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## An Ideological Critique of the legacy of Nelson Mandela in Brenda Fassie’s “Black President”

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### ABSTRACT

The intrarelationship between language and music is an enthralling and intricate interplay that spans various dimensions of human expression. Both language and music are complex forms of communication, and their interaction can be observed in several ways. Words, phrases, and sentences in a language underpin specific meanings and convey information. The structure and choice of words enable precise communication of thoughts, emotions, and ideas. Musical elements such as melody, harmony, rhythm, and dynamic forces contribute to the emotional and expressive power of music. Even without lyrics, instrumental music has the capacity to evoke a wide range of sensibilities. With this in mind, the primary aim of this article is to uncover Brenda Fassie’s “Black President” in an attempt to unravel Nelson Mandela’s political and leadership discourse. To achieve this, employing an ideological critique framework as a theory is applied to the discussions. Ultimately, this article makes two notable findings and discussions. First, Fassie’s “Black President” stands as a potent symbol in the context of postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa.. In fact, the clause “Black President” is laden with historical significance, representing a departure from the era of racial subjugation. Through linguistic choices and symbolic language, the song contributes to the ideological critique by illustrating Mandela’s presidency as a transformative moment in the nation’s history. Second (last), Fassie’s lyrical craftsmanship introduces a layer of narrative complexity, offering an ideological critique that goes beyond simple glorification. While the song acknowledges Mandela’s heroic stature, it equally confronts the challenges and disparities countenancing in post-apartheid South Africa. Linguistic choices convey a multifaceted reflection on the “Black President’s” legacy, questioning whether the dreams of liberation have materialized into concrete improvements for all citizens. The language used becomes a tool for critique, urging listeners to grapple with the intricacies of societal transformation and the realization that, despite the monumental changes, there remains unfinished business in the pursuit of liberty and justice. The concluding remarks underline the necessity to continue to examine political and leadership figures as (re)produced in musical linguistics.

**Keywords:** Ideological critique; Music; Language; Nelson Mandela, Postcolonialism, Post-apartheid; Freedom; Legacy

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## 1. Contextual background and introduction

Language and songs play a central role in configuring the narratives and perceptions surrounding historical figures like Nelson Mandela. They serve as powerful instruments for voicing emotions, preserving collective memories, critiquing political, government figures, and influencing public opinion. This denotes that songs, as a voice for the voiceless and as a form of social and political commentary have a rich history and play a significant role in critiquing and responding to state officials. The choice of words, phrases, and sentences, as well as narratives in speeches, writings, and dialogues, influences how individuals are commemorated. Nevertheless, it is critical to bear in mind that the language used in songs carries multiple layers of meaning, ethnological references, and intricate expressions that require meticulous examination for a comprehensive understanding. This suggests that the linguistic evaluation of song lyrics entails exploring not only the verbatim meanings of words, phrases, and sentences, but also the poetic devices, metaphorical expressions, and cultural context entrenched in the language. It is for this reason that Jäncke (2012) underlines that narratives, including songs, that are passed down through generations contribute to the collective memory, history, and consciousness of a society. Mandela, for example, is esteemed for his rhetoric of reconciliation and forgiveness in South Africa, while his legacy is framed in terms of his role in the fight against colonialism and apartheid, and later, economic and political turmoil (Lewis, 2022; Mudau and Mangani, 2018). It is for this reason that musical linguistics, which this discourse rests on, ought to be regarded as expounding on social issues and injustices. Through recitation and lyrical commentary, songs draw attention to specific challenges, such as corruption, illiberality, human rights transgressions, and government failures. In this article, it is imperative to indicate that musical linguistics is the interdisciplinary scrutiny of the language-like properties of music, focusing on the structural and

communicative components of musical expression. It examines how musical elements such as rhythm, melody, harmony, and form convey meaning and interact with each other to create coherent musical narratives. Through the scrutinization of musical syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, among others, musical linguistics seeks to uncover the underlying principles governing musical communication and comprehension.

It stands to reason, therefore, to regard music as uniquely encapsulating narratives and voices that are continually downplayed in other spaces such as literature and education. In support of this view, Diko (2024) maintains that artists could use lyrics to challenge or buttress existing political ideologies, presenting alternative perspectives on historical episodes and figures such as Mandela. This spells out that artists may potentially use lyrics to question mainstream narratives about historical figures. However, this is not always clear given the complexities of language. In any event, artists may highlight aspects of Mandela's voice that are continually overlooked or downplayed. Hence it is denoted that language that is used in music is a fundamental instrument for configuring narratives and influencing perspectives on historical episodes and figures. Over and above this, emotive language in music helps to create a poignant connection with the audience. This is particularly patent in political and social activists, as well as those who focus on addressing gender and racial injustices (Rosenblum et al., 2020). For example, Mandela's political speeches, characterized by conviction and unity, have contributed to a constructive emotional legacy. Thus, music that is composed about him, holds a profound political, social, historical, and economic impact on emotions, especially to those who directly or indirectly resonate with his ideologies. This is in addition to those who oppose and challenge his narratives. In any event, I must underline that opposing and challenging Mandela's narratives could be seen as fair in the context of critical analysis and historical examination. While Mandela is universally revered for his role in ending apartheid

and his advocacy for reconciliation in South Africa, it is essential to engage in critical discourse to fully understand his actions, decisions, and their implications.

By the same token, songs evoke sensibilities of nostalgia, empowerment, or reflection. Among other issues, this scholarly discourse reflects on Mandela's leadership after the official end of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. In any case, artists potentially use melodies and lyrics to convey the emotional essence of a historical period or person, influencing how people feel about their legacy. Furthermore, it must be stressed that the exposition and emotional response to songs, especially those addressing political figures or sensitive issues, are highly subjective and ultimately lie with the listeners or critics. This indicates that people bring their own experiences, perspectives, and ethnological backgrounds to their understanding of music and language. Some listeners or critics approach songs with a critical or methodical mindset, examining the linguistic undercurrents, themes, and artistic choices. They might engage with the song on an intellectual level, considering its socio-political implications and expositions. While some listeners may perhaps feel emboldened by songs that uncurl with their ideologies, others might approach them with affinity, seeking to comprehend heterogeneous perspectives even if they do not agree with them. Inevitably, it stands to reason to regard songs that touch on political figures or contentious issues as catalysts for dialogues and debates. In fact, in this article, I engage in discussions, sharing and contrasting viewpoints for the very reason that I appreciate the heterogeneity of voices and opinions within the realm of music and language.

Similarly, through literature, documentaries, and educational materials, language helps preserve the memory of historical figures. Building upon this, academic discourse and public conversations facilitate a thorough examination of historical figures, including through the lens of music. As a result of this, I submit that Mandela is a subject of ongoing debates, and language plays a central role in

framing these dialogues. This is based on the premise that artists such as Brenda Fassie use songs as a form of critique, providing a platform for expressing dissent or offering alternative perspectives. With special reference to Mandela, songs that have been constructed about him such as Zahara's "Nelson Mandela" and Hugh Masekela's "Bring Him Back Home" contest mainstream narratives and stimulate listeners to reevaluate historical legacies. This makes it clear that the significance of songs that contest mainstream narratives about figures like Mandela lies in their propensity to contribute to a more multifaceted and comprehensive understanding of historical episodes and legacies. In addition to this reality, the languages used and choices of expression contribute to the ethnological identity of a nation. Taking this into account, Gikandi (2001) proclaims that African music mirrors ethnological intricacies and is a powerful tool for expressing the country's identity. For example, Mzwakhe Mbuli's "Madiba", Zahara's "Nelson Mandela", Vusi Mahlasela's "When You Come Back" and many others, mirror the linguistic intricacies and identities that exist in South Africa.

With this contextual background in mind, the principal aim of this article is to conduct a comprehensive examination of Brenda Fassie's "Black President" that elucidates the ideological critique of the legacies of Nelson Mandela. This indicates that by intently scrutinizing the lyrics, musical elements, and contextual factors of this song, this intellectual discourse seeks to uncover the contrasting perspectives interwoven within this musical narrative. The intention is to identify the multifaceted ways in which Fassie constructs her critique, exploring the underlying ideologies and value systems that configure the (re)production of Mandela. It must be underlined though that the aim is not to examine the artist who produced this song but to focus solely on the selected song, linguistic elements, and socio-political discourses. The secondary aim of this article is to elucidate the socio-cultural contexts surrounding the production of the selected song that ideologically critiques the legacies

of Mandela. This pursuit is to unravel the historical, political, and cultural circumstances underpinning the creation of this song, examining how these attributes influenced the artist's choices in crafting their critique. By situating "Black President" within its specific context, I aim to unmask the motivations, intentions, and potential societal impacts of the artist. Ultimately, understanding the broader environment in which this song emerged contributes to an overarching exposition of ideological critiques in musicology, shedding light on the dynamic interplay between art, language, literature, history, and socio-cultural subtleties. Given the outlined objectives, it is crucial to emphasize the significance of this scholarly inquiry, which will be elaborated upon in the subsequent section.

## **2. Scholarly significance of this discourse**

The scholarly significance of an ideological critique of the legacies of Nelson Mandela through the selected song lies in its capacity to unravel complex political narratives and socio-cultural reflections encapsulated within musical expression. Examining this song, which engages deeply with the legacies of the iconic African leader, this study elucidates the multifaceted dimensions of political discourse, historical (re)production, the use of language, and the impact of leadership on society. By the way, ideological critique entails probing and questioning the underlying belief systems, values, and assumptions embedded within social, political, or cultural ideologies. It seeks to uncover power dynamic forces, imbalances, and inconsistencies within these ideologies to challenge hegemonic narratives and promote critical awareness. In any case, through the lyrical content, Brenda Fassie's "Black President" not only highlights the struggle against colonialism and apartheid but also provides an intricate depiction of Mandela's subjugative injustices in South Africa. Due to this fact, this article deconstructs the ideological attributes within this song, exploring how it positions Mandela as a symbol of defiance and the yearning for exhaustive

liberation. In addition to this scholarly pursuit, this musical expression could be viewed as an ethnological artifact that mirrors the collective consciousness of a nation during a crucial period of political upheaval. This is on account that the ideological critique entails interrogations about the representation of Mandela, the construction of heroism, and the role of music as a mechanism for political mobilization. In view of this fact, this scholarly dialogue ought to be regarded as one that draws connections between liberation movements in South Africa, particularly those that sought to eradicate colonialism and apartheid. This ideological critique unravels how the selected song navigates the intricacies of anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles and leadership subtleties, offering perspectives into Mandela's roles within the broader context of the South African liberation movement. In the end, with this scholarly scrutiny, one uncovers the ideological underpinnings of public memory and historical consciousness surrounding Mandela. Recall that music and language function as vehicles for social commentary, contributing to both the construction and dissemination of political ideologies and discourses. Beyond this reality, this scholarly discourse facilitates a meticulous examination of the complexities and contradictions inherent in political leadership, elucidating the contested nature of legacies and the varying perspectives within society and in musical linguistics.

With special reference to language, the significance of an ideological critique of the legacies of Mandela lies in the intricate evaluation of linguistic choices, symbolism, and narrative structures within the lyrics. On account of this, probing the language employed in "Black President" allows one to unmask layers of meanings, ethnological references, and the rhetorical strategies used to convey messages about this political leader and their legacies. In any event, one would recall that lyrics employ dramatic imagery and metaphorical language to depict activism and oppressive socio-political contexts (Diko, 2024). Considering this fact, musical linguists potentially dissect the symbolism within the language,

examining how specific words, phrases, and sentences contribute to the construction of denotation and the ideological stance of each song. In the same vein, linguistic examination unveils the rhetorical devices used to evoke emotion and provoke thought, illuminating the persuasive strategies employed in the song. Consequently, I underline that a language-focused examination of these songs contributes to a profound comprehension of the ideological critique of Mandela's legacies. It allows for an exposition of the interactivity of linguistic constituents, cultural implications, and rhetorical strategies, unmasking the ways in which language functions as a powerful mechanism for expressing and shaping political ideologies in the context of musical discourse—musical linguistics. It must be reiterated that the discussions of this article do not necessarily trend with Fassie's depiction of Mandela. Instead, a juxtaposed and balanced discussion is carried out. This means that the constructive and destructive contributions of Mandela are deliberated too. In so far as the significance of this scholarly discourse remains of the essence, it is prudent to acknowledge the existing body of knowledge through the review of literature. This is presented in the next section.

### **3. Literature review: the intersection of music and linguistics**

The intersection of music and linguistics, known as musical linguistics, represents a captivating arena where the intricate patterns of human communication converge with the emotive and expressive power of music. Researchers from diverse disciplines have delved into this intersection, unraveling the complex relationship between language and musical structures. The literature on this subject spans various domains, including cognitive science, anthropology, musicology, and psycholinguistics. For example, the advent of neuroimaging technologies, including functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) and Electro-Encephalography (EEG), has revolutionized the scrutinization of cognitive processes. Scholars like Koelsch (2014) and Patel (2003) have employed these techniques

to explore the neural underpinnings of music and language, allowing for a detailed examination of brain activity during various cognitive tasks. In the same vein, numerous scholarly discourses have identified overlapping neural networks engaged in the processing of both linguistic and musical elements. Functional neuroimaging scholars such as Peretz and Zatorre (2005), and Maess et al. (2001), reveal collective brain regions involved in syntactic processing, suggesting that the brain recruits similar networks to decipher the structural elements of both music and language. This overlapping activation provides compelling evidence for a cognitive nexus between these two domains. By the same token, musicologists and linguists have engaged in structural analyses to uncover linguistic elements entrenched in musical compositions. This denotes that the concept of musical syntax parallels linguistic syntax, with scholars like Lohmeyer (2023) and Diko (2024) identifying rhythmic and melodic structures that mirror grammatical constructs. Typically, this technique seeks to uncover the ways in which composers employ musical elements to convey meaning and narrative.

Similarly, ethnomusicologists have contributed to the discourse by exploring how linguistic features are entrenched in multiple musical traditions. For instance, Mngoma (1990) claims that tonal languages such as Mandarin Chinese, Thai, isiXhosa, and many others reveal connections between linguistic tones and melodic patterns. With this assertion in mind, it stands to reason to argue that cross-cultural investigations provide perspectives into how different societies utilize music and language symbiotically to express ethnological identity and convey narratives. Furthermore, this interdisciplinary technique augments human understanding of the ways in which humans communicate and delineate music, language, and culture. Having said that, the potential links between language acquisition and musical proficiency could be examined by psycholinguists and educators. This is based on the premise that Liang (2023) suggests that exposure to music constructively factors language development,

emphasizing the role of rhythm and melody in linguistic learning. This indicates that this line of research has implications for educational practices and intervention strategies in language and music education. In parallel to this view, it is perceptive to bear in mind that with the advent of computational tools, researchers have employed sophisticated algorithms and computational analyses to examine large datasets of musical and linguistic elements. In explaining this view, Brent (1996) indicates that these approaches offer quantitative insights into the statistical regularities and patterns shared between language and music, advancing human understanding of the intricate relationship between the two domains. While significant strides have been made in understanding the cognitive, structural, and communicative aspects of both domains, there are still notable gaps that persist. For instance, music and language are continually studied in distinct academic silos, limiting the potential for a more integrated understanding of their intersections.

Keeping this in mind, I propose that establishing interdisciplinary frameworks that encourage collaboration between these fields is essential for bridging gaps and advancing human comprehension of how linguistic and musical elements coalesce in human cognition and communication. As a matter of fact, interdisciplinary collaboration encompasses bringing together expert discourses from different disciplines, such as linguistics and musicology, to collectively address complex questions. This means that by breaking down silos, researchers could gain a more exhaustive understanding of the intricate relationships between linguistic and musical attributes. Similarly, this approach recognizes that language and music are interconnected facets of human expression, and probing them in isolation may obstruct a holistic comprehension of their collusive impact. The methodologies used in linguistic and musical research could differ significantly, posing challenges in creating a unified approach. Owing to this fact, bridging this gap requires the development of methodologies that seamlessly integrate linguistics and musical

analyses, allowing researchers to explore complex relationships across various levels, from syntax and semantics to musical structures and political discourses. Furthermore, this article exemplifies this interdisciplinary approach by analyzing a single song to critically evaluate Mandela's legacies. In the process, this article applies ideological critique as a theory to its discussions. All these are explained in the next section.

#### **4. Research methodology and theory**

It must be emphasized that this article does not follow a specific experimental design because of the nature of the phenomenon that is unraveled herein. Instead, this article focuses on one selected song as a source of data. One would recall that the examination of songs, particularly in the context of musical linguistics or exploring the cognitive dimensions of music and language, diverges from the traditional experimental design associated with empirical research (Long, 2014). While the experimental design is a cornerstone of scholarly inquiry, the examination of songs involves a more qualitative and interpretive approach (Diko 2024). In support of this view, Diko (2024) underlines that: ... the examination of songs entails subjective exposition. Listeners and analysts bring their own perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and emotions to the understanding of lyrics and musical elements. However, experimental research typically generates quantitative data that may be statistically examined. This facilitates objective comparisons and the identification of patterns or trends. In essence, while experimental design is valuable for controlled investigations and quantitative analyses, the examination of songs requires a different set of tools.

Over and above Diko's (2024) claim, scrutinizing songs leans towards a qualitative paradigm, focusing on interpretive exposition, interpretation, and understanding rather than statistical generalization. This approach is valuable for uncovering affluent contextual meanings, ethnological nuances, and the subjective experiences associated with music. Therefore, this article chooses to rely on Brenda

Fassie's "Black President", which is a song dedicated to Nelson Mandela, as a source of data. The choice of this song is motivated by the reality that songs serve as an affluent and multifaceted source of data, offering a unique forum through which this article explores various dimensions of human culture, emotions, politics, and societal dynamic forces, with special reference to Mandela. The quality of this song lies in the fact that it plays a central role in making commentary on political and leadership figures, providing a unique and influential platform for expressing opinions, dissent, and perspectives on those in power. This makes it clear that song lyrics use expressive and poignant language to convey political commentary. In fact, throughout history, musicians have used their art to voice dissent and protest against social, economic, and political injustices. Protest songs, in particular, employ musical linguistics to articulate grievances, call for change and transformation, and challenge leadership decisions. In the same vein, the linguistic components within the lyrics contribute to the storytelling dimensions of the music (Diko, 2024). What is also significant to bear in mind is that "Black President" encompasses symbolism and allegory to convey political messages subtly. This suggests that the choice of linguistic utterances and metaphorical expressions carries profound meanings that resonate with listeners familiar with the political context in South Africa.

Whereas Mandela departed the world on the 05th of December 2013, it remains imperative that his narratives and voice continue to be probed in an attempt to adopt their contributive rudiments and correct or avoid the non-contributive ones. This means that the importance of this song in this context lies in its ability to contribute to public discourse, configure political narratives, and serve as a form of social and political commentary. By the same token, songs provide a medium for artists to express dissent and critique political leaders or government policies. Whether through explicit lyrics or metaphorical expressions, musicians articulate opposition, highlighting concerns and calling for

accountability, among other constituents (Denisoff, 1970). In the process, the appreciation of the selected song herein as a source of data lies in the reality that it is a part of the historical record, preserving the sentiments and perspectives of a specific time such as the contemporary context. This is based on the premise that commentary in songs captures the collective response to political episodes, serving as a cultural artifact that future generations could refer to in order to comprehend the socio-political climate. In the same vein, these songs amplify the voices of subjugated communities by offering a forum to express discontent or advocate for social justice. In fact, commentary on political figures in songs mirrors the experiences of those directly affected by political decisions, providing a means for empowerment and solidarity. In so far as "Black President" remains significant, it is prudent to bear in mind that this article applies ideological critique as a theory of exposition.

Ideological critique refers to the examination and analysis of ideas, belief systems, moral principles, and underlying assumptions within a particular system or ideology. It entails a critical evaluation of the hegemonic narratives, ethical codes, and power structures to uncover implicit prejudices, contradictions, or the potential manipulation of ideas. Its aim is to reveal the ideological underpinnings that form perceptions, influence societal structures, and contribute to the formation of collective belief systems (Cook, 2001; Sankaran, 2020). In the context of this article, this theory involves scrutinizing the ideas and values that are profoundly ingrained in Fassie's "Black President" to uncover their perspectives on the legacies of Mandela. Typically, in the context of musical linguistics, ideological critique refers to the examination and analysis of the underlying ideological undercurrents nested within the linguistic components of musical expressions (Horton, 2001). It encompasses a critical assessment of the ideas, doctrines, values, and social perspectives conveyed through the lyrics, themes, and musical attributes of a song. In the process, this theory explores how language in songs (re)produces

and shapes communal ideologies, power structures, and cultural norms (Lemmon, 2023). In a nutshell, this theory involves a close examination of the lyrical contents, focusing on the choice of words, phrases, and expressions. It seeks to identify the ideological underpinnings and perspectives conveyed by the artist regarding a particular subject, event, or figure. In addition to this, artists use metaphorical language and symbolism in their lyrics to convey abstract and concrete ideas and perspectives. Bearing this in mind, this theory deciphers these metaphorical expressions and symbols to comprehend the underlying ideological messages. With this selected song as a source of data, as well as the theory of interpretation and analysis, it is imperative to now focus on the findings and discussions of this article in an attempt to address the already outlined aims. These are presented in the next section.

## 5. Findings and discussions

As previously stressed, in musical linguistics, ideological critique entails identifying and scrutinizing elements within songs that convey underlying ideologies, belief systems, or social perspectives. The critique in musical linguistics delves into the lyrics, examining the language used to express ideas, ideologies, and critiques related to political, social, or cultural matters. It was also underlined that songs may potentially contain implicit critiques of political figures, institutions, or prevailing ideologies. For this reason, probing these implicit messages reveals the artist's stance on societal and political issues more explicitly. It is on the grounds of this that it is important to observe Brenda Fassie's lyrical content in the song entitled "Black President" below:

The year 1963  
 The people's president  
 Was taken away by security men  
 All dressed in a uniform  
 The brutality, brutality  
 Oh no, my, my black president

Him and his comrades

Were sentenced to isolation  
 For many painful years  
 For many painful years  
 Many painful years  
 Of hard labor

They broke rocks  
 But the spirit was never broken  
 Never broken  
 Oh no, my, my black president

Hmm maa, hmm maa, hmm ma mama  
 Hmm maa, hmm maa, hmm ma mama  
 Hmm maa, hmm maa, hmm ma Madiba  
 Hmm maa, hmm maa, hmm ma Madiba  
 Ahh uyem-yem

They broke rocks  
 But the spirit was never broken  
 Never broken  
 Oh my black president

Let us rejoice for our president  
 Let us sing for our president  
 Let us pray for our president  
 Let us sing, let us dance  
 For Madiba, Madiba's freedom

Now in 1990  
 The people's president  
 Came out from jail  
 Raised up his hand and said  
 "Viva, viva, my people"

He walked the long road  
 Back, back to freedom  
 Back to freedom  
 Freedom for my black president

Let us rejoice for our president  
 Let us sing for our president  
 Let us pray for our president  
 Let us sing, let us dance  
 For Madiba, Madiba's freedom

We thank You Lord,  
For listening to our prayers  
Oh, my president

I will die for my president  
I will sing for my president  
I will stand and say

Viva, viva, viva, viva, viva, viva my president

These lyrics celebrate Nelson Mandela, referring to him as the people's president and underscoring his struggle against colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. Unequivocally, Mandela dedicated much of his life to the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggle. His activism and commitment to ending racial segregation and injustice resonated with a broad spectrum of the South African population. On account of this view, I contend that celebrating Mandela's legacy is crucial in contemporary contexts as it serves as a reminder of the perennial fight against injustice, racism, gender disparities, and oppression. In particular, Mandela's constructive legacy lies in his role as a symbol of determination, reconciliation, and the liberation struggle. His resolute commitment to ending colonialism and apartheid, and his advocacy for absolution and unity in post-apartheid and postcolonial South Africa are inspiring examples of contemporary movements advocating for human rights and social justice. While this is the case, it must be accepted that Mandela's fight against all forms of injustice is met with contemporary setbacks that demand acknowledgment and reflection as underscored by ideological critique as a theory. This denotes that despite the progress made in dismantling colonialism and apartheid, as well as achieving political liberation in South Africa, the tenacity of various forms of injustice in the present day underscores the progressing challenges faced by societies striving for justice and human rights. In view of this fact, by applying ideological critique to this score, contemporary setbacks include the persistence of economic disparities, health crises, racial and institutionalized discrimination, and systemic imbalances. It must

be stressed that the most affected by these setbacks are sidelined communities, including black South Africans, who continue to face the brunt of economic disparities, health crises, racial discrimination, and institutionalized inequalities. Through an ideological critique as a theory, these setbacks could be seen as symptomatic of entrenched power structures, historical injustices, and systemic imbalances perpetuated by hegemonic ideologies, revealing the progressing struggle for social justice and equity in the country. Given this context, Mandela's vision of a just and unprejudiced society faces headwinds in contexts where social, economic, and political structures perpetuate subjugation and discrimination.

In the main, the failure to comprehensively address these challenges could be regarded as a setback to Mandela's ideals that are embraced in Fassie's "Black President". These ideals include human rights, global solidarity, education, inclusivity and diversity, leadership by example, service to others, and many more. Moreover, the global escalation of xenophobia, nationalism, and authoritarianism poses challenges to the ethical codes of inclusivity and social justice that Mandela championed. In fact, countries like Hungary, Russia, Turkey, India, and South Africa are some of the many countries that are adversely affected by xenophobia, nationalism, and authoritarianism (Bieber, 2018; Kuzio, 2016). All these are some of the dimensions that the selected song pursues to embrace concerning Mandela's stance and legacy. However, it is greatly regrettable that these countries, among many others, are confronted by these challenges. This is in addition to the reality that in some instances, political leaders exploit divisive rhetoric and discriminatory policies, contrary to the spirit of Mandela's advocacy for unity and reconciliation as underscored by the linguistic phrase "The people's president". With this in mind, I contend that instead of advancing unity, these political leaders potentially exploit differences within society to consolidate power or pursue particular agendas. Therefore, this divisive approach with its linguistic rhetoric and discriminatory policies contributes to polarization,

eroding the sensibility of a collective national identity that Mandela sought to cultivate. In addition to this, the phrase “The people’s president” denotes a leader who works for the collective welfare of all citizens, regardless of their background. Therefore, when leaders deviate from this spirit and engage in discriminatory practices or exclusionary rhetoric, it not only undermines the principles of unity but also exacerbates social tensions and reinforces divisions. Beyond this challenge, Mandela, known for his accentuation on reconciliation and inclusivity, sought to build a united nation where citizens could transcend historical divisions.

Therefore, it stands to reason to argue that these setbacks that run contrary to Mandela’s ideologies extend to the international stage, where conflicts, human rights transgressions, and instances of injustice persist. This denotes that Mandela’s call for global solidarity and cooperation faces challenges in a world marked by geopolitical tensions and the erosion of international ethical codes. Owing to this fact, recognizing these contemporary setbacks is crucial for several reasons. Among others is that it evokes a reevaluation of strategies, policies, and societal perceptions to address persistent injustices effectively. It underscores the importance of continued activism and advocacy to uphold Mandela’s legacy. By the same token, acknowledging contemporary setbacks allows for a more intricate understanding of the complexities involved in the pursuit of justice, prompting a collective commitment to overcoming present-day challenges. In addition to this, acknowledging Mandela’s positive legacy helps promote a collective sensibility of conviction and empowerment. It encourages individuals to believe in the possibility of positive change and transformation, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges. As a matter of fact, the positive influence and contribution that Mandela advocated for is patent in the phrase “Let us pray for our president”. Considering the ideological critique as a theory, this mirrors a call for spiritual solidarity and highlights Mandela’s belief in the power of prayer and collective values to bring people

together, transcending divisions. This means that the use of “Let us ...” underlines collective participation. This is based on the premise that Mandela encouraged a sense of collective responsibility, urging people, especially people of the lower class, to come together in prayer for the security of the nation. This aligns with his broader message of unity and inclusivity. This song, by invoking prayer, symbolically underscores a communal spiritual connection that goes beyond political or ideological differences. It suggests a common ground where individuals, despite their variegated backgrounds, could come together in a spirit of benevolence or the spirit of humanity. Furthermore, the act of praying for the president conveys a positive and constructive outlook. Mandela’s advocacy for reconciliation involved advancing a mindset that looked forward to a well-proportioned future rather than dwelling on past discordancies. This view should not necessarily be misconstrued to suggest a complete disregard or nullification of past discordances. Instead, it should be viewed to suggest reevaluating past grievances and working towards improving them.

This underlines that Mandela’s leadership demonstrates that transformation is achievable through amicable means and negotiation, offering a powerful model for conflict resolution and social progress. Despite this, it is accordingly important to recognize the adverse aspects of Mandela’s legacy within a balanced commemoration given that ideological critique makes it permissible to critique and reflect on public figures rationally. This necessitated acknowledging his strategic compromises during negotiations, grappling with the persistent economic challenges that emerged post-apartheid, and limitations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which was established in 1996 with the primary aim of promoting national healing, justice, and reconciliation in the aftermath of colonialism and apartheid. Considering these points, I argue that Mandela’s focus on reconciliation and avoiding a radical transformation of the economic structure contributed to the tenacity of economic disparities

in post-apartheid South Africa. As a result of this, South Africa continues to grapple with high levels of inequality, and more decisive action could have been taken to address these issues during Mandela's presidency. In fact, while the TRC was a groundbreaking initiative, it faced criticism for granting amnesty to perpetrators of gross human rights violations (Byrne, 2004; Mamdani, 2002). This highlighted that such compromises may have unintentionally undermined the pursuit of justice for victims and advanced a perception of impunity for those responsible for colonial and apartheid atrocities. Over and above this, I put forward that Mandela's dedication to reconciliation and avoiding vengeance led to sabotage in terms of implementing structural changes such as economic reforms, corporate restructuring, constitutional amendments, and rural planning and development. This approach left many of the economic and social structures of colonialism and apartheid intact, obstructing the prospects for legitimate transformation. In addition to this, Mandela's image as a global icon of reconciliation sometimes contrasts with the ongoing challenges within South Africa. That is the reason Choi (2007) suggests that international admiration for Mandela's persona may have overshadowed local issues, making it challenging to address deep-rooted problems at home. Similarly, the African National Congress (ANC), which has been a national ruling party in South Africa since 1994, under Mandela's leadership, has faced criticism for certain policies and decisions. This includes accusations of corruption and money laundering, inadequate service delivery, and concerns about the party's ability to effectively address contemporary challenges.

It must be underscored herein that these criticisms do not negate or downplay Mandela's significant and positive contributions to South Africa's and global history. Instead, they underline that Mandela encountered complex challenges during the transition from colonialism and apartheid to democracy, and these critiques mirror ongoing dialogues about the best approaches to achieving justice, reconciliation, and socio-economic transformation.

Inevitably, Mandela's legacy is multifaceted, and (re)assessments of his presidency and its long-term impact vary. In contrast to these critiques, it is further important to observe that the lyrical content in "Black President" presents Mandela as a symbol of opposition, resilience, and triumph over subjugation. The lyrics acknowledge his imprisonment, hard labor, and isolation, but emphasize the unbroken spirit of Mandela and his comrades. Specifically, the narrative of an unbroken spirit highlights Mandela's refusal to succumb to the dehumanizing effects of imprisonment and subjugation. It becomes a voice of defiance against injustice, with Mandela emerging as a symbol of unwavering commitment to the principles of freedom and equality. This means that by acknowledging the austerities Mandela endured, this narrative humanizes him and his fellow activists. It emphasizes the personal sacrifices made for the larger goal of dismantling colonialism and apartheid, making Mandela relatable and inspiring to people around the world.

By the same token, the celebration of Mandela's release on the 11th of February in 1990, after spending 27 years in prison, and the subsequent call for rejoicing, singing, and dancing suggests a positive and optimistic depiction of Mandela's legacy. Given this context, the lyrics concentrate on Mandela's imprisonment, his triumphant release, and the joyous celebration of liberation, thereby constructing a narrative that is selectively optimistic. This is based on the premise that an ideological critique potentially questions whether this narrative downplays certain complexities, such as Mandela's compromises in negotiations, the limits of the TRC, or ongoing socio-economic challenges in post-apartheid South Africa, as previously outlined. This indicates that while the lyrics provide a powerful and uplifting narrative of Mandela's struggle and eventual triumph over colonialism and apartheid, they present a somewhat selective and idealized view of his legacy. It is for this reason it was underlined earlier that an ideological critique in musical linguistics evaluates issues from both sides allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the intricacies involved. Recall that many socio-political issues are

inherently multifaceted., and a one-sided evaluation oversimplifies the reality, leading to incomplete or distorted conclusions. This is indicative of the reality that considering variegated viewpoints generates a more proportionally weighted assessment of a situation. It helps avoid a skewed or prejudiced exposition that results from solely focusing on one perspective. A balanced critique promotes fairness and objectivity. With special reference to musical linguistics, examining diverse expositions of these lyrics, and considering cultural, historical, and individual perspectives, leads to a more multifaceted understanding of the musical expression. Just as ethnological context is crucial in understanding the meaning of lyrics or musical styles, a balanced assessment considers the cultural diversity of expositions. This ensures that the analysis does not favor one cultural perspective over another.

What is also important to bear in mind is that these lyrics celebrate freedom, but an ideological critique allows one to question how much freedom has translated into tangible improvements for the majority of South Africans, particularly in terms of socio-economic justice, poverty reduction, and access to education and healthcare. Bearing this in mind, I contend that despite political freedom, South Africa grapples with significant socio-economic imbalances, with disparities in income, education, and access to services disproportionately affecting certain communities, especially underprivileged communities. Similarly, joblessness, especially among the youth, remains a pressing challenge, obstructing the realization of economic liberation for many South Africans. For instance, youth unemployment in South Africa is currently standing at 32.6% (Terrance, 2023). In addition to this, the issue of land redistribution has been a complex and contentious one, with slow progress in addressing historical injustices related to land ownership. This is compounded by corruption within political and economic arenas that have raised concerns, impacting effective governance and equitable resource distribution. It is for these reasons that ongoing social movements and advocacy efforts highlight that, while progress has been made, there

is still work to be done in addressing systemic failures and advancing social justice. Indeed, the ongoing resilience of democratic institutions amidst challenges necessitates sustained and collaborative endeavors aimed at reinforcing governance and enhancing accountability. This is the reason I outlined previously that by primarily focusing on Mandela's imprisonment, release, and subsequent celebration, these lyrics could be critiqued for not providing a more exhaustive view of the complex political, social, and economic terrain in postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa. For instance, repeated phrases like "my black president", "I will die for my president" and "Viva, viva, viva" contribute to a heroic depiction of Mandela. While this is a common way to express admiration and support, it must be critiqued for potentially glossing over more complex dimensions of Mandela's political decisions and policies, as previously underscored. As a matter of fact, this highlights a common theme in political and cultural representations—the tendency to create heroic narratives that underscore the positive aspects of a leader while downplaying or overlooking complexities and potential shortcomings. In parallel to this, referring to Mandela as "my president" and expressing a willingness to die for him contributes to a form of hero worship that may potentially discourage critical examination of his policies and decisions. This kind of personalization could make it challenging for people to engage in constructive critique or interrogation. On the grounds of this, I argue that the use of celebratory and emotive language, while powerful, oversimplifies Mandela's political decisions and policies. This means that it does not adequately capture the complexity of the challenges he faced or the trade-offs involved in the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa. Consequently, heroic portrayals shy away from nuanced dialogues about the decisions made by political leaders. Therefore, an ideological critique potentially argues that a more nuanced dialogue is necessary to understand the full scope of Mandela's legacy, including both successes and downfalls. With these findings and discussions in mind, it is

perceptive to observe the concluding remarks of this article. These are presented in the next section.

## 6. Conclusion

Brenda Fassie's iconic song "Black President" serves as a poignant reflection and ideological critique of the legacy of Nelson Mandela, capturing both the admiration and the intricacies surrounding the revered leader. This musical tribute to Mandela, with its linguistic utterances, continually referred to as the "Black President", encapsulates the spirit of a nation in transition and the challenges faced in the pursuit of liberation and justice. Through Fassie's lyrics, one delves into a musical and linguistic narrative that navigates the highs and lows of Mandela's legacy, offering a multifaceted perspective on the complexities of leadership, politics, and societal transformation. This song opens with a jubilant proclamation of "uMadiba", an affectionate term for Mandela, signifying a sense of familiarity and closeness between the leader and the people. This means that Fassie's choice of the term "Black President" is itself charged with political and racial significance. It echoes the historical struggle against colonialism and apartheid, where the presidency had long been associated with white leadership, and the term "Black President" mirrors the dreams and aspirations of a disenfranchised majority. As the song unfolds, the lyrical content becomes a canvas on which Fassie paints a portrait of Mandela's character, underscoring both his heroism and humanity. Mandela is (re)produced as a leader who endures struggles and setbacks, epitomizing the collective agony and sacrifice of the nation. Yet, amidst the challenges, he stands as a symbol of resilience and conviction, a beacon for those yearning for justice and equality. The ideological critique herein lies in the acknowledgment of Mandela's humanity—a reminder that even iconic leaders are fallible, facing the burdens of leadership and the complexities of navigating a divided society towards unity.

The song's chorus, a repetitive and rhythmic chant of "uMadiba" becomes a rallying cry, transforming into a rallying cry not merely for

Mandela as an individual, but for the comprehensive movement and the populace whose aspirations he embodied. Fassie elevates Mandela to to mythical proportions, underlining his role as a unifying figure and a symbol of defiance. The ideological critique profoundly interwoven in this anthem lies in its propensity to both celebrate Mandela's accomplishments and challenge the collective memory of his legacy. Nonetheless, Fassie does not shy away from addressing the challenges and contradictions within Mandela's legacy. The lyrics acknowledge the persistence of poverty and disparity, questioning whether the dreams of liberation have been fully realized. In so doing, Fassie engages in a subtle critique of postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa, drawing attention to the social and economic disparities that persist despite the political transformation. The song's bridge introduces a mournful tone, lamenting the continued struggles faced by the people even under the leadership of the black president. In other words, Fassie's poignant lyrics highlight the tension between the ideals of the anti-apartheid struggle and the socio-economic realities post-liberation. Therefore, the ideological critique becomes a reflection on the unfinished business of the revolution, urging listeners to question the extent to which Mandela's presidency translated into tangible and concrete improvements for the majority.

In the final verses, Fassie's vocal delivery becomes more urgent, expressing a plea for transformation and renewal. The repetition of the phrase "We don't want to fight no more" underscores a collective desire for a society free from strife and injustice. This plea for peace and progress formed the heart of the ideological critique, contesting not only the historical legacy of Mandela but also the present realities that require an ongoing commitment to the principles of justice and equality. It is also perceptive to observe that Fassie's "Black President" not only serves as an ideological critique of Mandela's legacy but also offers a compelling commentary on language, showcasing how linguistic choices contribute to the song's profundity and

resonance. The use of language in the song plays a central role in conveying complex emotions, capturing historical narratives, and engaging listeners in a reflection on South Africa's socio-political terrain. As this article progresses towards its ending, future scholarly implications of conducting an ideological critique of Fassie's 'Black President', which celebrates Mandela, could include extensive insights into the complexities of Mandela's legacy and its reception among different social groups. This denotes that by examining the song's lyrics, themes, and reception, scholarly critics may uncover intricate perspectives on Mandela's leadership and the socio-political context of postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa. This exposition could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the tensions between idealized narratives of Mandela's presidency and the lived realities of marginalized communities in South Africa. In closing, Fassie's "Black President" stands as a multifaceted ideological critique of Mandela's legacy. The song weaves together admiration, celebration, and a sober reflection on the challenges that persisted in postcolonial and post-apartheid contexts. Fassie's lyrical prowess creates a musical tapestry that invites listeners to engage meticulously with the complexities of leadership, the unfinished journey towards equality, and the ongoing pursuit of a just and unified South Africa. Through this musical standpoint, Mandela's legacy is not just a historical relic but a living discourse, inspiring reflection, dialogue, and a renewed commitment to the ideals of justice and liberation.

### Author contributions

Mlamli Diko is the sole author of this article.

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