

**‘MY FELLOW SOUTH AFRICANS’:
Cyril Ramaphosa Emulates Mandela in His COVID-19
Presidential Speeches**

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ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes a rhetorical analysis of selected speeches delivered by the South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, to the citizens of his country about developments around the coronavirus pandemic in his country in 2020. Drawing on the notion of Mandelaism, the study argues that in his addresses, Ramaphosa employed very similar techniques used by Former President Nelson Mandela to appeal to patriotic sentiments, often invoking notions of magical powers in an endeavour to reconcile South Africans, and advance nation-building in light of a pandemic that exposed the nations deeply entrenched economic and social divisions. The speeches considered in this study were those delivered by Ramaphosa in the early stages of the pandemic's impact on the country, when very few cases had been reported. However, the nation was uncertain, considering the perceived scale of impact this health crisis was set to have. To date, there do not appear to have been many studies that have considered Ramaphosa's rhetoric. Thus, this study will add to the body of knowledge of, firstly, understanding how he employs rhetoric and, secondly, the broader body of knowledge around how Mandelaism, as a rhetorical approach, has been appropriated by other rhetors who emulate his rhetorical approach in their endeavour to promote harmony, and

reconciliation amid an uncertain social, political and economic context.

Keywords: rhetoric, Mandelaism, Cyril Ramaphosa, coronavirus, South Africa.

BACKGROUND

The covid-19 pandemic has been as much of a public health issue as it is an issue of communication. As nations have tried to contain the spread of the pandemic, government communications have been a central tool in that endeavour. It has been used to provide information and persuade the public to adhere to public policy measures, such as national lockdowns, social distancing, and wearing masks that have required public compliance to be effective.¹ South Africa has been lauded for its swift and efficient response to the pandemic, especially in the early stages of the outbreak in March 2020, linked to its communications.² However, the development has spotlighted President Cyril Ramaphosa's leadership and deployment of rhetoric to allay public fears and ensure public compliance.

Cyril Ramaphosa

Cyril Ramaphosa is South Africa's 5th democratically elected president. He first assumed the caretaker president role in February 2018 after the then president Jacob Zuma announced his resignation after being recalled by the African National Congress amid mounting allegations of state capture. In December 2017, in his campaign to remove Zuma, Ramaphosa positioned himself as a saviour from Zuma's failed leadership. He termed his era 'the new dawn' for South Africa's economy. This ascension to power would prove significant as it positioned him as a hero who would turn the country's prospects around after the so-called 'nine wasted years' under Zuma's leadership. He was later officially elected into power

¹ Lilleker *et al.* 2021.

² Carlitz & Mkhura 2021.

after the 2019 general elections based on his promises to turn the country around.³

Ramaphosa had previously been touted to be the successor of South Africa's first democratically elected president Nelson Mandela and is often viewed as Mandela's preferred candidate for the role, even though Thabo Mbeki was eventually elected and installed by ANC branches in 1997. Disappointed by his inability to assume the leadership of the country, Ramaphosa left active politics to build a career for himself in the private sector. As a result, he amassed a significant amount of wealth as a businessman.⁴ However, he rejoined active politics in 2012, when he was elected as the ANC's deputy president, which put him in line to become the country's deputy president in 2014.

Ramaphosa re-entered public politics as a billionaire businessman, one of only two known black billionaires in South Africa.⁵ He took presidential office with the promise of a 'new dawn' as a slogan of a new era for South Africa. This new dawn dissociated from the previous president's term, which was associated with corruption and state capture.⁶ He associated himself with Mandela's New South Africa through the New Dawn. In a speech delivered at his presidential inauguration on 25 May 2019 in Pretoria, South Africa, he introduced the notion stating: 'Through the irrefutable power of the ballot. . . South Africans declared the dawn of a new era. . . A new era has dawned in our country.'⁷ In another address, delivered on the occasion of the Presidency Budget Vote two months later, on 17 July, 2019, he invoked the memory of Mandela and encouraged the nation toward reconciliation. He confirmed that as part of the new dawn, his government would speak with one voice: 'In this Mandela month, I would like to invite everyone to take a moment to commit

³ Haffajee 2019.

⁴ Lodge 1993.

⁵ Businesstech 2019.

⁶ Martin & Solomon 2016; Madonsela 2019.

⁷ Ramaphosa 2019.

themselves to keep Madiba's legacy alive in both word and deed.⁸ Thus, the new dawn ideology is similar to the notion of the 'new South Africa,' which ushered in Nelson Mandela's presidential term. The new South Africa promised hope and reconciliation;⁹ the new dawn led by a businessman for a moment brought hope to South Africans.

Ramaphosa's presidential campaign slogan was *Thuma Mina*, borrowed from the biblical Isaiah's response to God, 'Send me.'¹⁰ Ramaphosa ascended office as 'the sent one.' The ideas of 'the new dawn' and 'the sent one' carry spiritual or messianic connotations.¹¹ Further, by defining his era in power as 'the New Dawn,' he implies that his predecessor, Jacob Zuma's years in office were dark, almost as the Mandela era signified a new day and the passing of the dark days of apartheid. The Zuma years were associated with the Bell Pottinger public relations social media campaign, which was accused of dividing Mandela's Rainbow Nation.¹² Thus, Ramaphosa became 'the sent one' *Thuma Mina*, who would resuscitate Mandela's 'New South Africa,' which primed the national conscience for the New Dawn. Just as Mandela crossed South Africa from the perilous dark days of apartheid to an inclusive New South Africa, Ramaphosa would also lead the nation through the perilous days of a deadly global virus.

Little is understood about Ramaphosa's political-ideological convictions and philosophy: hence the paucity of research that has considered his approach to persuasion. He has chosen silence as a tactical political strategy since the early 90s. Lodge (1993: 71) observes, 'Cyril Ramaphosa gives many interviews, but he keeps his personal philosophy to himself.' Moving in silence is an understandable decision given his early political career, where his ideology cost him assuming the presidency after Mandela's term.

⁸ Ramaphosa 2019.

⁹ Salazar 2002.

¹⁰ Mahuleke 2018.

¹¹ Mashau & Kgatle 2021.

¹² Verwey & Muir 2019.

Ramaphosa's view of Mandela after his release from prison raised eyebrows and perhaps revealed Ramaphosa's ambition for the highest office. He equated Mandela with other members of the ANC. 'Mandela was a member of the ANC, and his status is no different from any other member [though] he is one of those people who may have to be considered for a leadership position.'¹³ The next time Ramaphosa revealed himself, he addressed the World Trade Center, which did not sit well with some of the most influential kingmakers, such as Peter Mokabe, then ANCYL president. In 1982, Ramaphosa had a public disagreement with Moss Mayekiso, a spokesperson for the Southern Transvaal civic associations, where it became apparent that Ramaphosa's ideology had shifted from the left. That is how Thabo Mbeki became president instead of him.

While Ramaphosa has succeeded in moving in silence as a political strategy to power, not all his movements have been silent. The Marikana massacre exploded out of the country like a volcano, leaving South Africans dumbfounded.¹⁴ The idea of a peaceful post-apartheid South Africa was stained. Ramaphosa was again found to be silent regarding his role in the massacre where police killed 34 miners after his email to Lonmin bosses described the miners' strike as 'criminal.'¹⁵ Ramaphosa apologised for his role in Marikana about five years later.¹⁶ However, in 2020, Marikana families and injured workers were still waiting for the president's apology.¹⁷

In his current role as the president of South Africa, he has been forced out of this silence because his leadership is closely tied to his ability to persuade South Africans that he is the right man for the job. The coronavirus crisis has provided an occasion where he is forced to communicate continuously. In so doing, it provided an

¹³ Lodge 1993: 69.

¹⁴ Marinovich 2016.

¹⁵ Eyewitness News 2012.

¹⁶ Tandwa 2017.

¹⁷ Dintwa 2020.

opportunity to consider how he employs persuasive techniques and how these may betray his inferred ideas about South African people and the South African nations. As discussed in greater detail in the analysis below, our examination of these has found that Ramaphosa is inclined to appropriate and, at times, emulate harmonious and reconciliatory rhetoric, most commonly associated with Mandelaism. Whether this is deliberate or a by-product of having been Mandela's protégé. Nevertheless, what is clear is that in portions of the speeches he delivered to South Africans at the start of the coronavirus crisis in the country, Ramaphosa's rhetoric had aspects most associated with Mandelaism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mandelaism and rhetoric

Nelson Mandela's rhetoric has been widely studied, focusing on his unmatched ability to use words to promote reconciliation.¹⁸ From his 1964 Treason Trial speech to the 1994 speech he delivered at his inauguration as South Africa's first black president, his work is widely quoted and used in various literature, the press, biographies, television, and scholarly publications. Mandelaism is a term that has been derived from the mythologising of Mandela. Although much has been recorded and studied about Mandela's rhetoric and leadership, it is not a proliferated term yet. What has been written about Mandelaism varies from scholar to scholar. In some contexts, Mandelaism is studied as a method of grassroots activism alongside a notion called Ghandism.¹⁹ For this study, we adopt Mpofu & Chasi's (2017: 1, 9) conceptualisation of Mandelaism. They define Mandelaism as an idea that 'draws on patriotic sentiments, often invoking notions of magical powers to reconcile racial divisions, to right wrongs of the past and to nation-build[ing]' based on mythologising Nelson Mandela, and imagining a South African nation characterised by 'harmony, peace, reconciliation, and success, denying the significance of informational disturbances that

¹⁸ Salazar 2002.

¹⁹ James *et al.* 2013.

contradict these narratives.’ While specifically called Mandelaism, this notion is not solely characteristic of Mandela but the general rhetoric around imaginations around democratic South Africa.

In her work, comparing Mandela’s rhetoric to that of his predecessor and the last president under apartheid, F. W. de Klerk, Mary Brockett (2005: 75) argues that Mandela’s rhetorical vision for South Africa, as articulated in his speeches, was as ‘a united, free, nonracial South African society’ which would be the hopeful outcome of a process of negotiation. Kenneth Zagacki’s (2003: 723) work on Mandela’s speech following the assassination of Chris Hani. This event was thought to fuel divisions between black and white South Africans, similarly finds that ‘Mandela rhetorically enacted the bringing together of a divided community that would survive Hani’s murder.’ These scholars find that in times of crisis, a key trait of Mandelaism is rhetoric that argues for harmony and reconciliation. Thus, in examining how Cyril Ramaphosa appropriates Mandelaism in response to the coronavirus pandemic, the study examines how his speeches advance these values as central to South Africa’s response to the crisis.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this paper, we use Mandelaism and crisis rhetoric to consider how Ramaphosa used notions of reconciliation and success to frame the South African government’s approach to dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. Amos Kiewe (1994: xvii) defines crisis rhetoric as ‘the discourse initiated by decision makers to communicate to various constituents that a certain development is critical and to suggest a certain course of action to remedy the critical situation.’ We focus on the phrase, ‘certain course of action to remedy the critical situation,’ wherein we are considering how Ramaphosa employed ideas closely linked with Mandelaism to persuade South Africans of the government’s response to the pandemic. This type of crisis rhetoric, typically epideictic, is used to respond to events that are seen as critical. According to Bonnie Dow (1989: 302), this rhetoric is used by leaders amid a crisis to ‘promote continuity,

restore communal feeling, and . . . reconcile the audience to a new situation.’ Our study argues that in his endeavour to promote continuity, restore communicable feeling, and reconcile the audience to a new situation, Ramaphosa employs persuasive strategies that align closely with the idea of Mandelaism.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The study considered four speeches Cyril Ramaphosa delivered on live television at the start of the coronavirus pandemic in South Africa. The first speech was delivered on March 24, when he announced the country would be going into lockdown. A week later, the second speech was delivered on March 30, when South Africa had been in lockdown for four days. The following speech was on April 9, and the final speech considered was on April 21. These speeches were delivered consecutively. The sampling method allows us to examine how his crisis rhetoric developed.

Data analysis: the coding process

Each of the researchers read through the speeches. We also watched the live speeches when they were delivered and then revisited them several times during the analysis phase of the study for close caption since the medium in which they had initially been presented was audio-visual, being broadcast on television and streamed online. After this initial reading, the researchers coded the aspects of the speech that appeared most salient and alluded to the persuasive approach Ramaphosa had employed. The researchers then exchanged documents and performed member checking to ascertain the similarities and differences that emerged from this first coding round. From this round of coding, it was decided to consider how Ramaphosa’s speeches had alluded to the aspects of Mandelaism mentioned by Mpofu and Chasi (2017), namely harmony, peace and reconciliation; and denying the significance of informational disturbances that contradict these narratives.

The readers engaged in a second-level analysis, explicitly considering the two elements discussed above. This second-level analysis was done because the first-level analysis generally examined the rhetorical devices and approaches in the speeches. In contrast, this second-level analysis specifically considered the two types of rhetoric discussed above. Again, each researcher coded independently, and then member checking was used to ascertain consistency between the researchers.

DISCUSSION

Harmony, peace, reconciliation

Mandelaism manifests in the iconisation of Nelson Mandela as a symbol of an ‘imagined mythic South African nation;’ to produce false legitimacy and belonging.²⁰ President Cyril Ramaphosa begins each of his four speeches with ‘My Fellow South Africans.’²¹ The tone of these opening words as a greeting is familiarity, evoking a sense of belonging to every South African. This emotive salutation is a shortcut for the ‘imagined mythic’ South African nationhood ideals of togetherness, inclusivity, and reconciliation in times of crisis. ‘My fellow South Africans’ as a shortcut for a unified, overcoming, reconciled nation is supported by evidence throughout all four speeches.

From religious leaders to sporting associations,
from political parties to business people, from
trade unions to traditional leaders, from NGOs to
public servants, every part of our society has come
forward to confront. . . ’ (March 24, 2020);

‘The rich and the poor, the young and the old,
black and white, those who live in the cities and
those in the villages. . . ’ (March 30, 2020)

²⁰ Mpofu & Chasi 2017: 2.

²¹ March 9, 2020; March 24, 2020; April 9, 2020; April 21, 2020.

‘Government, as NGOs, as political parties, as large corporations and small businesses (April 9, 2020).

We are determined to ensure that women, youth and persons with disability received particular attention and support’ (April 21, 2020).

This reconciliation and inclusivity rhetoric finds its effectiveness mainly when used within moments of national crisis since it is how it was forged during the Mandela years. Mandela was a more effective messenger of this inclusivity as he was the face and the embodiment of the national crisis through his life as one who fought against apartheid and addressed the white oppressive regime during the Treason Trial, where he first injected the notions of an inclusive society after which he was imprisoned for 27 years. Ramaphosa draws on this Mandelaism in the context of crisis by using the phrase ‘My fellow South Africans’ as inclusive language is effective because of the psychological power of priming and shortcuts for political communication.

The president arouses reconciliation in the context of crisis, imploring citizens to remember historical pains that have been overcome: South Africans are a people who come together and unite at moments of great crisis’ (April 9, 2020). Throughout the four speeches where the overcoming and togetherness of South Africans are brought to national consciousness, Mandela is recalled. This manufactures a temporary aura of harmony, unity, and reconciliation. Mandela is present, though salient, as the president addresses the nation, ‘My fellow South Africans.’ In the address, Mandela is projected through motifs of resilience, racial harmony, national unity, harmony, and working together.

Mpofu & Chasi (2017) point to two Afrikaans lines that Mandela used in his inauguration speech, where he reassured Afrikaners, whose regime was ending, about forgetting the past. This invoked amnesty rhetoric silenced millions of black South

Africans who lived the harsh reality of making peace with the past, as Mandela proposed. The inclusion of silence as a means to reconcile became part of the political language of reconciliation. In his first speech, just as Mandela used the Afrikaans language as reconciliatory rhetoric of inclusion and silencing the past, Ramaphosa closes his first speech by addressing South Africans in the languages they understand. One of those languages is Afrikaans. '*Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika. Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso. God seën Suid-Afrika. God bless South Africa. Mudzimu fhatutshedza Afurika. Hosi katekisa Afrika* (March 24, 2020).'

The first line of our national anthem is used to end the speech as a reconciliatory rhetorical device that evokes notions of national pride and the magic powers of being South African. The Mandelasque reconciliatory rhetoric silences political differences and the racial and economic inequalities created during apartheid.

Mandelaism denies complexity and simplifies history so that Mandela is iconised as a magician grandfather.²² Therefore, Mandelaism relies on what South Africa called 'Madiba Magic'.²³ The iconic Madiba Magic was evidenced by sporting events such as the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Mandela adorned a Springbok jersey in 1995, a symbol of apartheid only previously adorned by white people and Afrikaners since black and coloured players had been systematically excluded during apartheid. Mandelaism silently communicated that reconciliation meant forgetting about those systematic injustices and being happy with temporary togetherness. This and many other instances were a global display of South African togetherness. Ramaphosa plays on this global magic of togetherness. An example of this is when he says:

I wish to thank you personally. I wish to thank you for reaffirming to each other and to the world that we South Africans are a people who come together. . . Our ability to come together

²² Mpofu and Chasi 2017.

²³ Boehmer 2012.

in a crisis, and our commitment to each other
and our common future.’ (April 9, 2020)

Ramaphosa emphasises the ‘our’ (possessive plural of ‘We’) as though he were not addressing one of the world's most racially and economically unequal countries. How is this ‘commitment to each other’ measured? What is the commonality of the future of the shack dweller and street dweller with the wealthy? Ramaphosa performs Mandelaism in a manner that conflates myths of peace, harmony, and reconciliation in South African society as though they were real, where a false ‘our’ exists.²⁴

Mandela is the exception, yet there is an implicit expectation that the black masses are expected to be like Mandela. Mandelaism burdens the black South Africans with an invisible but felt the weight of emulating the reconciliatory Mandela. This exceptionalism is part of the inclusive reconciliation rhetoric that speaks to false oneness and equality. ‘All of us are experiencing great hardship’ (March 30, 2020). An economically and racially unequal society can’t experience a common ‘great hardship.’ Some citizens have multiple properties, while others are homeless and live in poverty.

‘If we work together’ (March 30, 2020)

‘We South Africans are a people who come together
and unite at moments of great crisis . . . I wish to
thank you for reaffirming to each other and to the
world’ (April 9, 2020)

‘I have faith in the strength and resilience of
ordinary South Africans (April 21, 2020).’

²⁴ Mpofu and Chasi 2017.

Exceptionalism is part of the burden placed on South Africa. The president further 'reaffirms' this to South Africans and the world. This is an additional burden where South Africa is the face of Mandela that models forgiveness and reconciliation attributes.

Reconciliatory rhetoric is part of Mandela's iconic political communication magical power attributed to transitioning South Africa from apartheid without a civil war. Mandelalism is characterised by close relationships with corporates that will fund Mandela projects and continue to profit from their association of Mandelalism with their brands.²⁵ Ramaphosa incorporates business throughout his speeches, where business is a force for good. Business or business associates are represented in Ramaphosa's speeches as part of his reconciliatory rhetoric, as if business in South Africa forms part of an inclusive and reconciled fabric of South Africa.

In some ways, the corporate sector is represented in a manner that positions the business community in a messianic position to the nation in crisis.

'While these measures are providing obvious relief to many companies and workers, it is clear that there is a far greater need across the entire economy. We will therefore be introducing a R200 billion loan guarantee scheme in partnership with the major banks, the National Treasury, and the South African Reserve Bank' (April 21, 2021).

Banks are working with the government to assist companies with their operational costs. However, contrary to this reconciliatory rhetoric, based on the evidence of what transpired, the partnerships of the banks and the Reserve Bank were primarily for the benefit of big businesses rather than the majority. Ramaphosa's proximity to the corporate sector is emblematic of the quintessential

²⁵ Mpofu and Chasi 2017.

Mandelaism; however, Ramaphosa is a symbol and personification of big business since he is one of the country's only known two black billionaires.

‘We welcome the commitment by the Motsepe Foundation of R1 billion and by Naspers of R1.5 billion. We are also extremely grateful to Mr. Jack Ma, the founder of the China-based company Alibaba.’ (March 30, 2020).

Motsepe is also the president’s brother-in-law, the only black billionaire in the country. In addition, Ramaphosa spent years as a businessman at Mandela’s encouragement. This intimate relationship with business manifests from the president’s first speech; halfway after his remarks, the president addresses the public as ‘Fellow South Africans,’ expressing his business concern.

‘Our country finds itself confronted by a virus...but also by the prospects of a very deep economic recession that will cause businesses to close and many people to lose their jobs.’ (March 24, 2020).

The president follows this by using reconciliatory rhetoric to suggest that the government will work together with businesses. ‘Therefore, as we marshal our every resource and energy to fight this epidemic, working together with business’ (March 24, 2020). Ramaphosa further introduces a fund called the ‘Solidarity Fund,’ which would be headed by business leaders, one a black businesswoman and a white man who is a billionaire; ‘Ms. Gloria Serobe and the deputy Chairperson is Mr. Adrian Enthoven (March 24, 2020).’ Ramaphosa reenacts and affirms the South African reconciliation myth or the Rainbow Nation myth with a black businesswoman and a white billionaire man. Reconciliatory Mandelaism finds its meaning in shallow representations of racial unity. The Solidarity Fund leaders become mascots of racial and

economic equality who exercise messianic powers. Mandelalism is, in essence, harmful since it is abused for corporate gains through projecting the false nation-building 'we' for its interests. 'White capital continues to dominate post-apartheid South Africa at the expense of the majority who remain largely poor.'²⁶

Denying the significance of informational disturbances that contradict these narratives

For this particular segment, we have considered silence as a rhetorical device to examine the relevant aspects of Ramaphosa's speech, where he uses silence on an issue to communicate. Writing about rhetoric and silence, Robert Scott (1972: 146) notes, 'Every decision to say something is a decision not to say something else, that is, if the utterance is a choice. In speaking, we remain silent. And in remaining silent, we speak.' In this case, consideration is given to instances where one would have expected Ramaphosa to say something, but instead, he remained silent about it in his address. In his case, silence is not the absence of speech but rather the decision to speak about something else.

An example is his speech on March 30, 2021, after South Africa had been in lockdown for around three days. During the early stages of the lockdown, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) was deployed to assist with law enforcement operations, particularly in ensuring the public did not contravene lockdown regulations. Amid this, there was a public outcry on the aggressive and violent approach employed by the soldiers toward civilians. In the March 30 address, the president was expected to condemn these actions unequivocally when he spoke about them. However, in passing, he states: 'They (the SANDF) know that they must always act within the law and not cause harm to any of our people' (March 30, 2021). Here we see him talking about the issue but in a way that minimises it and denies its significance. Earlier in the speech, he had been lauding 'the people of South Africa for acting in a disciplined manner.'

²⁶ Mpofu and Chasi 2017: 8.

He also uses silence as a rhetorical device by denying or minimising dissenting voices and views. Examples of this include the following:

‘Millions of our people have understood the gravity of the situation’ (March 23, 2020).

‘And then there is each of you, the 58 million South African citizens and residents who are standing together to confront this national health emergency.’ (April 9, 2020).

Here the denials arise when Ramaphosa does not acknowledge that not all South Africans viewed the pandemic as such and that many did not see it as a health emergency. Mpofu and Chasi (2017: 9) discuss how ‘Mandelaism locks Mandela into a narrative order of forgetting which ignores apartheid oppression.’ Using objections and counterarguments is an established and persuasive communication strategy because it deals directly with opposing views.²⁷ However, Ramaphosa appears not to prefer this approach, perhaps because the idea of dissent is not congruent with Mandelaism and the notion of unity that is held up by the view that all South Africans want the same thing: in Mandela’s case, it was support for the reconciliation project; in Ramaphosa’s case it was support for the government’s programmes on dealing with Covid-19.

Mpofu and Chasi (2017: 6) argue that it is a myth that Mandela united South Africa since it ‘remains violent, unequal and an alienating society.’ There is no evidence of supposed harmony and peace, as the evidence of violence is overwhelming. Instead of addressing violence and inequality, Ramaphosa is silent about the pervasive violence in the country. When he does talk about safety,

²⁷ Leitão 2003.

it is about protection from the virus or when he is referring to the economy.

‘We will prioritise the lives and livelihoods of our people above all else and will use all of the measures within our power to protect them from the economic consequences of this pandemic. (March 24, 2020).’

Ramaphosa addresses the urgency of loss of life in the nation as though there had not been a life-threatening situation in the country because of violence that leads to loss of life. During the early stages of the lockdown, the police stats revealed that certain categories of violent crimes had decreased due to government restrictions to prevent the spread of the virus. By addressing the threat of the virus, the government also limited violent crimes, but it was still taking place.²⁸ The violence increased over lockdown, according to 2021 stats (IOL 2021). The president is silent and does not address the fact that South Africa is the most unequal country globally. What happens is that the contributions of billionaires are named by the president and applauded.

‘We must applaud the commitment made in this time of crisis by the Rupert and Oppenheimer families of R1 billion each to assist small businesses’ (March 24, 2021).

‘We welcome the commitment by the Motsepe Foundation of R1 billion and by Naspers of R1.5 billion to the coronavirus response. We are also extremely grateful to Mr. Jack Ma, the founder of the China-based company Alibaba, who has donated vital medical supplies to South Africa and other countries across Africa’ (March 30, 2020).

²⁸ News24 April 2020.

The poor workers who contribute to our safety and our economy are faceless and nameless.

‘We would like to thank our nurses, doctors and other health workers, social workers and frontline government staff, volunteers and NGOs who are leading the fight against the disease’ (March 30, 2020).

While the president names their service to our nation, their names are denied, even if it is the leaders of these critical services.

‘I speak of the caregiver in the old-age home, the childcare home and the hospice, who comes in every day to tend to the most vulnerable of our citizens’ (March 30, 2020).

Mpofu and Chasi (2017) note that one of the marks of Mandelaism is Mandela’s relationship with white capital. The post-apartheid South Africa is characterised by a poor black population where white capital controls the economy. Ramaphosa understands the political pressure of leading an economically unequal country where the poor and economically excluded are black.

‘Our new economy must be founded on fairness, empowerment, justice, and equality.... Our new economy must open new horizons and offer new opportunities’ (April 21, 2020).

Ramaphosa uses the rhetoric of silence as a political statement to his political opposition, the Economic Freedom Fighters. Ramaphosa repeats the words ‘new economy,’ followed by ‘justice.’ He takes a moment when political parties do not have a platform to address the nation to appropriate their rhetoric. The words ‘new economy’ is another rhetoric of silence to silence the ANC Radical

Economic Transformation faction led by Zuma, where Ramaphosa is accused of working for white capital. Lastly, the notion of the 'new economy' brings to national conscience notions of the 'new South Africa' where Ramaphosa is the 'New Dawn' and Thuma Mina 'the sent one.' He uses the rhetoric of silence to bring his campaign to the fore and represent himself as the one who would fulfill all the nation's hope.

Ramaphosa weaponises silence. Arguably, it is how he focuses the country on positive attributes and controls negative news and criticism. He eliminates negatives from his speech and creates an imagined reality where all that exists is what he names. However, this silencing rhetoric may have an opposite effect where listeners focus on what has not been named, such as violence by soldiers on citizens.

Silence is a rhetorical device that Ramaphosa wields with intent; perhaps it would be safe to state that silence is one of Ramaphosa's key rhetorical devices. This has been evidenced by a few landmark moments in his career where he lost an argument, reputation, trust, and position because of something he said. These moments can be summarised in this order: in 1982, his public spat with Mayekiso led him to keep his ideology to himself. Secondly, his ambition for the presidency was revealed when Mandela was newly freed. Ramaphosa reduced Mandela to any other member of the ANC who would have to contest for his position. This was not well received by the ANC. Thirdly, Ramaphosa lost the confidence of key leaders that could have made him president after his speech at the World Trade Center. Thabo Mbeki was elected president in his place. Lastly, Ramaphosa's email during the Marikana Massacre was controversial; he was accused of being responsible.

There were no journalists to interrogate him after each lockdown speech, as other presidents are often interviewed after their speeches. Perhaps there are no journalists because he may say something that adversely affects his career. In some ways, this is dangerous for the nation as his decisions or speeches can be viewed as autocratic, unlike in a democracy where a president faces difficult

questions from journalists. What then is the nature of the South African democracy if the president is not engaging journalists? Where is accountability at a time when the country faces the deadliest virus?

CONCLUSION

The coronavirus pandemic is an ongoing crisis that continues to affect the world. In South Africa, the first recorded case was on March 5, 2020. Ramaphosa's response to the global pandemic is compared with President Thabo Mbeki's response to HIV/Aids. Although Mbeki was called an Aids denialist, Ramaphosa embraced the moment as a national threat.²⁹ Seekings and Nattrass (2020) criticize the African National Congress government for a militarised response. The national addresses delivered during the lockdown provided unusual opportunities for the nation to pay attention to President Ramaphosa's words since their lives depended on them. Ramaphosa seized the moment and attempted to rebrand the country to Mandelaism, where notions of peace, harmony, and reconciliation were central themes. President Ramaphosa had more opportunities to address the nation in a shorter time than any other president. This allows for his style of rhetoric to be noticeable as 'Family Meeting' or 'Fellow South Africans' would trend on social media as the nation anticipates another speech. This paper has established the Mandelaism that emerged from his speech.

South Africa's response to the pandemic has been lauded, playing into the Mandelaism notion that Mandela was an 'exceptional light in the darkness of Africa.'³⁰ This exceptionalism comes through in Ramaphosa's rhetoric, as he positions the interventions made by the government in response to the coronavirus pandemic in exaggerated and flattering terms, often juxtaposing these two nations that he suggests have not been as decisive. The other idea around success, as embodied in

²⁹ Seekings & Nattrass 2020.

³⁰ Mpofu & Chasi, 2017: 10

Mandelaism, means one value must be sacrificed for another, namely redistribution for reconciliation.³¹ Ramaphosa's rhetoric is silent on the aspects where the government has erred in its response to the pandemic and yet very pronounced on its successes, attributing these to the fundamental values espoused in Mandelaism, namely harmony and reconciliation.

³¹ Mpofu and Chasi 2017.

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