

### Part III

## ‘We Are Seeing Things’

### *Recognition, Risk, and Reproducing Kinship*

*Lerato ke lone leo  
A re itshwarelaneng  
A re buisaneng  
Lerato la matlatsi a le nkitsa go nyala*

That’s love  
Let’s forgive one another  
Let’s talk together  
Love these days makes it difficult for me to marry ‘*Lorato la Malatsi A*’  
(Love These Days), Culture Spears<sup>1</sup>

It was a hot, quiet Sunday afternoon, and we sat together lazily in the *lekwapa*. Kelebogile, Oratile, and Tshepo were braiding Lorato’s hair. I sat with Mmapula and her granddaughter Boipelo on a blanket spread out in the shade of the stoep. Boipelo was nursing her infant child; the other children lay on the blanket with us, and then clambered over us, and then chased each other around the yard, their irrepressible energy in stark contrast to our lethargy. Kagiso tinkered with a car nearby; Dipuo sat mending a chair and half-heartedly waving off chickens.

We were joking about the possibility of Boipelo’s and Lorato’s marriages. Both girls were in their mid-twenties and were in relationships we all knew about but avoided discussing. Boipelo had a child. They were prime candidates. Tshepo, Boipelo’s younger sister, had asked in passing how much her grandmother Mmapula would expect for *bogadi*. ‘These days, I would insist on at *least* ten cows,’ Mmapula asserted. Her daughters and granddaughters all set up an instant clamouring disagreement. ‘*Heela!*’ exclaimed Kelebogile. ‘What man can offer that many cows?’ ‘No family can agree to that!’ added Oratile. The younger girls laughed and made noises of incredulity and dismay.

<sup>1</sup> A video of Culture Spears’ ‘*Lorato la Malatsi A*’ is at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvizJ9O4jn4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvizJ9O4jn4).

'Listen, let me tell you,' Mmapula rejoined sternly. She numbered the cattle off on her fingers: one for Mmapula's younger brother, who was *malome* to the girls' mothers; another for Dipuo's older brother; two for the girls' own mothers' brothers (for Lorato, Modiri; for Boipelo, Kagiso); two for Dipuo himself; two for other relatives I couldn't place; and two for the feast. The genealogies left us all baffled. But their bafflement didn't stop the younger women from taking issue with these distributions, arguing all at once that nothing was owed to the old man's brother, that one cow should be enough for their own *bomalome* – Kagiso protested half-heartedly from under the car bonnet – and that the cattle for the feast should properly come from the herd at home.

'Now you see why none of us is married from this yard,' Lorato observed archly, bracing herself as her hair was pulled and twisted. Tshepo, 17 years old and precocious, took a different tack. '*Aaa-ee! Nna* I am taking *bogadi* for myself!' she insisted with comic vehemence, to general laughter. 'How am I supposed to start my family if my husband has given away all his cattle? How will I look after my children?' It was a position I had heard her rehearse almost word for word in past conversations; it was both satirical and serious, deliberately provocative.

'You can't take *bogadi* for yourself!' her grandmother challenged, while her mother's younger sisters laughed.

'At least my mother should get it so she can build, then,' Tshepo said. 'But not my father! What has he done to raise me?' Tshepo's father had lived with Tshepo and her siblings their whole lives but had never taken any formal steps towards marrying their mother. He had had only intermittent work, squandered money on drink, and was generally considered a deadbeat, not least by Tshepo herself.

'*Heela*,' her grandfather intervened, quietly but sternly. 'Your *bogadi* will come to me, both of you. Your fathers never paid *bogadi* for your mothers. You are my children.'

'And I'm saying, ten cows,' Mmapula added.

'*Ijo! Nna* I'm not getting married then,' exclaimed Tshepo. 'Or I'll tell my *nna* to keep his cattle so we build a house,' she mused, deftly exploiting the congruence of terms for 'my man' and 'my husband' (both are *monna wa me*).

'*O tla ipona!!*' rejoined her grandmother – you'll see (lit. you'll see yourself). 'What happens when he leaves you like that with your children? As for us, we won't know anything about it.'

'These days women can even pay for their own *bogadi*,' observed Lorato, generating another reproachful and incredulous clamour from the women. '*I can't*,' she clarified. 'How can you marry yourself? And if the man can't even pay *bogadi* then how do you know he will look after

you? He can even leave. But some women who have money and their men don’t, it happens.’

‘*Hei*, even NGOs marry people these days!’ added Boipelo, to even greater collective surprise. ‘Didn’t you hear about that NGO in Mochudi? They take unmarried couples who have long been living together and already have children, and marry them! The NGO even finds the cattle for *bogadi*, and rings; they have the whole ceremony!’

‘*Ee*, when people like this old woman expect ten cows what else can we do?’ observed Oratile.

‘*Ija! Ke kgang*,’ Mmapula exclaimed, derisively. ‘Then when there are problems, who resolves things? Do the woman’s *bomalome* negotiate with themselves? Does the NGO look after their children? Do these NGOs think people have no parents?’ Everyone laughed at the series of incongruous scenarios.

‘*Mm-mm*,’ Dipuo commented, shaking his head in dismay. ‘*Re bona dilo*.’ We are seeing things.

The topic of *bogadi*, or brideprice – often also called *lobola*, as elsewhere in Southern Africa – came up frequently among the Legaes. It often triggered a subtler array of questions and concerns around marriage, pregnancy, and children, and about intimate relationships more generally. At the time I lived with them in 2012, six of Mmapula’s eight children, and one of her grandchildren, had had children of their own; but by the time I was on fieldwork, none of them had yet married, much to Mmapula’s chagrin. The situation was not unusual. At the time, marriage rates in Botswana, and across Southern Africa, had been in sharp decline for years (Pauli and van Dijk 2017). While Mmapula was keen to see her children married, she was also very concerned that those marriages should be concluded in a specific way. Her preoccupation with how things should be done drew together many of her abiding worries, and her children’s abiding uncertainties: the success of their self-making, the care of their children, and the solvency, well-being, and reproduction of the extended family. Mmapula was not alone in her anxieties: deep ambiguities in the reproduction of Tswana kinship have preoccupied Batswana and anthropologists of Botswana for at least a century (Comaroff 1980; 1981; Comaroff and Roberts 1977; Gulbrandsen 1986; Livingston 2003b; Lye and Murray 1980; Schapera 1933; 1940; Solway 1990; 2017a; Upton 2001; van Dijk 2010; 2012a; 2017) – and they have taken on new urgency in the context of one of the world’s worst AIDS epidemics.

Taking cues from the scene above, this part engages the fraught ways in which Tswana kinship is extended and reproduced through intimate relationships, as well as the legacies of this fraughtness for self-making.

The loaded tropes around seeing, saying, and knowing that peppered our conversation – and that emerge frequently in such conversations – indicate ways in which conjugal relationships<sup>2</sup> transform and are transformed into kin relationships during pregnancy and marriage negotiations: in a gradual, carefully managed process of recognition. Both the tone of contestation in the family's discussion and the wide range of problems and disagreements it anticipated also suggest that recognition is a fertile source of *dikgang*: 'issues', problems, conflict, or crisis. I show how it is in the acquisition of these *dikgang*, and the collective process of reflection and interpretation through which they are negotiated, that new kin relations are constituted, and self-making pursued. Finally, I extend these possibilities to conjugal relationships in a time of AIDS, and suggest that the risk of contracting the disease is of the same order as the risks of *dikgang* that Batswana routinely face in managing such relationships. I contend that it is the management of recognition as much as – or more than – the risk of illness and death that raises the stakes of HIV infection, while offering families a key means of addressing the crisis AIDS represents, and of living with the epidemic.

### Recognition

'Recognition' is a concept elaborated by social scientists, but I use it to condense a range of emic terms and ideas: specifically, *go bona* (to see), *go bua* (to speak), *go utlwa* (to hear/feel), and *go itse* (to know). These terms appear regularly – often interchangeably – in Setswana conversation, as exclamations and challenges. *O a bona* (you see) is frequently appended to the end of sentences, as is *o a itse* (you know). *O a utlwa* (you hear) is affixed to instructions or requests. Such injunctions may indicate the clarification of ambiguity, an invitation to agree, an attempt to convince, or an implicit insistence on being heeded; responses cast in the same terms may mark either willingness or refusal. Recognition, in this sense, is perpetually sought but frequently evaded and contested. And it takes on special relevance in the context of both relationships and self-making. Among the Tswana, love, care, understanding, and so on involve not simply sentiment but action, demonstration, and performance, so that they can be seen, heard, and felt (Alverson 1978: 138; Klaitz 2010: 6). In being seen, heard, and felt – in other words, recognised – these enacted sentiments create intersubjective effects:

<sup>2</sup> I use 'conjugal relationships' much as Julia Pauli and Rijk van Dijk (2017: 259) do: to connote 'a range of [heterosexual] ... relationships' variously understood in terms of 'customary practices, residence arrangements, state and religious laws, and sexual and other types of exchange', which may or may not signify or lead to a formalised marriage.

health, strengthened relationships, prosperity, and the capacity to give and evoke love and care. At the same time, refusals or misinterpretations of such demonstrations can produce jealousy and scorn, which also generate sentimental action, with potentially deleterious repercussions for the well-being of others – including illness and the threat of witchcraft (Klaits 2010: 4–5). In this sense, recognition is both a key dimension of sociality and a key source of social risk (Durham 2002a; Durham and Klaits 2002).

This tension between the risks and possibilities of intersubjectivity underpins the Setswana understanding of personhood and self-making as well. On the one hand, the risks of recognition ground an imperative to keep the self fragmented and concealed – never fully seen, known, or grasped – in order to protect it from danger, and especially from witchcraft (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). On the other hand, recognition is a singular source of self-knowledge and moral personhood; as Richard Werbner notes from his work among Tswapong wisdom diviners in Botswana's north-east, '[u]pon recognition by others depends the very dignity of the self' (Werbner 2015: 2). It is only possible to know an intersubjective self 'mirrored in the gaze of others' (Werbner 2016: 83, echoing Laidlaw 2014: 502); making oneself involves inviting the ethical reflection of others on oneself. And doing so successfully – in ways that contain the risks of recognition already noted – requires the careful management of what others see, hear, and know. Not only does recognition therefore inevitably involve 'ambivalence, conflict and contradiction' (Werbner 2016: 82), it is sought, achieved, and ascribed through them – in other words, through *dikgang*.

The management of recognition, then, involves the management of selves and relationships; as such, it also structures power, hierarchy, and specifically gender. The licence to hear, know, and speak in the resolution of disputes, for example – whether at home or in the *kgotla* – is held customarily by older men and is instrumental in conveying their authority (van Dijk 2010: 290). In Werbner's terms, it exposes them to reflection on the part of a wide range of others, and therefore to greater risk, but also to more far-reaching recognition and potentially greater dignity and political power. Women, too, hear, know, and speak in the management of *dikgang* and thereby gain recognition; but, as we have seen already and will see in the chapters of Part III, their repertoires are comparatively constrained, centred largely on the household and its relations. The reflection of others on women's behaviour is tied to the appropriate observance of these constraints – which is one reason silence figures so strongly in women's management of *dikgang*, and particularly *dikgang* involving men. As well as different repertoires of hearing,

knowing, and speaking, different sources of *dikgang* are key to the recognition of men and women: pregnancy and its attendant crises prove most formative for women, and marriage and its attendant crises for men.

Framing conjugal relationships in terms of recognition, I suggest, avoids the limitations of considering them in terms of either exchange or love, as either collective processes of social reproduction or strictly personal projects – framings that have predominated in the anthropology of marriage and intimacy, especially in Africa (Smith 2009: 159). Recognition makes room for both affect and economy, mutuality and contract (Gudeman 2009), sociality and self-making, capturing their mutual entanglements and the tensions between them while underscoring the social creativity of the conflicts that inevitably emerge. It creates space to draw filial and affinal relationships into the same analytical frame, marking a key point of articulation between the two. It draws together both the social processes and the events that mark contemporary Setswana marriage and pregnancy<sup>3</sup> and their shifting temporalities, their quickenings, foreshortenings, and inversions (Livingston 2003b; Solway 2017a; Upton 2001). And it makes room for ambiguity, partiality, and reversibility, incorporating – for example – practices of secrecy and concealment, where relationships may be known but not spoken (Hirsch et al. 2009). It accommodates the jural, processual, and ritual dimensions of conjugality; and it accommodates the equally crucial ethical practice of inviting and undertaking reflection on the self. In this sense, recognition captures both the historical sensibilities that inform Setswana conjugality and emergent practices that may be changing it (Comaroff 1980; Comaroff and Roberts 1977; Solway 2017a; van Dijk 2017).

These dynamics of recognition, of course, take on a new significance in a time of AIDS. The recognition of those living with HIV has alternately mediated or foreclosed access to treatment, precipitated alienation from community and kin, or granted 'therapeutic citizenship' (Henderson 2011: 24; LeMarcis 2012; Nguyen 2010: 89–110). In Botswana, governmental and non-governmental responses to the epidemic have produced new, formalised modes of recognition, emphasising the need to know one's status and speak about it with sexual partners, while promulgating 'confessional technologies' and 'a market for testimonials' seen elsewhere

<sup>3</sup> John Comaroff (1980: 167) identifies 'public recognition' as the 'final element in the creation of a legitimate union' among the Tshidi. He distinguishes it from the four other elements he identifies – *patlo* negotiations, the prestation of gifts, cohabitation, and *bogadi* – because it is not linked to a specific event. However, I suggest that it also characterises those events and might offer a strong analytical thread to bind them.

in the management of HIV and AIDS (Nguyen 2010: 21, 35–60). Botswana's nationwide voluntary HIV testing programme is even called *Tebelopele*, or 'vision'. Secrecy, concealment, and silence, on the other hand, are linked to the spread of the virus – originally cast in Botswana, as elsewhere, as a dangerously 'silent' or 'invisible' epidemic (ibid.: 2) – and thereby pathologised. These shifting, heightened stakes around recognition suggest one possible link between the parallel 'crises' of AIDS and marriage, while the work that marriage does in the management of recognition suggests one reason why churches and other intervening agencies might present it as a panacea to the epidemic (van Dijk 2010: 287).

In the stories that follow, I describe courtship, pregnancy, and marriage – in that order, as they are most frequently experienced in the Tswana life course – as marking a continuum of recognition, negotiation, and risk. I explore the ways in which women and their relationships are made recognisable, largely through their bodies, in pregnancy, and the ways in which men and their relationships are made recognisable, largely through the marriage negotiations they undertake. I consider the concealments both allow and the *dikgang* both produce – including *dikgang* across generations, among siblings, between the conjugal partners themselves, and between their respective extended kin, as well as the unresolved *dikgang* of past pregnancies and marriage negotiations, which are brought into intergenerational recognition in turn. More than just a question of managing new economic constraints or producing new class distinctions (e.g. James 2017; van Dijk 2010; 2017), I suggest that pregnancy and marriage require engagement with fraught family relationships and histories, in anticipation of fraught futures. I further suggest that acquiring and successfully navigating these *dikgang* – which include the full range of *dikgang* that characterise kin relations – are crucial, gendered dimensions of self-making and underpin the potency of both pregnancy and marriage in reproducing and reorganising relationships among kin. These processes may reorient relationships between households, but they are also strikingly preoccupied with realigning relationships among existing kin – a long-standing orientation that indicates the persistence of ambiguity, even in times when certainty is sought (cf. van Dijk 2010; 2017). And in these practices, unexpected means of absorbing and addressing the risks presented by HIV and AIDS emerge.