

14 Lifting up Culture

A Homecoming

Kgotla ke agiwa ka losika.

The customary court is built by family.

It was a warm afternoon in early September, and hundreds of people from the surrounding villages had gathered at the main *kgotla*. Anyone who could get away from work and make the trip to the district's main village, Maropeng – the administrative locus of the *morafe* (tribal polity) – had come to welcome back the first *mophato*, or age regiment, to be initiated in nearly 40 years.

People had been milling around the stone walls of the *kgotla* since late morning, exchanging greetings and speculating on when the initiates would arrive and how the afternoon would unfold. The *mophato*'s return had been greatly anticipated since they had left a month previously, and the initiation had been the subject of frequent conversations both at home and around the district in the interim. Mmapula and Dipuo had both been initiated, as had many other elders in Dithaba, but anyone younger had learned what little they knew about *bogwera* and *bojale* – men's and women's initiations – from stories and schoolbooks, and many were acutely curious. For perhaps the first time in my fieldwork, almost everyone was as confused as I was about what would happen next and what it all meant. Our collective bewilderment gave the day an air of festive camaraderie.

No one seemed sure about why the initiations had been discontinued in the first place. Official rationales, provided to local media outlets by the paramount chief's office, focused on recurrent drought and South Africa's political instability in the 1980s, which had a habit of spilling over the nearby border (*Midweek Sun* 2012). Anti-apartheid activists frequently sought safe haven in Botswana's border towns, of which the district's main village was one, or in the empty stretches of bush between them, where initiations were held. The unrest, of course, had died down long ago, but the initiations had not been revived in the interim.

Most other *merafe* in Botswana stopped running initiations in the colonial era – generally under pressure from the missions, which imagined them as lascivious and violent at worst, or as ‘tedious ceremonies’ that created ‘prodigious barriers to the gospel’ at best (Moffat 1842: 66; see also Schapera 1955 [1938]: 105–6; Werbner 2009: 453). Some *merafe*, however, continued to initiate age regiments of men and women intermittently throughout the colonial era – most notably the Bakgatla (Schapera 1955 [1938]: 106; Setlhabi 2014b: 461–3), a group of whom had settled in Dithaba during that time. But even among the Bakgatla, the practice was abandoned, revived, and abandoned again (Setlhabi 2014b). Girls’ puberty rituals – which share several symbolic aspects with the initiation of age sets but focus more on individual initiates – had been sustained further north in Tswapong; latterly, however, at around the same time that initiation revivals in the south gained steam, they began suffering a drop-off in participation, as girls sought more ‘progressive’ and ‘modern’ ways of being and becoming women (Werbner 2009; 2014b).

This tension between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’, the political claims and subjectivities each category marked, was one likely source of the lapses – and revivals – in *bogwera* (the men’s initiation). When Lentswe II, the paramount chief or *kgosikgolo* of the Bakgatla, reintroduced *bogwera* in 1975 after a long absence, it was explicitly aimed at ‘the restoration of our cultural values and civilisation’ (quoted in Grant 1984: 15). In response, Sir Seretse Khama – the first president of the Republic and the paramount chief of the Bangwato – denounced *bogwera* as primitive, divisive, and tribalistic, an ‘impediment to progress’ (ibid.) for a nation seeking to assert a unified, homogeneous national culture and identity in place of the ethnic fragmentation of Britain’s colonial government (Werbner 2008: 38–40). The echo of the missions’ disparagements was not accidental.

As Keletso Gaone Setlhabi argues for the *bojale* (women’s initiation) among the Bakgatla, initiations are often bound up with the political needs of the paramount chief to assert authority, an ‘indication of his power and prestige’ (Setlhabi 2014b: 463) that harks back to a time when *mephato* were military and labour regiments at the service of the *kgosikgolo*. As she observes, the initiations of Kgatla *mephato* map directly onto the years when new Kgatla chiefs were installed, with additional initiations held when needed for their wives or heirs. The revival initiations run by Lentswe II in 1975, and later by Kgafela II in 2009,¹ also marked

¹ See Setlhabi (2014b) for a full account of the dramatic story of Kgafela II and his struggles with the Government of Botswana.

a 'more ambitious project to reclaim the power of the Tswana chiefs, abolished by the Botswana constitution and a succession of laws, by enhancing ... chiefly autonomy and independence' (Werbner 2014b: 375–6).² But while initiations could be highly responsive to a *kgosikgolo*'s political needs, they could equally well lapse in his (or her) absence (Setlhabi 2014b: 462); and, as became clear among the Balete in the apartheid era, they were also highly sensitive to political upheaval.

Political imperatives were less obvious at the Balete initiation in 2012. The paramount chief, Mosadi Seboko, had been installed nearly a decade previously – the first woman to hold the role. Unlike the contentious *kgosikgolo* of the Bakgatla, she had no political axe to grind with the Botswana government. But *kgosikgolo* Seboko shared other concerns with her Bakgatla peers. In Maropeng, the revival of initiations was justified explicitly in terms of repairing the moral fibre of tribal and family life – which, in the alarmist terms of one local newspaper, was beset by corruption, degradation, and the inability to run families properly (*Midweek Sun* 2012). AIDS was cast as one of many symptoms of this purported social rot. Specifically, initiation was intended as a means of promoting *botho* – often translated as 'humanity' but also literally 'personhood', a powerful moral standard of dignity, humaneness, respect, and civility (see Livingston 2008) – as an antidote to these iniquities. In other words, this initiation was deeply preoccupied with regenerating a collective ethics, and was intended to inspire collective reflection on shared and intransigent ethical dilemmas – a preoccupation familiar from family negotiations of *dikgang*.

Our uncertainty about how the ritual events would play out had precedent: that process of collective reflection was not only historically contested but deliberately left open to interpretation. In Pnina Werbner's (2009) account of Tswapong girls' puberty rituals, the elders' explanations of what was happening and what it meant were multiple and highly variable, mapping out a landscape of interpretive – and ethical – possibility that the new initiates would no doubt reinterpret in their turn, adapting it to the circumstances in which they lived. As far back as 1909, W. C. Willoughby commented in his reports on 'Becwana' initiations that 'the significance of the ritual is not known even by the tribes that preserve it' (1909: 228). Ignorance and confusion around initiation rituals are, of course, one way of distinguishing the initiated from the uninitiated, and of privileging those with ritual knowledge (LaFontaine 1985: 16–17). However, I suggest that the interpretive open-endedness

² See also McNeill (2011: 74–113) on the contested role of initiation in renewing chiefly power and resisting state interference among the Venda in South Africa.

that characterises Tswana initiations, even among the initiated, is also a potent site for the collective exercise of the moral imagination.

If initiation ‘shapes an ethical subjectivity’ (Werbner 2009: 441), then, it also marks a zone of contestation over what ethical frameworks ought to apply and what sorts of subjectivities are desirable – and these are political questions as well as ethical ones (Werbner 2014b). These questions are worked out, in part, by collectively negotiating appropriate relationships between the self, the *losika* (or family), and the *morafe* (or polity). In this sense, initiations provide an important antecedent and context to the NGO and government interventions I have described in this book. They offer an insight into the ways families have figured in and managed such interventions in the past, and with what implications for the relationships between *lekwapa* and *kgotla*, *losika* and *morafe*.

I do not propose, in this chapter, to attempt a full analysis of Tswana initiation on the basis of a single homecoming celebration.³ However, following Maurice Bloch (1992), I take it that the reintegration stage of such a rite of passage might be illustrative of its legacies and implications, and may therefore have much to say about the relationships between self, *losika*, and *morafe* that initiation mediates. Specifically, I suggest that the homecoming condensed a long-standing interdependence between these domains, in which being able to mobilise labour and contributions from within families was key to establishing, asserting, and centralising political power in the *morafe*, and in which family histories, relationships, contributions, and care were highlighted and reanimated in turn. It also enacted a series of distinctions: between the initiate and his family; among *malwapa*; between *lekwapa* and *kgotla*; and, ultimately, among *merafe* and between the *morafe* and the nation state (Setlhabi 2014b). And, as elsewhere, these interdependencies and distinctions, and their ethical implications, are made evident in the generation and management of *dikgang*.

The initiation was carefully veiled in secrecy: initiates – past and present – were explicitly forbidden from discussing what the process entailed (see Setlhabi 2014a on secrecy and *bojale*). But between pestering the elders at home, prompting their age-mates among our neighbours, and considerable speculation, the Legae siblings and I had cobbled together a few ideas. Mmapula and Dipuo explained that the men would learn the history of the *morafe* and its songs and practices – although, based on the send-off event, Mmapula was concerned that they would be learning generic Setswana songs rather than those particular to

³ For a thorough historical overview and symbolic analysis of Tshidi initiations, which bear several resemblances to events described here, see Comaroff (1985: 78–122).

the *morafe*. They would learn to hunt. Rra Ditau, our neighbour and builder, had tipped us off that initiates also learned minor witchcraft – of the sort that was necessary to protect oneself, one’s cattle, and one’s family, or to identify and divert malicious threats and attacks sent by others. And, perhaps most importantly, the men would be circumcised and ‘doctored’ with herbs thereafter – although official statements on the current initiation had carefully aligned themselves with the Safe Male Circumcision campaigns to curtail HIV and AIDS and noted that trained doctors would be involved (*Midweek Sun* 2012). When they returned, the initiates would be recognised as men. Indeed, once they were back in the village, initiates were greeted and congratulated with shouts of ‘*O tla nyala!*’ – You will marry! – although many were already married and had had children long ago. In fact, the initiates ranged in age from their early twenties to their late forties, there having been no initiations for so long.

None of the Legae brothers had opted to participate. Tuelo, the youngest, had originally planned to go along and had attended preparatory meetings, but at the last minute he backed out. Kagiso was adamantly disinterested. ‘*Ga ke motho wa dilo tse,*’ he said dismissively – I’m not a person for these things, implying that with their dalliances in witchcraft and tradition they were inappropriate for a born-again Christian. Modiri and Moagi registered no particular interest. Oratile and Kelebogile were ambivalent when toying with the idea of participating in the women’s initiation planned for the following year. Kelebogile was up for it until her mother told her that she had had to sit quietly and without reacting next to a snake at her own initiation, at which point Kelebogile changed her mind abruptly. Neither Mmapula nor Dipuo put any pressure on their children to participate; indeed, both official discourse and village conversation seemed to stress the importance of initiates choosing to participate for themselves, although they required fairly hefty ongoing sponsorship from their families (to which we will return). Only Mmapula’s *malome* from the main village – or rather the son of her *malome*, who had inherited the responsibility – had decided to attend. We were hoping to find him among the men at the homecoming.

By early afternoon, word had spread that the *mophato* would soon arrive. The milling spectators converged on the main road into the *kgotla* in anticipation, their phone cameras readied, jostling one another with an air of companionable merriment. Someone wedged herself through the crowd to stand next to me. I glanced up, surprised to find Mmabontle giving me a mischievous look. She was an old friend from Dithaba with whom I had worked at the orphan care centre for some time, but hardly someone I had expected to see there. After some affectionate teasing and banter, I asked whether she had come specifically to see the *mophato*.

'*Ee*, I'm here for Tharo,' she explained. This statement came out of nowhere, and I was baffled. Tharo was a young man we both knew from the orphan care project in Dithaba, but then we both knew plenty of young people that way, and it seemed an odd reason for her to come all the way to Maropeng. She watched my confusion for a moment with a knowing look. 'Don't you know we're related?' she added casually, knowing the discovery would give me a shock, and laughing with satisfaction when it did. She explained that after doing some research into a 'small house' her father had had – another family outside his marriage – she discovered the link. 'My father was his grandfather. Anyway,' she continued, with her characteristic nonchalance, 'when we heard Tharo was to be initiated, we contributed to buy a cow. I bought him blankets and contributed for some food,' she added, referencing the costs incurred during the initiation itself.

It was a very generous contribution, given that Mmabontle was already looking after her own and her sister's children on a fairly meagre income. Tharo's older sister had been complaining bitterly to me of the initiation's expense the week before, calculating the combined cost of food, blankets, shoes, and the shorts, beads, and creams with which the men decorated themselves on their return at well over P3,000 (£250) – more than most reasonably employed people in Dithaba made in a month. The cost had been a source of some strife at home, making Mmabontle's contributions timely – they would have added as much as P1,000 (£85). '*Hei!* They don't tell you how expensive these things are in the beginning,' Mmabontle said. 'You just see them coming to you saying they need more money to feed *mogwera* [the initiate]. Even these boys they don't know how much it costs. But what can you do? If the boy wants to be initiated, you see what to do. Look, I made him a purse,' she added, showing me a small drawstring pouch she had sewn from scraps of cloth to give to him for collecting coins from people who wished to speak to him that day.

In his notes from 1909, Willoughby describes a similar economy of contribution mobilised to feed the initiates. He records that the initiates were housed together by ward and that the women of the ward would prepare and bring out food to them daily, dropping it at a safe distance before retreating. The initiates would eat this food together, along with their initiators. Remembering that wards tended to be patrilineal, in Willoughby's account, both the provision and the consumption of food were active expressions and experiences of kinship, extending from the village into the initiation camp. While the logistics of feeding no doubt worked differently in 2012 – Tharo's older sister had complained that the initiators insisted on being given packs of Russians, as the popular spicy

sausages were known, as well as money – the contributory expectations and process were similar. And for Tharo and Mmabontle, it provided an opportunity for the public acknowledgement and performance of what would previously have been an unknown kinship. Much like the youth posted out on national service (*Tirelo Sechaba*, or ‘Work for the Nation’, a programme now lapsed), the initiates ‘were situated ... as household members receiving care, as engaging in self-development, and as forming links with and for the nation’ (Durham 2007: 119) – in this case, the *morafe*.

As Mmabontle and I chatted, older men in blue work overalls and hats moved towards us along the road, pacing back and forth and snapping long, slender sticks against the pavement like whips to clear the route. The spectators moved quickly out of the way; the initiators were rumoured to thrash people if the occasion demanded it. Then we heard ululations and excitement from the top of the road, and, in the distance, above the heads of the crowd, we saw handkerchiefs dancing on the ends of long staffs. Before long, the *mophato* was trooping past us, each man covered completely in new, heavy blankets, incongruous with their floral prints. It was impossible to see any man’s face, much less recognise him. It reminded me of the way I had seen women covered in blankets for *patlo*, as their relatives and in-laws whispered advice in their ears. One initiate was driven by in a car, the rumour chasing up the line behind him that he was ill.

The men were herded into the cattle kraal attached to the main *kgotla*, the high stone walls of which made it impossible for them to be seen. Anyone who tried to climb something nearby to get a look was angrily chased off by one of the initiators. No one was admitted into the *kgotla*, and so we all waited around in some confusion. Eventually, smaller groups of men – still bundled head to toe in blankets – began to emerge from every exit, heading off in different directions. The crowd scattered, people running to attach themselves to one group or another, following behind them with enthusiasm. I lost Mmabontle, and, like many others, followed one group and then tagged after another, clueless about what was happening until someone explained to me that each group was going back to its home *kgotla* – of which each ward in the sprawling village had its own.

Lorato joined me soon after she knocked off work, to try to find Mmapula’s *malome* (whom the whole family took as *malome* as well). Many of the wandering spectators were not entirely sure in which *kgotla* they might find their relatives – nor even, in some cases, where the ward *kgotlas* were. Some simply followed the initiates, although there was no way to recognise anyone unless you knew – having bought – their

blanket. After many phone calls home to Dithaba for suggestions, we eventually traced our *malome* to a yard in the neighbourhood Mmapula and Dipuo had grown up in. We didn't find the open, stone-walled circle that would ordinarily signify a *kgotla*, nor even the more old-fashioned semicircle of stripped logs jammed upright in the ground, but we surmised that the yard must have been that of the headman. Like many larger yards in Maropeng, it had a thatched rondavel at the edge of the *lelwapa*, which had been requisitioned for the men; the *lelwapa*, or courtyard, had been partitioned and enclosed with a fence of thin hedge branches. We greeted the hosts and elders perched around the edge of the *lelwapa* individually, most of whom were familiar from past funerals and weddings I had attended. A man sitting in the entrance tried to demand money from everyone who entered, in exchange for the right to speak to the initiates – an act of contribution that would be demanded again the following day by the initiates themselves (a practice also described in Tswapong by Werbner 2009: 453) – but visitors didn't always oblige.

The initiates were ranged inside with their backs to the thin fence and their legs drawn up, looking tired and ragged, clothed only in cut-off shorts. The gatekeeper told us to greet everyone quickly and move out, but at the insistence of our uncle and a couple of his friends we sat in front of them to chat awhile. To my surprise, I found Tharo among them too, grinning and asking me to bring him a bottle of Coke the next day as he had been craving it. As we chatted, it became clear that most of the other men had been connected to the ward through family history (see also Willoughby 1909: 230). Given that wards were historically settled by a single patriline, that congruence suggested that most of the men would have been related. While the initiation worked to stratify families and thereby shore up political hierarchies, '[t]he ranking system always revealed unknown family histories' (Setlhabi 2014b: 469) as well, demonstrating and reviving unexpected relationships among and between extended kin groups, while transmitting and reproducing them intergenerationally (Werbner 2009: 454; Willoughby 1909: 230). And yet, specific relationships remained opaque, especially to those of us who were uninitiated. Given his presence there, I surmised that Tharo must also be somehow related to the Legae family, as well as to Mmabontle's.

We were back in Maropeng again the next morning to see the official welcoming and naming of the *mophato* by *kgosikgolo* Seboko. The main *kgotla* was packed: the large, thatched stage was crammed with dignitaries, and grandstands erected around the open meeting area were jammed with people standing and sitting, many having clambered up onto walls and the roofs of vehicles. The initiated men came trooping in from the

various corners of the village at a stomping trot, kicking up clouds of dust around their jostling staffs, glistening red with a mixture of soil and Vaseline they had applied to their bodies. Their hair had been shaved to their scalps and coloured back in, sharp-edged, black, and iridescent. Plastic beads rattled, draped diagonally across their chests. Some blew on the hollowed, twisting horns of kudu antelopes, symbols of a successful hunt. Their initiators circled them with thrashing whips, keeping the crowd back, herding the men back into the cattle kraal, where they stood out of sight until being called in front of the paramount chief.

The official programme of the event unfolded in something of a blur, everyone jostling for space and talking excitedly over the top of one another. It was uncharacteristically brief. Unlike *kgotla* events for Independence Day and other celebrations – which usually featured long-winded speeches from district bureaucrats, local counsellors and members of parliament, the chief, pastors, and whoever else might be available – only the *kgosikgolo* spoke. She named the *mophato* ‘*Matsosangwao*’ – ‘those who lift up culture’ – emphasising the importance of rediscovering culture as a route to dignity and *botho*.⁴ She described the historical importance of *mephato* in defending the village, and later in advancing development projects for the community’s benefit; and she emphasised the initiates’ new-won status and the civic responsibilities that went with it, urging them to work for the betterment of the village and to support one another in times of need. The crowd listened impatiently. When the ceremony concluded, the men were trooped back to their respective ward *dikgotla*, from there to return to their homes. The men from Dithaba and other, more distant villages stayed the night and undertook the entire event again on a smaller scale in their home communities on the following day.

This series of events around the *mophato*’s return suggests an interpolation of the *morafe* into the role of the family in the process of self-making, as we have seen it unfold throughout this book. The main *kgotla* called, sent, and moved the initiates around the village in ways that were opaque to the uninitiated, and briefly housed them as well – much as they had been called, sent, and housed together in the bush. Initiates were required to mobilise contributions of money, food, and labour to support them during their time away, and to support their initiators too; and the *kgosikgolo*’s speech emphasised the continuing contributions they would be expected to make to one another and to their villages and

⁴ *Mephato* were historically named to reflect key socio-political themes or concerns among the Balete, rather than after participating chief’s sons, as described by James (1996) for the Pedi.

morafe. Both the contributions and the organisation of initiates by ward enacted and performed a wide range of kin relationships, including some that were previously unknown, making the *bagwera* and their kin networks newly recognisable to themselves and each other. The men's initiation also rendered them recognisably marriageable on their return. All of these undertakings resonate with the interlinked practices of kin-making and self-making we have explored, and in many ways they seem to usurp them from the *mogwera's* natal family. At the same time, initiation does not serve to extend or produce kinship among initiates who were not otherwise related, even metaphorically. The *kgotla*, in other words, produces kin and selves in the same ways families do; but, in the process, it actively distinguishes *morafe* from *losika*, the realm of the domestic from the political. And it is the simultaneous enactment of kin work and distinction from kin that underpins the *kgotla's* claim to pre-eminence.

This demonstration of the *kgotla's* efficacy in self-making and kin-making was especially potent in a context where other means of making-for-oneself were so fraught and difficult to achieve, particularly for men. But its appeal extended to married as well as unmarried men, settled with families or otherwise. More than marking a specific, fixed stage of transition in the lifecycle, *bogwera* provided an additional, experimental means of self-making – itself an open-ended, cumulative process. The fact that none of the men at home felt obliged to participate – especially those, like Kagiso, with confidence in the ways in which they were already making-for-themselves (through business, church leadership, and marriage negotiation) – underscores the extent to which initiation, revived after so long, was more an optional and alternative approach than a necessary prerequisite to personhood. At the same time, there was some effort made to reassert the value of initiation in self-making. During the entire month that the *mophato* was out in the bush, weddings and parties were banned, bars were asked to close early, and churches were asked to keep their services quiet (a gesture that suggests the comparable roles of each in the making of persons; see Suggs 2001 on bars and making men). For two nights before the *mophato* returned, a village-wide curfew and blackout was maintained. The emphasis on maintaining silence, invisibility, and secrecy for the duration of the initiation, and during the subsequent gradual, controlled process of revealing or emergence – as the men returned to the village first covered in blankets, then partly obscured in *makwapa* (courtyards) scattered all over the village, then resplendent in red body cream and beads at the main *kgotla* – is reminiscent of the emergence into recognition that pregnancy provokes for women, a permanent sort of recognition to which

men otherwise have limited access. By demonstrating its ability to bring about this unique sort of self-making, the *kgotla* again distinguishes itself from and elevates itself over the *lelwapa*.

The family is actively backgrounded in this process, if not altogether concealed. Unlike the careful description of relationships that characterised the party – whether during invitations, speeches, or introductions among guests – the public ceremonials of the homecoming obscured and understated kin networks. No one was quite sure where the initiates were going when they left the *kgotla*; even when they arrived in the yards of familiar (and familial) wards, no one was quite sure whether or how they were all related, and no formal effort was made to describe those relationships. Family queued to see their initiates and paid money to speak with them; the men ate and slept separately. Speeches focused on the men's achievements and responsibilities, their new roles in the *morafe*, and their new relationships to one another, rather than to kin. The men were demonstrably distinguished from their families, and the *morafe* was likewise distinguished from the *lelwapa* and bound to the *kgotla*.

At the same time, as narratives such as Mmabontle's suggest – and they were common currency among spectators as we waited for the *mophato*'s return, trying to piece together what was unfolding – kin relations permeate *bogwera* and are crucial to the initiate's success. An initiate's family must be willing and able to cobble together money, food, clothing, and other resources sufficient not only to send the initiate off, but also to address immediately any need expressed by his initiators in his name during the initiation, and to welcome him home again – often with lavish celebrations (also described by Willoughby in 1909). In supporting a man's initiation, his family demonstrates its ability to cooperate, to provide, and to sustain its members in their self-making projects – opening opportunities of marriageability and the reproduction of the family in turn. As we saw in the example of Mmabontle's new-found kinship with Tharo, who constitutes an initiate's family becomes newly evident in who contributes to his sponsorship and upkeep, who clothes him for his homecoming, who takes him gifts upon his return, and who throws him a party. Initiation is thus enabled by kin, performs kinship, and becomes a kin-making process as well. And, indeed, the scope of kinship is unexpectedly expanded in this process: a 'small house' is absorbed into the relations of the 'big house', long-standing but long-forgotten ward-based patrilineal relations are rediscovered and re-animated, and so on.

Family – and specifically the *lelwapa* – also has a critical role to play in reintegrating the *mophato*. The initiated men are considered dangerous when they return from their isolation in the bush. They have great

potential to cause damage – hence the preparatory interventions of witchcraft to ease their return into the village, the distance at which people are kept as the *mophato* travels to the *kgotla*, their covering in thick blankets, and the imposed curfews. And, of course, they pass through the *kgotla* – or, at least, its cattle kraal – first. But then they are returned homewards – specifically to one *lelwapa* in their ancestral wards, which, given that they were historically settled by kin, returns the men to perhaps their widest network of family, and thereby throws the history of their kin relations into relief. Those who could find them there were those who shared and knew those relationships, or were able to discover them (as we did) from family; alternatively, they were those who – being family – had provided the men’s blankets and could identify and follow them accordingly. As such, those who visited the initiates and contributed money to speak with them – a gesture of re-establishing kin economies of contribution, perhaps, acknowledging that the initiates had accumulated a new sort of value – tended to represent the widest possible extension of kin. It is in the space of the *lelwapa* that the men bathe, shave, and beautify themselves in preparation for their recognition as a *mophato* the following day, in a sort of preliminary domestic transformation that will allow them to move via the kraal of the *kgotla* to its central arena – cattle becoming men.⁵ The *lelwapa*, in the case of Maropeng’s contemporary *bogwera*, is a key space both for containing and mitigating the danger the new initiates present and for rendering them safe again – for re-domesticating them. After their initial return, and before they can be named and officially recognised by the chief, the age regiment is literally contained in the *lelwapa*; and, in that sense, so too is the political construct of the *merafe*.

I suggest that this obscured but permeating involvement of kin in initiation is key to the *kgotla*’s project of regenerating a collective ethics. A school textbook the Legae children showed me listed the first task of initiation as ‘*Go ba fa molao wa Setswana*’ – to give them (the initiates) the law (Makgeng 2004: 206; see also Werbner 2009: 450 on ‘laying down the law’ in Tswapong girls’ puberty rites; McNeill 2011: 92–101 on the role of Venda laws, or *milayo*, in initiation). It reminded me of a similar explanation Mmapula had given me of *patlo*,⁶ the gender-segregated,

⁵ Compare Werbner’s description of girls in Tswapong being driven to the kraal like goats, and then home again, as part of their puberty rituals – moving them ‘from animality to reproductive, domestic animality’ (2009: 445). In the past, at least among other *merafe*, these domesticating refinements occurred in the main *kgotla*, where the men stayed for a week after their return from the bush (Willoughby 1909: 243).

⁶ *Patlo* is not understood in the same way everywhere in Botswana. Friends from other *merafe* (polities) associated the term with marriage negotiations, and much of the

nominally secret session in which a marrying woman is advised by the married women of her own and her spouse's family on her obligations as a wife, during which she is also 'given the law' (men undergo a similar session). Giving initiates, or marrying spouses, *molao wa Setswana* involves equipping them with an ethical framework to effectively engage *dikgang*, and thereby make both themselves and their families. While the *kgotla* constructs and retains the ultimate authority to rule on disputes that cannot be addressed by the family, it also positions initiates to better address *dikgang* at home and thereby avoid that eventuality. Much of Tswana customary law is geared towards managing disputes of kinship; on this reading, kinship emerges as one major means of the law's transmission, interpretation, implementation, and change over time (Reece 2021a). Just as the family generates and permeates the village and *morafe*, the *kgotla* and the law permeate the family – and the distinctions marked between the two are made in terms of *dikgang*.

This distinction was already emerging in the *bogwera* itself, which generated a range of *dikgang* for initiates' families to navigate. As we have seen, the expectations that emerge from initiation are likely sources of *dikgang* among kin, and they must be managed to ensure that they do not interfere with the initiate's success – or, indeed, the wider success of the *mophato*. As Tharo's older sister discovered, mobilising the resources necessary to support him occasioned pushback, shortfalls, and disappointment among his family, much like those that characterise the contribution economies of kin – requiring both her careful management and Mmabontle's help to ensure that they were suitably addressed. More seriously, the sick man who came back from the bush by car – reputedly fallen ill because of a reaction to the herbs used to heal the circumcision – was nursed for a week at home, until he died, raising the fraught question of whether he or the family had been targeted for supernatural attack, and by whom. While *bogwera* provoked these issues, they were not addressed in or by the initiation, nor indeed by the *kgotla*; they had to be managed by kin – who are also, of course, one likely source of the problem.⁷ The *dikgang* produced by the initiation offered a sobering reminder of both the potential threat kin posed and their singular capacity for managing that threat, on which initiate and *morafe* alike relied.

literature on marriage in Botswana understands the term in the same way; the noun *patlo* is derived from the verb *go bala*, to seek. Among the Balete, however, it is as described here (see also Reece 2021a).

⁷ It was also widely speculated that this young man, and two others who fell ill after their return, had neglected to take their ARVs with them into the bush. One of the ill men, a family friend and neighbour, was hospitalised and then nursed at length by his eldest daughter, but he recovered.

In Maropeng's contemporary *bogwera*, then, the *kgotla* permeates and animates extended kin networks, bringing their histories and relationships to light; creating new opportunities for self-making and kin-making through kinship practice; and equipping families to negotiate *dikgang*. At the same time, the *losika* permeates and animates the *morafe*, drawing it into being, containing and domesticating it. The *mophato*, in other words, tapping capacities that Durham associates with youth more broadly, proves 'key to regenerating household and community interdependency' (2007: 103), enacting and embodying both the ties and the distinctions between *losika* and *morafe*. Rather than simply demonstrating that the *morafe* encompasses or supersedes the family (*pace* Comaroff 1985: 98), initiation underscores the ways in which the *losika* builds the *kgotla* as well, as the proverb at the beginning of this chapter suggests – an iterative process in which both *losika* and *morafe* produce and reproduce one another as collective ethical subjects (see Lazar 2018). In this sense, the Tswana public mirrors the Tswana person – it is brought into being through, if in marked tension with, the family, which it brings into being in turn.

At the same time, the limits on this mutual involvement – like the temporary wall erected to contain the newly returned initiates in the *lekwapa* – are equally clear. As Jean La Fontaine notes, 'Initiation defines boundaries' (1985: 16). After a man's initiation, the *kgotla* acquires a narrow access to him, and through him to his family – a right to call him to service or work and to demand contributions from him and his kin – as do a man's co-initiates. And the *kgotla* is drawn into a narrow connection in turn, whereby it may be called upon to resolve intractable family conflicts and disputes. But the *kgotla* does not, for example, enter into family conflicts without being called to do so (usually as a last resort); it seldom accesses the space of the home at all. Even historically, it did not force initiates to leave paid work or neglect their obligations to plough and harvest in order to undertake the work of the village (Schapera 1955 [1938]: 110). In this sense, a relationship of relative, voluntary parity is established. As collective ethical subjects, *losika* and *morafe* are imbricated but separate; neither one absorbs or supersedes the other. I suggest that it is in reasserting this deep mutual embeddedness and these clear distinctions, and in regenerating this parity, that *bogwera* achieves the social change sought by the *kgosikgolo* at the outset, in and through the family – in ways that similar attempts by NGOs and social work offices struggle to achieve.

Having examined how the Tswana family manages its interdependencies and boundaries with the *motse* and *morafe*, and how the *morafe* manages those interdependencies and boundaries in turn, Chapter 15 explores

how government ministries, local NGOs, and international civil society and donor groups manage similar dynamics. These agencies foreground idioms and ideals of kinship to naturalise and legitimise their work, to establish relationships among themselves, and to encompass the families in which they intervene. They, too, explicitly and implicitly open up spaces of contestation around alternative ethical frameworks and alternative subjectivities, posed in terms of alternative relationships between the self, *losika*, and *morafe*. And, in doing so, they, too, work to establish themselves in and through the Tswana family. But at the same time, they are permeated and driven by an unmarked range of kin dynamics. These dynamics – and their accompanying, divergent ethics – simultaneously animate and frustrate their projects, aligning them with but excluding them from the families they serve, undermining their claims to precedence, and interfering with their projects of social change.



Figure 10 The *Matsosangwao mophato* returns home.