3   Geographies of Intervention

Tsholo filled me in as we bumped our way along a meandering red dirt road to the outskirts of the village in her NGO's spacious, logo-plastered combi-van. 'The girl's parents died,' she began.

So she left their home village and came here looking for work, maybe as a maid for somebody. At first it was fine, she was living with a family, cooking for them, caring for the children. They didn't pay her much but she had a place to stay, and food. But then her younger sister came looking for her. After some time the family felt it was too much and kicked them out. When we found them they were just staying under a tree.

The yard to which we were making our way was the last stop in the NGO's grand tour. We had begun at the orphan care centre, as they called it, which stood in the heart of the village behind a high perimeter fence. The centre comprised several modern, custom-designed buildings: an office block, an impressive kitchen and hall, and a set of classrooms, all set around an open, paved area in the middle of the plot – not unlike the buildings of a household, set around a *lelwapa*. I was introduced to some of the children who attended, and I participated in some group singing and play in the hall, which spilled out after us into the open area as Tsholo led me round the classrooms to see the large garden tucked away behind the buildings. As we walked, Tsholo described how the organisation was helping the children with their schooling and life skills, and providing opportunities for developing their talents, as well as feeding them and letting them 'just be children'.

After the centre, Tsholo showed me to a café and shop a short drive away, freshly painted and still boarded up but soon to be opened by a group of parents as income-generation ventures. The project as a whole had been conceived and founded by a European citizen now resident in Botswana, was heavily funded by European development agencies, and was supported by many resident expatriates from Europe, the UK, and the USA. But, on a day-to-day basis, Tsholo and her husband – both from the village themselves – ran the show. Throughout the tour, Tsholo

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spoke about the centre's clientele as 'our children'. Having known the organisation since its inception, I was struck by the rapidity of its growth and the reach it had achieved; but the model, and even the structure of the tour, was familiar to me from dozens of other NGOs I had visited around the country. Indeed, I had led similar tours myself. Whether because she acknowledged that shared experience, or whether it was part of the tour, Tsholo was frank about the family we were visiting last.

'The social workers had heard about them but weren't doing much,' she continued. The NGO fell under the auspices of the local Social and Community Development (S&CD) office, and the two agencies held the majority of their orphaned clients in common. They sometimes worked together on cases, but they also shared a certain mutual suspicion and distrust, which was not uncommon in similar settings around the country. 'S&CD found them a place at school, but you know they were hardly eating, only the meal they got at the centre,' Tsholo went on.

The social workers were looking for a plot for them but not managing. You know Tumelo at S&CD, we worked together with her on that one, going to land board. Then they found this plot, but *hei*! You see how far it is, how are the children supposed to get to school? Tumelo couldn't find transport for them, so for a long time we were coming here to pick them to school ourselves.

By now we were already at the outskirts of the village. Patches of dusty scrub stretched between intermittent cleared yards. Where people had built, their houses were clearly newer: many were still unpainted or not yet plastered, and some had reached only window level. Children stopped their play to watch us pass.

'At least we managed to find some money for building,' Tsholo continued. 'S&CD managed with some, and then there was this volunteer with us who did a lot of fundraising for it. But when the house was finished! *Owai* … Relatives started pitching up from everywhere.' I admitted I had been wondering about them; previously unexpected family members had a habit of gradually overpopulating such tales. I asked whether anyone had tried to find the girls' extended family in their home village before the building had begun. Tsholo shrugged.

We didn't know anything about them. But as soon as the house was there … *Ija*! This other uncle, the mother's brother, came with the wife, they have two children; then the child for the mother's sister; plus the three children that were here already. Now there are eight people in a little two-and-half, and lots of others coming and going. Nobody is working, you know, and the food basket from S&CD is not enough. We took the older girl back to school but then she fell pregnant, imagine … She is still *motsetse* [confined] in the house by now.

She gestured up ahead a little, where the house had come into view. It was a neat, peach-painted two-and-a-half. The stoep had black iron burglar bars across its front, a security measure only well-employed people could generally afford. The house sat in the back corner of the fenced, cleared yard, which had been swept smooth and featured a few decorative flowers in broken water jugs near the standpipe.

We turned in at the gate and one of several small children in the yard ran up to open it for us. We drove through and turned in front of the house, Tsholo leaning over me to shout a greeting at the small group of women and children washing clothes under a tree in the back corner of the yard, opposite the house. 'I don't know those ones,' she commented, suspicious. She came to a halt in front of the stoep, where a young woman looked up from her sweeping and smiled at us shyly.

We didn't get out of the combi-van. Tsholo explained to the young woman that we were just passing by, and then asked after the girl who had just given birth. The young woman chatted readily but apologetically, casting me uncertain smiles throughout – we had not been introduced, which made us both hesitant. The new mother was fine, and the baby was healthy. They were hoping she could go back to school for the next term. The younger siblings were at school. The young woman herself still hadn't found work. A half-dressed toddler came waddling out of one of the rooms onto the stoep, uncertainly; Tsholo called teasing, affectionate greetings to him and the young woman smiled broadly and encouraged him to greet us. Shortly afterwards, we headed out again, on our way back to the centre, saying goodbye to everyone we had greeted on the way in. Their expressions were studiously impassive.

The epidemiology of HIV and AIDS has focused on spatiality from the outset, and on the pathological potential of mobility in particular. The rapid transmission of HIV has been traced along transport and migration routes, linked with imperatives to move away from home for work or other opportunities, and to return home for care, or to die (see, e.g., Dilger 2006; 2010; Dilger et al. 2012; Farmer 1992; Klaits 2010: 40–5; Thornton 2008: 74–6). In many ways, these are contemporary reformulations of long-standing concerns: Schapera's colonial-era assessment of the effects of labour migration from Botswana to neighbouring South Africa was similarly devastating, as we saw above (Schapera 1940: 178). In both cases, mobility is understood simultaneously to create and to reflect social crisis, specifically in the form of family breakdown – an understanding that fits neatly within the broader logic of the AIDS narrative. And these spatialised assumptions are implicit in many programmes designed to address the epidemic, including those run by

orphan care projects such as Tsholo's and by government social work offices.

The pathologised spatialities of HIV and AIDS epidemiology map the spatialities of kinship described in Chapters 1 and 2, echoing their risks and amplifying their stakes. But the creative dimensions of distance, multiplicity, and mobility for the Tswana family, and the responsiveness to crisis that kin spatialities enable, are largely overlooked in formulating responses to the epidemic. NGOs and social work offices providing supplemental care to orphaned children and their families often organise space much as it is organised in the *gae*, allowing them to engage both families and the epidemic in unique and constructive ways. But the imperative to contain the epidemic underpins certain exceptions and inversions made in the spatial organisation of these agencies, in new patterns of staying, building, and movement, which in turn refigure kin spatialities. The spatial practices that provide strategies for families managing *dikgang* are also disrupted by these interventions, which attempt to encompass families and create alternative spaces to the *gae*. These new configurations generate new *dikgang* in turn, but they simultaneously constrain families' means of addressing them – generating unintended effects that may prove more significant than those of the epidemic itself.

An impressive variety and number of NGO interventions target children and their families in Botswana. I established a unit to liaise with and coordinate them in Botswana's Department of Social Services in 2005; a rapid assessment I conducted uncovered no fewer than 220 orphan care projects – as most called themselves – nationwide. They ranged from preschools to therapy camps, from weekly 'life skills' and abstinence programmes to residential places of safety, from community mobilisation programmes to income-generation projects. Some involved one person handing out donations; others, a committee of local volunteers conducting events, or a group of professional social workers creating training curricula. Many communities – including Dithaba – had several such projects, targeting the same children, and their initiatives frequently overlapped and competed with one another. These projects filled important gaps in government programmes and helped clients navigate government bureaucracies and access resources. Their relationships with local S&CD offices were alternately collaborative and combative, but both agencies were deeply interdependent. Among NGOs, the sought-after ideal, often the best-funded and most respected projects, operated on the model of the drop-in centre, like Tsholo's. Despite the prohibitive costs involved, NGOs right across Botswana were quite insistent about building their own centres rather than working through existing (and often empty) government buildings or in an exclusively home-based manner.

Once built, some centres ran all-day preschools, but most were set up for after-school care; they usually welcomed orphaned children and youth of school-going age for several hours every afternoon.

As Tsholo's tour demonstrated, the spatialities of orphan care centres are strongly and deliberately reminiscent of the *gae*. Tsholo's centre, like many others, had been designed with its buildings set around a paved, open area that explicitly referenced and resembled the *lelwapa*. Offices, classrooms, and kitchen/hall each occupied different structures, for use by different people (the children hardly ever ventured into the offices, the office workers seldom into the classrooms, but all might gather together in the hall or in the open area outside, for example). The open area was used by the children for play, by the staff to sit out and bask in the sun, and sometimes for eating meals, as well as for welcoming guests and, on special occasions, hosting celebratory events – much as a *lelwapa* would be. Indeed, some centres I have visited were set up in rented yards, originally built for residential purposes around a *lelwapa*, or even in the founder's own *lelwapa* – particularly at the start of new programmes. To many centre coordinators, these were key measures in helping the children they served feel 'at home'.[1]

The NGO's layout was reminiscent of the *gae* in other ways, too. Tsholo's tour took us to affiliated income-generation projects and building sites that bore a geographical relationship to the centre not unlike the relationship between the lands, cattle post, and the anchoring *lelwapa*. All, notably, were sites where NGO staff and clients might be based (or 'stay'), among which they would frequently be called and sent, and where they might be seen to be doing care work (cooking, for example, gardening, building, or looking after children) – characteristics that echo those of the *gae*. Indeed, as in Tsholo's case, many NGOs were managed by couples; frequently their children were in attendance and extended kin were tapped to help with the day-to-day running of the project, making the spatial work undertaken by the NGO a sort of extension of their familial movements. As well as being actively engaged in building at the centre's main site, these projects frequently undertook building for clients, such as the young girl Tsholo described above – creating room for their self-making projects while binding them in new ways to the NGO itself.

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[1] Government social work offices that oversaw the licensing of preschools often resisted this conflation of school and personal *lelwapa* as inappropriate, in line with the detailed policy and licensing guidance available for preschools and places of safety. Orphan care centres had no such clear-cut guidelines, however, and many took advantage of the perceived urgency of orphan care to make cases for a range of alternative set-ups.

But there are, of course, clear distinctions to be made. Agencies in which children and staff are resident full time are comparatively uncommon in Botswana, and residential orphan care has been scrupulously avoided in government policy responses to AIDS (although the few institutional places of safety offered by NGOs and government are becoming oversubscribed, with many social workers suggesting that more such institutions are required). The patterns of movement undertaken by agencies also differ sharply from those undertaken by kin, especially in terms of their direction. As we have seen, kin move more or less constantly among the spaces of the *gae* in ways that gravitate centripetally around the *lelwapa*. Tsholo's movement among the NGO's sites also mimicked this directionality. However, NGOs and S&CD both specialise in moving their clients outwards, or centrifugally, in directions expanding away from the family *gae* and the pseudo-*gae* of the centre – a directionality key to their agendas of social change. NGOs that take children out on therapeutic retreats are an obvious example of this tendency, but trips to events and workshops, or social worker subsidies for transport to school, follow the same pattern. Referrals to additional NGOs or government offices, which constantly expand a client's responsibilities for movement, are another onerous dimension of this tendency. These movements rarely take in the *lelwapa* of clients at all – unless, as in the case above, it has been built by the NGO for them, often away from the client's *gae*.

This apparent avoidance distinguishes government and NGOs not only from kin but also from neighbours and friends, for whom visiting is critical to maintaining relationships. It was not uncommon for Batswana to reflect disparagingly on both NGOs and social workers in these terms, complaining that they stay in their offices or are always away at workshops and events when they should be moving around the village (a topic we will return to again in Part V). To some extent, the types and directions of movement undertaken by agencies are reminiscent both of the problematic aimlessness of 'going up and down' and of building: they involve moving and drawing others away from the familial *lelwapa*, partly as a means of establishing and entrenching an alternative base. In both ways, distance is continuously produced and becomes a defining spatial characteristic of the relationship between agencies, clients, and their families. In turn, this extending distance unsettles the careful balance Tswana families manage between closeness and distance.

But perhaps the critical spatial features of both NGOs and government offices are the boundaries they establish and destabilise. Like every yard, shop, or business, both government offices and NGOs were marked off with fences and gates, some of them quite intimidating. But these

agencies also created bureaucratic boundaries: one could not access them without appropriate referrals, without proof of claims (in appropriate paperwork), without registering, without waiting and often being turned back, and in some cases without being accompanied by appropriate advocates. Even once these requirements had been met, access was controlled: children's family members were seldom allowed in past the office of the orphan care centre, except for invitation-only special events; they would not be taken along on the children's retreat camps, nor see the offices of the NGOs that ran them. The boundaries of each of these agencies, then, created differential claims of access that distinguished them from each other, and from the families they served. Combined with their centrifugal tendencies, these spatial practices mark a gradual inversion: the NGO becomes increasingly exclusive and the family *lelwapa* increasingly accessible to a new range of agencies and institutions, the boundaries between them blurred and realigned.

Of course, homes also have boundaries: fence lines at the edge of the yard, the low wall that distinguishes the *lelwapa*, the walls of the house that define spaces of sleeping, bathing, and intimacy. And each boundary works to exclude specific groups: suitors may not pass beyond the yard's fence; visitors must announce themselves when entering the *lelwapa* and will not usually pass beyond it; and the interior spaces of the house are reserved for immediate family, close friends, and occasionally neighbours, with the bedrooms of adults usually off limits even to these. In this sense, we might see the boundary-making work of NGOs and government offices – like others of their spatial practices – as a process of creating a similar, but alternative, family-like space by establishing both alternative sorts of boundaries and alternative patterns of movement. And that may be one reason why the appearance of the girl's unexpected family in her new house seemed transgressive to Tsholo, much as our appearance in the yard seemed to be transgressive for her family.

Limiting access to these alternative spaces has profound implications for the relationship of family to organisation, and for relationships within the family as well. In Chapter 1, as we listened to Tefo's beating, Boipelo made an important point in this regard. Tefo's mother had left the door open, enabling the entire family to enter, should it prove necessary. While no one went in, the fact that anyone *could* enter held her accountable and kept Tefo safe. In other words, it kept the beating within the family's sphere of access and therefore subject to its oversight – and to its ethical reflexivity as well. Where the family cannot enter – or where one member of the family can, as a client, and the others cannot (or their rights are suspect, as in the case of the NGO house above) – its relations

of authority and responsibility are challenged, even potentially suspended. Notably, as in the case of Lorato's house, the threat posed is to intergenerational relationships: a child who can move freely in and out of an orphan care centre, or even a house built on her behalf, supplants a parent who must wait to be called or invited to enter, generating new freedoms of movement for the former and new constraints on the latter. As we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, these inversions threaten new *dikgang* – a likelihood already apparent in the simmering mutual suspicion I noticed on Tsholo's tour to her client's newly built house.

Places of intervention also lack the integration – either with one another or with the *malwapa* of their clients – that is characteristic of the *gae*; they are arguably characterised more by their fragmentation. Of course, government social work offices and NGO programmes are not necessarily intended to integrate with one another, or with the homes of families they serve; while this fragmentation may distinguish them, it is unsurprising. At the same time, the spatialities of the *gae* and of intervention are not simply distinct. The similarities that intervention spatialities bear to kin spatialities link the two, enough for the fragmentation of intervention practices to disrupt the spatial practices and integration of the *gae*. During my time in Dithaba, children and teenagers returning home from the orphan care centre frequently chose to take their friends halfway, to stop and hang about on the train tracks, or to go off for illicit meetings, not returning until after dark. The centre, already shut, took no responsibility for these situations (and it could hardly track 70 children across the village in any case); the families, uncertain whether special events at the centre might be taking place and whether their children had or hadn't been sent home, did not know when to expect them. Arguments became frequent between the adults at home and the children dallying en route: about missed chores, unwashed school uniforms, missed meals, their unavailability, and undesirable goings up and down. Children resisted and avoided these confrontations, spending even more time away, adeptly deploying the sheer variety of possible excuses to do so (Dahl 2009a). They developed a reputation in the village for being children who didn't listen (*ga ba utlwe*),[2] who were disrespectful, lazy, and contrary, and even for frequenting bars and being otherwise 'out of place'. They were closely watched and often beaten at school and at home accordingly. A cycle of worsening tension and conflict, of serious *dikgang*, emerged. While this situation was perhaps an extreme example,

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[2] As one reviewer points out, this was a description often disparagingly attached to all children – but also perhaps more quickly deployed against children fostered into a home than those born there (a distinction we will return to in Part IV).

it demonstrates the risk such fragmented interventions present, in the proliferation of 'in-between' spaces they create – which compete with the anchoring 'in-betweenness' of the *lelwapa*.

Notably, the *dikgang* arising out of these situations were primarily intergenerational – much like the *dikgang* that attach to the familial management of space and time we saw in Chapters 1 and 2. And they were addressed in similar ways: with confrontations, beatings, and disparaging gossip. These *dikgang* were borne primarily by clients and their families, but also escaped them and spilled into broader concern, among neighbours, at schools, and in the village at large. As people reflected and speculated on the causes of these problems and what they meant about the children and their relations, the families' *dikgang* were compounded in ways they could neither control nor adequately engage. The organisations that had inadvertently generated these prolific *dikgang* and brought them into these wider discussions, however, were markedly absent from the processes of addressing them. While I saw NGO staff and volunteers reflect on and consider the undesirable aspects of their clients' behaviour among themselves, and even speak to the children about it, such discussions and reflections were generally not undertaken with families, nor in community venues. In NGO interpretations, the source of and responsibility for the issues at hand were invariably situated at home, among kin. Unlike Tefo's beating, Dipuo's illness, or Lorato's return home, the spatio-temporal *dikgang* produced by orphan care interventions presented no obvious means of management. The new risk they represented was not simply a matter of people being in the wrong places at the wrong times, or being unavailable to be moved as they should (although it included these things as well); it was produced in the assertion of a spatiality that competes with and disrupts that of the family, simultaneously exposing it to intense scrutiny and ethical assessment on the part of others, and isolating it from engagement in those processes in ways that might address the issues involved. And, as we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, these exacerbated *dikgang* carry the threat of particularly dire consequences for intergenerational relationships – the very relationships that orphan care interventions are designed to reinforce for children who have lost parents to AIDS.