

Contextualizing South Africa's Freedom Songs: A Critical Appropriation of Lee Hirsch's *Amandla!: A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony*

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Abstract

This article offers an examination of Lee Hirsch's *Amandla!: A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony*. Beginning with the liberation songs that gained salience during the National Party's implementation of apartheid policy in 1948 and ending with the struggle songs of a post-1994 democratic South Africa, the documentary's aim is to retrieve and recount the role of freedom songs in antiapartheid struggle. Using the writings of Ernesto Laclau, John Mbiti, Paul Ricoeur, and Alfred Schutz, this essay will argue that liberation songs are ancestral text that were partly used by antiapartheid activists to create their collective identities. This essay will further argue that *Amandla!* set itself the task of retrieving South Africa's liberation songs and liberation's praise singers from the ancestral region John Mbiti calls Zamani to a region he calls Sasa. However, this essay will assert that the ancestral retrieval task of this documentary is compromised by the documentary's privileging of the hegemonic groups within the African National Congress (ANC),

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the documentary's presentation of the ANC as a monolithic and univocal organization, and the producer's snowball sampling method. Arguing that this documentary relegates some of the South African struggle experiences into Zamani, this essay will attempt to correct these omissions and broaden the context of liberation songs.

Keywords

Amandla, African philosophy, ancestral text, liberation songs, collective identity

This article offers an examination of Lee Hirsch's award-winning documentary, *Amandla!: A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony* (2002). We argue that the aim of this documentary is to seemingly retrieve South Africa's liberation songs and liberation's praise singers from the ancestral region John Mbiti calls Zamani—an ancestral space that is mostly forgotten by the living—to a space called Sasa—a region that is within the horizon of the living. However, the documentary relegates some of the South African struggle experiences into Zamani. Thus, the essay will attempt to highlight and correct these oversights in an effort to broaden the context of South African liberation songs. Using the writings of Ernesto Laclau, John Mbiti, Paul Ricoeur, and Alfred Schutz, we argue that liberation songs such as the ones highlighted in Hirsch's film are ancestral texts that were partly used by antiapartheid activists to create their collective identities. We assert that the ancestral retrieval task of this documentary is, however, compromised by the following: The privileging of hegemonic groups within the African National Congress (ANC); the documentary's presentation of the ANC as a monolithic and univocal organization; and the producer's snowball sampling method.

Ancestors as a Text

This essay begins with a critical discussion of the concept of ancestors. Some African beliefs hold that human beings are sent by the Gods into the world of the living to accomplish specific tasks. With death these tasks are terminated, and the experiences of the deceased are stored in various media such as narratives, tools, archives, and electronic storage devices. While all past experiences are stored, not all of these experiences are in the horizon of the living. John Mbiti makes a distinction between two kinds of ancestral storage spaces: Sasa and Zamani. Mbiti argues that after "the physical death, the individual or spiritual entity continues to exist in the Sasa [region] . . ." (p. 24). This

spiritual entity and its experiences are remembered by the living. Mbiti calls those individuals whose experiences are remembered by the living, the “living-dead.” In contrast to Sasa, Zamani is the abode of those who have been forgotten; those who have been “cast out of the Sasa [region], and are in effect excommunicated, their personal immortality is destroyed and they are turned into a state of non-existence” (Mbiti, 1990, p. 26). While the living-dead and their experiences are in the horizon of the living, the inhabitants of Zamani are completely dead and are outside of the horizon of the living (Mtshali, 2009).

Mbiti further argues that funeral rites constitute a mechanism through which the ancestral experiences transition from Zamani to Sasa. Those who are not accorded proper funeral rites are relegated to Zamani. Thus, alluding to the latter ancestral experiences, *Amandla!* commences with footage that depicts the South African National Party’s (NP) ascent to power; forced removals; the exhumation of Vuyisile Mini’s body; and Vusi Mahlasela’s song *When you come back*. The unknown grave that is the focus of the first line of Mahlasela’s song refers to the graves of activists like Vuyisile Mini, a composer of South African freedom songs, who was executed by the Apartheid government. Those who were executed by the Apartheid regime were buried without the involvement of their families, friends, and comrades. Some of Mini’s family members attest to this when they say that Mini was killed and buried like a dog. The experiences of all those who were executed and buried by the state were therefore symbolically banished to Zamani.

For the apartheid government, it was not enough to silence political activists; attempts were also made to remove antiapartheid cultural material from the public sphere. Thandi Modise, an antiapartheid activist and current premier of South Africa’s North West province (2014), as well as a participant in the documentary, reminds us that antiestablishment songs such as *Nkosi Sikelel’ I Afrika*—the anthem of the oppressed during apartheid rule—were banned. The apartheid government was also able to censor antiapartheid cultural material through its monopoly of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Thus, cultural objects such as songs and books were symbolically relegated to Zamani by the Apartheid state. In the case of Mini’s burial, some African beliefs hold that these abandoned and restless ancestral spirits cannot contribute to the well-being of the living. Mbiti argues that the “departed resent [being exiled to Zamani], and the living do all they can to avoid it because it is feared that it would bring illness and misfortunes [to the living]” (p. 26). Sibongile Khumalo’s *Untold story*, a song featured in the documentary, speaks of these restless spirits. Khumalo, a classical musician, explains, “It [the song] is saying let their demise [the demise of those who sacrificed their lives for freedom], let their destruction not be for naught.”

Thus, the exhumation of Mini's body could be read as symbolic of the transference of the banished experiences of the liberation struggle from Zamani to Sasa.

Songs as Ancestral Texts

The concepts of "text" and "ancestor" will play a pivotal role in this discussion. In particular, we argue that liberation songs are ancestral texts. In "What is a text?" Paul Ricoeur defines a text as "a discourse fixed by writing" (p. 44). Writing "preserves the discourse and makes it an archive available for individual and collective memory" (p. 45). Furthermore, the separation of the "text from the oral situation entails a veritable upheaval in the relation between language and the world, as well as in the relation between language and various subjectivities concerned (that of the author and that of the reader)" (pp. 45-46). The text appears as if it were "in the air, outside or without a world" (p. 47). In *From Text to Action*, Ricoeur (1991) argues that the "relevance and importance of a text has to transcend its relevance and importance for the author" (pp. 154-155). Ricoeur therefore suggests that the five characteristics of a text are objectivity, autonomy, openness, importance, and relevance. Thus, a written discourse is a text because of its objective and autonomous existence; that is, it is separable from its author. A written discourse is also open to all those who can read. To be a text, a written discourse has to be important and relevant to some individuals or groups. Ricoeur generalizes the concept of a text to include all objects that share these characteristics.

There is a parallel relation between authorship of a text and life. Authors of written texts are guided by their purposes as to the kind of work they produce. While novelists create the world of their works, they "do not invent everything anew when they write: their works are situated within the context of established literary genres . . . which must be taken into account during the writing process . . ." (Mkhize, 2004, p. 61). Similarly, some African beliefs hold that human beings come into the world with a divinely imbued purpose. Like authors of written texts, individuals actualize their purposes under given historical conditions. Death marks an end to an individual's life project. Funeral and other rites associated with death symbolically separate the deceased from the living. These rites also ensure that the deceased has a safe journey to the ancestral land. Thus, the deceased's experiences are autonomized and objectivised. However, the experiences of the deceased, of the ancestors, are open to interpretation by the living. Thus, one of the labels isiZulu culture gives to ancestors is that of *izithutha* (the foolish ones). Pointing to the risks associated with this openness, an isiZulu adage warns,

“Do not talk for me, I am not an ancestor.” Nonetheless, ancestral spirits are important and relevant because they carry the messages of the living to the ancestral world. They are also responsible for protecting the living. Thus, like a text ancestors are objective, autonomous, open, important, and relevant.

To argue that liberation songs are ancestral texts, this essay will show that these songs are objective, autonomous, open, important, and relevant. With regard to the authorship of these songs, some songs such as *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika* and *Nans' indod' emnyama Verwoerd* have identifiable composers. *Nkosi sikel' iAfrika* was composed by Enoch Sontonga in the late 19th century while *Nans' indod' emnyama Verwoerd* was composed by Vuyisile Mini in the 1950s. *Thina sizwe, Wasiqoqela ndawonye*, and *Sobashiy' abazal' ekhaya* were probably products of collective improvisation and do not have identifiable authors. An individual might compose a song but others might alter it before it is publicly used. Hugh Masekela, a South African jazz musician and one of *Amandla's!* participants, argues that songs “select themselves. If people do not like them, they will tell you to stop.” Claiming “African people always made music, there was no individual ownership,” a focus group that was organized for the documentary at South Africa's FM 99.8 studio corroborate the collective authorship of some of these songs. Pointing to this collective authorship, Lindiwe Zulu, a participant in the documentary as well as a former member of the ANC's military wing and current member of the ANC's National Executive Committee (2014), gives an example of a song titled *Lihambile* that was composed after the death of some of her comrades.

Cultural objects become objective and independent of their makers once their composers put them in the public sphere. While an art object imposes boundaries on how it can be used, these boundaries may transcend the author's intention. For example, Sontonga, the composer of *Nkosi sikelel' i-Afrika*, might have

composed [this song] as an African Christian hymn without thought of political protest. However, the folklike simplicity of the melody and the sincerity and deeply felt sentiment of the words made a direct and instantaneous appeal to all Africans . . . (Rhodes, 1962, p. 17)

Similarly, once Mini had composed his *Nans' indod' emnyama Verwoerd*, it became independent of him and was available for later generations to use.

These songs, as texts, are open to different interpretation by different social activists. Rhodes (1962) points out that Christian hymns served African nationalists as “covert expression of protest against colonialism” (p. 16). Two of *Amandla's!* creative consultants, Sifiso Ntuli and S'busiso Nxumalo,

indicate that most of the liberation songs were simply reinterpretations of religious songs. Political activists would alter and radicalize religious songs by "Putting an A.K. 47 there, and taking out a bible there." Another example is *Meadowlands*, a song that emerged as a response to the Apartheid regime's forced removal program. While this song by the 1950s band, *The All Star Flutes*, simply lamented forced removals, two documentary participants, Sophie Mgcina (a musician) and Dolly Rathebe (an actor), point out that listeners often changed and radicalized the lyrics to vent their anger against apartheid.

Amandla!, through the voices of various South African commentators, wrestles with the importance of these liberation songs. Sifiso Ntuli, for example, argues that freedom songs were a means of "communicating with people who otherwise would not have understood where we are coming from. You could give them a long political speech but they would not understand." Upon singing a particular liberation song, the listener would say, according to Ntuli, "I know where you guys are coming from." In this role, especially for an international audience, freedom songs disclosed the experiences of Black South Africans and played an important role in creating an international anti-apartheid movement.

Freedom songs facilitated communication not only with the international community but also within South African liberation movements. Duma ka Ndlovu asserts in the documentary that people related to songs and touched each other's hearts. Ndlovu points out that people used songs to communicate with their God(s). Pointing to the centrality of songs in African spirituality, he argues,

One of the ways in which an African feels closer to his or her creator is through song. We were raised in families and homes where our parents would break into a song at the slightest provocation. When your mother could not figure out what to feed you for that night because she did not have any money, she came back from looking for a job [and] she would break into a dirge that would express how she felt.

While Duma ka Ndlovu highlights the healing role of music for South Africans living under apartheid's oppressive thumb, once-exiled musician Abdullah Ibrahim describes a culture of lies and schizophrenia. Ibrahim maintains that in this stifling environment, "music was part of liberating ourselves." However, this liberatory aspect of the music is compromised by the role of these songs in masking reality. Peter Makarube, a music journalist, for instance, argues that freedom songs were "used when people were very angry, irrational, facing bullets with stones." Vincent Vena, an activist, similarly

alleges that freedom songs “made us not to see the bullets and the guns that the whites used to shoot us.” Interestingly, the contention made by formerly exiled South African jazz musician, Hugh Masekela, that these songs were used to frighten the riot police—who, though fearful, maintained a stoic presence—is confirmed in the documentary by the former national head of the riot police, general Andrian de la Rosa. That the oppressed rattled South Africa’s awesome state machinery with nothing more than music, wooden guns, and stones says much about the so-called Black danger, or *die swart gevaar*, that haunted the psyches of White South Africans. Liberation songs therefore constitute an ambivalent ancestral text with both rational and irrational possibilities.

Ancestral Text and Collective Identity

This essay has so far argued that liberation songs are ancestral texts. We will use Alfred Schutz’s phenomenology of music and Ernesto Laclau’s (2005) theory of populism to articulate the connection between liberation songs and collective identity. Schutz (1977) argues that when we perform a song we symbolically travel the same musical path as a composer. Although the composer and the performer may be separated “by hundreds of years, the latter participates with quasi-simultaneity in the former’s stream of consciousness by performing with him step by step the ongoing articulation of his thought” (Schutz, 1977, p. 114). It is as if a performer awakens an ancestral composer and invites him or her to Sasa. In the case of more than one performer, each “coperformer’s actions is oriented not only by the composer’s thought and his relationship to the audience but also reciprocally by the experiences in the inner and outer time of his fellow performer” (Schutz, 1977, p. 116). There is thus a “mutual tuning-in relationship” and a formation of collective identity among coperformers. For Ernesto Laclau, this mutual tuning-in relationship and the emergence of collective identity are facilitated by the existence of shared and unresolved grievances.

The documentary argues that each generation of antiapartheid activists had its own songs. The documentary also claims that the collective identity of the participants evolved with the evolution of the phases of the antiapartheid struggle. *Amandla!* groups antiapartheid struggle into the following five phases: The advent of the NP and the ANC’s extraparliamentary opposition; the apartheid government’s political repression and the period of exile and underground politics; the 1976 uprising; the 1980s or the era of people’s war; and finally the birth of the postapartheid era.

Hirsch’s documentary introduces the first phase of South Africa’s liberation struggle with a narrative text that accords the key role to the NP’s 1948

apartheid policy. This is accompanied by footage of Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid policy, telling the world that apartheid is good neighborliness. The documentary shows footage of the forced removals of Black people from Sophiatown to Meadowlands as an exemplification of the apartheid policy. As the documentary does not link the new apartheid government to previous colonial administrations, a viewer not familiar with South African history may get an impression that the colonization of South Africa began in 1948.

For *Amandla!*, *Nkosi sikelela i-Afrika* and *Nans'indod'emnyama Verwoerd* are, among others, the two songs that capture the first phase of the liberation struggle. As already indicated, *Nkosi sikelela i-Afrika* was composed by Enoch Sontonga in the last decade of the 19th century:

Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika	God bless Africa
Maluphakanyisw' uphondo lwayo,	May thy horn rise up
Yizwa imithandazo yethu,	Hear our prayers
Nkosi sikelela, thina lusapho lwayo.	God bless us thy children
Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso,	God protect our nation
O fedise dintwa le matshwenyeho,	Stop the war and suffering
O se boloke, O se boloke setjhaba sa heso,	Protect us, protect our nation
Setjhaba sa Afrika	The African Nation

In performing this song, the performers invite Sontonga and his contemporaries to Sasa. This song points to the shared and unresolved grievances: that is, the war and suffering faced by its protagonists. The dramatis personae in this song are God and the nation. An omnipotent and transcendent God listens to and answers the pleas of the nation. While the nation is a protagonist, the antagonist is not named. In the spirit of the song's Christian origin, judgment is not passed against the persecutors. We are therefore given an impression of a homogeneous nation with no class, race, or gender distinctions. This is partly the reason that Duma ka Ndlovu asserts that this particular song is a soothing and unthreatening prayer. *Nkosi sikelela* imagines one transcendent God who anchors one African nation that eclipses individual ethnic groups. The nation that is imagined by *Nkosi sikelela* emerges in the context of a threatening environment.

Amandla! places *Nans' indod'emnyama*, a song composed by Vuyisile Mini, in the same period as *Nkosi sikelela*:

Nans' indod' emnyama Verwoerd	Here comes the black man Verwoerd
Nans' indod' emnyama Verwoerd	Here comes the black man Verwoerd
Bhasobha nans' indod' emnyama Verwoerd	Watch out for the black man Verwoerd
Bhasobha nans' indod' emnyama Verwoerd	Watch out for the black man Verwoerd

Assuming that these shared grievances are still unresolved, the song points to the hardening of positions and the emergence of divisions, or what Laclau calls an “internal frontier” (p. 5) between those who have power and the underdog. Prefiguring *The Wretched of the Earth's* Manichean world, Mini’s song warns Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of the apartheid ideology as well as South Africa’s prime minister from 1958 to 1966, of the emerging radicalism among Black people. In contrast to *Nkosi sikelela*, which does not name its antagonist, *Nans' indod'emnyama* names the apartheid state as its antagonist and the “black man” as the protagonist. This song also introjects the virtues of courage into the oppressed, and attunes its participants and listeners to what appeared as an inevitable confrontation between the apartheid state and the Black majority. Thus, Jeremy Cronin, a participant in the documentary and the deputy minister of public works (2014), suggests that this song played an important role as an organizing tool. While *Nkosi sikelela* envisions a homogeneous nation, *Nans' indod'emnyama* envisages a populist entity divided between the “black man” and the apartheid state.

Amandla! fails to see the two trends within the 1950s ANC that are symbolized by *Nkosi sikelela* and *Nansi indoda emnyama*. The first trend believed in petitions and cooperation with the government of the day, while the second trend was confrontational and argued for the leadership of the Black elite in the antiapartheid struggle. These contradictions within the ANC culminated in the breakaway of the Africanists and the consequent formation of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), which initiated the 1960 antipass campaign. In conflict with historical sources, the conversation between documentary participants, Sophie Mgcina and Dolly Rathebe, accords the ANC the primary role in the 1960 antipass campaign. The government responded with brutal force to this campaign, the result being the Sharpeville massacre where at least 67 unarmed demonstrators were killed and more than 180 were injured.

In addition, the apartheid government passed laws that outlawed political organizations such as the ANC and the PAC.¹ Intensified repression eventually forced these organizations into exile.

The documentary's narrative text erroneously accords the pivotal moment of the antiapartheid struggle to the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela, the result of which was that "apartheid government successfully repressed dissent for more than a decade." The documentary presents the exile period as one of passivity in which individuals and collectives simply responded to the government's repression. Personal stories of Sifiso Ntuli, Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, and Abdullah Ibrahim are used in the documentary to portray the disabling effects of exile. Ntuli calls exile a spiritual desert while Makeba reminisces about the death of her daughter during this trying period. Masekela, on the other hand, points to the cultural alienation that accompanied exile life. For Ibrahim, "The hardest thing in exile was dreaming. Because you would dream that you were at home . . . [But] you would wake up to the reality that you are not, and can't go. You cannot go back." Thandi Modise suggests that the shootings, bannings, and exile of the central leadership broke the peoples' spirit.

The documentary argues that *Thina sizwe esimnyama* is one of the songs that encapsulate this second period of the liberation struggle:

Thina sizwe,	We the nation
Thina sizwe esimnyama	We the black nation
Sikhalela	We lament
Sikhalela izwe lethu	We lament the loss of our land
Elathathwa	Which was taken
Elathathwa ngabamhlope	Which was taken by white people
Sithi mabayeke,	We demand that they stop
Mabayek'umhlaba wethu	We demand that they return our land

Thina sizwe is one of those songs without known composers. Singing this song is thus an invitation to the wandering spiritual inhabitants of the unknown graves to come to *Sasa*. For this song the shared and unresolved grievance that holds the collective together is land expropriation by the

“white people.” *Thina sizwe* names the protagonist as the Black nation and the antagonists as White people who took Black people’s land. Like *Nans’ indod’ emnyama*, *Thina sizwe* draws the boundaries between the protagonists and the antagonists. While *Nans’ indod’ emnyama* warned the apartheid regime of an imminent attack by the Black man, *Thina sizwe* simply demands that land be returned.

For the documentary, *Wasiqoqela ndawonye* is another song that belongs to the second phase of the antiapartheid struggle. This song illuminates the contradictions within the Black collective:

Wasiqoqela ndawonye	You have moved us into one place
Hulumeni senzeni?	Government, what have we done?
Wasiqoqela ndawonye	You have moved us into one place
Hulumeni Senzeni?	Government, what have we done?
Sesibona lezompimpi	We see the informants
Sesibona lezompimpi	We see the informants
Zifun’ukudla nathi	Wanting to eat with us
Sizabalaza sodwa	We struggle on our own
Sizabalaza sodwa	We struggle on our own

This song points to what Laclau (2005) calls the subversion of the “internal frontier” (p. 8), that is, the division within the collective. By pointing to the divisions within the nationalist movement, this song betrays the narrative voice’s focus on the nationalist movement as homogeneous. The dramatis personae in this song are the government, the collective (which may be political prisoners, political organizations, or the nation), and government informants. This song points to internal frictions between the collectives of freedom fighters and government informants who do not contribute positively to the struggle but want to benefit from it. Prefiguring the 1980s and the 1990s environment where the label of government informant equaled a death sentence, this song yearns for a simple world with clear boundaries between the freedom fighters and government informants. The collective identity of antiapartheid activists, at this time, was dissipating.

The documentary correctly points to the passivity of ordinary people during the 1960s, but it fails to hint at the increased activity of the liberation movement's elite. Both the ANC and the PAC, which had commissioned representatives to create external missions, spent most of the 1960s rebuilding their organizational structures and preparing their military wings. However, this process did not run smoothly as the liberation movement was characterized by infighting, disconnection from events inside South Africa, and frustration among the idle military cadres. While the ANC was able to resolve its contradictions by centralizing power structures in a conference held in Morogoro, Tanzania, the PAC was riddled by internal turmoil until the late 1970s (Kondlo, 2003; Ndebele & Nieftagodien).

Amandla! glosses over the period that covers the early 1960s to the early 1970s. For the director and producers of the documentary, it suffices to maintain that "the apartheid government successfully repressed dissent for more than a decade." While it is true that the banning and exile of political organizations left a vacuum that was filled by a liberal and White-dominated student federation, the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), by the end of the 1960s dissatisfied Black members of this group broke away to form a Black Consciousness Movement affiliated student organization, the South African Students' Organization (SASO). The documentary thus relegates the Black Consciousness Movement that played an important role in students' and workers' activities of the 1970s to the ancestral region John Mbiti calls *Zamani*.

The early 1970s were marked not only by the repression suggested in *Amandla!* but also by increased mass political activities that included strikes and bus boycotts. These activities culminated in the 1976 "Soweto Uprising." The documentary uses video footage that shows the confrontation between the apartheid government's police force and students. S'busiso Nxumalo and Sophie Mgcina suggest that the cause of these upheavals was the government decision to make Afrikaans the medium of instruction in Black schools. The government responded with deadly force and imprisonment, forcing thousands of youth and students into exile. This political environment was further worsened by two events that are not mentioned in the documentary: The death in detention of the leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, Steve Biko, and the banning of 18 Black organizations in 1977.

Duma ka Ndllovu suggests that the most popular song of the 1976 era was *Senzeni na?* (What have we done?), a collective, introspective song that interrogates God's omnipotence and justice. As *Nkosi sikelela* anchored the African nationalist identity on God, it was pertinent to ask, If God is just and omnipotent, why do Black people suffer? Perhaps informed by both the South African liberation theology and Saint Augustine's thesis on evil, the song

identifies racism as the primary problem. Thus, God should not be held responsible for evil, but human beings. Specifically, asserted in *Senzeni na?* is that “*Amabhunu ayi zinja*”—The boers (the White oppressors) are dogs. Absolving God of any responsibility in the oppression of Black people this song, like *Nans’ indod’ emnyama*, allows for the agency of the oppressed.

Pointing out some of the nuances of this particular song, Sibongile Khumalo asks in *Amandla!*,

Can you imagine? That is one line, *Senzeni na?* What have we done? Over and over. I mean come on, you have no other option but to stand up and go and fight . . . It is like hammering somebody.

While *Senzeni na?* points to the necessity of practical activity, as implied by Khumalo, it borrows biblical language to make its point. Challenging the Christianity of the old missionaries as well as the Afrikaner political elite, the song posits that Black people are oppressed simply because of their hue: “*Sono sethu ubumnyama*” (our sin is being black). *Senzeni na?* is therefore able to interestingly hold in balance the omnipotent role of God and the agency of human beings. In *Senzeni na*, like in *Nans’ indod’ emnyama* and *Thina sizwe*, the antagonist is the apartheid state and the protagonists are the Black people who are persecuted.

Duma ka Ndlovu suggests that the 1970s generation “started seeing the crystallization of the struggle. [They] started seeing where the struggle was going . . . and [they] started seeing the possibility of the fall of the apartheid regime.” But the 1976 experience had convinced this segment of the youth that fundamental changes in South Africa were not to be achieved through nonviolent means. Thandi Modise recalls the devastation of this era:

One morning I woke up and I was told I was a ring-leader. I was being hunted down . . . But I had also lost friends. The children were being arrested all over. The children were being shot down. I thought in 1977 I would be going to medical school. I saw myself as a little country doctor somewhere . . . All of that was just blowing in my face. So I was angry . . . I was too angry to be a student.

Hoping that the exiled political organizations were prepared for a military struggle, South African youth responded to internal turmoil and repression by choosing exile.

This period inspired songs that affirmed and celebrated the experiences of the youth, an example being *Sobashiy’ abazal’ ekhaya*:

Sobashiy’ abazal’ ekhaya

We will leave our parents at home

Savuma sangena kwamany'amazwe	We agree to go to other countries
Lapho kungazi khon' ubaba nomama	Which are unknown to our fathers and mothers
Silandel'inkululeko	Following freedom
Sithi salan' salan' ekhaya	We say goodbye to those who remain at home
Sesingena kwamany'amazwe	While we enter other countries
Lapho kungazi khon' ubaba nomama	Which are unknown to our fathers and mothers
Silandel'inkululeko	Following freedom
Sobashiy'abafobethu	We will leave our siblings
Savuma sangena kwamany'amazwe	We agree to go to other countries
Lapho kungaz' ubaba nomama	Which are unknown to our fathers and mothers
Silandel'inkululeko	Following freedom
Sithi salan' salan' ekhaya	We say goodbye to those who remain at home
Sesingena kwamany'amazwe	While we enter other countries
Lapho kungazi khon' ubaba nomama	Which are unknown to our fathers and mothers
Silandel'inkululeko	Following freedom

Acknowledged in this song are the life-changing decisions that forced thousands of youth to leave their families for safe harbor in other countries. This song prepared the antiapartheid activists for the eventuality of leaving their parents and siblings in South Africa. However, the song promises that exile was going to be a temporary means to freedom. Songs such as *Uph'uTambo?* (Where is Tambo?) reinforced the belief that the military training facilities were ready for new recruits:

Uph'uTambo?	Where is Tambo?
UTambo usehlathini bafana	He is in the jungle, guys
Wenzani na?	What is he doing?
Usafundisa amajoni	He is training the soldiers
Oh! One line, one line, one line	Oh! One line, one line, one line
Two lines, bafana	Two lines, boys

Imagining all the military cadres to be young men, this song paints a picture of a structured world in which the recruits will have to follow instructions from their commanders. The 1960s songs shaped a fragmented national identity with the radicals who were primarily unarmed stoics prepared to sacrifice themselves. The Sharpeville massacre and the 1970s police repression had shown that apartheid state would stop at nothing to crush opposition. Imagining a military confrontation with the apartheid regime, the 1970s generation saw themselves as potential military recruits who were ready to fit within the antiapartheid military organization. The documentary thus suggests that the collective identity that was dissipating in the 1960s was reconsolidating in the 1970s.

As briefly suggested in *Amandla!*, opposition against the apartheid regime intensified in the 1980s. But it was not only the international antiapartheid movement privileged in *Amandla!* that ushered in a democratic South Africa. Rigorous internal resistance was partly encouraged by the political independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. Beginning from 1977, military cadres of South Africa's liberation organizations gradually returned to South Africa. Faced with internal and external pressure, the apartheid government introduced reforms that encouraged the emergence of youth, labor, and other community organizations. Thus, when the South African government introduced the 1980s constitutional reforms, it immediately faced opposition, which partly culminated in the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) that, in cooperation with other political organizations such as the Azanian Peoples Organisation (AZAPO), initiated rent and consumer boycott campaigns. These activities, which are largely ignored by Hirsch, resulted in the 1980s revolts.²

The government responded to the internal extraparliamentary opposition through repression and deadly force. It also attempted to forestall the role of banned organizations by attacking neighboring states, thus forcing these

states to limit asylum to members of antiapartheid organizations. The apartheid government's assault on its neighbors and on the liberation organizations did not deter the 1980s mass action events, which the documentary calls the people's war. S'busiso Nxumalo suggests that the exiled liberation organizations changed tactics: Instead of training a large army outside South Africa, they sent a few military trained cadres to train recruits inside South Africa. However, this period put to the forefront the contradictions of decolonization. To some, the 1980s displayed the strength of the mass movement. To others, such as Duma ka Ndlovu, this era showed the dynamism of the liberation struggle even though nobody was certain of the direction of the movement. The increase in guerrilla campaigns led to the radicalization of struggle songs. Songs such as *Shon'amalanga* threatened the police and military with confrontation. The radical dimensions of this song are unmistakable as participants eagerly anticipate confrontation with South African security, police, and military forces. What is obvious from the songs of this era but is not picked up and thematized by *Amandla!* are the unequal relations between the exiled antiapartheid organizations and their internal counterparts. Deferral to exile leadership is evident in the following lyrics:

Oliver Tambo thetha noBotha	Oliver Tambo speak with Botha
Akhulul' uMandela	To release Mandela
Azobusa	So that he [Mandela] can rule

Operating from a position of supplication, the above song calls on Tambo to negotiate with Botha for the release of Nelson Mandela so that he can head the government of a democratic South Africa.

The songs of the 1980s clearly imagined a radicalized collective that took its direction from the exiled leadership. Moreover, these songs inculcated a belief that the militarily trained cadres of the exiled organizations had already returned to South Africa and were among the local population. It is only with this kind of mediation that the participants in these singing events envisioned themselves as ready for confrontation with the South African police and military.

While the South African government was able to check opposition through violent repression, these measures had unintended consequences. As indicated in *Amandla!*, the international pressure against the South African government was intensified. These measures against the apartheid regime included sanctions, disinvestments, and loans recalls. Aside from privileging the international antiapartheid movement, Hirsch overlooks contradictions

within the NP. Faced with internal extraparliamentary opposition and a mutiny within the NP, President P. W. Botha was forced to resign. F. W. de Klerk, Botha's successor, initiated negotiations with the political opposition, including the ANC, which resulted in the unbanning of political organizations, the release of political prisoners, and a Transitional Executive Council that supervised the election of a Government of National Unity of which Nelson Mandela was the first president.

The contradictions of the 1980s notwithstanding, a "new South Africa" portrayed as a family saved by its patriarch, Mandela, was ushered in. Capturing these sentiments is the song *Nelson Mandela, usilethela uxolo*:

Sekudala ulwelinkululeko	You have been fighting for freedom for a long time
Kepha manje sewuyitholile	You have now received it
Ungashintshi kwesosimo	Do not alter this position
Usileth'uxolo	You bring us peace
Nelson Mandela	Nelson Mandela
U-Mandela	Mandela
Usilethela uxolo	You bring us peace

In the context of a violent political environment, the song conveys a belief that Mandela was able to negotiate a peaceful resolution. Interestingly Mandela, who is widely regarded as the hero of heroes—and even as a messiah—has consistently refused sole responsibility for South Africa's liberation from the shackles of apartheid. From his perspective, he was simply one of millions of foot soldiers in the political struggle.

Summary, Critique, and Conclusion

Using John Mbiti and Paul Ricoeur, this essay commenced by arguing that ancestors are a text. Through various measures, such as capital punishment and burying of its opponent in unmarked graves, the apartheid government attempted to banish some of the ancestral and liberatory experiences in the ancestral region that Mbiti calls Zamani. Using *Amandla's!* interviews and songs, this essay argues that liberation songs are ancestral texts because they meet all requirements of ancestral text that are discussed by both John Mbiti

and Paul Ricoeur. Finally, adding Alfred Schutz' phenomenology of music and Ernesto Laclau's theory of populism, this essay critically discussed the making of a collective identity from liberation songs, which we read as ancestral texts. *Amandla!* argues that South Africa's antiapartheid struggle progressed through five phases: The advent of the NP and the ANC's extra-parliamentary opposition; the apartheid government's political repression and the period of exile and underground politics; the 1976 uprising; the 1980s or the era of people's war; and finally the birth of the postapartheid era.

The first shortcoming of *Amandla!* is its choice of time frame. As discussed, the documentary begins with the ascent of the NP to power in 1948. A viewer not familiar with South African history may think that colonialism in South Africa began in 1948. Dalamba (2012) also points to the documentary's logical errors in dating the phases of the antiapartheid struggle. For Ramose (1999), dealing only with the post-1948 colonialism is also problematic because it leaves the pre-1948 injustices unresolved. This means that those ancestors who waged pre-1948 anticolonial wars are left wandering in Zamani.

Hirsch, who presents South Africa's so-called revolution as a dream rather than a dream deferred, attempts to align each of the highlighted songs with different phases of the struggle. Thus, from the information provided in the documentary, one would expect to see in the 1980s, for example, only radical and militaristic songs. In actuality, political events such as commemoration services, funerals, and marches were centered on different songs. While *Nkosi sikelela* was used at the beginning and end of events, songs from other eras such as "*Nans' indod'emnyama*," "*Thina sizwe esimnyama*," and "*Senzeni na?*" were also used. Most of the youth would have preferred that only radical songs be performed, but they needed the lawyers and the priest to formalize events such as the funerals (Bozzoli, 2004). The use of different songs in each phase, therefore, symbolized an alliance of different social groups in the struggle against apartheid.

Another shortcoming of this documentary is the presentation of the ANC as a homogeneous organization. As indicated, the documentary fails to point to the ANC's 1950s and 1960s divisions among the Africanists, the Charterists, and the Communists. The contradictions within the 1980s ANC that resulted in the mutiny among the ranks of its military wing, uMkhonto weSizwe, are also not addressed. Furthermore, the documentary has historical inaccuracies, such as the claim that the ANC played a pivotal role in the 1960 pass campaign. The documentary is also silent on the role of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Lastly, the documentary deals inadequately with the violence of the 1980s that consumed Black communities. Thus, the documentary fails to grasp the multiaccentuality of the

liberation songs. These songs had different meaning for different participants in the antiapartheid struggle.

While the documentary somewhat deals with the power of music to communicate, heal, and liberate, it does not deal with the power structures related to the creation and performance of these songs. The songs with which the documentary is mainly concerned were performed at public gatherings such as ideological classes, marches, commemorative services and funerals. Belinda Bozzoli (2004) correctly points to the theatrical form taken by these events; the implication being that these events were primarily scripted, staged, and performed. Scripting and staging gave power to script writers who not only selected the songs to be performed by specific lead singers but also how these songs were to be performed. Thus, the choice of songs and role-players was, in most cases, determined by the dominant groups within the liberation movements. With the ultimate aim being what Kelley Askew (2002) terms symbolic/cultural hegemony, these cultural performances used art to nurture consent.

The documentary's DVD includes extras, which may shed some light into the obstacles faced by the producer. In response to a question by an audience member, Lee Hirsch points out that the biggest challenge faced by the documentary was funding. It is understandable that under these circumstances properly contextualizing South Africa's liberation songs as well as expanding the documentary to accommodate other segments of South Africa's liberation movement would not have been easy. However, it also appears that his research method limited the range of his interviewees. As a student, antiapartheid activist Hirsch noticed the importance of music in South Africa's liberation struggle. After completing his university education, he set himself the task of producing a documentary about the role of songs in the antiapartheid struggle. Following the "snow ball" research methodology, he traveled to South Africa where he met Vusi Mahlasela, who provided him with other contacts who were later to contribute to the documentary. It is perhaps this methodology that biased the selection of interviewees to prominent South Africans such as Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba, Abdullah Ibrahim, and Duma ka Ndlovu, among others. It also seems that this methodology prejudiced Hirsch to give a primary role to senior ANC members such as Lindiwe Zulu, Manala Manzini, and Thandi Modise.

The opening scenes of *Amandla!*, such as the reburial of Vuyisile Mini's body and Vusi Mahlasela's song *Our lost African music*, promise to retrieve anticolonial resistance experiences from Zamani and place them in Sasa where they will be available for current generations. However, the biases embedded in the production of *Amandla!* conspire to banish some of these experiences, including the experiences of the ANC's internal rebels and the

experiences of other antiapartheid organizations, to Zamani. While this documentary is a useful teaching tool, users have to take these limits into account.

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Notes

1. An account of the Sharpeville events can be found in Gail Gerhart's (1978) *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology*.
2. Accounts of the political events in the 1980s can be found in Tom Lodge's and Bill Nasson's (1991) *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*.

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