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Abstract

Constructing normalised sociopolitical order during the COVID-19 pandemic appeared a common feature of countries across the globe, constituting identities and engendering political struggles. This study analyses the concrete discursive practices of the President of the Republic of Ghana during the pandemic. Foucault's notions of discourse and power provide the framework for analysing the performances and realisations of disciplinary (power) normalisation and biopolitical practices during the pandemic. How do the discursive practices of the President of the republic of Ghana construct new normalcy, a normalised sociopolitical order, and managed the virus spread during the COVID-19 pandemic? The study revealed the deployment of disciplinary normalisation and the biopolitical constitution of subjects. It found out that there is a discursive link between the discursive practices of the President of Ghana and the pandemic discourse of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and funding support from the World Bank. The President's discursive shift from disciplinary normalisation to self-discipline increased the chances of the ruling party towards winning the December 7, 2020, general election in Ghana. Also, this study provides a better understanding of the reconfiguration of the political and the similarities between Ghana's pandemic discourse and some Global North countries.

Key words: *Discourse, COVID-19 pandemic, disciplinary normalisation, biopolitics, power*

1. Introduction

Constructing normalised sociopolitical order and political authority, and constituting identities, which engender political struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic appeared a common feature of many countries across the North and South. Also, these struggles are fuelled by the proliferation and implementation of normalising and securitisation practices performed at the intersections of

disciplinary and biopolitical practices in furtherance of the new normalised order (Dück, 2022; Foucault, 2007; Marling, 2022). As the pandemic intensely cuts across all countries, global and local economic, socio-cultural, political and spatial ramifications on contemporary societies (Issahaku & Abu, 2020; Megoran, 2021; Sturm et al., 2021) are still visible, especially in the Global South.

In Ghana, the COVID-19 pandemic of the government significantly draws on WHO's prescriptions and statements about the pandemic since March 2020 when it was declared a global health pandemic (WHO, 2020), and from the national institutional set-up as explicated in the study context section. We argue that the government of Ghana adopted disciplinary approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic. Social and public gatherings, movement, and spaces were limited and restricted in adherence to WHO's prescribed prevention measures to halt the spread of the disease (Güner et al., 2020). The livelihoods of majority of the population worsened and health care delivery and access reduced during the peak of the COVID-19 in Ghana (Asuming et al., 2022; Pasquali & Godfrey, 2022), largely due to the actions of government in relation to WHO's prescriptive measures.

However, it remains unclear in what way the actions, practices of WHO's prescriptive measures aided by the national institutional set-up and the discursive practices of the President of the Republic of Ghana construct normalised sociopolitical order, political authority and constituted identities during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana. How do the discursive practices of the President of the republic of Ghana construct new normalcy, a normalised sociopolitical order, and managed the virus spread during the COVID-19 pandemic? The constitution of identities and struggles during the pandemic are not self-evident and ideal but must be construed in relation to the concrete practices of those endowed with discursive authority, privilege to act, speak during the pandemic. However, privilege speakers neither possess power nor are they the source of power, they only exercise power relationally (Foucault, 1991). In so doing, it appears appropriate to talk about political struggles and political identities in so far as struggles and identities need to be analysed in relation to the materiality of power and discursive practices. Furthermore, the relationship between statements, discursive practices, the operations of power and disciplinary normalisation, and the struggles and identities these practices engender to impose a certain order and conduct during the pandemic, in our view, constitutes the political. Consequently, the study explores the disciplinary normalisation practices, and the constitution of political identities and the struggles in relation to normalisation and biopolitical practices during the COVID-19 pandemic in the socio-political context of Ghana. The study provides nuanced understanding of the discursive constitution of political struggles and identities in relation to the actions of the government and President of Ghana, during the COVID-19 pandemic in the sociopolitical context of Ghana. Specifically, the study explores the concrete practices, actions and interactions between the government and the people as objects and subjects (Foucault, 2007) in the pandemic discourse.

The reconfiguration of the political in this study is situated in Foucault's (1972, 1998) notions of discourse, and power in terms of disciplinary normalisation and biopolitics. The study purposively sampled recording of naturally occurring televised presidential speeches on COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana, and the analytical procedures and steps are outlined and explicated in

the methodology section. Whereas securitisation gives rise to the deployment of disciplinary normalisation and the biopolitical constitution of subjects aided by the discursive practices of the President of the Republic of Ghana and pandemic discourse of the World Health Organisation (WHO), the President's discursive shift from disciplinary normalisation to self-discipline reconfigured the 'political' in a surprising direction. Aside the apparent motivated discursive shift, there are some similarities between Ghana's pandemic discourse and some Global North countries (Kutter et al., 2022).

2. The Pandemic and the Election in Ghana

On March 12, 2020, barely a day after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 disease a global health pandemic, Ghana's Ministry of Health confirmed two imported cases of COVID-19 in Ghana. Drawing on constitutional mandates and legal frameworks, the government of Ghana immediately started developing plans and implementation strategies to halt the spread of the disease nationwide. One of such plans was the Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (EPRP) with three core objectives outlined: "(a) slow and stop transmission, prevent outbreaks and delay the spread; (b) provide optimized care for all patients; and (c) to minimize the impact of the pandemic on health systems, social services, and economic activity" ranging from halting the spread of the disease, improving care for patients (Government of Ghana, 2020, p. vi). To achieve the objectives mentioned in the EPRP, the World Bank financed the EPRP focusing on four thematic areas, but the aspect that is relevant in this study's context is the Community Engagement and Risk Communication theme because risk communication focuses on the safety and precautionary measures the people need to stay safe and halt the spread of the disease. The Ghana Health Service Act, 1996 constituted the legal basis for the Ghana Health Service leading role in the implementation of the World Bank funded EPRP. Also, the Imposition of Restriction Act (IRA), 2020, Act 1012 was passed as an additional Public Health Act to ensure public health and safety. An Executive Instrument (E.I.) 64 of 2020 was made to ensure that the EPRP objectives are achieved. The IRA provided the legal frame for the imposition of restrictions on people, and to govern and protect the health and safety of the population. Consequently, the security agencies in Ghana, especially the military and the police acted on the basis of Act 1012 and E.I. 64 of 2020 to enforce the directives and restrictions outlined in the President's televised speeches on the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana.

It is worth noting that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic 2020 coincided with Ghana's national election year and the presidential and parliamentary elections were due December 7, 2020. In such periods, the sitting president assumed dual responsibility – a responsibility to his political party as the flagbearer, with the aim of retaining political authority over the nation, and a responsibility towards the people of Ghana as the commander-in-chief. The president assumed the role of the 'legitimate speaker' on the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the management strategies put in place to manage or halt the spread of the disease in Ghana. In such a situation, it would be impossible to present routine televised speeches without traces of campaign messages to the advantage of himself and his political party. There were instances in the televised addresses to the nation where he made explicit

references to the election campaigns and the impending national general elections. For example, 'It is important that we maintain this positive position, especially with a few weeks to the holding of the December 7 presidential and parliamentary elections' (Update 18, October 18, 2020). Also, 'with a month to the conduct of the 7th December presidential and parliamentary elections, there would, obviously, be an intensification of political party activities in all parts of the country, with its accompanying human contact' (Update 19, November 8, 2020). Aside such explicit statements, some speeches emphasised that the ruling government had done many good things for the people of Ghana in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. To sum up, the contextual information outlined above provide and enhance interpretation and understanding about the 'politics' of COVID-19 pandemic management discourse in the society of Ghana. Thus, it is likely that the manner the incumbent president and the flagbearer of the ruling party managed the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana had an effect on the party's fate in the December 7, 2020, general elections in Ghana.

3. The Constitution of Identities and Political Struggles

The discursive archives of the COVID-19 pandemic established the basis of constituting political identities and struggles thereof. Fundamentally, the prescriptive measures of WHO did not only provide basis for nations and government in the reconfiguration of the political, but it also served as the basis for transnational organisation such as the UNICEF in constituting political identities in the pandemic discourse. UNICEF targeted relevant categories of people in different places and spaces; for example, school administrators and teachers, community members, parents and students with relevant messages and actions towards preventing COVID-19 in schools and communities (Bender, 2020). Many countries worldwide adopted and implemented measures including partial and total lockdowns, and worldwide travel restrictions were imposed (Phelan et al., 2020) to halt the spread of the disease. Also, the implementation of prescriptive measures were evident and manifest in places and spaces worldwide, reinvigorating the materialisation of national, regional and local borders, restricting movement of people, classifying and characterising individuals and groups one never imagined (Megoran, 2021). For Sturm et al. (2021), the objectification, medicalisation and securitisation of individuals at places and in spaces borders on human rights that cannot be ignored in the pandemic discourse. Disciplinary controls practices emphasising border restrictions and adherence to prevention measures as provided by the WHO appeared to be the surest method to halting the spread of the disease (Güner et al., 2020) but not devoid of disciplinary normalisations and regulatory ramifications along with the constitution of identities and political struggles.

Moreover, while the prescriptions and guidelines of WHO were adopted and implemented in many countries for the purpose of containing the spread of the virus, and constructing and restoring normalcy, it soon became obvious that the articulation of 'normal' is political and characterised by a form of coercion (Foucault, 1991) or material force. In this way, prescriptive measures are both practices of disciplinary normalisation and biopolitical regulations, which sometimes lead to failure if not adequately deployed as observed in the case of

Estonia where biopolitical tools were not deployed despite their availability during the Covid-19 pandemic (Marling, 2022). In many other countries, the focus was on getting people tested and vaccinated, which were intensified calls to biopolitical and disciplinary measures – a normalisation control and biopolitical regulation of subjects, but it failed in some countries (Marling, 2022). Experts in favour of COVID-19 pandemic preventive discourse appear to hail the prescriptive measures for halting COVID-19 spread in communities, schools and workplaces. However, the ‘dark side’ (Puorideme, 2020) in relation to the social, political, spatial, and economic cost (Pasquali & Godfrey, 2022), the normalisation of the abnormal (Krzyżanowski, 2020), and the securitisation (Dück, 2022) of individuals, communities and the nation were evident. Normalisation and securitisation are both realised in disciplinary and biopolitical practices (Kutter et al., 2022).

A study in Ghana claims the emphasis on COVID-19 control and prevention measures nationwide contributed to the decline in infections in the country (Kenu et al., 2020). However, there are concerns that the prevention and control measures deployed in places and spaces to halt the disease were not adequate, thereby highlighting disciplinary and biopolitical failures (Marling, 2022). Similarly, risk communication as a key prevention and control measure was not adequate as misinformation led to limited adherence to COVID-19 prevention protocols and increasing spread (Quakyi et al., 2021). Whereas de-Graft Aikins & Akoi-Jackson (2020) reported that Ghanaian creative artists’ multimodal communication and context-specific strategies were not directed at any particular group of people regarding COVID-19 control and prevention, disciplinary normalisation and securitisation in the COVID-19 pandemic discourse created a division between the normal and abnormal, and constituted political identities and struggles between groups, or the government and the governed (Dück, 2022; Foucault, 2007; Marling, 2022).

The above studies highlight the importance of disciplinary power and biopolitics in the constitution of identities and political struggles in the pandemic discourse in contexts. However, an elaboration of the concrete deployment of disciplinary normalisation, biopolitical and securitisation practices of government seemed inadequate in providing an understanding of the constitution of political identities, amidst struggles, necessary for successfully halting the spread of the pandemic. As Foucault (2007) pointed out, a combination of disciplinary normalisation and biopolitical practices and an element of coercion or material force is required in targeting the population as a political object and the constitution of political identities for specific desirable outcomes during the pandemic. Consequently, the construction and deployment of normalised sociopolitical order is not without struggles. Thus, this study adds to the above studies, as it contributes useful data and insights to recent limited literature regarding the understanding of concrete actions and practices (discursive practices) of the government (the President) targeting the population as a political object and the constitution of political identities necessary to halt the spread of COVID-19 in Ghana.

4. Discourse, Power and Disciplinary Normalisation

Foucault’s (1972) notions of discourse in his archaeological works, and power in his genealogical works (Foucault, 1991, 1998) provide a framework for

investigating the constitution of identities and construction of normalised sociopolitical order in society, which are open to political contestations and struggles. Discourse according to Foucault (1972) is constitutive of rules and knowledge systems of society in a certain period as well as the practices that target and form objects and subjects for which certain statements can be made, but not other statements. In this way, discourse also concerns the implications or effects of knowledge systems and rules, the practices of real individuals, and the institutions of social life (Miller, 1990). However, the object of discourse is not self-evident, but a historical construction and perspective of certain aspects of reality, and for that matter discourse is context specific and historically contingent (Foucault, 1972). Discourse is irreducible to grammatical expressions or language as a transparent medium just for the purpose of representation, it shapes and constructs social reality. Subsequently, in his genealogical works, Foucault (1991, 1998) emphasised that discourse and power are intricately linked and constitute and reinforce each other in producing forms of knowledge, subjects and institutions of social life and normalising practices. However, Foucault (1998) does not construe power as a thing to possess, rather power is exercised in relational terms with practical and strategic effects. Power is exercised or conveyed through discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). So, power relations in discourse is intentional, but non subjective, in the sense that power produces subjects by acting on the actions of people (Foucault, 1998) in relation to a set of knowledge systems or statements (Foucault, 1972) in socio-culturally specific contexts.

The relation between discourse and power is complex and so are discursive phenomena, with complex aspects and dimensions. For instance, Kutter et al. (2022) presented an outline including the medical, managerial, and the political aspects and dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic discourse. First, the medical dimension of the COVID-19 pandemic discourse involves all actions and practices, for example viral diagnosis, measurement of infections aimed at preventing or curing, second, the management dimension involves the actions and practices, for example, vaccination regimes and social contact tracing, and restrictions of governments aimed at containing the virus, and third, the political dimension involves all the actions and practices, for example, prescriptive and disciplinary control as well as modes of subjection by government and subjectivation practices, which aim at conducting and normalising the conduct of populations towards the containment of the virus. The focus of the study is on the third dimension of the COVID-19 pandemic discourse – the political and its reconfigurations at the intersections of discourse and power (governmentality), which serves as the theoretical underpinning for this study.

Acting on the actions of human subjects implies discourse, power-knowledge relations towards specific ends, which were outlined, in relation to the concepts of governmentality and biopolitics (Foucault, 2007). Political struggles and constitution of political identities lie at the intersection of disciplinary power and biopolitics – the government of self and the government of others (Foucault, 2010a). The objective of political struggles are ‘to attack not so much such-or-such institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but, rather, a technique, a form of power that constitutes individuals subjects (Foucault, 2002, p. 331). In so doing, the everyday life and actions of individuals or a population become the object of a political strategy under an explicit mechanism of disciplinary and regulatory power (Foucault, 2007). One of such

disciplinary power mechanisms is ‘disciplinary normalisation’, which comprises ‘techniques of normalisation’ that construct models and norms targeting the achievement of certain ends, mostly, aimed at normalising the abnormal (Vaughan, 1996).

Disciplinary power and the regulation of the population – biopolitics – are not in opposition to each other, but these mechanisms of power are often exercised in combination (Foucault, 2007, 2010a). Disciplinary normalisation prescribes the norm and determines the limits of the normal and abnormal in relation to the established norm (Foucault, 2007). Normalisation processes involve classification and dividing practices in which the normal and abnormal remain important. In relation to Foucault’s notion of normalisation, Krzyżanowski (2020) notes the discursive construction of normative order and normalisation in public discourses where discursive strategies are mobilised to normalise thorny issues in the public domain or socio-political contexts deemed abnormal (Vaughan, 1996). ‘Normalisation hence takes place when new norms and ideas of social order, strategically constructed in discourse, become – or are strategically assumed to become – part and parcel of mainstream or common thinking’ (Krzyżanowski, 2020, p. 435). Thus, the notions of discourse and power relations in terms of governmentality and related concepts – techniques of normalisation and biopolitics – are central to the analysis of concrete discursive and social practices and actions of real individuals and institutions of social life in this study.

5. Methodology

This study is a discourse analysis that focuses on analysing the discursive practices and actions of the President of the Republic of Ghana in relation to the actions of the people during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study employed purposive sampling to select two datasets comprising, first, text realised from the transcripts of the president’s periodic addresses to the nation on updates of measures the government is putting in place to stop the spread of COVID-19 disease infections. The second dataset comprises relevant texts realised from the practices of institutions created for managing the COVID -19 disease infection in Ghana. In this study, we construe the president’s speeches as social action performed and directed at population resident in Ghana during the pandemic. As indicated above, our analysis focuses on the relations between the here and now actions and the practices in socio-political context, which are necessary for the broader interpretation and understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic discourse in Ghana. A total of twenty-seven (27) transcripts were retrieved through online search of televised speeches of the President of Ghana between the periods of March 11, 2020, and December 15, 2021. Four transcripts of speeches delivered on April 5 and 19, 2020 and May 10 and 31, 2020 corresponded to the selection criteria and were purposefully selected, but two transcripts (April 5 and 19) were most relevant for analysis. Two criteria were used to guide the selection of relevant speeches for analysis. First, the relevance of a speech to the study. Second, a search was performed for keywords – ‘restriction’ and ‘normal’ in the transcripts, and the speeches with the highest ‘restriction’ and ‘normal’ frequencies selected and relevant sections or portions chunked for analysis. The two words are not to be construed as direct or perfect reflection but lexical proxies and prefiguration of power and disciplinary

normalisation actions and practices during the pandemic. Restriction became a keyword in the COVID-19 pandemic discourse, not only in Ghana, but globally. In this study, we use 'restrictions' to mean the discursive constraints the COVID-19 pandemic discourse places on the everyday actions and interactions of people and social relations of power leading to lockdowns in Ghana. Also, the word 'restrictions' assumed discursive importance and invoked certain expectations and social relations conveyed in the televised speeches and discursive practices of the President of the Republic of Ghana during the peak periods of the COVID-19 pandemic in which the speeches were delivered. In addition, this study is interested in 'normal' or normalcy not in the mere sense of the (re)introduction of what is normal, but in the political sense of constructing and implementing a certain new normative order, the politics of normalisation (Krzyżanowski, 2020).

Analytically, this study sheds light on disciplinary power and normalisation (Foucault, 1991) as an important aspect of the discursive reconfiguration of the 'political' during the pandemic in the sociopolitical context of Ghana. Distinct discursive operations relevant for the realisation of disciplinary power and normalisation according to Foucault (1991) include, comparison, differentiation, hierarchisation, homogenisation and exclusion. Consequently, the deployment of disciplinary power and normalisation and concomitant discursive operations suggest and invoke classification, surveillance, and securitisation practices during the pandemic. The study employed classification, surveillance and securitisation as analytical categories to highlight disciplinary power and normalisation in the discursive practices of the President of the Republic of Ghana during the pandemic. Aside using the categories outlined above to realise the operations of disciplinary power and normalisation, the study focuses on the discursive strategies the President used as enabled and constrained by the institutional set-up in the context of Ghana. The analysis proceeded from the operations of surveillance and authoritative policing of subjects enabled by rules targeting the people, and the constitution of subjects enabled by biopolitics or biopolitical operations of self-responsibilisation, the construction of threat and the securitisation of subjects leading to the production of self-responsible subjects. The study contends that disciplinary normalisation is realised through distinctive discursive operations of disciplinary power and biopolitics, and in both aspects, the subject is an object of power – normalising or law/norm conforming subject and an instrument of power – a self-constituting subject (Foucault, 1991, 2007).

The steps and procedures of selecting and chunking the relevant portions of the purposefully selected transcripts for analysis are as follows. First, we undertook a close reading of selected transcript, and mapping and chunking relevant portions in relation to the study objective and theoretical orientation to 'the political' as indicated in the theory section of this study. Second, as mentioned earlier, portions of selected transcripts that suggest and point to discursive operations of disciplinary normalisation were mapped and chunked for further scrutiny. Third, a close reading of portions of selected transcripts was performed to identify discursive strategies and shifts and movements between disciplinary normalisation and biopolitical practices. Consequently, the discursive strategies of the President were identified selected from the transcripts for further analysis.

6. *Discursive Construction of New Normal*

This section focuses on the connections between the actions of the speaker and the institutional practices in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana. Sections 169 and 170 of the Public Health Act, 2012 (Act 851) mandates the Minister responsible for Health to declare a public health emergency. Consequently, the Government of Ghana enacted the Declaration of Public Health Emergency Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic and Executive Instrument, 2020 (Executive Instrument 61, 2020). The Minister issued testing and quarantine directives, and preventive measures. Section 171 of the Public Health Act, 2012 (Act 851) mandates the health minister to provide 'health information, reporting and notification'. Other institutional set-up and practices such as the Imposition of Restrictions Act, 2020 (Act 1012) and the Imposition of Restrictions (Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic) Instrument, 2020 and Executive Instrument 64 of 2020 enabled the discursive operations and power practices of the President during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana. In so doing, The President of the Republic of Ghana seemed to have unfettered access and control of the COVID-19 pandemic discourse.

In Excerpt 1, the analysis focuses on ways the President discursively achieved the exercise of power and normalises the pandemic discourse leading to the emergence of 'new normal' in 'a new phase of COVID-19 fight' in the absence of treatment for the disease.

Excerpt 1.

- 1: we have to learn to adapt to the conditions. It is not normal that
- 2: we have to wear masks, but now we have to; it is not normal that
- 3: we cannot shake hands with each other; and it is certainly not normal that
- 4: we cannot hug our family members and loved ones;
- 5: but that is our current reality. Until treatment is found,
- 6: COVID-19 will remain a part of our lives. But life cannot be
- 7: put on hold indefinitely, and Ghana cannot remain in
- 8: a never-ending crisis management situation, and that is why
- 9: we have been putting measures in place to restore gradually
- 10: some normalcy in our social and economic lives,
- 11: as we learn to cope with the reality of the virus.
- 12: These changes I have announced transition us into
- 13: a new phase of our COVID-19 fight, in which we teach ourselves
- 14: how to live responsibly with Coronavirus.
- 15: We do not expect to go back to the way things were
- 16: five (5) months ago – but we should create a “new normal”,

(Ghana's President televised speech, Sunday, 5th April 2020)

In the above excerpt, we observe the President discursively construct normalisation by categorising and distinguishing what is not normal and what is normal. First, what is not normal include not wearing masks, shaking hands and hugging each other (lines 1 to 4). Second, the President constructs the norm as 'our current reality' (line 5) in which people must adapt to certain conditions, wear masks, not shake hands and hug each other. However, the norm needs to be normalised to achieve results during the pandemic, thus, the President needs

to activate disciplinary power to achieve normalisation. The President announced changes to transition the population to a new phase of the COVID-19 pandemic fight (lines 12 to 13). The ‘new phase’ of the pandemic appears to be the ‘current reality’ or the norm the President is creating. Also, the changes to transition the population are prescriptive measures issued by the President to normalise the actions and conduct of the population during the pandemic.

Whereas the President embarks on the construction of the new norm and describing it as ‘our current reality’ and that ‘COVID-19 will remain a part of our lives’ (lines 5 and 6), it appears contradictory to suggest that the creation of a “new normal” (line 16) automatically translates into the restoration of normalcy (lines 9 and 10). It is important to understand that normalisation sometimes connotes the restoration of normality, but it is often not the case (Krzyżanowski, 2020) as new norms are classified and prescribed, and surveillance enacted and targeted at population and the conduct of subjects. Consequently, it is in these prescriptive practices that the President’s performance of power is accomplished during the pandemic. In excerpt 1, there is evidence to suggest that a new normative order is created, and a disciplinary normalisation (Foucault, 2007) is activated in which the people of Ghana must ‘learn to cope with the reality of the virus’ and teach themselves ‘how to live responsibly with Coronavirus’ (lines 11, 13, and 14). The President’s discursive practices during the pandemic appear to have transformed key context-specific practice of ‘shaking hands’ for instance to ‘not shaking hands’ thereby creating a new normalised sociopolitical order.

7. Disciplinary Normalisation

Disciplinary normalisation is realised by analysing the discursive practices of the President during the pandemic. Fundamentally, normalisation, to be sure, disciplinary normalisation is bound to classification (Krzyżanowski, 2020) and dividing practices, especially, between the normal and abnormal with the aim of normalising the abnormal as we observed in the analysis of excerpt 1. In Ghana, the Imposition of Restriction Act (IRA), 2020, Act 1012 was constructed and enacted to legitimize the “new normal” mentioned in excerpt 1. In so doing, Act 1012 empowered the President to impose restrictions thereby dividing spaces and classifying people (Foucault, 2007), their actions and events into normal and abnormal in relation to the new normative order. Evidently, the President employed two distinct discursive strategies or operations to accomplish disciplinary normalisation. One of the discursive strategies the President employed was to appeal to law-conforming subjects by employing disciplinary power and normalisation actions and practices, and the other was to appeal to hygiene-conforming and self-responsible subjects as analysed in the following sections.

7.1 Authorising Restrictions and Surveillance

Along with the classification is the deployment of restrictions with corresponding security agencies and institutions such as the police and the military to enforce and ensure compliance, and the normalisation of the “new normal” as indicated in Excerpt 1. Normalisation is realised from the enforcement of the directives deployed by the state apparatus (Foucault, 2002)

and aimed at acting on the action of people. The text presented in Excerpt 2 and analysed is taken from update number 5 (April 5, 2020) of the President's televised address to the nation regarding the imposition of restrictions.

Excerpt 2.

- 1: I announced the imposition of strict restrictions to movement,
- 2: and asked that residents of the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area and
- 3: Kasoa and the Greater Kumasi Metropolitan Area and its contiguous
- 4: districts to stay at home for two (2) weeks, [...]
- 5: To the men and women of our security services, who have been enforcing
- 6: the directives, by patrolling our streets day and night, conducting
- 7: surveillance, snap checks and mounting roadblocks,
- 8: we are deeply in your debt. It is these security measures
- 9: that have created the basic framework within which
- 10: our medical personnel are able to pursue contact tracing,
- 11: testing and treatment of persons with the virus, whose
- 12: implementation offers us the most secure means to defeat the virus.

(Ghana's President televised speech, Sunday, 5th April 2020)

As observed in Excerpt 2, the key discursive operations aside the classificatory practices are 'the imposition of strict restrictions' (line 1) and the enforcement of directives through surveillance (lines 5 and 7). Evidently, the creation of "new normal" – learning how to live responsibly with Coronavirus – as evident in excerpt 1, requires some legitimacy and discursive enablers such as the IRA to operationalise. The IRA enabled 'the imposition of strict restrictions to movements' (line 1) and enforcement of directives for the realisation of disciplinary normalisation during the pandemic. Consequently, the mechanisms of surveillance and securitisation in excerpt 2 above (Foucault, 2007, 1972) were important disciplinary normalisation practices embedded and conveyed in the COVID-19 pandemic management discourse. The divided spaces and the classified people (lines 2, 3, and 11) were targets of political strategy (Foucault, 2007). Whereas it appears the deployment of disciplinary mechanisms created a framework for managing the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana, it was also evident the IRA legitimised and normalised the abnormal actions of the state apparatus (Krzyzanowski, 2020; Vaughan, 1996).

7.2 Justifying Command and Control

The President discursively justified disciplinary normalisation as offering 'the most secure means to defeat the virus' (line 12) thereby paying little or no attention to the ramifications such as those presented and analysed in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3.

- 1: In the very few instances where members of our security agencies
- 2: have employed the use of excessive force against the citizenry, in
- 3: enforcing the restrictions on movement, the Inspector General of Police
- 4: and the Chief of Defence Staff of the Armed Forces have taken steps

- 5: to investigate such incidents, and, they have given me the assurance that,
 6: those found culpable, will be duly sanctioned. Thus far, the alleged
 7: wrongdoers have been withdrawn from the ongoing exercise.
 8: To enhance command and control, more senior officers have been
 deployed
 9: at the operational level, and each member of our security services
 10: participating in the exercise has been handed an aide-mémoire
 11: highlighting, essentially, the guidelines for the operation.
 12: However, I am extremely disturbed by the actions of a few,
 13: unpatriotic persons, who are deliberately passing off and
 14: circulating old videos of alleged brutality by members of
 15: the security agencies, largely of foreign origin, and presenting
 16: them as though they were new incidents by Ghanaian security
 personnel,
 17: which have occurred during the course of this past week.
 18: It is sad, it is unfortunate, and it must end.
 19: We should all be in this fight together [...]
 20: The law enforcement agencies are determined to locate
 21: the originators of these anti-social acts.

(Ghana's President televised speech, Sunday, 5th April 2020)

In Excerpt 3 disciplinary normalisation is evident in 'instances where members of our security agencies have employed the use of excessive material force against the citizenry' but the police force is absolved from wrongdoing. In so doing, we observe a shift in the discursive practice where the President discursively shifted blame to a category of people classified as 'unpatriotic persons' engaging in 'anti-social acts' (lines 13 and 21) thereby normalising such wrongdoings and blocking opportunities for resistance and counter-conducts as observed in excerpt 3. Not only do such classifications of people require normalisation (Foucault, 2007), it also legitimises and normalises the use of excessive material force and brutality as evident in the statements of the President (Vaughan, 1996).

7.3 Biopolitical Appeal to Self-Discipline

Whereas the analysis of previous sections' excerpts focused on discursive operations justifying disciplinary normalisations practices targeting the population as a biopolitical object, the analysis in this section focuses on the biopolitical appeal to self-discipline (Foucault, 2007, 2010a) during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana. The analysis focuses on the use of biopolitical regulatory techniques to constitute subjects; an appeal to self-conduct (Foucault, 2010b) in the realisation of disciplinary normalisation. This section highlights a shift in disciplinary normalisation, transcending the justification of authoritative practices of surveillances to a biopolitical self-discipline and responsabilisation directed at the subjects. In so doing the discursive practices of the President focuses on the actions of real individuals acting on themselves and in their own interests as prefigured in Excerpt 1 – living responsibly.

Excerpt 4.

- 1: Discipline, self-discipline, is that strong bridge that all of us,

- 2: from the safety of our homes, in our workplaces, and in our communities,
- 3: must build. We need to build a strong bridge of self-discipline
- 4: in order for us to cross over from this difficult period of restrictions
- 5: and the spread of the Coronavirus to the other side, where total freedom
- 6: to go about our normal lives awaits us. To defeat the virus, and get
- 7: there, we have to accept that we have to wash our hands, maintain good
- 8: hygiene, refrain from shaking hands, wear our masks, and practice social
- 9: distancing in all of our engagements.

(Ghana's President televised speech, Sunday, 19th April 2020)

In Excerpt 4 line 1, we observe an appeal to self-regulation as the 'strong bridge' appearing at the intersections of surveillance and self-discipline as an alternative for managing the spread and devastating consequences of the disease. Interestingly, there appears to be a discursive shift in the President's speech, from prescriptive and authoritative disciplinary mechanisms such as the 'imposition of strict restriction' and normalisation actions and practices. Foucault (2007, 2002) emphasises that disciplinary and regulatory powers are exercised concurrently, which means that it is possible to realise disciplinary normalisation through discursive operations contingent on authoritative imposition of restrictions and biopolitical appeal as observed in Excerpt 4. Furthermore, we argue that these shifts and combinations were enacted to facilitate processes for the conduct of the impending December 7 general elections in Ghana. Thus, the December 7, 2020, national general elections in Ghana might have accounted for the sudden shifts in the discursive practices of the President. It is important to emphasise that the biopolitical shift was not to replace the authoritative imposition and surveillance but to play a complementary role in the pandemic management. It appears that the deployment of security forces, disciplinary normalisation and the normalisation of the abnormal – the use of excessive force (Vaughan, 1996) might greatly reduce the chance of the ruling party – of which the President was the flagbearer – of winning the general election. The assertion above is seen in the statements he made in his subsequent televised addresses to the nation as the days to the elections drew closer. Also, such discursive shift is observed in excerpt 5 as presented and analysed.

Excerpt 5.

- 1: Let me thank, in particular, all our frontline actors
- 2: who continue to put their lives on the line to help ensure
- 3: that we defeat the virus. To our healthcare workers,
- 4: I say a big ayekoo for the continued sacrifices you are making
- 5: in caring for those infected with the virus, and in caring for the sick
- 6: in general. You are the heroes and heroines of our generation,
- 7: and Government will do all in its power to provide you with
- 8: the relevant tools to do your work effectively.

(Ghana's President televised speech, Sunday, 5th April 2020)

In the Excerpt 5, the President discursively constructed ‘our health workers’ (in Excerpt 4, line 3) as ‘the heroes and heroines of our generation’ (in Excerpt 4, line 6). Both negatively and positively constructed identities in discourse or discursive practices have practical and political implications for the actors in discourse. Identities that are constructed positively and affirmatively in discourse are not only called upon to self-discipline or responsabilisation as we observe in Excerpt 5, but they were rewarded. For instance, in ‘April, May and June 2020, three hundred and twenty-three million cedis (GH¢323 million) is being used to motivate our health workers’ whereas those ‘unpatriotic citizens’ are held accountable for their actions (CNBC Africa, 2020).

8. Discussion of Findings

The data presented and analysed under the themes and subheadings presented above revealed two key findings: first, the deployment of disciplinary normalisation and the biopolitical constitution of subjects; second, there is a discursive link between the discursive practices of the President of Ghana and the pandemic discourse of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and funding support from the World Bank towards normalised sociopolitical order and the constitution of the subjects. This is evident in the implementation of the Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (EPRP) during the pandemic.

Disciplinary normalisation and the biopolitical constitution of the subjects were evident in Ghana’s pandemic management discourse. In Ghana, the discursive practice of the President did not only target the population by appealing to already law-conforming population as prescribed by the IRA and justified through the authoritative imposition of restrictions, but deployed biopolitical mechanisms towards the constitution of self-disciplined subjects (Kutter et al., 2022). Thus, aside the deployment of surveillances directed at the population, the President’s practices appear to constitute the subjects by appealing to hygiene-conforming and self-responsible subjects, which is discursively achieved through operations such as classification and securitisation (Dück, 2022; Megoran, 2021). While the deployment of disciplinary normalisation and biopolitical operations are not new in both global North and South countries during the pandemic (Marling, 2022), this empirical study revealed the ways the discursive practices of the President combined authoritative imposition of restrictions and biopolitical appeals to manage the population of Ghana during the pandemic. The discursive practices of the President of Ghana performed and realised disciplinary normalisation and managed to construct a new normalcy during the pandemic.

This study demonstrates pandemic discursive links between Ghana’s pandemic discourse and that of the WHO and the World Bank. The pandemic discursive links and similarities exist across countries in the global North, especially, regarding the realisation of disciplinary normalisations and biopolitical practices. Also, these links were evident in the ways the WHO constructed the pandemic discourse along with specific mechanisms directed to people world-wide. Recent studies demonstrated similarities in the pandemic discourse, particularly the combinations and shifts in discursive operations realising disciplinary (power) normalisation and biopolitical practices across countries (Kutter et al., 2022; Marling, 2022).

9. Conclusion

In Ghana, the discursive practices of the President normalised and constituted subjects to construct a new normalcy to manage public health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. People were classified, identities discursively constructed, and the abnormal normalised. For instance, people were classified as law-conforming subjects and hygiene-conforming and self-responsible subjects in relation to the constructed normalised sociopolitical order enabled by the transformation of context-specific social practices. However, non-law-conforming subjects were classified as unpatriotic persons. Also, the classification of people was realised by constructing normal and abnormal events and practices, and the deployment of disciplinary normalisation, aided by local context-specific institutional setup and the global institutions' pandemic discourses. Furthermore, in relation to the new normal or normalised order, identities were discursively constructed, for instance, health workers were constructed as heroes and heroines.

The President's discursive combinations and shifts in disciplinary power, normalisation and biopolitical self-discipline had an influence on the peaceful and democratic conduct of the December 7, 2020, general election in Ghana, in which the ruling political party retained political power and authority. This study contributes new perspectives to understanding COVID-19 pandemic management discourse in a non-western society such as Ghana, where similarities in the pandemic management practices were observed between Global North and Global South countries. However, the data of this study was limited to the televised speeches of the President of the Republic of Ghana at the national level in relation to the practices of the institutional and legal frameworks (of Ghana) in the socio-political context of the pandemic discourse. Multiple datasets including the discursive practices of actors, especially, the actions and perspectives of real individuals and the practices of the institutions of social life in the context of the study could strengthen the findings of this study.

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