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FULL PAPER

Analysing Counter-Hegemonic Discourse in Nelson Mandela's "I Am Prepared to Die" Speech

Abstract

This study critically investigates Nelson Mandela's 1964 discourse, "*I Am Prepared to Die*," via Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's Hegemony Theory, as drawn in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), by Wodak's (2011) Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). The study observes how Mandela's speech constructs a counter-hegemonic speech that challenges apartheid ideology, reshapes democratic ideals, and restructures the political landscape of South Africa. Through deep analysis, the study categorises rhetorical strategies such as "dislocation", "empty signifiers", "chains of equivalence", and "myth creation". It shows how Mandela's speech strategically describes him and the organization of the African National Congress (ANC) as legitimate representatives of social change. The analysis further searches how language in political discourse functions as a site of hegemonic struggle, with Mandela reshaping the vital political concepts such as "freedom, democracy, and patriotism" to encounter dominant narratives and encourage a shared political subjectivity.

KEYWORDS: counter-hegemony, discourse, dislocation, political, dominant.

Prepared by

Lect. Afrah Abdul Qader Jassim
Instructor /Department of English
College of Basic Education
University of Mosul
Afrah.abed@uomosul.edu.iq
ORCID: <https://orcid.org>

1. INTRODUCTION

Nelson Mandela's "I Am Prepared to Die" speech, provided during the Rivonia Trial in 1964, is regarded as a powerful announcement of conflict against apartheid's unjust government in South Africa. The speech overtook the courtroom, developing a powerful act of political discourse that faced entrenched ethnic ladders and expressed a dream of an independent and varied nation. The study assumes a critical theory to analyse Mandela's speech through an eclectic model that contains Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist theory of hegemony and Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). The rationale for choosing this framework, it enables a clear investigation of the speech's ideological constructions, rhetorical strategies, and historical embedment, which reveals the dynamics of counter-hegemonic discourse formation.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study investigates the following questions:

1. How does Nelson Mandela construct a counter-hegemonic discourse in his 1964 speech "I Am Prepared to Die"?
2. What rhetorical and discursive strategies are used to delegitimize the apartheid regime and articulate a democratic alternative?
3. In what ways are Laclau and Mouffe's concepts—such as nodal points, chains of equivalence, and dislocation—manifested in Mandela's speech?
4. What role does the strategic use of history, collective identity, and moral appeal play in constructing a performative act of political resistance?

3. Research objectives

The major objectives of this study are:

1. To provide a critical discourse analysis of Mandela's "I Am Prepared to Die" speech through an integrated theoretical lens that combines Laclau and Mouffe's Hegemony Theory with Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach.
2. To identify and analyse the counter-hegemonic discursive elements that challenge the ideological framework of apartheid.
3. To explore how Mandela rearticulates dominant political signifiers (e.g., "justice," "freedom," "democracy") to propose a new, inclusive national identity.
4. To investigate how the socio-historical context, as emphasised by DHA, enhances the effectiveness and meaning of Mandela's rhetorical strategies.

4. THE LIMITS OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on how Mandela discursively threatens apartheid hegemony and expresses a new political imaginary using counter-hegemonic strategies. It looks at key fragments of the speech and examines how language constructs resistance. It is also limited to textual and discursive features, with attention to how Mandela's language serves to challenge and reframe dominant apartheid discourse.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of political discourse has long been central to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly regarding how language is used to construct, sustain, or challenge social power structures. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse is not merely a reflection of ideology but an active process in which ideology is produced and contested. Similarly, van Dijk (1998,p,37) views political speeches as ideological acts that influence cognitive models and contribute to the reproduction or transformation of social dominance. Within this analytical tradition, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985, p. 112) introduced a post-

structuralism approach to discourse and hegemony, offering one of the most influential theoretical models for analyzing political rhetoric and counter-hegemonic struggles. Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) reconceptualises hegemony as a discursive rather than purely material phenomenon, arguing that meaning is not fixed but is continually negotiated through articulation. At the heart of their theory is the idea of empty signifiers, terms like "freedom" and "justice" that are contestable and gain meaning through political struggle (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, pp. 111-113). Their framework introduces concepts such as chains of equivalence, in which heterogeneous demands are unified under shared signifiers, and dislocation, a moment in which the dominant order is challenged and ideological realignment becomes possible (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 142). This discursive model has been expanded upon by scholars like Žižek (1990,p.7) and Howarth (2000,p.25), who emphasise the antagonistic dimension of discourse and the political construction of subjectivity.

In the South African context, this model offers a useful lens through which to understand the contestation of apartheid ideology. Norval (1996,pp. 45- 47) applied Laclau and Mouffe's framework to post-apartheid discourses, showing how concepts like "nation" and "citizen" were re-signified in the process of democratic transition (pp. 45- 47). Similarly, Bentley and Habib (2008) identified how resistance movements challenged the racial and colonial discourses embedded in state ideology by rearticulating social justice, equality, and sovereignty through alternative discursive strategies.

6.1 COUNTER-HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE AND HEGEMONY THEORY

The concept of **hegemony**, as developed by Antonio Gramsci and later reformulated by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), provides a foundation for understanding how ideological dominance is maintained and challenged. According to Gramsci, hegemonic power is not sustained merely through coercion but through **consent**, manufactured by dominant ideological apparatuses (Gramsci, 1971). Laclau and Mouffe expand this idea by introducing the notion of discourse as the site of political struggle, where meanings are never fixed but always contingent and open to rearticulation. In their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, they argue that counter-hegemonic discourses emerge when marginalised groups challenge the discursive fixations of dominant ideologies by constructing new chains of equivalence (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, pp. 93-104).

In Mandela's case, the hegemonic discourse of apartheid — structured around race, civilisation, and order — is challenged through a counter-discourse that promotes multiracial democracy, dignity, **and** historical justice. His speech functions not merely as resistance but as a discursive struggle to redefine national identity, reflecting what Laclau and Mouffe describe as the radical potential of democratic articulation.

6.2 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) explores how language and discourse are shaped by, and help shape, social power relations (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008). CDA scholars argue that discourse is inherently political and ideological. Fairclough (1995) emphasises how discourse contributes to the reproduction of social dominance, while van Dijk's (1998) *Socio-Cognitive Model* highlights the role of mental models and shared knowledge in the legitimisation of power. In this context, Mandela's courtroom speech becomes a site of ideological struggle. His rhetorical strategy disrupts the "common sense" narratives of the

apartheid state by delegitimizing the system's authority and creating a new cognitive frame aligned with global democratic values.

6.3 WODAK'S DISCOURSE-HISTORICAL APPROACH (DHA)

Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is particularly relevant for analyzing political discourse as it emphasizes the interconnection between historical context, social memory, and linguistic practice (Wodak & Reisigl, 2001). DHA aims to uncover the ideologies embedded in discourse by analysing strategies such as nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation (Wodak, 2011, pp. 38-42). Mandela's speech draws on historical memory, colonialism, institutionalised racism, and global liberation movements to construct a legitimising narrative. By using topoi such as the topos of justice, *the topos of history*, and *the topos of human rights*, Mandela positions his resistance not as criminal defiance but as morally necessary and historically justified action. DHA enables us to trace how Mandela connects past injustices with present conditions to legitimise future political transformation.

6.4 POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE AND ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE

Postcolonial philosophers such as Said (1978), Bhabha (1994), and Fanon (1961) have shown how colonial power maintains dominance through linguistic and discursive practices. Mandela's discourse decomposes the language of apartheid, which required labelling African struggle as terrorism or tribalism by assuming the language of universal privileges, justice, and democracy. In this manner, Mandela's discourse supports what Bhabha calls a "third space", a cross-universe where colonial binaries are dislocated and new meanings are discussed (Bhabha, 1994, p. 112). Mandela, consequently, enters the postcolonial discursive battlefield not merely as a speaker but as a symbol of collective resistance. His rhetoric repositions the African subject as a legitimate actor in shaping national and global political futures and reclaims discursive authority from colonial paradigms.

Furthermore, several scholars have examined Nelson Mandela's rhetoric, emphasizing his dual appeal to African nationalism and universal human rights. Samuelson (2003, pp. 124–130) argues that Mandela's discourse is characterized by its legal rationality and moral universalism, which allow it to resonate across cultural and ideological boundaries. Lodge (2006, p. 153) and Suttner (2007, p. 99) acknowledge the speech's significant political and moral force, particularly its role in legitimizing the anti-apartheid movement on both national and global stages. Clark and Worger (2011, p. 88) further explore how Mandela's discourse helped articulate an inclusive vision of democracy, moving beyond mere protest to lay the foundation for institutional transformation.

However, few studies have applied Laclau and Mouffe's hegemonic discourse theory directly to Mandela's "*I Am Prepared to Die*" speech. While the speech's rhetorical and historical significance is well-documented, what remains underexplored is how Mandela's discourse functions as a counter-hegemonic articulation, utilising concepts such as empty signifiers, chains of equivalence, and the construction of collective identity. This study seeks to fill that theoretical gap.

6.3 PREVIOUS STUDIES ON MANDELA'S SPEECH

Mandela's "*I Am Prepared to Die*" discourse has been widely recognised for its rhetorical brilliance and political impact. Leeman (2013) and Bowers (1996) describe it as a foundational text of the global struggle for justice, with its moral clarity and strategic rhetoric positioning Mandela not only as a defendant but as a statesman-in-waiting. However, most existing analyses focus on rhetorical style, moral authority, or historical context. They stop short of analysing how Mandela's discourse constructs counter-hegemony at the level of language and ideology.

By integrating Laclau and Mouffe's hegemonic theory with **Wodak's DHA**, this study offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding Mandela's discourse. It not only highlights the rhetorical force of the speech but also explains its political function as a strategic reconfiguration of the dominant apartheid narrative. This dual-framework approach allows the researcher to analyze both the ideological construction of meaning and the historical legitimacy of Mandela's challenge to white minority rule.

7. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative textual analysis was conducted to analyse Mandela's 1964 "I Am Prepared to Die" speech. The analysis identified key discursive features corresponding to Laclau and Mouffe's concepts of articulation and counter-hegemony and Wodak's discursive strategies and rhetorical topoi. These features were examined within their historical and political context to reveal the speech's counter-hegemonic function.

7.1. MODEL ANALYSIS

The study adopts an eclectic integrated framework, which includes:

1. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory focuses on ideological articulation, the construction of political identities, and counter-hegemonic dynamics. Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) post-Marxist theory conceptualises hegemony as a contingent, discursively constructed process through which social identities and political meanings are produced. Their theory introduces several foundational concepts:

1. Nodal Points: Privileged signifiers such as "freedom" or "democracy" around which meaning is temporarily fixed (p.113).
2. Empty Signifiers: Abstract terms that are rearticulated by various political actors to signify different ideological visions (p. 111).
3. Antagonistic Frontiers: The construction of binary oppositions that define "us" versus "them," a key strategy in counter-hegemonic discourse (p. 122).
4. Chains of Equivalence: A discursive linkage of different social demands under a unifying signifier to construct a collective political identity (p. 130).

Through these mechanisms, counter-hegemonic discourse works to disarticulate dominant meanings and rearticulate new political imaginaries, exactly the function performed by Mandela's 1964 speech.

2. Wodak's DHA, which locates discourse in historical context and analyses discursive strategies and rhetorical topoi. Mixing these frameworks enables an in-depth analysis that captures both the political ideological contestation and the socio-historical embedding of Mandela's speech. Complementing Laclau and Mouffe's theory, Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Wodak, 2011) emphasises the interplay between discourse, history, and ideology. It focuses on four primary strategies:

1. Nomination: How social actors are named or represented.
 2. Predication: The attributes ascribed to those actors.
 3. Argumentation: The use of topoi or common-sense arguments to justify claims.
 4. Perspectivization: Inclusion of particular viewpoints, actors, and voices.
- By grounding discourse in its socio-historical context, DHA makes it possible to trace the evolution of ideological narratives and to reveal how discursive practices reproduce or resist power. Applying DHA to Mandela's speech allows for the mapping of how apartheid is delegitimised through rhetorical appeals to justice, democracy, and equality.

7.2. THE ANALYSIS

Depending on Wodak's DHA historical context and discursive environment, Mandela's speech was delivered amid the intensified repression of apartheid, where laws institutionalised racial discrimination and political disenfranchisement of the majority Black population. This historical context is critical to Wodak's DHA because it anchors the speech's discursive strategies within the ongoing struggle against systemic injustice. Furthermore, disarticulating apartheid's hegemonic nodal points, Mandela targets apartheid's ideological cornerstone, the supposed legitimacy of racial segregation and white supremacy, using Wodak's topos of injustice and nomination strategies. He nominates the African people as oppressed subjects and predicatively characterises apartheid as "foreign" and "unjust": for example, ("The African people have for many years suffered the consequences of discriminatory laws and practices which are foreign to their traditions and beliefs"). The disarticulates the apartheid discourse that justified racial separation as "natural" or "necessary," by highlighting its artificial and imposed character. It also undermines the hegemonic nodal point of "law and order" by showing that these "laws" perpetuate injustice rather than fairness.

Mandela rearticulates democratic and inclusive ideals by carefully rearticulating an alternative vision rooted in universal values, producing a sequence of equivalence between democracy, freedom, equality, and harmony, which acts as a counter-hegemonic nodal point. For example, ("I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities.")

This speech represents Laclau and Mouffe's reshaping of the chain of equivalence, joining "democratic," "free," "harmony," and "equal opportunities." Each concept appeals to extensively established ethics, inviting different groups to rally around the shared ideal. Concerning Wodak's perspective, the use of the topos of democracy and historical certainty structures they are not just as desired goals, but as historically justified and morally compelling.

Moreover, Mandela explicitly frames the discriminatory government as the unfair "other" through an antagonistic frontier, a central concept in Laclau and Mouffe's theory. This creates a political "us vs. them" divide essential for mobilisation. For example ("The government and the people of South Africa are divided by irreconcilable differences... Our struggle is inspired by the suffering of our people and their desire for freedom.")

Here, Mandela uses Wodak's argumentation based on collective historical experience to justify the resistance, aligning the "us", the oppressed majority, against the "them" — the apartheid regime. This antagonism constructs political identities central to the counter-hegemonic discourse.

Also, Mandela's repeated appeal to "freedom" is considered an empty signifier that compresses various demands and desires, combining a symbol for the anti-apartheid movement. For example, ("It is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.")

This sentence expressively controls the discourse, which makes the term "freedom" into a powerful rallying cry that transcends specific political details. Wodak's DHA

highlights how such emotionalisation and rhetorical pathos enhance the speech's organising potential, creating solidarity through shared sacrifice.

Mandela expresses a vision of inclusive nationhood that embraces diversity through direct opposition to apartheid's racial exclusivism. For example, "There is room for all the various races who live in this country to live in harmony and peace.")

The use of nomination and predication strategies (Wodak) not only describes who belongs to the population but also recommends how they relate harmoniously rather than being isolated. Laclau and Mouffe's concept of articulating a pluralist national identity is visible here, as Mandela resists racial essentialism and opens the nation to multiple identities united by shared democratic ideals.

In addition, Mandela sets his struggle within a broader historical narrative of anti-colonial resistance, enhancing the legitimacy of the counter-hegemonic project. For example, ("Just as the British colonialists were resisted and defeated by our people, so too will apartheid be resisted and overthrown.")

The intertextual reference connects the present struggle against isolation to previous anti-colonial victories, leveraging historical memory as a source of empowerment. Wodak's DHA sees such intertextuality as crucial for inserting discourse within a shared socio-political history, thus reinforcing its persuasive power.

The analysis is based on micro-level linguistic features, which support counter-hegemony through the following:

Mandela used modal verbs such as "must," "will," and "prepared to" to clarify moral certainty and political necessity, strengthening the speech's ideological force. For example, ("I am prepared to die."/"We must strive for a democratic society.")

These modals emphasise promise and certainty, supporting the antagonistic boundary (Laclau & Mouffe) and the topos of necessity (Wodak). The firmness in modality legitimises the anti-apartheid struggle as both morally imperative and historically unavoidable.

Besides, Mandela wisely uses pronouns to build inclusive identities and describe oppositional groups. For example, inclusive "we" and "our" e.g., "our people," "we have been oppressed" to create solidarity and collective identity among the oppressed. This is central to forming the chain of equivalence uniting diverse groups. And exclusive "they" and "them" e.g., "they impose laws," "their oppression" to establish the antagonist as an external, illegitimate force, marking the political antagonism.

Furthermore, the strategy of using of pronouns supports Laclau and Mouffe's notion of us-vs-them antagonism and Wodak's nomination strategy that assigns roles and identities in discourse.

As we notice Mandela's speech is rich in metaphors that frame the political struggle colorfully and persuasively. For example, ("Our people have been seared in the flames of oppression."/"We have been cast into the dark prison of segregation.")). These metaphors evoke suffering and injustice, using Wodak's topos of suffering and topos of imprisonment, eliciting emotional response and moral outrage. The flames metaphor dramatizes oppression as active and destructive, underscoring the urgency of resistance.

Mandela uses metaphors of hope and light. For example, ("I have cherished the ideal of a joyous daybreak.")). These metaphors construct an image of a new beginning, signalling the positive outcome of the counter-hegemonic struggle, resonating with Laclau and Mouffe's emphasis on empty signifiers such as "freedom" as open-ended symbols of hope.

In short, the following tables represent the analysis of Nelson Mandela's "i am prepared to die" speech, organised by central categories from Laclau & Mouffe's Hegemony Theory and Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), including examples and commentary under each table to explain the findings.

Table 1: Disarticulation and Rearticulation (Laclau & Mouffe,1985)

Concept	Definition	Example from Mandela's Speech	Function in Counter-Hegemony
Disarticulation	Breaking apart the dominant meanings of the ruling power	"Africans want to be part of the general population, not one group living on its own."	Deconstructs apartheid's logic of racial separation.
Rearticulation	Reorganising political meaning to construct a new hegemony	"I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society..."	Replaces segregation with a vision of shared democratic values.
Nodal Point	Central term around which meaning is organized	"Freedom"	Becomes an empty signifier uniting all oppressed groups.

Commentary:

Mandela's speech performs disarticulation by exposing apartheid's illegitimacy and presenting it as historically and morally bankrupt. He then rearticulates meaning around "freedom" and "democracy" as empty signifiers, building a broad coalition of support among diverse racial and political groups. These acts are fundamental to forming a new counter-hegemonic project.

Table 2: Chain of Equivalence and Political Antagonism (Laclau & Mouffe,1985)

Concept	Definition	Example from Mandela's Speech	Function in Counter-Hegemony
Chain of Equivalence	Linking different demands to create a shared identity	"The Africans, the Coloureds, the Indians, and the democratic whites"	Unites diverse groups into one anti-apartheid front.
Political Antagonism	The Us vs. Them structure defines friend/enemy distinction	"The government has attacked the African people as a whole."	Constructs a clear moral and political division.

Commentary:

By grouping oppressed communities under one chain of equivalence, Mandela builds a new political identity. Antagonism is framed not around race, but around justice and oppression, thereby appealing to democratic whites too. This ideological frontier is crucial for radical democratic change (per Laclau & Mouffe).

Table 3: Nomination and Predication (Wodak's DHA)

Strategy	Definition	Example from Mandela's Speech	Function in the Discourse
Nomination	Naming social actors to construct group identity	"The African National Congress... our people..."	Builds legitimacy for the ANC and collective identity for the oppressed.
Predication	Attributing traits or actions to actors	"The government... has oppressed us for centuries."	Delegitimizes the apartheid state through negative moral attributes.

Commentary:

Using nomination, Mandela elevates the African National Congress and positions it as the voice of “the people.” Through predication, the apartheid regime is painted as immoral and historically unjust, which reflects the topos of history and the topos of responsibility through DHA model.

Table 4: Argumentative Topoi (Wodak’s DHA)

Topo type	Function in Argumentation	Example from the Speech	Discourse Effect
Topos of Injustice	Argues that something should be changed due to injustice	“Africans are arrested... without warrant.”	Justifies resistance by highlighting state injustice.
Topos of Threat	Warns of consequences if action is not taken	“If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”	Frames resistance as necessary and inevitable.
Topos of Democracy	Appeals to shared democratic values	“The ideal of a democratic and free society...”	Aligns the anti-apartheid cause with global norms.

Commentary:

Mandela structures his reasoning using common argumentative topoi, especially injustice and democracy. These rhetorical strategies lend credibility and global moral weight to his argument, resonating with both local and international audiences.

Table 5: Micro-Linguistic Devices and Their Discursive Impact

Linguistic Feature	Example from Mandela’s Speech	Discursive Function	Related Theory
Modality	“I am prepared to die.”	Expresses ultimate commitment and moral conviction	Laclau & Mouffe: Radical subjectivity
Pronouns	“We... our struggle... their oppression”	Builds solidarity and defines the enemy	DHA: Collective identity via pronouns
Metaphors	“The flames of oppression”	Creates emotional impact and moral urgency	DHA & Laclau: Evocative framing of antagonism

Commentary:

These micro-level features perform significant ideological work. Modality emphasises Mandela’s resolve. Pronouns enact inclusion/exclusion, and metaphors enhance emotional resonance. Together, they deepen the speech’s ideological effectiveness and support macro-structural shifts in hegemony.

Table 6: Summary of Key Concepts from Laclau & Mouffe (1985) and Wodak’s DHA with Examples from Mandela’s Speech

Concept / Strategy	Definition / Function	Example from Mandela’s Speech	Theoretical Frame
Disarticulation	Breaking apart dominant hegemonic	“Discriminatory laws... foreign to	Laclau & Mouffe

	meanings	our traditions”	
Chain of Equivalence	Linking demands around shared ideals	“Democratic and free society... harmony and equal opportunities”	Laclau & Mouffe
Political Antagonism	Creating “us vs. them” political divide	“Our struggle is inspired by... government and people divided”	Laclau & Mouffe
Empty Signifier	Ambiguous signifier uniting diverse demands	“Freedom”	Laclau & Mouffe
Nomination	Naming social actors and groups	“The African people... the government”	Wodak’s DHA
Predication	Assigning characteristics or qualities	“Oppressive,” “unjust,” “foreign”	Wodak’s DHA
Topos of Injustice	Argument from unfairness or wrongfulness	“Suffered the consequences of discriminatory laws”	Wodak’s DHA
Topos of Democracy	Appeal to democratic ideals as morally right	“Ideal of a democratic and free society”	Wodak’s DHA
Intertextuality	Linking discourse to historical/social events	“Just as British colonialists were resisted and defeated”	Wodak’s DHA
Modality (Linguistic)	Expressing certainty, obligation, or willingness	“I am prepared to die.”	Micro-level Linguistics
Pronouns (Inclusive/Exclusive)	Constructing collective identity and marking antagonists	“We” (oppressed) vs. “they” (regime)	Micro-level Linguistics
Metaphors	Framing abstract ideas in vivid imagery	“Seared in the flames of oppression”	Micro-level Linguistics

Furthermore, a crucial element of Laclau and Mouffe’s Hegemony Model is the construction of a vision for a new political order. Political discourse frequently presents an alternative to prevailing power configurations, offering a new vision of society. This vision challenges the status quo and provides a narrative that can unite and mobilise people towards collective action, for instance, Mandela presents his vision of an independent South Africa, by saying all people, nevertheless of race, are permitted equal rights and opportunities. This dream encounters the apartheid regime and offers an exciting alternative to the ethnically isolated social and political order that existed under apartheid. As in Mandel's speech ("It is an ideal for which I am prepared to die"). This vision of democracy is central to his counter-

hegemonic discourse, as it presents a stark contrast to the racist and exclusionary system of apartheid.

Besides, repetition as a rhetorical and ideological strategy is used in Mandela's discourse "I Am Prepared to Die,". He uses **repetition** as a thoughtful rhetorical strategy for focusing key political subjects, align his sacrifices with collective struggle, and encounter the apartheid regime's hegemonic discourse. Mandela repeating central terms and phrases, to reinforce his ideological attitude, dramatises the insistence of political change, and legitimizes the African National Congress's (ANC) resistance.

The powerful samples of repetition in Mandel's speech is the phrase: "I have cherished the ideal...". He initiates and tops the speech by returning to this phrase, prominence the central political worth of equality and democracy. By anchoring his speech in ideals rather than personal defence, Mandela converts the courtroom into a stage of moral resistance, using repetition to draw attention away from criminal controls and toward the greater ethical conflict between apartheid and human rights.

Repetition also appears in his descriptions of "violence," "peaceful protest," and "the African people", each used strategically to map the ANC's shift from nonviolent protest to equipped resistance. This rhetorical device explains his strategy as a last resort while invoking shared suffering and a collective vision for freedom. See table 7

Table 7 : Repetition and Ideological Function in Mandela's "I Am Prepared to Die"

Repeated Phrase/Theme	Example	Function	Ideological Message
"I have cherished the ideal..."	"I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society..."	Frames the speech morally; reappears in closing	Emphasizes equality, frames struggle as ethical not personal
<i>Africans want...</i> / <i>"The African people..."</i>	"The African people want to be paid a living wage."	Highlights collective voice and demands	Constructs a unified oppressed identity seeking justice
<i>Violence</i> " and <i>"nonviolence</i>	"We first broke the law in a way which avoided any recourse to violence."	Explains shift in ANC tactics	Justifies armed struggle as a rational reaction to systemic oppression
<i>"White domination"</i> / <i>"Black domination"</i>	"I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination."	Clarifies ideological neutrality	Rejects racial revenge; upholds inclusive democracy
<i>Ideal</i> " and <i>"freedom</i>	"It is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."	Ends with repetition of core belief	Elevates political struggle into moral and existential commitment

In summary, Mandela's strategic use of repetition deepens the emotional and ideological resonance of his message. It allows him to reframe his trial as a political rather

than criminal matter, reiterate democratic ideals as universal rather than racially defined, and legitimize resistance as both morally justified and historically necessary. Thus, repetition becomes a discursive tool through which **Mandela rearticulates power**, challenges apartheid hegemony, and projects a **counter-hegemonic vision** aligned with universal justice.

8. DISCUSSION

The integrated models reveal that Mandela's speech operates on multiple levels. Laclau and Mouffe's theory elucidates the ideological articulation and contestation processes, showing how meaning is constructed and reconfigured politically. Wodak's DHA enriches this analysis by embedding discourse within its socio-historical context and uncovering the discursive and rhetorical strategies employed. Together, they demonstrate how Mandela's speech was a powerful act of counter-hegemonic resistance that both delegitimised apartheid and constructed a democratic alternative.

At the macro level, Laclau and Mouffe's framework clarifies how Mandela strategically constructs and contests political meanings. The speech disarticulates apartheid's dominant nodal points—such as “law and order” and “racial hierarchy”—exposing their contingency and injustice, which weakens the existing hegemonic configuration. By reshaping an consistent chain that contacts democracy, freedom, equality, and harmony, Mandela generates a new nodal point around which a pluralistic political identity can cohere. This chain of equivalence unites diverse groups and demands under the banner of anti-apartheid resistance, fulfilling the role of a counter-hegemonic articulation. Moreover, Mandela's explicit establishment of a political antagonism between the oppressed majority and the apartheid regime mobilizes political subjectivity and highlights the irreconcilable nature of the conflict, which is crucial for radical democratic politics.

Simultaneously, Wodak's DHA grounds these ideological articulations within their socio-historical context and uncovers the discursive and rhetorical strategies Mandela employs to construct legitimacy and persuade his audience. Through nomination and predication, Mandela designates social actors and ascribes moral qualities that delegitimize the apartheid regime while valorizing the oppressed. The deployment of rhetorical topoi—such as injustice, democracy, historical inevitability, and suffering—provides normative warrant for the counter-hegemonic project and resonates deeply with the audience's collective historical experience. Wodak's emphasis on intertextuality highlights Mandela's linking of the anti-apartheid struggle to global and historical movements of liberation, reinforcing its moral and political legitimacy.

At the micro-linguistic level, Mandela uses modality, pronouns, and metaphors to perform a crucial ideological work. Modality functions to communicate and determine inevitability. Furthermore, he uses pronouns to construct inclusive identities and mark antagonists. Also, he uses Metaphors intensely to frame the struggle's gravity and hopeful aspirations. These linguistic choices enhance the emotive and persuasive power of the speech to transform abstract ideals into lived political realities.

The adopted frameworks determine how Mandela's speech functions not only as political rhetoric but also as an act of ideological and discursive reconfiguration. It interrupts the apartheid regime's hegemonic speech and offers an alternative vision capable of uniting a diverse coalition around shared democratic ideals. The speech's accomplishment lies in its ability to simultaneously engage moral reasoning, historical consciousness, and emotional resonance, fulfilling the double responsibilities of delegitimizing unjust power and constructing an inclusive political identity.

Below is a summary table(8) of rhetorical and ideological strategies used in Nelson Mandela's “I Am Prepared to Die” speech (1964). The table highlights how Mandela constructs a counter-hegemonic discourse by challenging apartheid, redefining key political

concepts, and creating fetters of equality that unify oppressed identities under the African National Congress (ANC).

Table 8: Hegemonic Strategies in Mandela’s “I Am Prepared to Die” Speech (1964)

Based on Laclau and Mouffe’s Hegemony Theory

Hegemonic Strategy	Example from Speech	Theoretical Function	Ideological Outcome
Dislocation	“I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony...”	Creates a rupture in dominant apartheid ideology by introducing an alternative vision.	Opens space for a new political identity and delegitimizes the status quo.
Empty Signifiers	“Freedom,” “Democracy,” “Equality”	These terms are stripped of apartheid’s meaning and redefined by the ANC’s values.	Allows multiple social groups to identify with these rearticulated concepts.
Chain of Equivalence	“Africans, Indians, Coloureds, and whites” fighting under the ANC	Unites disparate social groups against a common oppressor (apartheid state).	Constructs a collective political subject and a broad anti-apartheid front
Myth Creation	“The ANC has spent half a century fighting against racialism...”	Establishes a foundational narrative that legitimizes ANC leadership and its struggle	Repositions ANC as the hegemonic challenger representing moral authority
Articulation of Counter-Hegemony	“We are fighting for a democratic government based on the will of the people...”	Constructs a counter-narrative to apartheid rule by redefining national identity and power	Frames the ANC’s struggle as inclusive, just, and historically grounded.

In summary, Nelson Mandela’s “*I Am Prepared to Die*” speech intentionally creates a counter-hegemonic discourse towards apartheid by using central concepts from Laclau and Mouffe’s Hegemony Theory. Through dislocation, Mandela interrupts the governing apartheid ideology and presents a new political vision that includes equality and unity. He reshape empty signifiers such as "freedom" and "democracy," removing them from their exclusive racialized senses and transferring them up to wider general interpretations. By constructing a sequence of equivalence among marginalized groups ,as in Africans, Indians, Colored, and white sympathizers he joins opposition identities into a unified front under the African National Congress (ANC). The speech also employs in myth creation, presenting the ANC as the historical and moral authority in the liberation struggle. Finally, Mandela’s rhetoric utters a counter-hegemonic narrative that not only confronts the justice of the apartheid regime but also offers a rearticulated vision of South African identity and authority, based on equality, justice, and collective will.

9. CONCLUSION

The following are the main conclusions:

1. Counter-Hegemonic Articulation appears in Mandela’s speech, effectively reflecting the hegemonic apartheid discourse and rearticulating a counter-hegemonic vision based on

democracy, freedom, and equality, supported with Laclau and Mouffe's concept of hegemonic struggle..

2. The speech begins with a clear antagonistic boundary that activates political identities, positioning the oppressed community from the apartheid regime, thus fostering political solidarity and resistance.

3. Wodak's DHA model reveals that Mandela's discourse is deeply surrounded in its historical and political context, using rhetorical topoi and intertextual references to enhance legitimacy and resonance.

4. Discursive Strategies such as nomination, predication, argumentation, and emotionalization play pivotal role in delegitimising apartheid and legitimizing the anti-apartheid movement.(e.g., injustice, democracy, history) to build a morally charged narrative of resistance rooted in South African and universal values. His discourse draws on intertextual references to global struggles, evoking a shared memory of resistance against colonialism, racism, and injustice.

5. Micro-level linguistic features such as modality, pronouns, and metaphors enrich the speech's convincing power by constructing collective identities, articulating moral commitment, and evoking emotional engagement.

6. The analyse of Nelson Mandela's 1964 "I Am Prepared to Die" speech is applied through eclectic model which contains from Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony and Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). The analysis proves that Mandela's discourse functions as a powerful counter-hegemonic intervention, strategically constructed to undermine the ideological dominance of apartheid and promote a new democratic pretence. such as "law," "order," and "civilization", and rearticulates them through the inclusive ideals of "freedom," "equality," and "justice".

Thus, Mandela's speech is not merely a defence in a courtroom, but it is an ideological rupture, a performative act that shapes new political subjectivities and challenges the naturalised authority of apartheid.

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