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Debunking “The New Dawn” Myth: A comparative analysis of South Africa and Zimbabwe

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This paper is a comparative analysis of the politics of South Africa and Zimbabwe. It aims to demystify “The New Dawn” phenomenon espoused by the presidents of the two countries. On 24 November 2017, Emmerson Mnangagwa was sworn in as Zimbabwe’s President. This followed the forced resignation of President Robert Mugabe by the country’s military after spending over three decades in office. In South Africa, President Jacob Zuma was also forced to resign as President of the country by the African National Congress. On 15 February 2018, Cyril Ramaphosa became the new President. Strikingly, both these new leaders announced that they were bringing with them the so-called “New Dawn” for their respective countries. This was even though they were both from the governing political parties in the two countries and were going to implement the same policies. The paper uses the Constitutions of the governing political parties in South Africa and Zimbabwe to demonstrate why “The New Dawn” was a myth from the day the concept was appropriated by the two leaders. Indeed, five years after these leaders made such a claim, “The New Dawn” remains a myth. Instead, the socio-political situation has become worse than when they assumed office.

Key words: Constitution, Myth, South Africa, The New Dawn, Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa and Zimbabwe share a lot in common. During the liberation struggle, the African National Congress (ANC) and Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) worked together as they waged war against white supremacy in both countries. Even after obtaining political independence, these movements kept their close ties under a new identity of being the governing political parties. It is not surprising that the leaders of these parties sing from the same hymn book as they talk about the so-called “New Dawn,” which

has become a myth. The word “myth” is linked to origin; it explains how things began. As aptly captured by Losada (2015: 930), “every myth is essentially etiological.” This view is predicated on the understanding that the aim of the myth is to make sense of a particular situation. Jaja (2014:9) opines that “generally, a myth is a story which is believed to be true....” In simple terms, a myth does not necessarily have to be true but should appear as such so that people could believe it. Man cannot live without myths (Anyanwu, 1987). Historically, “myth” can be traced

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back to the 6th century BC in the Greek cities of Asia Minor (Madondo, 2008). Madondo (2008:71) avers that “Myth is not only a narrative, but also a discourse of desire and feeling. It does not express itself through ideas or concepts and it develops on the fringes of rationality; its object is to tell the psychic truth.” This conceptualisation of “myth” explains why the claims by Presidents Emmerson Mnangagwa of Zimbabwe and Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa amount to ‘imagined reality’ in the same manner that Anderson (1983) talked about ‘imagined communities.’ Invoking this concept aimed at instilling new hope. These leaders knew very well that what they were promising was impractical and unrealistic. This was not an anomaly; other politicians make empty promises which they know they will not fulfil. They do this in order to obtain and/or retain political power and to win support. The phrase “New Dawn” has been abused for different reasons. Politicians have joined the bandwagon and appropriated it for their own political gains. Sometimes they either do not understand its meaning entirely or pretend not to. This calls for an explication of this concept to allow for informed engagement with those who wittingly and unwittingly use it loosely. This paper unpacks the phrase in the contexts of South Africa and Zimbabwe. On assuming power between 2017 and 2018, Presidents Mnangagwa and Ramaphosa appropriated this phrase in order to position themselves as the ‘Messiahs’. They did so in order to distance themselves from their predecessors, President Robert Mugabe, and President Jacob Zuma. Mnangagwa averred that “the voice of the people is the voice of God” (Mudzanire and Banda, 2021:1). Like Mugabe, he argued that God wanted him to rule Zimbabwe. However, he believed that his mission was to rescue the country from the misery caused by Mugabe. He saw himself as the unifier of the divided nation (Garusa, 2019). Chimininge (2019:47) did an analysis of Mnangagwa’s usage of God in his speeches in order to entrench himself.

Both these leaders had worked together with their predecessors as Deputy Presidents. They had been part of the team which was responsible for the implementation of party policies. Therefore, for anyone who fully understands what the “New Dawn” means, it was clear from the start that these leaders were exercising political grandstanding (Jakaza, 2021). Both Presidents gave their people and the international community false hope about better things to come. Deep down in their hearts, they knew that their promise would not be kept. They understood how their political parties operate. They also knew that any sitting President implements party policies. Importantly, they understood the circumstances which had led to their parties not performing well. The paper will reflect on certain clauses in the Constitutions of the governing political parties of the two countries. The primary aim will be to establish the extent to which their claim can be authenticated by party Constitutions.

Structurally, the paper will first discuss the methodological approach followed. It will then provide the meaning of the “New Dawn” from a general perspective. This section of the paper will also discuss the contextual and theoretical understanding of this phrase. The paper will then zoom directly into the two case studies. Lastly, it will conclude if the phrase as appropriated by the two leaders has adopted the *real* and conventional meaning or is just a myth and political rhetoric.

METHODOLOGY

The study falls within the qualitative paradigm – although some statistical data from secondary sources are used. The methodology used to gather information for this paper was document analysis and direct observation. In short, the paper is based on desktop research which analysed available documents such as the Constitutions of the two political parties, statements by the two leaders, and various reports (including both media and research reports) about the performance of the two countries in various spheres of life. Observation of what has been happening in both South Africa and Zimbabwe under the two leaders (Presidents Ramaphosa and Mnangagwa) also constituted the research methodology used in the study. Literature review was also used to obtain data and to provide the necessary context within which the paper should be understood.

DEFINITION OF THE “NEW DAWN” AS USED IN THE LITERATURE

Generally, the “New Dawn” denotes a new beginning; a turning point or a fresh start. It marks deviation from the previous or current situations and promises change to something better and more progressive compared to what was there before. According to the *Collins Dictionary*, the word “dawn” on its own literally means the time of the day when light first appears in the sky, just before the sun rises. Therefore, when understood from this context, the “New Dawn” marks a new beginning, a new start. Other words commonly used to refer to the “New Dawn” include but are not limited to the following list: restoration, resurgence, revitalization, rebirth, renewal, regeneration, resurrection, rejuvenation, revival, renaissance, and rebuilding. The understanding is that one breathes fresh life into what has been there.

The common thread running through these words is that one is starting anew and is leaving the past (the old) behind. The envisaged change is one that brings about new hope. Implicit in this understanding is that for anyone who propagates the “New Dawn” phenomenon the assumption is that such a person was either not part of the old order or was disempowered under the old dispensation and thus unable to make any change. With the newly-obtained power, such a person is prepared to make evident and significant change and to open a new page to ensure that the lives of the people are impacted

positively. With the benefit of hindsight, it remains unclear if this line of thought is applicable to Presidents Mnangagwa and Ramaphosa. Firstly, both were Deputy Presidents of their respective political parties and countries. They had political power and access to state resources. Secondly, as shall be seen later, since assuming office, the social and political life of the people in both countries has deteriorated. The countries' economies are not doing well, and corrupt activities have escalated. Importantly, in South Africa, the energy crisis has derailed all development projects – including job creation and investments. At the contextual and theoretical levels, the “New Dawn” (as mentioned earlier) means starting anew, it is premised on the understanding that nothing similar has happened before. It paints the picture that something new is going to happen. Thus the “New Dawn” phenomenon makes people think about something that will set society on a new pedestal and impact their lives positively. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to state that the phrase triggers optimism and positive thinking about the future. Reflecting on BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa], various authors put together chapters in a book titled *A new dawn* (2020). They grounded this book on cooperation theory. The thrust of the argument in the book is that when BRICS was conceptualised, it was envisaged to be a body that would instil positive change among the countries of the global South. This aim was going to be achieved through cooperation in different spheres of life, which would empower member states in an unprecedented manner and improve the lives of their citizens. Therefore, BRICS was perceived to be the real “New Dawn”! When Presidents Mnangagwa and Ramaphosa talked about the “New Dawn,” they projected themselves as “liberators” who were going to miraculously save Zimbabwe and South Africa from the perceived suffering endured under Presidents Mugabe and Zuma. Their cogently thought through agenda, which was assiduously crafted and elegantly articulated, was to make their countrymen believe that they were going to start afresh and take their countries out of the present predicament. Even authors who write entertainment books use the title “A New Dawn” (Pustakalaya, 2013) with the same understanding that it denotes a new beginning and a positive change.

Theoretically, in tracing the history of nationalism studies, Storm (2018) argues that it was the path-breaking works of authors like Anderson, Gellner as well as Hobsbawm and Ranger which constituted the starting point of nationalism studies. All these works were published in 1983. According to this argument, before 1983, nationalism studies were not in place as the area of academic investigation. This should not be misconstrued to mean that there was no discussion on nationalism at all. Reference is made strictly to nationalism studies. After 1983, this theme gained momentum. Here, the

phrase the “New Dawn” was applicable in the sense that the works cited above set nationalism studies on a new path. Since then, nationalism studies have gained new impetus and attraction. The book by Richard Lenzi titled *Facing toward the dawn* (Lenzi, 2019) points to the direction where something new was expected to come from. The book provides an illumination of an unfamiliar aspect of Connecticut history. Reviewing this book in 2020, Rogers sustained this view and subscribed to the correct meaning of “The New Dawn.” He applied it appropriately to talk about the direction from which something new was going to come from. In the realm of politics, the “New Dawn” is generally understood in line with the definitions provided earlier in this paper. An article by Ahluwalia and Miller (2017) titled “A new dawn for Cuba: the end of an era” encapsulated the envisaged “New Dawn” for Cuba. This was in reference to the visit by American President Barak Obama to Havana in 2016. Such a visit marked the beginning of renewed bilateral relations between Cuba and America. For a period of almost five decades, the two countries had not been in good terms diplomatically. President Obama turned a new page through his reconfiguration of these relations. His view was that time had come for America and Cuba to smoke a peace pipe and mend the wall for the sake of the people of both countries. Had President Donald Trump not subsequently reversed these gains, the “New Dawn” would have been sustained; America and Cuba would still be having good and renewed relations at all levels and in all spheres of life. Another example of the “New Dawn” can be witnessed in the wording of a Report by Fakude (2019), titled: “Ethiopia: A real new dawn?”. Although the author posed this as a question, the idea remained the same that something new was anticipated for Ethiopia. This was in reference to the new political developments that were taking place in that country, epitomised by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed assuming office in February 2018. There was renewed hope that political stability would eventually prevail in Ethiopia after a tumultuous period marked by political intolerance. It was during this time that multilateral institutions started looking at Ethiopia in a more positive light compared to the earlier periods of political turmoil. Here, the “New Dawn” phrase was used in an appropriate manner to fit what was happening and what was envisaged.

Similarly, in 2019, Russian scholar, Vladimir Shubin reflected on South Africa's politics in the early 1990s following the unbanning of liberation movements. He penned his article: “South Africa: A new dawn?” (Shubin, 2019). This title was in reference to the fact that the ANC held its first National Conference in Durban in July 1991 following the historic decision by President FW De Klerk to unban all liberation movements and to release Nelson Mandela and others in 1990. Shubin wondered if this development marked the “New Dawn” or the new beginning. His focus was both on the ANC as an

organisation and on South Africa as a country. Shubin's view was that both the ANC and South Africa had a chance to start anew and do things differently from what the apartheid government used to do. Here, too, the phrase the "New Dawn" was applied correctly; it referred to the anticipated positive change.

All the examples cited above have one common thread. They paint a positive picture by giving hope that something new and better will come about through the "New Dawn." In these cases, the expected changes were going to mark a new start, a new beginning, a real "New Dawn"!

ANALYSIS OF ANC AND ZANU-PF POLICY PROCESSES VERSUS THE "NEW DAWN" NARRATIVE

In order to establish if Presidents Mnangagwa and Ramaphosa applied the phrase the "New Dawn" correctly, it is of cardinal importance to take a closer look at succession politics in both the ANC and in ZANU-PF. In so doing, it is important to scrutinise the Constitutions of both political parties with the view to understand what they say about succession politics in general and about party leaders and what is expected of them once they assume their office. Such an analysis will assist in establishing the extent to which the two leaders were honest when they appropriated the term the "New Dawn" while being guided by the same Constitutions.

Succession politics in the ANC

The election of office-bearers in the ANC happens through elective conferences which are encapsulated in the party's Constitution. The election process starts at branch level where Branch General Meetings (BGMs) are convened. At this level, branch leaders are elected. This is followed by regional conferences. The process culminates in the provincial conferences where each province compiles a list of its candidates to represent it at the national conference. The provincial leadership in the form of the Provincial Executive Committee (PEC) also takes a stance on draft policies to be discussed at the national conference. Rule 17 of the ANC Constitution focuses on Provincial Conferences. Among other things, it states that the provincial conference will "Promote and implement the decisions and policies of the National Conference, the National General Council, the NEC and the NWC" (ANC Constitution, Rule 17.3(1)). Therefore, local processes cannot be divorced from national processes. Provincial conferences are followed by the National Conference, which sits every five years. Rule 10 of the ANC Constitution talks about the National Conference covering voting and non-voting delegates as

well as the National General Council (NGC). Rule 11 speaks directly to the powers and duties of the National Conference. It states *inter alia* that the National Conference shall "decide on and determine the policy, programme and Constitution of the ANC" (Rule 11.1). According to Rule 11.4, the National Conference shall "elect the President, the Deputy President, National Chairperson, the Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, the Treasurer General and the remaining 80 (eighty) additional members of the NEC," which is the National Executive Committee. The first six office bearers have traditionally been referred to as "The Top Six" until December 2022 where a decision was taken to add the second Deputy Secretary General, thus changing the structure to "The Top Seven". Before the National Conference, which is usually held in December of the fifth year, there is a Policy Conference, which is normally held in June/July of that year. The main aim of the Policy Conference is to deliberate on the proposed policies which the ANC aims to implement if it emerges victorious in the national election. It is for this reason that both the Policy Conference and the Elective Conference are held about two years before the national general elections.

This timeframe is meant to allow the ANC to ruminate about its policy positions and to factor them into their election manifesto. It also gives the ANC ample time to share its policy positions with all its structures before the election takes place. This is meant to ensure that everyone reads from the same script on those policy positions across all the levels of the organisation. Ideally, all ANC members should be able to articulate the party's policies unambiguously and confidently when asked to do so. They also need to have the same understanding when the manifesto is presented to the public and when the policies are implemented after the elections. All the policies discussed at the Policy Conference are also tabled at the Elective Conference, which is attended by delegates from all nine provinces and where branches are also represented. It is at this level where the draft policies are deliberated upon and subsequently adopted as the position of the party. For example, in 2017, the ANC's policies were discussed and adopted at the 54th National Conference (ANC. 54th National Conference Report and Resolutions). The eight resolutions listed on pages 13-70 are: Organisational Renewal, Communications and the Battle of Ideas; Economic Transformation; Education, Health and Science and Technology; Legislature and Governance; International Relations; Social Transformation; Peace and Stability; and Finance and Fundraising. Each of these resolutions was expounded to give it both meaning and context. This was done in order to assist all those who would be elected into office to be able to implement these resolutions understanding fully well what each one of them means and hopes to achieve for the country.

Procedurally, once the policies have been adopted, any

member of the ANC who gets elected at the conclusion of the National Conference does not have to scratch his or her head trying to figure out what to do. Each resolution prescribes what the incumbent must do. All that is left is for the appointee to implement the resolutions of the party in line with government processes. This depends on the outcome of the deliberations by the National Assembly on each resolution of the ANC and subsequent adoption by parliament, not based on who the ANC leader is at any given time. Even if the leader is replaced by another, the new one implements the same policies because the mandate remains unchanged. Therefore, this makes it difficult to claim that the policies of a new leader are a 'New Dawn.' The issue of the "New Dawn" in the ANC is only a dream; it does not exist in practice. Anyone who claims its existence misrepresents the ANC and misleads the public – both those within the ANC and beyond. What would be correct would be to state that the new leader will correct some mistakes committed by the predecessor but within the confines of the rules of the party. Such changes and/or improvements do not amount to the "New Dawn."

Flowing from the analysis above, the "New Dawn" as espoused by Ramaphosa is a misnomer. His argument cannot be sustained – both from a theoretical perspective and contextually.

Succession politics in ZANU-PF

Chiminge (2019:41) argues that "In Zimbabwe, politics unlike other spheres of life is about populism and for this to happen, legitimacy is an important ingredient to promote amicable local, regional and international relations." But as is the case in the ANC, ZANU-PF is guided by its own Constitution, which spells out how leaders are elected and dictates what its leaders should do when they assume office. Article 11 of the ZANU-PF Constitution focuses specifically on the National Consultative Assembly (NCA), which normally meets twice a year – convened by the President of the party and the First Secretary after discussions with the Central Committee. The NCA comprises six types of members, which are classified as follows:

1. Members of the Central Committee;
2. Members of the National Assembly of the Women's League and their Deputies;
3. Members of the National Assembly of the Youth League and their Deputies;
4. Members of the ten Provincial Executive Councils;
5. Such other members designated by the Central Committee on account of their contribution to the liberation struggle or development of the country after independence; and
6. Former members of the Central Committee.

Regarding the powers and functions of the NCA, Section 85 clearly states that the powers and functions of the NCA shall be: to receive, hear and debate any major matters of policy as the President and First Secretary or the Central Committee shall from time to time determine; and to make recommendations to the Central Committee on any matter of policy relating to the Party or Government. Implicit in this ZANU-PF article is the view that policy decisions within the party are not necessarily the prerogative of a particular individual who makes decisions unilaterally. Instead, they constitute a collective effort by all party members. While it is true that the incumbent President may propose policy positions to be considered by the collective, the final decision is reached after wide deliberation by party members. The final decisions are binding to all members – including the sitting President of the party and the successor(s). The Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC) as discussed under Article 12 is primarily responsible for looking after the interests of the province and is chaired by the Chairperson of the Province. This Committee meets once every three months or as the situation demands from time to time. It is convened by either the Chairperson or the Provincial Executive Council (PEC). In other instances, at least one third of members of the Central Committee and the National Consultative Assembly in the Province could push for the meeting to sit. When it comes to the functions of the PCC, it is tasked to do three things: to act as the Elections; Directorate of the Province; to monitor and recommend any political or development programmes and initiatives in the province; and to foster an integrated approach to provincial issues between Party, Government, and non-governmental organisations" (ZANU-PF Constitution, 88(2(a-c)). There are also District Coordinating Committees (DCCTs) whose primary focus is specifically on issues happening at the district level. The overall aim remains the same but the focus differs as per the level in the hierarchy. Article 6 of the ZANU-PF Constitution is about the National People's Conference (NPC). Regarding the composition of this structure, it comprises the following:

1. Members of the central Committee;
2. Members of the National Consultative Assembly;
3. Members of the National Council of the Women's league;
4. Members of the National Council of the youth leagues;
5. Members of the Provincial Coordinating Committee;
6. Members of the Provincial Councils; and
7. Members of the District Executive Councils as may be invited by the Central Committee from time to time (Constitution of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front).

The five powers and functions of the NPC are:

1. To receive and consider reports of the Central

- Committee on behalf of Congress;
2. To co-ordinate and supervise the implementation of decisions and programmes of Congress by the Central Committee;
 3. To declare the President of the Party elected at Congress as the State Presidential Candidate of the Party;
 4. To exercise any such powers and authority as may be incidental thereto; and
 5. To make resolutions for implementation by the Central Committee (Constitution of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front. ZANU-PF, 33(1-5).

Implicit in these functions is the understanding that, as is the case with the ANC, party decisions on policies and programmes in ZANU-PF are taken collectively. They are decided upon after broad consultation within party structures. Those who are deployed into parliament (inclusive of the President) are given a clear mandate to ensure that these party decisions receive expression in parliament. This means that both party members outside of Parliament as well as those in government sing from the same hymn book in unison.

Flowing from this synopsis, it is evident that both the ANC and ZANU-PF have a clear process of adopting policies and electing leaders. In both instances, National Conferences constitute the culmination of processes that begin at the lower structures of each political party. Once adopted by the party, policies are implemented by whoever emerges victorious at the party's elective conference. When these individuals eventually go to parliament to represent their organisations, they implement what has already been decided upon by their parties. In that sense, the "New Dawn" phenomenon is hard to fathom or comprehend.

ANALYSIS OF THE "NEW DAWN" CLAIM BY RAMAPHOSA AND MNANGAGWA

Considering the above, the key question becomes: is the claim to a "New Dawn" as espoused by Presidents Ramaphosa and Mnangagwa sustainable (or valid/accurate)? The immediate response is an emphatic no! As mentioned earlier, both leaders were Vice-Presidents in their political parties and in government. Therefore, they implemented the same party policies as their superiors, and later predecessors. On assuming office, it would be a delusion to expect that they were going to bring about a new political dispensation in terms of policy positions. In the case of South Africa, Ramaphosa was President Jacob Zuma's Deputy – both in the ANC as a political party and in government too. Constitutionally, the Deputy President in South Africa "must assist the President in the execution of the functions of government" (The Constitution of the

Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996), Section 91(5). Therefore, should government derail, the Deputy President cannot claim innocence. The Deputy President co-governs with the President and serves as the President's advisor on government issues. Such a person usually serves as the Acting President whenever the President is not available in terms of Section 90(1)(a). This includes chairing Cabinet meetings where policies and Bills are processed and adopted before they are tabled in parliament for deliberation by the various political parties. Once approved by the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), the Bill is sent to the President where it is approved into law. The Deputy President performs this role in the absence of the President. Therefore, neither the President nor the Deputy President can claim to have no knowledge of such a policy or legislation. The process outlined above is sacrosanct until such time that there is a Constitutional Review. It is the same process that was followed when Ramaphosa was Zuma's Deputy. They were guided by the same Constitution in executing their mandate. Therefore, if President Zuma's administration did not perform well, thus resulting in the so-called "nine wasted years," Ramaphosa cannot speak as though he was an outsider. It does not make sense that he would suddenly talk about the "New Dawn" when he took over from Zuma. If the argument was that Ramaphosa was not going to abide by the ANC's resolutions and policies that would raise several questions about party discipline and Ramaphosa's party loyalty. While it is true that a new leader can improve on the predecessor's activities within the confines of the party's laws, any such improvements would not amount to a "New Dawn." When President Ramaphosa told the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Davos, Switzerland that there were "nine wasted years" or "nine lost years" under President Zuma, he failed to add that he was also part of that. Initially, Ramaphosa referred to the decade 2008-2018 but revised this period so that it could focus on Zuma's time. When Ramaphosa talked about the "New Dawn" under his administration, he unwittingly undermined ANC processes and practices. He deviated from the conceptualisation of this phrase ["New Dawn"] as discussed earlier in this article. After five years since President Ramaphosa made his promise, the "New Dawn" has not yet materialised. On the contrary, the situation in the country has worsened from what it was under President Zuma's administration. According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSa) reports, the unemployment rate has risen from 26.91 per cent in 2018 when Ramaphosa took over as President, to 32.9 percent in the last quarter of 2022; with that of the youth standing at over 77% (Maluleke, 2022). These figures do not include the expanded definition of "unemployed." Economic growth in South Africa has either stagnated or declined. In March 2023, the World Bank reported that at the end of 2022, there were still close to half a million

fewer jobs than at the end of 2019, with women and youth being the mostly affected. Inequality in South Africa was also reported to be still among the highest in the world, and poverty was an estimated 63% in 2022 based on the upper-middle-income country poverty line. Overall, GDP growth was said to be slowing to 2% in 2022 from 4.9% in 2021 (World Bank in South Africa, 2023).

According to the World Bank report, socio-economic challenges were further exacerbated by rising fuel and food (bread and cereals) prices, which disproportionately affected the poor. Inflation averaged 6.9% in 2022 but was 8.2% for those at the bottom 20% of the income distribution. Other sources confirm this situation. For example, the National Economic Development and Labour Council (2023:5) reported that “the unemployment rate has been on a resilient upward trend. This upward trend accelerates from 0.4 percentage points per quarter pre-pandemic to 0.7 percentage points per quarter post-pandemic.” These figures do not confirm the “New Dawn” narrative. Conversely, they point to a worsening situation.

Corruption remains rampant in South Africa. Transparency International reported that South Africa scored 43 points out of 100 on the 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index (www.tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/corruption-index). Service delivery backlog has worsened as evidenced in service delivery protests. At the beginning of 2023, the *Mail and Guardian* (2 February 2023) observed that “data shows that service delivery protests will increase, intensify in 2023.” The crime rate is at an unprecedented high level. This is confirmed by the successive crime statistics released by the Minister of Police, Bheki Cele. The first quarter crime statistics for the April 2021/2022 Financial Year reported that there was an increase of between 60.6 and 74.1% (Annual Crime Statistics 2021/2022 Presentation; Fourth Quarter 2022/2023 Crime Statistics Presentation). The energy crisis has worsened since Ramaphosa took over. A report published on 18 January 2023 by CNN Business stated that “South Africa’s energy crisis deepens as blackouts hit 12 hours a day.” Under Zuma’s administration, Brian Molefe who was appointed CEO of Eskom in 2015 was able to contain the situation and dealt with loadshedding. Addressing the State Capture Commission, Molefe argued: “We defeated load shedding on August 8, 2015, and we never had load shedding again for three years after I left” (Sidimba, 2021). Noticeably, after Ramaphosa took over, the country moved up to Stage 6 of loadshedding, thereby crippling the economy and resulting in more job losses. To this day, there is still no solution to the country’s energy crisis, although talks are underway with neighbouring countries like Mozambique, and BRICS partners such as China to seek assistance.

Certainly, Ramaphosa is not directly responsible for the current energy crisis; there are several contributing factors. Among them are poor maintenance of power

lines, use of low-quality parts, and high demand for electricity which exceeds the supply. Given this situation and the many promises that he made when he assumed office, would it be proper to say that Ramaphosa came with the “New Dawn” for South Africa? The answer to this question is an emphatic no! Any response to the contrary would be naïve and oblivious to the facts. Therefore, the “New Dawn” narrative cannot be sustained as being characteristic of Ramaphosa’s administration. Commenting about Ramaphosa, Desai (2019:234) argues that Ramaphosa’s holding “does not signal a deeper and more fundamental shift, especially at the level of the economy.” Such observations debunk the “New Dawn” phenomenon and make it fit the label of being a myth and a far-fetched dream. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, the Vice-President of the country wields significant power and forms part of the senior administration. The Deputy President is the second highest ranking government official after the President. As is the case in South Africa, the incumbent of this position serves as the President’s main advisor. He or she is the governing partner who works closely with the President and represents the President when the latter is not available. The Zimbabwean Constitution creates space for the appointment of the First and Second Vice-Presidents. Regarding seniority, the First Vice-President is the senior of the two and is an influential person. In the absence of the President, the First Vice-President takes charge of the country. Such a person cannot talk about the “New Dawn” on assuming office after having been part of the same administration. Mnangagwa was the late President Robert Mugabe’s second in command. They were both members of ZANU-PF. Thus, they were guided by the same party mandate. Importantly, the two leaders had met in the early 1950s during the liberation struggle and worked together for decades even outside of government. After Zimbabwe obtained political independence in 1980, Mnangagwa served in Mugabe’s different Cabinets. When Mugabe’s government annihilated over 20 000 people from Matabeleland (Joshua Nkomo’s stronghold) in what became known as Gukurahundi massacre, Mnangagwa was the Minister of State Security (Gusha, 2019). He held this position from 1980 to 1988. Therefore, it is hard to fathom why President Mnangagwa would talk about the “New Dawn” when he ascended to power following the ousting of President Mugabe as though he was a newcomer. Since Mnangagwa assumed the Presidency in November 2017, is Zimbabwe better than it was under President Mugabe? An answer to this question would determine if the “New Dawn” narrative is sustainable. In the realm of politics, reports by the International Trade Organisation (ITO) observe that “political tensions and civil unrest persist since the end of Robert Mugabe’s rule in November 2017” (ITO, 2 August 2022). This does not show positive change.

On the economic front too, no “New Dawn” has been witnessed. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported in 2022 that “real GDP contracted cumulatively by 11.7% in 2019-20 and inflation reached 837% (y/y) by July 2020” (IMF Country Report No.22/112). If there was the “New Dawn” as Mnangagwa claimed, why would Zimbabweans continue to emigrate? Based on these facts, it would not be an exaggeration to state that the “New Dawn” narrative in Zimbabwe is a myth that is not backed up by evidence. As confirmed by Helliher and Murisa (2020) in the context of Zimbabwe, economic crises are rampant in post-November 2017 Zimbabwe, and even more so since the national election held in 2018, which confirmed Mnangagwa as Zimbabwe’s new President. Various reports (Mangudya, 2020; Robalino and Motsaka, 2021) unanimously concur that between 2009 and 2018, Zimbabwe’s economy grew at an annualized rate of 7 percent and, for the first time in almost 20 years. However, in 2019, the country’s GDP contracted by 6.5 per cent (Mangudya, 2020:3). There is a temptation to link this decline to the COVID-19 pandemic. But reports confirm that even before this international health crisis, Zimbabwe’s economy was already in recession, contracting by 6.0% in 2019 (African Development Bank Group, 2023). Not even President Mnangagwa’s mantra that ‘Zimbabwe is open for business’ has produced positive results for the country. In fact, Zimbabweans and non-Zimbabweans alike hold divergent views on the question posed above. As the country’s inflation rate worsened, as more Zimbabweans left the country to look for a better life in other neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Botswana, and Mozambique, the “New Dawn” phenomenon has been put into question. Drawing from the discussion above, it is fair to argue that the “New Dawn” concept/terminology has been wittingly and/or unwittingly misused by both Presidents Ramaphosa and Mnangagwa in order to score political points. There is no substance to it. Firstly, both these leaders were part and parcel of the old administration of their predecessors. Secondly, they are members of the same political parties like their predecessors. Thirdly, very little positive change has been recorded in the two countries since Ramaphosa and Mnangagwa assumed power. Instead, the situation has deteriorated on many fronts as evidenced by the data presented above. Given these observations, the phrase the “New Dawn” is misplaced in both the South African and Zimbabwean contexts. Presidents Ramaphosa and Mnangagwa created a myth and gave their countries false hope that people’s lives were going to change for the better under their administrations. The opposite has happened. Given these and many other realities, the question arises: does the “New Dawn” phenomenon apply to the two leaders? Evidence points to the contrary. The decision by the two leaders to appropriate the “New Dawn” phenomenon on assuming office amounted to

political rhetoric. They have failed to change the fortunes of their citizens positively as they had promised. The “New Dawn” has not yet descended!

CONCLUSION

Flowing from the discussion above and the statistical data presented any reference to the “New Dawn” by either the ANC’s Ramaphosa or ZANU-PF’s Mnangagwa cannot be substantiated by evidence. There is a general tendency among politicians to elevate themselves at the expense of their predecessors. They promise the electorate heaven and earth but end up disappointing them. In Zambia, Frederick Chiluba painted President Kenneth Kaunda negatively and promised to draw from his religious and trade unionist experiences to serve his people well. Unlike his predecessor who had been in office from 1964 until 1991, Chiluba promised to lead the country only for two terms. Ironically, in the middle of his second term, he tried to change the Constitution so that he would be eligible to run for the presidency for the third term. He could not sustain the “New Dawn” narrative. Like many other African leaders who tried the same (including Nigeria’s President Olusegun Obasanjo), Chiluba failed (Mngomezulu, 2013). What Presidents Ramaphosa and Mnangagwa did when they invoked the “New Dawn” concept was to portray themselves as the “Saviours” who were going to save their countries. Their “New Dawn” remained political rhetoric. As shown above, five years since these leaders ascended to power, living conditions in South Africa and Zimbabwe have worsened as reflected in the GDP and crime statistics, among other areas. Therefore, the “New Dawn” remains a myth in both countries. In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated that Presidents Ramaphosa and Mnangagwa were not being truthful when they promised the citizens of their countries that they were bringing the “New Dawn.” They knew very well that they were going to implement the same party policies. They also knew what the Constitutions of their political parties say. However, like many politicians, they invoked this phrase solely to win support. Over time, their empty promises were laid bare by the deteriorating living conditions. Therefore, the “New Dawn” narrative cannot be sustained in the two countries; it is a myth!

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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