

Part II

‘Who Is Taking Care of Your Things?’

Care, Contribution, and Conflict in the Economies of Kinship

Kgetsi ya tsie e kgonwa ke go pataganelwa.

A full bag of locusts is gathered when everyone works together.

‘If something like this happens, about something we agreed upon as a family, you don’t just keep it to yourself. You call a meeting to hear everyone’s opinion on the matter, because everyone has a part to play and we all have things that need to be taken care of,’ insisted Kagiso, speaking quickly and earnestly. His voice carried across the yard.

It was a clear night in early winter, and the sky was thick with stars. All the adults at home were gathered around the fire, packed tightly into the *isong*, but it was hardly a convivial scene. Dipuo had recently come from the lands, and Mmapula had alerted him to a growing dispute between two of his sons, Modiri and Kagiso, over a herdsman who had been hired to help tend the cattle. Dipuo had called the two men and their sisters together. Resin seeping from the wood on the fire hissed and sparked inauspiciously, a sign of coming conflict.

‘What I want to know is whether you have consulted Moagi,’ Kagiso picked up from where he had left off. Moagi was the second-oldest brother after Modiri and lived on the other side of the country, although his son stayed at home in Dithaba. ‘You cannot consult some siblings while others are left aside. We all stay here. And what about Tuelo?’ he added, drawing in his youngest brother. ‘Tomorrow, if Lorato isn’t working, will you keep her out of these meetings because her contribution doesn’t matter?’ He swept his arm around the half-circle of his siblings, indicating each in turn, attempting to bring them all into the fray.

‘Let’s not talk about people who are not here,’ his older brother Modiri deflected. ‘Moagi stays far away. We can’t stop this issue [*kgang*] because of him. If I see your cow straying I won’t say it doesn’t belong to me, I’ll just take it back to the kraal.’

‘Kagiso is just being difficult. He keeps saying he wants Moagi, but he can see he is not here. He should focus on what belongs to him,’ asserted Dipuo.

'Is it me who's provoking this fight?' Kagiso challenged. 'You hired this man, but I don't know anything about him. I just want to know, has Moagi been informed?' Kagiso repeated.

Some months previously, the brothers had all agreed that it was time to hire a herdsman to look after their cattle. Modiri, the eldest, had borne the burden of the work up to that point; but as his small transport business began to get off the ground, it became difficult for him to spend extended periods at the cattle post. The cattle post was unfenced, and the cattle had a habit of wandering off if they were left for too long, making for several days' work in finding them. They needed regular attention. Most of the brothers were employed and could not pick up the slack – and none of them trusted the youngest, Tuelo, with the work, since he had lost the entire herd once before. A herdsman was the only sensible option.

After the brothers had taken the decision, Modiri identified and employed a herdsman on his own initiative. Since then, Modiri had been paying the man's modest wages and giving him food. He had become increasingly angry about his brothers' refusals to help. Kagiso took the position that he had not been consulted on the choice of herdsman, the amount of his wages, or the terms of his employment; and, in the absence of this proper consultation, he refused to contribute. It had become a *kgang*, and it quickly drew in a wide range of other *dikgang* the family had been grappling with – most of which concerned the balance to be struck between consulting one another and working together, on the one hand, and looking after individual interests, on the other.

'Kagiso, stop arguing. You are talking nonsense,' his mother Mmapula rejoined. 'A long time ago we all worked together [*re ne re dirisanya mmogo*]. Girls would look after cattle, not just boys. There were no disputes [*medumo*: lit. noise] like this. I am very disappointed...' Mmapula trailed off.

'I don't really understand where we are right now,' noted Lorato, entering cautiously into the fray. 'I feel like I've come into the middle of something. But I've observed that in this family we don't talk, we are scattered. When anyone wants something they do it on their own without consulting anyone. That's why you see everyone wanting to take what's theirs. There is nothing that belongs to all of us as a family. We don't work together [*tirisanyo mmogo*].'

'When these arguments started I took them lightly,' said Dipuo. 'I thought, as they are siblings [*bana ba motho*: lit. children of a person] they will resolve it on their own. I was just telling Modiri that for a long time you have not been talking through things together as a family. He said he doesn't like discussion [*puo*]. What ties do you have?' he mused rhetorically, the question damning in its simplicity.

'When Kagiso says he's buying food here, I thought someone would ask him if he knows about the cooking,' Modiri intervened. 'The pot is cooking at the cattle post,' he added, meaning both that the herdsman was being fed there and that the cattle were being taken care of. 'The problem is that someone has been buying food at the cattle post,' he said, indicating himself, 'while someone was buying for the village,' indicating Kagiso dismissively.

'Oratile, have you heard what your brother is saying?' asked Mmapula, trying to draw her daughters into the discussion.

'I hear him,' responded Oratile carefully. 'I won't say if he is wrong or not, but I feel it's not fair on others to contribute while others don't. Whether you work or not, if you have something that needs looking after, you have to take responsibility.' Her older sister, Kelebogile, gave her an arch look.

'This issue could have been resolved long ago,' Kagiso replied curtly. 'I also said if Tuelo was not here I won't sit for the talks. And here we are, he's not here.'

'Let's leave that issue – those who are not here will be told.' Dipuo was growing impatient. 'What kind of a person are you, Kagiso?' he added, provocatively.

'I want this issue to be over,' Kagiso answered simply. 'I don't have any problems. If this is how it is, I will just take my cattle.'

'Kagiso!' Mmapula was exasperated. 'If this issue finishes the way you want it to end, does that mean you'll just be there on your own?'

'I'm just taking my cows, but anything else that needs discussing as a family, I'll be part of it,' he replied, trying to sound nonchalant.

'No, if you've been used you've been used [*ga o jekwe o jekwe*: lit. if you've been eaten, you've been eaten],' Modiri interjected bitterly. 'This issue will never finish. Kagiso can take what belongs to him, it's no problem. I looked after his cattle; if that's how he thanks me, it's fine. Now he should just tell us when he is going to take what is his so that I can be there.'

'I'll tell you when I decide,' answered Kagiso evasively.

'And who will be taking care of your things? They're in my kraal, eating my food, being looked after by me. You want to take them, you should say when,' insisted Modiri. 'And the cow I gave him is not going anywhere. I'm taking it back,' he added, becoming livid. He had gifted Kagiso a cow earlier in the year.

'No, don't do that,' their mother admonished him. 'He is your child, just give it to him. Tomorrow he will come back to you when things are not going well, leave him.'

Modiri snorted. 'I want to do my work,' he said, standing abruptly and stalking off into the night.

This section explores the Tswana understanding of care, or *tlhokomelo*, and the crucial role it plays in constituting both family and personhood, through the lens of contribution. I draw on the work of Frederick Klaits (2010; see also Livingston 2003a; 2005) to examine *tlhokomelo* in emic terms: as a sentiment that generates and is generated by specific material resources, and the work involved in producing, acquiring, and looking after those resources, or using them to look after others (see also Klaits 2010: 4–7). This combination of things, work, and sentiment is a critical means of cultivating mutuality (Sahlins 2013) and has powerful inter-subjective effects, including by building and evoking love and producing well-being in and through others' bodies (Klaits 2010: 4–7). It also poses significant risks, however: where care breaks down, threats of scorn and jealousy emerge, with intersubjective effects of their own – including illness and suffering (Klaits 2010; see also Durham 2002a: 159; Livingston 2005; 2008). The ways in which Tswana families in particular are bound up with one another are sharply affected by their management of work and sentiment around the things that belong to them, individually and collectively.

Taking cues from the discussion above, and from other similar conversations, I suggest that this collective management of care is undertaken and reflexively assessed in terms of an ethic of contribution. Kin roles set out expectations for these contributions, by gender and age; but, as we will see, contributions are subject to contestation and refusal, even reversibility, as well as continuous reflection, commentary, and reinterpretation – that is, to *dikgang* – which reshape and recalibrate those roles in turn. These contestations emerge most markedly among siblings, in the paradox of expectations that they should be simultaneously unified and separable, equal and hierarchical. Sibling *dikgang* are negotiated by deploying a fluid and multiple framing of generations and intergenerational relationships – demonstrating how 'sibling relations are significant in creating and sustaining ties across generations' (Alber et al. 2013a: 7) and over time. In this sense, contribution provides a novel perspective on the economies of kinship.

But there is a second dimension to these *dikgang*. The specific things, work, and sentiments that constitute care are divisible and bound up in broader economies of contribution that link kin to their wider communities – which, in turn, are crucial contexts *go itirela*, to do or work for oneself (Alverson 1978: 133), make-for-oneseff (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 141), or produce oneself as a social person (Durham 2007: 117).¹

¹ Historically, Batswana explicitly differentiated between 'making oneself' – which connotes the risk of antisocial egocentrism – and 'making for oneself', which is a moral project that conceives of personhood as fundamentally relational (Comaroff and

To this end, the things, work, and sentiment that constitute care must be disarticulated and contributed to others, in different ways and in different configurations for colleagues, neighbours, friends, and partners – potentially or actually at the expense of one's natal family. Self-making involves 'negotiating a way through a series of overlapping and competing claims for the products of [one's] labour' (Townsend 1997: 419; see also Solway 2017b on striking this balance) in ways that change over the life course (Townsend 1997: 407), for both men and women, if in gendered ways. Agency, autonomy, and power are produced less by establishing independence than by creating, demonstrating, and carefully managing new forms of interdependence (Durham 1995; 2007; Ferguson 2013) – and by 'regenerating household and community interdependency' (Durham 2007: 103). These gestures signify the potential of care and, in time, they may build mutuality (especially with partners); or they may not, and their disarticulation may run the risk of scorn and jealousy. Navigating these possibilities generates *dikgang*, responses to which may involve drawing people into collective reflection on the sources and significance of their conflicts – thereby building relationships – or may require strategic avoidance and minimisation, thereby containing them. The dual imperative of family-making and making-for-oneself, and the dual claim made on contributions of care-linked work, things, and sentiment, means that care is continuously subject to uncertainty and contestation, reflexivity and reassessment – to *dikgang* – in families above all. In this sense, care is routinely in crisis; and the 'crisis of care' in terms of which the AIDS epidemic has been cast may represent a difference in degree more than a difference in kind, a heightening of stakes and a shift in symbolic terms more than an unprecedented event. Indeed, it may be that crisis – and the process of ethical reflexivity it enables and requires – is a defining characteristic of care.

Klaits describes a widespread discourse of doubt around the reliability of kin care in Botswana, and links it to a parallel concern with family breakdown (e.g. Klaits 2010: 1–3; see also Dahl 2009a; Durham 2000; 2004; 2007; Livingston 2005; 2008). Botswana frequently question, express concern, and even complain about kin care, and they actively recruit large networks beyond their natal families to supplement and expand their access to care. But these networks are seldom meant to – and seldom do – replace kin. Indeed, these alternative networks of care are often built on kin models or through existing kin networks (much like Mma Maipelo's church in Klaits' account), strengthening and

Comaroff 1987; 1991: 141) and connotes generating one's own social personhood, particularly through building wealth in people (Miers and Kopytoff 1977).

diversifying the ways in which kin can care for each other. Care, in its simultaneous orientation to creating relationships with others and to making the self, its potentially fraught intersubjectivity, its divisibility and indeterminacy, has friction and conflict built into it. Constant contestations around care signify the negotiated, creative continuity of kinship, rather than its breakdown. A discourse of doubt about kin care does not so much signify or portend the collapse of family, but rather facilitates reflection on who does and should provide what to whom and how, gauged in comparison to their relative ability and responsibility to do so. Complaints about the inadequate provision of care by kin preface claims or acts of *go itirela* and ground the establishment of care-building relationships that are necessary to that process. I suggest that the flash-points around care – the terms in which people most frequently cast the failures of family – are in fact the points where kin roles and relationships are most powerfully reasserted and most effectively recalibrated. And they are also the points where space is made for self-making, within the context of kinship.

Contribution

I frame this analysis in the terms most commonly used by Batswana, as we saw in the dispute above (which are also subtly evident in past anthropological accounts of Tswana economies; see Durham 2007; Townsend 1997): as *contributions*. Analytically speaking, *contributions* sit awkwardly – but productively – between and beyond the realms of gifting and exchange, being both and neither. I often heard 'contribution' used in English, and its roughly interchangeable counterparts in Setswana have similar connotations. *Seabe*, from the verb *go aba*, suggests something divided, shared, or given away (Matumo 1993: 348). *Dikatso* suggests things given in payment for services rendered or anticipated (ibid.: 34). Each of these terms connotes both a thing and an act; they accommodate and bridge objects and work. Like both gifts and money, contributions rely on other contributions and beget further contributions in their turn, giving them a cyclical, open-ended, continuous temporality and generative potential (though not, crucially, an indefinite or guaranteed continuity; cf. Graeber 2012: 100).

At the same time, contributions do not quite fit economies of reciprocity, whether of gifting, commodity exchange, or idealised forms of 'generalised reciprocity' (Sahlins 1972) – a notion, as many have noted, often stretched to cover interactions that are scarcely reciprocal at all. While Tswana contributors certainly anticipated various potential benefits from their contributions, they were not so much focused on getting a

return from what they put in, or even on who needed, was owed, or had received what; instead, they were focused on whether others were contributing in equal and sufficient proportion to their ability and responsibility to do so. And this was the case for contributions made at home, or to small-scale savings groups, or between lovers. Contributions were often fraught with *dikgang*, but conflicts were carefully controlled and linked more to the relationship in which the contribution was taking place than the fact of the contribution itself – a distinct difference from the poisonous, corrosive risks attached to the unreciprocated gift or the unpaid debt (Graeber 2012; James 2017; Parry 1989). As Thomas Widlok (2013) argues persuasively, models of reciprocity and gifting are essentially mirror images of market exchange, and they assume the same logics of transfer and value – thereby missing other key forms of acquiring, redistributing, and consuming resources. Much like Widlok's analysis of sharing, contribution makes room for the range of ways in which things and labour are drawn into, produced through, and moved or redistributed around families, owned and used both individually and jointly, addressing and creating shared needs. They cannot easily be reduced to a transactional or reciprocal logic, and they are governed by a rather different set of values and moral expectations.

And yet, among the Legaes and others I knew and worked with in Botswana, ethical questions about who was doing what for whom, and how, were seldom described or assessed in terms of sharing. To the extent that we might understand siblingship in terms of shared parentage, exchange, and experience (Alber et al. 2013a), economies of sharing are no doubt crucial to sibling relations of the sort this part examines. But *dikgang* such as the debate over the care of the cattle were almost exclusively framed in terms of contribution – in part, I suggest, because they were more unstable, contested, and significant to persons and relations alike. The conflicts that arise around household economies of care (see Durham 2007), in other words, are not so much the 'almost inevitable ... other side of generational reciprocity' (Alber et al. 2008: 8) as a key means of assessing, collectively reflecting on, and in turn working to ensure and sustain an ethic of contribution. In this sense, contributions fit the Tswana moral logic of *tirisanyo mmogo*: doing, working, or making together. And they helpfully adapt the moral framework of exchange to incorporate both multiplicity and collectivity, making room for economies that produce both interdependence and independence at the same time.

As Deborah Durham notes (1995), models of reciprocity and exchange tend to assume that the figures engaged in such transactions pre-exist them as agentive, equal individuals (see also Graeber 2012: 122). But in Botswana, Durham argues, agentive individuals must be

created through acts such as asking, which constitute relations between them. Even transient, short-term, and apparently acquisitive transactions – in Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch's (1989) terms – may thus underpin long-term subjectivities necessary to the reproduction of the social order (Durham 1995: 126). I suggest that contribution does something similar: it, too, creates agentive individuals, but by demonstrating, performing, and delimiting intersubjectivity and interdependency – a 'richly social' sort of dependency, generative both of personhood and of social belonging (Ferguson 2013: 235). Of course, as we have seen, intersubjectivity is risky and must be carefully managed. One way in which the risk of intersubjectivity is contained in economies of contribution is by actively disentangling the things, work, and sentiment that together constitute care, withholding and diverting certain of those resources. Another is by avoiding and downplaying *dikgang*, and minimising opportunities for collective consideration of who has done what for whom, occasioned by conflict. We will see both tactics deployed in the chapters of this part.

Contribution, in other words, is never complete or total (symbolically or in practice): something is always held back. And what remains, whether it is kept for personal use, given away, or contributed elsewhere, is obscured and kept secret – making it subject to considerable uncertainty, conjecture, and suspicion. A history of contributions does not guarantee future contributions, and an imponderable array of factors might interrupt or waylay them, temporarily or permanently. Indeed, contributions may even be reversed – or, for those contributions that are irreversible (such as lay nursing care; see Klaitis 2010; Livingston 2005), reinterpreted over time into something else. This holding back, obscuring, reversibility, and interpretability enables family members to retain the things, undertake the tasks, and build the relationships of their own that constitute making-for-oneself – a key means of managing 'competing claims, and an uncertain future' (as Townsend put it, for Tswana men in an era of labour migration; see Townsend 1997: 415), especially in rapidly changing political-economic contexts. It enables men to save money against the cost of brideprice and weddings, women to clothe their children and pay school fees, and both to provide gifts to lovers or to build houses, allowing obligations both within and beyond the family to be met (see also Durham 2004). For Batswana, not only is the separation between short-term and long-term transactional orders rather indistinct, but transformations from one to the other are often tenuous and partial; the structural and moral tensions between the two, and by extension between personhood and kinship, are therefore not so neatly resolved through those transformations (cf. Parry and Bloch 1989:

25; see also Durham 1995: 124). Like other tensions explored in this book, these are negotiated in practice through a continuous process of conflict and mediation, reflection and assessment – *dikgang*.

The framework of contribution, then, allows us to see the ways in which family economies are bound up in, impacted by, and distinguished from wider economies, and how individuals navigate these entangled exchanges to make for themselves. Drawing together everything from children's labour to migrants' remittances to parents, siblings, and future spouses, extending in turn to expectations of neighbours, community members, and leaders, contribution is key to intergenerational relationships both within the family and across the community (Durham 2004: 595–6; see also Townsend 1997), articulating links and limits between them. They are subject to a changing political economy and they make its effects evident, especially as they shift over the life course (Alber et al. 2008; see also Livingston 2007b; Townsend 1997). And they are imbued with a moral logic that is practised and revised in managing *dikgang*.

In Part II, I follow the ethnographic thread of a few key 'care things' as they are contributed in different contexts. As I have suggested above, the essence or 'thingness' of these things is less at issue than what people do with and through them, and the relationships that are thereby built around them (*pace* Heidegger 1971 [1950]; see Appadurai 1986). It is in this sense that things, the work they involve, and the sentiment they enact are mutually interdependent and subject to ethical evaluation. Much as the spaces and places of Part I took their relevance from how people used, built, and moved through them, things in this section take their meaning primarily from how they are acquired, distributed, used, looked after – and, of course, fought over.

There are several specific things that might provide apt threads to follow through the dynamics of care and contribution in making kin and making selves among the Tswana, but Batswana explicitly articulate the priority of some things over others. The dispute recounted above consistently returns to two of the most important: cattle and food. Others include clothes, household goods, and access to cars and cash. As it happens, these things coincide with the things prioritised by NGOs and government in their family support programming. In the stories that follow, I focus on these priorities; the economies of contribution into which they are drawn; the conflicts, or *dikgang*, they produce; and the implications of these dynamics for our understanding of care. In Chapter 4, I focus on the dynamics of contribution and conflict that emerge around cattle and food, primarily among siblings – establishing their unity and separability, their specific, gendered relationships to one another, and the highly fluid generational relationships that are

simultaneously equalising and hierarchical. In Chapter 5, I consider the contribution economies of making-for-oneself, their gendered and gendering dimensions, and their implications for kin care. Food and cattle reappear, alongside cars, cash, and household goods. Finally, in Chapter 6, I look at how government and NGO donations can be understood in the context of contribution economies, and the ways in which their attempts to address the epidemic's 'crisis of care' simultaneously resonate with families' needs and expectations, and unsettle key dimensions of kin care.