

TRANSFORMATION

What we can expect of second Cyril Ramaphosa term

With a week to go before the general election, this may well be the moment to reflect on President Cyril Ramaphosa's next presidential term, given the near certainty of the ANC leading the next government.

At the Franschhoek Literary Festival last weekend, former public protector Thuli Madonsela surprised her audience when she declared Ramaphosa a really good president. Not to be deterred, Madonsela was pressed by the audience for her assessment of DA leaders. She was typically gracious, praising Alan Winde



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for engaging in positive campaigns.

The focus on remarkable individuals in Adekeye Adebajo's book *Global Africa* and in fellow panellists Nick Dall's and Matthew Blackman's *Legends* is typical of discussions on leadership. The emphasis is on the single, heroic figure achieving great heights

against huge odds. Hence the focus – for good or for bad – on the big personalities of Paul Kagame, Thabo Mbeki or Madonsela herself. Nelson Mandela is mentioned as a probably once-in-an-epoch type of leader belonging to the pantheon of Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King.

I venture to argue that Ramaphosa's style falls within what scholars in this field call transformational leadership suitable for postmodern times. Larry Sackney of University of Saskatchewan and his collaborator, Coral Mitchell of Brock University, argue that "postmodern theories of leadership take the focus off

vision and place it squarely on voice". They argue that instead of a compelling vision articulated by leaders, there are multiple voices and diverse cultural meanings. SA society has myriad forces and identities that voice their opinions loudly, making ours a very noisy democracy.

So what's a president to do in this context? Klaus Kotze of the Inclusive Society Institute says that given Jacob Zuma's state capture legacy, which Ramaphosa had to deal with, he sought to show he was advancing the national interest above that of the party, "leading the party by leading the nation". Ramaphosa had to draw the line

between him and his predecessor by proclaiming the "new dawn".

Ramaphosa's primary source of inspiration is the very SA constitution he played a huge role in drafting, with Kotze arguing Ramaphosa "does not assert himself personally as a leader to be followed but embodies the norms and values enshrined in the constitution".

His biographer, Anthony Butler, described his approach as "visionary pragmatism". Hence his "thuma mina" – reminiscent of JF Kennedy's 1961 call, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country" – worked at various

levels: a repudiation of the sleaze and patronage that had come to grip government and business, while calling on South Africans to put in efforts to uplift the country. Similarly, the regular "family meetings" during the Covid-19 pandemic sought to unify the various voices and concerns of society.

Last week's signing into law of the National Health Insurance

POSTMODERN LEADERSHIP THEORIES PLACE [THE FOCUS] SQUARELY ON VOICE

(NHI) Bill is vintage Ramaphosa setting a vision, a stretch target, for all our contending forces to address, to work out how this can be implemented. We saw him operate in a similar fashion when in his February 2022 state of the nation address he called for a social compact in 100 days. This focused the minds of business, labour, civil society and government, and is now seen in the mini-compacts such as against gender-based violence and the government-business working groups looking at burning issues of the day: energy, water and logistics, fighting crime, and corruption.

Ramaphosa has echoed the call made by Mbeki for a

national dialogue after the elections. Vague as this may sound, it could well become the successor to the traditions established in writing the new constitution, referred to as Codesa. Mbeki said the dialogue should consist of "civil society organisations, politicians, businesses, labour and other organisations to discuss a way forward". It's a recognition of the postmodern reality of contending voices and which would appeal to Ramaphosa's natural consensus building style.

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