, with some Khoe who "actively participated in Xhosa society as diviners" (Laband 2020, 60–61).

[15] For an excellent recent discussion on this, see *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (2019) co-written by First Nations author Mark Charles and South Korean author Soong-Chan Rah.

Riebeeck's arrival (ibid., 95). By looking at European shipping logs (records), he discusses how the Khoe established a proto-port at Table Bay, controlling the most valuable natural resource being drinking water that flowed from Hoerikwaggo (Table Mountain) (ibid., 95–99).

Nonetheless, once Europeans began settling in the Cape and beyond, it led to the systematic marginalisation of both San and Khoe people (Adhikari 2010, 19). Roger Hewitt states that, during the 17th and 18th centuries, European colonisers hunted San peoples as they hunted animals – saying, horrifically, how many San peoples were "hunted for sport" as farmers would go out to shoot them in large numbers for "the fun of it" (1986, 30). Although many indigenous people at the Peninsula fought back, communities in the (Western) Cape were almost completely annihilated during the 18th and 19th centuries as a result of land theft, massacres, forced labour and cultural suppression, as well as by the destruction of the environment and their means of subsistence which accompanied colonial rule (Adhikari 2010, 19).

Additionally, European colonisation introduced infectious diseases into the area and many Khoe and, later, San communities were "obliterated by, for example, smallpox and flu epidemics" (Nurse *et al.* 1986, 36). Khoe, as well as those San peoples who still resided on the coastal areas by this stage, did not have antibodies to fight off such diseases which European sailors carried, and thousands died during various epidemics, in the 18th and 19th centuries (Nurse *et al.* 1986, 36). Apart from the devastating impact of rampant diseases, European colonialism led to armed conflict and land theft, with many San groups being forced further north (Hewitt 1986, 30).

The southern Kalahari, a desert region with no surface water stretching some 300 kilometres north of the !Garib River (Orange River), remained relatively out of the reach of European settlers until the 19th century (Adhikari 2010, 22). Nonetheless, commando military raids were introduced, followed by European farmers who desired to create a colony for Europeans in the Cape (Hewitt 1986, 30). These dehumanising and deeply troubling actions were motivated by the idea that San "inconveniently occupied land allocated to farmers", thus they were officially declared to be "vermin" which needed to be exterminated in order to "tame" the farming lands (Chennels 2004, 215).

1.3.4 Marginalisation in Post-Apartheid South Africa

The advent of the 20th century found a people who had not just been victims of genocide but, for those who survived, linguicide (erasure of language) and culturicide (attempted erasure of culture)

thus marginalisation on multiple levels (Bam 2021, 141). Recent studies indicate that all but a few pockets of San groups were completely absorbed, first into the agricultural economy of the Bantu-speaking migrant groups and later into the European agricultural settler economy (Ellis 2012, 10). Moreover, the formation of the modern apartheid and post-apartheid South African states, seemed to confine the San to the status either of being extinct or just clinging to survival (Ellis 2012, 10).

Somewhat of a cultural revival has taken place over the last decade or two with increasing numbers of, mainly "coloured", South Africans identifying with their San and Khoe heritage (Mellet 2020, 18).[16] Considering the majority of "coloured" South Africans live in the desirable coastal province of the Western Cape, this "revivalist formation" is seen as a complication, even threat, to certain black (Bantu-speaking) South Africans' land claims – even as discussions around restorative justice and land restitution have become increasingly important in the country, due to severe poverty and lack of basic resources (ibid., 307–309). Considering that South Africa has been under Bantu-speaking leadership since its first democratic election in 1994, this has led to a continued deAfricanisation[17] of San (and Khoe) identities to fit certain political agendas – contributing further to the marginalisation of the San, southern Africa's first people (ibid., 20).

The continued usage of the merged identity, "Khoisan", by recent revivalist groups has contributed (perhaps unintentionally) to San (as well as Khoe) marginalisation (ibid., 20). Mellet argues that certain of these revivalist groups do not do "thorough research to ensure they are not overlooking surviving communities", and they thus "impinge" on these communities "in an opportunistic manner for gain" which, he says, is "in many ways a form of cultural genocide" (ibid., 20). Whilst I do not know enough about the intentions of such revivalist movements to say whether the word "cultural genocide" is applicable, authors like Francesca Mitchell have similarly pointed out certain San's feelings of "ultra-marginalisation", resulting from certain revivalists' using the misnomer "Khoisan", and the political baggage that comes with it (Mitchell 2020).

1.4 Reclaiming Heritage

[16] Contrary to international usage of the term, "coloured" does not refer to black people in general but instead alludes to a "phenotypically varied social group of highly diverse cultural and geographic origins" in South Africa (Adhikari 2005, 2). This distinction is important as the term "coloured" is considered derogatory in certain international contexts, such as the United States of America though this, generally speaking, is not the case in South Africa. Historically residing in the Western and Northern Capes, "coloured" people are descended, to various degrees, from Southeast Asian slaves, indigenous Khoe and San populations, black Nguni-speaking populations who assimilated in Cape colonial society, and European settlers (Adhikari 2005, 2).

[17] This refers to the erasure of an African identity and by extension rejection of said identity within predominately so-called "coloured" and POC communities.

Considering the San have suffered immense marginalisation and alienation over the last few hundred years, the last few decades have necessitated the establishment of political structures, aimed at helping the San affirm their place within the post-apartheid South African social landscape. Whilst San social structures were customarily not hierarchical, South Africa's political climate in the 1990s meant it was necessary to set up organisations to legitimise the San's claims for recognition (H. Swart 2019).

This, however, has not been an easy process for several reasons. The San, as hunter-gatherers, have historically been considered nomadic – making things like land claims, so pertinent to post-apartheid South African politics, extremely complicated. Although San societies and cultures are described as being "highly complex and effective", the European-imposed ideas of "civilisation" and legal systems, coupled with white supremacy agendas, regarded the San as having no legal system in terms of which their rights to land can be measured or recognised (Chennels 2004, 215). Many of these systems and imaginations have thus determined the conditions under which San land claim processes have to follow (Chennels 2004, 213).

Another hindrance to the reclamation of heritage rights is the colonial, and later apartheid, eras' intentional erasure of the history and culture of South Africa's indigenous people (Bam 2021, 141). This led to a false narrative that the San were 'extinct', which we now know to be damaging colonial and apartheid historiographies intending to delegitimise heritage and land claims (Bam 2021, 21).

1.4.1 The Issue of Land and the Establishment of SASI

Nonetheless, certain social and political institutions have been successful in their reclamations of land. The South African San Institute (SASI), for example, which would eventually establish the Kalahari Desert Festival, was originally set up to assist the ǂKhomani San – the San of the Southern Kalahari with land restitution after the end of apartheid (H. Swart 2019). SASI played an important role in launching a land claim for 40 000 hectares of land outside the KTNP, which proved successful in 1999. A further 25000 hectares inside the Park was returned to the ǂKhomani San in 2002, with an amalgam of different people of San ancestry adopting the name ǂKhomani to represent the identity of their newly re-united community (SASI website, 2019).

Whilst SASI's original objective was a necessary reclaiming of heritage rights, mainly in the form of land, in the subsequent quarter of a century the organisation has evolved into a vehicle through

which the ǂKhomani are able to celebrate[18] and sustain their cultural identity. Working together with the South African San Council and ǂKhomani leadership, SASI sought to create spaces for young and old people to come together to talk about the past, their history, and to learn skills to create new types of livelihoods (SASI website, 2019). These projects categorised under the CRAM Project (cultural resources auditing and management), have been guided by San field workers trained in cultural resource management and in collaboration with academic researchers (ibid.). Recent projects include a tracker-training programme in the Kalahari for young people, whilst various youth host heritage tours and develop cultural products for visiting tourists and their own community (ibid.).

Together with, and assuredly influenced by, the work of institutions like SASI, the last decade or so has seen the beginnings of a cultural revival. San and Khoe activists, authors, political leaders, cultural practitioners, and musicians have all begun self-determining their identities, and engaging with their historiographies, which have suffered marginalisation and erasure. Seeing this, or desiring to contribute to it, in 2013 SASI decided to pursue its perhaps most ambitious undertaking yet – the establishment of the Kalahari Desert Festival.

1.4.2 Research Question and Conceptual Framework

Given the history of San marginalisation which I have presented, my earlier contention that the Kalahari Desert Festival (KDF) is seminal and ground-breaking, is made apparent. The festival's establishment on politically returned San lands is nothing short of remarkable. Hennie Swart, the main organiser for the duration of the 2013–2019 festival run, stated that there "aren't really any other platforms" similar to, or as big as it, saying it acts as a space for people to not just "perform and enjoy themselves", but subsequently to "celebrate their heritage" (H. Swart 2019).

Whilst I will discuss the festival in greater detail in later chapters, at present I wish to present my main research question or argument which is an enquiry into the significance of the festival to the ǂKhomani San, and the greater Kalahari region. Considering the San's marginalisation and alienation in South African history, my research question asks in what way(s) and does the Kalahari Desert Festival act as a platform for the celebration of San heritage and identity? I explore how the festival acts as a platform and site for the celebration of heritage and identity. As I unpack in my third and

[18] I use the terms celebrate and celebration throughout this dissertation to express the pride and joy revelers feel at the festival which is tied into the emotional aspect of identity reclamation and by extension celebration.

fourth chapters, I particularly situate the role of music and dance within the festival as means of expression which hold, embody and embrace the beauty of San heritage and culture.

1.4.3 Rationale

If my rationale behind pursuing this area of enquiry is not yet clear, I will start by saying that I believe this is vitally important work. The background information I have provided regarding the marginalisation of the San deems any enquiry helpful and necessary – whether relating to music, dance, art, history, language or any other aspects of San culture and heritage. Whilst San culture has received a degree of scholarly attention (I review this literature in my next chapter), much of this is outdated and based on colonial imaginations of the San people.

Even as increasing numbers of indigenous scholars–in this I include so-called "coloured" scholars with San or Khoe roots (like myself) and black South African scholars–are focusing large studies on San culture, I wish to contribute to this small, but ever-increasing body of research. The Kalahari Desert Festival has, until my current discussion, never been the focus of any academic research or study (apart from featuring in a few news articles). I believe it is a significant research focal point, as I explore ideas of heritage, identity, cultural sustainability, and artistic expression amongst the ǂKhomani San and related groups from the Kalahari region.

1.5 Chapter Outline

Following from this introductory chapter in which I provided insight into the history of marginalisation of the San, thus highlighting the seminal nature of the Kalahari Desert Festival, I will progress into my second chapter in which I discuss my methodological approach and review literature relevant to my research area. For the latter, I focus on different eras of literature relating to the San, emphasising the imaginative shift from early problematic colonial works to recent decolonial contributions.

In chapter three, I provide a historical outline of the festival during its seven-year run between 2013–2019, foregrounding this with a brief history of the festival's establishment and intentions. By focusing on "insider" reports, I discuss how the festival–given the context of historical marginalisation presented in Chapters One and Two–can be seen as a site for cultural celebration and sustainability in its stated focus on uplifting and empowering local San communities. Via the employment of metaphors relating to San culture, I discuss how the contemporary festival site engages with the past and present to become a seminal annual event for the celebration of heritage

and culture.

In chapter four I analyse the various ways in which the Kalahari Desert Festival provides a platform for local communities to celebrate their heritage and reclaim their identities via the specific mediums of music and dance. Presenting several emerging concepts and themes centred around cultural sustainability and heritage, I enhance my discussion by briefly engaging with indigenous festival studies and situating KDF within the broader field. Thereafter, I continue my discussion on how the festival provides a platform of expression for local communities to claim dignity, pride and agency towards self-determination as indigenous people.

Finally, in chapter five I summarise and assess my study, with concluding thoughts and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2:
Research Methodology and Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

As outlined in my introductory chapter, the focus of my study is to situate the Kalahari Desert Festival as a site of cultural reclamation, celebration, and sustainability, particularly through the mediums of music and dance. By emphasising the importance of the festival to the ǂKhomani San, and the Kalahari region, I use this chapter to discuss my methodological approaches, as well as to review literature relevant to my research area. Considering my training in both ethnomusicology and dance studies, which embrace methodological approaches with ethnographic leanings, I explain how several external challenges lead me to developing a creative, multi-methods research approach.

Research Methodology

2.2 Overcoming Early Challenges

I began my master's research proposal in September 2019, shortly after attending that year's Kalahari Desert Festival. At the time, I was an educator at Hout Bay High School, and was invited to the festival by a former colleague, and dear friend of mine, the late Hennie Swart. I drove the stretch of more than 1000 kilometres from my home in Cape Town to the northern border of South Africa, roughly 50 kilometres from the southern border of Botswana, where I spent the next three days revelling in the vibrant sounds, smells, dancing and joyous atmosphere that was the 2019 festival. Before returning home, I knew that The Kalahari Desert Festival was what I wanted to focus on for my planned master's research in the following year.

As I was yet to register for my degree (I had to first submit my proposal for the start of the academic calendar in 2020), I was unable to conduct any fieldwork or interviews at the festival *in situ*. I had not yet officially begun my research degree, meaning I naturally needed to follow all the correct ethical procedures. Nonetheless, my time at the 2019 festival was valuable and extremely insightful.[19] My experience at the 2019 festival was vital as my planned fieldwork was scuppered with the world going on lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2019 festival ended up

[19] As any budding scholar would, I made several notes and recorded various voice notes at different junctures in the festival to remind myself, retrospectively, of some of my observations of the landscape during the wonderful reveling.

being the last festival, until the present time of writing, with both the 2020 and 2021 festivals being cancelled.

During the process of research for my master's research proposal (in 2019), and subsequently for this dissertation (during 2020–2021), I was made acutely aware of the lack of scholarly sources focusing on the Kalahari Desert Festival. This is in part due to a degree of scarcity of research on San culture in general (although this is improving, as I discuss later in this chapter), as well as the fact that the festival is a relatively recent occurrence. With the lack of academic sources, I initially relied on the sources of publicly available information, which came from the Kalahari Desert Festival's website, social media pages, and a few news articles and videos.

As I realised the limitations of this publicly available information, my next step was to uncover "insider" information, which I did through various interviews with festival organisers. My former colleague Hennie Swart, who had invited me to the festival in the first place, was my first port of call. Unaware at the time, I soon discovered that he was the primary festival organiser, as the director of the South African San Institute (SASI) which founded the festival – a perfect primary research participant, who considered the establishment of the festival as part of his legacy and life's work.

Sadly, tragedy struck. In late 2019 Hennie suddenly passed away after a short illness. I was devastated at this personal loss because, apart from being colleagues, we had become close friends. Hennie was excited and expectant for the research I was going to do at the 2020 festival. His desire was to increase the awareness of the festival, thus the prospect of my researching the festival brought him great joy. I could fortunately interview him on 13 October 2019, in preparation for writing my proposal, which is why his matchlessly informed perspective is included in this dissertation (I had the inclusion of his interviews signed off by the university's ethics board and Hennie's family retrospectively, considering the exceptional circumstances).

2.2.1 From an Ethnographic Study to a Historical Consideration

Apart from what a blow Hennie's passing was to me personally, it forced me to recalibrate my methodological approach (which initially would have seen me sort of "shadow" him, as he arranged all the logistical things needed for the 2020 and 2021 festival). His passing left a major gap in my planned research because he held a wealth of knowledge about the ins and outs of the festival and, when he passed, much of it went with him. However, his eldest daughter, Almé Swart, valiantly took

over the reins as interim director of SASI and by extension as the primary organiser of the Kalahari Desert Festival. While enduring great personal grief, she managed to "keep the lights on" ensuring that SASI still functioned after her father's passing (A. Swart 2021). Almé became my main research participant and liaison, and she kindly granted me access to all her father's KDF reports, documents, and photographs and she introduced me to many key research participants, whose voices are heard throughout my subsequent discussion.

Together with Hennie's passing, the COVID-19 pandemic had an enormous effect on the practicalities, and subsequent outworking and approach of my research. Whilst I had initially planned to conduct ethnographic studies of both the 2020 and 2021 festivals, I was forced to change my approach as my intended fieldwork was rendered impossible due to both festivals being postponed, and then cancelled, because of lockdowns and governmental restrictions relating to the pandemic. Although originally intending to conduct an ethnographic study of the festival, due to the external factors mentioned, I realised the most efficacious way forward would be to study the festival through more of a historical approach and consideration, in which I look back on the first seven years of the festival by discussing its important features and assessing its impact and importance to communities in the Kalahari.

2.2.2 Interviews, Sources and Fieldwork

To do this historical study, I made use of primary sources including interviews, footage, and various texts pertaining to the festival. Consequently, I focused my attention on conducting interviews with the festival organisers and other key contributors – something which, coupled with my relationship with the Swart family, enabled me to access numerous "insider" documents about each festival during its seven-year run.

A large majority of the interviews were conducted online, via Zoom, although I also conducted some in person. Whilst I was unable to conduct ethnographic research in the Kalahari region, I was able to conduct a research trip to *!Khwa ttu*, a San history and heritage centre on the West Coast of South Africa.[20] Besides the interviews I conducted with the people who work there, this research trip

[20] Apart from being a centre for San heritage, *!Khwa ttu* seeks to educate outsiders, provide jobs and practical residential training for young San people from all over southern Africa, since 1999. Known as the "Embassy of the San" and housing three museums, it is also a thriving tourism destination whose mission is to enable San to "reclaim and share their heritage, in their own way" (*!Khwa ttu* website 2021).

enabled me to gain important insight regarding San history and culture, as I spent hours conducting research in *!Khwa ttu's* excellently curated museums.

Altogether, these experiences and the information I gathered, along with my first-hand experience of the 2019 festival has wonderfully intersected to provide me with the ability to frame an accurate and detailed historical account and conceptual analysis of the Kalahari Desert Festival, which I unpack in Chapters Three and Four respectively.

Literature Review

2.3 Introduction

To lay the groundwork for the discussion, it is crucial that I further outline the cultural and socio-political landscape within my field of research. It is only through understanding the historical contexts within which the festival takes place that we can fully appreciate its importance, seminal nature and relevance. In this next section, I therefore briefly assess various periods of literature on San studies, with particular focus on what has been written in the areas of music and dance. I begin by reviewing early scholarship, emphasising how many written works are framed through problematic white, Western, male lenses, which has contributed to (and sometimes been the cause of) the marginalisation of the San. As I progress through this section, I contrast this by opening discourse around positionality, as I engage with the very recent works by indigenous and black scholars who employ helpful decolonial frameworks.

2.3.1 Positioning Colonial-Era Literature

Considering all southern Africa's indigenous people historically employed indigenous knowledge systems based on oral traditions (besides rock art), the earliest writings regarding the San were penned by Europeans. These writings on the San and Khoe people were mainly in the form of journal entries and diary accounts. Once scholarly research of San communities began from the late 1800s, much of it was centred around the preeminent colonial imagination of the day.

Although the Western academy has often made claims about its genuine pursuit of "objective" research, scholars today have become increasingly aware of the inevitability of the individual's cultural background or worldview having a significant effect on their research (see for example Sikes 2004, Bahari 2010, Scotland 2012, Ormston *et al.* 2014, and Grix 2019). Such impacts include the individual's ontological assumptions (an individual's belief about the nature of social reality and

what is knowable about the world), epistemological assumptions (an individual's beliefs about the nature of knowledge), and assumptions about human nature and agency (an individual's assumptions about the way we interact with our environment and relate to it) (Holmes 2020, 1).

It is imperative that we view Western scholarship, especially early work, about San peoples within the context mentioned above. Doing so helps us to acquire an understanding of the dominant trends of scholarship throughout different eras, which enables us to problematise and question certain work as we are made aware of the underlying intentions of its authors. These intentions, which I interrogate here, are vitally important to uncover as they undoubtedly greatly determined the authors' approaches, as well as their research outcomes.

Whilst it is of course outside the scope of this discussion to review everything which has been written about the San, I will particularly focus on seminal works which reveal certain social imaginations of the day. Within my larger discussion, which emphasises the importance of the Kalahari Desert Festival, such a consideration and problematising of Western scholarship is vital as it shows how certain literature, stemming from a dehumanising colonial imagination of the world and its people, contributes towards reaffirming abhorrent beliefs about marginalised groups such as the San.

2.3.2 The Dehumanising Colonial Imagination of the San

The arrival of Europeans on the shores of southern Africa first on Wednesday 8 November 1497 by the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch in 1652, and the British in 1795, lead to a long, painful history of land theft, colonisation, oppression, and marginalisation for indigenous communities (Barnard 2007, 11–15). The mere notion of "discovering lands already inhabited" reveals the unsettling though evident truth that Europeans considered indigenous peoples, such as the San and Khoe, to be sub-human, or "not fully human" (Charles and Rah 2020, 20). This tendency, based on the colonial imagination of the period, is derogatively illustrated in various written works such as Robert Knox's *The Races of Men* (1850), which describes the San and Khoe as "troglodytes" (cave dwellers) and "savage *bosjemen*" (bushmen) (221), as well as Henry Lichtenstein's *Travels,* which described them as having "the true physiognomy of the small blue ape of Caffraria" (Lichtenstein 1812, in Lubbock 1874, 7).

Whilst dehumanising indigenous peoples is problematic in and of itself, it should be made clear that the primary intentions of this academic "race theory" was for Europeans to set themselves up as

"superior" to all other peoples – a superiority not simply observable through supposed advanced technology or "enlightened" institutions of government, but biologically (Cohen 1980, 91–92). In an approach like that of the early European comparative musicologists (I discuss this later), early European researchers focused largely on biological differences between peoples (and animals!), mainly focusing on physical characteristics (Barnard 2007, 19). For the San and Khoe (or "Khoisan", as per the colonial imagination) this meant that "short stature, 'peppercorn hair' and steatopygia (fat on the buttocks)" were denigrated as characteristics of "inferior" branches of the human race – with many Europeans thus studying peoples of other lands, as a means to proliferate the harmful and white supremacist notion that Europeans represented "the pinnacle of human development" (Barnard 2007, 19 and Sharpley-Whiting 1999, 23 in Gordon-Chipembere 2011, 6).

The infamous and heart-wrenching kidnapping of Sara Baartman–a despicable human rights abuse of note–goes some way to illustrating this. Baartman, known also as "Saartjie" (Little Sara), was a young Khoe woman who was taken from her home and exhibited in London and Paris as a "freak", from 1810, where she was humiliated and "showcased" next to animals (Barnard 2007, 19). After her untimely death in 1815, her body was dissected, made into plaster casts, and her brain and genitals were placed into jars which were put on display at Paris's *Musée de l'Homme* (Museum of Man) until as late as 1974 (ibid.). Only at the request of Nelson Mandela,[21] South Africa's first democratically-elected president, and the popularity of Diana Ferrus's poem *I've Come To Take You Home* (2021a, 1–2) she was eventually rematriated to her home, in 2002, where she was laid to rest on Women's Day in Hankey, near the Gamtoos River in the Eastern Cape Province (Barnard 2007, 19).

Sara Baartman's story, which has been the focus of various excellent studies (see Abrahams 2000, Qureshi 2004 and Gordon-Chipembere 2011 for example), is somewhat of a focal point for displaying the dehumanising imagination of white, male scholars. Whilst well known, she was sadly one of many such stories of indigenous people stripped of their homelands, throughout the world, to be displayed in Europe's cultural fairs and human zoos (Barnard 2007, 19). Sadiah Qureshi criticises early scholarship for "ahistoricising Baartman" by treating her exhibition "as though it was a unique occurrence", with the author stating that the reality is that Baartman was "just one of the many humans, animals and plants that were trafficked to Europe for display of their singular qualities"

[21] As Gordon-Chipembere points out, it took the French government eight years to fulfill Mandela's request (2011, 10).

(2004, 235). To white European male scholars in the 1800s, Baartman's "value" lay in her "perceived uniqueness as a rare live specimen of the exotic" (Qureshi 2004, 235).

Baartman's label as "The Hottentot Venus", which Gordon-Chipembere analyses as a "construction of masculinist, colonial discourse on (black) female sexuality" (2011, 10), points to the fact that European scholars considered her, as an indigenous southern African woman, to be physically different from "the Negro race" (Hilaire 1815 in Kirby 1954a, 320). Initially considered a "Hottentot" (Khoe person), after Leonhard Schultze introduced the term "Khoisan" into scholarship in 1928, Baartman came to be associated as a Khoe, San or "Khoisan" woman – with authors like Percival Kirby even postulating later that she was "a hybrid" of "Bushwoman (and) Hottentot" (Kirby 1954a, 321).

Sarah Baartman, as with many other San and Khoe peoples during the colonial era in literature and scholarship, suffered greatly due to white, male, colonial approaches to research on southern Africa's indigenous people. The obsession with racial theory emphasising physical characteristics was particularly prevalent amongst German anthropologists during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Authors such as Gustav Fritsch (1872, 396–410), Isaac Schapera (1930, 51–72), and Percival Kirby (1954a, 321) made detailed records of heights and measurements of San people and their body parts, commenting on their supposed "peculiarities" of genitalia, breasts, and buttocks, to situate them within a hierarchical classification of "the races of the world" (Barnard 2007, 19).

2.3.3 Problematising Bleek and Lloyd

The work of German linguist Wilhelm Bleek and his British sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd, is held in unusual high esteem, receiving somewhat of a "cult status" following among many scholars, even today (Barnard 2007, 25). Bleek and Lloyd carried out linguistic and anthropological studies on |Xam, and later !Kung, peoples, recording legends, myths, and stories in what would become the book *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911). The work was published after Bleek's death in 1875 and is celebrated as the only complete record of the now "extinct" |Xam San (Barnard 2007, 25). Their work, which includes seventy-three notebooks, watercolours and drawings, is housed in the Bleek and Lloyd Archive, across four South African institutions - the National Library of South Africa, Iziko South African Museum, the University of Cape Town and the University of South Africa (Centre for Curating the Archive Website, 2005).

Whilst Bleek and Lloyd's extensive work undoubtedly carries immense value, it is important that we

interrogate it – particularly to understand it within the context of the colonial imagination of San people, which I unpacked early in this chapter. Firstly, the context of their field research is very important to note, as their "informants", interviewed between 1870 and 1875, were prisoners at the Breakwater Prison in Cape Town, for whom they received permission to stay at their house in Mowbray (Mellet 2020, 36).[22] Whilst Bleek and Lloyd presume to have simply relayed the information given to them by numerous San people, the context of their positions as prisoners (in Cape Town and Mowbray) in an unjust system and all the trauma that comes with that must be considered from an ethical standpoint – and not "overlooked by those enamoured by their work" (Bank 2000, 166 and Mellet 2020, 36).

It is also imperative that we contend with and interrogate the fact that Bleek was a man of his time. As Andrew Bank points out, this meant that Bleek's intellectual contributions were categorically premised on the idea of "primitive forms" located within a hierarchical evolutionary framework (Bank 2000, 177). In idealising Bleek as an "intellectual forebear" for San research, as existing scholarship has done, many have almost completely ignored his racial theory, which is one of the most uncomfortable, though evident, aspects of his intellectual contributions (Bank 2000, 177). Indeed, Mellet goes as far as to say that Bleek was "well known as a pioneer of racist theory", and that he "can rightly be called the father of the system of race classification in South Africa" (2020, 36).

Bleek's intentions to "trace the links between Bushman language and the communication of apes" are evidenced in an excerpt of a letter,[23] sent in September 1866, in which Bleek requests the help of zoologist, Ernst Hubel, for information on " a book on the sounds made by apes: a description of the sounds and how they are produced" (Bank 2000, 169 – 170). Bleek's *On the Origin of Language as a First Chapter in a History of the Development of Humanity* (1869), which was highly praised by Charles Darwin, later applied European evolutionary theory to the ethnographic study of the languages of the indigenous peoples of southern Africa (Bank 2000, 169).

Apart from the underlying intentions of Bleek's studies of San people within his written work, less well-known was his involvement in taking anthropometric photographs, including nude studies of "Bushman" subjects (Wittenberg 2012, 676). This dehumanising practice involved taking

[22] They collected materials from a few /Xam "informants", namely, /A!kunta, //Kabbo, Dia!kwain, and /Han≠kass'o (Barnard 2007, 25).
[23] UCT, JL, Bleek Collection, BC151, C12.33.1No. 4, Auguste Bleek to Haeckel.

photographs, measurements and finally casts of indigenous San people, which were used for scientific study, later as "museum objects" to showcase their "otherness" trapped in timelessness, for a European audience (Cedras 2016, 32 and 43).[24]

2.4 Early Music Scholarship

2.4.1 Comparative Musicology and (Continued) Dehumanising Imaginations

A similar colonial imagination of categorical hierarchies existed in early European scholarship relating to San musical culture. It nonetheless took on a slightly different form, with scholars framing their studies mainly first through comparative musicology (Rice 2014, 27, 18). Comparative musicology is marked by a comparison of data–often by "armchair musicologists" who did not go into "the field" themselves–which was gleaned from early accounts of local musical practices written by voyagers, travellers, missionaries, and diplomats (Rice 2014, 17, 18). This work was aided by the 1877 invention of the phonograph, leading to comparative musicologists typically focusing their analyses on five principles which included the origins of music and musical evolution (Rice 2014, 17).[25] As with their early European counterparts in other fields, they subscribed to theories such as social Darwinism and culture-circle theory – colonial imaginations which assumed that various cultures around the world were "frozen in time" and that, through comparative analysis, one could discover the "different stages" of human social evolution (Rice 2014, 18–19).

Percival Kirby gives a good review of the earliest literature in his article, "A Study of Bushman Music" (1936a). The Scottish-born musicologist comments that "the only reference to Bushman (San) music that (he) discovered prior to the nineteenth century" was written by Simon van der Stel's secretary in 1685 (Kirby 1936a, 206). This reference was in relation to the former Governor of the Cape's meeting with a group of about twenty San men, women and children in Namaqualand, with van der Stel's journalist describing the "very queer" dancing, singing and "shrieking" of the group as resembling "nothing so much as a herd of yearling calves just turned out of the cowshed" (Kirby 1936a, 206).

Another similarly dehumanising description was made by Petrus Borcherds, a former civil

[24] These full-body casts are stored in the vaults of the Physical Anthropology Department of Iziko Museums in Cape Town. Museum authorities removed them from public display in 2001, following a public outcry about how the display dehumanised South Africa's first inhabitants (Cedras 2016, 32, 43).

[25] The other listed principles were "understanding the distribution of musical styles and artifacts around the world", musical style analysis and comparison, and the classification and measurement of musical phenomena such as "pitch, scales, and musical instruments" (Rice 2014, 17).

commissioner of the Cape, in his *An Autobiographical Memoir* (1861). Borcherds describes the San as a "barbarous tribe…stepped in between the orang-outang and the more perfect form of man", upon meeting a group of "the Bushman race" in 1801, along the !Garib River (1861, 110–115). He goes on to describe a performance by the group explaining that one of their instruments, a *!gora*[26] (musical bow with an attached quill), produced a sort of "humming noise" and was accompanied by "shrieking, wild dancing, and jumping" (Borcherds 1861, 114–115). Borcherds' use of words such as "shrieking" and "wild dancing" is indicative of the colonial imagination of San "savagery" and "barbarianism", thus implying their assumed sub-humanness (ibid.).

William John Burchell additionally describes a *!gora* performance in similarly problematic terms, in volume one of his book *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* (1822). The naturalist and scientist refers to meeting a group of San people near Klaarwater in the Northern Cape while traveling to Graaff-Reinet on 16 November 1811, with the author comparing the sound produced by the musician's mouth as "grunting sounds which would have highly pleased the pigs" (Burchell 1822, 458). Similarly, Kirby notes General Janssens as describing a performance near the Zeekoe River, by a group of San people, as "akin to speech" – with the Governor only realising it "was actually a song" after "incessant repetition" (Janssens in Kirby 1936a, 208).

Considering the contemptuous descriptive terms in these early writings on San music ("barbarians", "wild dancing", "shrieking" and "grunting") and comparison of performers to animals ("yearling calves", "orang-outang" and "pigs") it should be of no surprise that comparative musicologists viewed San music as being "simple" and representing the "primitive forms" of their social evolutionary music-theory (Rice 2014, 17). These highly problematic postulations imagined a "universal music theory" in which scales, rhythms, harmonies, modes, and even musical instruments, were imagined as developing from simple to complex, culminating in European art music – the "evolutionary peak" (Rice 2014, 17).

After the interval-comparison cents system was invented by Alexander John Ellis in the 1880s, this led to even further comparative approaches (Rice 2014, 18). Whilst outside the scope of this discussion to go into further detail here, the notion of a "universal music theory" centred European music – thus making very little intention to understand music of other cultures like the San on its

[26] The instrument is a mouth-resonated musical bow which is sounded by blowing on a piece of quill attached to the string. This gives it a "distinctive tone quality", somewhat like that of a free reed, as in the harmonica or the concertina (Rycroft 2001).

own terms (Rice 2014, 18). Notions of "incessant repetition" were thus disregarded as "primitive" music forms, instead of scholars realising that such music was based on a completely different concept of musical structure, namely cyclic forms, rather than it being a "primitive branch" of a Eurocentric "universal" music theory (Rice 2014, 18).

2.4.2 Problematising (and Appreciating) Kirby

As the 20th century arrived, authors such as Scottish-born musicologist Percival Robson Kirby (1934, 1936a and 1936b) and American ethnomusicologist Nicholas M. England (1967), wrote more ethnocentric research studies on various aspects on San musical practices. Kirby in particular has been viewed with particular appreciation for his extensive research on the music of southern Africa's indigenous people, between 1923–1933 (Wits Press online, 2020). Over this period, Kirby undertook nine "special expeditions" as well as many shorter excursions to study various musics and collect musical instruments,[27] which culminated in his seminal work, *The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa* (1934), which sought to document, and preserve southern African musical cultures, one of which was the musical practices of the San.

On the note of music preservation, Kirby also wrote the formerly mentioned "A Study of Bushman Music" (1936a) and "The Musical Practices of the /?Auni and ǂKhomani Bushmen" (1936b), after receiving two manuscript music books from Dorothea Bleek, which had belonged to her aunt Lucy Lloyd (1936a, 205). Featuring words and musical notation of several /Xam, /?Auni and ǂKhomani songs, Kirby comments on the importance of "(conserve[ing] the musical and poetical art" of what he describes as "a fast-vanishing race" (1936b, 429). Whilst I will not go into detail here, this notion of preservation is another aspect of the colonial imagination of indigenous people, in this case the San (I will unpack this in greater detail in my fourth chapter, where I contrast it to cultural sustainability).

The articles nonetheless give a good overview of San musical culture – with Kirby covering various things like musical instruments and playing techniques, which he describes in detail, as well as several aspects of music theory analysis, concluding, rather degradingly that "indigenous (San) songs are of a simple type though at first, they sound quite complex to the European ear" (1936b, 429). The

[27] Kirby's personal collection of instruments culminated in what is now known as The Kirby Collection of Musical Instruments, which is currently housed in a strictly access-controlled room on the ground-floor of University of Cape Town's music department, the South African College of Music.

latter article also features ten photographs of San performers with their instruments (1936b, 432–436).

Whilst Kirby, like Bleek and Lloyd before him, has been viewed with immense appreciation by scholars over the years, it is also vital that we situate him as a product of colonial-era scholarship, in that he continued to proliferate a certain imagination of San and Khoe people. Apart from the problematic notions of "preservation" (1936a, 205), as well as his demeaning assertion of San music as "simple" (1936b, 429), seemingly unbeknown to most scholars in musicology, apart from his extensive writings on music, Kirby also wrote four articles about the formerly mentioned Sara Baartman, between 1949 and 1954, which brought her story back into the public discourse of the day (1949, 1953, 1954a and 1954b). I mention them here, as they help us further understand the "Khoisan" colonial imagination, scholars like Kirby propagated about the San and Khoe in particular.

In the third of Kirby's writings about Baartman, published in 1954, in which he refers to her as "the Hottentot Venus", he comments how he managed to source "specially taken photographs" of castings of her body, as well as close ups of her skeleton and skull, which he seems proud to announce that he "reproduced in (his) paper" (1954a, 319). Kirby also notes that it is "of interest to record" that Baartman's brain and genitals were "preserved", before quoting a previously unpublished "description of 'Venus'" which was written by Frenchman Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire in 1815 (Kirby 1954a, 319).

The horrific descriptions, which Kirby makes no attempt to disagree with or rebuke, compare Baartman's "muzzle" to that of "the red orang-outang which inhabits larger islands of the Indian Ocean", whilst also noting that her "prodigious buttocks" are "proportional" to female maimon and mandril monkeys when they "begin to experience the disorder of menstruation" (1954a, 320). Kirby goes on to state how he personally "submitted the measurements" of Baartman's skull to a colleague who described them as "very good Bush measurements", with the Scottish musicologist going on to publish the first full table of Baartman's cranial and indices measurements (Wells in Kirby 1954a, 320 and Kirby 1954a, 320). Finally, contributing to the confusion of Baartman's heritage, Kirby asks "one final question"; whether Baartman was "a Bushwoman", "a Hottentot", or "a hybrid", with the

author concluding "on balance" that she was "a Bushwoman who possessed a certain proportion of alien blood" (1954a, 321).[28]

2.4.3 The Importance of Positionality

In assessing the impact of literature by European colonial scholars–in the fields of music and other disciplines–there are a few things to mention. Firstly, to state the obvious, their research is immensely valuable, and forms a part of knowledge about San peoples, culture and music. In the same light, it is also important that we interrogate this body of work, particularly in terms of its representation of San people and history. As much as we can find value in the work of authors like Bleek and Kirby, we must acknowledge that their work has also been extremely harmful and dehumanising and that it contributed significantly to the marginalisation of the San. Unfortunately, much of this was a result of researchers' biases and positionality with almost all of the research mentioned being written from the epistemically privileged perspective of white European men.

This white male "gaze" is apparent in numerous discussions. One does not need to "read it" into the text, it is there – clear and obvious. My critical engagement and interrogation of this work helps us gain clarity regarding the colonial imagination of San people. Considering the harmful, untrue and inaccurate nature of this imagination, it is important we decentre such work, particularly in our considerations that such scholars are "the authorities" in the field. As part of shifting our perceptions of who are the "experts" in the field, it is important that we foreground the recent and emerging work pertaining to San culture and music, particularly that which has been written by indigenous southern African women.

2.5 Emerging Decolonised Research and Shifting Imaginations

2.5.1 Centring San 'Herstory'

If the term positionality describes an individual's worldview and the position they adopt about a research task and its socio-political context, what is the positionality of indigenous South African women, and how does it determine their research? (Foote and Bartell 2011, Savin-Baden and Major 2013, and Rowe 2014). Within South African scholarship, the perspective and expertise of indigenous female scholars have been marginalised and alienated. Narratives written through white male lenses have historically been favoured, with a lack of respect given to the intergenerational

[28] Kirby should be interrogated on his problematic notions of "music preservation" which contributed towards false assertions that San and Khoe peoples were virtually extinct. I will discuss this further in my fourth chapter, where I argue that "cultural preservation" should be replaced with the decolonised framework of "cultural sustainability.

epistemologies which many indigenous female scholars embody. I will thus foreground some recent literary works by indigenous female scholars, who employ decolonial frameworks in their research, by centring San "herstory"–a transdisciplinary approach which refers to the unity of knowledge encompassing knowledge of *the past, present, and future*–not just the history, or "the past", as recorded via white male lenses.

Herstory texts reimagine and defy the white male preoccupation of history as the past. They instead recognise that, for historically dehumanised people, the "past remains present and silenced", whilst herstory helps us focus on our "collective humanity across time" (Henkeman 2021, 188, 189). A herstoriographical approach, uniquely grounded in and informed by the positionalities of indigenous and black female scholars, involves a retelling of stories and narratives about the San, and reframing these in a decolonial manner. For young BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Persons Colour)[29] scholars, like myself, whose positionality is inherently different to that of white European men, herstory helps frame the necessary work of re-membering, reimagining, and herstoricising.

As I did with the colonial-era scholarship, I will first foreground multidisciplinary work, before discussing what has recently been written in the fields of music and dance as well as festivals. The first work I would like to centre, forming part of this new era of San and Khoe scholarship is *Ausi Told Me: Why Cape Herstoriographies Matter* written by June Bam (2021). The author, who was the head of University of Cape Town's recently renamed San and Khoi Centre, is an indigenous scholar of ǂKhomani San descent (through her matrilineal lineage), and *Ausi Told Me* was written as a result of years of embodied knowledge, in-depth research, and "re-membering"[30].

In a truly ground-breaking work for San and Khoe studies, Bam purposefully subverts the dominant white, Western, male imagination of South Africa's indigenous communities, by addressing the systematic attempts at erasure of indigenous knowledge during the colonial and apartheid eras (2021). By employing the symbol of *Ausi*[31] (plural *Ausidi*), Bam details the wisdom which *still* resides within the "female, intergenerational knowledge-keepers" of San and Khoe descent (2021, xi). By reimagining and rethinking precolonial history, she challenges the various scholarly

[29] This term is primarily applied in multi-cultural and multi-racial movements working to "dismantle the systems of oppression which create racial hierarchies" (Selvarajah *et al.* 2020, 1).
[30] An established concept in theorising around memory, loss, and restoration (see White 1995).
[31] The term refers to first-born daughters and female knowledge-keepers (Bam 2021, xi). *Ausi* is a term of respect reserved for the matriarch and the first-born daughter who, in turn, ensured that there was respect for elders in the family. The custom of showing great respect for elders and old people in general is still found among indigenous-descendant people (Bam 2021, 3).

assumptions about the "origins and influence" of the San and Khoe in the cultures and languages of southern Africa.

The book addresses the gaps in knowledge created by the erasing processes of the liberal, Afrikaner nationalist, and contemporary neo-colonial historiographies, with the author "working with the knowledge of connected communities in contemporary society" (Bam 2021, 20). This primary research method is contrary to the usual "delinked" research methods which depend on the disciplinary canons of history and archaeology, and on colonial records (Bam 2021, 20). Bam's research approach is evidenced particularly in part two of her book, "Intergenerational Cape Khoe and San knowledge narratives", where she foregrounds the stories of current and former residents of the Cape Flats, who share their vast knowledge of indigenous plants, flowers, and animals, as well as approaches to midwifery and cosmology (Bam 2021, 57 – 138).

Ausi Told Me (2021) serves as a reminder that popular history is not unassailable. It should be regularly questioned, interrogated and, where necessary, challenged, as I have done in my earlier literature review, where I interrogated the colonial imagination of San people, and its underlying intentions. The book makes a powerful case for the importance of a decolonised approach when exploring southern Africa's neglected past, in which the stories, dreams, visions and rituals passed down through generations are recognised once more as critical sources of scholarly knowledge and physical and emotional wellbeing. By centring indigenous herstoriography, Bam's work offers academia and the general public an alternative and reimagined approach, which troubles the Eurocentric "official" historical accounts of the birth of South Africa occurring in 1652 (with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck). Bam also challenges and rebukes–unlike scholars like Kirby before her–all of the sinister intentions and harmful assumptions that were markers of colonial and apartheid-era scholarship, instead offering a reimagined past, present and future.

The prolific Bam also recently co-edited *Rethinking Africa: Indigenous Women Re-Interpret Southern Africa's Pasts* (2021) with fellow indigenous author Bernedette Muthien. The excellent book, featuring contributions from twelve different women, critically opens new pathways for decolonial scholarship and the reclamation of indigenous self-definition by women scholars. The various authors address the loss and erasure that "mainstream" knowledge production has caused, which is by its nature limited and deficient, often being exclusively focused on the "official" colonial archive. In this process important voices and interpretations of pasts, and their relation to the present and future of the people themselves and their descendants, are left out. In their introductory chapter,

co-editors Muthien and Bam outline and emphasise the importance of providing new "herstoriographical" lenses, philosophies, epistemologies, methodologies, and interpretations of the past, which are reflected in all the chapters (2021, 6–7).

Rethinking Africa (2021) is a compilation of essays and poems which examine and debate a range of topics. Of significance to my study, in "Ancestral Letter to Unborn Descendants" (183–200) Sarah Henkeman discusses the various manners in which dehumanisation in southern Africa has and continues to take place (2021). She frames the oppression and erasure (of culture) of indigenous peoples during the colonial and apartheid eras as one example of symbolic violence (2021, 191). The consequence of this is seen in the "hierarchy of racial, economic, social forms" and other forms of oppression, based on the dispossession of land, its natural resources, and loss of identity (Henkeman 2021, 191). Henkeman calls for the descendants of marginalised, enslaved and oppressed people to escape the "interlinked" and pre-existing "conceptual traps" into which we are born (2021, 183). Author, playwright, and journalist Sylvia Vollenhoven, in "Writing Ourselves Back into History: The Liberating Narrative of Who We Are" (17–50) makes a strong case for embracing a "new kind of narrative", a reimagination, to allow the "unhindered flow of inspiration" between the "realms of the seen and unseen self" (2021, 19).

The book also includes poems which centre San and Khoe stories, such as "Camissa" (123–126) by Khadija Tracey Carmelita Heeger, "One and Many" (213–214) and "Green Kalahari" (85–86) by Bernedette Muthien (2021). Diana Ferrus's famous "I've Come to Take You Home" (2021a, 1–2), which she performed at the first ever Kalahari Desert Festival in 2013, also features, as well as her poem "The Bones" (2021b, 121–122) – with all the poems exploring themes of identity, loss, restoration, rematriation (in the case of Sarah Baartman), disability and the natural world. *Rethinking Africa*, as its name suggests, goes beyond conventional research methods and theorising, with the authors providing a long overdue herstory, as written by indigenous women. The authors offer theoretical knowledge worthy of interpretation as part of the inclusive ecology of knowledge. Therefore, by rethinking Africa from an indigenous feminist perspective, which critically engages with the process of producing knowledge-deep pasts, the subsequent offering is a fuller, complex, and diverse telling of history.

Another recent book I wish to briefly foreground is *Representation and Black Womanhood: The Legacy of Sarah Baartman* (2011), edited by Natasha Gordon-Chipembere. Although Gordon-Chipembere is not South African, being of Afro-Costa Rican heritage, she spent several years

studying and teaching in South Africa, and forms part of an African diasporic community of feminist scholars. The book, featuring essay contributions by eleven different BIPOC women, frames Baartman's story as "that of black women across land and time" (2011, 14). Gordon-Chipembere's intentions in gathering various female contributors is to enable black women to "apply the knowledge" of Sara Baartman's story as 'active agents' in how they participate in the exhibition and representation of their bodies" in the twenty-first century (14).

Whilst I cannot go into much detail regarding the specific discussions, the ultimate intention of the book is to reframe and retell Baartman's story in a decolonised way. Indeed, the first half of the book, titled "The Archive: Disrupting the Colonial Narrative" (17–97), comprises five essays, which challenge the colonial imagination of Sara Baartman as "The Venus Hottentot" desiring to frame her story in a contextual way. The first chapter (17–30), written by Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu argues that Baartman's story was "too shaped by the archive, and by extension (Euro) history" (Ndlovu 2011, 19). As with Bam, Muthien, Henkeman and Vollenhoven (all 2021), Ndlovu and Gordon-Chipembere (both 2011) similarly frame San and Khoe history–and representations–in a decolonised way, disrupting the colonial narrative and centring herstoriographical interpretations of the past, present and future.

2.5.2 Recent Decolonial Studies on San Music and Dance

Scholars in the fields of music and dance have similarly contributed to new, emerging imaginations of San studies. As tangible and observable aspects of culture, music and dance are important focal points to consider personal and communal engagements with identity and heritage. Before unpacking how these interplay in a celebratory way at the Kalahari Desert Festival, I will briefly foreground some recent scholarship on San music and dance, which, by centring contextual narratives, helps San peoples affirm their own identities *on their own terms*. Of course, this scholarship should be contrasted with the valuable, though nevertheless marginalising contributions from early European scholars.

The most recent relevant published work on music within San communities was written by University of Johannesburg-based scholars Itunu Ayodeji Bodunrin and Shanade Barnabas. Bodunrin, having conducted ethnographic research between 2013–2018, wrote three papers exploring the relationship between hip-hop and storytelling amongst the Khwe and !Xun youth in Platfontein, just outside Kimberley in South Africa's Northern Cape. The papers, published between 2016 and 2021 (the latter which was co-written with Barnabas), form part of research funded by the

Rethinking Indigeneity project.[32]

In his research Bodunrin discusses how certain young San artists are using their indigenous languages to rap about their history, culture, heritage and present experiences – digitising their work via DIY bedroom studios (Bodunrin 2019, 175). These young artists have negotiated a balance between the dominant western popular culture which surrounds them and their own indigenous culture, by using their languages in a "hip hop driven modernity" (Bodunrin 2019, 175). Through the vehicle of music, specifically contemporary hip-hop, Bodunrin discusses how these performers challenge the "colonising narrative" that San people are "premodern" and that they cannot engage in, and produce, modern cultural texts or products (Bodunrin 2019, 183). Through rap, the oral component of hip-hop musical culture, the Platfontein youth creatively incorporate and transform the San practice of storytelling, using modern digital recording technologies (Bodunrin 2019, 175). Bodunrin's research is particularly relevant to my research on the Kalahari Desert Festival as, at the 2019 festival, a few hip-hop/rap individuals and groups he mentioned performed during the *Kalahari's Got Talent* competition (which I was asked to adjudicate, on short notice).

San hip-hop is particularly interesting as it is contrary to what the general perceptions of San music entails: singing, clapping, and dancing in groups, or playing the musical bow individually or in small groups. As with previous authors not in the field of music, Bodunrin's theoretical assertions–which I unpack further in my fourth chapter–are vital in their reimaginative power, resisting colonial imaginations of what it means to be indigenous (Bodunrin 2019, 183). He shows how San artists have re-claimed, re-named, and re-written their indigeneity and artistry *on their own terms* (Bodunrin 2019, 183). This being a celebration of identity, which not only "contest(s) and rethink(s) the question of coloniality", but also enables San peoples to protect their endangered language and culture by "present(ing) their own narratives and version of reality" (Bodunrin 2019, 187).

Another recent work I wish to highlight is South African scholar Engela Britz's recent master's dissertation, *Songs in the Dust: Riel Music in the Northern and Western Cape Provinces, South Africa* (2019). Britz discusses how *riel* – a southern African dance form, characterised by distinctive intricate footwork, animal mimicry, and courtship displays – emerged from San and Khoe dances (2019, 1). The dance style is practiced by Afrikaans-speaking, working class, "coloured" or *bruin* people in the Northern and Western Cape Provinces of South Africa (ibid.). As Britz relays, oral

[32] Led by Keyan G. Tomaselli from the University of Johannesburg.

history explains that the dance style is directly linked to San and Khoe dances performed after a successful hunt or harvest, thus making it one of the oldest dance forms in southern Africa (Britz 2019, 1). It features the aesthetic remnants of all-night dances which were performed in circular formations around a fire by San and Khoe peoples – dance styles similar to that which I observed at the Kalahari Desert Festival (Britz 2019, 20).

Britz's work focuses on the annual ATKV *Rieldans* competition established in 2006, which is directly linked to a recent *riel* revival. She explores how the competition has become a powerful space for the "performance of indigeneity and negotiation of Khoe-San identity" and how it aims to bring recognition to the still marginal position of "coloured" and "Khoe-San" communities in South Africa (Britz 2019, 74 - 75). One can draw some parallels between the AKTV *Rieldans* competition and The Kalahari Desert Festival as the latter has similarly become a site of celebration of identity and heritage within indigenous descendent communities, as I unpack in my subsequent discussion.

Indigenous Botswanan scholar Connie Rapoo's "Performing Cultural Memory and the Symbolic: The Musical Theatre Traditions of the Basarwa in the Ghanzi District, Botswana" (2013) focuses on the Kuru Dance Festival in Botswana, which is arguably, of all festivals in Southern Africa, the most like the Kalahari Desert Festival. They are comparable in various ways. Firstly, in their intention, with Kuru Dance Festival organisers publicly remarking that the festival's aim is to "uplift the interest of San people" and to (help them) "promote, preserve and use their culture for their identity and recognition" (Kuru Dance Festival, Facebook). The festival also takes place within the broader Kalahari region, similarly, centring indigenous cultural expression – in this case the Basarwa, the group of San living in the region of Botswana where the festival is usually held (Rapoo 2013, 190). Like its counterpart further south, the Kuru Dance Festival is run by a non-governmental organisation, the Kuru Development Trust. As with SASI amongst the ǂKhomani, in addition to hosting the annual festival, the Trust also provides consultations for San communities throughout the country and develops income-generating projects to empower local communities (Rapoo 2013, 190).

Rapoo discusses how the two-day festival solidifies the "maintenance of social unity and solidarity" amongst the San of Botswana, with the author discussing how performance practices occur through a symbolic cultural revitalisation aesthetic (2013, 201). She suggests that the festival should not only be seen as an entertainment site but rather, and most importantly, as zones for the "creation of value" within the marginalised indigenous community (2013, 201). Her theoretical approach is extremely well thought out and, as with Bodunrin's emerging work, I will unpack more of her conceptual ideas

in my fourth chapter as these can similarly be applied and observed at the Kalahari Desert Festival, which promotes identity formation, cultural heritage celebration and social sustainability.

2.6 Concluding Thoughts

Considering the greater context of my intentions in this chapter as a review of literature on San culture and music, my focus has been to foreground the imaginative frameworks through which the San have been viewed over different eras. This has transformed from marginalising, dehumanising colonial imagination of San people–as an animalistic, primitive, "near extinct" group within a social evolutionary framework–to a reimagined herstoriographical framework, which centres indigenous stories and narratives.

Far from the marginalising and dehumanising "race theory" discourse of scholars such as Lichtenstein (1814), Knox (1850), Schulz (1928) and even the often-praised Bleek and Lloyd (1911) and Kirby (1934, 1954a), recent scholars–particularly indigenous and black women–have added a completely new imaginative shift to San culture. As with Bam (2021), Muthien (2021), Henkeman (2021), Vollenhoven (2021), Gordon-Chipembere (2011), and Ndlovu (2011)[33] and, authors in the field of music, such as Rapoo (2013), Britz (2019) and Bodunrin (2016, 2018, 2019 and 2021), have meaningfully contributed to the broader field in their theoretical approaches and analyses of San music culture. This research, encompassing different forms of decoloniality, contributes towards centring the dignity and flexibility of indigeneity. By considering a history of marginalising scholarship, these valuable contributions help affirm identity amongst San people on their own terms. Although these respective authors have differed in their theoretical approaches, the most significant impact of their work has been a contribution to an imaginative shift of San people and culture.

My intention in exploring and reviewing these works, in my larger discussion of the Kalahari Desert Festival, is that I believe the festival, as a celebration of San heritage, should be viewed within this framework. For a historically marginalised people group, in a historically marginalised area, the festival emerged and exists as an innovative, catalytic space which reimagines, uplifts, reclaims and recentres indigenous narratives and artistic expression in various ways.

[33] These scholars are from diverse fields, namely, African Studies, Gender Studies, African Literary Studies, and Social Science.

Chapter 3:
The Kalahari Desert Festival as a Comprehensive Site for Cultural Sustainability

3.1 Introduction

Having reviewed relevant literature regarding emerging, decolonised reimaginations of the San, I continue my discussion by situating the Kalahari Desert Festival as a site of study within this context. Considering its recent establishment in 2013, I argue that it has become an important locus for the reimagining of San heritage and identity, for those in the Kalahari engaged with indigeneity in the 21st century. As I discuss, the festival can be seen as an innovative, comprehensive space in how it centres the historically marginalised San, giving credence to the greater Kalahari region which has historically been on the periphery of South Africa's geographic and political imaginations.

Unlike the music scholars which I foregrounded in my previous chapter – namely Britz (2019) and Bodunrin (2019) – I was unable to conduct extended community-based ethnographic fieldwork, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and postponement of the 2020 and 2021 festivals. Nonetheless like Rapoo (2013), who similarly just attended one Kuru Dance Festival, I attended the 2019 festival and will share my experiences thereof here and in the subsequent chapter. In some serendipitous way, these *in situ* limitations were rather helpful, and shaped my research in a positive way.

If I had done a classic ethnographic study, my focus would likely have been acutely "zoomed-in" on what happens *at* the festival – a music-anthropological study of sorts, presenting and analysing things based on my *in-situ* observations. Whilst I do lean into that kind of descriptive and theoretical analysis in my fourth chapter, this chapter is more of a "zoomed-out", "behind-the-scenes" look at all that surrounds the festival. In researching the organisational and logistical aspects of KDF– knowledge which I gained via access to "insider" documents such as project proposals, personal emails, and interviews with festival organisers–I was made aware of the fact that the festival, as per the stated intentions of its organisers, was set up as an empowering and catalytic for local San communities, which it does in several ways.

In this chapter, I further contextualise the festival, by offering descriptions of its key elements during its run between 2013–2019. I should point out that the festival has never been studied or thoroughly documented before. This chapter, therefore, also serves as a documentation of the festival; something

which may prove to be a valuable source for future researchers, or people desiring to know more about the festival and its impact. Although I did not state it in my prior literature review chapter, my examination of the festival fills an obvious gap in broader scholarship on the San. More importantly than this for me, though, is to contribute towards emerging indigenous-centred decolonial work, to thus promote further imaginative shifts and to explore the possibilities of cultural reclamation and celebration within San communities (see Rapoo 2013, Bodunrin 2019, Bam 2021, Vollenhoven 2021).

3.2 SASI and The Four Cousins

To begin my behind-the-scenes examination of the festival, I will discuss the organisational structures which brought it into existence. In my first chapter I explained briefly how the South African San Institute (SASI) was founded in 1996 as a necessary political structure to aid ǂKhomani land claims. Since its inception, SASI has been dedicated to serving the ǂKhomani, Khwe, and !Xun San communities of Southern Africa through legal, advocacy, socio-anthropological, and related, services (Schroeder *et al.* 2019, 56). Their focus on "capacity building and community development" is evidenced in a variety of projects conducted over the years, including the community production of ceramics, various textiles, art prints, jewellery and hunting tools which are sold near Kimberley in the shop of the Wildebeest Kuil Rock Art Centre (SASI website 2019).

SASI's support was especially extended to the !Xun and Khwe communities who were relocated to South Africa from Namibia after the end of the "bush wars" in 1990, where they settled in a temporary army camp near Kimberley, where SASI is based (Schroeder *et al.* 2019, 77). The institute helped address the communities' most-pressing needs which were predominantly related to housing and other social problems, arising from the two San communities' exceedingly disrupted and war-torn history – with many San having been "caught in the crossfire" between the apartheid government of South Africa and guerrilla fighters in Namibia and Angola (Schroeder *et al.* 2019, 77).

SASI has also worked with specialists to co-design systems with San communities (Schroeder *et al.* 2019, 77). Examples include the TRUST[34] Project, PARTY[35] Project, and Indigenous Knowledge

[34] TRUST (Equitable Research Partnerships), co-ordinated by Prof. Doris Schroeder, is a project, which seeks to catalyse a global collaborative effort to improve adherence to high ethical standards around the world (TRUST website). See more here: http://trust-project.eu/the-project/about/.
[35] PARTY (Participatory Development with the Youth) is a project based at the University of Lapland, in Finland. It partners with South African and Namibian institutions to "endorse human development and assist in reducing youth

Systems Documentation Centre (ibid.). The TRUST Project, funded by the European Union, was a global initiative which intended to "reduce exploitation in North-South research collaborations" (Schroeder *et al.* 2019, 80). It operated between 2015 and 2018 contributed to the creation of the San Code of Research Ethics developed by the South African San Council (SASC) and SASI, in consultation with local community members and leaders (Schroeder *et al.* 2019, 14).

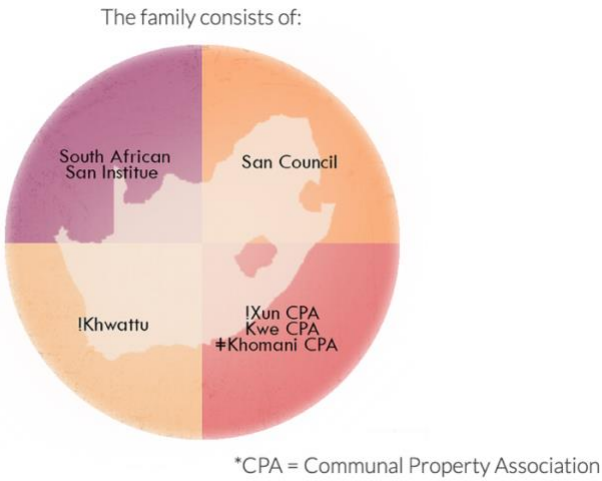
SASI forms part of a larger Southern San organisational structure affectionately called the "Four Cousins"[36] (the name which is also a well-known South Africa wine). Hennie Swart, the former director of SASI, relayed to me that each "cousin" operates independently, having different responsibilities, yet as one family (2019). These cousins are the South African San Institute, the South African San Council (SASC), *!Khwa ttu* San Heritage Centre (where I conducted my short fieldwork trip), and the respective !Xun, Khwe, and ǂKhomani Communal Property Associations (CPAs). In an interview on 13 October 2019, Swart summarised the roles of each cousin as such:

> In establishing) SASI as an independent NGO…we needed a political structure as well. A political reputation that could engage with (South) African politics. Therefore, the San Council was set up…During this time *!Khwa ttu* was purchased…so today we are very proud of !*Khwa ttu* because it has been such a success story and also a good thing to show the world. (Furthermore) the whole government thing came through, (although) communal property associations were complicated because you couldn't get land if you didn't do it through a community. The (reclaimed) land never went to individuals. So, therefore we had to set up the ǂKhomani Communal Property Association, with representatives.

Of the four cousins, three played a significant role in establishing and growing the Kalahari Desert Festival. SASI, and later the SASC and the ǂKhomani CPA were involved with the planning, organising and support of the festival during its seven-year run between 2013–2019 (H. Swart 2019).

unemployment by increasing the involvement and inclusion of young people in service development… by using participatory and explorative service design tools (PARTY website). See more regarding their work with San youth here: https://www.ulapland.fi/EN/Webpages/PARTY/Sites-with-San-Youth.

[36] During our interview session on 13 October 2019, Hennie Swart explained that the "Four Cousins" had a tradition of drinking Four Cousins wine during their meetings hence the term Four Cousins came to collectively include the organisational entities.



Source: South African San Institute website, accessed in October 2019.

3.3 Logistics

3.3.1 The Symbolic Significance of a Festival in the Desert

On the weekend of the 22–23 March 2013 in South Africa's Human Rights month, SASI, along with its partners, staged the first ever Kalahari Desert Festival. The event was hosted by the ǂKhomani San on the //Uruke Bush Camp (2013), followed by the Erin Game Farm[37] (2014–2018) and Kopano Farm (2019) (Kruger 2021). //Uruke Bush Camp forms part of the ǂKhomani-owned land within and adjacent to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park whilst Erin Game Ranch, where most festivals took place, was one of six farms awarded to the ǂKhomani San, in 1999, as compensation for land lost during colonisation.

During my interviews with festival organisers, upon asking a question regarding location and logistics, I was answered with some of the following: "It was a logistical nightmare" (Kruger 2021), "putting up a festival in the desert is kind of ridiculous logistic-wise" (H. Swart 2019), and "logistically it was quite difficult" (A. Swart 2021). These assertions were, however, quickly followed by interesting stories of cars being stuck in the dunes, drinking litres of water but not needing to use the ablution facilities (due to the extreme heat), and accounts of spotting scorpions and other wild desert animals at night (H. Swart 2019, A. Swart 2021, Kruger 2021).

Nonetheless, staging a multi-day festival in the desert is no small feat, as I soon discovered while

[37] Today, Erin is a game-fenced farm of approximately 6,000 hectares managed for the benefit of the San community. Erin was previously managed as a commercial game ranch prior to handover, and now the community's objective is to run Erin as a prestigious game ranch, offering tourists unique experiences featuring San trackers, guides, and other cultural experts, in a typical rustic Kalahari landscape.

investigating this topic for research. There are multiple factors to consider such as, but not limited to, general safety, security, entertainment, transport, environmental impact, electricity, and sanitation. This excerpt from the 2018 Department of Arts and Culture Report illustrates a small fraction of the magnitude of the organisational feat required for a successful staging of the Kalahari Desert Festival:

> Terrain and infrastructures required for a festival in the Kalahari Desert is one of the biggest challenges as the terrain is in the desert, in an area designated for conservation. [Therefore] the impact of the festival on the terrain has to be minimised. Maintenance of the current facilities and the upgrades to the existing water system had to be done to be able to provide clean running water to the festival goers. Ablution facilities were rented for the duration of the festival, 20 Mobile toilets and a VIP toilet was hired from a regional supplier. Placement of the portable bathrooms were strategically placed to be able to be accessible to all festival goers in need. A 150KVA generator was hired to light up the terrain at night and supply enough power to the respective entertainment areas and tents. An additional generator was hired for the stalls that required electricity (Swart 2018, 9).

Relating to the festival's location in the desert, known for its sweltering heat, organisers also had to strongly consider the health and safety of all who attended the festival, including performers and festivalgoers (H. Swart 2019). They thus employed the services of the provincial clinic and on site ER24 Paramedics. Luckily, no serious medical cases were reported to festival management at any of the six festivals. From a security standpoint, the local South African Police Service (SAPS) and additional security teams assisted in ensuring that all attendees were safe (ibid.). These law enforcement officers also helped enforce the festival's no-alcohol rule, whilst assisting with parking, cordoning off the necessary areas, and ensuring the general smooth running of the festival (ibid.).

Considering the logistical nightmare, did festival organisers really need to hold it in the desert? Surely this location exacerbated problems that were not worth the headache? With the festival's record attendance being nine thousand in 2018, surely organisers would have found it much easier to host it in the town, or even a few hours down south, in the city of Kimberley? The answer to these questions is quite simple. The ultimate purpose of the festival, established by San organisations, was to uplift the local ǂKhomani community – hence the festival was held on their lands. The festival, as a reimagined celebration of heritage and identity, always had to be held on ǂKhomani lands, on Kalahari sands.

As absurd as a desert festival[38] may seem, the geographic centring of a periphery, via the temporary movement of thousands of peoples and modern technological structures into the desert, is what makes it so special and significant. The annual festival thus, through centring and uplifting communities who quite literally have been forced to live on the periphery of South Africa, acts as symbolic oasis in the desert – a thriving, reimaginative site for community members and visitors.

3.4 Empowering San Communities

3.4.1 Organisational Portfolios, Employment and Funding

From an organisational standpoint, the festival tried to empower members of local communities in various ways. This is affirmed by current SASI director Almé Swart's assertion that the festival organisers did not want to "just bring a festival *to* the Kalahari", but that they wanted to "create a festival *from* the Kalahari" (2021). Whilst the organisational team was made up of experts from both within and outside of San communities, there was significant community collaboration, and ownership of the festival, with SASI's employees and short-term contract employees collaborating with members of the host San communities, and those representing other groups in the wider Kalahari region (H. Swart 2018, 6).

To ensure the effective planning and execution of the festival, key leaders are given festival portfolios, comprising the "workforce" of the festival (ibid.). These portfolios include Support Services and Public Management, Tourism and Public Relations, Stalls and Transportation, Academic and Schools, and Terrain Services (ibid.). The centring and empowering of San people is evidenced in the employment demographics of portfolio and other workers, with the majority of those employed coming from ǂKhomani, Khwe, and !Xun San communities (ibid.). In 2018, the largest festival to date, as per the report submitted to the Department of Arts and Culture, the breakdown of the ethnicities of those employed as part of the organisational team was as follows: 56 San, 5 white, 2 coloured, and 1 black person (Swart 2018, 41–46).

In numerous organisational documents and government reports, I observed that emphasis is placed on capacity building for execution through the portfolio managers and area representatives. In the 2015 funding report, for example, Swart notes that the festival organisers' intentions were for the

[38] *AfrikaBurn* is another example of a desert-based festival in the Tankwa Karoo area of South Africa, however it has international origins (*Burning Man*) and does not place emphasis on indigenous southern African expression. However, it is similar in that the festival is focused on art, music, dance, and a broader sense of being connected to community (https://www.afrikaburn.com/about).

local San community, as hosts, to be empowered to take full charge and control of the festival in the future (2015, 5–6). Although this had not yet happened before the postponement of the festival in 2019, SASI and the organisational team were actively working towards a sustainable practice of festival planning, where the ǂKhomani could be fully equipped, through the acquisition of logistical skills and knowledge, to run the festival themselves (ibid.).

3.4.2 Funding and Economic Opportunities

A recurring challenge which was raised by several organisers whom I interviewed was the issue of timeous funding tranche payments.[39] In my interview with Hennie Swart, shortly after the successful staging of the 2019 festival, he told me how "funding has forever been a problem" with the funding "always coming before or on the day of the festival" (H. Swart 2019). This was echoed by the operations manager, Kevin Kruger who relayed a story about the first festival, saying "the first year was a rough year, we were planning this festival; we were doing everything based on promises. So, I owe yous and promises were our thing... If I'm not wrong, [the funding came in] four days before the festival" (2021). This created a host of challenges because vendors and suppliers typically require partial payment prior to delivering the service in order to cover their costs. However, as the festival progressed through the years and more working relationships with suppliers were built, these funding issues were not too much of a hindrance, although no less stressful for organisers (Swart 2019).

The conversation around funding and finances is an important one when one considers the context of the ǂKhomani and Kalahari communities. Considering the historical marginalisation of the group and region, many communities experience poverty, discrimination and battle for economic survival (Francis *et. al* 2016, 380). Communities also experience illiteracy and lack of access to healthcare (ibid.). The aspect of economic benefit and job-creation for local communities is something festival organisers hold as prominent, evidenced in the official funding reports (Swart 2018, 4).

Together with the employment of San people as key organisational leaders, KDF also seeks to provide economic opportunities for other community members to earn much-needed income – firstly, ǂKhomani San, and secondly, people from the greater Kalahari region, including nearby towns (H. Swart 2018, 4 and Kruger 2021). The goal is to consistently create short and medium-term

[39] The festival was primarily funded by the South African Department of Arts and Culture, with additional support from the Provincial Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, the Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism, and the Northern Cape Tourism Authority (Swart 2015, 23). In June 2019 the national Department of Arts and Culture was merged with Sport and Recreation South Africa to form a new department – Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (The Presidency, press release 14 June 2019).

income-generating opportunities from small, medium and micro enterprise (SMME) activities, such as homestay accommodation, stalls, terrain preparation, transport services and other necessary services (Swart 2018, 4 and Kruger 2021).

Homestay accommodation opportunities were explored during the fourth festival in 2016. This consisted of locals hosting festival visitors in their homes for the duration of the festival. The intention of doing so was to create a financially beneficial opportunity for hosts, and an opportunity for guests to have an intimate experience in a Kalahari homestay (Swart 2019). The accommodations were advertised on the KDF website though, according to Swart, they were not as successful as the organisers had hoped (ibid.). This was due to hosts financially overextending themselves to ensure an enjoyable experience for their guests, but unfortunately not enough people booked accommodation, resulting in a financial loss for the hosts (ibid.). However, these opportunities were still a means of growth in communities which may have sparked entrepreneurial skills in the future beyond the confines of the festival.

3.4.3 Food Stalls

One of the most popular and successful features of the festival are the food stalls run by local community members. These feature a selection of the best food the Kalahari has to offer, including *braaied* (flame grilled) venison, *roosterbrood* (grilled bread), *potjiekos*[40], and a variety of refreshing, non-alcoholic drinks. Stall owners are required to apply for their station, and to follow strict food and health safety guidelines for effective operation (Swart 2018, 31). Once their applications are accepted, the KDF organising team provides a structured training programme for these entrepreneurs (Swart 2018, 31).

The training curriculum includes municipal legislation and registration procedures, costing and basic accounting skills, health regulations (including preparation, presentation, and related aspects), and information regarding refrigeration and heating in accordance with municipality regulations (Swart 2018, 31). Importantly, the festival organisers seek to use the festival to not only provide locals an opportunity to earn money, but also as a means of enrichment of knowledge and skills needed to run a small business, within municipality regulations and guidelines. Apart from contributing to economic growth for locals, the food stalls also allow festival revellers to enjoy local foods, leading

[40] A well-known South African meat and vegetable dish which is slowly cooked in a three-legged cast iron pot over hot coals.

to a further appreciation of San and Kalahari food and culture.[41]

Social cohesion of the wider region is one of the most important aspects of festival organisation (H. Swart 2019). In pursuit of the "integration and inclusion in communities", economic opportunities such as food stalls include people from "other communities…who are not (classified) as San" (ibid.). This included people from so-called "coloured" or *bruin* (brown) communities including "those involved with churches" from nearby areas like Askham, Andriesvale, Rietfontein, Mier and Upington (ibid.). In any given year there can be anything from 10 to 40 stalls, indicating the thriving entrepreneurial impetus at the festival. Similarly, other services are offered by local San and *bruin*[42] (brown) communities. These include transport services such as donkey cart rides which, due to the logistics of the terrain, were a vital means of transport at the first festival and thereafter became a popular recreational activity at the subsequent festivals (ibid.).

3.5 The Tents and the Symbolism of Trees

Whilst stalls are an important part of the imported festival landscape, its most prominent feature are the several tents. The colossal tents are set up to provide shade for festivalgoers, acting as meeting or gathering spaces. Even from afar, these massive tents stand out strikingly–as points of orientation– against the sparse Kalahari landscape, usually dotted with greenish-brown shrubs on a bed of red sand that continues for thousands of kilometres.

One could argue that, given the vast and unforgiving landscape, the tents act in a similar way to trees in the Kalahari – the significance of which has been discussed by Chennels (2003). During the ǂKhomani land claim process in the late 1990s, elders were asked to recount their life stories to indicate their familial relationships, landmarks, rituals, stories, songs, myths, traditional knowledge, hunting and gathering places, healing and medicinal practices, burial sites, sources of water, shelter and sustenance (Chennels 2003, 277). With the help of linguists, cartographers and lawyers, elders were able to map their traditional (historical) lands, thus strengthening their legal case (Chennels 2003, 277). Within this context, knowledge of the significance of trees in the Kalahari was particularly emphasised and recorded by Ouma |Una Rooi (Chennels 2003, 277).

[41] I vividly remember enjoying a delectable *gemsbok* (oryx) sausage roll on day one of the 2019 festival (and the stall owner was so delighted when I expressed my pleasure and appreciation). Before then, I had not tried anything quite like it except for beef or lamb sausage readily available in Cape Town where I live.
[42] Some people in the region identify as *bruin* a term which refers to people of mixed ancestry with strong ties to indigenous San and/or Khoe ancestry (Britz 2018, 8).

Rooi recounts how trees formed an integral part of her childhood; particularly four specific ones, which she called "Tree of Healing", "Tree of Love", "Tree of Life" and "Tree of Family" (these were the *kameeldoring* and *witgatboom* species) (Chennels 2003, 277). She discusses how the tree acted as a beacon of memory where family and friends gathered, elders taught children, babies were born, and where loved ones were buried (Auret 2006, 1). Historically, and today, trees are of great significance within ǂKhomani culture and everyday life (Chennels 2003, 277). They provide shelter and act as points of orientation and places of gathering, celebration, exchange of knowledge and rest (Chennels 2003, 277). This is comparable to the role tents play at the Kalahari Desert Festival – where they are points of orientation (for travellers seeking the venue location), places of shelter,[43] gathering, celebration, thus acting as contemporary symbols for the reimagination of cultural heritage.

Considering the annual nature of KDF one could also argue that tents, like trees, act as "beacons of memory" in a reimagined "life cycle" where personal and communal memories are formed on a yearly basis (Auret 2006, 1). This symbolism comparing tents to trees points to an active reimagination (and continuation) of indigenous culture, relating to the notion of cultural sustainability which I frame (in Chapter 4) as a decolonised form of "cultural preservation", one which is dynamic and receptive to change. Whilst I will discuss cultural sustainability as it relates to music and dance, in more detail in my next chapter, this notion of new forms of indigenous culture is also apparent in what occurs underneath the shade of the respective tents themselves.

At a typical Kalahari Festival, apart from the stalls, portable toilets, and parking areas, the festival grounds comprise of three to four tents. These include the Main Stage, *Kuier*[44], Children's and, in some years, Academic tents.[45] The programmes in the tented areas include music and dance performances as well as facilitated dialogue and conversations on issues relating to the historical and contemporary realities of indigenous communities, language workshops, film festivals, photographic exhibitions, children's activities, art, craft, cultural exhibitions, and even book launches (Swart 2015, 21). Like the role Ouma |Una Rooi's trees played historically, the tents embrace important

[43] Due to the dry, hot climate in the Kalahari Desert, with temperatures rising to 46 degrees Celsius in the summer months, a tent offers much-needed protection from the elements.
[44] An Afrikaans word which directly translates to "visit", but it has come to represent a relaxed feeling of visiting, talking, and sharing food with people for an extended period.
[45] In 2018, the Academic Tent was renamed "the SKA Tent", which was funded by the South African Radio Astronomy Observatory who contributed to the programme by giving informative presentations to high school learners about job opportunities in Astronomy.

community functions with themes of Healing, Love, Life and Family symbolically comprised in the various tents in a reimagined, innovative way.

Festival terrain infographic from KDF 2019. Design by Almé Swart.

3.5.1 Main Stage

The Main Stage tent, referred to by organisers as Arena A, is the focal point of the festival. It stretches over 420m2, and is the gathering point, or venue, at which all the main programme performance events take place. The main tent covers a large stage with big speakers, subwoofers and lights, surrounded, in a loose semi-circle, by at least a thousand plastic chairs arranged in rows. The main tent is often *the* place to be – the exciting gathering place of note, where the biggest local acts perform, and where attendees can jubilantly sing and dance. Many artists have performed at the main stage over the years, including the Southern African San Development Organisation (SASDO) dance and music groups, Klipwerf Orkes (an Afrikaaner *vastrap*[46] music group), numerous local gospel music artists, and well-known South African pop stars such as Emo Adams, Jamali and Garth Taylor (Swart 2018, Kruger 2021).

[46] *Vastrap* is a South African rhythm which translates to "stamp down hard", this refers to a dance style characterised by stamping foot work (Dunseith 2017, 139).

2019 Festival Main Stage Tent, Kopano Farm. Photograph by Almé Swart.

The packed opening night of the 2019 KDF on Kopano Farm in Askham, Northern Cape.
Photograph by Rashid Adams.

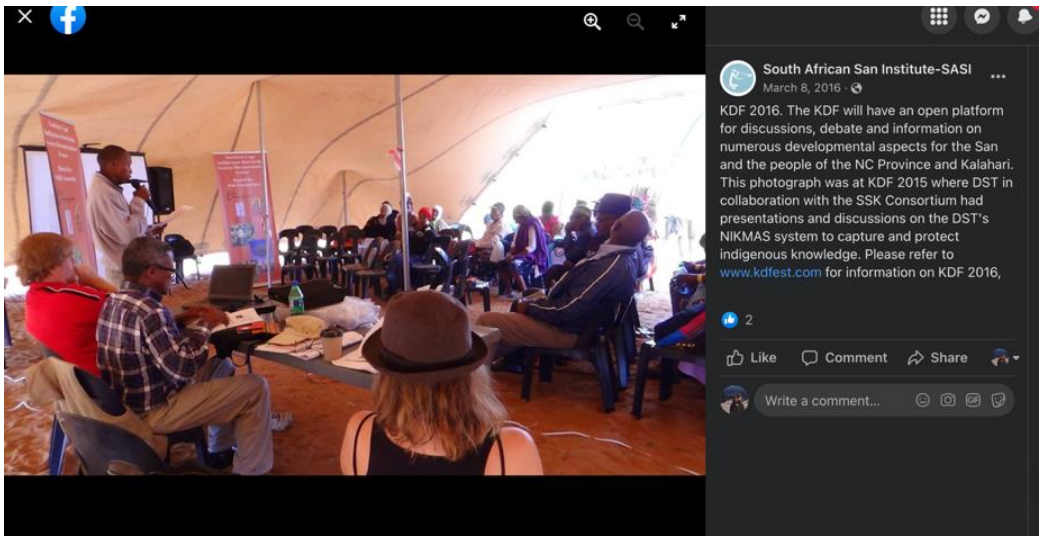
3.5.2 Children's Tent

The children's tent and adjacent jumping castle are popular attractions for all the children who attend the festival. Volunteers in the tent ensure that the children are thoroughly entertained, taken care of and educated. Considering the extended nature of the festival, organisers and volunteers need quite a list of diverse activities including mask making, cupcake decorating competitions, painting, pop quizzes, colouring in worksheets and games (H. Swart 2018, 17). One important feature of the children's tents is the N|uu, !Xun, and Khwe language lessons, workshops and programmes, which are principally focused on San language sustainability (ibid.).

The language programmes, which took place in the *Taal* (language) tent in 2014 and 2015, are run by African Tongue, a professional linguistic consultancy group directed by Dr. Kerry Jones with the help of three local language teachers (H. Swart 2015, 7). Much like the family-based knowledge exchange which occurred under the trees which |Una Rooi spoke of, both children and adults partake in the language activities, learning about ancestral languages (ibid.). Ouma Katriena Esau, who is one of the last fluent speakers of N|uu, participated in the activities by helping the younger generations with pronunciation, whilst Hantie Guys and Ghumba Katchorro assisted with teaching !Xuntali and Khwe respectively (Swart 2015, 7).

3.5.3 Academic Tent

Whilst games and mask-making seem like quite a casual affair, the importance of San language lessons for children and adults portrays the festival organisers' emphasis on education about San heritage being part of the festivals' intentions. This is reflected in the academic tent which fosters debate, demonstrations, and interactive discussions between San leadership, elders and the general public on issues of language, culture and cultural identity (Swart 2018, 29). Some discussions were facilitated by The University of South Africa (UNISA), PROGRESS EU and EU TRUST – the latter two in partnership with SASI and SASC (Swart 2018, 29). The inclusion of these discussions within the broader KDF programme is indicative of the organisers' desire to promote cultural sustainability amongst the San by encouraging discourse between community members on the importance of celebrating their heritage and identity.



Screenshot from SASI Facebook page. 2016 KDF. Photographer unknown.

In this regard, the festival does not merely consist of "entertainment", but it nurtures meaningful discussions and inspires initiatives such as the "San Innovation in Practice" living museum (Swart 2018, 29). The exhibition space demonstrates how indigenous practices such as the use of plant materials, indigenous medicine practices, language and cultural heritage sustainability can be integrated into modern innovative models (Swart 2018, 29). The emphasis on indigenous knowledge sustainability projects was not limited to discussions among the older generations but extended to the younger generations. I profile one such creative example in the following section.

3.6 Youth Development: Drama and Puppetry

One of the most notable youth development and indigenous knowledge sustainability projects was the EU Delegate supported Youth Development Drama and Storytelling Project, which was featured at the 2014 and 2015 festivals. SASI had started the artistic development programme with the purpose of developing artistic skills, cultivating an interest within young performers in the local ǂKhomani San and surrounding Kalahari communities (Swart 2015, 23). After a rigorous consultative process with local community members, the development of two creative disciplines were identified: acting and puppetry (Swart 2015, 23). The two skills' training partners were Mangaung Drama and Dance Academy, who trained participants in storytelling and the dramatic arts, and B. Steyn Consulting, who taught participants how to make puppets (Swart 2015, 24). Both partners were highly skilled in their specific fields and, after auditioning sixty-two candidates in the Andriesvale Community Hall a month before the festival, twenty-two participants were selected to participate in the training programme (Swart 2015, 24).

After a series of developmental workshops, under the guidance of the facilitators, the ǂKhomani San youth were taught how to interview the elderly in their communities with the intentions of recording ten traditional stories important to the local indigenous population and local knowledge system (ibid.). These stories included *Jakkals en die Son* (Jackal and the Sun), *Tannie Duif, Sekretarisvoël en Jakkals se Avonture* (Aunt Pigeon, Secretary Bird and Jackal's Adventures), *Die Olifant se Slagting* (The Elephant's Slaughter), *Die Boesman en die Ratel* (The Bushman and the Honey Badger), *Donkie, Bok, Hond en Motorkar* (Donkey, Goat, Dog, and Motorcar), *Slang, Boer en Jakkals* (Snake, Farmer, and Jackal), *Al die Diere en Koning Leeu* (All the Animals and Lion King), and *Leeu, Springbok en Jakkals* (Lion, Springbuck and Jackal) (ibid.)

After the stories were gathered, they were transcribed, developed, and reworked into scripts which were performed as fully staged dramas and short plays, featuring a combination of acting and

puppetry, at the 2014 and 2015 festivals (ibid., 25). Due to multiple programmes running simultaneously, each show was repeated at least twice during the festival to make it accessible to all festival audiences (ibid., 27). According to the official festival reports, these shows where very well received by the local, national, and international festival audiences (ibid.). The local San communities are said to have related to the tales, being reminded of their own "unique storytelling traditions" (ibid.). In addition, festival attendees were granted a glimpse into ǂKhomani San folklore which taught "life lessons, morals, and general ethical values" via the means of an excellent dramatic performance (ibid.).

Official reports of the festival also remark that some San elders praised the young performers for their creative retelling of the stories (ibid.). These stories, passed down over centuries from generation to generation, had likely never been put into this kind of dramatic performance featuring acting and puppetry. As all storytelling is, in some way, a dramatic performance, the dramatic puppetry performances which the Kalahari Desert Festival created are thus not just reimaginations of a tradition, but a continuation of one. Whilst the process was anchored by the experienced facilitators, part of the intention was to equip the programme participants with several skills such as researching, acting, puppetry and stagecraft (ibid., 26). This is not dissimilar to the structured training programme given to locals who applied to have stalls at the festival. In both instances these skills, of course, were not just theoretical as the festival itself was an opportunity, a catalyst, for those who acquired new skills to put them into use, to implement them.

The notion of cultural sustainability, rather than the colonial dictated notion of cultural preservation, is seen beautifully here in the engagement and knowledge exchange between the younger and older generations within the ǂKhomani community, particularly via the documentation of stories. As part of my greater discussion on decolonial approaches to research, I should very quickly emphasise this empowering and uplifting work on San folklore in comparison to the formerly mentioned Bleek and Lloyd's *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911). We see this vast difference by examining the different approaches of knowledge collection; from Bleek and Lloyd's interviewing of (probably unjustly) imprisoned San people in the Cape, to the KDF's approach of empowering indigenous researchers and fostering creative collaboration between elders and children within Kalahari communities. Having been inspired by their experience at the festival, a group of San youth established The Kalahari Drama group, later performing at other locations in the Kalahari, such as at Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres in Andriesvale and Rietfontein (Swart 2015, 30).

3.7 Concluding Thoughts

Given my further contextualising of the Kalahari Desert Festival within this chapter, I have situated the festival as a reimaginative space for San people, in which culture is appreciated through symbolic annual celebrations, intergenerational collaboration, and the creative cultivation of indigenous knowledge. With its emphasis on equipping and empowering a historically marginalised people group, I discussed how festival organisers' focus on skills training also provided opportunities for direct socio-economic benefit to San and Kalahari communities, with the festival thus acting as a catalytic and sustainable site. In my next chapter I continue this discussion of the festival as a site for cultural reclamation and the celebration of heritage, by focusing on the "main event" which occurs in the tents – music and dance. I foreground the frameworks of cultural sustainability, indigenous self-determination, and festival studies (to a lesser degree) to discuss the various ways in which music and dance are vital mediums for identity reclamation, for San performers and festival revellers alike.

Chapter 4:
Celebration of Heritage and Identity Through Music and Dance

4.1 Introduction

Music and dance are important mediums for cultural sustainability and the celebration of heritage for the San of the KTNP and wider Kalahari regions. By providing a large-scale platform for musical and dance performances, the Kalahari Desert Festival promotes cultural celebration, social unity, and a move towards social solidarity, as it fosters a space for a negotiated and self-determined imagination of San identity. In this chapter I explore how the Kalahari Desert Festival's music and dance performances are important sites for these ideas – which I categorise under the umbrella term of cultural sustainability. This chapter is thus a continuation of my previous one, yet in foregrounding musical culture, I present more of a conceptual approach which focuses on how music, by its very nature, creates a space for creative reimagining of negotiated identities.

To begin, I briefly describe and define cultural sustainability and festival studies, emphasising how these pertain to music. I then examine the practical ways intangible cultural heritage and sustainability have emerged during the festival, thus furthering my argument that the Kalahari Desert Festival is a catalytic and reimaginative space for performers and revellers alike. Drawing on ethnomusicologists, festival study scholars, and cultural sustainability practitioners (see Titon 2009, Phipps 2010, Rapoo 2013, Assman 2019, Allen 2019, and Bodunrin 2021), I situate a diverse body of conceptual work within the context of the festival to examine the varied ways in which cultural sustainability is observable, via musical and dance performances.

To discuss the contributions of music and dance, I employ an ethnographic-based descriptive analysis approach to detail notable performances from the 2019 festival framing these through cultural sustainability, social solidarity, and ideas of indigenous self-determination. Finally, I explore how young indigenous artists, through engagement with contemporary genres, are redefining notions of indigeneity within the festival and beyond. All this builds on the discussion I started in my literature review (Chapter Two), where I explored how various recent research studies have moved from colonial to decolonial perspectives, as I further position the Kalahari Desert Festival as a site for reimagining San heritage and identity.

4.2 Music and Dance

To frame these conceptual enquiries regarding performances at the Kalahari Desert Festival, I will briefly define cultural sustainability and festival studies, with a focus on music as a means of cultural sustainability. This is important to begin with as I explore the overlaps and intersections between cultural sustainability and festival studies at an indigenous cultural festival, such as the Kalahari Desert Festival. These theoretical lenses are particularly helpful given my prior framing of the San's historical and ongoing positioning in South Africa, as they help support and demonstrate the significance of the Kalahari Desert Festival within a context of political and imaginative marginalisation.

4.2.1 Cultural Sustainability

"Cultural Sustainability" is an umbrella term which describes the maintaining of cultural beliefs, heritage protection, and cultural practices for any group of people (Cavicchi 2019, 131). As a theoretical concept it emerged via the discourse, practices, and theories of environmental sustainability, which, like cultural sustainability, is motivated by "moral imperatives" (Baron and Walker 2019, 3). Cultural sustainability is thus typically driven by an urgency to protect and ensure the continuation of what we already "have, know, value and cherish" – something which is applied to cultural texts, objects, buildings, cultural practices, and artistic practices (Assman 2019, 26). It encourages taking "care of the past" and keeping only those items for future re-use, while reimaging the possibilities of dynamic development within contemporary forms of cultural practices (Assman 2019, 27).

Regarding the etymology of the term, "sustainability" is derived from the Latin word "*sus-tenere*" meaning to "uphold".[47] Musicologist Aaron Allen posits that "sustainability" has a two-fold meaning; the first being to maintain, endure, or keep doing something, and the second being to stop, change, or do something different (2019, 43). Regarding the second part of the term, Allen defines "cultural" or "culture" as the languages, practices, beliefs, rules, arts, knowledge, and collective identities and memories produced by members of all social groups that provide meaning to their surroundings (2019, 43).

[47] The concept of sustainability has been applied to various political and scholarly discourses within tourism, environmental studies, product design, fashion, the arts, cultural practices, and even library management (see Owens 2001, Chapman 2005, Bradley 2007, Newcomb 2012, Hethorm and Ulasewicz 2015, Hughes *et al.* 2015).

Incorporating these ideas for the purposes of this research, I define cultural sustainability as the importance of sustaining and expanding cultural life, cultural history, and creative human practices such as music and dance. Of course, I have already pointed to several aspects of cultural sustainability within other aspects of the Kalahari Desert Festival apart from music and dance. These include the metaphorical reimagined symbol of the festival tents encompassing a similar function to what trees historically do in San society, as well as the intergenerational creative collaboration resulting from the drama and puppetry performances. All of this affirms my supposition that the Kalahari Desert Festival is a vehicle for cultural sustainability, as it provides a platform for social solidarity and celebration, as a sense of group identity is fostered, strengthened and reinforced through this annual community-based event (Getz 2010, 8).

4.2.2 Festival Studies: Indigenous Cultural Festivals

Festivals, meanwhile, are generally defined as regularly occurring social gatherings in which all members of a community participate directly or indirectly, with varying degrees of participation, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious and historical bonds (Phipps, 2010, 217). According to Rossetti and Quinn, cultural and arts festivals play several important social, cultural, economic and political functions, particularly in indigenous communities (2021, 46). Much of the literature on festivals has focused on measuring their economic impact on communities, however recent works have begun exploring how festival participation can be beneficial for participants on social levels (Rossetti and Quinn 2021, 46). This is of great relevance considering the Kalahari Desert Festival's focus on developing a festival *from* the Kalahari, with the festival placing an emphasis on offering a platform for local performers and participants to celebrate their culture and heritage.

According to festival studies scholar Peter Phipps, festivals are one of the few consistently positive spaces where indigenous communities can build and assert positive self-understandings, both intergenerationally and within the context of a drive for recognition and respect as distinct cultures within local, national and international contexts (2010, 217). Similarly, Duffy and Mair posit that festivals can foster concepts of belonging to a specific place or people, of internal cohesion and of collective unity (2018, 35). In the contexts of many indigenous communities, such as in the case of the San in the Kalahari, the historical and geographical marginalisation of festivalgoers and performers means festivals, particularly grand-scale annual ones with thousands of attendees like KDF, play an important role as necessary sites of cultural sustainability. On individual and collective

levels, festivals additionally provide a space for people to engage with both the tangible and the intangible aspects of their culture and heritage, in various ways (Cudny 2016, 49).

4.3 Music as Cultural Sustainability

Within the festival, music, and dance–as observable and embodied tangible aspects of culture–emerge as particularly important culturally sustaining mediums, which possess relative "fluidity and license" for transformative experiences and representations (Phipps 2010, 221). This occurs for both performers and festival attendees (whether the latter are active or passive participants in performances), considering ethnomusicologist Jeff Todd Titon's theoretical assertions that music plays an important role in the construction, articulation and maintenance of ethnicity, identity and belonging (Titon 2009, 5–6). These notions–relating to a reimagined or renegotiated self-determining identity–situate music as an important mode of cultural sustainability. Many performers at KDF namely, the musicians, singers, and dancers thus embody the relationship between traditional/historical and contemporary performative practices, as they actively engage with their own indigeneity and present it on a large-scale public platform.

Considering these factors, I posit that we should think of music as cultural sustainability in a way that transcends problematic "preservationist" agendas, which is often filtered through the colonial imagination of the San as "extinct" or "near extinct" people. My application of this concept opposes the outdated concept of "preservation" within musical practices and scholarship (discussed in Chapter Two), instead arguing for the theoretical lens of cultural sustainability to be applied to music and dance. This sets up these art forms as dynamic and open to reimagination and reinterpretation, with the KDF providing a platform for dynamic negotiation and innovation around notions of culture and heritage. Most importantly, by viewing the festival's performances in this light we can witness the self-determination of San performers who are able to sustain, appreciate and celebrate their culture and heritage *on their own terms*.

4.3.1 Examples of Music and Dance as Cultural Sustainability at KDF

Considering the symbolic association of the festival tents with trees, which conveyed the idea that the tents were places of gathering and celebration, the following section focuses on the music and dance activities which took place in the tents. By employing the framework of cultural sustainability, I explore how communities (re)imagine themselves through indigenous performance practices, enactments of socio-cultural memory, and culture-based processes of identity (Rapoo 2016, 352).

This observation of music and dance as cultural sustainability is evidenced by several performances at the Kalahari Desert Festival, during its 2013–2019 run. Considering my ethnographic engagement and *in situ* observations at the 2019 festival, I will particularly foreground several performances and performance events that occurred at that year's event, although I also highlight aspects of selected performances from previous festivals, based on the footage, photographs, and official documents and reports I was able to source.

Those I focus on are particularly the performances by SASDO[48] indigenous San music and dance individuals and groups, contextual gospel music artists and young indigenous rap artists. In discussing these music and dance performances, I discuss how the festival serves as a platform for fostering cultural sustainability marked by social solidarity, heritage celebration and self-determination for performers and participants. Lastly, I foreground selected performances during the popular *Kalahari's Got Talent* competition, which takes place in the *Kuier* and Main tents at KDF, which extends the festival's impact in sustaining cultural identity and creating new artistic innovations for San and other Kalahari-based artists.

4.3.2 Music and Dance Performances

The Kalahari Desert Festival's music and dance performances should not merely be viewed as "entertainment", but as sites which generate value and cement the "maintenance of social unity and solidarity" within a marginalised indigenous community (Rapoo 2013, 201). This is evident considering van der Hoeven and Hitters's assertions that live performances lend a sense of belonging to communities, enabling people to connect with one another (2019, 266). In addition to providing a forum for the development of social networks and cultural appreciation among various groups of San and related communities, KDF also provides a unique opportunity for cross-cultural interaction. The festival organisers have a vested interest in promoting local performers, as demonstrated by the 2018 report which stated that 70% of performances were by local (Kalahari-based and mainly San) artists (H. Swart 2018, 31). The KDF organisers make sure these local artists perform primarily on the various stages and arenas (where applicable) since "there are very few opportunities in the Kalahari for the San to perform" for local, national, or international people, apart from at large-scale events like KDF (H, Swart 2015, 6).

[48] The Southern African San Development Organisation is a nonprofit organisation based in Platfontein outside Kimberley in South Africa. They fall under the CPA segment of the Four Cousin concept I discussed in Chapter Three. Their mission is to "educate, empower, uplift and motivate development" of the San communities in Southern Africa (SASDO website 2021) https://sasdowebsite.wixsite.com/website/about

Whilst programmes have differed over the years, performers usually comprise ǂKhomani San dancers and musicians, !Xun and Khwe San hip-hop artists, national and international artists (the latter usually including indigenous groups from various parts of the world), DJs, and mainly "coloured" jazz musicians and gospel groups from nearby towns such as Upington (H. Swart 2018, 34). By including a wide variety of genres in the KDF performance programme, the organisers aim to increase the participation of the broader Kalahari community with an immense focus on social solidarity in the region (H. Swart 2018, 34). One can see the diverse nature of the acts from the official 2018 programme shown in two parts below.

Official 2018 Kalahari Desert Festival programme. Days 1 and 2.
Design by Almé Swart. Courtesy of SASI director, Almé Swart.

Official 2018 Kalahari Desert Festival programme. Day 3 and sports schedule.
Design by Almé Swart. Courtesy of SASI director, Almé Swart.

The centring of San expression is apparent at the festival in many ways. Yet, this is fostered not through the problematic essentialist and primitivist colonial imaginations of San people, but through a self-determining and self-representing manner (Guenther 2006, 17). Remembering the geographic and cultural landscape in which the festival takes place, namely the ǂKhomani lands, the significance of a festival on indigenous land, hosted by the custodians of the land creates the platform upon which the performers and audience members alike derive "identity and a sense of pride" from performances at the festival (van der Hoeven and Hitters 2019, 267). This is observable in the audiences' engagement during performances which consisted of dancing, singing, cheering and general merriment.

There is a significance in centring San artistic expressions at the festival, which ranged from indigenous songs and dances, localised indigenous gospel performances, hip-hop and rap. These artistic practices cultivated an appreciation and celebration of the range of cultural expressions rooted in San communities of the region. For the purpose of this analysis, I concentrate on examples of how the music and dance performances of the San and related communities contributed to cultural sustainability at the festival. Additionally, how the performances uplifted and built ideas of celebration and community within the festival.

There are two related performance examples which I believe deserve emphasis: the *Gospel Extravaganza* opening night at the 2019 festival and the SASDO-led dance performances on the second day of the 2019 festival. Using my dance studies and ethnomusicological training, I briefly describe the musical and dance styles and their significance below.

The *Gospel Extravaganza* (2019) performance segment was well-attended, I recall being enthralled by the sheer energy and enjoyment of the audience. The artists mainly performed *koortjies* (choruses) which is a localised genre of religious music based in predominately "coloured" (*bruin*) Christian communities in South Africa. The music style is characterised by repetitive lyrics, percussive elements, cyclical forms, fast tempos, and call-and-response (Jorritsma 2011, 57). A lead singer is typically accompanied by backing vocalists, as well as musicians such as a drummer (drum kit), keyboardist, bassist and lead guitarist. The music, being rooted in "coloured" communities of the Northern, Eastern and Western Capes, is influenced by San and Khoe musical expressions, colonial-era religious music and Xhosa religious music styles (Jorritsma 2011, 50, 51, 56).

This particular expression of Christian music is a regional style expressed through mainly Afrikaans lyrics, up-beat tempos and energetic dancing. During the Kalahari Desert Festival *koortjie* performances, audience members danced along in a circle in front of the stage, in a manner that bears a striking resemblance to San dance practices I have seen. These dances are referred to as *koortjie* dancing or *juig*[49] and they are characterised by revellers stomping their feet rapidly, with knees bent, their feet carrying them along in a circle while moving in a hiccup-like manner with bodies leaning slightly to the side and the arms are kept bent as they gently swing (see figure below).

[49] An Afrikaans word which directly translates to rejoice, denoting the joyous, spontaneous dancing which audience members partake in when listening to *koortjies* in church or similar settings.

Audience members dancing in a circle in the manner described above. Screenshot from a video recording from the *Gospel Extravaganza* on the opening night of the 2019 festival. Video recorded on 24 September 2019 by Rashid Adams.

Dancing and singing are important elements of San practices, where all-night ceremonies often include music and dance (Jorritsma 2011, 48). This is reflected in the extensive programme which included late night dancing and celebration on the opening night of the 2019 festival. Hennie Swart relayed to me that the gospel evenings at the festivals are always well-attended and specifically *for* the enjoyment of all the communities who attend the festival (H. Swart 2019). Additionally, the performative and communal space of the gospel performances create solidarity among the San and *bruin* festival attendees, where all revel and enjoy the music. In this regard, music and dance are strategically employed at the Kalahari Desert Festival to define personal and group identity, and to celebrate the fact of belonging to a family, a community and a place (Titon 2009, 5–6). This sense of belonging, which anthropologist Victor Turner refers to as *communitas* (1969, 95 - 97), describes the feeling of being connected, embracing the belonging that arises from being involved in a communal event such as a festival (Duffy and Mair 2018, 38).

Official programme of the opening night at KDF 2019.
Source: Kalahari Desert Festival website 2019.

The Southern African San Development Organisation (SASDO) brought a few groups of young San musicians and dancers to perform at the various arenas at the 2019 festival. A performance which I wish to highlight took place on 25 September 2019 in the Cultural Village area of the festival grounds. The all-female dance group, some of whose members came from San communities in Botswana, performed various short group song and dance items. I will briefly discuss one of these performances which took place in the Cultural Village area.

The SASDO dance group of around fifteen San women, all relatively young, presumably between the ages of 18 and 35. The dancers wore indigenous cultural attire, which consisted of short beaded animal skin skirts, beaded head adornment and short tops. They danced barefoot and some groups wore percussive ankle rattles, and two female musicians accompanied the dancers on what appears to be two *ngoma*[50] drums. I noticed that the footwork, body position and communal aspects were quite similar to the *koortjie* dancing I had witnessed the previous evening. In a few of their performances, the larger group of women sang and danced whilst two of them enacted culturally important stories, employing a tortoise shell as a prop of sorts. The performances are significant in the fact that they

[50] There are many variants of this term used to describe a variety of drums among the Bantu-speaking peoples of central, eastern-central and southern Africa (Cooke 2001, Grove Music Online). https://doi-org.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.46358

strongly encouraged communal celebration and engagement with cultural identity and heritage. The young women embodied the notion that tradition and culture are continuing processes[51] – a theme relating to cultural sustainability, which I observed here and throughout the rest of the performances in various ways (Rapoo 2016, 358).

Young dancers from SASDO at the 2019 festival. Photograph by Rashid Adams.

4.3.3 *Kalahari's Got Talent* Competition as a Means of Cultural Sustainability

Since its introduction in 2014, the *Kalahari's Got Talent* (KGT) competition has become a key festival event. Inspired by, and loosely following, the format of the *Got Talent* franchise, an international televised reality talent show, this local version allowed undiscovered talent the opportunity to be 'discovered' and celebrated. However, unlike the international reality show, *Kalahari's Got Talent* is not overly competitive, is not televised, and instead focuses on providing anyone within San and Kalahari communities with an opportunity to perform to an audience. The focus is on appreciating and celebrating the competitors. With each passing year, the competition has grown steadily and by 2018 was a major attraction for festival supporters, with 64 entries that needed four rounds of adjudication (H. Swart 2018, 21).

[51] This continuing process of a dynamic tradition and culture was evident in the performers' engagement with traditional dance and music styles and the contemporary styles performed at the festival. I recall that the women pictured in the performance above, quickly changed out of their traditional garb into their street clothes and danced along to hip-hop music which was blasted from the sound system at the festival.

KGTs call for applications is usually announced through KDFs social media sites, and through word-of-mouth communication a few weeks prior to the festival's commencement. Hence, performers are afforded ample time to prepare for performances, rehearse and select costumes. Several types of performance acts were included in the programme, however, the majority focused on performance styles such as indigenous dance, hip-hop dance, rap music, and gospel music. There is a recurring theme woven throughout most of the performances, this being individuals who are part of an indigenous or related community and negotiate their culture and expression of identity through dance and music.

On the second day of the 2019 festival, Hennie Swart invited me to serve as one of the KGT judges. I presume he was supposed to do it but, considering he knew my tertiary training in dance and music, he thought I would be a good person to take on the role, which would enable him to focus on other organisational aspects at the festival. I was hesitant at first, particularly due to the last-minute nature of the invitation (I was asked less than half an hour before the first round of performances were to take place). Nonetheless, I agreed to fulfil the role – something I am extremely grateful that I did, as my needing to observe each performance helped me gain significant enrichment and insight into the various performances. There were multiple rounds of elimination during the competition, which began in the *Kuier* tent and concluded in the finals on the main stage.

While observing the performances in my role as a judge, my attention was drawn to the relationship between the notion of indigeneity and the intertwining of traditional and contemporary performative practices. This observation was enhanced by the setting, which featured a stage, speakers, lights and sound equipment juxtaposed with the vastness of the desert terrain. Thus, the tent and the accompanying stage serve as a symbolic tree within the expanse of the cultural landscape – a place of gathering, artistic performance and cultural appreciation. This cultural appreciation was not limited to the entrants from the area but even those who, like a group of dancers from Hout Bay High, were well-received and in fact won third place at the 2019 KGT festival. In this regard, there is an emphasis on community-building, which is inclusive of all ages and promotes solidarity among all the attendees of the festival.

Three performances particularly left an impression on me: those of a ǂKhomani San dancer !Xhopan[52] "Elvis" Swarts, a young female Khwe rapper, Diana Shiwarra and San Miracle rap group lead by !Xun rapper Fostino Mahongo. These performances represented the varying degrees of negotiation of indigeneity – how their intersect within the performative space of the KGT competition. !Xhopan performed a moving dance characterised by intricate footwork. Diana, accompanied by two male rappers and a backtrack of contemporary hip-hop beats, performed an original rap song in Khwedam, a San language spoken widely across the region. San Miracles similarly performed an original rap song in !Xuntali, which made use of contemporary music production elements such as autotune vocal modification (in the backtrack) and studio produced hip-hop beats.

I was intrigued by these artists' negotiation of their indigeneity through music and dance performances within the format of or on a western stage. Proudly indigenous, !Xhopan wore cultural ǂKhomani attire which consisted of an animal skin headdress and short pants or loincloth. He had a walking stick in one hand and bound animal hair in his other, which he waved expressively during his dance performance. Dancing to a backtrack of San music, !Xhopan was completely immersed in the music. The audience cheered loudly when he started his performance, with a few people proceeding to dance in the audience in a similar fashion.

!Xhopan's fast, stomping footwork, bent upper body, and occasional variations such as a movement called the "frog dance", which involved a quick squatting position before continuing the routine was indicative of an indigenous style of dancing. However, his dance was performed within a contemporary setting on a stage. !Xhopan was the eventual winner of the 2019 *Kalahari's Got Talent* competition, with the audience and judges alike being vividly moved by his performance. The intersections of performative elements, which included his dance style, his attire, the performative space (a large contemporary stage, though on historical San lands) and his music choice, embodied the possibilities of cultural sustainability through dance.

Diana Shiwarra and her friends, equally proudly indigenous and wearing western style clothes, rapped in Khwedam but within the format of Western stylised hip-hop, which consisted of a studio produced backtrack. Diana additionally performed on the main stage outside of the KGT competition

[52] !Xhopan is a tracker in the Kalahari, he works for Vinkies Kalahari Experience tour company (Facebook business page 2020).

as part of the broader KDF programme. San Miracles similarly performed a rap song entirely in !Xuntali, set to a backtrack and additionally it included the use of autotune vocal modification. Based on my observations, their uptake of hip-hop culture has an aesthetic value found in their participation and use of the music style, which Bodunrin–whose research focuses on hip-hop music of San youth in Platfontein, including artists like Diana Shiwara and San Miracles–explains has an impact on the way they perform, dress and how they negotiate the more pressing issues of their communities (2021,109). In their own way, each performer engaged with their culture and sustained it by reimaging and dynamically engaging with it on their own terms. I will elaborate upon how this particularly relates to hip-hop amongst San youth later in this chapter.

In my active participation in the judging process of the 2019 KGT and in my subsequent reflection on it, I observed that the competition holds meaningful value for festival participants and performers alike. The significance of a competition at a festival is best expressed by South African ethnomusicologist Sylvia Bruinders' suggestion that performing arts in public spaces are key activities for "representing and shaping social identities" (2017, 19). Thus, *Kalahari's Got Talent* provides an ideal setting to observe issues of identity, cultural appreciation and cultural sustainability as referenced by the examples above.

Kalahari's Got Talent banner in the *Kuier* tent at the 2019 festival.
Photograph by Rashid Adams.

4.4 Self-determination, Indigeneity and Cultural Sustainability: Beyond KDF

In my post-festival research and exploration, I found some compelling examples of performers who were part of the Kalahari Desert Festival continuing their creative expressions through music. In the following section, I explore some of these examples and how they are intersections of indigenous self-determination and cultural sustainability beyond the three-day Kalahari Desert Festival. This section is largely based on Bodunrin's (2019, 2021) theoretical assertions which challenge colonial notions of what it means to be indigenous. His work was based in Platfontein and helped give voice to San rappers, which includes Diana Shiwarra and San Miracles leader, Fostino Mahongo.

I have considered performances that may have originated at the festival but have developed beyond it, I engaged with Bodunrin (2019, 2021) who researched some of the work which has continued to develop beyond the KDF festival space. My focus is on specific instances where two of these hip-hop rap artists, Diana Shiwarra and San Miracles, have used their art to self-determine and embrace their identities as San. Thus, furthering my argument that the Kalahari Desert Festival is an imaginative space with an impact beyond the three-day festival event. In this manner, the cultural appreciation is enacted and sustained beyond the geographic confines of the festival into the very communities in which the performers reside.

4.4.1 Beyond the Festival: Hip-Hop and Rap Intertwined with Indigenous Identity

In my literature review I described how some European scholars have simplified what it means to be San and therefore indigenous. Consequently, this work is a decolonial contribution which acknowledges that people have the capacity for self-determination and celebrate identity through various art forms, primarily music and dance as observed at the festival. In positioning the festival as an imaginative space for the celebration of heritage and identity, I draw upon the work of Bodunrin (2019, 2021) which explores hip-hop and rap music among young people in Platfontein. The work was particularly interesting to me as it gave me insight about artists that I was unable to interview at the 2019 Kalahari Desert Festival for ethical research reasons.

I was struck by the multiple asserted identities enacted on the stage during the *Kalahari's Got Talent* competition in 2019. This speaks to the notion that the performers are seemingly active agents in responding to modernisation and exploring contemporary, popular forms of music performance. In my observation at the festival, this response to and exploration of contemporary forms was evident in the choice of hip-hop and rap among the young performers. Furthermore, their embodiment of self-determination and indigenous identity in a modern setting helped shape their performances. They

were not only San, but they negotiated identity within the broader context of the region and their chosen contemporary performative art forms, namely hip-hop and rap.

In a similar vein, Bodunrin suggests that hip-hop provides the San youth with a means of controlling their narrative regarding indigenous 'authenticity', as they use it to socially construct their concept of "indigenousness" (2021, 107). This complexity is important to understanding the construction and representation of indigeneity and what it means to be an indigenous person (Bodunrin 2021, 107). In his work in Platfontein, where the two formerly mentioned rap artists who performed at KDF reside, Bodunrin observed that popular modern cultures such as hip-hop music and new media technologies are used as platforms for new forms of self-expression (2021, 106). This is an example of music as cultural sustainability, which supports Jeff Todd Titon's theoretical assertions that music has a key role in constructing, articulating and maintaining ethnicity, identity and belonging (2009, 5–6). This is enacted in the young artists' dynamic negotiation of their indigenous identity, primarily through their respective languages, and their creative and imaginative participation in global popular youth culture of hip-hop (Bodunrin 2021, 109).

The !Xun and Khwe of Platfontein, like many other indigenous groups, have adapted their indigenous intervention to match the shifting times and realities of modern-day South Africa. Interestingly, young people are at the forefront of "self-representation and self-authoring of new San indigenous narratives"; stories interwoven with social media and the popular culture of hip-hop. By self-representing and protesting marginalisation, the young people of Platfontein are aware of the power inherent in their indigenous status and reclaimed names such as "San" and "Bushmen" to "perform and reproduce their own indigenous narratives" (Bodunrin 2021, 109).

Much like San storytelling, Platfontein hip-hop is a form of deep communication and a decolonised practice, which is capable of shifting colonising narratives, perceptions and views, while exchanging knowledge about social justice, equity and cultural safety (Bodunrin 2019, 175). Within the context, hip-hop is considered a protest tool, and many !Xun and Khwe people have taken up this genre of music, rapping and rhyming in their native language to protest against government neglect and marginalisation (Bodunrin 2021, 106).

As a result, the "battleground for cultural survival" during late modernity is embedded and negotiated in the realm of popular culture and music genres such as hip-hop (Bodunrin 2019, 175). Rap, an oral component of hip-hop culture, offers Platfontein youth the opportunity to creatively integrate and transform their cultural storytelling practices into the digital era using modern

recording technology (Bodunrin 2019, 175). In this way, music contributes to cultural sustainability. The importance of cultural celebration and indigenous self-determination leads to sustainability and connection to indigenous cultural practices, with the Kalahari Desert Festival acting as a means in advancing this in its provision of a platform, and in the community engagement and social solidarity which occurs during performances.

4.5 Concluding Thoughts

Given my explanation of cultural sustainability, indigenous festivals and the music and dance performances at KDF, I have provided further evidence and solidified my assertion that the Kalahari Desert Festival is a site of reimagination and a catalyst for cultural sustainability. My discussion progressed beyond the three-day festival, to the community of Platfontein in the Northern Cape where two KDF performers, San Miracles, and Diana Shiwarra reside. I explored the way in which they negotiated and explored their indigeneity by means of hip-hop and rap. Their performative expression was not limited to KDF but in fact extended beyond that into their communities. The performers expressed pride in their indigenous identity and the subversive nature of rapping in their indigenous languages was contextual and decolonial.

In a SABC news segment which was recorded on 16 June 2019, Diana stated “my language, Khwedam, means a lot to me because language and culture gives you an identity. It shows you where you come from, where you are, and where you’re going. That’s why my language means a lot to me and I’m proud of my culture” (Diana Shiwarra 2019, SABC news segment). During the same segment, San Miracle group leader, Fostino Mahongo said, “here in Platfontein, there are not a lot of singers. Usually, we have people who can dance and now we’ve stood up to prove that we can sing as well, and we want to take over and get recognition” (2019, SABC news segment). This is evident of the catalytic and reimaginative platform that the Kalahari Desert Festival offered performers and revellers alike. I now progress to my final and concluding chapter.

Chapter 5:
Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will conclude my study by summarising the key research findings in relation to the research question(s) and aims. I will begin by sharing a summary of my findings and its relationship to existing research within the field. Thereafter I will evaluate the contribution my study has made to the field of indigenous cultural sustainability through the mediums of music and dance. I clarify the issues and limitations of my study by emphasising my focus on a historical consideration with some ethnographic descriptive methodology, an overall approach which was necessary due to the complications which arose as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions on field research. Lastly, I conclude my discussion by offering recommendations for future studies within the research area.

5.2 Summary of Findings

In this dissertation I discussed, examined and assessed the various ways in which the Kalahari Desert Festival can be seen as a site of cultural reclamation, celebration and sustainability, particularly through the mediums of music and dance. I explored how the festival acts as a platform and catalyst for the celebration of heritage and identity in its initial seven-year run. I discuss the significance of the festival which takes place in the geographic margins on politically returned ǂKhomani San land through the lens of cultural sustainability and indigenous festival studies. I positioned the Kalahari Desert Festival as a cultural site and reimaginative event within the broader field of San and indigenous heritage, emphasising its importance given the political and social marginalisation of the San historically and into the present day.

I presented a historical consideration of the festival, which provided a detailed understanding of everything that goes into the festival. This included the intentions of its organisations to promote cultural sustainability and social solidarity in the Kalahari region – with an emphasis on the maintenance of cultural beliefs, heritage protection and intergenerational cultural practices. Similarly, my ethnographic descriptions of the festival emphasise themes of cultural sustainability, particularly highlighting the ways in which music and dance act as vehicles for this. The Kalahari Desert Festival, the site at which this all unfolds, has thus contributed to protecting and maintaining what San and related communities “know, value, and cherish” (Assman, 2019, 26).

Regarding my historical approach, my discussion in Chapter Three focused on the ways in which the festival was a social space for cultural sustainability. I presented a behind-the-scenes examination of the festival, a historical reconstruction of sorts. The reconstruction and highlights of the first 7-year run of the festival included an in-depth discussion of the organisational structure of the festival, led by the South African San Institute (SASI) and the other three groups which make up the Four Cousins. Here I also discussed the significance of an indigenous festival in the desert, which acted as a symbolic oasis – a thriving, reimaginative space for community members and visitors. One example was the significance of trees within ǂKhomani San culture and how the various tents at KDF similarly acted as "beacons of memory", points of orientation, shelter, gathering and celebration (Chennels 2003, 277).

In a similar vein, I discussed how the festival placed emphasis on capacity building and empowering local community members to host the festival by overseeing various key aspects (H. Swart 2015, 5-6). This was reflected in every aspect of the organisation of the festival, from the meetings leading up to the event, to the security duty, food stalls and performances at the festival (H. Swart 2019). Furthermore, the festival provided an excellent platform for people of all ages to reclaim their identities and celebrate their heritage in various ways. Some fascinating examples included the youth development and indigenous knowledge sustainability programme which focused on the artistic development of young ǂKhomani San performers who were trained in acting, puppetry, oral history interviewing method and storytelling. As I discussed, the ten indigenous stories, which were shared by elders in the community became scripts and dramatic plays employing puppetry, with KDF's approach of empowering young indigenous researchers and fostering creative collaboration between elders and children within Kalahari communities became apparent. Thus, the festival and the organisation thereof can be seen as a site through which cultural sustainability and inter-generational co-creation occurs.

My discussion in Chapter Four focused on how the Kalahari Desert Festival is a site of cultural reclamation, celebration and sustainability, particularly through the mediums of music and dance. Building on my symbolic reference of festival tents as indigenous trees, I focused on the various music and dance activities which took place at the 2019 festival. By engaging with the idea of music and dance as cultural sustainability (Titon 2009), and cultural reclamation and celebration (Rapoo 2013), I foregrounded performances from the *Kalahari's Got Talent* competition and other programme performances at the 2019 festival. Through diverse performances of gospel artists,

ǂKhomani San dancers and musicians, and !Xun and Khwe San hip-hop artists, I presented examples of how KDF creates a platform for continued cultural sustainability within the wider Kalahari community. My analysis of the gospel performances and accompanying dance styles gave evidence of the influences of San indigenous styles of dance and an example of *communitas* (Turner 1969).

My discussion of the 2019 *Kalahari's Got Talent* demonstrated how KDF is a social space, which promotes a reimagination and negotiation of indigenous identity and artistic expression and innovation, as evidenced by the performances by !Xhopan, Diana Shiwarra and San Miracles. I discuss the two latter artists' continued work beyond the event of the festival and how they employ hip-hop and rap as mediums of self-representation and self-authoring of new indigenous San narratives, and a reclamation and celebration of their cultural identity.

5.3 Contribution to Knowledge

The Kalahari Desert Festival has, until my current discussion, never been the focus of any academic research or study. Thus, it was an efficacious subject for exploring ideas of heritage, identity, artistic expression and cultural sustainability among the ǂKhomani San. I believe this research carries importance for three reasons. Firstly, though small in scope, it provides an historical record or snapshot, of the first seven years of the Kalahari Desert Festival, a unique indigenous festival in South Africa. Secondly, by engaging decolonial and emerging literature within the broader field, this work endeavoured to centre the creative expression of San and related indigenous communities within cultural studies. Lastly, this study illustrates the importance of an imaginative and culturally sustainable festival and the subsequent creative possibilities which may emerge.

5.4 Issues and Limitations

The two overriding limitations to my study was the sudden passing of my primary research participant in 2019 and the practical limitations, which I faced during the first and second years of my master's degree due to unprecedented nationwide lockdowns and restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This prevented me from travelling to the Northern Cape to interview potential research participants. As discussed in my methodological approach in the second chapter, I was nonetheless able to remedy these through creative methodological shifts. As I only attended the 2019 festival, which happened to be the last one when I wrote this thesis, due to COVID-19.[53] I drew on

[53] There was a festival hosted in February 2023. It took place after I had submitted this thesis and while I awaited my results.

my experiences and impressions as a festival attendee and *Kalahari's Got Talent* judge. Furthermore, the interviews I conducted in 2019 and 2021, and access to the official organiser's funding and reporting documents proved to be invaluable in my reconstructive approach. It is important to note that some documents were not properly archived in the seven-year run of the festival and, with Hennie Swart's passing, have been difficult to track down. Additionally, Swart's full and intimately informed perspective as festival organiser over the seven years and SASI director was only partially accessed due to his sudden passing. Nonetheless, I am grateful to have been able to have conducted interviews with him just before his passing, giving voice to his invaluable insight which is woven throughout this dissertation.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

This study is a starting point for research into the Kalahari Desert Festival, as well as any indigenous San (or Khoe) festivals in southern Africa, including the broader indigenous community who partook in and attended the festival. There are possibilities for a transdisciplinary and multidisciplinary study and research approach now that the festival started up again. A potential large-scale study could draw on the expertise of linguists, anthropologists, ethnomusicologists and oral historians which could result in a multi-faceted in-depth study of the festival and its impact within communities.

Additionally, there are possibilities for co-creation between researchers and community members via community engagement research processes. This approach calls for an inclusive participation, which emphasises authentic partnerships and respect of values – in contrast to the notion that the researcher is the primary or sole expert in the field. A community engagement approach seeks to participate with communities to achieve long term sustainable outcomes, discourse, implementation and relationships, perhaps undoing the harm caused by colonial scholars and literature. In this regard, a decolonial and egalitarian approach, and an understanding of the positionality of the researcher, is necessary going forward.

In conclusion, I believe it is important to consider the Kalahari Desert Festival as a catalytic and significant cultural event within the San communities of the Kalahari region and the broader Northern Cape. By discussing the various ways the festival promotes a reclamation and celebration of identity and heritage through music and dance, I have contributed to the broader field of San cultural knowledge by researching an important festival which takes place on ǂKhomani lands. Finally, my contribution centring South Africa's most historically marginalised group, should be

situated within the larger context of present decolonial dialogues on heritage and identity as scholars and non-scholars alike gain reimagined and self-determined perspectives of indigeneity.

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