

## 6 Supplementary Care

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Pono came struggling up the dusty road towards me, pushing a wobbling wheelbarrow piled high with sacks of maize meal, sugar, vegetables, and odd toiletries tucked in around the edges. I hollered to catch her attention, and she looked up, throwing me a cheeky grin. Shortly, she pulled up in front of me to rest. 'I'm from the shop,' she said breathlessly, omitting the other obvious detail: she had been sent to take her food basket.

I had known Pono since she was six years old, when I met her at the orphan care centre. We had been neighbours, and she and her little sister had visited my yard frequently. She was also a distant relation of Mmapula, their families both hailing from Maropeng. In her early teens, slight, bright, and precocious, she had a mischievous sense of humour and was wise beyond her years. I turned to accompany her home.

'Where's the old woman?' I asked, partly to hear how Pono's grandmother was doing, and partly hoping to avoid meeting her. Since before Pono's mother's death, her mother's mother had been somewhat infamous in the neighbourhood; in my company, she was prone to diatribes and discomfiting requests for money (see Durham 1995).

'She's at the shebeen, *akere*,' Pono answered, without missing a beat. Her grandmother was frequently drunk and often left the children locked out of the run-down brick house in which they lived while she was off drinking. Pono's grandmother did not work, and only infrequently ploughed; the household subsisted primarily on intermittent contributions from Pono's older sister, occasional gifts of food and clothes that came via the NGO, and the food basket Pono and her little sister received monthly from the government as registered orphans. Pono and her younger sister were often left to cook for themselves, wash their school uniforms, and otherwise look after the house and yard, even when I first knew them – which meant that many of the chores either didn't get done or were done haphazardly. At the NGO, we had been tasked occasionally with marching the girls in for a shower, or ensuring that they washed their uniforms at the centre; like the other children, they ate lunch and an early supper there. I had even been asked to administer and monitor a

prescription for Pono, since her grandmother was apt to forget. Pono was headstrong, quick to talk back, and acutely aware that she was the primary conduit for many of her family's resources.

'My older sister has moved,' Pono noted as we rolled into her grandmother's unfenced, rocky yard, thankfully empty. She fetched me a ramshackle chair. 'She's saying she wants to take me and my other sister to stay with her.' The older sister, Mpho, was only in Maropeng – the next village over, and the administrative centre of the district – but it was still some distance away. By then, Mpho had two children of her own, and neither she nor her boyfriend had regular employment. They were staying with Mpho's father's father, who was losing his sight. I asked Pono what she thought of the idea. '*Gaketise*,' she said – I don't know. She shrugged. 'This old woman is saying my sister only wants the food basket. And she's asking, what is she going to eat if we go?'

Tumelo, the village social worker, seemed to share the old woman's scepticism. Pono described joint visits to Tumelo's office with her older sister and grandmother, and their fruitless attempts to negotiate a transfer of the girls' registration and food basket from Dithaba to Maropeng. Mpho would produce a litany of examples demonstrating her grandmother's neglectful behaviour; her grandmother would answer with a litany of examples demonstrating Mpho's greed and filial irresponsibility. From what I knew, both were probably accurate. Tumelo had asked Pono and her sister what they would prefer, but they had remained silent. 'What could I say?' she asked me, rhetorically; we both knew one situation could be as bad as the other, and that taking sides could provoke uncertain consequences.

I heard a few weeks later that Mpho had eventually just taken Pono and her sister to stay with her, hoping that the transfer of the food basket would be hastened when the social workers realised the change in residence was already a *fait accompli*. It was a misjudgement. The social workers refused, taking the incident as proof that Mpho was only after the girls' food basket and therefore did not have their best interests at heart. The girls remained registered in Dithaba at the same shop; but, in their absence, their grandmother could not fetch the monthly ration from the other side of the village, and so it went uncollected. It marked a major falling-out between Mpho and their grandmother, after which they refused to speak to one another, although the girls were allowed to visit the old woman from time to time.

The Department of Social Services introduced the food basket as its central response to the 'orphan crisis' in 1999, under the *Short Term Plan of Action on the Care of Orphans* (RoB 1999). Much to the chagrin of social work practitioners and policymakers alike, the plan was still the primary policy guide for the orphan care programme during my fieldwork in 2012. The food basket had been a source of endless consternation in the interim. The plan explicitly framed it as a contribution to the

entire family, to assist them in managing the additional burden of caring for an orphaned child in the absence of contributions that child's parent would have made. As such, it provided an ample amount of food – much more than a single person could eat in a month, and certainly more than many of the adults in the Legae household managed to contribute. Nutritionists had been involved in identifying a healthy range of foodstuffs. And yet the stories of the ways in which it had gone wrong were legion: grandmothers were rumoured to resell the staples in their tuckshops; greedy aunts were said to feed their own biological children while letting the orphaned children of their late siblings go without; or orphaned children were reported to have commandeered the baskets and refused to share them with anyone else in the household, cooking for themselves and insulting their grandparents into the bargain. Indeed, tales of food basket abuse by neglectful, selfish relatives or poorly socialised orphans were a sort of shorthand for the irreparable collapse of the Tswana family.

Perhaps partly because of these narratives, almost all of the NGOs I knew provided feeding programmes of some kind. In many cases, that was all they provided. Whether a lack of food was ever a serious issue for the orphans served by these projects was never fully established. Given that the children were fed at school as well as through the government's problematic food baskets, it seemed unlikely. As a Motswana colleague who worked for the American Embassy observed wryly one day: 'Botswana must have the fattest orphans in the world' (see similar commentary in Dahl 2014).

Food was not the only thing with which government and NGOs responding to the AIDS epidemic in Botswana provided their clients – although it was by far the most common. Clothes – donated outfits from NGOs or school uniforms from social workers – were also provided, as was cash support for school fees and transport. Household necessities such as blankets and mattresses were also favoured. But what was most striking was that all of these items were the very sorts of things that figured so strongly in the contribution economies of kin-making and making-for-oneself explored above. Their relative priority in families was largely mirrored in these programmes.

To the extent that AIDS has been framed as a crisis of care – with more people (the ill, dying, and orphaned) needing care, and fewer people to provide it – this parallel is deeply appropriate. To an extent, food *is* care, as are clothes and household goods; and both government and NGOs were attempting to make contributions where they believed those of parents had been lost. This gesture presented a 'way in' to the family, creating a pseudo-kin role for these agencies by dint of their contribution. The common habit of referring to orphaned children as *bana ba bomma-boipelego*, children of the social workers, or *bana ba diNGO*, children of the NGOs – much like calling the calf Modiri's child – seemed to

recognise the contribution made in terms of the parent–child relationship central to Tswana kinship.

But the ironic undertone of these expressions was equally telling. Although they may provide food for the family, social workers don't undertake the cooking or any of the other work of care that raising children or being family requires; nor do they undertake the work of producing the food itself. The same limitation generally applies to NGO donations to the home. The child recipients, in turn, are either unable to do the work that these things require, or they must do it for others who have not necessarily contributed towards it. Even if they are animated by the appropriate sentiment, then, food baskets and NGO donations are awkwardly estranged from the work that might make them expressions of care. And, as we have seen, this disarticulation of things, work, and sentiment not only disrupts care and its relationship-building potential, but also creates the risk of scorn and jealousy in its place. The tekonymic phrases noted above are often deployed when children are conducting themselves inappropriately at home; they serve to signify the children's growing distance from the family rather than the social worker's or NGO's inclusion. These contributions, in other words, only partially live up to their billing as supplemental care, and they do not serve to regenerate kin relationships in the way care ordinarily would. Instead, these contributions behave like poisonous gifts that cannot be reciprocated, and therefore threaten relationships (Durham 1995; Parry 1989). They are not generative – neither of future, additional contributions, nor of kin relationships as such.

This partiality does not entirely foreclose the possibility of care, however, as it leaves the source of the contribution open to reinterpretation. Government policy positions the food basket as a sort of replacement for a dead parent's contributions, for the use of the whole family (RoB 1999). But in the absence both of the dead parent and of the contributing institution, the contribution is delinked from a contributor. And it is open to claims – as a contribution – by those who cannot otherwise contribute to the extent expected of them. In this sense, it offers family members a potential means of asserting a new role for themselves in their families, and a new means of making-for-themselves as well. Thus, Pono, her elder sister, and her grandmother all asserted some claim on the girls' food basket – not simply for their own use, but as an object that their other care work validated as a contribution to the family and therefore as an expression of care. But, as we saw in Tuelo's case in Chapter 5, contributions made of others' things seldom have the desired effect. The extent to which the food basket is delinked from work and from its original contributor makes contributory claims on it highly volatile and open to contestation. As we saw with Pono's older sister above, ethical assessments about what such a claim means or demonstrates about the

would-be contributor and her relationships may arrive at quite different conclusions. And this indeterminacy is particularly marked when the potential arbiters of such claims – social workers or NGO figures – explicitly exclude themselves from the relationships of the *gae* and apply rather different ethical measures of their own.

Perhaps more importantly, these claims to self-making by appropriating contributions are made *at the expense of* someone else's claims, or in direct competition with them. Children's claims to food baskets become a sort of precocious claim to personhood and to a more significant role in the family (even a political claim, as suggested by Dahl 2009a) – a claim that speeds them up or knocks them out of time, much as Lorato's building project did in Chapter 2. Because these newly acquired resources cannot easily be contributed or gifted elsewhere, they do not serve to build the extrafamilial relationships that might constitute self-making. In the worst-case scenario, like the soil-eating children of the Amazon (Gow 1989), Tswana orphans are enabled to provide for and look after themselves – truncating the relationships that constitute and sustain not only family but also personhood. In this sense, food baskets and donations successfully enter into the contribution economies of kin, but they also serve to disrupt those economies, frustrating attempts at making-for-oneself within the context of kinship. Much like the Basic Income Grants and other forms of direct cash transfer support James Ferguson describes in South Africa, food baskets meet material needs but 'offer far less by way of dealing with ... social and moral needs', are unable to convey 'meaningful personhood or social belonging', and prove 'dangerously empty' (Ferguson 2013: 235).

Of course, there were limited but important ways in which NGO and social work actors *did* undertake the work of care associated with the things they provided, in ways animated by the appropriate sentiment as well. As we saw in Pono's case, staff or volunteers at the NGO cooked the food they provided, washed the uniforms supplied by social workers, and helped administer the medicines they sourced. This approach echoed and preserved a distinctly Tswana understanding and expression of care. However, this expression of care was non-contributory as concerned the family. Care was provided within the confines of the NGO, exclusively to the registered client, disentangled from the *gae*. Between them, NGO staff, child clients, volunteers, and others might be thought to be collectively involved in a contribution economy that generated care; however, since these 'contributions' were either professionalised (the cooks are paid to cook) or gift-oriented in a way that was impossible to reciprocate (as with gifts from anonymous foreign donors to small children, intended as 'pure gifts' (Parry 1989); see also Durham 1995: 111), they unsettled the logic of contribution.

In this sense, NGOs seemed to be establishing themselves as fully fledged alternatives to family, in part by establishing an alternative economy of care. Removing their clients from the contribution economy of their families encouraged children's refusal to contribute at home. As we saw with Lesego's refusal to cook, the withdrawal of a child's contribution at home is potentially enough to set off a domino effect among the contributions of the whole family. During my time working at the orphan care centre, we fielded streams of complaints from grandmothers whose orphaned charges arrived home, claimed to be full after having eaten at the NGO, and refused to cook, to clean dishes, or to eat the food that had been set aside for them. Because they spent all the time they weren't in school at the NGO, they weren't doing any other work at home either. Accusations that the NGO was breaking apart families were generally framed in these terms. In other words, the very 'crisis of care' and family collapse discourse that motivates NGO support provokes crises of its own.

This book takes as its central argument the idea that conflict and crisis are productive of kinship, not simply destructive. But rather than providing for the recalibration of relatedness, the conflicts that developed around NGO and government contributions were often intransigent. Families were not in a position to call NGOs or social workers together in the way they could with their own wayward broods. NGOs or social workers might call families together, but as they positioned themselves outside the family's economy of care, they were ill-placed to resolve emergent tensions within it. And, of course, because families do not contribute to NGOs or government – they are institutions that rely on other economies for their solvency – families that called them or complained to them enjoyed little leverage. The basic pre-conditions under which *dikgang* could be engaged and negotiated, reflected on and evaluated, went unmet.

By the same token, resources are resources – seldom would anyone risk losing them by complaining about their surfeit. Food baskets and other donations held out both the possibility of transformation into a contribution through someone's appropriate care work, and the possibility of making-for-oneself, difficult to realise as it may be. The recalcitrant children themselves could be – and often were – called and upbraided; but to the extent that they understood themselves as sources of major contributions to the family, their usual position in these interventions was upended, and their dependence on family for their own independence was undermined. In the NGOs they attended, and for the social workers who served them, these children were also the critical objects of the 'contributions' and gifts those institutions attracted, which put them in a comparably powerful position. In both cases, confrontations presented the risk of permanent schism, and, as such, they were frequently avoided.