

Conclusion: Part IV

Historically, much of the literature on fosterage and child circulation understood these practices primarily in terms of prevailing political and economic conditions (Alber 2004; Bledsoe 1990; Block 2014; Goody 2013 [1982]: 3; see a similar argument in Alber et al. 2013b), often as a response to crisis (Ingstad 2004; see Goody 2013 [1982] on crisis versus non-crisis fostering), and specifically as a reaction to poverty, seeking opportunities for social advancement on the part of the child, the natal parents, or the foster parents (Archambault 2010; Bledsoe 1990; Leinaweaver 2007a; 2007b; Stack 1974). But it is also an ordinary, widespread kin practice, not simply responsive to socio-political conditions, but also actively engaged in reworking them. Researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners alike work on the assumption that child circulation in the context of AIDS can best be understood (and formally deployed) as a response to mass orphanhood and a crisis of care. However, taking cues from Schapera's (1940: 246–7) descriptions of practices that are familiar from my own fieldwork over 70 years later, in Part IV I have argued that child circulation forms an integral dimension of the ideals, structures, and practice of Tswana kinship more broadly. Further, I have sought to demonstrate that it serves not simply to extend kin networks or bind them more closely together, but also to differentiate and distance them; that *dikgang* are critical means and indicators of this differentiation; and, counterintuitively, that such differentiation is critical to the resilience of those networks.

In Part II, I examined ways in which relationships among siblings, between siblings and their children, and between grandparents and grandchildren are all frequently refigured as parent–child relationships – thereby generating a shifting field of generations and intergenerational relatedness. In child circulation, we find processes that work continuously to differentiate these relationships from one another and to prioritise certain parent–child (or generational) configurations over others. Thus, a girl like Lesedi might have an older sister, a biological mother, a mother's sister, and a grandmother, all of whom are potentially and actually considered mothers to her. But with her biological mother

largely absent, which meant that she was raised primarily by her grandmother, her grandmother takes precedence as mother; and Lesedi's relationships with other members and generations of her family shift to accommodate this precedence. If her older sister lived elsewhere and they seldom saw each other, the sister's parent role would be diminished in comparison; although, by the same token, if Lesedi went to live with that sister, the latter's parent role would be gradually prioritised. And these configurations often change over time, depending on the circumstances of the people involved and their enactment of the key processes of kin-making we have explored – above all, their involvement in managing *dikgang*. While an 'essential similarity flows between and among' (Wagner 1977: 623, italics in the original) these relationships, making them each a sort of parenthood, the circulation of children – counter-intuitively – works to disrupt that flow.

This differentiation, in turn, enables the multiplicity that is so characteristic of Tswana kin roles and relationships. One can have multiple mothers, be mother to multiple people (siblings, offspring, grandchildren), and be multiple sorts of relative (sister, mother) to a single person, not because these relationships are conflated and interchangeable, but to the extent that they are differentiated and particularised. Multiplicity suggests not simply that anyone or everyone *can be* someone's parent, but that several specific people, by dint of their positions in a network of relationships, the responsibilities they undertake (of managing movement, contributing care, and jointly reflecting on and negotiating *dikgang*), and their explicit differentiation from one another, *are* one's parents. Similarly, one can only be sister *and* mother to someone (potentially or actually) if these are differentiated roles. And it is perhaps this multiplicity above all – and, by extension, the means of differentiation that produce it – that has made families and kin practice so fraught and yet so resilient in the context of the AIDS crisis, and many other crises besides. While there is no question that socio-politico-economic contexts affect kin practice, it is not simply in terms of the stimulus–response effect that is often presupposed; one produces, is implicated in, and adapts to the other. I suggest that it may not be the epidemic itself as much as assumptions about the childcare crisis it has created – and associated policy responses to that apparent crisis – that have begun to introduce new variables into Tswana understandings of child circulation.

In Part V, I move from the creation of appropriate distinctions within and between families to the creation of appropriate distinctions between the family and the village. Taking my cue from concerns about the appropriate relationship between law and kinship noted in the context

of formal fostering, I explore the work that goes into ordering interactions between the *lekwapa* (courtyard, house, or family) and the *motse* (village or community) or *morafe* (tribal polity). As in previous chapters, self-making is implicated in – and in turn enables – these processes of ordering and distinguishing. And as in all the scenarios I have explored so far, the management of *dikgang* plays a critical role as well – this time in terms of its exposure and concealment. These dynamics were thrown into sharpest relief in the frequent public events that characterised village life during my fieldwork – most notably, in a major celebration to honour Mmapula and Dipuo, in the first initiation held in a generation, and in an opening ceremony conducted by a local NGO.

INTERLUDE: TUMI'S NOTE

One Friday afternoon I had a short, formal message from Lesedi's brother.

'Hello Koreen! I duly inform you of the passing on of Tumi M. She passed on today, in the morning.'

Its suddenness caught me off guard. 'Tumi as in your cousin Tumi??' I responded. A ridiculous question. A last-ditch attempt to stave off the news.

'The Tumi you know,' he replied, patiently.

I was sitting at a table in a bustling café in Edinburgh, feeling suddenly out of place. I had been trying to write, which now felt pointless. But words were all I had to imagine my way to them. I saw them making their way up the A1, in Lesedi's white Toyota. Lesedi's girl will be in the back seat. But with whom? Lorato, perhaps. Lesedi's girl will be talking away, provocative, precocious, working at being oblivious. Lesedi's brother may be in the front seat, up from South Africa. Others may have caught the early morning bus north. What would the mood in the car be like? Tired, I think. Tired of the week that has been and the weeks before that – of illness, hospital visits, trips all over the city looking for medicines, of children crying, the strain of not knowing what was to come. Tired of the week to come – the cooking and greeting and cleaning and singing and burying.

But things are never quite as I imagine they might be. Two messages arrived from Lorato as I wrote. They are still in Gaborone; Lesedi has too many errands to run; they will leave tomorrow. Tumi has already gone ahead. They went to fetch her at Marina, the local hospital, in the morning, with the mortuary car; they took her back to the house in the city for prayers; and then she left. The last journey home. There is little mention of how anyone might feel. But Lorato says she can't stop crying; she says it's disbelief, shock. They were not particularly close. Then again, death has surprising ways of bringing us together.

I have fought against this being a story of dying. But still it is: a story of dying mothers, of dying children, of endlessly, impossibly, recreating ourselves and our families in the face of death.

I had been writing about Tumi the week before she died. About her sitting on the floor, on the tiles, with her back against the wall in the house in Gaborone; about her two-month-old child on folded blankets beside her, sleeping, then kicking awake, then mewling. About sitting on the end of the worn, slung-back red sofa near them, holding the fussing little one as Tumi described her family on my sketch pad, instructing me not to look. Being careful of the baby's neck and head. Tumi writing on her knees, noticing that she'd forgotten to include her child at first, then squeezing in her name at the bottom of the page with a laugh. How much less, and less brazenly, she laughed by then. Her eyes, which always seemed grounded, relaxed, but that darted suspiciously too. Her talk of witchcraft. The love of her daughter. Her slow smile and freckled face. Her seriousness: I must not read what she had written, nor show anyone, until after I had left. Closing the sketchbook, putting it upside down under my other books as we continued our conversation; her watching to make sure I had taken it and kept it closed even as I departed.

Finding a list of the names of her family members and their relationships to her, from her grandmother to her daughter. A short paragraph on how much she loved her family, especially her cousin who had looked after her so much, and her baby girl.

I send money for the funeral, and a story. I feel as if something is slipping through my fingers.