

Part V

'We Show People We Are Together'
Making Selves, Families, Villages, and Nations

Motse o lwapeng.

The village is in the home.

'There are other things I could say here, but I am told I shouldn't.' Dipuo paused for effect, casting a dour, subtly challenging look over the dozens of people seated at long tables before him, and at the dozens of people standing behind them, jostling for shade under the lip of the tent.

Behind his immediate audience, in the far corner of the yard and out of earshot, still more people were busy tending the stews and beef *seswaa*, the chicken, rice, and samp that had been cooking all morning in massive three-legged cast-iron pots. My room had been commandeered, and I had popped in to check on the ginger beer, which we had been fermenting in a 50-gallon vat for two days. The apples and oranges and pineapple I had added early that morning floated in a thick, fruity layer on its surface. Around me, women were filling enormous enamel dishes with squash and beetroot and chakalaka. Stacks of plates stood ready in the corners. The women moved with alacrity; when the speeches were over, the meal had to be ready.

The party was a celebration to appreciate Dipuo and Mmapula for having raised their children so well, and it had been in the works for several months – anticipated with excitement, anxiety, and endless meetings, errands, and preparations. Two cows had been slaughtered, a vast amount of food procured, pots and chairs and dishes borrowed, a tent and tables and a sound system hired. Themed T-shirts emblazoned with a slightly misprinted quote from Proverbs 23.25 – 'Let's our parents be glad' – had been ordered in four colours and pre-sold to invitees. His sons had bought Dipuo a new suit and shoes; Mmapula had had two new dresses tailored. We had repainted the inside of the house in a bright peach, and had covered its outer walls with a rough stucco coat of deep burgundy. That morning, guests had begun trickling in early to help with the cooking and preparations; as mealtime drew closer, their numbers

had swollen to perhaps 200. It was the first time I had seen almost the entire extended family together in one place. Neighbours, friends, co-workers, churchmates, some local politicians, and even a well-known singer from the village had all come. The Legae siblings and their children scurried hither and thither, sorting out last-minute problems, shepherding people, worrying whether there would be enough food and whether it would be cooked on time. They were in decidedly high spirits, teasing one another (and me), working efficiently and happily together. 'Tomorrow we show people we are together,' Moagi had said to us, by way of encouragement, late the night before. And so we seemed to be.

As one of the guests of honour, Dipuo's was the last official speech to be made. The assembled crowd had already heard the full genealogy of the family stretching back three generations, to the elderly couple's parents' parents; formal introductions of its key living members; and short speeches of appreciation from Mmapula's *malome* (the son of her mother's late brother), one of the couple's children, and one of their grandchildren. Mmapula had just given an impassioned oration about parenthood and family. When it was his turn to speak, Dipuo began by noting, '*Ke bediwa Dipuo, mme ga ke rate dipuo*' – I am called Dipuo but I dislike disagreements (literally, *dipuo* means 'discussions') – to general laughter. But it was also a sort of ironic warning, a phrase he had been uttering ominously in family meetings leading up to the event itself. As his speech wore on, his meaning became clear.

'I can't refuse; I'm happy about what they did for us today,' he allowed, picking up from his deliberate pause. 'Even though they are saying I should not tell you that I'm not happy with the fact that they are not helping me at the lands, and not looking after me – yes, I won't say it.'

Over the days prior to the party, the old man had been sounding out people in various quarters about his speech, and about voicing his complaints about his children's supposed filial failures. Provocatively, he had suggested the possibility first to his eldest daughter, Khumo, and then to his son Moagi – both of whom had been marginally involved in the party planning but were nonetheless contributing and were implicated in the accusation. Both told him abruptly that it would be inappropriate. Worse, he then suggested to the son of one of his brothers (often called as *malome* for his own children) that he would shame his children in front of the crowd for being busy organising parties and pretending to care about him in public when in fact they don't help him at the lands or look after him properly. Reputedly, the brother's son had become very angry with him and had insisted that he should say no such thing. But now it had been said.

As he finished, some of the women began gathering in the outdoor kitchen – converted now to a serving station – and started filling plates for the older children to ferry around the yard to guests. To the siblings’ great relief, there was ample food, and still more left over for guests who might arrive later. But most of the siblings had been busy in the yard during Dipuo’s speech and would only come to hear of his imputations later that evening when we sat down to debrief. ‘*Re na le mathata,*’ Modiri concluded then – we have problems. ‘*A mantsi,*’ added Moagi. Many.

At any given time, there were countless celebrations in the offing in Dithaba. During my fieldwork, we organised three notable parties at home: one for the first birthday of Boipelo’s child; one for Lesego’s thirteenth birthday; and the enormous feast described above. Scattered between were celebrations hosted by neighbours, friends, and relatives: for Christmas or New Year; *motshelo* (savings group) meetings, graduations, or birthdays – including the eighty-third birthday of Mmapula’s late mother’s sister, a party that drew well over 100 people. And then there were the frequent village-wide events held at the *kgotla* (customary court), parties thrown by local NGOs, baby showers, weddings, and funerals. Some were customary, with long-standing precedent, like the first birthday party, but most were ad hoc, such as those attached to the otherwise randomly chosen birthdays of Lesego or Mmapula’s *mmamogolo*.

A remarkable prevalence of celebratory events is nothing new among Batswana, although their motivations may have changed. Schapera records the frequency of parties and get-togethers in the colonial era, for everything from ‘doctoring’ new huts to births, confirmations, initiations, betrothals, weddings, and funerals – although he notes that some causes for celebration had already been abandoned (Schapera 1940: 174–5). He touches on them only in passing, however, as ‘[e]vents ... [that] help to relieve the monotony of what at best is hardly a colourful existence, even to the people themselves’ (ibid.: 172) – although he concedes that they might ‘counteract in some degree the disintegrating tendencies of frequent separation’ (ibid.: 178) that he described as characterising household routines and residential patterns, especially during the era of labour migration (ibid.: chapter 6). In that capacity, he connects events with family meetings called to deal with marriage negotiations, court cases, and internal conflict.

I suggest that these two sorts of ‘family gatherings’, as Schapera calls them – for celebration on the one hand and for negotiations on the other – are equally important in making kin, but of rather different orders. Parties and events explicitly involve everyone from neighbours to friends to political figures, and they focus on performing the family’s

success in achieving certain kin ideals. But negotiations are exclusive to key members of the family, are carefully restricted and hidden, and grapple continuously with the threats and failures that families face. While both bring family together, they do so in quite different ways, to quite different ends. One often produces the other: negotiations are undertaken in anticipation of weddings and funerals. And, like other kin-making processes, hosting or participating in events creates discord and risks of its own, which must be managed and contained in certain ways, and which are critical processes in sustaining and delimiting family. But in their differentiation, part of the relevance of celebrations emerges: more than simply relieving monotony or encouraging togetherness, celebrations demonstrate the negotiation of tensions between the familial and political dimensions of Tswana kinship, between publicly performing the ideals of kinship and managing its fraught realities.

Celebrations provide insight into the production and management of other tensions as well. As McKinnon and Cannell point out, any distinction between the familial and the political is ideological, not given, and therefore requires significant boundary-making – in spite of which, a deep interdependency remains (McKinnon and Cannell 2013: 11). Events like those described in this chapter mark critical sites for this work, and provide useful perspectives on the unexpected interdependencies that emerge. They require participants to 'negotiate issues of inclusion and exclusion, of cooperation and rejection, of civility and incivility' (Durham and Klaitz 2002: 778); those negotiations work primarily to differentiate and connect certain groups from or with others in certain ways – especially kin from and with non-kin. Moreover, they are negotiations condensed around *dikgang*. Glossing the proverb that opens this chapter, Schapera suggests that 'a man's social standing and influence are often determined by his reputation as a host' (Schapera 1940: 170). His analysis hints at but understates the relevance of the conduct and management of the home, and of kin and non-kin *in* the home, to the political dynamics of the village. To say *motse o kwapeng*, the village is in the *lekwapa*, is to suggest that the village begins in, is sustained by, and is even generated by the home; and that, in many ways, the shape and meaning of the public sphere, and the power of its politics, emanate from this specific relationship with the home. And, as Schapera's gloss implies in its emphasis on hosting, these relationships are perhaps most apparent in events and celebrations.

The chapters in Part V examine this possibility through a close reading of three quite different events: the party at home introduced above; a homecoming celebration for the first *mophato*, or age regiment, to be initiated in nearly 40 years; and a ceremony held to celebrate the opening

of a campsite run by a local NGO. I consider the first event, and kin events generally, as a key means of establishing a family's relative success, its collective ability to mobilise people and resources, to cooperate, and to provide amply for itself and for others. But such events are also a site where families both invite and contain conflict (or *dikgang*) in ways that establish the limits of kinship. Family parties are also alternative, experimental means of producing opportunities to self-make when pregnancy, marriage, and other routes can be so fraught; and they mark moments in which specific distinctions and relationships between the home and the village, the family and the state, the realms of kinship and of politics are generated, sustained, and negotiated. The initiation homecoming is a similar site of negotiation, explicitly oriented towards regenerating the *morafe*, or tribal polity – again by creating new opportunities for self-making and kin-making, but also by demonstrating the interdependencies of *morafe* and *losika*, or family, and by establishing distinctions between the two that render a rough parity between them. Finally, the opening ceremony demonstrates the ways in which NGOs, state agencies, and transnational donors tap into kinship idioms and practices to naturalise and legitimise their work, their relationships with one another, and the precedence they seek over the families in which they intervene. But the ceremony also demonstrates the contradictory multiplicity of kinship practices and ideals that permeate that work and those relationships, overwhelming and undermining them, and frustrating their projects of social change. Holding these three events together, I suggest, enables what Sian Lazar has called a 'kinship anthropology of politics' (2018), focused on political spaces and the construction of political subjects – but also, here, on the spaces in which the domains of kinship and politics are distinguished and produced and in which the self, the family, the polity, and the state are generated.

In Part V, I have chosen to focus on comparatively exceptional, ad hoc events. Attention to such festivities helps to sidestep deep-seated and problematic assumptions that AIDS affects only family reproduction and survival – which a preoccupation with weddings and funerals in the literature suggests – and to take a wider perspective on the potential legacies of the epidemic. Parties such as the one described above often share many features with weddings – the range of invitees, the large white tent, the changes of clothing, choreographed dancing, programme of speeches, and not least the feast itself – and this resonance has important implications. But opportunities for ad hoc parties are more easily and spontaneously created – often at more or less random junctures, in response to a felt need as much as a specific event, time, or more predictable rationale – and their frequency suggests something ongoing

and continuous in the dynamics they generate. In this sense, parties offer insight into the everyday ritual dimensions of kinship, and they become especially relevant when certain key rituals, such as marriage, can be so difficult to orchestrate. Parties and celebrations also proved surprisingly open to experimentation: small organisations and government agencies could (and did) organise and adapt them to their own ends. I suggest that this adaptability makes these otherwise distinct sorts of events uniquely demonstrative of ongoing negotiations around the limits of family, the differentiation of political from family spheres, and the management of appropriate relationships between the two.



Figure 9 *Dipitsane* – pots cooking for the feast. Men tend three-legged pots of meat for *seswaa*, and women pots of vegetables, for the Legae party.