

Feminism in Sindiwe Magona's *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*

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Bachelor's Thesis
2024



Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně

Fakulta humanitních studií

Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Akademický rok: 2023/2024

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení: Lucie Ježková
Osobní číslo: H20662
Studijní program: B0231P090005 Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi
Forma studia: Prezenční
Téma práce: Feminismus v románu Sindiwe Magony *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*

Zásady pro vypracování

Shromáždění materiálů k tématu
Studium odborné literatury
Formulace cílů práce
Analýza vybraného románu
Vyvození a formulace závěrů práce

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

Arndt, Susan. *The Dynamics of African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African-Feminist Literatures*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001.

Attwell, David, and Derek Attridge. *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

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Hannam, June. *Feminism*. Harlow: Pearson, 2007.

Heywood, Christopher. *A History of South African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Ewald Mengel**
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **1. února 2024**

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **6. května 2024**

Mgr. Libor Marek, Ph.D.
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doc. Mgr. Roman Trušík, Ph.D.
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Ve Zlíně dne 28. února 2024

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce analyzuje prvky feministické ideologie v novele *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* od jihoafrické autorky Sindiwe Magony. Práce je rozdělena do dvou částí. První část seznamuje čtenáře s autorkou díla Sindiwe Magonou, vyzdvihuje její úspěchy a popisuje, jakým způsobem se v jejích dílech odráží její zkušenosti černošské ženy jihoafrického původu, jež zažila apartheid. Následující část je zaměřena na analýzu díla a za využití pasáží z novely popisuje překážky, kterým černošské ženy čelí v patriarchální společnosti, v níž jsou muži tradičně nadřazeni ženám. Cílem této práce je analyzovat prvky feminismu v novele s ohlednutím na autorčinu angažovanost v genderové nerovnosti a na problematiku nerovnoměrnosti v tradiční africké společnosti.

Klíčová slova: Jižní Afrika, feminismus, Sindiwe Magona, patriarchát, dědictví, manželství, genderová nerovnost, násilí, vzdělání, tradice

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis analyses the elements of the feminist ideology in the novel *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* by a South African author Sindiwe Magona. The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part introduces the author Sindiwe Magona, highlights her achievements, and describes how her experiences as a black woman of South African descent who lived during apartheid are reflected in her works. The following section focuses on the analysis of the novel and by using passages from the novel, the section describes the obstacles black women face in a patriarchal society where men are superior to women. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the elements of feminism in the novel with consideration of the author's engagement in gender issues and the problem of inequality in a traditional African society.

Keywords: South Africa, feminism, Sindiwe Magona, patriarchy, inheritance, marriage, gender inequality, violence, education, traditions

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Ewald Mengel and convey a great appreciation for his guidance, patience, and valuable advice.

Furthermore, I would like to extend my thanks to my friends and family, with special thanks reserved for my mother for believing in me even during the toughest times throughout this journey.

I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
1 SINDIWE MAGONA	4
1.1 LIFE DURING APARTHEID AS A BLACK WOMAN	5
1.2 SINDIWE MAGONA'S ENGAGEMENT IN GENDER ISSUES	9
2 FEMINISM IN <i>CHASING THE TAILS OF MY FATHER'S CATTLE</i>.....	12
2.1 THE ATYPICAL HEROINE.....	13
2.2 THE PURSUIT OF EDUCATION	16
2.3 THE TRAP OF MARRIAGE	18
2.4 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN	24
2.5 THE QUESTION OF INHERITANCE	28
2.6 SHUMIKAZI AS A ROLE MODEL	32
CONCLUSION.....	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY	38

INTRODUCTION

The novel *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* is set in a rural South African village Zenzele in the 1930s and follows the life of a girl called Shumikazi from her birth to her adulthood. Written by a South African author Sindiwe Magona, the novel deals with the hardships Shumikazi faces from childhood to adolescence and her gradual realisation that she is treated differently by her family not only for being motherless and an only child but also because of the simple fact that she is a woman. As a black South African woman born in the Transkei region, Sindiwe Magona not only writes about the struggles of black women but also lives them and she places great emphasis on the issues women face in a traditional African society as well as the need for gender equality. With this novel, Magona takes a stand against traditions and customs that plagued South Africa and its regions, traditions that viewed women as the property of men to do with as they pleased. By merging many of the different ways in which South African women were impaired, Magona tackles the moral issue of education, violence in marriage, lack of property and bodily autonomy, and more by taking into account the socio-political context of South Africa and incorporating her own experiences as a black South African woman.

The primary aim of this thesis is to observe gender inequality and the elements of feminism portrayed in the novel by considering the traditions that persist in South Africa and how differently feminism has been received in South Africa compared to the rest of the world. The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part of the thesis is divided into two chapters and begins with the introduction of the author Sindiwe Magona. The first chapter deals with the oppression black women faced during apartheid, a time when women were not only discriminated against by white men but by black men as well. It focuses on how Magona personally lived through the events of apartheid, how they affected her life and how she acknowledges the struggles of black South African women in her works. The chapter also explains the basis of the apartheid system, the living conditions that black women had to endure and how this affected them. The second chapter focuses on Magona's achievements, her involvement in gender issues and how she is perceived for her writing. It aims to interpret why feminism was received differently in Africa as compared to the West and to find the reason for the emergence of a different type of feminist ideology, Womanism.

The second part of the thesis deals with the elements of feminism portrayed in the novel *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*. In the novel, Magona effortlessly unfolds the

injustice and discrimination that black women of South Africa have faced and continue to face to this day, as opposed to men who are seen as the head of the family and decision-makers. She highlights the problems black women face in a society where they are seen as commodities, only responsible for chores and bearing children for men, by taking us on the journey of a young girl named Shumikazi who challenges the grip of traditions in a patriarchal society. This part of the thesis aims to show how the themes of female inequality are portrayed in the novel and how they relate to the feminist movement by using passages from the novel, examining the behaviour and thought processes of the characters and providing a look into the traditional South African society. The second part of the thesis is divided into six chapters and each chapter describes a different feminist theme presented in the novel. By interpreting the situation of women in South Africa and combining it with passages from the novel, the thesis aims to analyse the feminist elements present in *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*. The conclusion will be drawn from these chapters.

1 SINDIWE MAGONA

Sindiwe Magona, now regarded as one of the most significant female writers from South Africa, was born as the first child of eight on August 23, 1943, in the Gungululu village in Transkei, a region now known as the Eastern Cape.¹ In 1948, when Magona was 5 years old, her family moved into an urban area of Cape Town Blaauwlei and later to Guguletu in 1961. Magona knew that she wanted to be a writer from an early age and was able to study thanks to her parents who wanted their children to gain an education, despite not being educated themselves. It was not common in the community for women to write books and Magona herself did not know anyone who did, perhaps due to the fact that oral storytelling was a more significant part of the African cultural tradition rather than writing.² Another reason for the scarcity of female writers was the lack of proper education in Africa and the gender inequality on the academic ground which is one of the main topics portrayed in the novel *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*. Because women used to have a lesser access to education, they make up around 60% of the illiterate adults in sub-Saharan Africa. Magona's dream to be a writer was unusual due to the circumstances she lived under during apartheid and she herself recalled that the first time she personally came into contact with a book written by a black woman, she was 32 years old.³ As a teacher, Magona saw the lack of resources for proper education first-hand, especially after the passing of the Bantu Education Act in 1953 which halted the progress of gaining better education for black people by making them dependent on white people and their schooling system. Depriving black people of education ensured that they would not succeed on their own and only go as far academically as the government allowed.⁴

When Magona was in her early 20s, she became pregnant out of wedlock and was forced to resign from her teaching job as it was against the rules to teach as an unmarried mother. During her leave, she became pregnant two more times and eventually found a job as a domestic worker in a white household where she faced racial discrimination for the first time. She started teaching again after her husband left for Johannesburg and in the 1990s,

¹ "Sindiwe Magona," South African History Online, last updated August 27, 2021, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/sindiwe-magona>.

² Kathy A. Perkins, *Black South African Women: An Anthology of Plays* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 87-88.

³ Kathy A. Perkins, *African Women Playwrights* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 2.

⁴ Puleng Segalo, "Belonging, Memory and Subaltern Voices: Reflecting on Sindiwe Magona's *To my Children's Children*," *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (June 2020): 198-199, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23277408.2020.1785669>.

she moved to the United States to study while being a single mother of three children. In the United States, she began to write and graduated from Columbia University with a bachelor's degree in social work and business administration. She was later offered a job at the United Nations in 1984⁵ where she worked for ten years in the Anti-Apartheid Radio Programmes and then for nine more years in the Public Information Department. After her retirement in 2003, she moved back to Cape Town. Apart from her degree from Columbia University, she also holds a bachelor's degree from the University of South Africa, and she is the first person to ever receive a PhD degree in Creative Writing at the University of the Western Cape, where she currently works as a writer-in-residence. To this day, she has written nine books including autobiographies, several short stories, poems, plays and over 100 children's books.⁶

1.1 Life During Apartheid as a Black Woman

Sindiwe Magona was 5 years old when apartheid was implemented in 1948 and 51 years old when it was demolished in 1994. She uses writing to portray the struggles of black people and black women in particular during an era when women were often stripped of their voice. In her works and autobiographies, Magona expresses how living during apartheid as a woman influenced her life and her decisions. She believes that it is important to know and accept where we come from, and she merges fiction and her real-life experiences to write about growing up in a system that treats black people as savages and lesser than human. She acknowledges the voices of women before her that were ignored and censored, and she refuses to be silenced out of fear. This resolve is often reflected in her works, one of the examples being the main character of *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* Shumikazi, who learns that it is important to use her voice and stand for herself in a society where she is looked down on for being a woman.⁷ The fact that she often draws from her life is clear in the collection of short stories *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* published in 1991

⁵ Kathy A. Perkins, *Black South African Women: An Anthology of Plays* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 88-89.

⁶ "The Story of Dr Sindiwe Magona!" Museum of Literature, published August 28, 2023, <https://www.amazwi.museum/article?post=the-story-of-dr-sindiwe-magona!>

⁷ Puleng Segalo, "Belonging, Memory and Subaltern Voices: Reflecting on Sindiwe Magona's *To my Children's Children*," *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (June 2020): 189-191, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23277408.2020.1785669>.

where she uncovers the hardships of being a black woman in a gender-oppressive society,⁸ or in her autobiographies *To My Children's Children* from 1990 and *Forced to Grow* published two years later, where she depicts her childhood during apartheid and her life as a young woman with three children and no husband, who decided to take her life into her own hands and pursue an education in the United States on her path to freedom after living in a gender oppressive system.⁹

In her works, Magona often looks back on the struggles that black women had to endure as opposed to white women. The difference between the conditions of women in the West and of South African women was that while women in the West did face misogyny, it was much more ingrained in South Africa where the idea of men being superior to women was encouraged by the white government system ruling of apartheid, as well as by the customary laws of the indigenous communities. Race played a major role in the process of gaining equal rights for women in South Africa because although white women were oppressed because of their sex and sometimes due to their class, women of South Africa suffered due to the “triple yoke of oppression”, a term coined by the author Judith Nolde to point out that black South African women suffered for three different reasons – their class, gender and race.¹⁰ The apartheid policy was established in May 1948 after the National Party led by Dr. Daniel. F. Malan was elected in the referendum held and voted in by exclusively white people and it deepened the segregation of black people in South Africa, a segregation already prevalent since the 17th century caused by an invasion from several European countries. The new government aimed to separate black, white, Indian, and coloured people and limited all relations between them by making them use different facilities.¹¹

The segregation based not only on gender but race as well impacted the hierarchy in African society and the social standing of women. Black people were not allowed in white spaces in an attempt to maintain white supremacy by the government, but while black men were discriminated against due to their skin tone, they possessed more rights than black women who were at the bottom of the social ladder for the fact that they were black and of the female sex. Although white women in South Africa were limited in means of

⁸ Christopher Heywood, *A History of South African Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 234.

⁹ David Attwell and Derek Attridge, *The Cambridge History of South African Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 730.

¹⁰ Amber Michelle Lenser, “The South African Women’s Movement: The Roles of Feminism and Multiracial Cooperation in the Struggle for Women’s Rights” (Thesis, University of Arkansas, 2019), 5-6.

¹¹ Ntfojjeni Dlamini, “Comrades in their Own Right: Women’s Struggle Against Apartheid in the South African Novel” (Thesis, Stephen F. Austin State University, 2017), 1-2.

employment and political decision-making, they gained the right to vote six decades earlier than black women, which shows the difference in how women of separate races were perceived and why the fight for women's rights was more complicated for black women. The physical segregation of white and black people was carried out by forcibly moving black Africans, who made up around 70% of the population in South Africa, into reservations on the outskirts, a small area of land with no infrastructure or industries.¹² In the reservations, around four million black women suffered under the customary laws which legally saw women as minors. In the novel *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, Magona focuses on how women were stripped of their rights to ownership of properties and guardianship of their children, which both belonged to their husbands, fathers, or other male family members.¹³ Husbands often took more than one wife which resulted in worse financial security of the wives and children, as well as a higher chance of medical problems. The property and all of its components including the cattle were in the ownership of the head of the family and if a man wanted to take a wife, he paid a bride price called *lobola* to her family, essentially making her his property as well.¹⁴ When Magona moved to the United States, one of the culture shocks she and her children had to adjust to was the lack of *lobola*. Magona was used to the customs of South Africa but was grateful that her daughter would be able to have freedom in choosing a husband she had feelings for, and she could enter a consensual marriage instead of being sold like a property.¹⁵

Some of the women in the reservations in South Africa were able to work as servants on white-owned farms and households as a domestic worker like Magona, but the majority of them were unable to find employment and they took care of the land, depending financially on their husbands who worked in towns. This often led to poverty. Diseases such as tuberculosis or scurvy were not uncommon, as was death from starvation and malnutrition of children.¹⁶ If women were able to find employment, they were not paid well and often faced ill-treatment from their employers. The medical care provided in hospitals for black people was of low quality and had little to no resources, forcing them to seek alternative

¹² Hilda Bernstein, *For their Triumphs and for Their Tears: Conditions and resistance of women in apartheid South Africa* (Cambridge: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1975), 8-10.

¹³ Bernstein, *For their Triumphs and for Their Tears: Conditions and resistance of women in apartheid South Africa*, 18-19.

¹⁴ Amber Michelle Lenser, "The South African Women's Movement: The Roles of Feminism and Multiracial Cooperation in the Struggle for Women's Rights" (Thesis, University of Arkansas, 2019), 6.

¹⁵ Kathy A. Perkins, *Black South African Women: An Anthology of Plays* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 95.

¹⁶ Hilda Bernstein, *For their Triumphs and for Their Tears: Conditions and resistance of women in apartheid South Africa* (Cambridge: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1975), 22-23.

forms of medical care in the form of traditional healers. Because abortions were illegal in most of the regions and gynaecological care was underdeveloped, numerous women turned to at-home abortions, which frequently led to injuries and loss of life.

Due to black women being viewed as a property, the instances of violence against them spiked during apartheid, and they were often subjected to sexual violence not only perpetrated by their husbands but by employers and law enforcement as well with no repercussions. While the rape of white women was punished by law, sexual abuse committed against black women was generally seen as normal and, in some cases, understood as a custom as is shown in the novel *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*.¹⁷ Women were also often subjected to genital mutilation which served as a ritual for girls stepping into adolescence. Placing importance on the reform of family law, health education and literacy of women was a way to dismantle the ages-old tradition of female circumcision, supported by the creation of the Association of African Women for Research and Development in 1980.¹⁸ The AAWORD was one of the many associations created by African women to combat female inequality throughout the years. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Women's League and the Federation of South African Women were created as an opposition against discrimination and the white rule during apartheid. The feminist document created by the federation tried to spread the belief that men and women share similar problems generated by poverty and discrimination and that in the quest to complete liberation of society, the need for the emancipation of women is cardinal. The document recognized the need for modification of the customs and legal laws which regarded women as minors, stripped them of their rights to inheritance and ownership of property and gave men control over women's lives. With these statements, the women of Africa expressed their acknowledgement that their society was built on ancient traditions which no longer had a place in modern society. This acknowledgement is expressed in the novel through the actions of Shumikazi and her father who both recognized the need for reform.¹⁹

¹⁷ Amber Michelle Lenser, "The South African Women's Movement: The Roles of Feminism and Multiracial Cooperation in the Struggle for Women's Rights" (Thesis, University of Arkansas, 2019), 6-8.

¹⁸ Estelle Freedman, *The Essential Feminist Reader* (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 351.

¹⁹ Freedman, *The Essential Feminist Reader*, 263-265.

1.2 Sindiwe Magona's Engagement in Gender Issues

Growing up as a woman during apartheid, Magona got a first-hand experience of the discrimination women faced and she constantly uses her platform to help create a better environment for women in South Africa. In her autobiographies *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow* she draws from the womanist ideology. Womanism as a concept was created by Alice Walker and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi as a response to Western feminism because black women felt that feminism did not correctly reflect their experiences.²⁰ In Britain and the United States, the standing of women in society saw a change in the late 19th century during the anti-slavery campaign. Women who fought in the campaign gathered and protested against slave labour, claiming that the link between female emancipation and the abolishment of slavery was closely connected. These women related to the position of slaves and compared it to their living situation because they themselves felt as if they had no bodily autonomy within marriage and in society. In a way, they were slaves in the legal, sexual, emotional, and physical aspects of their lives.²¹

While the events of this period helped women in the way they were treated within society, the feminist movement was dominated by white women who did not fully acknowledge the experiences of black women in a fundamentally racist society.²² Because white feminists ignored the situation of women of different class and race, they thought that their experiences were universal and would emancipate all women. This ignorance made black women hesitant to join the feminist movement. Black women were also reluctant to call themselves feminists because in Africa the movement was perceived as anti-male, anti-culture, anti-religion, and anti-tradition. This led to the dilemma of whether to accept feminist values despite some of them clashing with the values of black women or to distance themselves from it and create their own ideology which would align with their unique experiences.²³ This led to the creation of womanism. This ideology acknowledges the oppression and the racism that black men faced during apartheid. In her autobiographies, Magona shows that rather than focusing on a fully female perspective, womanism revolves

²⁰ Siphorazi Koyana, "Womanism and Nation-Building in Sindiwe Magona's Autobiographies," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 16, no. 50 (June 2011), 64-65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2001.9675994>.

²¹ June Hannam, *Feminism* (Harlow: Pearson, 2007), 25-28.

²² Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 226-227.

²³ Margaret Fafa Nutsukpo, "Feminism in Africa and African Women's Writing," *African Research Review* 14, no. 1 (April 28, 2020): 88-91, <https://doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v14i1.8>.

around a family where men and women are equal, and she believes that its purpose is to celebrate black roots. When writing about families, Magona writes from the female perspective and points out how traditional practices limit women. After having to resign from teaching due to being an unmarried mother, she had to marry a man with a poor education who worked in the mines in Johannesburg. While men were able to have children out of wedlock and they would face no consequences as is also depicted in the novel *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, single mothers were shamed by the community. Unlike other authors such as Emma Mashinini or Ellen Kuzwayo who often pull away from topics like abuse in marriages, Magona writes openly and recognizes the inequality women in South Africa face. Because of her honesty and involvement in gender issues, Magona was invited to the International Women's Tribunal on Crimes Against Women held in Belgium in 1976²⁴ and she became one of the founding members of the Women's Peace Movement the same year.²⁵

Barbara Boswell described Magona as an author who “transcends their received identities as labourers and reproducers of labour for the apartheid nation, to become authors of their own lives and works”²⁶ and she was praised by critics such as Tiffany Willoughby-Herard and Eva Hunter for the way she expresses the agony women in South Africa endured and suffer to this day which is not only caused by apartheid but also by the customary laws and patriarchal traditions which reduced women to be less than men.²⁷ For her work and activism in issues such as women's rights, racism, environmental problems and the fight against the apartheid system, Magona has been decorated with several awards as well as honorary doctorates. In 1997, she received a New York Foundation for the Arts award in the non-fiction category, in 2008 a Lifetime Achievement Award for *Beauty's Gift* from Women Demand Dignity and a Molteno Gold Medal for Lifetime Achievement in 2009. She has received two awards from the Xhosa Forum for her achievements in promoting Xhosa as well as the highest award from the English Academy of Southern Africa and the Order of

²⁴ Siphorazi Koyana, “Womanism and Nation-Building in Sindiwe Magona's Autobiographies,” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 16, no. 50 (June 2011), 64-67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2001.9675994>.

²⁵ Kathy A. Perkins, *African Women Playwrights* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 171.

²⁶ Puleng Segalo, “Belonging, Memory and Subaltern Voices: Reflecting on Sindiwe Magona's To my Children's Children,” *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (June 2020): 191-192, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23277408.2020.1785669>.

²⁷ Ntfontjeni Dlamini, “Comrades in their Own Right: Women's Struggle Against Apartheid in the South African Novel” (Thesis, Stephen F. Austin State University, 2017), 16.

Ikhamanga in Bronze in 2011. She is currently classified as a Living Legend, a title she acquired after receiving the Literary Lifetime Achievement Award.²⁸

²⁸ “The Story of Dr Sindiwe Magona!” Museum of Literature, published August 28, 2023, <https://www.amazwi.museum/article?post=the-story-of-dr-sindiwe-magona!>

2 FEMINISM IN *CHASING THE TAILS OF MY FATHER'S CATTLE*

The story of the novel *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* takes place in the small village of Zenzele in the South African province of the Eastern Cape during the white rule in the 1930s. The novel, published by Seriti sa Sechaba in 2016, observes the life of a girl called Shumikazi who navigates her destiny in a time of strong traditions and social customs. Miseka and Jongumzi Madala, known by his community as Jojo, are burdened by the tragic fate of their nine children who all died either right after birth or during the first years of their life, none of them living to see adolescence. When Miseka is pregnant for the tenth time, the couple fears the loss of another child, but a miracle occurs, and a healthy girl is born. Miseka, however, dies during the birth and her last wish is for Jojo to look after her baby, a sentence often repeated in the novel to highlight the importance of the duty given to Jojo.

The events of *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* occur in a time period when female offspring were less important than male ones and when the absence of a father figure was not unusual. To this day, South Africa struggles with a high rate of father absence, second only to Namibia, which can be traced back to the times of colonialism when men had to work remotely in mines to earn a living. The pay was often not high enough to support their families and some men denied paternity because they could not afford to pay the bride price *loloba*.²⁹ While the guidance of a mother was more significant, a belief reflected in the *Nguni* saying “an orphan with a mother is better off than an orphan without a mother”, the father figure had a crucial role as well and the Xhosa people of Cape provinces lived by the principle of *Ubuntu*, a belief that each individual in a community should care for others as much as they care for themselves because the welfare of children is dependent on the whole community. Both the *Nguni* saying and the principle of *Ubuntu* are reflected in the novel as the people of Zenzele share a strong sense of community. For instance, when Miseka is pregnant for the tenth time, the religious red women of the village gather to fetch dry wood for her and when Miseka's daughter needs help after her death, she is looked after by Miseka's mother Manala because traditionally grandmothers played a major role in the lives of their grandchildren. But while a mother was generally deemed more important than a father, the problem of absent fathers was rampant in the community and living in a fatherless

²⁹ Linda Richter, Jeremiah Chikovore, and Tawanda Makusha, “The Status of Fatherhood and Fathering in South Africa,” *Childhood Education* 86, no. 6 (September 2010): 360-361, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2010.10523170>.

home was associated with higher criminality, health issues, worse education, substance abuse and even higher suicidal tendencies in the children.³⁰ In this novel, however, Sindiwe Magona portrays Jojo as the opposite of a traditional South African father in hopes of encouraging future generations of African men to revert back to the family values that were once shared by the Xhosa people³¹ because Jojo constantly questions the traditions and the moral lack of them throughout the novel when he realizes that his daughter faces challenges in life simply because of her gender.

More and more, tradition irritated Jojo. Tradition seemed to always stand in the path of his heart's desires – what he saw, plain as day, as what he had to do, ought to do. His duty.³²

2.1 The Atypical Heroine

The main heroine of the novel, Shumikazi, is not a traditional female character from the very beginning and her whole life is entwined with mysteries and strange happenings. She goes against traditions by possessing not only an unusual strength of character but seems to always be at the centre of something that the community cannot grasp, for example her gift of foretelling the future when she predicts that an inspector will visit her school before it happens or her communication with her late mother in a way that others do not understand. But her abnormality also stems from the way people act around her and the way they treat her. The one person who defies the conventions of the time the most is her father Jojo who contradicts the usual way men treat their daughters in favour of Shumikazi.

The very first time we see Jojo go against the traditions is at the beginning of the novel after Miska dies and he slaughters an ox for her burial, despite the fact that unnecessary slaughter of the cattle was prohibited in many families. This decision is met by dissent of Jojo's two older brothers Welile and Mawethu and their wives, but it shows Jojo's strong affection for his late wife Miska, an affection that is later passed onto his daughter. Jojo's older brothers and his sister Funiwe strongly believe in the customs of the community, and

³⁰ Fazel E. Freeks, "A fatherless South Africa: The importance of missional parenting and the role of the church," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (March 2022), 2, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7150>.

³¹ Dianne Shober, "A father's legacy ignites a daughter's fire," *Literator* 38, no. 1 (January 2017), 1, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/lit.v38i1.1303>.

³² Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Our Sister's Keeper, Kindle.

they are against any kind of violation of the traditions. Jojo, however, goes against his siblings' wishes and follows his own judgment, a pattern often repeated in the novel:

Welile, however, would not hear of 'maybes' and so, for some time, the argument continued. Finally, Mawethu said, 'Let us not exchange heated words when we are still unclean.' And Funiwe huffed, 'No one ever listens to what I say,' before she flounced off. So, when Welile saw he was alone, he simply shrugged his shoulders. Thus, one by one, Jojo's siblings backed off. In reality they were left with little choice for, after all, it was Jojo who had the largest kraal, a herd of more than twenty cattle. And so it was that he sent his wife to her last earthly home with a full-grown ox. He accompanied her in a manner reserved for departed men, and no ordinary men either. Oxen and cows were only ever slaughtered for the funerals of kings and chiefs or men who had teeming kraals.³³

The manner in which the argument is resolved shows that Jojo's wealth plays a major role in getting his siblings to agree with him because while they and the rest of the community do not approve of his decision to grant Miska the kind of honour only reserved for men of higher status, he owns a larger property and cattle *kraal* than them and Miska was the one who helped his *kraal* flourish. In Jojo's eyes, the *kraal* was as much her property as his, despite the custom that all the property belongs to the man. However, their sister Funiwe's frustration is also shown when her opinion on the matter is not regarded because she is a woman.

When Jojo must return to the mines in Johannesburg after Miska's death, his daughter is taken in by Miska's mother Manala who lives in the village of Khubalo. Manala, who is a pagan red woman and not a Christian like her late daughter and son-in-law, does not approve of the name Shumikazi chosen by Miska as it means the *tenth child* and it refers back to the nine children that died before Shumikazi. She instead chooses to call her Nokufa which means that the girl *came through death* in Xhosa language. Jojo and the priest who baptizes Shumikazi disapprove of the name Nokufa and in Zenzele she is known as Shumi, but up until Manala's death, the grandmother calls her granddaughter Nokufa and believes that the girl was given life because Miska lost hers.

In Khubalo, Shumikazi grows up with Manala, Manala's five other grandchildren and two *makotis*, Manala's daughters-in-law Maxolo and Mamkwayi, whose husbands work in the mines in Johannesburg like most of the men in Cape provinces. From the start, Shumikazi faces hostility from the two *makotis* because they are worried that Manala will favour Shumikazi over their own children and give her special treatment. The dissent grows when

³³ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Miska's Child Deserves a Name, Kindle.

the *makotis* find out that Manala is breast-feeding Shumikazi, something unusual in her old age especially when it is done for a child that is not her own. While Manala sees it as a miracle, the *makotis* perceive it as witchcraft and even think that Shumikazi will never be able to walk because she is heavily attached to Manala.

To the two *makotis*, what their mother-in-law was doing – suckling a baby on her grandmotherly breast – was no miracle but witchcraft. But miracle or witchcraft, none could deny the obvious: the baby was growing like a seedling by the banks of a bountiful stream.³⁴

The *makotis*' conviction that Shumikazi is not an ordinary child grows when she is eight months old and a snake crawls into the hut where she is resting. Shumikazi is not afraid of the snake and instead smiles and plays with it, and the snake seems to know that it is held in gentle and harmless hands. The snake rolls over Shumikazi's little body while Manala prays to the girl's *Ngwanya* ancestors who she believes are projected onto the snake, showing her strong sense of belief. When Jojo returns from the mines to see Shumikazi, he is prideful to know that his daughter was honoured by the ancestors as he believes that she will be thus protected. It appears as if Shumikazi is truly a miracle of a child, a belief that is further reinforced when a feast is made in her honour, and Shumikazi appears to be communicating with her late mother:

And so it was that later that week the feast was held. It would have gone down as quite 'ordinary' – for that is what it was – except that, out of the blue, Shumikazi called out, joyously, 'Mama! Mama! Mama!' It was the most extraordinary thing anyone there had ever seen. The child held a conversation with what or whom only she could see. But that there was a presence, no one could doubt. Some said it was the novelty of the new word she'd just that day learned to say; others said that by her conduct, the way she looked at whatever or whoever it was she saw, there definitely was something or someone there with her. Thus, in Zenzele too, the little girl drew the attention of the residents because there was just something about her; and they said, verily, this one is not alone.³⁵

Suspicions of mistreatment of Shumikazi first arise when Jojo sees his daughter playing with her dolls. Shumikazi gives food to each of the dolls but when it comes to a certain doll, she only smears food around its mouth and cheeks which alarms Jojo as it was common knowledge that stepmothers often did this practice. They would feed their own children but smear food around the mouths of their non-biological children under their care to make it

³⁴ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. 'Bring the Pail', Kindle

³⁵ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. The Call of Home, Kindle.

seem like they were fed equally. Jojo worries that the *makotis* might not be feeding Shumikazi but because he has no proof, he decides to let it be for the time being while simultaneously drowning in worry of what Shumikazi might be enduring. He shortens his work time in the mines to six months a year and during the months he resides in Zenzele, he takes Shumikazi back to his homestead to take care of her and to see to his cattle and land which both thrive. When Shumikazi is in Zenzele, she helps her father in the field, and he soon sees that she inherited his industrious temperament and work ethic.

When Shumikazi is back in Khubalo, the situation escalates when the *makotis* prepare a feast of meat without Manala's knowledge. They feed their own children but when Shumikazi asks for food, they jokingly smear the chicken fat around her mouth.

One by one, the children got bits and pieces – from their mothers. One by one, they scurried off and away eagerly munching at whatever they'd been given. All, except Nokufa. Neither of the two women had remembered to give her meat or bread. Neither. Without coming to any agreement about it, neither gave her any food; she just seemed to disappear from their horizon.³⁶

When Manala catches them intentionally not feeding Shumikazi, the *makotis* defend themselves by pointing at Shumikazi's mouth but Manala knows where the truth is. The *makotis'* mistreatment of Shumikazi results in the death of the three children who were fed the meat and word spreads that Shumikazi escaped death for the fourth time. The first time was when she survived the birth while her mother died, the second when she was visited by the snake and the third when a young girl from the village drowned in the river while trying to save Shumikazi. Throughout the novel, the phrase *cluck, cluck, cluck* is often repeated to convey how gossip spreads through villages, but the truth is omitted, and this incident only fuels the belief that Shumikazi is a miraculous child surrounded by witchcraft and evil forces.³⁷ After this incident, Manala begins to fear that Shumikazi will be killed by the villagers and Jojo has proof that his daughter is being mistreated. This prompts him to leave the mines for good and he takes Shumikazi with him to Zenzele where her new life begins.

2.2 The Pursuit of Education

³⁶ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Apron Strings, Kindle.

³⁷ Dianne Shoher, "A father's legacy ignites a daughter's fire," *Literator* 38, no. 1 (January 2017), 2, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/lit.v38i1.1303>.

From the moment Shumikazi starts attending school, she is regarded as the top student and her teachers consider her gifted. Furthermore, she enjoys learning and wants to aim for higher studies. Women in South Africa were allowed to pursue European primary and secondary education since the beginning of the 20th century, but the quality was low and while boys were taught the art of trade, the girls' education took a more domestic direction because girls were not seen as the priority. If they were allowed to pursue an academic education, they were often set back by the unreachable fees, and they often had to rely on finding a good husband. They were mainly taught how to sew and cook to train them for the life of a housewife.³⁸ In Shumikazi's village, education was not a priority and the teachers at her school were from different villages:

Since the missionaries had started it, the three-teacher school Shumikazi attended had not had one teacher from this his own village. The pursuit of education had not yet hit Zenzele, but Jojo wanted his child to have an education.³⁹

Jojo sees the potential in Shumikazi and decides to support her in pursuing a higher education at St Cuthbert's, an industrial high school run by a church in the town of Ngcolosi where she would learn how to sew, knit, and weave. He believes that she could be the first person in the family to have an education beyond primary school despite the cost and if Shumikazi was unable to get into St Cuthbert's, she would apply to Shawbury to study to be a teacher. Jojo is met with disapproval from his brothers because he goes against the customs by supporting his daughter in pursuing higher studies. His brothers believe that higher education is pointless and a waste of his wealth. While Jojo believes that education is important and does not want Shumikazi to do hard labour, his brother Mawethu is adamant that he will not educate any of his children because he believes that if he had to suffer, his children must suffer too. But it soon becomes clear to Jojo that the pursuit of education is not the only problem – the problem is Shumikazi's gender.

Welile, who had remained silent for most of this conversation, asked, 'Why do you want to educate a girl child?' At that, Mawethu added, 'She will get married and go to her husband's family with all that education you paid for!' He stopped and then, eyebrows raised in query,

³⁸ Rowena Martineau, "Women and Education in South Africa: Factors Influencing Women's Educational Progress and Their Entry into Traditionally Male-Dominated Fields," *The Journal of Negro Education* 66, no. 4 (Autumn 1997), 386, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2668166>.

³⁹ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. My Father's Cattle, Kindle.

continued, 'It is her in-laws who will eat store-bought bread with jam while you eat crumbs.'⁴⁰

Shumikazi is excellent at school and does not understand her uncles' objections to her pursuit of higher studies. While she knows that girls are prejudiced in more ways than boys, she always believed that her blood relatives saw past her gender. But she starts to understand that her standing in society is disadvantaged not only because she is motherless but also because she is female:

That evening, after everyone had left, her father told her: 'Your uncles think I make a mistake, sending you to school.' 'Why?' Shumikazi asked – asked and then answered her own question. 'Because I am a girl?' 'There is that,' the father said. 'And that is probably the main reason. But to be fair, one must not forget that your Uncle Mawethu won't send any of his children to school after Standard Six.'⁴¹

With the support of her father, however, Shumikazi is determined to do well at school and to continue her studies even after primary school. She excels in handwork, and she is praised by the teachers and inspectors for her gift. Shumikazi starts to attend Lourdes Secondary School, a Catholic boarding school in Mzimkhulu, where she learns maths, physics, Latin, biology, geography, history, English and Xhosa, an education that many people in her village will never have. In Zenzele, most children never finish primary school because the ability to write a letter to someone in the Johannesburg mines was enough of an accomplishment for them. Shumikazi sees the importance of education in society and wants a better life for herself as opposed to her ancestors but after the death of Jojo, Shumikazi's dream of pursuing education is in danger. While she has a bursary for three years, it does not cover travel costs, clothing, and pocket money and although Jojo was adamant in supporting Shumikazi in her studies, her uncles Mawethu and Welile are not. They refuse to pay for her studies and see no reason in her continuing at school when she is to be married soon. Shumikazi's dream of becoming a nurse or a teacher is in shambles and her pursuit of education ends.

2.3 The Trap of Marriage

⁴⁰ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. The Promise, Kindle.

⁴¹ Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, chap. The Promise.

Marriage was not seen as a mere contract between a man and woman by customary laws but rather a contract between two families with procreation as the main function.⁴² In a way, marriage was seen as a property transaction between the families because of the bride price *lobola*. Usually measured in a number of cows, the *lobola* was paid by the man's family to the family of the bride, which declared her the property of the man. If the bride wanted to escape the alliance, problems would ensue as the groom would not want to give the *lobola* back and women were essentially trapped in the marriage. Because the main function of marriage was to reproduce and make heirs, the woman's ability to procreate was also owned by the family of the man and it was ultimately inherited as well. If the husband died, it was not uncommon for the widow to marry her late husband's brother.⁴³ To bear children was a duty and if the man was unable to impregnate his wife, it was not unusual for his brother to do it because the families were united and the child was as much a child of their parents as of their uncles and aunts. In the novel, it is revealed that Mawethu was unable to become a father and the family came to the agreement that his wife Nosapho will be impregnated by other men of the Tolo clan.

His children were his, or theirs – any of the three could be the father of any of the children Mawethu called his. When this pact had been made, it had made perfect sense to all three. 'That way,' Jojo, the youngest had said, 'the children will be our children, Madala children, ooTolo.'

Nosapho had been made to see reason, for the agreement, the secret, could not be without her cooperation. Ukungenwa was a well-known practice, the only difference in this case was that her husband was still alive. But since he agreed, was part of the conceived solution, no one could call it adultery. Besides, who would know? And their hearts would not get in the way – this was duty, nothing but duty, just as sisters bore children for their barren sisters.⁴⁴

The payment of the *lobola* marked the change of ownership for the woman from her father to her husband. It was not uncommon for the family of the bride to give their daughter to men who were known to be abusive when they paid well. This customary law forced women to be trapped in abusive marriages from which they could not escape, not only because they legally had no custody rights of their children and would be forced to leave them with the husband but also because of the threat of rape, further abuse and even murder

⁴² Nicolette Moodie, "Denial of Inheritance Rights for Women Under Indigenous Law: A Violation of International Human Rights Norms" (LLM diss., University of South Africa, 2000), 5.

⁴³ Cynthia Grant Bowman, "Domestic Violence: Does the African Context Demand a Different Approach?" *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 26, no. 5 (September 2003), 478-479, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2527\(03\)00082-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2527(03)00082-7).

⁴⁴ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. And So It Came To Pass, Kindle.

if they left. Women were dependent on their husbands and had to obey them in every part of their life. If they did not consent to sexual intercourse, they would often be forced by their husbands because they were legally minors and under the guardianship of men who could do as they pleased. There were no laws for marital rape in place. Infidelity and marriage to a second wife were not uncommon in the community, so the women were also at a bigger risk of sexually transmitted diseases.⁴⁵ For its transactional nature and the economic advantages of marriage for the families, to be wed was seen as the sole purpose of women as the next passages show:

Suddenly, out came a thought that must have been percolating in Mawethu's mind for the longest while. 'Pity your wife was barren,' Mawethu said glumly. The remark triggered in Jojo a reaction so strong, so impulsive that he arms shot up, hands balled. His fists clenched, eyes bulging, he advanced on his brother. 'Barren?' he hissed. 'What about Shumikazi?' But Mawethu heeled his stallion and it began gently trotting off. 'She is a girl child!' he shouted. 'Why waste your money on her? Hers is to go be a wife, bear children for her husband. That's it, kuphela ke!' Turning his horse around, off and away he rode.⁴⁶

What was he (Jojo) becoming? To think of his daughter remaining husbandless? Was that not the only thing, really, that a girl grew up to become – a wife? That was her destiny, even with an education, that was still her destiny; was it not?⁴⁷

When girls reached a certain age, they were expected to get married and great emphasis was placed on keeping the daughter pure. If the girl was a virgin, her family could ask for a higher *lobola*. Other aspects which affected the *lobola* were the girl's looks and personality. Girls with attractive figures and larger breasts, as well as obedient and submissive girls, had a higher chance of being sold for a greater sum.⁴⁸ Once Shumikazi reaches an age when she is ready to be married, the event of *intonjane* takes place. She is to be sat down by her uncles' wives' Nosapho and Nomzi and she is let in on the secrets of womanhood and the role that women have in life. Her purity is tested during *intonjane* to determine her worth as a future wife.

When she was presented before the court, before the elders – both men and women – and the women who had seen and attested to her virginity, all three of her fathers stood up and thrust the spears they'd been holding into the ground. Their word, their sacred vow, to protect the

⁴⁵ Amber Michelle Lenser, "The South African Women's Movement: The Roles of Feminism and Multiracial Cooperation in the Struggle for Women's Rights" (Thesis, University of Arkansas, 2019), 66-67.

⁴⁶ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. The Promise, Kindle.

⁴⁷ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. My Father's Cattle, Kindle.

⁴⁸ Amber Michelle Lenser, "The South African Women's Movement: The Roles of Feminism and Multiracial Cooperation in the Struggle for Women's Rights" (Thesis, University of Arkansas, 2019), 66.

sanctity of Shumikazi's purity with all in their power, proud she'd been proclaimed a virgin, they were happy to proclaim their status as her guardians. That was what fathers did.⁴⁹

Shumikazi is aware of her role as a woman but now that she knows that she is ready for marriage and everyone knows it, she feels trapped. Since Jojo decided to pass the rights to his cattle to Shumikazi and she is his heir, she fears that because of the livestock she inherited, she might be kidnapped by a man and forced into marriage. The following passage shows Shumikazi's extraordinary perspective in a patriarchal society:

Now, she saw, a man might thwala her simply because he coveted the cattle she possessed. Even were such a man to come and ask her father for her as wife, she would never be sure whether it was her he wanted or what she would bring. Not that she wanted marriage, bent as she was on getting an education, but ukuthwalwa was a fact of life – she could not be so foolish as to deny that – and she was well aware that this inheritance endangered her freedom. A man hungry for an easy fortune might suddenly find her the most desirable maiden to carry off and make a wife.⁵⁰

Shumikazi longs for an education and she is not interested in being a wife, but she is aware that marriage is the purpose of her life as a woman. Her fear grows even stronger when a kidnapping of a young girl takes place in Zenzele. A group of ten girls including Shumikazi goes to the mountains to pick wild spinach but before reaching the hillside, Shumikazi is stopped by her unexplained foretelling power, and she is struck by the visions of her mother. She stops halfway and tears cover her cheeks when she hears screaming. Eight girls run down from the hillside to Shumikazi, but a girl called Ntombi is missing, and it turns out that she was attacked and taken away by a group of men:

They caught Ntombi and carried her away. At first, she screamed. Then, abruptly, her screams stopped. The other girls guessed what had happened. They knew, could almost see in their mind's eye what was happening. Ntombi had either been fright-strangled, her windpipe stopped long enough for her to stop the screaming. The warning, 'If you scream again, we'll keep the air away from your lungs longer', enough to scare her into silence. Or they'd tied a scarf over her mouth, muffling any sound she made. Carried off and away, frightened to go, like a lamb. But she was no lamb. She was a girl, a girl silenced by the force of men who carried her away without so much as a 'By your leave ...'. Tradition.⁵¹

When the news of the kidnapping reaches the village, no one is worried about the fate of the kidnapped girl because it is not an uncommon occurrence. Meanwhile, everyone

⁴⁹ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. A Promise of Rain, Kindle.

⁵⁰ Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, chap. A Promise of Rain.

⁵¹ Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, chap. A Promise of Rain.

focuses on how Shumikazi knew what was going to happen. The girl Ntombi was taken away to be a wife by a man who targeted her, but no one sees anything wrong with it and Shumikazi's family even teases her that she will be next. The practice of kidnapping young girls is called *Ukuthwala* and it was a way for men to pressure the girl's family to give her hand in marriage. This traditional practice is often followed by violence and rape, and it is a result of gender inequality.⁵² But Shumikazi is not content with the way of life everyone is used to, and she does not want to be a mere wife. She is thankful to be supported in her dreams by her father and her teachers:

Was not a girl born to be a wife? What they wished for Shumikazi they wished for their own daughters, had wished for the same, when they were her age. But Shumikazi had a wish quite different to theirs. Indeed, her wish was diametrically opposed to theirs for her. She wanted to get herself an education and her father had promised her that – years before, he had. Her teachers encouraged her in her dream. Indeed, they did more: they supported her.⁵³

Shumikazi realizes she cannot escape marriage. When she goes to visit Manala in Khubalo, she is set up by her uncles to meet Lunga, a boy Shumikazi knows from her childhood who wants to take her as his wife. She is enraged and so is Jojo, who does not yet know that Shumikazi's intent is not to marry. But eventually, Jojo's health starts to deteriorate and when a man from Ncembu asks for Shumikazi's hand in marriage, offering that he will wait before he finishes his studies, Jojo agrees as he wishes for Shumikazi to have the best life possible after he passes away. When Shumikazi meets her future husband Sandile, she is delighted to know that he is not only handsome but a gentleman as well. Furthermore, she is relieved that by being promised to a man, she does not need to fear kidnapping anymore and she can focus on pursuing her ambitions of getting an education because she does not yet know that the dream will be demolished by her uncles' actions. When Shumikazi is no longer able to continue with her studies after Jojo dies and her uncles refuse to pay for it, she has no choice but to marry Sandile as soon as possible. When she tries to postpone the marriage, she is met with disdain from her uncles and her aunt Funiwe. They warn Shumikazi that the longer she waits, the bigger the chance of being kidnapped is and they encourage Sandile to take Shumikazi away to speed up the process and avoid the cost of a formal wedding:

⁵² "Ukuthwala," Justice/Home, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.justice.gov.za/brochure/ukuthwala/ukuthwala.html>.

⁵³ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. A Promise of Rain, Kindle.

[Funiwe] turned to her brothers, who had come with her for support. ‘I-iishi! Why doesn’t this boy simply thwala her? Is he scared of her?’ ‘Kanti,’ Mawethu said in warning. ‘If he isn’t careful, another young man will do that; thwala our daughter while he continues to suck his finger.’ Funiwe’s brothers, not averse to the idea of thwala, had already sent a hint to Sandile, but were again disappointed by his response: ‘Shumikazi and I want to marry in church.’ That put paid to any idea of thwala, which had in fact appealed greatly to Welile especially. Thwalwa’d, he would save immensely by not having to give the girl a wedding. Weddings were not cheap, and especially among the converted, when a church wedding was a must.⁵⁴

Despite her previous resolution to not marry, Shumikazi is happy in her marriage with Sandile, although she faces hostility from her new mother-in-law. In African communities, it was common for mothers-in-law to have power over their daughters-in-law, one of the only privileges insured by the traditions and the hierarchy.⁵⁵ In her new home, Shumikazi is given a new name *No-orenji, the orange one* because of her yellow complexion. Her mother-in-law orders her around and blames her for their shortcomings because she gave up her cattle. But Sandile is gentle and loves Shumikazi and soon they welcome their first daughter. After Shumikazi gives birth to two sons, the preference for male heirs over female ones is shown in the mother-in-law's behaviour, reflecting how girls were seen as inferior from their birth:

Two years after the birth of their daughter, Sandile and No-orenji were blessed with a son. Luvuyo was named for the great jubilation he brought his grandparents. The event of his birth brought remarkable change to the makoti’s relationship with her mother-in-law. If marriage does not make a woman a wife, nothing makes her more so than the birth of a son. With the birth of her second child, therefore, No-orenji bought herself not only acknowledgement but the acceptance, if not admiration, of her mother-in-law.⁵⁶

Shumikazi soon gains good grace from her parents-in-law for her personality. They start to see that Shumikazi is hardworking, great at wielding a hammer and shovel, and efficient in building and digging. And most importantly, she loves Sandile and makes him happy. Unfortunately, after a few years of marriage, Shumikazi is once again hit by the loss of a loved one when Sandile dies in the mines. One week after his funeral, Sandile’s brother makes a sexual advance towards Shumikazi, followed by several other men. This shows that

⁵⁴ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Wife, Kindle.

⁵⁵ Susan Arndt, *The Dynamics of African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African-Feminist Literatures* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 21.

⁵⁶ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Wife, Kindle.

the woman was the property of the family after marriage and when her husband passed away, it was not unusual to be chased by other men:

As their wife, married to a man of the same blood or clan, she always but always had to mind her manners. Therefore, even as she warded off this new menace, she could only do so with soft words, due respect ... careful lest she be seen as unruly and disrespectful to the men of her husband's clan. But a day or two later another approached her for the same reason. Soon, even neighbours joined in the widow's trial of wills. As the months rolled on, hardly a week passed without one or another of the men of her but-so-recently-late husband's clan finding some pretext or another to be near her. In fact, every single day it seemed one of them would find some reason to come to her home. Relating the story of those days, years later, she would say: 'Every man in the village saw me as a vacancy for his stick to get busy. This when I was still a wet widow, the tears not yet dry on my widow's pillow.' Of course, it is not uncommon that a woman alone is sought after by men, even married men, in village life as well as elsewhere.⁵⁷

Shumikazi is disgusted by the insensitivity, and she fears that now she will never feel peace again and will only be despised by the wives of these men. Soon, her parents-in-law offer her to marry their youngest son because by customary law, she can be passed on onto the next relative of the late husband, but Shumikazi does not want to conform to the customs, just as her father Jojo did not:

She had no interest in ukungenwa, being 'entered' by the brother of her deceased husband as a wife. Tradition.⁵⁸

Instead, she decides to do what she feels is right as her father taught her and she returns to her girlhood home. She promises her parents-in-law that she does not want to find another husband but does not reveal that the reason she wants to go away is the fear of being raped. Once again, Shumikazi goes against the traditions of her people and remains a single woman, showing her strength of character and her ability to think for herself in a community where she is looked down on.

2.4 Violence Against Women

Another theme portrayed in the novel is the violence perpetrated on women, an ongoing problem in the African communities to this day. Because women were seen as the property of men, abuse in marriage was often downplayed as a standard part of life and accepted as a

⁵⁷ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Betrayal, Kindle.

⁵⁸ Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, chap. Betrayal.

form of discipline.⁵⁹ It was common knowledge in Zenzele that women were often beaten, and it was not unusual to see the victims in daily life, as the following passage shows:

He knew many women whose lives he did not envy. In Zenzele itself, broken arms, gashes on heads, split lips and even lost, completely popped-out eyes were not unheard of. There were women with permanent limps not from bone degeneration due to the passing of years, but from kicks to her hip, having been jumped on while lying flat on the floor, her man dancing on her mangled body as though she were isigaga sisukwa, the skin of a newly slaughtered animal being cured by children jumping and dancing on it as it lay flat on the ground – until all life, all resistance, was gone from its fibres, killed and softened by the gleeful exuberant exertion of carelessly dancing feet. Those women were marked for life, maimed, beyond repair. One-eyed sorry bodies no one envied, pitied or compensated, condemned to a life worse than servitude – a life unquestioned, unchallenged, unrepudiated.⁶⁰

The next passage also shows that women were often blamed for their abuse because of the belief that they deserved it for their actions:

Another nurse asked, ‘What did your sister do?’ ‘Does she look like she’s done anything?’ Jojo could not hide his irritation. ‘Well,’ unperturbed the nurse asked, ‘why did her husband do this then?’⁶¹

But Jojo is a man of principle and condemns violence. When his sister Funiwe is beaten by her husband Solomzi, he hurries to find solutions to help her and offers to accommodate her in his home. This is according to the traditional way how cases of domestic violence were handled. The abuser was warned by the family of the victim that if he hurt his wife again, the family will take her back to their homestead and he will have to compensate by paying them. But at times the family refused to take the abused woman back because they worried that by taking her home, they would have to repay the *lobola* to the husband and pay for her expenses while she remains at their home, expenses otherwise paid by the husband.⁶² Furthermore, Mawethu and Welile think that the three of them should wait and see how the situation escalates because they worry that the community will look down on a

⁵⁹ Cynthia Grant Bowman, “Domestic Violence: Does the African Context Demand a Different Approach?” *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 26, no. 5 (September 2003), 478-479, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2527\(03\)00082-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2527(03)00082-7).

⁶⁰ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. My Father's Cattle, Kindle.

⁶¹ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Our Sister's Keeper, Kindle.

⁶² Cynthia Grant Bowman, “Domestic Violence: Does the African Context Demand a Different Approach?” *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 26, no. 5 (September 2003), 480-481, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2527\(03\)00082-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2527(03)00082-7).

wife who flees her husband and returns to her childhood home. This results in Funiwe having to be hospitalized after being beaten nearly to death as is described in the following passage:

Funiwe was lumpy-faced, eyes screwed tight as though glued, doughy fists, a blotched bluey-reddish-brown. Her lips were raw steaks out of which oozed a thin, watery fluid, a gummy canary yellow. She could not say a word; couldn't even mumble, her jaws clenched tighter than spoiled clams. Jojo wondered if she could hear, if her ears heard sound at all. They were the only thing that looked remotely unhurt, recognisable in both shape and colour. 'She hears all right,' the nurse assured him when he asked. 'Although how he didn't burst her eardrums, only God knows.' If I take her hand she might respond, show by a squeeze of hand that she hears me, Jojo thought. But the mummy prone on the bed had no hands with which to do anything. The two bandaged lumps where her hands should have been told the story of her brutal beating. Jojo's anger simmered, threatening to boil over. Was Solomzi bent on killing their sister?⁶³

Following his sister's assault, Jojo is determined to take Solomzi to court and he seeks out the chief of court at the Great Place. On the day of the court hearing, Jojo requests that Funiwe is to be taken to her girlhood home after she is released from the hospital and his wish is granted. Solomzi is also charged the fine of four cows – for the beating of his wife and insulting her clan Tolo, spilling the blood of the clan's daughter and for her physical pain. Two of Funiwe's minor children are to go with her, thus another cow must be given to feed them.

Jojo hoped the outcome, the decision of the court, would be a lesson to many a man to think before acting and, above all, to respect their wives and treat them with consideration.⁶⁴

When Solomzi visits Jojo's homestead and requests to take Funiwe back, referring to her as "it", Jojo is furious. Aware of the problem of domestic violence, he refuses to let his sister go back to her husband because he fears that he will hurt her more:

And what would happen when, in future, he again tried to kill her? Violence had only one way to go – if it didn't or wasn't stopped, it went up, escalated. There was no doubt in Jojo's mind that Solomzi would go on beating Funiwe, and if anyone thought what he'd done now was the worst, they had another think coming. As long as they stayed together, he would not only continue beating her but her injuries would increase, grow – especially as Solomzi seemed to see it not only as a right but a duty to beat his wife.⁶⁵

⁶³ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Our Sister's Keeper, Kindle.

⁶⁴ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. I Accuse Our Brother, Kindle.

⁶⁵ Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, chap. I Accuse Our Brother.

Solomzi, however, is a traditional man who believes that his property was stolen from him and appeals against Jojo's sentence at the Great Place. This time, Jojo takes Funiwe to the Great Place with him and on the way there, Funiwe faints and vomits blood, showing the scale of her injuries from her beating. At the hearing, Solomzi declares that he accepts the fine of cows imposed upon him, but he begs the court to allow him to take Funiwe back to his home. Solomzi and his companion Ndunankulu argue that he did not kill anybody and that it is cruel to make his children orphans. When it seems like Funiwe might not be given justice and will be forced to go back home to the husband who abused her, something uncalled happens. Funiwe is given a voice, and she uses her words to rise against the abuser. She acknowledges her place as a woman who is inferior by tradition and speaks of the horrors she endured:

'I know such as I am, a person of the weaker sex, I should not stand in the centre of the courtyard of the nation. Yet such is the life I live, have lived, the abomination I must perform.'⁶⁶

She uses her voice to describe the abuse at the hands of her husband:

'I ask you, my Fathers, where have you seen a woman, wife and mother, who has the ungainly shuffle I now call walking, my hip irrevocably broken, bent, miss-hapen? The ligaments atop the heel of one foot shrunk from a tear suffered when my husband ... my husband threw me to the ground and then used my body – lying there face down – as a football field. He jumped and stamped on my body with both feet. Did that while all the time shouting obscenities at me ... about my character, my birth, my mother, whom he has never set eye on, as she died in the Big Fever of 1918.'⁶⁷

Before the court of the Great Place full of men, Funiwe shouts that she does not wish to return to her husband and leaves everyone at a loss for words. But although she speaks of the injuries done to her and of the fear that her husband will kill her, the court decides that she is to return to her husband once she is fully healed. While she is recovering at Jojo's homestead, Funiwe starts to physically punish Shumikazi which shows that violence is a cycle that is often repeated and that the beaten one justifies abuse done upon others in the name of tradition and discipline:

'Your child is not to be punished when she does wrong?' 'I don't beat her.' 'Oh! Be careful. A tree is trained while still young. Umthi ugotywa usemncinci.' 'I do not use a stick on my child.'

⁶⁶ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. There is No Going Back, Kindle.

⁶⁷ Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, chap. There is No Going Back.

‘You don’t? How will she learn right from wrong?’ ‘Did you learn nothing from brother-in-law’s beatings?’ There was nothing the sister could say to that. Nothing.⁶⁸

Despite being a woman and suffering under patriarchy as much as Shumikazi, Funiwe lived her whole life believing she was inferior to men. She accepted this way of life because it was a standard for her:

Female as his daughter was female, Sis Funiwe had drank all the bad amasi from the collective thinking of the nation about what it meant to be female, to be a woman.⁶⁹

While Funiwe is healing from her wounds, Solomzi takes a new wife which was not unusual in the community, but a second wife was supposed to be an aid to the first wife, not a replacement. Fortunately, this frees Funiwe from the marriage and she does not meet her end at the hands of her abusive husband. Instead, she is allowed to move into a land owned by her brothers to live there alone with her children.

2.5 The Question of Inheritance

Throughout the novel, Jojo goes against the traditions of his people several times but his perhaps most nonconformist deed against the practices of his community is reflected in the title of the novel *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*. During the period in which the novel takes place, women were not legally allowed to own any property under customary law which includes having no inheritance law.⁷⁰ Women were ultimately seen as minors under the law, their legal guardians being their fathers and later their husbands. Anything a woman earned through her work would become the property of the family and not her own, disregarding the fact that women often contributed to the growth of the property as much as men. Due to them having no right to ownership, women and their children were heavily dependent on their husbands which at times trapped them in abusive marriages. If the husband were to die, his property would not be inherited by his widowed wife but usually by the husband’s brother who would take on the role of the head of the family and while

⁶⁸ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. My Father’s Cattle, Kindle.

⁶⁹ Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, chap. My Father’s Cattle.

⁷⁰ Hilda Bernstein, *For their Triumphs and for Their Tears: Conditions and resistance of women in apartheid South Africa* (Cambridge: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1975), 19.

women were not forced to continue in the marriage with the brother, they often did for economic reasons and to financially support their children.⁷¹

After the events of his sister's abuse, Jojo starts to ponder what might happen to Shumikazi once he is gone. He realizes that as a motherless child with no rights and no husband yet, her prospects as a woman are dire. But Jojo sees past gender and his thoughts about his daughter reflect feminist ideology long before feminism was a topic. Through the love he feels for his daughter, Jojo starts to contemplate the way the society was built under patriarchy, and he speculates on the standing of women in his community. He is aware that women are believed to be less than men but instead of accepting this notion like everyone around him, he once again questions the traditions as he does several times throughout the novel:

Jojo's mind refused to go further. He failed to comprehend how they, his flesh and blood, his brothers whom he loved and respected, could fail to love his child, and want only what would be best for her. Simply because she had been born a girl. How could that be a shortcoming? Gender was no determinant of character. A girl was a complete human being, was she not? These sons they so adored, worshipped, had achieved nothing despite their own accident of birth, having been born male. In fact, where would the human race be without Woman? So, then, what would become of his daughter? What about his only child, dear flesh of his own and that of his beloved Miseka? Was she not as good as he was, if not better? Did she not deserve all the rights and respects accorded him, Jojo? Was she less human? Were women less human? And who said so? Who determined that women – just for their gender, through no sin, misdeed or lack of character, indeed, through nothing anyone had defined – were less than men? Even the best, the loftiest, the most achieving of women were deemed less than the least worthy of men. But by whose determination was this so?⁷²

With the realization that Shumikazi will not be protected after his death because his brothers are traditional men who perceive women as less than them, Jojo makes a decision. He decides that he will go against the customs of his people and give his inheritance to Shumikazi, not to his brothers. Jojo makes an appeal at the white magistrate's chamber to change the ownership of all his animals by putting Shumikazi's name on a card where all of his cattle is recorded, his whole wealth. The magistrate is struck by Jojo's decision as it was common to pass the inheritance either to male heirs or to other male relatives, but Jojo stands his ground, and the magistrate accepts his request while congratulating Jojo's bravery to

⁷¹ Nicolette Moodie, "Denial of Inheritance Rights for Women Under Indigenous Law: A Violation of International Human Rights Norms" (LLM diss., University of South Africa, 2000), 5-7.

⁷² Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. My Father's Cattle, Kindle.

make his daughter his heir. The news spreads quickly and leaves everyone bewildered, most of all Shumikazi:

Jojo had done the unexpected – a most unusual thing – leaving ilifa, inheritance, to a female, a girl child. Shumikazi knew this. She knew it was not usual because, among other reasons, she had never heard of such a thing, even in iintsomi, the folk tales of her grandmother Manala in Khubalo. Of course, when she heard this news, she certainly did not fully grasp the full implications of her father's action.⁷³

The community cannot comprehend how a sane man could give all his wealth to his female child and Jojo is condemned by the village for his actions. While Shumikazi is overjoyed with her father's decision, she also fears what might happen to her now and her fears deepen more when Ntombi is kidnapped. She realizes the dire situation she is in – she is a girl with no mother, a father who is getting sick and male relatives who work in the Johannesburg mines far away. There is nothing that could stop a man from kidnapping her because of her newly gained wealth. When Shumikazi is to be married to Sandile, another fear grows in her mind. If she were to remain unmarried, she would have to worry about being kidnapped because of her cattle and she would eventually lose it. But marriage would strip her of her wealth as it would automatically belong to Sandile because of the customary law.

What if Sandile should tire of her one day? Such things happened. Wives were let go of and sent packing. What would then happen to the cattle she had brought with her? Once married, those would automatically belong to him ... to her husband. They'd be hers only as long as she was still attached to him. However, were he to get rid of her, take another wife, that wife would then be the rightful owner, with him.⁷⁴

In the end, Shumikazi comes to the conclusion that the best way to protect the inheritance that she was given by her father is to give the cattle to her uncle Welile so it remains in her paternal home.

If, for whatever reason, her marriage crumbled, in the eyes of the law, the cattle would otherwise be his and she would be stripped of all her father's bequest, whereas Uncle Welile or his sons would always be there for her, look after her should she, for one or another reason, become a

⁷³ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. A Promise of Rain, Kindle.

⁷⁴ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Wife, Kindle.

returnee from wifhood. That was their role, the role of the men of the family since it was they who received her lobola and, in this case, more – her inheritance. They were blood, her blood.⁷⁵

She places her whole inheritance in the hands of her uncle believing that if anything were to happen to her, he would help her as it was the way of the *Ubuntu* to help each other in the community. Shumikazi believes her uncle will take care of her as well as her cattle, but the first betrayal comes on the day of *ukwambesa*, a tradition where the family of the bride gives gifts to the groom's family to show their respect. Each member of the groom's family is to receive something designated for them. But Shumikazi's uncles are greedy and the gifts they offer to Sandile's relatives are of very poor quality which insults his family. This prompts Sandile's relatives to be hostile towards Shumikazi during their marriage, apart from Sandile and his father. The second betrayal occurs when Shumikazi is to move to Sandile's homestead and bring the essentials she will need. The only people who contribute to her bridal bundle are Funiwe, aunt Nosapho, her father's previous servant and friend Sibuka and the head teacher from her primary school. Despite Welile's new wealth that he gained thanks to Shumikazi, he does not help her because she is not his child, betraying the principle of *Ubuntu* as well.

Neither woman went into the shame and unfairness of the treatment Welile had meted out to Shumikazi. While he stinted on Shumikazi's bridal bundle, his own daughter, on the other hand, got one fit for a princess. It would take two wagons to haul the goods, never mind the bridal party. And, to add insult to injury, how did he get the money to make all these handsome purchases? Why, he sold two of the cattle Shumikazi had given him to hold for her. So he could do that for his daughter while he did nothing for Shumikazi, his niece, who had but so recently made him a rich man!⁷⁶

With Nosapho's help, Shumikazi can receive a better bundle, but the people of Zenzele question Welile's treatment of Shumikazi. Even though she is the one he should be thankful to for making him wealthy, he stiffes Shumikazi and then uses her cattle to pay for a glamorous wedding of her cousin Nosisa. Shumikazi's deed of giving her cattle to Welile turns against her. Welile uses the cattle to pay a man whose wife he impregnated and who came to live with him, much to his wife Nomzi's dismay.

Then, another betrayal from Shumikazi's uncles is revealed. When Shumikazi meets Mr Sutton, a shopkeeper who helped Jojo make Shumikazi his heir by setting him up with the

⁷⁵ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Wife, Kindle.

⁷⁶ Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, chap. Wife.

magistrate, he asks Shumikazi why she did not continue with her studies. It is revealed that the nuns from Lourdes School made an offer to Shumikazi to study free of charge, but Welile never informed her about it and deprived her of the opportunity to pursue education. Welile and Mawethu are the image of traditional men who see no need for the education of a girl child and do not believe in Shumikazi's ambitions.

2.6 Shumikazi as a Role Model

When Shumikazi returns to her girlhood home, she finds it in ruins. The efforts of her father are destroyed by her uncles' indifference. But despite their protests against Shumikazi returning, she decides to bring her father's home back to its glory and raise her children there just as her father raised her. Shumikazi seeks help from her uncles to save her home as a repayment for the cattle she bestowed upon Welile and she is instead mocked by them. But Shumikazi is not content with being treated as inferior and she knows her worth. She speaks up for herself and talks of the unfairness and betrayals she faced from them:

‘I gave you my inheritance because you are my eldest father. You took my inheritance. And you took my lobola. Ndalotyolwa mna! Now that my marriage is no more, I do not think I am unreasonable in expecting help from you.’ The boldness of the woman silenced the three men, and for a while it seemed even breathing stopped, each deep in thought, eyes darting from place to place, searching for what the others there present thought – asking, challenging.⁷⁷

Welile argues that he has nothing to give to a woman who should stay where her children were born and that it is not normal for a wife to return to her childhood home. When Funiwe tells her brothers that they should be ashamed of themselves for treating their brother's child this way, he retorts that Shumikazi gave him the cattle willingly. But Shumikazi uses her voice to oppose them:

Shumi sighed and, shaking her head, she said, ‘You're right. I should blame my stupidity in trusting you ... trusting custom. Tradition ... I should have learned from your treatment of your own sister, Funiwe, Sister of Father. My father went against tradition ... Umntu uyabazi azelwe nabo. One knows one's siblings, I guess. He tried to protect me against you ... and I erred.’⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Chasing, Kindle.

⁷⁸ Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, chap. Chasing.

Shumikazi realizes that by putting her trust in her uncles, she gave away her inheritance, an inheritance never given to anyone else, and she is determined to chase what her father, who went against traditions, had given her, his cattle:

‘Sibuka – he who waits outside now to hear what crumbs Senior Father might throw my way – he drove my cattle here. He knows where my cattle went. He followed the tails of my cattle, my father’s cattle, to Uncle Welile’s kraal. Not to mention the twenty hale and hearty beasts, four-footed, without blemish, my lobola – those Uncle Welile also swallowed. I believed I would never be without, never suffer want, never be destitute – for my father, Senior Father Welile, had my cattle in his kraal, which was my kraal as I was his daughter and he my father.’ Then the widow straightened her frame, looked at those gathered there, and, in tone loud, bold, and clear, announced: ‘Ndilandel’ imitshoba yeenkomo zikabawo! I am chasing the tails of my father’s cattle.’⁷⁹

Shumikazi is not discouraged by her uncles’ betrayal. Instead, she puts everything she learned at school and from her father to use. She does not want her son to die in the mines and for her daughter to live as a kitchen girl. She wants a better life for her children so they can pursue education just as she did. She also wants a better life for herself, and she knows that she is not alone when the village of Zenzele comes together to help her.

Zenzele had come out in full force to welcome Jojo’s child. The villagers had come to show her the kindness they harboured in their hearts, kindness learned from her father, shown to each and every one of them by that man all the years he still lived. The people had not forgotten Jojo’s good work, his kind deeds, and his givingness toward those in need. Yes, in the village no one was an island when it came to fortune, good or bad.⁸⁰

Zenzele has a strong sense of community and in a community, it is important to help each other. The village comes together to aid Shumikazi just as her father always aided them in times of need without asking for anything in return. Mawethu and Welile are shunned by the village and Shumikazi is grateful that Jojo is remembered with fondness, as a hero. She realizes that Jojo’s real cattle is his kindness that can be passed on to anyone. Shumikazi’s home and gardens are brought back to life, and she repays the help of her neighbours by giving the fruits of her harvest back to her community.

As time passes, Shumikazi’s daughter Sinethemba graduates with a BA in Linguistics and Environmental Studies and Shumikazi is permitted to read a poem at the university as a tribute to her firstborn daughter who is the first person in her extended family to graduate.

⁷⁹ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Chasing, Kindle.

⁸⁰ Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, chap. Chasing.

When a livestock disease spreads in Zenzele in 1989, Shumikazi's cattle are spared because of her learnings and her education.

Many people in the village had followed amaMpondo who, in 1960, revolted against the government. The dipping of cattle was held in suspicion by many. They believed it would kill their cattle. During the revolt, dipping tanks – seen as a symbol of state authority – were attacked. Dipping stopped in the whole region of Mpondoland and this spilled over to neighbouring Mthatha, Qumbu and even Mount Fletcher regions. Although in these areas the dipping tanks were not destroyed, the practice itself became less common, and authorities unable to enforce it for lack of capacity, let it be. So, some dipped but others didn't; in fact, many more didn't than did. Shumi, however, was faithful in dipping, for she understood the reasons behind it, and – thanks to the nuns at Lourdes – believed in its efficacy.⁸¹

Meanwhile, Welile's whole cattle are annihilated, and the people of Zenzele believe it to be a punishment from the Ancestors for forgetting his duty and for his treatment of Shumikazi. But Shumikazi is not concerned with the fate of the people who wronged her. Instead, she uses her education to become a businesswoman as the last passage of the novel shows:

But the niece herself was far removed from such sentiments; the depletion of Welile's kraal little concerned her. She had her hands full. She had completed a course of spinning, sewing, knitting and weaving – done weekends at St Cuthbert's – and started a small factory for the women and girls of Zenzele. This she built right in her yard ... in her very own yard – with her own God-given hands. Just as her father had done.⁸²

Despite the many obstacles Shumikazi faces during her life in a traditionally patriarchal society, she is never consumed by rage or the need for vengeance. Her character shows that even when women are discouraged, discriminated against, abused and belittled, it is possible for them to create opportunities for themselves against all odds. Jojo as a character is the manifestation of an ideal that men should strive for and that they should uplift women instead of seeing them as inferior.⁸³ He is perhaps a reflection of Sindiwe Magona's parents who were not educated but believed in the importance of learning and were willing to make sacrifices so their children could pursue education.⁸⁴ The novel touches on many feminist topics such as marital rape, forced marriage, violence against women, the right to inherit,

⁸¹ Sindiwe Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* (Cape Town: Seriti sa Sechaba, 2016), chap. Chasing, Kindle.

⁸² Magona, *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, chap. Chasing.

⁸³ Dianne Shober, "A father's legacy ignites a daughter's fire," *Literator* 38, no. 1 (January 2017), 3, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/lit.v38i1.1303>.

⁸⁴ Kathy A. Perkins, *Black South African Women: an Anthology of Plays* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 88.

women's role in society, poverty, the problem of inequality in pursuing education and the perception of women in a patriarchal society. It shows the way women can blossom and be successful when they are supported and given the opportunity to prove that they are equal to men, reflecting the beliefs of the feminist movement. With her writing, Magona reminds us that patterns of behaviour and customs are passed through generations, but that we do not have to pass suffering and hatred. Compassion, kindness, hope and most importantly love can be passed too.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Puleng Segalo, "Belonging, Memory and Subaltern Voices: Reflecting on Sindiwe Magona's *To my Children's Children*," *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (June 2020): 200, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23277408.2020.1785669>.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to introduce the author Sindiwe Magona and analyse the elements of feminism in her novel *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*. The first part of the thesis tells us about Magona's life and her achievements. As a woman born in South Africa in the 1940s, she underwent the transition from childhood into womanhood in a patriarchal society during the oppressive system of apartheid and experienced gender, race, and class inequality first-hand. As a young husbandless woman with three children, she had to combat the expectations of a society that looks down on single mothers. But despite all odds, she was able to acquire three university degrees and open a path for her children to pursue education as well. She uses writing to voice her discontent with South African customs and to honour the women who were silenced. By merging fiction and her own experiences, Magona creates timeless works and is currently highlighted as one of the most prominent South African female authors, an honour proved by the many awards she has received for her activism and her many achievements. In her autobiographies and her novel *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle*, she draws from her encounters with racial and gender prejudice and focuses mainly on feminist topics such as the lack of proper education, violence perpetrated upon women, forced marriage, women having legal status as minors, poverty, discrimination, the rights to inheritance and the problematic side of old traditions and customs.

The second part of the thesis is dedicated to the analysis of elements of feminism present in the novel. The customs and the circumstances of women in South Africa were researched to highlight the bigotry they faced in a society where female submission was seen as a standard. By using passages from the novel, the thesis aims to show the many feminist topics present in the story which Magona believes to be the most important in the quest for gender equality. Shumikazi, the main character, is essentially a feminist character as she slowly realizes throughout her life that she is looked down on because of her gender and she tries to overcome these struggles. With the help of her father Jojo, she acknowledges the prejudice she must face as a woman and combats the traditions by shaping her own opinion of the world and finding her voice in a community where women were silenced. She pursues education, leaves her husband's family after his death to live as a single mother of three and takes ownership of her property, owing to her father and the cattle she inherited from him despite women having no legal claim to ownership and inheritance. Afterwards, she goes a

step further and creates her own factory to help other women gain employment and find their freedom. Despite never calling herself a feminist, Shumikazi is an example of a woman who realizes her worth in a patriarchal society and fights for her emancipation. Her behaviour reflects the beliefs promoted by the feminist movement and she is essentially a reflection of Sindiwe Magona and her own struggle in a quest for equality.

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