

## 4 Children of One Womb

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*Bana ba motho ba kgaogana tlhogwana wa ntsi.*  
A person's children share even the head of a fly.

*Maraganateng a bana ba mpa ga a tsenwe.*  
Conflicts among children of one womb are not intruded upon.

### Cattle

Around 2 a.m., long, mournful cries started echoing from the far corner of the yard. I was used to the sounds of roosters crowing, donkeys braying, trains passing, and cowbells jangling through the night, but this sound – nasal, plaintive, almost childlike – was a new one.

'What *is* that?' I asked quietly, unsure whether any of the other girls in the room had awoken.

'*Haish! Ngwana wa ga Modiri!*' Lorato exclaimed with frustration, pulling a pillow over her head.

Modiri's child. Modiri didn't have a child. But the day before, he had arrived home from the cattle post with a doe-eyed, gangly calf. Its mother had died, and knowing it would not otherwise survive, Modiri had brought it home to rear it himself. As someone who had once liked to threaten the children with a *sjambok*, he had presented an anomalous figure, lifting the tangled calf gently out of the back of the truck, murmuring reassurance.

It was an especially harsh winter. A drought had been declared earlier that year and the cattle had little to eat, little to drink, and were getting mired in the mud of dried-up waterholes without the strength to pull themselves out. Modiri travelled between home and *moraka* (the cattle post) daily to help the herdsman, ferrying feed and medicine back and forth, and occasionally bringing home the carcass of a cow he had lost for cooking and curing. It was onerous work. But every evening, without fail, he carefully mixed milk and medicine into a two-litre glass soda bottle, attached a rubber nipple, and fed the calf by hand. It followed him around

when he was at home, nosing his hand or the pocket of his jeans – to which Modiri would react with mixed annoyance and indulgence. The rest of the time, the calf wobbled on its awkward legs freely around the yard, the boys keeping an eye on it and ensuring that the gates were closed so it couldn't wander off. At night Modiri closed it into the makeshift kraal in the corner of the yard. After the household had settled into silent slumber, it would start lowing pitifully.

Modiri was the first-born son of the family and his parents had given him a name popular among first-born boys: Modisaotsile – 'the herdsman has come'. The name was less a premonition than a prescription. 'Herdsman' described Modiri's position in the family, as if having defined his contribution to it from the outset. And it was a critical, powerful position. As in many other places in Africa, in Botswana cattle are a repository of wealth and are key to relationships within and between families, including 'of power and debt' (Durham 1995: 117). Cattle remain a fundamental component of *bogadi*, and siblings were historically 'cattle linked' in anticipation of this expense: the cattle a married sister brought into the family would be earmarked to enable the marriage of her linked brother, who would later bear special responsibilities to his sister's children as their *malome* or maternal uncle (Kuper 1975). Indeed, cattle have been so important that the practice of parallel cousin marriage – unusual in the region – was cast in terms of keeping a family's cattle together; Isaac Schapera cites the proverb, 'Child of my paternal uncle, marry me ... so that the cattle should return to our kraal' (1940: 42). Cattle are contributed predominantly to family – to celebrate wedding feasts, initiations, and parties of all kinds; to mark funerals; and to make major purchases, such as for building houses. More rarely, they may be contributed to enable development projects; the University of Botswana was built partly from public contributions of cattle.

But cattle do not simply produce and define kinship structurally, by their exchange; they are also emblematic of care, both as objects of care and in the care they require. *Bogadi*, for example, is provided to recognise a family's contributions and care in successfully raising a marrying daughter; to transfer her responsibilities of contribution and care to her husband's family; to contribute towards her brothers' successful marriages and making-for-themselves (as they herd the cattle in their turn); and to link the two marrying families together so that they can continue to claim help and contributions from one another, especially through the couple's children. Having a boy who can assist in herding the

cattle – which is customarily, though not exclusively, the work of boys and men – eased the work of cattle herding and enabled the acquisition of a larger herd. The child's contribution enabled the family's expansion of wealth and kinship ties. And Modiri's assiduous fulfilment of his name's promise had just that effect. Calling Modiri's calf his child was partly playful, but it also recognised the contributions Modiri invested in the cattle, and put them on a par with parenting as a contribution critical to producing and reproducing the family. When his father, Dipuo, was away at the lands, Modiri acted and was treated as the head of the household – and this role partly conveyed, and was partly conveyed by, his responsibility for the cattle.

The cattle Modiri herded were not his alone, nor did they belong exclusively to his father. The old man had perhaps only one cow left; the rest belonged to Modiri and his younger brothers. When they were teenagers, they were each presented with one or two cows in recognition of their contributions to the care of the herd (a fact that embittered their eldest sister, Khumo, since she had also spent much of her time herding as a child but had received no such recompense). Gradually they had increased their stock, individually setting aside money – mostly from wage labour – to buy additional heads of cattle. The brothers' cattle all shared the same brand, however, and the same pattern of cuts and notches out of their ears; the brand was Dipuo's and marked both the cattle and the donkeys as belonging to the same family.

I was mystified how the men could tell their cattle apart. The older boys and their uncles could distinguish individual donkeys and cows by their hoofprints in the sand, having spent years responding to their habits and health and tracing them through the bush. But herding separately owned cattle together marked the men's contributions to the family and enabled contributions to events and projects that either extended the family or connected it with other families, producing a vast range of relationships in their wake. This cycle described both the men's movement into adulthood and a gradual generational transition, as cattle were contributed to boys who had contributed to their care, as their opportunities to contribute out of wage labour expanded, and as their responsibilities to contribute to others grew.

Much as they shared a brand, the adult brothers also shared the responsibility for the herd – although, just as they owned the cattle individually, their responsibilities to contribute were also individualised. All were expected to go to *moraka* (the cattle post) at the weekends, if

they were home; and each was expected to contribute to the cost of food, medicines, and a full-time herdsman who would mind the herd, in accordance with their relative incomes. These shared responsibilities asserted the adult men's siblingship. Of course, what they were each able to contribute differed depending on their individual circumstances (and their willingness to contribute); this differentiation indexed their relative influence and power in the family. Modiri's seniority was achieved by taking the lead role in cattle care – and it obliged him to take that role. Moagi's absence – he was in the army – meant that his contributions were limited to his holidays at home, when he was expected to be generous with his time and money. By the same token, he was somewhat distanced from the daily needs and concerns of the family, except when he was home. As Kagiso's success in business grew, and his capacity to contribute financially, so too did the respect he was shown at home, although the constraints that his work driving for a local NGO placed on his time at the cattle post had other effects (as we will see shortly). The fact that Tuelo had fewer cattle and unsteady work meant that his contribution was somewhat irregular and mostly in labour – which gave him a reputation at home for being unreliable. In other words, the brothers' shared responsibilities served to separate them as much as bind them together.

The ways in which cattle bind brothers to sisters, and enable sisters' making-for-themselves, also become evident if we think of them in terms of contribution. As well as contributing incidental work in the care of the cattle in girlhood, women have the potential to make perhaps the most substantial contributions of cattle to the family herd through their marriages. While binding spouses and their families in the idiom of care, these cattle also bind sisters to their brothers, whose self-making they enable and who bear an obligation to contribute to the ongoing care of their sisters' children in turn. The relationship established by this cycle of contribution binds siblings together in perpetuity through their marriages and children, which might otherwise be expected to divide them (cf. Kuper 1975). In other words, through contributions, siblings' separability becomes a source of their sustained togetherness; and both their difference and mutuality are established through contributions and care (Alber et al. 2013a: 12).

The tensions between siblings' unity and separability, equality and hierarchy, as well as between their ideal contributions and their actual ones, inevitably produce *dikgang*. In turn, these *dikgang* play an important role in calibrating sibling relationships. In the dispute with which

I opened this part, Modiri had been muttering for some time about his brothers' unwillingness to help him with the cattle, but he was especially fed up with Kagiso. Kagiso worked full time at a local NGO and was running three businesses on the side, each of which required a continuous investment of his time and money. But they represented work he was doing for himself, from which only he would benefit (like most young men, he had a significant amount of money to save up if he wanted to marry, much less build). He contributed a little here and there at home, but he seldom went out to the cattle post.

Kagiso was equally fed up with Modiri. Modiri had found and hired a herdsman without consulting his brothers on the costs involved, and without informing them about who he had chosen. Given Kagiso's gradually increasing wealth and social status – he was also becoming a preacher of some repute – he felt entitled to be consulted and taken seriously by his brother, as an equal. At the same time, he was keen to avoid bearing any further responsibility to contribute towards the cattle than he already did; he wanted to protect the solvency of his personal projects. Kagiso's growing sense of independence and success in making-for-himself gave him a certain entitlement to respect and authority – especially given that his elder brother, having not built, nor married, nor had children, may have seemed stalled by comparison. No doubt Kagiso's staunch apostolic leanings partly informed the value he attached to 'individual ownership, autonomy, [and] the value of assertiveness' (Klaitis 2011: 208) in this respect. Kagiso's emphasis on the equality of siblings – his insistence that all of his brothers should be present for the discussion, that everyone should bear the responsibilities of contribution jointly – served this dual purpose of asserting an equality of authority with his brother while escaping the added responsibility to contribute that such authority and his growing wealth entailed.

However, his family's dismayed and frustrated response made clear that Kagiso's relative success made him neither equal in authority to his brother nor able to claim the lesser responsibility enjoyed by his other siblings. As Mmapula emphasised at the end of their discussion, Kagiso was not simply Modiri's younger brother but his child – emphasising Kagiso's failures to contribute the right things in the right amount and in the right places, and his unwillingness to recognise this responsibility, as well as Modiri's continuing right to claim his contributions. Kagiso bore a greater responsibility than his siblings to contribute care, in both resources and work, commensurate with his

ability to do so. Some adjustments had been made for his changing circumstances; but, if anything, his success underscored the imperative to contribute more, simply to *retain* his role. The dispute also made clear that contributions within the family were not interchangeable: specifically, for a man, bringing home groceries did not suffice in discharging his responsibilities to contribute at and through the cattle post. But perhaps above all, the family's concern was with how Kagiso assessed his own responsibilities, and against what ethical standards. Dipuo asked Kagiso what kind of a person he was, not just rhetorically but to underscore that, in mediating the *kgang* of the cattle, they were jointly reflecting on his assertions as ethical judgements and finding them questionable – thereby calling his moral personhood into question.

While Kagiso's threat to take his cattle was a stubborn attempt to reject this repositioning – reminiscent, in some ways, of an historical tendency among Batswana to abandon a chief they no longer agreed with (Wylie 1991) – in the end it was far more expense and labour than he would be able to bear alone. Like Lorato and her house, he was unable to mobilise the resources and relationships that such a separation would require. But, more than that, the cattle bound him to his siblings, and especially Modiri, in dense contributory economies with long histories on which he would continue to rely. The weekend after the discussion, he spent two days out at the cattle post, helping with the work of the herd. The climbdown from his threat highlighted the extent to which his selfhood relied on bearing his shifting responsibilities to contribute within the family, as much as his success in accumulating resources and relationships outside it, and on finding a balance between them. Kagiso was achieving success in making-for-himself, but the *kind* of person he was becoming was far from decided, and depended very much on his contributory relationships with his kin. At the same time, his volte-face demonstrated the extent to which conflict can *avert* schism, rather than simply producing it, thereby making room for both continuity and change in kinship relations.

As the dispute between Modiri and Kagiso suggests, contributions of care around cattle intersect with and rely on other contributions in their turn. Not just anyone can contribute just anything: certain people are required to contribute certain things based on their relative age and gender. Conflicts arising around these expectations work to fix specific responsibilities on specific people, regardless of changes in their circumstances; and, counterintuitively, they thereby work to avert major schisms, especially between siblings. Below, I explore these themes in the dynamics among women around food.





Figure 5 Winnowing sorghum.

## Food

*Manong a ja ka losika.*

Vultures eat with their family.

I arrived home well after dark one evening, after a long day running errands in town. As I switched on the light in my room, a few of the children trickled over from the main house and flopped themselves on the bed.

‘*Haish!* We are hungry!’ Kenosi offered in a theatrical, significant tone. ‘I like apples,’ she added, in case I might have any.

I asked Lesego if anything had been cooked for dinner. At 13, Lesego was responsible for much of the preparation and serving of food at home. When her older cousin Tshepo<sup>1</sup> was around, they shared the job; very occasionally, one of the women – Kelebogile, myself, Lorato, or Oratile – took over for the evening. Every once in a while even Kagiso or Tuelo would whip something up. I had arrived home hungry, hoping I would find my plate full and covered in the kitchen as usually happened when any of us were away at mealtimes.

‘*Aa-ee!*’ Lesego responded, in a sassy, sardonic negative. ‘*Nna* I’m not cooking; I’m studying *akere*,’ she added. She had notified everyone some weeks previously that her Standard Seven final exams were approaching, and that she would stop cooking so that she could study. It was a reasonable position to take: cooking for between 12 and 20 people was tremendously time-consuming, and Lesego often complained about it. (Learning to type on my laptop, her little sister Kenosi had picked out, ‘Lesego cooks too much.’)

I asked Lesego whether there was any food in the house. She shrugged, and so I headed to the kitchen to check, trailing the children behind me. Food was bought sporadically; more appeared at month end when everyone had been paid, but only the basics were resupplied throughout the month. Usually Kelebogile bore much of the expense on her own. Oratile, her younger sister, would contribute what she could, which was not much, considering that half of her salary went to pay transport to and from work. I often restocked mid-month. Kagiso would intermittently offer a few hundred pula (£30–£40) to help out, or would bring a few small boxes of vegetables from the small shop he ran. His brothers contributed very little: Modiri would replace tea or sugar when they ran low, and occasionally buy some fat cakes or a few loaves of bread; Tuelo ate at home, but I never saw him contribute for food. Moagi lived away,

<sup>1</sup> The daughter of her mother’s older sister – *ngwana a mmamogolo*.



although his son stayed with us; he had bought a vehicle for his mother's use and occasionally made similar major contributions, but he excused himself from responsibility for the day-to-day running of the household. The upshot was that it was not uncommon to find the cupboards and fridge empty – in which case, dinner was sometimes forgone.

The rest of the children were sprawled out on the cement floor of the sitting room, watching TV, when we piled through to the kitchen. They followed, stretching and asking hopefully whether we were going to cook. I flipped on the light, and much to my surprise found various boxes and plastic bags on the countertop of the kitchen cupboard unit that stood by the stove. There were tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, maize meal, eggs, packets of soup mix, and seasoning – more than enough for a meal.

'Why has nobody cooked?' I asked. Kelebogile had been home all afternoon; Lorato had been home at least a couple of hours. The men were all home. The children looked at me.

It was already late, so I fried up a mess of eggs and vegetables for us to share. But the next night, I arrived home to the same situation. The same happened the night after that. Each time, there was food in the house – I supplemented it, just to be sure – and there were people at home who might have cooked, but no dinner was served.

The standoff continued for nearly three weeks. The perishables in the kitchen went off. We all grew hungry, cranky, and suspicious. Whispered recriminations flew thick and fast. Kelebogile was seen stashing half-pints of UHT milk and other food in her room, for the exclusive use of her son Tefo. Oratile arrived home one evening with chicken bologna and miniature yoghurts and asked if she could stash the 'food for *my* children', as she put it, in the small bar fridge in my room rather than in the main fridge in the house. The children made do with tea for breakfast and whatever was being served at school for lunch. When Tefo flaunted some takeaway chicken his mother had brought him one night, he was promptly thumped by Moagi's boy, Kopano (for which only I reprimanded them, unusually). Most nights we would go until 8 or 9 p.m. having eaten nothing. Eventually Modiri would call one of the children and send them to buy two loaves of bread so that we would have something to eat with tea.

I cooked a few times at the beginning; but because I routinely supplied half of the groceries, I too started questioning why I should do so, and I gradually stopped. Sometimes I would feed just the children, in my room, from whatever I had in my mini-fridge that didn't need cooking: beans, a tin of chakalaka (a spicy relish), apples, peanut butter. We might wait until there were only two or three of us at home to cook some eggs on the sly; or a few of us would buy something at the shop and go to eat it

somewhere the others wouldn't see us. '*Re ja jaaka magodu,*' one of the children observed on such a furtive eating mission: we eat like thieves. It was a sober reminder that our behaviour was profoundly antisocial and amounted to stealing the food out of one another's mouths.

Like contributions around cattle, the way in which family contribute food – and the work of cooking, or planting, tending, and harvesting it – tells us something about the demarcations of different kin roles by gender and generation. The female head of the household is often the most significant food provider, responsible for ploughing the fields, raising chicken and goats for slaughter, or buying the bulk of the food that needs to be bought. Other adult women in the home bear similar responsibilities, but to lesser degrees depending on their ability to contribute. The teenage girls of the family are primarily responsible for the work of cooking and serving. And, of course, these responsibilities are subject to rolling *dikgang* – especially as opportunities for younger women in education and employment have changed over time (Livingston 2007b).

Much as the brothers shared the responsibility to contribute to the care of the herd, the sisters shared the responsibility to contribute to the provision of food. And, likewise, their contributions were individualised according to their roles in the family, affecting those roles in turn. Kelebogile, being the eldest sister at home (and taking Mmapula's role when she was away at the lands), was primarily responsible for ensuring that there was food available and that someone would cook it; to the extent that she was successful in this role, she was respected as the female head of the household. When she disavowed this role – as she did during the time of the food feud – she was subject to suspicion and moral disapprobation, which motivated her to withdraw from contributing even further, in a sort of reversal of the contribution cycle we have seen. Oratile, being younger, was responsible in part for providing the food, but in greater part for ensuring that it was cooked – a responsibility borne on her behalf by her eldest daughter. Because of her absence for work, and the pittance she earned, Oratile was generally considered well meaning but still young in this regard. Lesego, however, was considered responsible and hard-working, having stepped capably into the role left her by her mother.

As with the men and their cattle, generational transition among the women was also marked by their respective contributions of care around food. More than once, I was called by Mmapula in the presence of one of the younger women and asked whether she should cook if Lorato, or Boipelo, or Tshepo were there. It was a rhetorical question – designed to remind the girls that their contribution was to cook, me that mine was to provide the food, and all of us that the old woman had a claim on our

contributions. Much as generational transition was marked among the men in the handover of cattle to boys who had contributed to their care, motivating further contributions and acquisitions, generational transition is marked among women by the gradual acquisition of care responsibilities: daughters take from their mothers first the responsibility to cook, then the responsibility to provide, then the responsibility to oversee both cooking and provision. Like the men, contributions among the female siblings served both to unite them through their shared responsibilities and to separate them as they met those responsibilities individually.

Contributions around food and feeding differ most from contributions around cattle in the ways that food differentiates between brothers and sisters, rather than binding them together. Men frequently feed themselves; the pot at the cattle post is both filled and cooked by them, and they will often buy themselves basic supplies even at home. Modiri was accustomed to buying his own sugar, tea, and bread, and Dipuo regularly bought himself food for the lands; both of them pointed out these facts in the course of the cattle debate. They may share these supplies in times of shortage, as Modiri did, but such gestures are understood more as a sharing of their own things than a sustained contribution they are expected to make. Indeed, casting such provisioning as a contribution is inappropriate – as Modiri insisted in Kagiso’s case. This differentiation arises because food and feeding are responsibilities primarily borne by the women not simply as women, but as parents of children. When Oratile set out to chastise Tuelo one day for eating vast quantities of food without ever contributing, he replied simply, ‘I don’t care, I don’t have children, do I?’ While his contributions to the household economy were lacking in other respects, Tuelo did not acknowledge an obligation to contribute food – regardless of how much he was eating – because he didn’t have children; indeed, he felt entitled to consideration as a child himself. Food does not figure critically in men’s making-for-themselves the way it does for women; and it figures critically for women primarily because it performs and enables motherhood, the strengthening of their relationships with their children, and future claims on care (Livingston 2007b). Contributions, then, bind and individualise siblings, but also establish the priority of parent–child relationships over – and within – siblingship.

As the food feud dragged on, Oratile, Kelebogile, Lorato, and I made the two-hour trip out to visit Mmapula at the family’s second lands. We chatted freely enough on the journey, although the tension of the past weeks stayed with us. Mmapula was visibly pleased to see us, having had little company for so long. Eagerly, she suggested we help her with some work in the fields, but no one jumped at the prospect and so she gave up.

After some chat about the children and others at home, I was surprised when the old woman turned and settled in her chair and said she had heard Oratile and Kelebogile were not getting along (*ga ba utlwane* – lit. were not hearing one another). I hadn't expected an intervention. The sisters straightened and readied themselves, however, as if they had come expressly for this purpose.

Each sister set out to give a measured account of what had been happening at home, but emotions quickly ran high. Oratile complained that her elder sister was treating Lesego and Kenosi harshly, describing the nasty comments Kelebogile was prone to making about their laziness or uselessness, or their mother's failure to look after them properly. Kelebogile complained of Oratile's scant contributions to the household, although she was working, and then turned on their mother as well. 'It started with you in 2009. If she can't contribute she tells you. But it's me looking after the household. Why can't she tell me?' Kelebogile spoke rapidly and with great annoyance, gesturing first at her mother and then at her sister, who was on the verge of tears.

The mutual recrimination continued for some time. Mmapula mused on both of her girls' behaviour, stretching back to childhood, with varying degrees of apparent relevance for the disagreement at hand. 'Kelebogile, you like things [*o rata dilo*] too much. These are things of Satan,' she added, referencing their shared faith. 'Oratile, you are too sensitive and cry too quickly; you need to stick up for yourself.' Quite suddenly, she leaned towards me and asked me what I thought should be done. I was at a loss.

'I don't know,' I responded with perplexity. 'Maybe we should figure out how much money we spend on food every month, and then everybody could contribute equally?' It was a naïve suggestion, but I knew the brothers were making decent money and were in the best position to help out.

Oratile crossed her arms and looked away wistfully. 'We can't ask Modiri, he looks after the cattle,' Kelebogile asserted. It was hard to argue the point: he spent a small fortune on the cattle, and this was already the subject of running dispute. 'What about the others?' I rejoined. They helped out occasionally with the cattle, but it was hardly an expense for them; and either they or their children ate at home. An expression of resignation passed across all three women's faces. There was an extended silence.

Mmapula sighed. 'Kelebogile,' she began, 'Oratile is your younger sister, her children are your children.' Kelebogile crossed her arms and looked sullen. Oratile's children recognised her as *nkuku* – the same title they used for their grandmother. Both Kelebogile and Mmapula bore the

responsibility of caring for the girls when Oratile was staying elsewhere for work, although Lesego – the eldest – did a lot of the actual work of looking after her little sister.

‘You see what I’m saying. You’re not children, you look after children,’ the old woman said. ‘I don’t like too much discussion [*puo*],’ she added, sitting up and putting her hands on her knees to end the conversation.

In the end, nothing changed. Kelebogile talked to me once or twice about trying to budget for our grocery expenses and asking her mother to speak to the men in the household about it, but it never happened. Perhaps we both suspected that either the old woman would refuse to make the request or that the men would refuse or be unable to respect it, which would only cause greater bitterness (Durham 1995: 123). It was only after Lesego had finished her exams and had begun cooking again that our dinners resumed.

The fluidity and multiplicity of generational roles emerged in the food feud among the women much as they had in the wrangling over cattle among the men. The egalitarian ethic of contribution is even more apparent in the conflation of mothers and daughters; Kelebogile reproached Oratile’s children for their mother’s failures, and took Lesego’s refusal to cook as a reflection of Oratile’s own refusal to contribute (see Livingston 2007b for similar intergenerational patterns of blame). And, much as Kagiso had, Kelebogile used this egalitarian ethic to try to limit the already onerous responsibilities placed on her. But, in the end, as their mother’s intervention made clear, Kelebogile’s seniority made her the girls’ parent and also Oratile’s parent, and so her responsibilities to contribute were greater. (Unlike Modiri, Kelebogile’s claim over her sister’s contributions was not reinforced by this hierarchisation, but I suggest that this difference arose only because Oratile had comparatively little to contribute.) As the silent dismissal of my naïve suggestion indicated, although siblings might be equals, an insistent egalitarianism can undermine claims on their contributions, and so the hierarchical differences in their responsibilities, usually framed in parent–child terms, is reasserted.

Finally, the food feud made the sharpness of gender distinctions in responsibilities to contribute especially clear. No matter how much the women were struggling to generate contributions sufficient to feed the family, men were not called upon. And no matter how expensive the cattle proved to be, the women were not asked to contribute to their ongoing care. Curiously, however, the men were carefully excluded from *dikgang* over food among the women, although the women were necessary players – if primarily as witnesses – in the *dikgang* over the cattle.

Framed differently, women contribute to the negotiation of *dikgang* among men about cattle, whereas men do not contribute to the negotiation of *dikgang* among women about food. Remembering that women are major potential contributors of cattle through their marriages, whereas men's contributions to the family's food and feeding carry no particular weight, this dynamic becomes clearer. The gendered ways in which siblings are engaged in *dikgang* mirror the contributions they make and that are expected of them. *Dikgang*, in other words, are microcosms of the contributory process, and they allow that process to be adapted to individuals' changing circumstances while reasserting a continuity in their complex relationships to one another.

Responsibilities to contribute care – and the conflicts they produce – define roles and relationships within family, both across and between generations, and also define generations themselves. On the one hand, siblings are ideally bound together as a cooperative group that shares those responsibilities, each contributing in accordance with their role and their capacity to do so, and relying on the contributions of others in kind. On the other hand, they are sharply separated and ranked by birth order, generally in the idiom of parent–child relationships. Greater responsibilities of care are borne by older siblings for their younger siblings and those siblings' children; their success or failure in meeting those expectations of care confers or withholds the moral seniority of parenthood in turn. In this sense, siblings' generational positions become multiple; they are potentially of the same and of different generations as one another, as their parents' generation, or as the generation of their siblings' children, depending on the order of their birth and the responsibilities in question. This multiplicity echoes and grounds many others, emphasising the ways in which persons are inevitably children as well as parents, in which one person may have three mothers, or children in other families, depending on the contributions they have made. At the same time, in all this multiplicity, it becomes clear that the critical relationship in terms of which kinship and care are understood is that of parent to child, and that siblingship is encompassed by parenthood.

The proverbs with which this chapter began neatly summarise these conclusions. Siblings share responsibilities to acquire and contribute; they hold and consume things jointly; they feast or suffer together. But the precept that they should share even the head of a fly does not guarantee their unity, much less their equivalency (*pace* Radcliffe-Brown 1950; 1971). The expectations attendant on this dictum are frequently disappointed, as each sibling, brother and sister alike, bears them differently and must meet them individually – while balancing them with attempts to establish a self, life, household, and family of his or her

own. Ideally, siblings are equal, united and together; but, at the same time, they, like their things, are ranked and separable (Alber et al. 2013a: 3). And yet, in making-for-themselves, and in the *dikgang* that ensue, important possibilities emerge for each sibling to access independence through one another – binding them together even as they individuate themselves. The second proverb nods to this paradox, taking as given that siblings are frequently in conflict, and implicitly condoning it as a necessary dimension of binding ‘children of one womb’ together as kin and as persons.

While demonstrating the ways in which things produce kin, the examples discussed above also demonstrate a concomitant dynamic. Things are held together, but owned separately; they are consumed together, but contributed separately. And, as a result, the work of care they require is cast simultaneously as a shared undertaking (‘we were working as one’) and an individual responsibility (‘if you own something that needs care, you must take responsibility’). This tension can be traced to a deep tension in the things of care and the care of things: they are bound up in wider economies of contribution that are critical to self-making, as well as to kin relationships. With the women stashing food for their children, and the men purchasing and expending cattle independently, it becomes clear that contributions of the very things and work that produce family are also called upon in making-for-oneself – a question to which I turn next.