

Conclusion: Part V

As Jacques Donzelot (1979) has shown in his history of ‘policing’ and philanthropy in France, political actors – including state and non-state agencies – have long prioritised access to families and provision for their welfare as key means of extending, stabilising, and reproducing power over time. I suggest that a similar project has animated the work of local, national, and transnational political actors in Botswana since at least the colonial era. Tswana families, in their turn, are constantly working to acquire and incorporate new resources and relationships, to enable the self-making of their members and the reproduction of kin groups over time. In Botswana’s time of AIDS, NGOs and government are important sources of those resources and relationships. The family and the state, NGO, or foreign donor are thus deeply reliant upon and implicated in each other; each establishes its relevance and sustains its growth through the other. But each also poses risks to the other that require containment and management. Efforts to generate social change find traction if they tap into this ‘immodern’ (Lambek 2013) interdependency, and can create the distinctions that enable a collective ethics; those that reject that interdependency, falling back on assumptions that the political sphere is naturally distinct from and encompasses the domestic, struggle to do so.

The *kgotla*’s attempt to create social change explicitly in and through families, on one level, resonated with the attempts of NGOs and state actors to do the same. But the *bogwera* enacted a deep interdependency between the family and the polity, as well as marking sharp distinctions that reinforced the capacity of families to engage and resolve *dikgang* – rather than taking over, blocking, or frustrating that role. Part of what was being reclaimed in the initiation was a particular relationship between the self, *losika*, and *morafe*, the shape and limits of which had been blurred over years of increasing programmatic interventionism on the part of competing public agencies. Mobilising the ethics and practices of kin-making allowed the *kgotla* to regenerate the collective ethical subject of the *morafe* through a regeneration of the collective ethical subject of the *losika*, simultaneously reasserting both as subjects ‘that

can take action on the world in order to transform the world' (Lazar 2018: 268).

By contrast, at the ceremony described above, the families of the *motse*, or village, were ranged around the outside of the event, an undifferentiated mass of variously engaged witnesses to the agencies' main act. While the NGO's attempt to recreate initiation in its programming showed an awareness of the transformative potential described above, in the event, the government ministries and Canadian students seemed instead to take these families as context and backdrop: a potential challenge, an audience to whom exhortations might be made and for whom responsibility must be borne, but an entity marginal to the performance itself. While these families were a source of far-reaching *dikgang*, in the speeches of the opening ceremony they were denied the capacity to engage those *dikgang* and regenerate the collective ethics that might address them, while restoring their relations as kin. The agencies being celebrated implicitly retained that power for themselves. And yet, it was these very families – and the shadow audience of Canadian parents behind them – against, through, and within which that performance was defined, and to which it was oriented. It was those very families – and the diverse and contradictory range of kin practices and ethical engagements they involved – against, through, and within which the everyday work of those same NGOs and ministries was conducted. Just as we found the village and *morafe* defined against, through, and within the family, here we find a transnational array of political agencies unexpectedly defined in the same way. But in ignoring the imbrication of their politics with the families they serve, the efforts of these agencies to shore up their power and to create social change through their collaborations fall short.

It is not simply that powerful national and transnational political, economic, religious, or other forces are exerting unidirectional influence on the Tswana family and creating upheaval – as Schapera (1940: 346–57) claimed in the colonial era, and as development and humanitarian discourse suggests now. And it is not simply that the Tswana family is evading those influences or exerting its own counter-influences. Rather, the 'domains' of family and politics (McKinnon and Cannell 2013) – produced in governance, development, and social sciences discourse – are intrinsically interdependent, in practice as much as in idiom: each can only be meaningfully and fully understood in terms of the others. This interdependence becomes especially clear in the context of *dikgang*, where the moral and ethical terms in which those domains are established is up for grabs, open to interpretation and reflection. Given that the distinctions made between domains underpin the production of

collective ethics, and in turn the ability to act upon the world, both these interdependencies and distinctions ought to be key objects of ethnographic enquiry when attempting to understand the production of social change.

Anthropological analyses of development, humanitarianism, and public health have tended to ignore the family, taking for granted that the domestic is distinct from and incidental to the political, and reproducing that distinction in turn. And yet families are a key sphere in which humanitarianism, development, and public health concerns inevitably converge (*pace* Redfield and Bornstein 2011: 4). Families are targeted by such a diverse and vast array of interventions in part because they provide a context, discourse, set of practices, and ethical framework through which the states, NGOs, and other agencies that run those interventions can produce and reproduce themselves, while simultaneously elevating themselves and naturalising their power and their relationships. The hierarchies generated between family, NGO, and state in turn provide a framework for reproducing, depoliticising, and naturalising global inequalities between nations. At the same time, kinship practices, ideologies, and ethics are shifting, in constant reformulation, and they saturate the work of these agencies in ways that blur and alter the distinctions those agencies seek, invert and denaturalise the hierarchies they assert, and ultimately disrupt the work they undertake, in part by excluding them from families. These dynamics account, in part, for the unintended consequences for which such interventions are notorious; any serious attempt to make sense of the complex legacies of intervention – especially in contexts of crisis – requires that we expand our frame of reference to incorporate the family accordingly.

INTERLUDE: THE INCIDENT CONCLUDED

It was late by the time we arrived home. We each faded into our respective nooks in the house, or prepared to bathe before sleeping. But the old man took up a chair at the edge of the *lelwapa* and laid the large knife carefully on the ground in front of him. He called his daughter Khumo.

What came to me of their discussion did so by way of overheard snippets carried by whoever was walking between the house and my room, although the traffic was steady. Kagiso and Kelebogile were soon called as well. Dipuo had decided that involving the police was the best way forward, and he was trying to convince his children. Khumo, her head bowed, was resisting the suggestion, concerned that it might mean Mosimanegape going to jail. Her siblings were also advising restraint.

Half an hour later, the beams of car headlights swept into the yard and through the windows. Two members of the village detachment came and stood near the

small group of chairs around the old man in the *lelwapa* and were quickly brought chairs of their own. They were not there long; the old man recounted the evening's events to them slowly and thoroughly, and they inspected the knife he handed them. His children remained silent. The police made an appointment with Khumo for the following day.

In the morning, the children got up and prepared themselves for school and the adults got ready for work, in the usual great bustle of ironing and heating water and bathing and drinking tea. I had a meeting in the city and left shortly after them. I had not seen Khumo in the yard, but I assumed that she must already have left for the *kgotla*, where the police were based. The old man had left to return to the lands before I was awake.

It was not until long after I had arrived home that evening, had greeted everyone and settled in that I noticed Khumo was still not around. I asked after her and was told that she had returned to her own yard. I had to eke out further detail from Kelebogile, Oratile, and Lorato: she had gone with the children; and, yes, it seemed that Mosimanegape was home as well. I was surprised – and a bit dismayed – but all three women either shrugged or laughed, noncommittally.

Over the course of the next couple of days, it emerged that the police had called Khumo and Mosimanegape together. Mosimanegape had been mildly threatened, the police having told him that they knew about him, his drinking, and his tendency to violence, and that he was walking a fine line. He expressed what they found to be appropriate contrition. Khumo declined to press charges. And they were sent home, promising that they would do better.

True to his word, the old man said nothing about this arrangement; nor, to my knowledge, did anyone else in the family comment on it, its appropriateness, relative success, or repercussions ever again.