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**A Comparative Analysis of
Moral (De)legitimation in Tanzanian
Presidential Speeches during
the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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Abstract

This study examines discursive strategies of moral legitimation and delegitimation deployed in presidential speeches by John Pombe Magufuli and Samia Suluhu Hassan during the COVID-19 pandemic in Tanzania. Drawing on van Leeuwen's (2008) framework of legitimation strategies, the analysis investigates how moral authority, rationalisation, evaluation, abstraction, and mythopoesis were linguistically mobilised to justify or contest public health measures. Four nationally broadcast speeches were purposively selected and analysed using qualitative discourse-analytic procedures. The findings demonstrate that while President Samia Suluhu Hassan predominantly employed authority, rationalisation, and moralisation to promote adherence to WHO-recommended mitigation measures and to rebuild public trust, President Magufuli utilised similar strategies to delegitimise Western interventions and legitimise locally grounded responses. Overall, the study reveals how presidential discourse functions as a strategic instrument for shaping public perceptions, articulating competing moral orders, and advancing divergent crisis-management approaches. The article concludes by underscoring the need for further systematic research on (de)legitimation practices in health-related crises.

Keywords: Legitimacy, moral discourses, Covid-19, presidential speeches, Tanzania

Introduction

Political actors' discursive articulations of social morality play a central role in the legitimation or delegitimation of contested actions. Such processes are accomplished through moral

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argumentation, which serves to foreground or suppress particular social values, collective experiences, identities, resources, and normative practices. This dynamic was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where both legitimation and delegitimation practices were underpinned by competing moral arguments advanced by politicians, health professionals, and media actors (Kwangerema et al., 2020; WHO, 2021).

Through moral argumentation, political actors construct and negotiate the value systems of a given society by framing specific social practices as desirable or undesirable, acceptable or unacceptable, and ethical or unethical for the legitimation or delegitimation purposes (van Dijk, 2011). In this process, abstract values may be selectively emphasised or downplayed depending on the nature of the action being justified or contested. Such values include individual freedom of choice, public cooperation, solidarity, care, and fearlessness, as well as, in some contexts, national autonomy—particularly when an action is perceived as threatening collective identity or societal continuity (van Dijk, 2011).

Moreover, political actors frequently invoke claims of collective benefit, arguing that the adoption of particular practices serves the common good or will lead to improved social conditions in the future, thereby reinforcing the moral legitimacy of the proposed action (Reyes, 2011).

At the discourse level, moral practices are viewed as cognitive beliefs of a particular society or party. These social beliefs are social structures emphasised or deemphasised in discourses to accomplish communicative ends (van Dijk, 2011). Van Leeuwen (2008) adds that moral practices may be legitimised or delegitimised in discourses through arguments. These arguments uncover social experience, scientific arguments, evaluations, storytelling, and the use of authority. These moral discourses have been studied in relation to minority or nationalist discourses (Wang, 2020); anti-immigrant discourses in Europe (Ekman, 2019); and discourses of others during the pandemic (de Rosa & Mannarini, 2020). To accomplish these moral practices in discourses, social agents have been found to employ linguistic strategies, like scientific evidence and personal evidence. The social actor sometimes claims the involvement in an action, and the abnormality of the action for (de) legitimation purposes (McAnn-Mortimer et al., 2004; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Schinkel & Schrover, 2013; Tusting et al., 2002). Sometimes, politicians claim the falsehood of an action to alter the direction of the whole nation (Capone, 2010:2965 & van Dijk, 1992:88).

Moral discourses have been used to influence the public behaviour towards the proposed measures during the global outbreak of COVID-19 by the end of 2019. Globally, politicians, health experts, and media experts were required to legitimise the WHO's proposed mitigation measures through discourses. They were required to communicate the surface structure of the pandemic in terms of its causes, symptoms, recommended mitigation measures, and consequences to the general public. The goal was to raise public awareness so that people could adopt the WHO-recommended COVID-19 mitigation measures. The recommended measures were surveillance (testing, laboratory and emergency centres); containment (contact tracing and quarantines); health workers' protection (Personal Protective Equipment—EPP); communication (public health messages, training of experts and material development); and mitigation measures (social distancing, mask-wearing, frequent hand washing, lockdowns and vaccinations) (WHO, 2022). In that case, the political discourses produced during the time of COVID-19 were important in legitimating policy actions and in delegitimising undesirable behaviour towards the recommended mitigation measures.

With the proposed measures by the WHO above, handling of the pandemic globally resulted in misunderstandings among big powers and African nations at large (Jaworsky & Qiaoan, 2021). There were tensions caused by the nature of the pandemic itself and the measures against the pandemic (Jaworsky & Qiaoan, 2021). With the available tensions, some discourses were consistent, and others were inconsistent with the WHO's proposed measures, which caused public confusion in the use of the mitigation measures. For instance, some of the discourses were immoral because they downplayed the pandemic and stigmatised the mitigation measures, health experts and government officials. Other discourses were moral as they promoted the mitigation measures,

helped to build public confidence, and emphasised individual responsibility and the government's ability to handle the crisis (Allen & Ayalon, 2021; Cmeciu, 2020; Wang, 2022).

The management of the COVID-19 pandemic was a critical issue in Tanzania. The country reported its first case on 16th March 2020. Political speeches and other discourses were necessary to legitimise the COVID-19 mitigation measures recommended by the WHO mentioned previously. Such discourses were also needed to delegitimise the public's undesired behaviour against the WHO-proposed measures. The handling of the pandemic in the country was done by both John Pombe Magufuli and Samia Suluhu Hassan. They addressed the public in Kiswahili. John Pombe Magufuli was responsible for implementing the measures against the pandemic. In the early phase of the pandemic, he accepted the WHO's interventions. In cooperation with the National COVID-19 Response Team (NCRT), WHO set out plans to deal with the pandemic (WHO, 2022). Therefore, the country responded to the pandemic by closing down schools, universities, and other public spaces; emphasising sanitisation (hand washing); closing international borders and banning international travel. However, later on, the President learned of certain inconsistencies in the mitigation measures recommended by the WHO (Carlitz et al., 2021; Kwangerema et al., 2021). His death on 17th March 2021 resulted in the ascension of Samia Suluhu Hassan, the former Vice President, to the presidency on 19th March 2021. She was, therefore, responsible for implementing the strategies against the pandemic. She took a different approach by complying with the WHO prevention strategies and launching the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines on 27th July 2021.

Literature Review

The consequences associated with the pandemic raised the need for different discourses to handle the pandemic. In the USA, President Donald Trump asked Congress to take legislative action and to warn Americans about the social and economic effects of the pandemic (Wang, 2022). The President also employed moral evaluation to show his obligation and high commitment to curbing the pandemic. In China, President Xi-Jiang's speech showed his commitment to financial investment and his concerns about international cooperation (Wang, 2022). In Italy and in Greece, political discourses focused on raising people's awareness of the pandemic and mitigation strategies in order to achieve some level of individual responsibility during the pandemic (Aspridis, 2021; De Rosa et al., 2020). With respect to the USA, Canada and the UK, the discourse of hero was used to legitimise the COVID-19 mitigation strategies. Such discourses portrayed nurses with moral values such as sacrifice, compliance and hard work during the pandemic. This might have been aimed at making them responsible and fearless against the pandemic.

Studies on delegitimising practices were also reported. Discourses of residential care in the USA provide vivid examples of how legitimisation practices were challenging to the COVID-19 mitigation strategies (Allen & Ayalon, 2021). The study analysed 54 articles from the top three newspapers in the USA. The results revealed that these newspapers negatively evaluated the role of residential care in the context of shockingly dangerous and deceptive health experts. This might have resulted in the creation of public panic, fearful emotional responses and blame on health facilities. Cmeciu (2020) conducted a study on strategic communications by the Romanian Ministry of Health posted on Instagram. The study analysed 1427 online communications used by online users. The study found that the public employed polarisation dichotomous constructions of health facilities. The public also negatively evaluated the way officials were engaged in the mitigation measures. In Italy, scientific discourses presented the COVID-19 virus as the flu during the early stages of the pandemic. Such underestimations lead to anchoring of the pandemic to other infectious diseases, like AIDS and Ebola (de Rosa, 2020). These stigmatisation practices might have led to public confusion and inconsistencies in the use of recommended mitigation measures in the country. Other discourses also blamed the Chinese, immigrants, refugees and diaspora as sources of the virus (Ivic, 2020; Kozłowska, 2020; Wang, 2022).

In the Tanzanian context, Kamazima et al. (2020) identified various delegitimation and legitimisation practices during the pandemic. They reviewed published papers, newspapers, and formal and informal media reports. They found that Tanzania adopted various responses, including adherence to the WHO standards in the early phase of the pandemic, the use of medical organic herbs such

as COVID-19 organic herbs (CVO) from Madagascar, the use of COVID-19 cure (COVIDOL), the use of herbal steaming (“Nyungu”), praying, and fasting (spiritual approaches). Moreover, there were hegemonic actions used for delegitimation purposes in the country (Kangerema et al., 2021). They include the banning of information on COVID-19 deaths, suppression of the National Referral Laboratory (NRL), the banning of social distancing and the use of Western masks.

Malima and Ngaiza (2023) employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to study the multivocality of the COVID-19 pandemic in Tanzania. A total of 60 participants were selected using purposive random sampling from four big cities, including Mwanza, Dar es Salaam, Arusha, and Dodoma. The study reported that the public use of COVID-19 vaccines in the country was based on the rational rhetoric related to imposing fear of death and their need for the vaccines based on human mobility. The study also indicated that the participants employed negative evaluations to reject the vaccines and Western masks. The public blamed the Western nations and the diaspora as the source of the virus. The government officials were also blamed for being irresponsible in handling the pandemic.

Robinson and Malima (2021) studied the legitimation of COVID-19 vaccines and online users’ reaction to the launch of the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in Tanzania on 27th July 2021 by Samia Suluhu Hassan. The study employed Rayes’ (2011) legitimation analytical approach to CDA. The results indicate that the president employed many emotionally-charged legitimation strategies relating to the attributes of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine. The study also revealed that the public described the COVID-19 vaccines as poisonous, dangerous, zombies, water-vaccines, fake-vaccines and neo-colonialism.

Moreover, Malima et al. (2024) conducted a study on confidence-building in Tanzania during the COVID-19 pandemic. They employed the Post-structuralist Discursive Approach suggested by Foucault (1976). The five speeches by the late president, John Pombe Magufuli, the current president, Samia Suluhu Hassan and the then Minister of Health, Dorothy Gwajima, were selected for analysis. It was revealed that the discourse of confidence-building involved the speakers’ emphasising the norms of social events and practices in handling diseases like Malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS, and vaccines like the yellow-fever vaccine. The speakers also urged the public to rely on scientific and reliable information, given the then-rampant misinformation.

The above studies presented the legitimation practices of COVID-19 and its mitigation measures relating to building public confidence, emphasising individual responsibilities, promotion of the proposed measures, and the consequences of the pandemic. Some of the delegitimizing practices presented are the polarisation of the measures and the health experts, underestimating the pandemic and blaming of diaspora, immigrants and foreigners as the sources of the pandemic and denial of measures by some health professionals. These findings imply that the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in Tanzania and other places was marred by inconsistencies, given the absence of a common understanding among the authorities (politicians and health experts). Based on the different approaches, inconsistencies and beliefs in handling the pandemic across and within countries, this study examined the discursive strategies of moral (de)legitimacy employed in John Pombe Magufuli and Samia Suluhu Hassan’s speeches during COVID-19, to gain insight into the way (de)legitimation practices are accomplished in discourse.

Theoretical Approach

This study is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing specifically on van Leeuwen’s (2008) framework of legitimation strategies to guide data analysis and the discussion of findings. Van Leeuwen’s analytical framework constitutes a strand of CDA that is concerned with examining how legitimation and delegitimation are discursively constructed in texts. The approach is based on the premise that actions, actors, and social practices require legitimation to gain acceptance and support. Importantly, legitimation and delegitimation do not apply solely to individual actions or persons; rather, social practices more broadly are legitimised or delegitimised through the discursive evaluation of actions and social actors.

Reyes (2011:782) conceptualises legitimation as “a justification of social behaviour (mental or physical)” and argues that legitimation is enacted through argumentation, whereby speakers provide reasons that explain and justify social actions, ideas, beliefs, and declarations. Reyes further notes that acts of legitimising or justifying discourse are typically goal-oriented, most often seeking the interlocutor’s approval or support (Reyes, 2011: 782). Similarly, van Leeuwen (2008) defines legitimation as the process of explaining why a particular action should or must be carried out, usually in the manner proposed by the speaker. Conversely, delegitimation involves the critique or rejection of controversial actions, actors, or social practices (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Cap (2006) observes that one way speakers legitimate their discourse is through assertion. Linguistic assertion enhances the speaker’s credibility and facilitates acceptance by the target audience, as assertions often articulate ideological principles that align with the psychological, social, political, or religious predispositions of the addressee (Cap, 2006:29).

Van Leeuwen (2008) identifies several discursive strategies of legitimation that may also be mobilised for delegitimation purposes. These include authority (personal, impersonal, expert, traditional, conformity-based, and role-model authority), moralisation (evaluation, abstraction, and analogy), rationalisation (instrumental and theoretical), and mythopoesis (moral tales and cautionary tales). Van Leeuwen’s analytical framework was selected for this study because of its suitability for examining (de)legitimising discourse. Specifically, it enabled the researcher to identify, analyse, and discuss the moral legitimation and moral delegitimation practices employed by the two Heads of State in managing the COVID-19 pandemic in Tanzania.

Methodology

Tanzania was selected as the study area to examine how two Heads of State implemented and advocated COVID-19 pandemic responses through discourses of moral legitimation. The study analysed four presidential speeches: two delivered by the late President of the United Republic of Tanzania, John Pombe Magufuli, and two delivered by the current President, Samia Suluhu Hassan. These speeches were selected through convenience sampling, a method deemed appropriate given that only four nationally televised presidential addresses on the pandemic were delivered during the period under study.

The two speeches by President Magufuli were delivered on 3 March 2020 and 27 January 2021, while the two speeches by President Hassan were delivered on 6 April 2021 and 28 July 2021. The speeches were obtained from the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC) following the researcher’s submission of a formal research permit to the TBC authorities. The collected speeches were subsequently subjected to qualitative analysis, as outlined below.

The analysis of the four selected presidential speeches was guided by Theo van Leeuwen’s analytical framework for (de)legitimation. To generate the study’s findings, a systematic qualitative analytical procedure proposed by Attride-Stirling (2001) was employed. The first stage involved the translation of the transcribed speeches into English to enhance accessibility and readability for a wider academic audience. The second stage consisted of coding the raw data according to relevant discursive strategies. Coding across the four speeches was guided by the four principal (de)legitimation strategies—authorisation, rationalisation, moralisation, and mythopoesis.

These discursive strategies, together with their respective sub-strategies, were identified and extracted from each speech in order to address the two research objectives. The coding process yielded six strategies of moral legitimation and six strategies of moral delegitimation, respectively, as presented in the findings and discussion section.

The third stage involved refining the identified strategies by grouping similar discursive patterns and distinguishing others according to their specific categories. The fourth stage focused on the detailed description of the results, supported by translated excerpts from the speeches, presented as Excerpts 1–22. The final stage entailed the interpretation and discussion of the findings, drawing on

the socio-political context, relevant theoretical perspectives, previous empirical studies, and the broader implications of the results. The following section presents the findings corresponding to each research objective and discusses them accordingly.

Findings and Discussion

Discursive Strategies of Moral Legitimacy

The findings addressing the first research objective indicate that both John Pombe Magufuli and Samia Suluhu Hassan employed six strategies of moral legitimacy in their COVID-19-related discourses to justify their mitigation measures. While John Pombe Magufuli appealed to traditional measures, Samia Suluhu Hassan complied with Western measures. The six strategies include traditional authority, conformity authority, experiential rationality, scientific rationality, evaluation, and abstraction moralisation. Each of these strategies is discussed separately below.

Traditional Authority

In their addresses, power-holders employed lexical items such as “*practices*,” “*habits*,” and “*customs*” to legitimate social actions. The underlying assumption is that actions rooted in longstanding tradition warrant acceptance precisely because of their customary nature (van Leeuwen, 2007: 105 -109). The findings indicate that John Pombe Magufuli drew on the strategy of traditional authority to legitimise the use of traditional treatments as responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, he emphasised practices such as herbal steaming and the use of organic remedies, including garlic and ginger, as measures against COVID-19. This strategy was discursively realised through the use of behavioural processes, as illustrated in Excerpt JPMSII.1 below.

- (1) *Lakini niwaombe pia Watanzania tujitahidi kutumia njia nyingine za asili katika kupambana na magonjwa haya.... pamoja na hizo **chemical** zingine wanazoita... wengine wanaweka tangawizi wengine wanaweka vitunguu, wengine wanaweka nini.... **Those are** mambo muhimu ambayo Watanzania wengi wanatakiwa kuhamasishwa katika kupambana na hili gonjwa la korona.*

English translation:

“But I also request Tanzanians to make the effort to use traditional medicines in fighting against these diseases. Along with other chemicals, they call ... others put garlic, others put onions, others put what Those are important things which many Tanzanians should make sure are used in fighting against COVID-19.”

Unlike John Pombe Magufuli, who employed traditional authority to legitimate the use of local measures, Samia Suluhu Hassan employed traditional authority to emphasise the use of Western measures. Specifically, she used a modal behavioural process (must comply) which shows the norms, habits or social practices of the world community during COVID-19. She noted that Tanzania was required to conform to the world’s COVID-19 practices like the rest of the world. This is exemplified in Excerpt SSHSI.2 when she says:

- (2) *Kwa hiyo nilazima twende na dunia inavyokwenda*

English translation:

“So, we must move [comply with the world mitigation measures] in the way the world is moving.”

Conformity Authority

In political discourse, the use of conformity authority typically conveys the logic that “because others are doing it, we must also do it.” This inclusive legitimisation strategy often relies on high-frequency

quantifiers such as *most*, *many*, and *the majority* to construct statistically oriented arguments (van Leeuwen, 2007:97). The analysis indicates that only President Samia Suluhu Hassan employed a conformity-based legitimation strategy, presenting the use of COVID-19 vaccines as appropriate because they were already being administered in countries such as South Africa, the United States, and elsewhere. This strategy is exemplified in Excerpt SSHS1.3, where she states:

(3) *Tunanunua chanjo hizi hizi Johnson & Johnson ambazo zinazalishwa Afrika Kusini na ndiyo hizo hizo anazopiga Marekani na kwingine.*

English translation:

“We buy the same vaccines, Johnson & Johnson, which is made in South Africa and which is used in America and elsewhere.”

Experiential Rationality

A speaker may legitimate social actions by drawing on various explanatory schemata, including personal experience. The analysis indicates that, unlike John Pombe Magufuli, Samia Suluhu Hassan invoked past vaccination experiences to legitimate the use of COVID-19 vaccines. She stated that the vaccines had enabled her and others to continue their lives, despite experiencing minor side effects. This strategy is realised through a cognitive mental process (*reminds*), as illustrated in Excerpt SSHSII.4 below:

(4) *Inanikumbusha miaka ya sitini wakati tuko shule ya msingi. Tulichanjwa chanjo nadhani kwenye mwili wangu kuna chanjo kama sita hivi au tano ya leo ya sita. Zote ambazo Mpoto amezitaja hapa mimi kwenye mwili wangu zimo na nimekuwa nikizitaja hapa. Na zimenipa uzima wa kutosha mpaka leo nimefika hapa. Madhara yalikuwepo, kuna waliovimba mikono wakati ule, kuna waliofanya madonda mpaka leo ukiwatiza amkono wa kushoto kuna makovu yapo. Lakini tulipona na tunaendelea.*

English translation:

“It reminds me of the sixties when we were in primary school. We were vaccinated; I think in my body there are almost six or five vaccines, and so the total is six. All the vaccines mentioned by Mpoto here are in my body, and I have been mentioning them. And they have given me enough life until today. There were some side effects; there were those whose arms were swollen, and there were those who had scars. If you look at their left hand, you’ll see scars. But we got healed, and we are still alive.”

Scientific Rationality

Speakers may also legitimate social actions by invoking a systematic body of knowledge to justify the practices of a particular institution. In contemporary discourse, scientists—such as psychologists—contribute to the production of knowledge-based discourses that legitimise actions not only through their purpose or experiential outcomes, but also through reference to established disciplinary frameworks and accepted ways of understanding the world (Habermas, 1976: 80–112).

The analysis indicates that both John Pombe Magufuli and Samia Suluhu Hassan employed a strategy of scientific rationalisation to underscore the scientific nature of, respectively, herbal steaming and COVID-19 vaccines. In particular, John Pombe Magufuli utilised an intensive attributive relational process to present herbal steaming as a scientifically grounded measure against the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby seeking to enhance public trust in the practice. This strategy is illustrated in Excerpt JPMSII.5 below:

(5) *Swala la kujifukiza **is scientifically very clear** kwasababu inatoka **vepour** ya maji katika **temperature** ambayo ni **above one hundred degrees centigrade**. Na huyo*

*korona kwa sababu ni futa atapasukapasuka kwenye maji ambayo iko **above one hundred degree centigrade**. Kwa hiyo is ... **it is a scientific treatment**.*

English translation:

“The issue of herbal steaming is scientifically very clear because herbal steaming releases water vapour at a temperature above one hundred degrees centigrade. And because the virus is an oil substance, it will burst in water that is above one hundred degrees centigrade. Therefore, ... it is a scientific treatment.”

The use of scientific rationalisation by John Pombe Magufuli differs from that of Samia Suluhu Hassan, who employed the same strategy to emphasise that COVID-19 vaccines had been scientifically validated. Additionally, Samia Suluhu Hassan framed this strategy through a negative perception mental process (*do not see*) to counter claims the potential risks associated with the vaccines. This is exemplified in Excerpt SSHSI.6, where she states:

(6) Kwa hiyo, mimi sioni hatari iliyopo na baada ya wanasayansi kujiridhisha. Zimekuja nchini na wanasayansi wetu wamejiridhisha.

English translation:

“Therefore, I do not see any danger after their approval by scientists. They [vaccines] have been imported, and our scientists have approved them.”

Evaluation

The analysis indicates that John Pombe Magufuli employed moral evaluation to underscore the significance of traditional measures. This is illustrated in Excerpt JPMSII.7, where he states:

*(7) ... wengine wanaweka tangawizi wengine wanaweka vitunguu, wengine wanaweka nini.... **those are** mambo muhimu ambayo Watanzania wanapaswa kujua katika kupambana na janga hili la korona.*

English translation:

“Others put in garlic, others put unions, others put what ... those are important things which many Tanzanians should be aware of in the fight against corona.”

Unlike John Pombe Magufuli, Samia Suluhu Hassan employed moral evaluation to emphasise the quality of COVID-19 vaccines. This was exemplified using attributive relational construction in Excerpt SSHSI.8 when she says:

*(8) Johnson & Johnson ni chanjo moja tu, **one show** ukichanja leo imetoka hiyo, huna haja ya kurudia.*

English translation:

“Johnson & Johnson is only a one-round vaccine, one show. If you get vaccinated today, it is done. You won't repeat it.”

Abstraction Moralisation

A speaker may attribute an abstract dimension to an activity by linking it to positive social or moral values for legitimation purpose (van Leeuwen, 2007). In contrast to John Pombe Magufuli, Samia Suluhu Hassan employed moral abstraction to legitimate the use of COVID-19 vaccines, emphasising the value of international cooperation. She realised this strategy through a neutral

quoting verbal structure when criticising the previous government for refusing to accept vaccine doses from international agencies. This is illustrated in Excerpt SSHSI.9 below:

(9) *Lakini Jumuiya inayofanya kazi na Taasisi za Umoja wa Mataifa wamesema muda mrefu, walileta chanjo zao hadi Nairobi na tukawambia hapa na sisi bado kuchanja Tanzania, na chanjo zao hadi zime-expire.*

English translation:

“But an agency working with the United Nations Organisations said for a long time they had brought their vaccines to Nairobi. We said to them, “Tanzanians are not ready to get vaccinated.” Their vaccines have expired.”

Samia Suluhu Hassan uniquely employed moral abstraction, articulated through obligatory behavioural constructions, to underscore the significance of adhering to international norms regarding COVID-19 practices. This strategy is exemplified in Excerpt SSHSI.10, where she states:

(10) *Kwa hiyo ni lazima twende na dunia inavyokwenda.*

English translation:

“So, we must move in the way the world is moving.”

The findings, therefore, indicate that John Pombe Magufuli employed these strategies primarily to build public trust in local measures and bolster confidence during the pandemic. He used them to promote traditional interventions, such as herbal steaming, organic remedies, garlic, and union-based treatments. In contrast, Samia Suluhu Hassan employed the same strategies to advocate for Western-oriented measures, including testing, mask usage, and social distancing. Additionally, one can argue that she leveraged these strategies to secure international support and cooperation, enhance public trust in Western measures, and heighten public awareness and concern about the pandemic to encourage compliance with preventive actions.

These findings imply that the endorsement of mitigation measures by John Pombe Magufuli indicated his intention to mobilise the internal resources to fight the pandemic. This is contrary to Samia Suluhu Hassan, whose endorsement of the Western mitigation measures meant the use of Western resources to manage the pandemic. She endorsed different Western interventions by emphasising the use of testing, vaccinations, social distancing, masking, avoiding shaking hands, and unnecessary travel (see also WHO, 2022). The findings align with van Leeuwen (2011), who stresses that the social actors may present his/her arguments through different authorities and rationality to validate an action.

Samia Suluhu Hassan’s endorsement of Western mitigation measures underscored that effective management of the COVID-19 crisis required both international collaboration and technical support. She employed abstract moralisation to highlight the value of international cooperation, noting that Tanzania was expected to work alongside international agencies in combating the pandemic. To reinforce this collaboration, she emphasised adherence to international COVID-19 norms, stating that Tanzania was not an isolated entity. For example, she welcomed partnerships with various international organisations to facilitate access to COVID-19 vaccine doses, including the COVAX Facility and AVAT states (see also UNICEF, 2021). This approach contrasts with that of John Pombe Magufuli, who relied on internal social mobilisation to manage the pandemic domestically.

Samia Suluhu Hassan’s endorsement of Western measures further reflected her intention to build public confidence in the use of COVID-19 vaccines. This is evident in her reference to personal experiences with various vaccines over her lifetime, noting that they produced only minor side

effects. In contrast, John Pombe Magufuli's promotion of traditional measures was aimed at fostering public trust in local interventions over Western alternatives. These findings align with those of Malima et al. (2024), who observed that referencing past and present experiences contributed to building public confidence in Tanzania during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also support van Leeuwen's (2008) assertion that appeals to social experience serve to justify proposed actions within a community context.

Therefore, John Pombe Magufuli's endorsement of traditional mitigation measures reflected his intention to rely on internal mobilisation of resources, foster public confidence during the pandemic, and build trust in local interventions. In contrast, Samia Suluhu Hassan's promotion of Western measures emphasised the utilisation of external resources, the cultivation of international collaboration, and the securing of global support in managing the pandemic.

Discursive Strategies of Moral Delegitimacy

The findings for the second research objective indicate that, unlike Samia Suluhu Hassan, John Pombe Magufuli employed six strategies of moral delegitimation during the COVID-19 pandemic namely: personal authority, experiential rationalisation, scientific rationalisation, evaluation, abstraction, and mythopoesis to challenge and deny the legitimacy of Western measures.

Personal Authority

The analysis indicates that only John Pombe Magufuli employed an institutional authority strategy to discourage the closure of markets and the implementation of lockdowns. He realised this strategy by using quotations to emphasise his position and express disapproval of lockdowns and business restrictions during the pandemic. Additionally, the strategy was enacted through rhetorical questions concerning the closure of the Kariakoo market in Dar es Salaam, a major source of food for millions of city residents. This is illustrated in Excerpt JPMSII.11:

(11) *Mtu anazungumza 'funga Dar es Salaam, funga Tanga,' Sifungi! Nilishasema ni lazima Watanzania tuishi, tuchape kazi, na tuendelee kuchukua **precautions**. Ukizuia Soko la Kariakoo pale Dar es Salaam watu milioni sita watanunua wapi? Watakula wapi? Bidhaa zitatoka wapi?*

English translation:

"Someone says, 'Put Dar es Salaam, put Tanga under lockdown.' I won't do so. I said that we Tanzanians must live, work and continue taking precautions. If you close the Kariakoo Market in Dar es Salaam, where will the six million people buy necessities? Where will they eat? Where will goods come from?"

Experiential Rationality

In delegitimation practices, a speaker may draw on past and present experiences to justify the rejection of a social action (van Dijk, 2011; Berger & Luckmann, 1966:112). The analysis indicates that John Pombe Magufuli referenced experiences with diseases such as HIV/AIDS to normalise the COVID-19 pandemic and to challenge the practice of social distancing. This strategy was realised through the use of possibility modality and further reinforced with imperative constructions aimed at discouraging the public from fearing one another due to the pandemic. This is exemplified in Excerpt JPMSI.12, where he states:

(12) *Inawezekana kuishi na huu ugonjwa kama wanavyoishi watu wenye UKIMWI, wenye surua, wenye TB na nini na maisha yakaendelea. Tuache kuogopana, tuache kutishana.*

English translation:

“It is possible to live with this disease as people with HIV/AIDS, people with measles and people with TB do; and life goes on. Let’s not fear one another, let’s not scare one another.”

Scientific Rationality

The analysis indicates that John Pombe Magufuli cited scientific evidence to challenge the validity of COVID-19 test samples. This strategy was realised through operational material processes, demonstrating that samples were taken from animals, birds, plants, and other sources for experimental purposes at the National Laboratory Research (NLR). He further employed operational material processes to show that the experimental results indicated inaccuracies in the Western testing methods, as even plants, animals, and birds tested positive for COVID-19. This is illustrated in Excerpt JPMSI.13 below:

(13) *Tulichukua **sample** za mbuzi, tukachukua **sample** za kondoo, tukachukua **sample** za papai, tukachukua **sample** za **oil** ya gali, na **sample** za vitu vingine mbalimbali. Tukavipeleka pale kwenye maabara bila wao kujua na tukavipa majina. **Sample** ya papai tukaipa jina Elizath Anne miaka ishirini na sita **female**, papai lile lilikuwa **positive**, kwamba lina korona. Maana yake maji yaliyotolewa mle ndani kwenye papai ni **positive**. Tulipeleka **sample** ya ndege kwale, imekuwa **positive**. Tumechukua mbuzi akawa **positive** na tukachukua kondoo akawa **negative**.*

English translation:

“We took a goat’s sample, we took a ram’s sample, we took a pawpaw sample, and we took an oil sample and other samples. We secretly named them in the laboratory, without the knowledge of the laboratory staff. We named the pawpaw sample “Elizabeth Anne,” a twenty-six-year-old female. That pawpaw tested COVID-19 positive. This means that the fluid taken from the pawpaw is positive. We sent a quail bird sample, and it tested positive. A goat tested positive, and a ram tested negative, too.

Evaluation

The findings suggest that, unlike Samia Suluhu Hassan, John Pombe Magufuli employed negative moral evaluations to depict certain Western social media outlets as agents of misinformation and as sources reporting erroneous COVID-19 positive cases during the pandemic. This strategy was realised through a material process (tarnishing), aimed at informing the public about the dissemination of misleading information by some social media users and its potential to heighten public panic. This is exemplified in Excerpt JPMSII.14, where he states:

(14) *Nimegundua baadhi ya hawa **social media** wala sio Watanzania namba zao ziko kwenye nchi zingine za jirani, wanawachafua tu Watanzania.*

English translation:

“I have realised that some social media users are not Tanzanians; their mobile phone numbers belong to the neighbouring countries. They are only tarnishing Tanzania’s image.”

He further employed direct quotations to illustrate how police officers reportedly misclassified COVID-19 cases while documenting deaths resulting from road accidents. This strategy is exemplified in Excerpt JPMSII.15, where he states:

(15) *Siku hizi hata mtuakikutwa na ajali, polisi wanakwenda wanavaa **gloves** zao wanasema, 'Huyu ana korona.'*

English translation:

"Nowadays, when a person is involved in an accident, police officers go to the scene wearing gloves and say, 'This person is COVID-19 positive.'"

The president also employed negative moral evaluation to highlight the unethical practices of certain religious leaders who suspended religious-based gatherings during the pandemic. This strategy was realised through a negative cognitive process (*do not mislead*), aimed at exposing how some religious leaders had been misleading their followers. Additionally, his use of a material process (*stop*) demonstrated that these leaders had prevented their congregants from attending church services. Through these constructions, he sought to discourage the suspension of religious activities during the pandemic. This is exemplified in Excerpt JPMSI.16, where he states:

(16) *Viongozi wetu wa dini msitupotoshe. Unazuia waumini wako wasiende kanisani, unaweza kukuta huo msikiti hata hukuujenga wewe, umejengwa na hao waumini.*

English translation:

"Our religious leaders do not mislead us. You stop your believers from going to church. Perhaps you didn't construct the mosque. It was the laity who constructed it."

John Pombe Magufuli employed negative moral evaluation to highlight the problematic nature of the test samples used during the pandemic. Specifically, he utilised an attributive clause to emphasise the inconsistencies of the samples in producing reliable COVID-19 test results. He further incorporated interpersonal modal elements (*maybe*) to convey his doubt regarding the accuracy of the test samples. This is exemplified in Excerpt JPMSII.17, where he states:

(17) *Lakini napo ni kama vifaa hivi vina **technical errors**. Labda vimetengenezwa tu kwamba vikishapima **sample** ishirini, ya ishirini na moja lazima iwe **positive**. Zikiishapima kadhaa, inayofjata lazima iwe **positive**. Labda imeshakuwa **calculated that way**, napo lazima ziangaliwe.*

English translation:

"But it seems the facilities are technically faulty. Maybe they have been made in such a way that after being used to test a total of twenty samples, the next samples should be positive. After several samples are tested, the next should be positive. Maybe they have been made that way; they should be checked."

Lastly, the president employed negative moral evaluation to show the sabotage of NRL workers by capitalists during the pandemic. John Pombe Magufuli couched the strategy in a hedging material operation clause to show that NRL workers might have been bought by the capitalists in their own interest. The objective was to disqualify the pandemic and the use of test samples from Western countries. This is exemplified in JPMS1.18 when he says: ***Either wahusikawa laboratory ilewamenunuliwanamabeberu.*** "Either those in charge of the laboratory have been bought by the capitalists."

Abstraction

The analysis indicates that only John Pombe Magufuli downplayed the pandemic and the associated mitigation measures by emphasising values such as social solidarity, spirituality, hard work, fearlessness, cooperation, and national autonomy. He conveyed this message through the

use of imperative verbs, urging Tanzanians to continue praying and working diligently. This is exemplified in Excerpt JPMSII.19, where he states:

(19) *Watanzania tusimame imara, tushikamane, tumtangulize Mungu, watu tucha pekazi, tusiogopane, tusaidiane hili tatizo liondoke.*

English translation:

“Let Tanzanians be strong, cooperate, depend on our God, continue working, not fearing one another and help one another in addressing this problem.”

He further deployed the value of national autonomy, dismissing the total adoption of the Western mitigation measures. This strategy was realised through negative visual imagery, conveyed using terms such as “copying” and “pasting.” This is exemplified in Excerpt JPMSII.20, where he states: *Masuala ya ku-copy na ku-paste hatutayaruhusu hapa nchini.* “The copying and pasting of issues shall not be allowed in this country.”

Mythopoesis

The analysis indicates that only John Pombe Magufuli employed moral tales of biblical heroes to critique the unethical practices of certain religious leaders, particularly in response to the suspension of religious gatherings. This is exemplified in Excerpt JPMSII.21 below:

(21) *Wako wengine walitupwa kwenye moto, wako walitupwa kwenye shimo la simba, samba hakuwala kwasababu walimtegemea Mungu. Mitume wengi tu walisimama imara katika kipindi kigumu. Viongozi wetu wa dini msitupotoshe!*

English translation:

“Others who were thrown into the fire, there are those who were thrown into the lion’s pit, but the lions did not attack them because they depended on God. Many disciples stood firm during hard times. Our religious leaders do not mislead us.

Thus, unlike Samia Suluhu Hassan, John Pombe Magufuli employed the strategies discussed above to advance various denialist actions, including challenging the use of Western testing samples, opposing the closure of markets, contesting social distancing measures, rejecting Western-style mask mandates, and resisting lockdowns. He also utilised these strategies to polarise Western measures and other social actors, while downplaying the potential consequences of the pandemic.

The rejection of Western measures reflects John Pombe Magufuli’s perception of the pandemic as a form of capitalist-driven interference and sabotage. He employed negative moral evaluation to assert that certain social institutions and actors within the country were influenced by capitalist interests for their own benefit. This use of negative moral evaluation suggests that the pandemic could be construed as a form of social manipulation orchestrated by various actors, including the police, religious leaders, social media, and NRL workers, in alignment with capitalist agendas. These findings are consistent with those of Ivic (2020), Wang (2022), and Kozłowska (2020), who note that during the COVID-19 pandemic, discourses often constructed “others” as unethical and responsible for the spread of the virus. The findings also align with van Leeuwen (2008), who argues that social actors may employ negative evaluation to ascribe moral or immoral characteristics to other individuals or entities.

Additionally, John Pombe Magufuli’s rejection of Western measures reflects his preference for integrative strategies in managing the crisis, rather than imposing a total suspension of socio-economic activities. Under this approach, the public was encouraged to maintain daily routines

while adopting precautionary measures. Lockdowns and quarantines were not implemented; businesses continued to operate, and religious gatherings were permitted. Magufuli emphasised social participation through personal authority, instructing and motivating citizens to work diligently, engage in commerce, attend markets, and participate in worship, all while applying local mitigation measures. This integrative strategy contrasted with the recommendations of both the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ACDCP), as exemplified by his decisions to reopen schools and, subsequently, universities (Kwangerema et al., 2021).

The findings suggest that managing the crisis in Tanzania required the internal mobilisation of various social agents, including religious leaders promoting fasting and prayer, and the public and health sectors engaging in cooperation and diligent work. These findings align with those of De Rosa et al. (2020) and Kamazima et al. (2020), who observed that COVID-19 discourses emphasised public solidarity during the pandemic.

Furthermore, John Pombe Magufuli's rejection of Western mitigation measures appears to have aimed at fostering public mistrust of these measures. This is evident in his repeated emphasis on the problematic nature of Western COVID-19 test samples. Van Leeuwen (2008) notes that social actors may employ negative evaluation as a strategy of delegitimation. The denial of Western measures also implied a downplaying of the severity of the crisis. Magufuli anchored the pandemic to familiar diseases such as malaria, HIV, and leprosy to normalise its perceived threat (see also De Rosa et al., 2020).

Magufuli's denial of the pandemic and its mitigation measures may have undermined public efforts to combat COVID-19 and potentially exposed the population to greater risk. This stance reflects his framing of the pandemic as a form of capitalist-driven sabotage. These findings are consistent with those of Malima et al. (2024) and Kwangerema et al. (2021), who observed that discursive representations of the pandemic and Western measures contributed to poor public responses. Van Leeuwen (2008) further argues that social actors may leverage social experience either to elicit public compliance with a proposed action or, conversely, to undermine it.

Therefore, the denial of Western mitigation measures through various strategies, as outlined above, reflects the president's perception of the pandemic as a capitalist-driven war and a form of sabotage against the country. The findings suggest that this stance was informed by nationalist views, guiding the adoption of alternative, locally oriented measures to manage the pandemic. Moreover, the rejection of Western measures implies an underestimation of the public's efforts to combat the pandemic within the country.

Conclusion

This study examined the discursive strategies of moral legitimation and delegitimation employed in the presidential speeches of John Pombe Magufuli and Samia Suluhu Hassan during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicate that John Pombe Magufuli primarily employed traditional authority, scientific rationalisation, and evaluation to promote traditional treatments, such as herbal steaming, garlic, onions, and COVID-19 organics. In contrast, Samia Suluhu Hassan utilised traditional authority, conformity authority, experiential and scientific rationalisation, evaluation, and abstraction to advocate for Western measures, including vaccines, testing, mask usage, and social distancing.

The analysis further shows that only John Pombe Magufuli employed discursive strategies of moral delegitimation, including negative evaluation, moral abstraction, scientific and experiential rationalisation, personal authority, and mythopoesis, to challenge the use of Western measures such as testing, social distancing, mask mandates, handshaking restrictions, lockdowns and quarantines, limits on gatherings, and market closures.

These findings suggest that political actors, during crises, deploy discursive strategies that reflect their management approaches—mobilising social actors, securing support and international

cooperation, fostering public confidence, building trust or mistrust in measures, and polarising social actors—to achieve both legitimation and delegitimation objectives. From the perspective of van Leeuwen’s analytical framework, the results highlight that discourse functions as a tool to reveal social experiences, values, norms, reasoned actions, myths, authority, and lived experience, thereby advancing the beliefs and positions of social agents in relation to legitimation and delegitimation. The study underscores the need for further research on (de)legitimation practices during health crises.

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