

13 The Village in the Home

A Party

Dijo ga di ratanelwe.

Some do not like the food of others.

Lorato had struck on the idea for a family party quite spontaneously, not long into the new year. 'Isn't the old woman turning 65 this year?' she had remarked with careful nonchalance as several of us sat in the *lekwapa* one morning. Nobody was quite sure; Mmapula herself was fuzzy about the year she had been born. 'Anyway, we should have a party for her,' Lorato continued, adding, 'We've never had a *big* party at home.' Smaller parties had been frequent enough, but Mmapula and her children often voiced their disappointment that nothing larger – specifically, no weddings – had yet been held in the yard.

Modiri, Kelebogile, and Oratile were all sitting nearby. Almost immediately, they began thinking up what they could provide and whom they could invite, assessing potential problems and solutions. They were pragmatic and muted, but undoubtedly keen. Modiri noted that having a party for Mmapula without involving Dipuo would create serious misunderstandings and would worsen existing tensions between them; so the siblings agreed to have an event that would celebrate both of their parents together, as a way of thanking them for having raised their children so well. Modiri was deputed to speak to Dipuo, and Kelebogile was asked to sound out Mmapula, to ensure that both were on board and to seek their advice.

Once the proper motivation and type of party had been established, and the elderly couple had given their approval, a date in December was set and preparations began. They were extensive and drawn-out, moving slowly and stalling frequently at first, picking up urgency as time progressed and the scale of the event grew. What started as a simple idea quickly became ambitious – and costly. We met monthly, and at every meeting it seemed that a new expense had been identified. Didn't we need a tent? A sound system? What about drinks? More food? Printed invitations? And the house had to be fixed up ... Each time the new cost

was voiced, everyone would shift uncomfortably and look at their shoes. Kelebogile was often quick to say that she had no money; none of us had much to spare, and the everyday costs of running the household already weighed heavily. And yet there was no question that the expense – whatever it was, whether hiring a tent or printing T-shirts – was necessary; it was simply accepted as such. And so the issue would be left hanging, the oppressive weight of expectation over everyone's heads.

Addressing these emergent costs was all the more difficult because not all of the siblings attended the meetings regularly, or at all. Moagi was out of town; Kagiso was seldom home, regardless of how often we changed our meeting times to anticipate his schedule. Khumo came once or twice, nearer the end, but everyone was aware of her financial circumstances and expected her to help mostly on the day itself. A flat contribution rate per adult family member was decided among the lead organisers who were present – usually Lorato, Kelebogile, Oratile, and Modiri – but it was virtually impossible to enforce it with those who had not been there to agree to it. Hoping to draw in help from the extended family, a larger meeting was called perhaps two months before the main event, involving representatives from among the siblings' age-mates, identified with Mmapula's help. But, on the day, only two people came, and certain key figures – the sister's daughter Mmapula had raised as her own child, and Mmapula's *malome* (her mother's brother's son, who had inherited the position from his late father) – were absent and sent no word. Such a discouraging silence puzzled and dismayed the siblings, and Mmapula as well.

In the context of this uncertainty, Mmapula indicated that we should go to make invitations in person. Doing so was a much more formal process than I had anticipated; it involved us going as a small contingent – Mmapula, Oratile, and Lorato, with myself as driver – from yard to yard among the relatives, most of whom lived some distance away, in the next village. We moved in a specific order: first to Dipuo's relatives (from his father's brother's son, to his sister's daughter, to his brother's children); then to Mmapula's brother's house. Each time we were offered chairs in the *lekwapa* of our hosts and sat shoulder to shoulder, facing outwards; and each time, after exchanging greetings and ensuring that our hosts knew who each of us were and how we were related, Mmapula conveyed the formal invitation. Oratile and Lorato were occasionally as clueless as I was about the relationships, even where we all knew the house and people of the yard from weddings and funerals we had attended. 'I'll never remember all of these relationships!' sighed Lorato as we drove home. 'At least if one of my sons was married I would have a daughter-in-law to send,' rejoined Mmapula with a note of melancholy, gazing out of the window.

As the party approached, we met more frequently, the question of contributions became more urgent, and there were more favours to be asked, things to be bought or collected, and choices to be agreed upon. Money began to materialise from somewhere – *motshelo* contributions, debts recalled or incurred, partners, savings, it was never quite clear where – and would sometimes be noted in meetings, sometimes not. No one wanted to advertise their wherewithal too liberally. I didn't even realise the old man was getting a new suit courtesy of his sons until I saw him wearing it. We met for the last time late into the night before the event – it was the first time all of the siblings had met together, in Mmapula and Dipuo's presence – and we ironed out the last costs, contributions, programme details, and errands to be run. Moagi, in charge of the meeting, thanked everyone for their hard work and invited his parents to offer words of encouragement or advice. 'Some people are jealous, and they will try to make problems with what you have done,' noted Dipuo. 'Work together, show them you are together,' he added, without apparent irony.

From the moment guests began trickling into the yard the next morning, they were carefully managed. The women – mostly friends and neighbours, plus a few younger relatives – began arriving first, and were directed to long tables set up in a fenced-in space under the trees to help clean and prepare mounds of potatoes, carrots, squash, and cabbage that had been bought. Enormous logs, gathered by the young men all week, were set in radiating circles to create several low fires not far from the tables, where still other women cooked bread for the helpers' breakfasts. The large pots waited in the wings, deployed later for the cooking of stews and vegetables, samp and sorghum, with a few left to the young men for cooking the tender beef *seswaa*. Older men and women arrived in the early afternoon, the men sitting with Dipuo in an impromptu semicircle just behind the tent, the women helping with the work that remained to be done as everyone waited for the official programme to begin.

Everyone stayed outside. We had spent hours painting and stuccoing the houses, but they were really just a backdrop to the event: virtually no one went in. I chopped fruit in the indoor kitchen in the morning, as it was the only counter space I could find, but even the children from the yard were reluctant to join me there to help. After we left, it remained empty. Mmapula's adjoining room out front was used to dress Dipuo and, later, the children. In the secondary house, Mmapula and the women used Kelebogile's room to change in – we all went from cooking clothes to formal clothes and then to T-shirts as the day proceeded. It was also used as a storeroom for drinks and plates, as well as anything of

value; access was regulated by Kelebogile's key and was restricted mostly to immediate family. My room had been cleared out and now housed everything from meat to cooking dishes, ginger beer to salads. Family, close neighbours and friends or relatives who were helping with the cooking – generally only the women – came and went freely, but efficiently, and did not linger. But perhaps most strikingly, the *lelwapa* was left clear the entire day. The large tent, where the tables were set out for guests and the speeches given, sat at its front edge; at mealtime, older women sat in chairs on the stoep around its edge to eat, children perched below them. And while it became a thoroughfare for those of us cooking and serving, no one dallied or sat *in* the *lelwapa*, which – as we have seen – was where most of the family's meals were taken and where guests were usually welcomed. While anyone and everyone had been invited into the yard, they were not only differentially restricted from the intimate spaces of the house (the bedrooms); they were also uniformly excluded from the shared living spaces (kitchen, sitting room) and even the distinctly public-private heart of the home – the *lelwapa*. People were drawn into the yard, but they were kept at a distance befitting the boundaries of the family and their existing relationships to it, which the party served to rearticulate.

Establishing boundaries of this sort was in many ways the business of the day. They were established in space and in movement, in terms of who could contribute what and how, and in terms of which relationships were on display and which were not. When Lorato's boyfriend turned up unexpectedly on the perimeters of the yard after dark, she served him outside with some annoyance. 'Two of my uncles saw him,' she explained later, adding, 'I don't need him to be seen by my uncles at a party like this.' Although Lorato's failed pregnancy had made her relationship visible, the rockiness of negotiations thereafter made her boyfriend a figure better hidden from both the family and their guests.

But the boundaries were not always clear. After most of the guests had gone home in the evening, with just a few close friends and neighbours remaining behind to barbecue the leftover meat, the siblings gathered together in Kelebogile's room to debrief. They invited their parents to join them. The gifts Dipuo and Mmapula had received were all laid out neatly on the floor: large cooking pots, oversized enamel serving dishes, tea sets, other household goods, and money. They had come from friends, neighbours, and family who considered the old couple to be elders or *malome* (mother's brother) and *mma malome* (lit. female uncle/mother's brother; usually the wife of *malome*). Dipuo made a special example of the beautiful new cooking pots one of his sisters' sons had provided. 'You see what beautiful things my relatives have given us,'

he said. 'I have been a *malome* to them,' he added, before exhaustively listing each marriage negotiation with which he had assisted, weddings and funerals attended, help given for children and houses. His children listened, nonplussed by the implicit, critical comparison: none of them were married, and none of them had completed a house of his or her own. 'I'm going to take these presents that were given by my family, because they were given to appreciate me and my help,' he concluded.

Everyone kept their faces studiously blank. After asking Mmapula whether she had any words for them – she had none, except to thank them for the day – they let their parents go so that they could evaluate the party in more depth among themselves. It was only at this point that they voiced their shock and hurt. 'Did you hear what that old man was saying?' asked Kelebogile incredulously. 'Always his sister's sons, his sister's sons [*bo setlogolo*]. Why should he take those things? They're also for his wife!'

The debrief meeting, held among the wreckage of the day's event – rumpled piles of clothes and half-finished bottles of soft drink, the jumbled presents and a couple of sleeping children – was in many ways a tallying of the day's ignominies, many of them generated by Dipuo. 'Hei,' began Moagi, 'this old man was refusing even to get dressed this morning.' He recounted Dipuo's complaints about his new trousers being ill-fitting, disliking his tie, and completely refusing to wear his shoes as one might recount the misbehaviour of a stubborn child. Dipuo had a serviceable pair of shoes Kagiso had bought for him, but a couple of days previously he had refused to wear them to the party. Kagiso had dashed to town the day before the party to buy a new pair; these, too, the old man had rejected, just that morning, complaining that he didn't like their style. Instead, he had chosen a battered pair provided some time back by one of his sisters' sons. 'He takes his sister's sons as if they are his children – as if he doesn't have children,' reflected Kelebogile. Modiri and Moagi echoed her last statement word for word, and the others hummed in dismayed agreement. Given everything the siblings had spent on and put into the party, and combined with reports that had filtered back to them on the old man's earlier speech, it was a particularly bitter pill to swallow.

Someone knocked at the door as these tales and grievances were being recounted. 'We're talking!' answered Modiri, ensuring that the door was shut tight. Despite frequent knocks, no one was let in for the duration of the meeting – with the exception of a neighbour's child who was sent to ask for a drink. Everyone fell carefully silent while she was given one and sent out.

The siblings reassured one another on having provided more than enough food, noting that they had overheard people commenting with

satisfaction on how well they had eaten and how amply even latecomers were served. Grumbling about the lack of food after a party was a common means of signifying the event's failure and casting doubt on the hosts. 'Nobody can say they went home not eating,' noted Modiri with a combination of approbation, relief, and latent concern. They were equally pleased with having kept the programme on schedule, and with the number and variety of guests who had come (aside from one or two notable absences). 'I heard some people saying it's like we were marrying our parents!' noted Lorato with a laugh and visible satisfaction. But it was small consolation. 'We need to call this old man and talk to him,' asserted Moagi finally, to general agreement. 'We have to tell him it's not okay for him to treat us like nothing in front of everyone,' agreed Kelebogile.

Dipuo was never called. The next day everyone was busy cleaning the yard and house after the party, returning things rented and borrowed. The day after, children were being prepared to visit their other parents' extended families before Christmas, or to go to help at the lands. Moagi was getting ready for the long drive back to his base. I asked quietly once or twice whether they were still planning to call their father; I was met with shrugs, sighs, and indications that Moagi would be leaving and it wouldn't be right to have the meeting without everyone concerned present. And so the issue was left to lie – like so many others.

As we saw in Part III, making intimate relationships recognisable is a key means of making them *kin* relations. The same might be said of large-scale family celebrations: parties involve a public performance of kinship and an explicit display and narration of who is related to whom and how, and of the historical trajectories and qualities of those relationships. The family genealogy was recounted, identifying which villages (and *merafê*) each ancestor had come from; within that context, Moagi introduced each member of the family by order of age, describing who was whose child and their specific contributions and importance to the family. Similar genealogical accounts characterise Tswana wedding feasts. Just as a pregnancy makes a previously hidden intimate relationship visible and knowable, a party throws the entire network of kin relations into public relief; and, as the frequency of parties suggests, this performance is a key means of expressing and sustaining kinship.

Parties, however, are carefully organised to make certain dimensions of the family publicly recognisable and to obscure or downplay others. Celebratory events are meant to demonstrate the achievement of key family ideals: harmonious cooperation, or *tirisanyo mmogo*, self-sufficiency, and the ability to provide for others. A beautifully built house, the ability to mobilise contributions of things and labour,

comfortable surroundings, ample food, music, and entertainment, and the seamless coordination of everything from invitations to yard preparations, cooking to the official programme – all are key indicators of the achievement of these ideals. In this sense, parties draw together and provide an opportunity to publicly perform all the ideals of Tswana kinship we have explored so far.

Of course, taking on such a task runs a significant risk of failing to live up to those ideals. The entire planning process had been fraught with refusals, absences, regrets, and the risk of failure – *dikgang*, now extended across a wide field of relations. The family's images of itself had been challenged; its relative success in achieving kin ideals – of marrying sons to acquire daughters-in-law, for example, or of retaining the support of children raised on behalf of others – had been thrown into question. Just as parties draw together all of the kinship ideals we have previously discussed, they echo the linked sources of *dikgang*: the organisation and management of space, and movement to and through it; contributions of material resources and of work; silence and speech, visibility and knowability. And the danger of *dikgang* is exacerbated in the public display that the event involves. Inviting so many people to participate led to heightened scrutiny and substantial potential for disappointment, criticism, and bad feeling. Celebrations risked putting a kin network's functionalities *and* dysfunctionalities, successes *and* shortfalls on display; and these ambiguities were not simply exposed to the family itself, but to friends, neighbours, and even strangers.

But these dangers were anticipated throughout the planning process, too. Holding parties like the one described here deliberately invites risk and danger into the yard, and into the very heart of the family. Celebrations at home perform familial success by setting it a sort of test. The cohesiveness and strength of the family are implicitly proven in its ability to absorb and withstand the *dikgang* presented by their invitees – incorporating the full range of their extended families as well as friends, neighbours, and colleagues. And the family is given a unique opportunity to identify and deal explicitly with the problems that emerge in the process (such as Dipuo's intransigence).

Unlike pregnancies and marriage arrangements, however, parties do *not* involve any explicit, public negotiation or collective reflection on these risks. *Dikgang*, and the means of their resolution, are obscured, concealed, and restricted to specific members of the hosting family. It is in this containment of problems and their resolution that parties work to define the limits of family. The management of *dikgang* does not simply extend the possibilities of kinship *ad infinitum*; it draws its boundaries, too. In spite of the kin-like contributions and behaviours expected of

guests – in readying the yard, in making contributions, in the preparation, cooking, and serving of food, in the eating and cleaning up, or in giving gifts, all of which we have seen featured in kin-making – the party is decidedly *not* a means of extending kinship. Instead, it restricts kinship, performs these restrictions publicly, and defines a public by virtue of its exclusion. At the same time, a certain hierarchy between the family and that public is established. The family demonstrates its capacity to reach distant relatives, friends, neighbours, and other community members – in mobilising resources and labour, in providing food, in accommodating, in calling and sending, and so forth – while containing the dangers that arise from that extension, revealing a power that goes beyond self-sufficiency and draws others into relationships of care and obligation. This process of defining kin and community against one another, and of establishing the priority of the former in generating the politics of the latter, is one way in which we might better understand the proverb *motse o lwapeng* – the village is in the home.

There are, of course, concomitant processes or attempts at realigning the relationships internal to the family, too – although they were more experimental, and, in this case, rather less successful. The party's consistent echo of wedding celebrations – in a context where none of the siblings were married and the family's attempts to negotiate marriage had been frustrated – marked a certain innovative attempt at self-making on the siblings' behalf. Dipuo's public reproach of their filial failures, in this reading, comes across more as a rejection of that particular claim than a wilful exposure of his family to public censure (although it also had to be handled as the latter). Notably, Dipuo did not dissuade his children from throwing the party in the first place, nor did he attempt to divide them or turn them against one another, as he had in other situations; he encouraged their display of togetherness and of harmonious cooperation, both explicitly and by providing them with a common cause to rail against. What he seemed to reject were the claims the siblings were making: the claim that the process of raising them was complete, and that they were therefore fully fledged adults; or the claim that they were self-sufficient enough to remarry their parents, thereby implicitly divesting themselves of further responsibilities to the pair, and celebrating themselves and their ascension to a new social role. Whether by pointedly wearing the shoes and claiming the gifts given to him by his married, established sister's sons, or by rejecting the presents given by his own children and shaming their behaviour *as children* (much less adults), Dipuo repeatedly refused to acknowledge these new claims on personhood as being equivalent to those acquired through marriage, building, and other more traditional routes. And his refusal – combined with his wife's frustrations in

not having a daughter-in-law she could send to make invitations, or in being disappointed both by a child she had raised and by her *malome* – suggests a further implication: that Dipuo's and Mmapula's self-making projects had also been inhibited by their and their children's failures to secure obligations among kin, marriages, and so on, failures that were put on display over the course of the party's organisation.

Recognising how parents' and children's aspirations to self-making are bound up in each other leads us to another way in which boundaries within the family were being renegotiated during the party: in terms of intergenerational relationships. The impression that the siblings were marrying their parents, noted by guests at the event, irked Dipuo in particular not simply for its untoward claim of adulthood on the part of his children, but for the inversion of generational order it suggested. Of course, this particular inversion has precedent in Tswana custom: historically, sons could pay *bogadi* for their mothers in the absence or after the death of their fathers, partly to ensure their own legitimacy (Schapera 1933). But this customary practice suggests the need to replace a father, where *bogadi* debts have been unpaid and marriage negotiations unsuccessful. Given that Dipuo was not only present but had successfully managed his own marriage as well as securing the marriages of others, his resistance to that interpretation of the party becomes clear. His refusal to wear clothes provided for him, as might be provided by a parent to a child, and his emphasis on how many quality gifts he had been able to acquire through the superior filial bonds he had crafted with his sister's sons, indicated resistance to his children's apparent attempt to undermine and claim his authority.¹

As we have seen, Dipuo's authority tended to be most visible not in his provision of goods or support for his family, but in his role as a negotiator of *dikgang*. In underlining his achievements as a *malome* to his sister's sons, his success in negotiating their marriages, and his ongoing responsibility for conflict management in their relationships, he was asserting the validity of his claim to authority primarily in those terms (ignoring the failures that may have affected his own children, which implicitly became their responsibility). But Dipuo also seemed to have been asserting his unique authority by *creating* problems that his children could not address – and about which they could not call upon anyone else to assist them. Whether in his slyly damnatory speech at the party, his self-

¹ Dipuo was adept at playing the tensions between agnatic and affinal kin; while these distinctions are structurally more blurred among the Tswana than in many other places where they have been described (i.e. Fortes 1949), they are all the more up for grabs and subject to canny manipulation as a result.

aggrandisement among his children as they debriefed, or in his past indiscretions and the upheavals they caused, Dipuo's greatest power lay in his ability to provoke *dikgang* among his kin. In his work among a neighbouring *morafe* (polity), Rijk van Dijk observes that '[p]laying havoc is reserved for the elderly, particularly for adult men' (2012a: 152); but more than a right of mischief earned through age, this causing havoc both demonstrates and reproduces power. As we have seen throughout this book, *dikgang* shape gendered persons, relationships, and hierarchies; and the role that older men, especially *bomalome*, play in navigating them is key to reinforcing patriarchy as the fundamental moral order (Werbner 2016: 85). I suggest that the ability to make potentially serious trouble that cannot be addressed or ameliorated by anyone else is more than a matter of skills in negotiation, mediation, influence, and consensus building (*pace* Wylie 1991); it stands at the core of the power enjoyed by older men – and at the core of the gerontocratic patriarchy that characterises Tswana sociality.

Ultimately, Dipuo's children seemed to recognise and accept their failure, despite the success of the party itself. They did not call the old man to account, as one might do with a wayward dependant or someone over whom one had established some authority, and they did not pursue the matter with anyone else. While the party held out the possibility of self-making for the siblings and their parents, as well as different inter-generational relationships, it also reinforced the limits of those possibilities. It generated the means to engage and negotiate tensions between the preservation of family unity and the promotion of individual members' self-making projects, but also between ensuring the progressive intergenerational transmission of authority and retaining inter-generational hierarchies and the claims of obligation and support they enable. These tensions, and the ways in which they could be negotiated, became most apparent in the *kgang* of Dipuo's intransigence and the ways in which his children handled the situation.

As in previous chapters, attempts to assert and enable self-making while retaining responsibility to the family, or to enable the progression of generations while preserving hierarchies, are a source of *dikgang*; and *dikgang* in turn enable a tenuous balance to be struck between those otherwise contradictory imperatives. What the example of the party underlines is the importance of an explicitly public audience or context in this process. Building, cars and *metshelo*, pregnancy, marriage, and the emergence of intimate relationships, and the care of others' children – these all derive both their riskiness and their salience to self-making not simply from recognition among kin but from their apprehension by a wider, specifically non-kin audience as well.

Of course, it is not only families, or family-run celebrations, who set the limits and terms of engagement between kin and community. A few months before the party, Dithaba had been preoccupied with the homecoming of the first age regiment – or *mophato* – to be initiated among the Balete in over a generation. In Chapter 14, I turn to this homecoming celebration to examine how the revival of a lapsed tradition sought to reorder relationships between selves, families, and the tribal polity – and thereby regenerate a collective ethics.