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2014-03-24
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This paper is submitted to the Faculty of Arts as a Masters Research Report

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Drama and Film (Masters)

Research Report

Supervisor

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Project

UGCALEKA UBUYILE: ACCENTS OF CULTURE

Aspects of Raymond Williams's theory of culture in relation to South African Drama

For

my late parents,

especially my Mother

who wanted me

"to be something in life"

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very glad to acknowledge the help and encouragement I have received during the course of this study. I must first use this opportunity to acknowledge the financial assistance I received from the CSD (Human Science Research Council) in the making of this research report. I would also like to acknowledge that some of the information used in this research report, especially in Chapter Three, is based on oral history. It is the information passed to me by my late grandmother (umakhulu "Putu" Nobhotolo Diana Yani) and parents (the late Mr & Mrs Yani) about the history of my people, AmaXhosa. I must also acknowledge that I have also extensively made use of *The Bible* and *The Holy Qur'an*, the books, especially *The Holy Qur'an*, which I regard as my bosom friends, as I do not go to my sleep without reading them at night. Let me also extend my gratitude to Ms M. E. Northey, a librarian in John G. Gubbins Africana Library at the University Of the Witwatersrand, for her assistance in helping me to get an access to John H. Soga's *The South-eastern Bantu* and *Ama-Xhosa*, the two books which are only available at Wits University and Fort Hare University library stores, and which have been of major help to me.

Ndibulela kumntu wonke ondinike inxaso kolugqatso lunzima. Ndindlulise umbulelo wam ongazenzisiyo Ku-Qamatha, U-Ntu, uThixo woKrila, ooThangane, AmaBamba amahle kunye nowaMampehla, ooCabashe, izikhwebu ezibomvu.

Ndithi kuni nonke: Nize ningadinwa, nangomso. Enkosi!

PREFACE

There is a specific rationale for the following biographical details and for the sometimes very personal observations in this preface. The subject matter of this research report is inextricably intertwined with the biographical details provided hereunder, because the author's argument about culture are inextricably intertwined with his experience. This will become clear in later chapters. For the present, I wish the reader to see the preface, not as ornamental prefix to the 'real' academic work which follows, but as organic part of the research. Like Oedipus, the author embarks on this research not only to discover, but also to find his identity at the centre of that discovery.

My Origins:

My father was a man called uZwelidinga Dennis Yani. He was born in a farm area known as Petersen near Grahamstown (Eastern Cape), from a single mother umakhulu (my grandmother) uNobhotolo "Putu" Diana Yani. My grandmother was the granddaughter of uZolile waseMampehleni, the praise singer for king Hintsa Gcaleka, the grandson of king Gcaleka. My grandmother was a dedicated Christian and she was the one who introduced my father into Christianity. It is said that after my grandmother was disappointed by my grandfather, for not marrying her, who was a chief for the Krila clan (AmaBamba) in the land of AmaRharhabe, she became a lonely woman who was bitter and suspicious of traditions and customs. As a result she committed herself to Christ. The reason for her not being married by my grandfather, was that she already had one female child from another man, and the custom was very strict, it did not allow a woman who had a child from another man to marry another man, especially if that man is a chief. When my father died, he died as the leader in his church. He was also about to be ordained as the leader of the clan from his father's house when death took him away.

It was after meeting my mother that my father started to be serious about, and committed himself to, the church. My mother was Lydia Xakiwe Saki, who was born

and grew up in Klipplaart near Graaf Reinet. She was of Khoi-khoi origins. Her father was a simple man, a church goer and a shoe maker. Her mother died when she was still young. The poverty and the hunger facing her at home made her grasp easily the political situation of apartheid South Africa. As a result she was a rebel who never liked anything that had to do with white folk, especially the so-called "Afrikaners", whom she complained about a lot: *"Amabhunu amabhunu akhohlakele. Babetha otata wam ndinjongile."* ("Boers, Boers are cruel. They brutally sjamboked my father in front of me"). Unlike my father, she was never directly involved in the liberation struggle, but, I think, she was more politically conscious than my father.

The two (my father and my mother) met each other in Graaf Reinet. After their marriage in Petersen (my father's home), and due to the conflict between my father's sisters and my mother, they moved to Port Elizabeth. That is were they had their first child, my oldest brother, in 1952. This child was followed by five more children between 1954 and 1966. The last child before me was born in 1968.

My Name:

Friends and colleagues in the field of arts and culture call me Skhura Makhura Yani. But the name I was given by my late parents is Sikhumbuzo kaYani. It is said that this name was given to me when I was going to be christianized (or baptized) in the Bantu Methodist Church in Africa under the Reverend M. Mvabaza. People who attended the ceremony said it was my father who suggested the name, and when he was asked by the priest: "Why this name?" The answer was simple: "One day he [me] will **remind** these people of me [my father]". I do not know the meaning behind that, and I am less interested in telling everyone the meaning of my name. But that answer, on its own, carries the answer containing the meaning behind my name.

My CV:

I was born and grew up in Port Elizabeth. I am the last born out of the family of seven children, not counting my brother who died in the seventies and my father's other children from other mothers.

I started acting in 1985, when we used to do sketches for the community, in the old Fordville Youth Club in Port Elizabeth. But I got my professional theatre skills when I met Winston Ntshona who was my drama teacher in the old Imvaba Arts Association. After my father, Ntshona was the first man to tell me "go and study, son. It is not those street things which excite you much now that will make you free. But it is education". Under his guidance I read Sir Lawrence Olivier on acting, Jerzy Grotowski's *Towards A Poor Theatre* and Konstantin Stanislavsky's *An Actor Prepares*. These dramatists did inspire me a lot in terms of acting skills.

I wrote my first play, in conjunction with Takes Thando Balfour, my friend, in 1987. It was for school purposes, entitled: *Unontozini*. My second play was a collaborative work between Takes, Looks Mafoto and me in 1989. This play we did for Imvaba Arts Association, and it was a 'protest' play entitled: *June 16*. After that I wrote a number of plays, and one of them, *Journey to nowhere*, was performed in Zabalaza Festival which was organized by the African National Congress (ANC) Department of Arts and Culture in London in 1990. *Journey to nowhere* was followed by *The Burning Land*, a play that received critical acclaim when it was staged at the Barn in Opera House in Port Elizabeth in 1993.

The struggle robbed me my childhood. During my early days of theatre I was more fascinated by Theatre of Resistance. For me it provided a 'language' to express myself freely and also a platform to attack the apartheid regime. I joined the struggle at the age of 13 years old. The first movement I joined was the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), but I moved to the old Port Elizabeth Youth Congress (PEYCO) after COSAS was banned in 1985. I was also the victim of detention without trial in 1986, and it was during this period that I became more radical in my

approach in politics and arts. I left ANC, after I came back from London (Zabalaza Festival) in 1990. I was disillusioned with the way the ANC handled the issue of army struggle, and also with its 'betrayal' positions in the Groote Schuur and Pretoria Minutes.

I found a political home within the extreme left wing parties. I joined the Azanian Student Movement (AZASM), the student wing of the Azanian Peoples' Organisation. As a cultural worker, I became more involved in organising cultural events for this movement. As a result in 1991 I was elected as the Project Co-ordinator and the Cultural Officer of the Port Elizabeth branch of this organisation. Later on, the same year, I was elected as the Eastern Cape Chairperson of the same organisation. It was in 1992 in Durban when I was the Cultural Officer of AZAPO Umlazi branch that I became disillusioned with the politics of AZAPO. I was very critical of the senior leaders of the organisation, for whom we (the young ones) were acting as their bodyguards, whilst they were busy holding secret meetings with Pik Botha, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs. I challenged them: "Comrades, I left my mother in PE, and came to protect you in this Natal of yours, full of violence and killings. Nothing I am getting, not a single cent I am getting for doing that, because of my love for the struggle of my own people. But you, you are busy drinking wines with that white bastard, Pik Botha. And worst of all your kids are more white than whites themselves. Why, comrades? Why are you fakes?" As a result of that I became less popular to Strini Moodley, that swine I will never forget, I nearly died because of him, as later on I was accused of being a spy for the system. Then I quit politics to start afresh my CV.

My Academic Career:

More than in most cases, my academic career is inseparable from my life experiences. Since I began with schooling, from the days when I was at higher primary, I faced problems in my life whether that was detention without trial or the death of my cousin brother, uMxolisi, who was burned alive being wrongly suspected of being *impimpi* (the police informer), to high school days, whether it was the death of my friend,

S'fundo who was brutally killed by gangsters, or my father's death. I started with my tertiary academic life at Durban-Westville University, when I was studying for a Theology Degree. But I never gave enough time, energy and focus on my studies as I was busy acting as bodyguard for "the sons of the soil" who I later discovered are 'sour like salt'.

After quitting politics I came to the University of the Witwatersrand, School of Dramatic...whatever (I reserve the last word, as it does not suit the school) in 1993. I never enjoyed my first year in that school. Right from the start I was pissed off with the attitudes of some staff members who never appreciated "difference" from their students. Right from the start I was labelled an aggressive Skhura and an arrogant and stubborn black student who did not know the value of education. I failed one course for reasons that I still do not know even today. I left the school to do a plain BA in the same university. And I wrote a poem about my departure from that school:

open the gates i'm leaving
all my life i've been a rebel
fighting for truth among the
people who don't want to change
open the gates i'm leaving
all my life i've been a lonely
man sitting among the people
who don't understand me
and even though I try my best
I can't find happiness...

Doctor Bill W. Domeris, my lecturer in Religious Studies, the only course that I managed to get an academic award in so far at Wits University, motivated me a lot. He was the spiritual father to me. He encouraged me to continue doing Honours after getting the BA Degree. But I told him my interest is in art, especially theatre: "I love theatre. Me and Theatre, we are colleagues," I said to him. He told me that then I should go back to School of Dramatic...And the following year, in 1997, after completing my BA in 1996, I went back to the School of Dramatic...All to find out that things have not changed. Instead they were worse than before. I became pissed off when they undermined my intelligence, giving me a certain lazy bastard as my supervisor. A lecturer who does not even read, and I do not like people who do not like reading. This time I was well prepared to challenge the school. I was going to

fight even if it meant losing my academic life. I was going to fight them. Fortunately, a messiah came for them under the name of Professor Ian Steadman.

It was under the supervision of Steadman that I began changing my attitude about the School of Dramatic...His liberalism worked a lot for him, and even me. I should say the truth openly that under the supervision of this man, I began to learn and understand other people -not the attitude I had before of always trying to force my way upon others. The attitude I got from my militaristic lessons in the struggle. The struggle nearly robbed me of my mind. Carrying AK47s at the younger age is not child's play. Throwing stones and petrol bombs when you are still a teenager is not a child's game. Ian Steadman did not focus on my aggressive character, as everyone I meet does. But he identified the 'things' that I love most in life -the books. Right from the start he advised me to read more books. He is the man who suggested that I read Raymond Williams, the cultural studies scholar whose theories informed my research report. After reading one book from Raymond Williams, entitled: *Marxism and Literature*, I said to myself this man (Steadman) is not playing games with me, he is close in knowing and understanding what I want. And what I want is to read more books in order to fulfill my late mother's wish -taking away myself from the "things" that nearly destroyed my life.

I passed my Honours very well. One day Steadman asked me after Honours what next. I told him the next is Masters. He then suggested that I read Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*, the book that inspired me to reclaim the script of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and restore it back into its African context as ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. This play is a means of recalling back my African heritage and my African personality. It is further a means of reconstructing, as language constructs, reality for myself. As it is the first play I made professionally after the death of my mother in 1995, it is therefore a source of inspiration to me and even to my academic career which was nearly destroyed by my involvement in the struggle, my attitude, and some selfish and foolish lecturers within the School of Dramatic....

My Philosophy:

My philosophy goes back to my father's lessons that: Every time I see the sun, I see the glory of my fortune. Then I shouldn't give up and start complaining about life. Instead I should continue with life and be more strong than I was yesterday. And always give thanks to God.

Most of my colleagues describe me as an anarchist. The reason is that I do not usually take things for granted, I always challenge everything whether it is favourable to myself or not. Another reason, they say, is that I always want to be different from others, and that I may even go to the extent of being different with the whole world.

I am not an anarchist. I am the rebel who is fighting against whatever diminishes the individual's blind impulse - the freedom to be honest to ourselves, to our minds and our world.

My Mother's Wish:

I remember the day *umama wam ongasekhoyo* (my late mother) asked me if I was going to become a medical doctor. I did not wish to tell her of my inability to count. I was ashamed to tell her of my inability to prove that *x* plus *y* is equal to one ($x + y = 1$). Truly speaking if she was still alive today I could have told her that mama, if I was a doctor, it was going to be difficult for me to count all the human lives who could have died in my hands (as, unfortunately, she too died in the hands of a doctor). But I could have proven to her that *x* and (not plus) *y* means umXhosa onguYani (Yani, the Xhosa). Thus I declare that one-day I will fulfill my mother's wish -so I will be a doctor. Oh no, do not be mistaken at all, not a medical doctor, but a Philosophical Doctor. Surely therefore if *x* and *y* means Yani the Xhosa, then culture is ordinary. Culture, as defined by Raymond Williams, is ordinary in the sense that it is who I am: the way I was born, the way I grew up, the way I was taught to behave and to be myself, a man and a human, the way I relate to my society and the way I communicate with people around me. And this is the source on which my play, ***uGcaleka ubuyile***, is based.

My Desire:

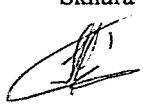
I desire to be something better. But the circumstances of my life experiences and my upbringing have been unfavourable to this ambition. I have been familiar from boyhood with violence, hunger and pains. Death, which always come like lightning in the sky, has been my playmate. I have been a wanderer in my life. I have trodden the ranks of "non-racialism" but I never found comfort with the Charterists. I have established love with Black Consciousness but only to be disappointed by its leaders. I have escaped to the School of Dramatic...but I found out that art means little to those who teach it.

I have conversed with men of genius. The theatre of ancient Greece and our own indigenous African theatre are to me a passion and an enjoyment. These are the sources from which the materials for the imagery of my play, ***uGcaleka ubuyile,*** have been drawn. I have considered theatre in its most comprehensive sense, and have read the writings of the Dramatists, the Historians and the Cultural Studies Scholars whose theories have been accessible to me, and I have made use of them in the making of ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. Yet the experience and the feelings to which I refer to in ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** do not constitute the experiences and the feelings of those Dramatists, those Historians and those Cultural Studies Scholars. It presents only my own experiences among, and feelings about my people, AmaXhosa.

> This is not waking me up from asleep
> No: understand that I've wept many
> tears, and travelled many roads [in my life].
>
> -Oedipus the king

February, 1999

Skhura Yani



INTRODUCTION

Raymond Williams wrote extensively about drama as a cultural form. Starting from his interest in Ibsen, he described a selective tradition of European drama in *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, revised his argument in the course of lectures at Cambridge University in the 1960s (published in *Modern Tragedy*) and then presented this revised argument in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*.[1] The existentialist themes of his early work on Ibsen are revised and replaced by the idea of "complex seeing" from Brecht in the revised book. The central issue throughout is the discovery of accents of culture which inform and are found within drama, and which allow expression of what is ordinarily silenced in everyday life. It is the purpose of this research report, therefore, to describe and analyse these accents of culture that are essential in Williams's perspectives on drama. This is done by examining the culture that is presented and represented in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***, a play adapted from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and transformed into the Xhosa context by Skhura Yani. This research report is divided into three chapters, the contents of which I will explain later. But now I must outline a brief background on Raymond Williams, the man whose ideas form a foundation for this report.

From his first appearance as an editor of *Politics and Letters* and *The Critic* in 1946 to his death in 1988,[2] Raymond Williams built up a prodigious and versatile repertoire, appearing as a literary critic, cultural critic, theorist, Marxist, dramatist, scriptwriter, television broadcaster, novelist, poet, media analyst and much more. When he died in 1988, he was praised much more as a writer, intellectual and cultural critic. Some of his colleagues even expressed a sense of personal loss over his death. For instance, his long-time friend and colleague in cultural studies, Stuart Hall, wrote:

> In this age of Philistine Barbarism over which Mrs Thatcher is pleased to preside, the loss of Raymond Williams is irreparable; and those of us who had the privilege to know him personally, to read his work, to talk and argue with him, to be formed, intellectually and politically, in his shadow, hardly know how to express or where to put our sense of the

[1] O' Connor, 1989, p. 80
[2] Gorak, 1988, p.1

> enormity of that loss.[3]

Stuart Hall went on to celebrate the range and stubbornness of Williams's critical intelligence, the variety of his modes of writing and his seriousness of purpose in seeking to understand and communicate to others "the central processes of our common life".[4] For Hall, Williams was a socialist intellectual who refused to be captured by any tendency:

> There wasn't the usual rift between thought and feeling, idea and feeling, which characterises so much "politicised" intellectual work. His practice was that of "dialogue" -with other traditions, positions, other ways of seeing and feeling, as a "pointed response to a particular orthodoxy" because "the society of dialogue" was his way of imagining what socialism would be like.[5]

Therefore to lose such a person when the discourses of the new right (neo-liberalist conservatism and things such as a slavish 'globalisation' without analysis of its social impact) are on the rise, and when the socialist project world-wide seems to be at its end, is to lose someone who saw socialism as a way forward. It is to lose someone who saw socialism and democracy as mutually interdependent if both were to flourish for the common good. It is to lose someone who saw socialism as a vehicle for the total liberation of the poor people.

There are three major themes in Williams's work: (1) the ways in which keywords operate through their semantic instability; (2) the concept of the knowable community in the novel; and (3) what he terms as "complex seeing" in drama. This last, which extends in Williams's account to film and television as well as to the theatre, seeks to draw our attention to the differing and changing experiences of audiences. It elaborates to us the ways in which the notion of a structure of feeling in the world and theatrical and televisual production may generate differing interpretations of what is seen and heard. It is, we may surmise, an attempt to come to terms with the realities of change in the world as well as the development of different forms and conventions

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[3] Hall, 1988. p.20
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid. p.21

within the theatre, some of which cross-over to film and television; and with new forms of technology which themselves create new possibilities in audio-visual media.

Williams wrote a number of books, articles and essays, such as *Culture and Society*, *Drama in Performance*, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, *Resources of Hope*, *Marxism and Literature*, *The Long Revolution* and many more. But my interest is specifically on his writing which deals with culture, especially drama, as it is this work which forms the basic foundation for the main ideas of this paper. For instance, in *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, Williams describes his critical approach to drama as one formed "not from a theoretical inquiry, but from responses to particular dramatic works".[6] Thus the "structure of feeling" is situated as a central and motivating force in drama. Furthermore, in the same vein, through his analysis of Synge's dramatic discourse as a naturalist language, Williams describes language as an active social process of our society. And it is from this point of view that the play, ***uGcaleka ubuyile***, which is the subject of my work, is (re)viewed and (re)analysed in this study.

The first chapter of this research report deals with the descriptions of accents of culture. Here the purpose is to explore Raymond Williams's definition of culture, then establish his critical theory of culture, and apply his work to ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. The second chapter outlines those facts which makes ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** connected to the original script, *Oedipus Rex*, and also to aspects of African civilization. This chapter on its own is divided into three parts. The first part surveys aspects of the history of ancient Egypt which are very important for the study of ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** and this paper, because it was the basic of Greek mythology, which the play is based from. The second one deals with analysis of *Oedipus Rex*, and here is to draw a line between the story of the original version and that of the transformed version. The last part deals with Skhura Yani's African heritage, which connects ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** to the African civilization that is made mention of in the first part. The last chapter, Chapter Three, discusses the culture of AmaGcaleka, which is presented and represented in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. Here the aim is to analyse the reality which is

[6] Williams, 1964, p.42

reflected in the play. Furthermore, is to outline in detail the ways of AmaGcaleka, as it is their culture that has transformed the ancient Greek play, *Oedipus Rex*, to be reconstructed into an African icon.

CHAPTER ONE

UGCALEKA UBUYILE: THE ACCENTS OF CULTURE

> *Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purpose, its own meanings. Every human expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land. The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind...[Thus] culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind.*
>
> -Raymond Williams

What is culture? The easiest way of answering this question is to trace the validity of the sentiment expressed in the above quotation from Raymond Williams and then explore some implications. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the accents of culture, by scrutinizing Raymond Williams's theory of culture, and then establish its application to ***uGcaleka ubuyile***.

The debates about culture and civilization since the Second World War, are the ones will lead us to a thorough analysis of the above quotation and to the definitions of culture. The anthropology of Malinowski was almost wholly preoccupied with a theory of culture.[7] There was a complex relation with the term "civilization", which was used by Clive Bell in 1928 as the title of his short book on cultural themes.[8] Two years later "civilization" came to stand for the deterioration of a vital society in the title of F. R. Leavis's, *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*.[9]

Although there was a debate in the early 1930s about Leavis's use of the word, it was T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948) which gave the word a new importance. Eliot wrote that:

> I have observed with growing anxiety the career
> of this word culture during the past six or seven years.
> We may find it natural, and significant, that during a period

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7 Rhoda Metraux, 1968, "Bronislaw Malinowski", *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, New York & London, Macmillan.

8 Clive, B. 1928. Civilization: An Essay. London. Chatto & Windus.

9 Leavis, F. R. 1930. Cambridge.

> of unparalleled destructiveness, this word should come to have an important role in the journalistic vocabulary.[10]

Frank Gloversmith points out that "natural", the key term used in the above quotation, was a key term in arguments about culture in the 1930s which favoured social inequality. The natural differences correspond to the residual notion of innate psychological needs in Malinowski's social anthropology.[11] The advance proposed by Malinowski's and Eliot's notions of culture is that them challenge the fixed categories of much nineteenth-century social thought. For instance, there was a dominance within European anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century of pluralistic and relativistic notions of culture. This involved a rejection of the three axioms of nineteenth-century European anthropology: the psychic unity of humankind, the unity of human history, and the unity of culture.[12] It should be noted that Malinowski's interest was in describing actual patterns of culture, and Eliot, on the other hand, insisted on a social perspective. Eliot also saw culture as the pattern of a society as a whole.

This argument was of great theoretical importance to Raymond Williams, who problematized Eliot's theory of culture, and provided us with another notion of culture. To Williams, Eliot's notion of culture as a whole way of life is valid but too simplistic. Williams argued that in any real society it would be impossible for one individual to have a working knowledge of all of its culture, defined as ways of life. Williams further argued that Eliot himself did recognize the fact that much of culture is not fully knowable: it is unconscious or emergent. Yet Eliot would not allow a potential contradiction between an emergent culture and the dominant culture in so far as it only protected a propertied class. Williams accepted the argument about culture and totality, but he insisted that it might be a contradictory totality.[13]

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[10] T. S. Eliot, 1962, London, Faber & Faber, p. 13.
[11] Frank Gloversmith, 1980, "Defining Culture" in *Class, Culture and Social Change*, Sussex, Harvester, pp.15-44.
[12] M. Singer, 1968, "The Concept of Culture" in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, p.527.
[13] R. Williams, 1961, *Culture and Society*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, p. 238.

In his foreword in *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams looks to the possibility of developing a new general theory of culture, by which he means a theory of relations between elements in a whole way of life. This, he maintains, would have to take on the idea of an expanding culture, its nature and content, as well as the social and economic problems of expansion. From the outset, therefore, his work is ambitious. The introduction to *Culture and Society* immediately introduces his five keywords - industry, democracy, class, art and culture:

> The change in their use, at this critical period, bears witness to a general change in our characteristic ways of thinking about our common life; about our social, political and economic institutions; about the purposes which these institutions are designed to embody; and about the relations to these institutions and purposes of our activities, education and the arts.[14]

To Raymond Williams, culture is the keyword so far as his project is concerned, and it is the one this paper focuses on as it is the subject of my work. From a term which had once referred to the tending of natural growth -as in agriculture- Williams indicates four meanings which developed through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: (1) A general state or habit of mind connected with the idea of human perfection; (2) the general state of intellectual development in a society as a whole; (3) the general body of arts; (4) a whole way of life; material, intellectual and spiritual.[15] In *Culture and Society*, Williams clearly states the centrality and significance of the word culture:

> The development of culture is perhaps the most striking among all the words named. It might be said, indeed, that the questions now concentrated in the meanings of the word culture are questions directly raised by great historical changes which the changes in industry, democracy and class in their own way represent, and to which changes in art are a closely related response. The development of the word culture is a record of a number of important and continuing reactions to these changes in our social, economic and political life, and may be seen, in itself, as a special kind of usage by means of which the nature of the changes can be explored.[16]

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[14] Ibid, p. 13

[15] Eldridge, J. & Eldridge, L., 1994, *Raymond Williams: Making Connections*, London & New York, Routledge, p. 46

[16] Williams, op. cit., p. 16

It should be clearly noted that Raymond Williams has done excellent work in addressing the subject of culture. For instance, in *The Long Revolution*, he defines culture as "the essential relation, the true interaction, between patterns learned and created in the mind and patterns communicated and made active in relationships, conventions, and institutions".[17] Thus culture can be defined as a way of referring to some critical formation of values (as in the case of literature) and it can also be used in the anthropological sense of a 'way of life' (which is close to some concepts of society, such religion etc.,).[18] From the very beginning, from Egyptian Hieroglyphic and Persian writings, from Aristotle and Plato, the subject of man and his world has always been of interest. Culture is always a state related to man, in conflict or in harmony with nature.

Indeed, there was a time when culture meant agriculture. "Cultivation" has never ceased to be implied in any discussion of the issue. It should be noted that through the ages, evolution of the idea has taken place and emphasis has shifted from the literal and physical, to the symbolic and psychological. Body and mind; the land and intellect; and individual and society -at every level, one element has remained constant: the human being. In essence, therefore, culture cannot exist without man and, since man is not alone - even though certain characteristics seem to point to a return to the roots of the cave-ape-man - his existence in society now means much. My interest here lies in that essential relationship between man and society.

It should be pointed out that a society is made up of people. Thus the way they live, the totality of their beliefs, codes of conduct, techniques and all elements that are necessary for existence and survival in a social setting is their culture. Williams calls it "a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual".[19] In *The Long Revolution*, besides industrial and democratic revolutions, Williams discusses cultural revolution as the expansion of education and the development of new means of communication. In other words, there are personal and social changes in the contemporary society and

[17] Williams, 1984, *The Long Revolution*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, p. 55
[18] Williams, op. cit., p.41

how can one ever think of denying the revolution, when our life-style has become so modernized up to the extent that it has even become post-modernized that we now have cellular phones, computers in our rooms, hi-tech shoes, and machines flying to the moon. Speaking of these gadgets brings to mind two very important accents of culture –arts and science. This fact may shock many students and lecturers in the Faculties of Engineering and Science, who rejoice in laboratories about the exclusivist supremacy of their career and profession. I daresay that many in our Faculty of Arts are forever ashamed of our inability to prove that one plus one make three, and we end up just squatting uneasily with our inferiority complex before the mind-boggling, mechanical monsters.

If culture is the whole way of life, then it follows that, not only arts and science, but also economic considerations are of relevance. Nineteenth century Europe, the era of Karl Marx, learned all too soon that intellectual and moral concerns could not be separated from economics. Indeed, as Marx himself put it, that economic factor came to be a determining factor in European culture(s). For instance, the rise of the industrial revolution produced in turn the commercial enterprise called colonialism. It was through this colonialism that Europe managed to spread its culture(s) around other parts of the world, especially in Africa. But it should be noted that the economic factor in culture is still accepted as not being absolute. A corollary to that is that art and reality are complementary parts of the 'totality' of life. Thus, whether one likes it or not, art cannot be dissociated from other spheres of man's existence.

The aesthetic man, as Raymond Williams puts it, cannot be divorced from the economic man. Here the point is that art (or creative activity) is part of the process of culture and primary to that creative activity is communication. Communication is community. Since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence, common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and

[19] Ibid.

change.[20] Therefore, as Williams says, any interpretation of culture should be based upon the social whole, upon reality, upon ideas imbibed, borrowed, exchanged, modified, injected and projected. Thus I regard Williams's theories of culture as essential to the definition of culture. At the same time it should be noted that Williams's analysis of culture is patently eurocentrist and I am not blaming him for that particularity. He was born and grew up in Europe and of European parents and grandparents. His thinking was influenced by communication with his European situation. His analysis of the world was largely influenced by images of his European environment. Through the routes he took in his life, he might have been influenced by other cultures, but he was European by roots and by blood.

At the same time, the major usefulness of his work is that it allows one to expose Europe's hypocrisy and inhumanism. For, if culture, as Williams notes, is a whole way of life, then every community has a culture and it is viable, not to be vilified. And it is this point that ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** makes through its presentation and representation of AmaGcaleka's culture and the point which I will return back to in Chapter Three of this work. Since the characteristics of culture are to be open, permeated by fruitful, spontaneous contributions and exchanges from within and without, Europe has no right to boast of a "superior culture" while casting aspersions on others as "inferior" and "savage". Complementarity is the constant, not absolutism. Complementarity means construction, not destruction. Therefore, Europe lied: "Africa had no culture".

Africa had no culture. Africa was a land barren of humans and populated by animals, which needed to be humanized. Africa was a jungle full of barbarians who needed to be civilized, a land which was invented by brilliant and brave Europeans. Africa was a dark continent, but Europe lied. Europe is a charlatan. It is part of Europeans' lies that would have Africa culture-less or culturally static. It is part of Europeans' lies that African culture(s) is/are of "lower standards". European lies have managed to produce a culture of arrogance and prejudice within the European society, which on

[20] Ibid., p. 55

its own gave birth to white racism. Hence European culture(s) go hand in hand with racism. Frantz Fanon is very clear on this point and he has rightly related the reciprocal action of racism and culture as follows:

> If culture is the totality of mental and motivating comportments born of the meeting of man with nature and with other men, we must say that racism is, to all intents and purposes, a cultural element. There are therefore cultures with racism and cultures without.[21]

There Europe is guilty of racism, and he has been guilty for too long. The hypothesis, as Fanon states, about racial superiority-inferiority is an antediluvian aberration. The Bible shows the existence of discrimination according to heritage, and Aristotle, who is worshipped extensively by Europe, already expressed the notion of peoples being free from birth while others were born slaves. It should be stated clearly that "racism involves the assertion that inequality is absolute and unconditional, i.e., that a race is inherently and in its very nature superior or inferior to others quite independently of the physical conditions of its habitat and of social factors".[22] This unproven assumption of biological, perpetual superiority, this system of discrimination and ethnic exploitation, has been Europe's great contribution to human culture. Social darwinism, or evolutionism, and biological determinism, all verbal expressions of the same phenomenon, stem from the fallacy of a pure race.[23] This fallacy of a pure race has been a corner stone of European culture(s) and dreams for a long time. If one documents the beginning of this fallacy he/she could say it started during the period of "Enlightenment" the era known as European Renaissance, which happened after the Middle Age, and was characterized by the rise of industrial revolution.

According to my Roman Gregorian-Christian calendar, the millennium is here. The era of materialism is here: murder for money, stealing for stomach, humans evinced by machines...etc. The Bible, a nice big piece of literature that I love to read, describes this period as the age of Armageddon: when the beast will come down on

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[21] Frantz Fanon, 1963, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York, Grove Press.
[22] Juan Comas, 1951, *Racial Myths*, Paris, UNESCO, p. 50.
[23] Ojo-Ade, f., 1989, *On Black Culture*, Obafemi Awolowo University Press.

earth and the whole world will worship his power and his great authority.[24] The people of the earth will ask themselves with fear: "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"[25] In this period, as the "Holy Scripture" states, there will be chaos and confusion on earth as the people of the earth will sleep with the harlot brought by the beast. "The nations will drink the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the rulers of the earth will commit fornication with her, and the merchants [capitalists] of the earth will become rich through the abundance of her luxury".[26] In such a mad situation one has a Right to ask: what will be the position of Africa then?

As a "dark continent", Africa will have no position. As a land with cultures of "lower standards", Africa will be lost. Unless some kind of "civilization" under the disguise of "African Renaissance" happens in order to give a position to Africa. A large part of this "civilizing mission" is the sermon of giving birth and life to Africa again, in order to make Africa understand her position in the global affairs of the world. But to a 'radical' Black Consciousness playwright and director such as Skhura Yani, the Xhosa, such "civilizing mission" is a futile exercise, and furthermore, rubbish, as Africa was never a "dark continent" in the first place. Africa did have the position before the Adams and the Eves. In fact, even in this era of the "great harlot" [America], Africa still has the position and will always have it even after the Armageddons are over. Africa does have life. With its rich culture(s), Africa is not dead, and this is reflected thoroughly and clearly in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***, a play about one of Africa's rich cultures –isiXhosa.

U-Gcaleka ubuyile is a classic Greek play, *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, transformed into the Xhosa set-up by Skhura Yani "in an informative way so that we [the audience] get to learn a lot about the Xhosa ways of living, like community gatherings and dress".[27] This gives the play "a very authentic and natural feel

[24] The Bible: *The book of Revelation*, chapters 12 & 13.
[25] Ibid., chapter 13, verse 4.
[26] Ibid., chapter 18, verse 3.
[27] *City Vision*, 12/05/1998, p.11.

reflecting the basis of African life".[28] The play tells, through Xhosa eyes, the story of Oedipus, the king who killed his own father and married with his own mother. In the Xhosa version of the play, Oedipus is substituted by uGcaleka, one of the last Xhosa kings who was determined in maintaining at all cost the core of African culture(s): the unity between the individual and his/her community. King Gcaleka was the first king of AmaGcaleka, the biggest ethnic group of AmaXhosa. King Gcaleka and his brother, king Rharhabe, were the sons of king Phalo, the greatest king of AmaXhosa (but the original name for Xhosa was uHlanga, meaning a united nation).

According to the Xhosa custom, king Gcaleka, as he was a twin, was supposedly after his birth to have been taken away from his parents and left to die alone in the bush (as it was the custom of "twin sacrifice"). At the time of his birth, AmaXhosa were undergoing, a social and cultural transformation. As a result the custom of "twin sacrifice" was never performed to the boy. This is believed to have angered the ancestors as the two boys, when they were old, fought for power. When Phalo was too old, Gcaleka took over the throne by force in the presence of his old brother, Rharhabe. Rharhabe being scared of Gcaleka, he took his dying father and ran away with him to exile. The elders, with the aim of avoiding more schisms and quarrels within the nation, divided the monarchy into two kraals. Because he was too brave, king Gcaleka's kraal became more popular among the people, especially among the elders. As a result he was regarded and ordained as the genuine king of AmaXhosa. This angered king Rharhabe who later decided to declare a war against king Gcaleka. Seeing the dissatisfaction and the anger of his own brother, king Gcaleka decided to search for the past, and found out who was supposed to have taken over the throne between him and his brother. This decision was in the long run regretted by his son, king Khawuta who took over power after his father's death, but it was more regretted by his grandson, king Hintsa, who mourned the past story of his grandfather, who died a lonely death as a traditional doctor.

[28] *The Citizen*, 19/05/1998, p.25.

As a drama, ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** manages to link this above-mentioned story with the story of Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* very well, but in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***, the content of the 'real' story of king Gcaleka has been changed to accommodate Oedipus Rex's story. This is creatively done in such a way that anyone who watches the play will argue that the play originated in Africa, whilst, at the same time, he/she will see the history of king Gcaleka in Oedipus' content. The purpose of that, I think, is to (re)analyse the African culture, specifically the culture of AmaXhosa, using a "western" story, while, at the same time, to (re)view the "western" story using indigenous African eyes.

It should be noted that drama as an art form is one of the major accents of culture, and it also on its own carries elements of the accents of culture within itself. Raymond Williams, in his studies of the establishment of accents of culture in drama and drama as an accent of culture, makes mention of four keywords that are central in the making of drama: community; connections; pressure and structure of feeling.[29] The crucial concept "structure of feeling" is interlinked with Williams' experience of creative writing, and it is a notion which:

> is strongly felt from the beginning, in the way that important actual relationships are felt, but also it is a structure and this...is a particular kind of response to the real shape of a social order: not so much as it can be documented...but as it is in some integrated way apprehended, without any prior separation of private and public or individual and social experience.[30]

Further, "structure of feeling" is not only a characteristic which emerges in the writing as written word but, for Williams, it informs his very experience of writing per se. As he describes it:

> I am in fact physically alone when I am writing, and I do not believe, taking it all in all, that my work has been less individual, in that defining and valuing sense, than that of others. Yet whenever I write I am aware of a society and of a language which I know are vastly larger than myself: not simply 'out there', in a world of others, but here, in what I am engaged in doing: composing and relating.[31]

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[29] Eldridge, J. & Eldridge, L., 1994, *Raymond Williams: Making Connections*, London & New York, Routledge.
Williams, 1983, *Keywords*, Glasgow, Fontana, p.264.
[31] Ibid., p.261.

Thus the concept of "structure of feeling" is, for Williams, both a practical experience and a theoretical tool. It is a predominant concept throughout all of his work, providing him with a means of examining history not just as product but as process.[32] With this concept, Williams attempted to analyse literary developments in relation to patterns of social change, rigid determinism being replaced by interrelationship, itself implicit to the concept of "structure of feeling".[33] Applying the same concept in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***, one would find out that in the play, "structure of feeling" embodies the interconnective approach adopted by Williams, creating a base from which various areas and issues within the play can be explored. This, according to Skhura Yani, is a sociological-artistic creativity. Meaning a combination of sociology and art, in a manner that will allow the creator of the performance (writer and director) to take into account how individuals, in their own communities, often become "falsely conscious of their social positions".[34]

The argument here is that there is some kind of "sociological imagination" that enables humankind "to grasp history and biography and relations between the two within society".[35] Here the point is that, the creator of the performance should not only be concerned with the creative part of performance, he/she should also take into consideration the sociological background of the characters. For this reason Yani argues that the building or the making of an individual, and/or fall of an individual has something to do with his/her society. To Yani, like Raymond Williams, you cannot separate the individual from his or her own society. Even the definition of culture, to Yani, is the communication the individual makes with, and that is between him/her and, his/her own society. Thus, according to this 'stereotypical' young angry black man, we are what we are because of what the society has made us to be, and no one controls his/her own destiny it is the society that determines it. He puts it like this:

> How does one become a saint,
> when the powers that be threaten him

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[32] Eldridge & Eldridge, op. cit., p.112.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Mills, C.. *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
[35] Ibid.

of exclusions and expulsions?
How does one become an innocent,
when the powers that be are thieves themselves...
e.g., senior lecturers who steal from their
own students...How, please tell me?
How does one obey the law,
when the powers that be are corrupt themselves?
Ag sies! Anyway we are ruled and ruined
by mafias. That's why I blame less the robbers,
car hijackers, and etc., But I blame more the society
that has produced them.[36]

This perspective itself, of making the individual a part of his/her society, stems from Williams's analysis of culture and society, and hinges more on his treatment of "the base-superstructure" [sic] problem in Marxist theory on culture. Williams argues that "the base and the superstructure that need to be analysed, from a Marxist point of view, is that expressed by the complex idea of determination".[37] This determination is itself seen as a matter of setting limits and exerting pressures. It is the one that questions us in our understanding of social reality and the relationship between the individual and his/her own society: How then are we to understand social reality and therefore the relationship between the individual and the society he/she lives in? This question is very applicable to ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** as the social reality (the culture of AmaXhosa) of the play is the one that determined the daily experiences of king Gcaleka, and the relationship between him and his society. But this point will be given more attention in Chapter Three, the chapter that deals with the representation of the Gcalekas' culture in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***.

The major accent of culture identified by Raymond Williams is language. In his theoretical approach, Williams puts more emphasis on both "language as activity" and "the history of language".[38] This outlines two predominant analytical methods adopted by Williams throughout all his work and, more specifically, in his examination of drama and literature: (1) analysis of phenomena in process; and (2) historical analysis.[39] Informing his methodological approach, both serve to establish a sense of continuity, of movement, and of connection, qualities characteristic of

[36] Skhura Yani, *Diaries of My Daily Darts*, unpublished.
[37] Williams, 1977, *Marxism and Literature*, London, Oxford University Press, p.82.
[38] Ibid., p.21.

Williams's writing on literature and drama.[40] For instance, he describes his own approach to literary and drama criticism, a description which illuminates the processes involved in his analysis of the drama and the novel as:

> Language in history: that full field. But even within a more specialised emphasis, language produced in works through conventions and institutions which, properly examined, are the really active society. Not a background to be produced for annotation where on a private reading – naked reader before naked text – it appears to be relevant and required. Instead the kind of reading in which the conditions of production, in the fullest sense, can be understood in relation to both writer and reader [or viewer]. A newly active social sense of writing and reading [or viewing], Through the social and material historical realities of language in a world in which it is closely and precisely known, in every act of writing and reading [or viewing], that these practices connect with, are inseparable from, the whole set of social practices and relationships which define writer and reader [or viewers] as active human beings, as distinct from the idealised and projected 'authors' and 'trained readers' [or 'viewers'] who are assumed to float, on a guarded privilege, above the rough, divisive and diverse world of which yet, by some alchemy, they possess the essential secret.[41]

Here there is a clear emphasis on language as a social historical reality, and also evident is Williams's essential desire to penetrate received ideas and ideologies. His literary and dramatic criticisms are at once criticisms of orthodox methods and accepted values, and a reassessment of the history of literature and drama which also challenge dominant modes of analysis and dominant definitions. This approach is closely connected to Williams's enthusiasm for 'realism' as a literary and dramatic form, a form which attempts to portray life as it is lived.[42] The kind of realism he encourages is, as Stuart Hall observes, realism "in the Brechtian sense", an artistic method which aims to expose apparent reality and thus, ideally, suggest the possibility for change.[43] This analysis of language as a social process is reflected well in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. In the play, language constitutes some kind of unity between the individual and his/her community. Skhura Yani uses language in this play as a tool for constructing a full human being, as only in the continuous encounter with other human beings does a human become a human being. This encounter is produced, promoted and preserved by language.

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[39] Eldridge, op. cit., p.113.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Williams, op. cit., p.189.
[42] Eldridge, op. cit., p.114.

The place of this encounter is the community. Man's participation in nature is direct, insofar as he is a definite part of nature through his bodily existence. But it is indirect, when mediated through the community insofar as he transcends nature by knowing and shaping it.[44] That is why, back to the point of language, without language there are no universals; without universals there is no transcending of nature and no relation to it as nature. Therefore, the unfortunate thing to individualists such as Skhura Yani (but sometimes he also recognises the importance of collectivism in the construction of a community) is that language is communal, not individual. The section of reality in which one participates immediately is the community to which one belongs. Through it and only through it communication in the world as a whole and in all its parts is mediated. Thus in ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** the use of isiXhosa is to outline the fact that language is the core accent of culture.

Therefore language, community and communication are the three concepts that are important in the description of accents of culture. These concept interlink or interconnect a lot with each other. In fact, there will be no definition of culture without the use of these concepts. That is why, in his play, Skhura Yani does not delve into the Xhosa traditional peoples' highly complex system of beliefs and customs. Instead with the use of the Xhosa language, he transforms of the play Oedipus Rex into a Xhosa context. His aim here is to record, reflect and retain the original sense and importance of the Xhosa traditional culture. And this, according to Yani, really connects the play to Raymond Williams's theories on culture as a social process in which humans communicate with each other in order to construct a community.

Another point that needs to be clarified is that, as Skhura Yani himself is umXhosa, the structure of the drama is in isiXhosa, this is the extension way facilitated by incorporation of the concept of "structure of feeling". Therefore, the use of isiXhosa

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[43] Eagleton, T., 1989, *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, Cambridge, Polity Press, p.63.
[44] Tillich, p., 1952, *The Courage To Be*, London, Fontana

in ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** is a means to express the 'totality' of life as it is lived and experienced by Yani. It is an attempt to reflect Yani's cultural and historical experiences and feelings, as social, cultural and historical factors are the ones that informed the mode, nature and content of dramatic expression. At the same time, Yani as the dramatist is engaging with his audience in a certain way of being in the same level with it, using reference to a "community of sensibility", and this whole idea he has borrowed from Raymond Williams, who states that:

> The artist's sensibility – his capacity for experience, his ways of thinking, Feeling, and conjunction – will often be finer than that of his audience. But if his sensibility is at least of the same kind, his language and the Language of his audience will be closely and organically related; The common language will be the expression of the common sensibility.[45]

Here the implication of this idea of "common sensibility" is to continue through the concept of "structure of feeling". Thus Williams defines "structure of feeling" as that which attempts to express "a complex whole",[46] The idea here being what I have mentioned earlier on as the 'totality' of life as it is lived and experienced by the dramatist. This 'totality' provides material for the artist, "only realisable through experience of the work of art, as a whole".[47] Through the use of this concept, Williams's dramatic criticism becomes an analysis of social conditions, of social structures and the conditions of production in which writing occurs, and of the available means of communication.[48] The adoption of Williams's dramatic criticism by Yani is a means of examining problems of experience that are confronting the dramatist which are also problems of form. Thus Yani's use of isiXhosa in ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** is also an attempt to come up with a dramatic form that is influenced by his cultural experiences. Therefore ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** is a cultural symbol used by Skhura Yani to depict his own cultural experiences which are largely influenced by the Xhosa culture and history. That is the reason, for Yani, when he speaks of the definition of culture the starting point is his Xhosa experiences –isiXhosa sasemaXhosani- which carry the roots of his being and it informs his cultural

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[45] Williams, 1964, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, p.31.
[46] Eldridge, op. cit., p.120.
[47] Ibid
[48] Ibid.

standpoint today. Furthermore if ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** is a cultural symbol used by the author to depict his own cultural experiences, then the play is an African icon.

CHAPTER TWO

UGCALEKA UBUYILE: MAKING CONNECTIONS

When the sun shall be folded up,
And when the stars shall shoot downwards,
And when the mountains shall be set in motion,
And when the wild beasts shall be gathered together,
And when the seas shall be swollen,
And when souls shall be paired with their bodies,
And when the land that had been buried shall be asked
For what crime she [Africa] was put to death,
And when the leaves of the Book shall be unrolled,
And when the heaven shall be stripped away,
And when hell shall be made to blaze,
And when paradise shall be brought near,
Every soul shall know what she [Africa] has produced.

- The Holy Qur'an: Sura LXXXII

"What is [so] classical about Classical civilization?"[49], asked Martin Bernal in his book, *Black Athena.* In this book, Bernal challenges the whole notion of "western" thinking about this question. Classical civilization, he argues, has deep roots in Afroasiatic cultures. But these Afroasiatic influences have been systematically ignored, denied or suppressed since the eighteenth century -chiefly for racist reasons.[50] The popular view that was and is being spread by the scholars who were/are pro this Classical civilization is that: "the Greek civilization was the result of the conquest of a sophisticated but weak native population by vigorous Indo-European speakers - or Aryans- from the North".[51] But the Classical Greeks, Bernal argues, knew nothing of this "Aryan Model".[52] They did not see their political institutions, science, philosophy, or religion as original, but rather as derived from the East in general, and from Egypt in particular.[53]

Thus therefore it is the purpose of this chapter to establish the validity of Martin Bernal's discovery of the origins of civilization in relation to the *Oedipus Rex*

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[49] Bernal, M., 1987, *Black Athena,* New Jersey, Rutgers University Press.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

mythology. But the main aim is to make connections between the "western" (Greek) version and the African (Xhosa) version of the play, and also to relate any theory that corresponds, especially Bernal's discovery, Sigmud Freud's psychoanalysis, and Raymond Williams's theory on culture, to any (or both) of the two versions. To accomplish the aims of this chapter, it will be futile if one does not first establish an outline of the history of ancient Egypt. This history is the one that forms the main subject of this chapter, and it also carries the legacy of origins of civilization. This civilization on its own was a result of Egyptian religion. Therefore the first part of this chapter focuses on the ancient Egyptian religion. The following historical sketch is necessarily brief, possibly superficial in parts, but useful. I focus on aspects of this history only insofar as they are relevant to the specific focus of this study. The historical sketch is, moreover, essential for the argument which follows.

To everyone who tours the Nile, or pauses in a museum, or turns the pages of a book on Egyptian art and/or culture, some portion of the varied heritage of ancient Egypt may be said to have been communicated. Yet, to some, this is a superficial and ephemeral legacy which can become 'real' only when the recipient is capable of giving his personal insight meaningful expression. There is, in other words, a fundamental difference in the abuse of Egyptian paraphernalia by a suburban "witch".[54] The true heritage of Egypt is, indeed, that which down the centuries has become woven almost imperceptibly into the never ending web of man's experience.[55]

From the fourth millennium BC. Egypt possessed a settled agricultural life dependent on the fruitful waters of the Nile and the rich mud-strips its inundations left behind.[56] But this fertile territory was not unified. The surplus of food was enough to enable the people to build cities, and each city-state was independent. In the course of time improved communications and the desire for wealth and land led to the consolidation of different states under one single dynasty. From 2300 BC. until the conquest of the

[54] Harris, J. R. (ed.), 1971 *The Legacy of Egypt*, London, Oxford University Press, Intr. B.
[55] Ibid.

country by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC.[57], Egypt was, with brief interruptions, unified under a succession of dynasties and kingdoms.

Great changes occurred in Egyptian religious life in this long period. But there are three recognizable features which give shape to the religion. There evolved a most elaborate and sumptuous cult of the dead, in which remarkably successful techniques for the preservation of corpses were devised. The ritual and mythology of Egypt also gave a unique status to the rulers, the Pharaohs. The person of the Pharaoh became the political and religious pivot of Egypt's widespread culture, and the key to social order. Religiously, the Pharaoh was regarded as the point of contact between the invisible and the visible worlds, the point of contact between heaven and earth. Thus his claim to divine kingship was the guarantee of political stability. Finally, the mythology of the sun god came to assume great proportions. Just as the sun in its glowing fierceness and benign fecundity dominated the land of the Nile, so the sun god came to dominate the religious imagination of the Egyptian people.

But it should be noted that "in the pre-Dynastic Egypt there must already have been a great deal of development in the religious conceptions which afterwards showed such vitality in Dynastic Egypt".[58] The Old Kingdom, including the Pyramid Period, shows that the Egyptian mind was obsessed with the certainty of life after death. It was also impressed with ideas of grandeur, order, and precision in the universe -ideas which found eloquent expression in the grand conceptions and mathematical symmetry and simplicity of its architecture.[59] Its massive dignity and repose are also reflected in the faces and poses of the figures in Egyptian statuary and painting.[60]

It was the Middle Kingdom that brought new ideas into Egypt. There is no clear data with which to appraise the influence of foreign cults and foreign ideas during this period. But by knowing, especially through reading or studying Martin Bernal's book,

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] *The Holy Qur'an*: Appendix V.
[59] Ibid.

Black Athena, and *The Holy Qur'an*, how Egypt acted as a magnet to the world at large and how many points of contact the Euphrates valley civilizations and the Nile valley civilizations had with each other, one can say this period broadened Egyptian culture and civilization. For instance, the Hyksos may have been Egyptianised in Egypt, but they could not have failed in their turn to contribute Semitic ideas to Egypt. Among these were Monotheism, a patriarchal organization of society. These might have contrasted strangely with a chaotic Pantheon of countless deities, the lash-driven slaves living huddled in the cities, and the dedicated priests and richly endowed temples which catered for the privileged few, but lived by the sweat of the brow of the unprivileged many.[61]

The New Empire was the flowering period of Egyptian genius and that is why it requires special attention. The crudities, according to *The Holy Qur'an*, of the old pre-Dynastic chaotic Pantheon had been in process of attrition through the centuries.[62] On the other hand, some sort of rationalization and spiritualisation had been going on throughout the dynastic period. A process of systematization and unification was now consciously taken into consideration. The primitive worship of animals had gradually been transformed into a system of animal-gods, with human bodies and animal heads. The human bodies represented the anthropomorphic tendencies, while the animal heads became types of qualities.[63] For example, Anus, with the dog emblem, was the door-keeper, the messenger, the custodian of the dead. Apis, or Herpes, the sacred bull of Memphis, symbolized the renewal of life, and he was identified with Soirees.

Another example is that of Thoth, who was symbolized by an ibis, that stately, mute, mysterious bird of passage in the Nile valley.[64] This Thoth who was regarded as "the god of wisdom and magic", is the same "god" who also appears in the Bible. For instance, in *the Book of Job*, one would find a line that says: "Who put wisdom into

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

Thoth? And who gave him understanding?"[65] Thus it should be emphasized that Thoth was filled with knowledge by the Lord and was therefore a sage and epitome of wisdom, not a god.[66] And this gives evidence that the Egyptians had one of the greatest gifts -wisdom- in the universe, which led to the beginning of civilization in Egypt.

The complex nature of early Egyptian mythology arose from the fact that the different city-states claimed the special protection of different gods. With amalgamation of cities, the god of one city was liable to be identified with the god of another. Each god had his own family and relations; the more universal deities entered into the local mythology. Moreover, as I have mentioned, it seems that early Egyptians worshipped gods in animal form, and although these became humanized, the resultant deities still retained, in many cases, traces of their animal background. A typical deity might possess a wide spectrum of attributes.

If one, for instance, considers the case of the god Horus, who attained a prominent position in the mythology, one would find out that from the earliest period of Egyptian history the king was identified with Horus, the falcon god. It seems from this that Horus was the deity and emblem of the Egyptian tribe that unified Egypt. The notion that the king himself was divine had an important ritual consequence and this is relevant to our study of the Oedipus myth, as we shall see. Though the king could not be everywhere and therefore could not attend at temples up and down the land, he was in theory the link between the gods and the people, and the priests served as his representatives in the divine office.

Even if the priesthoods of the various big centres of Egyptian civilization led a semi-autommous life, and there was implicit in the system, the notion, not merely of a centralized state, but also of a central religion under the king. The king was not only identified with the falcon god, but through him was equated with the sun. Thus there

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[65] The Bible: *Job* 38:36
[66] Bernal, op. cit., p.144.

was a tendency in Egyptian mythology to arrange the divine in groups of three. In this case it was the sun, the falcon, and the king. Later on, Horus fused with, and was in this aspect replaced by, the great sun god Ra.[67] Horus was the son of Osiris, the good god who came to earth for the benefit of mankind, and Isis, his wife. It should be stated clearly, that the myth of Osiris formed the basis of the Greek religion. And this is one of the fundamental pieces of evidence that supports the historical fact that the Greek civilization was borrowed or/and stolen from ancient Egypt.

It was the later Dynasties, XXI to XXXI, that saw the decay of Egypt as a Power. For instance, with the coming of Alexander the Great (332 BC.) and the foundation of the city of Alexandria, a new era dawned on the culture of Egypt.[68] The culture of Egypt mingled with Greek, and became cosmopolitan in nature. When Herodotus, the sensitive Greek mind, was impressed with the mystery and wisdom of Egypt. Herodotus was the first person to record as part of history the mystery of Egyptian civilization, and he praised the Egyptian civilization and regarded it as the basis of Greek civilization. For instance, in his great book, *Histories*, which is believed to have been written round about 450 BC.,[69] he describes "the temple of Athena which was founded by the daughters of Danaos [from Egypt]" as being very "instrumental in introducing Egyptian civilization to Greece".[70] He states:

> I propose to hold my tongue about the mysterious rites of Demeter, which the Greeks call Thesmophoria, though... I may say, for instance, that it was the daughters of Danaos who brought this ceremony from Egypt and instructed the Pelasgian women in it...[71]

Here it seems that Herodotus was keen to use reason rather than a blind faith in tradition, that is why he recognised Egypt as the "master of civilisation". His acknowledgement of Egypt as the founder of civilisation was/is opposed by the Aryanists, western classical scholars who came up with and promoted, and still promote, the idea that civilisation started in Greece. But Martin Bernal, in *Black Athena*, is fully behind Herodotus' idea that the origin of civilisation belongs to

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[67] *The Holy Qur'an.*
[68] Ibid.
[69] Bernal, op. cit., p.98.
[70] Ibid.

Egypt. Thus in the book, Bernal focuses extensively on Greek cultural borrowings from Egypt in the 2nd millennium BC., or to be more precise, in the thousand years from 2100 to 1100 BC.[72] And the reasons for him choosing this particular time-span are that this was "the period in which Greek culture was formed", and there were "no indications of any earlier borrowings from Egypt".[73] In his book, Bernal is more concerned with development of the Ancient and Aryan Models., and he depicts the Ancient Model as the model that traced the attitudes of Greeks in the Hellenistic and Classical periods clearly to their distant past. In his book, Bernal further considers the writings of authors who affirmed the Ancient Model as the foundation of all scholarly arguments or studies on ancient Egypt. That is why he confirms, in support of Herodotus, that Egypt, with the foundation of its religion, became the cornerstone of civilisation in our world.

If the Greeks borrowed from Egyptians, then the much of Greek mythology originated from Egypt. That is why Greek gods were connected to Egyptian gods. For example, Apollo, the Greek god, was associated with the Egyptian god, Ra, the sun god. Even the cults and the myths of the Greek Thebes were associated with the Sphinx, which was Horus' greatest monument at Giza,[74] and this adds to the intricate network linking those cults and myths to the aspect of Egyptian solar religion. Although the Theban Sphinx, according to Bernal, can be identified as the savage and leonine nature of Europa and Artemis, an even tighter connection between the two sphinxes is provided by the riddle posed by the Greek one. "What being has only one voice, has sometimes two feet sometimes three, sometimes four, and is weakest when it has the most?" Oedipus' answer referred to the life of man, but the riddle belongs to a cluster -found all over the world- many of which refer to the weakness of the sun in the morning and evening and its strength at midday.

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., p.17.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid, p.68.

To Bernal, in the light of the Egyptian Sphinx's dedication to the sun in the morning and evening, the parallel is quite remarkable. Therefore if the Oedipus story is connected to Egyptian mythology, ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** is a reclamation of what belongs to Africa back to its own roots. To my view, the play is a true reflection of African Re-renaissance, the rejection of European lies about Africa that it was a "dark continent" and was "civilised" by western colonisers. This point leads us to the story of Oedipus itself.

No Greek story has such pain as that of Oedipus, who, after answering the riddle of the Sphinx and being made king of Thebes, discovered that he had killed his father and married his mother, then blinded himself and became an outcast beggar. Apart from its great dramatic and tragic possibilities the story appealed to poets because it raised 'dark questions' about the treatment of humans by the gods. Oedipus, who seemed the very type of fortune's favourite, was suddenly cast down and ruined by gods.

It should be stated clearly that the story of Oedipus, the myth, was of course very old in Sophocles' time. But it should be noted that it was his use of tangible material, which was brought from Egypt as he was a scholar of Egyptian studies, that made the play new to its first audience. The play, *Oedipus Rex*, centers around Oedipus, the king, who 'accidentally' killed his father and married his mother. The story of the play depicts the events that led to the discovery of the truth -the true identity of Oedipus. The action is the most relentlessly secular of Sophocles' tragedies. Destiny, fate and the will of the gods do indeed loom ominously behind human action, but that action reflects contemporary realities familiar to the audience that first saw the play.

The voice of destiny in the play is the oracle of Apollo, who was associated with the Egyptian sun god, Ra. Through his priests, at Delphi, Apollo told Laius that he would be killed by his own son. And later on, he told Oedipus that he would kill his father and marry his mother. At the beginning of the play, Apollo tells Creon that Thebes will be saved from the plague when the murderer of Laius is found and expelled from

the city. This moment becomes an unfolding event of the plot. The most crucial and generally unquestioned assumption that remains with us from the story of the play is that Oedipus drew the correct conclusion that he was Jocasta's son.

Oedipus Rex shows Oedipus discovering that he has committed crimes: he has killed Laius, the king of Thebes, who proves to be his father, and has married Laius' widow, Jocasta, who proves to be his mother. Sophocles chose to concentrate his attention not on the actions of Oedipus which made his name a byword -the taboos he committed- but on the moment of his discovery of the truth. Sophocles engineered this discovery not by divine agency and not by chance, but through the persistent, courageous action of Oedipus himself. The hero of the play is thus his own destroyer; he is the detective who tracks down and identifies the criminal, who turns out to be himself.

Sophocles' play is so grand and so tragic that it is easy to misinterpret his fundamental ideas and to find explanations for the fall of Oedipus which are not really his. A story like this can hardly fail to invite some kind of explanation. Thus the tragic collapse of Oedipus could be justified in different ways. For instance, it could be justified as due to a hereditary doom or curse in the House of Laius. It also could be justified as a punishment for Oedipus' own pride. Finally, it could be justified as something caused by some mistake or faulty judgement of Oedipus. It is these arguments that are so central to the theme of this play, and it is the same arguments that are being raised by Skhura Yani in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***, thus linking the Xhosa version to the Greek version of the play.

Recent criticism of the *Oedipus Rex* has focused on two main problems: the nature and destiny of the Sophoclean hero, as the tragic operator who symbolises the limits of human possibilities and drives; and the question of Oedipus' parrincest. When one tries to define the tragic nature of Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*, one is confronted by several critical riddles. First, how should one construe Oedipus' heroic destiny within the projections of the oracle that announces this destiny and to some extent seems to fulfill it? Most critics of the play state that "the oracle does constitute a

predestination, and that Oedipus has always been free".[75] This conclusion is a neat resolution of a vexing age-old question, but elegant as it is, it risks leaving the oracle and its effect dangling nowhere, as if they did not really count.[76] To neglect the working of the oracle in the play is dangerous enough in itself, but the consequences of this neglect become even more serious when one considers the second question, which in some ways encroaches on the first -that of the parrincest.

In the play the oracle does not predict simply that Oedipus will commit some awful crime; but it specifies that Oedipus will murder his father and commit incest with his mother. Both criminal deeds are represented and elaborated in the play with insistent imagery and deep-seated references to the acts of fathering or begetting in nature and in the divine world. That is why, in the play, Oedipus' destiny is not only that of discovery and suffering but also that of being destroyed by his parrincest. It is this destruction that reveals to Oedipus his tragic destiny, and forces him to stand erect before deceptions and to realise the fundamental necessity of the law of the father, as the principle of one's being and status. And it is this destruction that connects the ancient Greek version to the new Xhosa version of the play, as ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** on its own deals with this specific destruction that shows to the audience the unavoidable law of the father that is identified with the voice of the gods. In the edifying view of Skhura Yani, only this voice is straight and fulfilling: all the other voices and narratives are merging with the mere randomness and drifting of human affairs.

Most critics have paid relatively little attention to the specific crimes into which Oedipus unwittingly falls. They concentrate on the process of discovery, specifically on the self-destructive effect of Oedipus' discovery that casts Oedipus out of his family and out of power, but they scarcely consider the nature of Oedipus' crime, the specific type of transgression. Indeed, for many critics the rejection of the psychoanalytic reading of the play has meant a relative indifference to the specific nature of Oedipus' transgression of the family's bonds -the bonds which on their own

[75] Ahl, F., 1991, *Sophocles' Oedipus: Evidence and Self-Conviction*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press.

lead to community's bonds. But psychoanalytic critics, since Sigmund Freud, have seen in the drama a lucid illustration of the Oedipus complex, and the more intent the psychoanalytic critics become on capturing of the subtleties of this play, the more exhaustive their psychoanalytic appropriation of the drama becomes.[77] Yet the extraordinary richness of these psychoanalytic readings leaves unfocused one question that seems essential in the analysis of the play. The central question is: "What is a father?"[78] According to Peter Rudnytsky, Freud has assumed the father to be a hypothetical function of the main experiences of the unconscious. To this extent, Freudian psychoanalysis surrounds the father with a certain "mystery".[79]

A careful analysis of the Freudian writings shows the complexity of the functions Freud attributed to the father: the father as a relation in its different versions, identification with the father, and the ambivalence of the father figure for the child.[80] This analysis, however, does not substantially contradict the popular views on Freud's interpretation of the father figure in his early reading of *Oedipus Rex* as the object of the son's hostility because of his love for the mother. This definition psychologises the father and already presents him from the point of view of the law that prohibits incest. It immediately puts the child in the guilty role and the mother in a relationship of complicity. This formulation, in other words, defines the father from the point of view of the law he gives to the son, from the "discourse" with which the father makes a differential entrance into the mirror-like relationship of mother and son.[81]

And it is the same role that is outlined in the two versions -the Greek one and the Xhosa one- thus interlinking the two versions, and also connecting them to Freud's psychoanalysis of the Oedipus complex. In both versions -*Oedipus Rex* and ***uGcaleka ubuyile***, four figures of the father emerge each with its own ideal and imaginary

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[76] Buxton, R. G. A., 1982, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
[77] Rudnytsky, P. L., 1987, *Freud and Oedipus*, New York, Columbia University Press.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.

foundations. For instance, one recognises (1) the king as a father of his citizens, (2) Polybus as the provider of cares and affection for the son, (3) Laius as the biological father, and (4) Apollo -and Teiresias, his messenger- as a divine Father. Therefore both versions present the notion of the Father-figure, some kind of "Godlike" image, which is very essential to human existence. In both versions, the image is presented and represented as the basis in building a well structured family unit and community. Thus this notion of father figure makes strong connection between the two versions - the connection of patriarchal community- although it is much more presented in ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** in order to give more respect to the Xhosa traditional culture, Mariel Clayton, theatre critic, puts it like this:

> Whilst Jocasta is a consistent presence but her
> character in the play [uGcaleka ubuyile] is powerless...
> The character of Jocasta is generally assumed to be commanding,
> however, I am inclined to believe that director Skhura Yani
> perhaps toned down her power and stature in deference to
> African [Xhosa] cultural conditions and behaviour, making her
> more subservient.[82]

In the Xhosa version of *Oedipus Rex* patriarchal is depicted as part of the traditional Xhosa ways of living, thus making the play fall into a trap of being seen as a tool of man chauvinism. The promotion of patriarchy in ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** plays down the role of women in society. But to director Skhura Yani it seems as if it was not his intention to portray women in a very subservient role, more that it was the true reflection of the Xhosa traditional community. He says of it:

> As I was preparing for my television project,
> entitled: "*ain't no black roses around*?" A documentary that
> deals with the notion of black beauty. A certain lady....
> who was also involved in this project, deciding to quit, accused
> me of being "anti-women", saying I am just a "sexist bastard".
> She went on lambasting my chauvinist ass, even quoting
> ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** as one of my "misogynist products".
> I didn't respond to those accusations of my half-baked feminist
> sister, as it is my policy when someone is giving me some lessons,
> no matter how boring they are, I should listen. Anyway, I always wait
> attentively for my turn to "teach". I always wait patiently for my turn
> to throw my darts...I always retreat in order to advance.
> And this has been my strategy since the day my brains were threatened
> to be blown into pieces by my fellow comrades in the liberation struggle,
> who felt threatened by my resignation...[from politics]...What came to my mind
> was that I might be a chauvinist swine but in ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** it was not my
> intentions to lower the role of women, more than I was attempting to be more
> realistic about the traditional Xhosa cultural conditions. I boldly said to her,

[82] Clayton, M. "Xhosa Oedipus Rex is Accessible" in *The Citizen*, 20/05/98.

> "Listen here, sister. I am an artist. I reflect what is seen, I say what is heard, and I portray what is done. If therefore I portray shit on stage then it means there is someone somewhere doing shit...."[83]

Therefore the portrayal of patriarchy in ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** should be (re)viewed along the lines of exposing what was or is happening in the Xhosa traditional community. And sometimes it needs to be exposed in a way that will be understandable to its own community. While we need to attack the patriarchal elements within the indigenous communities, we need to also respect the indigenous knowledge found within these communities which plays a part in harmonising the social orders of such communities. Here, according to Skhura Yani, the aim is not to fight or try to destroy the African cultures, especially those traditional cultures which were/are degraded, undermined and underestimated by colonisers, more than to correct, taking into consideration the indigenous knowledge, the bad aspects of African culture(s). It is the fact that African culture(s) has/have some bad elements within. That is why we should not idealistically glorify, without evaluating, African culture(s), and it is this fact that ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** portrays on stage, but the evaluation process is left to the audience.

Back to the story of Oedipus. Many critics have attacked vigorously the notion that fate is the dominating force in the plot of *Oedipus Rex* and have insisted that Oedipus acts in full freedom. Reinhardt, Knox, and Dodds among others realise that the notion of predetermination that earlier critics use is false and ahistorical.[84] Knox argues that the play enacts not fulfillment of Apollo's prophecies, but Oedipus' discovery of that fulfillment.[85] This point is correct for it locates the action of the drama in Oedipus' consciousness as he becomes aware that he acted freely and fulfilled the prophecies against his will. Nevertheless, this placement of the action of the drama in Oedipus' process of self-discovery does not efface the viewer's constant awareness and

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[83] Skhura Yani, *Diaries of My Daily Darts*, Unpublished.
[84] Reinhardt, K. [1933] *Sophokles*. Translated by Hazel Harvey and David Harvey under the tittle: *Sophocles*. Oxford. Blackwell, 1979.
[85] Knox, B. M. W. 1957. *Oedipus at Thebes*. New York, Yale University Press.

Oedipus' late recognition that prophecies, by becoming true, prove to have an unavoidable destination (telos).[86]

For although Oedipus never experiences any constraint or determination while he is acting, the viewer perceives that he is following an already written path unknowingly, and when Oedipus himself discovers his true situation, he recognises that Apollo was responsible for the entire chain of events. Fate is therefore visible and mysteriously active. One cannot help resorting to some idea of fate, however one labels or describes it, in order to understand the inevitable outcome of the Apollonian oracle and its necessary destination in the specific form of parrincest. Pietro Pucci, quoting Schelling, systematised the function and the position of "fate" in *Oedipus Rex*, and in Greek tragedy in general, with his view that in these plays a conflict unravels between the program of fate -representative of the power of the objective world- and human freedom.[87] The superior power of fate dooms the tragic hero to perish, but since he resists and fights back, he must be punished for his defeat itself. This defeat testifies to the hero's freedom and, indeed, turns out to honour his freedom.[88]

It should be noted that throughout the recent critical history of *Oedipus Rex* the conflicting terms of the play have been so often identified with various aspects of "fate" and "freedom," and one can see that the view of a tragic conflict between necessity and freedom has become largely conventional. On the one hand, the various facets and compulsion of objective reality that critics have evoked as the forces that Oedipus discovers to have led him to parrincest are often figures of what has been called "fate".[89]

On the other hand, the notion of "freedom" has generally been understood as Oedipus' drive to knowledge, specifically to self-knowledge.[90] To cite but one

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[86] Ahl, F., op. cit.
[87] Pucci, P. 1990. "The Tragic Pharmakon of Oedipus" in *Helios*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

example of the permanence of these conflicting terms, the Freudian interpretation of the play singles out the son's desire for mother and hostility toward the father as the specific "fate" of man, and might interpret the relentless process of Oedipus' discovery as a manifestation of the hero's freedom.[91] Freud's strategy is noteworthy because he resisted and dismissed the interpretation of *Oedipus Rex* as a tragedy of destiny;[92] but ultimately he retained the notion of "fate" simply by identifying the fate that operates in the tragedy with that of the Oedipus complex.[93]

To some critics, the oracle may stand for some inevitable condition inherent in the human situation. For Reinhardt, this condition is our existence in a deceptive world of appearances that confuses and snares us.[94] For Vernant, Oedipus is the model of the tragic fate of human nature: blind and seer, king and scapegoat he appears to be at once sublime and monstrous.[95] The fact that Oedipus' destiny is programmed by the oracle is instrumental in producing this double and enigmatic nature of man.[96] For Segal, the oracle's dramatic function in building up -beyond Oedipus' awareness- a dense network of enigmatic situations seems so clear that he accounts for the working of the prophecies only inasmuch as they are part of the same tragic world of ambivalence and of disintegration of differences.[97] While ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** reflects some of the views expressed above, the play clearly reveals to us that the destiny of man can be influenced, not by the individual, but by the observation of the appropriate rites. This point brings us to the third, which is the last, part of this chapter, the one that deals with the Xhosa version of *Oedipus Rex* ***(uGcaleka ubuyile)*** as part of the African heritage.

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[91] Freud, S. [1900] 1965. *The Interpretation of Dreams.* Translated by James Strachery. New York, Avon Books.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Pucci, op. cit.
[94] Reinhardt, op. cit.
[95] Pucci, op. cit.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Segal, C. 1981. *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles.* Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

However diverse the oldest forms of theatre in Africa may be, they almost always are concerned with the need of man to ensure his existence in the midst of dangers. This need, in fact, exists always and everywhere. Even the European man, no matter how much he boasts of his intelligence, (and the American man in that matter, no matter how much he boasts of his powerful dollar) has a need for security. Thus theatre attempts to hold a mirror to people in which they can examine their world. Theatre attempts to portray what takes place in our world.

In traditional society the religious system determines the cultural unity of the people. Life forces bind man to his past, his present and his future and determine his relations with gods, spirits, nature and natural phenomena. This unity tends to break down where "western" influence increases. Certain political, social and economic organisations may change drastically, and even linguistic and cultural forms may be altered. But African traditional theatre attempts to confirm the existing order and to keep the community together. However, the increasing influence from outside has not left African theatre unaffected. The theories of Jerzy Grotowski, Ionesco, Stanislavski, and others, have came with new dimensions and forms for African theatre. This is the case with ***uGcaleka ubuyile***, a play which is can be seen as part of oral literature but has some influences from the "west", as the director has made use of Raymond Williams' structure of feeling.

It should be noted that when one watches ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** it is unrealistic to make a clear division between oral literature and theatre. Feelings, gestures, intonation, the use of rhythms and pauses, reactions of the audience towards performers and vice versa are all part of the oral literature and they are visible in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. Thus the play makes oral literature part of theatre. Ruth Finnegan states that in the study of oral literature its most fundamental characteristic has been overlooked. The significance of the performance itself and the essential presence of the performers without whom it cannot exist as a "literary product" are often forgotten.[98] The idea that "real theatre" did not exist in pre-colonial Africa is an example of European lies -

[98] Finnegan, R. 1970, *Oral Literature in Africa*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, p. 2.

of undermining other peoples' cultures and of suppressing their contributions to civilisation. Martin Bernal notes that theatre began in Egypt when the Egyptians used to give sacrifices to their own gods in a form of gatherings, and in such gatherings there would be dances, with dancers wearing masks, for the Pharaoh and for gods.[99] Therefore it should be said openly that it is misguided to take European standards and use them as a criterion to determine whether or not the theatre existed among other peoples, as its theatre came late on stage during the days of Greek civilisation. That is why, in this Xhosa version of *Oedipus Rex*, oral literature has been taken into consideration, as a means of challenging Europe's lies about Africa. Thus this new version restores Africa back to its rightful place of being the founder of civilisation.

The oral tradition is clearly dominant in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. As a result, making the play a historical story. Essentially it is an aetiological story with a mythical character in which an explanation is given for the fact that two male bulls do not live in one kraal. In Skhura Yani's version, the play is introduced by a narrator who sits around with the audience, thus making the audience his children. The narrator begins the play with these lines:

> Once upon a time, in an ancient village
> among the Xhosa people, there was a king
> who had his first child. It was a baby boy,
> so they brought him to the Sanusi as it was
> the custom of the community to divine
> the future that the boy had brought with him
> from the gods.[100]

After the first part (the prologue) of the play the narrator does not appear again, he only appears in the end of the play. The narrator ends his lines in the first part (the prologue) of the play by shouting together with other characters on stage: "Makabulawe lomntwana" ("Let's kill this child"), and then the stage becomes chaotic with shouts and screams. Suddenly, the drums start and then every on stage sings the click song: "Iqgirha lendlela nguqongqothwane", a very old Xhosa traditional song, which is sung by traditional doctors when they are searching for isikhwa silima (for a solution).

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[99] Bernal, op. cit.
[100] Skhura Yani: *uGcaleka ubuyile.*

The language of this play is solemn, as like *Oedipus Rex*, the dialogues are in free verse. Making connections with the ancient Greek (*Oedipus Rex*), the language of this play is furthermore very poetical, but it relates very well to the Xhosa community with its use of Xhosa idioms, music, singing and dancing. Sometimes the language may seem rhetorical, but this is the way the Xhosa people make use of their language (that is why, perhaps, they produce good politicians -with emphasise- you can name them: the Mandelas, the Sisulus, the Mbekis, etc.,). The use of isiXhosa in ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** really (re)connects the play with the people it presents and represents on stage. Certainly this connects Skhu..a Yani's version to Raymond Williams's analysis of language as a social process. The use of the language of the people portrayed on stage is fundamental because it builds, as Williams puts it, "the process of communication between the author [creator] and the community"[101] represented on stage. Thus this "process of communication" on its own becomes "the process of community".[102]

When ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** ends, it ends with a ceremony in which the villagers gather together to celebrate the end of the "curse" -when uGcaleka (Oedipus) wipes out his eyes with the spear and then expels himself to wilderness where he was supposed to have died. This end on its own become a means of reflecting the fact that in traditional African communities the community becomes more valued than the individual. Thus these communities may sacrifice the individual in order to save the whole community. To the traditional African, without 'collective representations' individual thinking would not be possible at all. This means that the freedom of the individual depends on the will of the community. In such communities, the individual becomes the social being. This exactly links to Durkheim's sociological analysis of "souls" as social beings:

> It is quite true that elements which serve to form
> the idea of the soul...come from and express society...
> But whatever we receive from society, we hold in common
> with our companions. So it is not at all true that we are more

[101] Williams, R. 1966. *Modern Tragedy*. London, Chatto & Windus.
[102] Ibid.

personal as we are more individualized.[103]

Fundamental to social reality for Durkheim are classification systems, ways of ordering, arranging and making sense of things. The social structure therefore of the traditional African community is linked to Durkheim's perspective on society. In traditional African communities, as in John Donne's words, "no man is an island".[104] In these communities which are collectivist in nature the existence and life of the individual are determined by the existence and institutions of the group. No matter how powerful the individual is, whatever he is doing should be in line with the will of the community. In such societies the destiny of the individual is the destiny of being a part. Thus in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***, the fall of uGcaleka is not blamed on the oracle of the gods but on uGcaleka himself. His destiny was never a part of the community -it was 'cut short' after his death when the elders of the village suggested "the child must be killed". As a result when the truth is discovered about his true identity, the only solution is to drive away the destiny that was never from the beginning part of the community. Therefore, the community has a reason to celebrate when he decides to 'self-exile' himself to the mountains.

It is impossible to make an exact distinction in oral literature between myth, history and epic. This is even more so with plays derived from these genres. It may be said that much depends on the interpretations that the creators of such plays give to their sources. For instance, in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***, Skhura Yani draws the line from myth and ancestors via history through to the topical. The story of king Gcaleka is told in written history. It is a story of the king who sacrifices himself, by becoming a traditional doctor thus doing away with his kingship, to the ancestors. By doing so he saved the nation from the wrath of the ancestors, who became angry, as it is believed by the Xhosa traditionalists, after the "twin-sacrificial" ritual was not performed by the Xhosa people. Thus ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** becomes an epic whereby one can see how

[103] Durkheim, E. (1971) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. London, Allen & Unwin.
[104] Donne, J. (1975) Devotions. London, McGill-Queen's Publishers.

dramatic historical events can be recreated to afford the hero the opportunity of saving his nation.

It is very striking to see how Skhura Yani has used the historical hero in his work. For instance, while the story from this play may be viewed as the story that is based on Greek mythology (which on its own derived from Egyptian mythology), the main character, king Gcaleka, is a historical hero of the Xhosa people. As a result of this reality emerges with imagination in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. According to Yani, this is a means of making ancient myths accessible to the present generation. He puts it like this:

> Early in the morning, of the following day,
> after I was brutally punched on my intellectual jaws
> by shit-poet and his gang, I sat alone in my room,
> looking at my SELF on my mirror. Suddenly,
> a thought came to my mind. I was thinking of
> yesterday when shit-poet and his gang were
> lambasting me of glorifying "a western icon"
> whilst being an Africanist....But I told my SELF
> that "I don't blurty fucken care no matter what
> they say those intellectualist bastards. But through
> ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** I am reconstructing a historical
> piece. And a historical piece is not a historical thesis.
> My intention here is to recreate ancient myths in order
> to make them understandable to my people. If then they are
> "western icons" that one is still open to debate..."[105]

Really ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** is about the reconstruction of a historical piece, a history that would be accessible and understandable to the African people, especially AmaXhosa. That is why in this play, uGcaleka is not the barbaric king that colonial history made of him, but a dignified king who refuses to let his people down in any situation no matter that it could cost his life. The play is about the honour of the past. The hero rises above the historic reality and becomes glorified, giving him an almost mythological status. For the fact that he punishes himself for sinning against the community, king Gcaleka is portrayed as the victor of the situation. He sacrifices himself to fulfill the oracle of the gods and to save the people from the wrath of the gods, thus maintaining a core aspect of African culture(s) -that community's survival is much more important than the individual's one.

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[105] Yani, *Diaries of My Daily Darts.*

Therefore Skhura Yani's work is filled with ideas from his African cultural heritage. Through a thorough analysis of ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** one may argue that Yani stands close to the "return to the sources" to which Africanism refers. Africanism is the basis of the cultural heritage, values and spirit of African civilization. As the movement, Africanism began as an opposition to and a weapon of attack against colonial cultural domination and oppression of African people by white colonisers. But Yani keeps a distance between himself and the "African Renaissance" of Thabo Mbeki (South African future President) and Museveni (Ugandan President), which is also seen as a movement embracing Africanism. He explains his views:

> I speak of the African Re-renaissance,
> not the so-called "African Renaissance".
> Not that I'm against "African Renaissance".
> No, not at all! It's just I'm very suspicious of it,
> especially the people who are behind it. To me it seems
> as if "African Renaissance" is the cause of a group
> of alienated elites who practically have no
> contact with their own culture, but, ironically,
> you'll find them pompously proclaiming
> their africanity. For the Black Insider
> such as me there is no need of speaking of "African
> Renaissance", because I do have contact with my heritage.
> The only 'thing', for me, that I could speak of, is the
> African Re-renaissance. Meaning presenting my African
> personality and my African civilization again, please underline,
> which were presented before and which are still undermined
> and underestimated by the white cultural imperialists and
> their black chimpanzees...[106]

Skhura views the "African Renaissance" of Thabo Mbeki as part of an Aryanist philosophy, a philosophy which is based on a fallacy of Europe as the 'civilizer of the whole world'. Essentially the concern of this "African Renaissance" is to place the African personality within a European frame of reference. It is just a new form of what I called in the last chapter a "civilizing mission" whose mission is to "humanise" the "savages", aiming at reducing the struggle of the Africans into a battle for "acceptance" -whereby the Africans are fighting to be "accepted" in the 'global village' of capitalism and cultural imperialism.

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[106] Ibid.

Skhura Yani is a sceptic who disturbs his audience with questions which he himself is not in the position of answering, as it is assumed by his colleagues in art, except that he would reply by saying: "Go and watch my play, and if you have watched it, go ag in. If you do watch it again but no answers to the questions raised, just go and watch it again and again up until you get answers." It is the same scepticism he applies when critically approaching the ideas of the leaders of the "African Renaissance" who seem to idealise 'Mother Africa' as if their leadership has brought a genuine transformation of bad conditions in Africa and a relief for the many poor and suffering Africans.

The same scepticism he transfers to ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** whereby the gods themselves are being critiqued for their callousness and caprice in their relationships with people. For him, if the gods were really perfect, then why did they not kill uGcaleka while he was still an infant in his mother's womb? Why did they let him live on up until he was a man enough to kill his father (in the real history, to chase him out of the land)? Finally, while Skhura Yani views ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** as a means of glorifying his African heritage, he also uses it as a means of building a constructive criticism for the same heritage.

CHAPTER THREE

UGCALEKA UBUYILE: IMELE INKCUBEKO YAMAGCALEKA (REPRESENTING THE CULTURE OF AMAGCALEKA)

i pray you all gods of africa
to simmer down my fear
and transform it to courage
give me your heart for a spear
and your spirit for my shield
rub my body with animal fats
and smooth it with your
strong and soothing hands
for tomorrow is judgement day

-Ingoapele Madingoane

Boom! Boom! Boom!
[I hear you my Child]
I am the drum on your dormant soul,
cut from the black hide of a sacrificial cow.
I am the spirit of your ancestors,
habitant in hallowed huts,
eager to protect you, forever vigilant.
Boom! Boom! Boom!
Let me tell you of your precious heritage,
of your glorious past trampled by the conqueror,
destroyed by the zeal of a missionary.
I lay bare facts for scrutiny by your searching mind,
all declarations and dogmas.
Boom! Boom! Boom!
That is the sound of a cowhide drum-
the Voice of Mother Africa.

-Mbuyiseni Mtshali

What does language construct? According to Graeme Turner, language constructs reality for us.[107] We cannot think without language, so it is difficult to imagine 'thinking' things for which we have no language. We become members of our culture through language, we acquire our sense of personal identity through language, and we internalise the value systems which structure our lives through language.[108] We cannot step 'outside' language in order to produce a set of our own meanings which are totally independent of the cultural system.[109]

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[107] Turner, G. 1988. *Film as Social Practice*. London & New York, Routledge, p.43.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.

Nevertheless, it is possible to use language to say new things, to articulate new concepts, and to incorporate new objects. But we do this through existing terms and meanings, through the existing vocabularies of words and ideas in our language.[110] Turner states that, "for semiotic:ans such as Roland Barthes, 'language' includes all those systems from which we can select and combine in order to communicate".[111] Thus, therefore, dress can be a language -for example, the way we wear our suits can 'say something' about us. That is why language is associated with representation. Language is a means of constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing culture. As a result, as argued in chapter one, language is the most important accent of culture. Therefore it is the purpose of this chapter to analyse the representation of AmaGcaleka in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. Here the historical 'pieces' of AmaGcaleka are (re)visited in order to establish the true nature of their culture. But, since ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** is a South African play, a few important themes in South African theatre need also to be revisited and reinvestigated.

During the key apartheid years of the 1970s and 1980s, South African theatre attracted attention internationally with its uncompromising dramatizations of the evils of racial oligarchy.[112] Throughout the 1970s and 1980s actors, directors, creative writers and theatre scholars purveyed to international audiences and readers theatrical images of the aspirations of South Africans affected by apartheid.[113] As apartheid collapsed in the 1990s, theatre practitioners had to search for new targets and new methods, and much of the anti-apartheid theatre began to appear formulaic and dated.[114] Nevertheless, according to Ian Steadman, the legacy of anti-apartheid theatre influenced post-apartheid theatre: the years of 'protest' and 'resistance' theatre bequeathed to later practitioners in the theatre a voice that was uniquely South

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[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Steadman, I. 1995. "The Theatre of Maishe Maponya" in Maponya's *Doing Plays For a Change*. Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

African, and contemporary South African theatre cannot be understood without reference to the years of protest and resistance.[115]

When Albie Sachs made his controversial proposition that the African National Congress (ANC) members should be banned for five years from saying that "culture is a weapon of struggle,"[116] he provoked a barrage of responses from his comrades. In this paper, Sachs challenges the orthodoxy of the protest paradigm that had dominated 'protest' and 'resistance' culture. Against the habit of slogans tossed at a familiar target, he argues that the notion of culture as a weapon of struggle was politically as well as artistically limited, that it represented its subjects exclusively as "angry victims" or "freedom fighters" and so remains "trapped in the multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination" and sealed off from the transformative power of "dreams and humour".[117] He puts it like this:

> Instead of getting real criticism, we get solidarity criticism. Our artists are not pushed to improve the quality of their work, it is enough that it is politically correct. The more fists, and spears, and guns, the better. The range of themes is narrowed down so much that all that is funny or curious or genuinely tragic in the world is extruded.[118]

There were three strands that came in response to Sachs' criticism of "culture as a tool of struggle". The first one was in agreement with Sachs. Indeed, the voice said, sloganeering was a barrier to depth and genuine expression.[119] The second strand came from the militant cultural workers who insisted that "culture is a weapon of struggle" and as such it should be used. These artists did not apologise for sloganeering, for it was through slogans that the audiences were mobilised and rallied around a particular cause. The third strand was that of the "liberal" artist and critic, who read in Sachs' propositions a long-awaited admission from the saner ranks of the

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[115] Ibid.
[116] Sachs, A. (1989) "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Guidelines," A paper which was presented at an ANC seminar in Zambia.
[117] Sachs (1995) quoted by Loren Kruger in "Postcolonial Theatre in South Africa" in (ed. J. E. Gainor) *Imperialism and Theatre*. London, Routledge.
[118] Sachs, op. cit.
[119] Mda, Z. *Politics and the Theatre in South Africa*

liberation movement that it had been detrimental to link art with politics.[120] This was a position that asserted the autonomy and the permanence of the work of art, and the right of the artist as an individual to pursue his or her vision of the beautiful and excellent without reference to ulterior ends.[121] This was an art for art's sake position, for it was emphatic in its assertion that the South African artist must create work that is not expected to, and indeed should not, be put to any practical use nor fulfill any ulterior function.[122]

The separation of art, and specifically of theatre, from politics is an illusive notion. And when one examines the different genres of theatre that exist in South Africa, it certainly has not been a factor in the production and enjoyment of the art in this country. It is generally taken for granted that the creator of theatre selects his or her material from life, and from his or her society.[123] South Africa is a society characterised by racial divisions, political oppression, and economic exploitation. South African theatre can never be abstracted from this particular context. Therefore the writer in South Africa, particularly the 'black' writer, is not, to use Brink's words, "writing about 'something out there' when he/she draws politics into the text: it is part and parcel of the most intimate experience of his/her daily life."[124]

When one reads the history of South African theatre, he/she will find out that is characterised by many categories which on their own reflected the situation of the creator in society. The first category of South African theatre is that of the indigenous modes of performance that are precolonial, and it is more popular in rural areas of South Africa. These include praise performance poetry known as *dithoko* in Sesotho or *izibongo* in Zulu. It also includes dance performance modes such as *domba* ("snake dance") in Venda which are performed at harvest time, and reflect the world in which girls and young women live. Each ethnic group in South Africa has its own performance modes ranging from para-theatrical religious ritual to folk narratives that

[120] Ibid.
[121] Brink, A. (1992) "Towards a redefinition of aesthetics" in New Nation. December 1992
[122] Mda, op. cit.
[123] Ibid.

are performed by a single actor who assumes the roles of all the different characters in the play: the Zulu *inganekwane,* the Xhosa *intsomi*, and the Sotho *tsömo*. All these modes are visible in ***uGcaleka ubuvile.*** I have shown in the last chapter that ***uGcaleka ubuvile*** is an epic story and full of oral traditions, and in ***uGcaleka ubuvile*** these modes are highly developed into dramatic elements.

One major category of South African theatre that was dominant in the 1960s and 1970s, and has been popular throughout the country, is referred to by critics as Township Theatre.[125] It is called that because it was rooted in the townships. The master and, indeed, the progenitor of this genre is Gibson Kente. This theatre is characterised by the extensive use of music and dance. Kente is highly proficient in musical composition and in choreography. He is also credited with the invention of a peculiar style of acting which is full of energy and is spectacularly over-theatrical.[126] It is characterised by bulging eyes, wide open mouths, heavily punctuated dialogue, and exaggerated movements.[127] This theatre is very formulaic, and like the European and American melodrama of the 19th century it has its stock characters.[128] In every performance the audience would expect to see the hardworking Christian mother, the tsotsi, the shebeen queen, the prostitute, the errant husband, the evil inyanga, the moronic "blackjack" (a stupid policeman), death, funerals, weddings, etc.

Another category of South African theatre which was popular in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s has been referred to as Town Theatre. It was called that because it was performed in purpose-built city venues, and rarely did it go to the townships. Town Theatre was created by both black and white intermediate classes, whereas Township Theatre was created solely by black practitioners who ran commercial theatre companies.[129] While Township Theatre was highly syncretic, using both popular indigenous African modes and "western" ones, Town Theatre was

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[124] Brink, op. cit.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.

based on traditional "western" models in form, or on more experimental international models, although the content was South African. While Township Theatre would not be overtly political, except in rare cases such as Kente's *Too Late* and *How Long*, Town Theatre dealt with political themes. As a result it was referred to as "protest theatre". And it should be noted that not all the plays that dealt with political themes were "protest theatre". For instance, the plays of Maishe Maponya and the late Matsemela Manaka were not categorised as "protest theatre" due to their ideology of Black Consciousness. But I will come back to this point later on.

Due to its collaborative nature -between black and white theatre practitioners- protest theatre gained extensively support among the members and supporters of the United Democratic Front (UDF) -the internal wing of the ANC- which was the formation of black political activists and white liberals. The UDF, like the ANC, was based on the ideals of "non-racialism" whereby blacks and whites worked together in the establishment of a free and democratic country. As this movement (the UDF) was influenced by ANC's Freedom Charter, which was known as "the peoples' document", it welcomed and endorsed the formation of protest theatre.

In some quarters, protest theatre was criticized as the theatre that made statements of disapproval or disagreement, but never went beyond that.[130] Zanemvula Mda harshly states that protest theatre "addresses itself to the oppressor, with the view of appealing to his conscience".[131] Mda further notes that:

> It [protest theatre] is a theatre of complaint, or sometimes even of weeping. It is variously a theatre of self-pity, of moralizing, of mourning, and of hopelessness. It never offers any solution beyond the depiction of the sad situation in which people find themselves.[132]

A good example of this category can be found in number of Athol Fugard's plays, including his plays created out of collaboration between him and black actors such as John Kani and Winston Ntshona. His plays have depicted various aspects of

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[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.

segregation in South Africa, such as the Immorality Act in *Statements*, racial classification in *The Blood Knot*, and the Group Areas Act in *Boesman and Lena*. These plays clearly protest against apartheid by depicting its inhuman nature. But they have some prevarications in their depiction of the South African reality. The oppressed suffer in silence, and are not involved in any struggle against the oppression,[133] as is the case in *Boesman and Lena* wherein the old black man does not speak, he just dies like an 'animal' in an open field.

Some theatre practitioners in South Africa went beyond protest, a position which began with the advent of the Black Consciousness movement in the 1970s. Black Consciousness was a political movement aimed at fighting for the total liberation of black people. It was initiated by black students who were dissatisfied with the way the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) handled political affairs concerning blacks. These students broke away from NUSAS to form their own black student organisation, which was known as the South African Student Organisation (SASO). Their focus was to first liberate the mind of a black man, and then liberate his land. Bantubonke Biko, who was the leader of this movement, was:

> Black Consciousness refers itself to the black man and to his situation, and...the black man is subjected to two forces in this country. He is first of all oppressed by an external world through institutionalised machinery, through heavy work conditions, through poor pay, through very difficult living conditions, through poor education, these are all external to him, and secondly, the black man in himself has developed a certain state of alienation, he rejects himself, precisely because he attaches the meaning white to all that is good, in other words he associates good and equates it with white. [And] this arises out of his living and it also arises out of his development from childhood.[134]

Biko proposed radical means in the struggle for black freedom. He and his comrades were also inspired by the ideas of Frantz Fanon, the Algerian psychiatrist, who believed that black people would be able to attain their total liberation if they also take into consideration the psychological freedom. That is why, perhaps, the Black Consciousness movement suggested that black people should first decolonise their minds, whereafter they should fight to regain their land. This movement initiated and

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[133] Ibid.
[134] Biko, B. 1978. *I Write What I Like*. London, Heineman, p. 100.

encouraged the use of culture as the weapon against oppression. Perhaps, one may assume, this movement was yielding to the call made by Fanon that:

> The withering away of the reality of the national culture and the death pangs of the nation are linked to each other in mutual dependence. This is why it is of capital importance to follow the evolution of these relations during the struggle for national freedom.[135]

Black Consciousness saw a need to link the struggle for political freedom with the struggle for a better national culture. This national culture was going to challenge the 'mainstream culture' or the "western" culture, which was promoted by the former apartheid regime. According to Ian Steadman, this movement "posited a cultural alternative to white hegemony".[136] As a result of this alternative black artists were able to create works which radically affected the notion of the function of arts in resistance.[137] This movement also encouraged the use of culture as a popular form of expression and a source of identity which embraces the popular understanding of the masses about their own history and their own socio-political situation. To David Coplan it did not only provide a form of expression for the 'marginalised' masses, it also represented them in the circle of culture. Coplan puts it like this:

> [This movement] provides not only an autonomous form of expression and a source of identity and popular understanding. It also represents the people's interests and aspirations, and mobilizes support for a 'total' liberation process.[138]

In other words, the Black Consciousness movement represented an expressive response to the collective socio-political experience of blacks. And it was during this period that the Theatre of Resistance gained a mass following, and became a main genre. Whereas protest theatre addressed itself to the oppressor, the Theatre of Resistance addressed itself to the oppressed with the overt aim of rallying or of mobilising the oppressed to explore ways and means of fighting against the oppression.[139] Zanemvula Mda notes that this theatre was agitprop, "for it attempted

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[135] Fanon, F. 1963, *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York, p. 238.
[136] Steadman, I. in *Critical Arts*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1987, p. 1.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Coplan, D. "Dialectics of Tradition in South African Black Popular Theatre" in *Critical Arts*, Vol.4, No.3. 1987, p.7.
[139] Mda, Op. Cit.

to propagate a message, and agitate for action on the part of the oppressed to change their situation".[140] At its best, it served as a vehicle for sharing perceptions and insights among the oppressed themselves. But at its worst it became a litany of slogans that denounced the oppressor, and extolled the virtues and prowess of the leaders of the liberation struggle.[141] The late Matsemela Manaka was one of the more creative practitioners of this type of theatre. His play, *Egoli*, set in the hostel of a male workers' compound at a gold mine, was well praised when it was staged in South Africa and abroad in 1979 and 1980.

All these categories which I have mentioned played their roles very well during the days of apartheid, and they contributed extensively in the making of South African theatre. All of them represented the majority in South Africa. As a result they were regarded as "majority theatre" in South Africa. And it should be noted that the task of majority theatre cannot be simply seen as the representation of what Robert Kavanagh calls the "fundamentally oppressed classes of South Africa"[142] or the black proletariat, not least because the boundaries between classes, and the category "class" itself, have historically been relatively rather than absolutely defined.[143]

According to Loren Kruger, "this task is complicated by the question of taste".[144] For instance, many urban spectators prefer the lively and spectacular musical entertainments and melodramas provided by township entrepreneurs to talky and rather austere productions of black intellectualists. More modestly portrayed as a theatre with majoritarian aspirations, 'alternative' South African theatre has attempted to function as the theatre of a virtual public sphere. This virtual public sphere could be described as a "cultural space", an arena in which the theatre's fictional or what Raymond Williams calls "subjunctive action"[145] might provide a space for entertaining 'alternative' representations, fantastic as well as serious, of South

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[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Kavanagh, R. 1985. *Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa*. London, Zed Books.
[143] Kruger, Op. Cit., p. 155.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Williams, R. 1981. "Brecht and Beyond" in *Politics and Letters*. London, Verso.

African reality that is not yet given a platform in the "mainstream" theatre. It is the same "cultural space" that ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** attempts to provide a space for entertaining 'alternative' representation of traditional South African (in this case of AmaGcaleka's) reality.

In ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** the story of Oedipus the king who kills his father and marries with his mother is retold, as I mentioned in the last chapter (Chapter Two) but is seen through the Xhosa eyes. In this Xhosa version the name *Oedipus Rex* is transformed into the Xhosa idiom as *uGcaleka ubuyile*, which literally means *King Gcaleka's return*. With the view of chief Nicholas Tiyose Gcaleka's call: *"Iminyanya ibuyile"* (*"the return of the spirits"*), the man who recently went to England to demand the head of king Hintsa (*Aa Zanzolo ukumkani wakwaXhosa*), the grandson of king Gcaleka, who was killed by English soldiers in one of the Frontier Wars in the Cape in 1835, the idiom, *uGcaleka ubuyile*, may be interpreted as *"the return of the spirits"*. These are the spirits of the ancestors, and the ancestors of AmaGcaleka. Here the question that comes to the picture is: Who are these AmaGcaleka?

The Xhosa people constitute one of Southern Africa's largest ethnic groups. Like the English nation, AmaXhosa is a 'bastardised' nation. As a result their language is rich and it lends its influence in ever-increasing measures to other indigenous African groups in Southern Africa. Without counting the Khoi-khois and the Sans, the groups which also integrated with AmaXhosa, the Xhosas were the first indigenous African group to be colonized by white settlers. As a result of that they are more "westernized" than any other indigenous African group in Southern Africa. But there is still a hard core group within the Xhosa people, who are known as "AmaBomvana" ("the Red Blankets"), which is ethnically called (in fact the name they formally accept as theirs), AmaGcaleka. They are the ones who still 'stick' to the Xhosa traditional ways of living and they depict the end of an era in the Xhosa history. Soon this group will disappear completely, taking with them their picturesque way of life and leaving only as a memory the centuries-old traditional rites of their ancestors.

The play, ***uGcaleka ubuyile,*** deals with AmaGcaleka. The idea, according to Skhura Yani, is to capture something of their fascinating ways of life before the opportunity is lost forever. Thus this play tells an elaborate traditional rite of AmaGcaleka -the role of the individual in this community; their belief in their Sanusi and her "supernatural" powers; and their worship of the spirits of their ancestors. Furthermore the play is a means of giving educational lessons about the indigenous African ways of living to its audience. As one theatre reviewer, Vukile Pokwana, harshly puts it:

> *U-Gcaleka ubuyile* is not about the return of the bogus self styled Xhosa king. It is an adapted work from the classical Greek tragedy of *Oedipus Rex*. The play is meant to educate theatregoers, who are so ignorant and neglectful of [traditional] African culture[s], about the ways of the Xhosa [AmaGcaleka] people.[146]

Therefore this play, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, is a historical piece about the traditional culture of AmaGcaleka. It represents this through the use of the Xhosa language; and also in terms of the traditional setting and the indigenous African (the Xhosa) costume. It also represents this historical piece through its use of Xhosa traditional music and dances. Furthermore it also represents this historical piece by making use of the great historical name, ***uGcaleka*** -as this name was the name of one of the great kings of the Xhosa people. And at this point let me use this opportunity to give some historical detail of this great Xhosa king who is reviewed as "the bogus self styled Xhosa king" by critics.

According to custom among the Xhosa people, when a ruling king dies, leaving an heir who is an infant or a minor, as was the case with uPhalo, king Gcaleka's father, the child was usually placed in the care of an uncle. This custom was observed in this instance, Mdange being appointed regent and guardian of the infant heir. Mdange was half brother of Tshiwo, king Phalo's father, and was, moreover, the head of the Right-Hand House of his father, uNgconde. He was the proper person, therefore, to have charge of the infant, and to safeguard the interests and the training of the child so as to fit him for the onerous duties which in time, as the king, he would have to assume.

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[146] Pokwana, V. *City Press.* 18/10/98.

It is believed, from the point of view of oral history, that from his earliest years uPhalo gave evidence of possessing the elements of a fine character and temperament, which was fostered and confirmed by the wise guidance of his father's councillors. He grew in favour with the Xhosa people, as the years advanced, until he took over the throne of his father but with dissatisfaction from his uncle's oldest son, uGwali. It is further believed that uPhalo was beloved by his people, and in all the nation's matters he gave the utmost respect to the opinions of his councillors. But a time came when his father's councillors to whom he adhered, died out and he was left with younger men of less experience, and who were not as loyal to him as their predecessors. In any case, a disruption of the Xhosa nation took place during his reign. His heir, uGcaleka, when he came of age, was instigated by uPhalo's young councillors to claim control of the nation, although uPhalo was still alive.

According to oral historical sources, uGcaleka was born round about the year 1730, and died round about 1792. The name uGcaleka is widely known among the Xhosa people through uGcaleka's transmission of his name to the Great House of the Xhosa people. This was accomplished at the expense of splitting the nation into two divisions. It said that after he took over power his older twin brother, uRharhabe, and his father, uPhalo, ran away from the land. As a result of that a war broke out between the two brothers. Seeing that he might be defeated by uRharhabe, uGcaleka's councillors advised the king to recognise uRharhabe as another king of AmaXhosa but, not in the Great House, in the Small Kraal of the nation.

It should be stated clearly that, before uGcaleka came onto the scene, the Xhosa nation was an undivided unity, with one name known as *uHlanga*, meaning a united nation. But after uGcaleka's appearance on the scene, the Xhosa people are described by two names: AmaGcaleka and AmaRharhabe. This was brought about, according to the Xhosa traditionalists, by the curse of the ancestors who were angry at the Xhosa people for not performing "the twin sacrificial" ritual after the birth of uGcaleka. As a result many people ran away from the Xhosa monarchy when the two twins fought for power. This gave a bad reputation to the monarch to some sections of the nation.

Another reason which tended to injure the monarch's reputation to these sections was his unfortunate mother. His mother, it is believed, was a bully and a boisterous woman. She was influential in every affair, whether it was political or social. As a result some people avoided the Great Place of AmaXhosa.

While his brother, uRharhabe, increased attacks on his army, uGcaleka continued to face problems from his people who were dissatisfied with his role. Due to those dissatisfactions of this people, uGcaleka decided to search for the truth of who was supposed to have been killed between him and his brother. After finding out that he was the one who was supposed to have been sacrificed to the ancestors, uGcaleka became a traditional doctor. He died as the traditional doctor, and his great son, uKhawuta, took over the throne. While his birth should be celebrated as the end of the old era, the old era of "twin sacrifice", his death should be seen as the beginning of the new era, when the Xhosa people began to cast doubts on their traditions and customs. As a result when white settlers began to colonise AmaXhosa, their infiltration was so easy due to those doubts, and also due to the division among the Xhosa people -between AmaGcaleka and AmaRharhabe. At this point one needs to explain in detail the culture of AmaGcaleka.

AmaGcaleka are sociable people. For instance, they love the company of their fellow men and keep an open house to any stranger. A traveller, on his way, never has to worry where he will sleep or get the next meal, because any family he comes to will share with him what they have and give him a place by the fire to sleep. In the same way, when a kraal has *umqombothi* (a beer-drink) or a feast, there is no suggestion of "who is invited?", as is the case in "western" society, because everyone who is near enough is automatically invited, and is expected to stay until there is nothing left of the slaughter to eat and no more beer to drink. And these aspects are based on their belief in communality -that everyone belongs to my family, thus therefore we are members of one family- and also based on *ubuntu* (humanity), the core aspect of any traditional African culture.

The family's home is a round mud hut with a pole in the middle supporting a dome-shaped or a conical grass roof. A fire burns in a hollow in the mud plastered floor and, when the weather is too bad to cook outside, *unopotyi* (a traditional pot) stands over it with the next meal slowly cooking inside. The hut is a simple structure which consists of a basic wall framework made of wattles woven, basket-fashion, in and out of strong stakes stuck into the ground in a circle. And one should bear in mind that even kraals must be built in a circle shape, because the circle symbolises unity among the people within this community. The hut must have a single door and one tiny wooden window, and both must be closed tightly at night to keep *amagqwirha* (witches) and *iimpundulu* (bad spirits) out of sight. The reason behind the hut having a single door, according to the Xhosa traditionalists, is because human beings only have one entrance (birth) into life and one exit (death) out of life, therefore this should also apply to a home of a human. On the other hand, the reason for having a single window, the Xhosa traditionalists state, is because *ubuntu* encourages us to look at the world in one view with one common understanding.

The building of the hut involves everyone, even the neighbours. The men make the skeleton framework of wattles and the women then take over and with their bare hands, build up the wall with mud. When this is dry, it is the women who smear the inside of the wall and floor with cow dung and thereafter keep the inside of the hut in this condition. Women always cut the thatch grass, and it is a picturesque sight to see them coming from the grass field *ngenjikalanga* (at sundown), walking in single line with long bundles on their heads, silhouetted against the red sun and singing: *"Thina bafazi balelali singamathemba ezindlu zethu"* (*"We the women of this village, we are the hope of our own houses"*).

Indoda yomGcaleka (the Gcaleka man) is master of his home and no one is ever left in any doubt of this fact. But in some instances a strong woman emerges and dominates the family and her husband, as was the case with king Gcaleka's mother. The father is the head of the family and its spiritual leader on earth and, when he dies, he should guide his family, according to the Xhosa traditionalists, "from the place of

the ancestors to which he has gone". On the other side, *umfazi womGcaleka* (the Gcaleka woman) is given the status of being a man's helper in managing the affairs of the home. While she is the one who works more than anyone in the family, she is given fewer powers than her husband, even, in most cases, fewer than her old son. The irony is that the same woman who is subordinated by her community is seen, as the song says it, as the hope of the family. An old man uses a short pipe for smoking, whilst an old woman uses a long one. The boys look after cattle, whilst the girls help their mothers in domestic work. The men are not supposed to paint themselves, except in exceptional cases, for example, when they are the traditional doctors and/or they are in the circumcision school. It is only the women who are allowed to paint themselves, especially girls, because painting is seen as a way of beautifying (or decorating) the body.

Those aspects of the ways of living of the Gcaleka people are represented well in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. In the play, the ways of living of the Gcaleka people are portrayed exactly as they are. For example, the community gatherings, code of dressing and the subordinate role of women in the Gcaleka community are given special attention in this play, leading to Maishe Maponya, when he was giving feedback about the performance of the play to Skhura Yani, to declare that:

> "Your play presents itself as a piece with strong traditional outlook. The pre-set, overture and the overall setting of your play lend themselves to this outlook. The way you represented the traditional Xhosa culture, shows us [audience] that you are really part of that community. This is wonderful because you managed to impress and challenge your audience...[As a result] an ensemble work was achieved..."[147]

This representation of the Gcaleka culture is also reflected through the way Skhura Yani made use of the notion of the ancestors in his play. While Yani is critical of the ancestors, especially their callousness and capricious relationships with people, he portrays them as 'pure supernatural figures' as they are regarded in the traditional Xhosa community. In Yani's play the ancestors are considered to exert great influence on the living. They are worshipped as gods, and they are consulted as

[147] Yani, S. "Darting with my external examiner" in *Diaries of My Daily Darts*. (Unpublished).

guardians when the plague causes illnesses, death of people and death of cattle in the community. Scene Four of ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** is a good example of the part where the people are show worshipping the ancestors. For instance, in this scene the two elders (councillors to the king) are seen pouring beer on the entrance of the king's kraal as the way of asking the ancestors to help solve the problems facing the nation and also forgive the nation if it sinned against them. Here it seems as if Yani sings the same song of the African traditionalists that to obtain the favour of the forefathers, calm their anger or ensure their favourable disposition, sacrifices or beer-feast should be offered to the dead ones.

This representation of the Gcaleka culture is a drama that contains strong elements of what Raymond Williams calls "the structure of feeling". Its use of the Xhosa language -the language of the Gcaleka people- makes the play a drama that is a central element of the life of a society. As Skhura Yani speaks isiXhosa, one may therefore conclude that ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** is a means of presenting and representing the personal experience and expressions of Yani's feelings about his own culture. This is the way of reconstructing his own reality, as language constructs reality, about his situation in his own society. It is also a way of reconstructing an African icon out of what is perceived as a "western" icon.

CONCLUSION

The tragic irony in ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** emerges most often in the form of an ambiguity when the expression allows the audience to detect a different meaning from that which is intended by a character. The difficulty is that it is not always clear what meaning a given character intends to convey to another character within the play itself. Sadly, the rhetorical force of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in this Xhosa version has been considerably lessened, thus simplifying the motives of character within the play. The purpose of this was to make the transformed version accessible and understandable to its African audience. Skhura Yani's version, like the ancient Greek version, reflects not only dramatic irony but its reverse -where characters know things that the audience does not know. And this it is because Yani, like Sophocles, does not want to give his audience easy resolutions of the dilemmas facing uGcaleka (Oedipus) and his people. In the same way this conclusion is not going to give an easy resolution to the research report.

The aim of this research report was to critically analyse the culture presented and represented in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. This was done by examining accents of culture in Raymond Williams's theory of culture. Chapter One dealt with the accents of culture, by exploring Williams's definition of culture and then by applying his theory of culture to Skhura Yani's ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. Chapter Two aimed at making connections between the Greek version and the Xhosa version, and also at relating these two versions to different theories on the Oedipus story. It was this chapter that undertook a mission of exploring aspects of Egyptian history which relate *Oedipus Rex* to Africa. The same chapter was a means of establishing Yani's heritage, as it played a major role in the making of, and in his act of reclaiming, ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. Chapter Three highlighted aspects of the culture of AmaGcaleka which is presented and represented in ***uGcaleka ubuyile***. This chapter was also a means of giving a clear picture to the reader about the life of AmaGcaleka.

Finally, if one critically reviews ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** the notion of African Re-renaissance with which Skhura Yani associates his play, one will agree with Yani that this play is the re-presentation of aspects of African heritage and indigenous culture. This notion is enshrined within the idea of *mazibuye emazizweni* (return to the source), which is the rebirth of Africa and self-determination. This last point seems as if it contradicts Yani's stand point about "African Renaissance" which also advocates the rebirth of Africa. It should be strongly noted that to Yani the rebirth of Africa is not just the rebirth of the continent. Instead it is about the rebirth of African politicians who control the links of the African masses, who are, most of the time, less informed in terms of politics. To Yani there is nothing wrong with the masses, something is wrong with the leaders. Change in Africa depends on its leaders, who are always hungry for power up to the extent of creating unnecessary civil wars, in changing their own despotic views on democracy and social developments in Africa. Thus to Yani, ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** provides an example of a leader who is willing to change up to the extent of sacrificing his own life for the purpose of saving his own people from the disaster he brought for them. Hence ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** may be reviewed as a conscience and a mirror of the African nation.

Thus therefore this research report, since the author is the same author of the play, ***uGcaleka ubuyile***, may be seen as a means of rubber-stamping the views expressed in the play. The report may be critically viewed as the reflection, and the reinterpretation of, Skhura Yani's life experiences, and his interpretation of the notion of African Re-renaissance. But one may argue in support of this report, in its rubber stamping of ***uGcaleka ubuyile's*** exploration of African heritage, as a way of recording academically the author's cultural arguments which are inextricably intertwined with his experience. The reason for that is to contribute to historical and academic discourse about the theatre based on indigenous African culture, as ***uGcaleka ubuyile*** has a lot to teach to its audience, and also a lot for the benefit of theatre in this new era of theatre in South Africa.

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Author Yani Ss
Name of thesis Ugcaleke Ubuyile: Accents Of Culture Aspects Of Raymond Williams' Theory Of Culture To South African Drama Yani Ss 1999

PUBLISHER:
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
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