Legitimation in revolutionary discourse: A critical examination of the discourse of Jerry John Rawlings

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the legitimation strategies used by Jerry John Rawlings, a Ghanaian revolutionary leader, to license his revolutionary actions, including political enemy executions and a crackdown on corrupt practices. It adapts and extends van Leeweun's legitimation framework by demonstrating how Rawlings exploited historical memory and the notion of sacrifice in conjunction with the strategies of authorization, rationalization and moralization to formulate his revolutionary rhetoric. The analysis reveals that the legitimation strategies enabled Rawlings to project a patriot-cum-nationalist identity as well as construct himself as a noble revolutionary mandated by the people of Ghana to represent their interests, protect them from evildoers and lead the process of social transformation. The study illustrates the persuasive power of revolutionary discourses in terms of how they function ideologically in the message they communicate (or exaggerate) and conceal.

Introduction

An important field of inquiry in discourse studies, political discourse analysis continues to attract considerable scholarly attention. Several aspects of political discourse have been examined, including categorization (Edwards 2004), evasion (Friedman 2017), media and politics (Ciaglia 2013), politics and terrorism (Chiluwa 2015), resistance and emancipation (Nartey & Ernanda 2020), politics and war/military rhetoric (Hodges 2013) and political communication and metaphor (Nartey 2019; Nartey 2020). These studies illustrate the multidimensional nature of political discourse and how sociopolitical actors deploy language to achieve their objectives. Political discourse analysis presents an interesting area for the study of legitimation since the language of politics invariably seeks to validate political actions and ideological positions (Reyes 2011). That

is, given that political texts are not value-free, but are imbued with ideologies and overt/covert meanings, legitimation is essential in rationalizing the implications, presuppositions, connotations, worldviews, etc. expressed in political texts.

Legitimation refers to discourse that explicates and justifies social activity by providing "good reasons, grounds or acceptable motivations for past or present action" (van Dijk 1998, 255). It is the process by which speakers accredit or license certain social behaviors and thus entails the linguistic/discursive strategies utilized by speakers to recruit support for their actions in an effort to establish and cultivate belief in their legitimacy (van Leeuwen 2007). Legitimation offers an answer to the 'why' question – "why should we do this?" and "why should we do this in this way" (van Leeuwen 2007, 93). Therefore, it has explanatory power and functions ideologically in the message it accentuates or attenuates. The process of legitimation is realized by argumentation – that is, by adducing arguments that seek to explain social actions, ideas, thoughts and pronouncements (Rojo & van Dijk 1997). Importantly, the act of legitimizing is linked to an objective that seeks the addressee's support and approval. This search for approval can be motivated by various reasons such as achieving social acceptance, improving community relationships and gaining popularity or fame (Reyes 2011).

In political discourse analysis, legitimation has been extensively studied. It has been examined in different discourses such as war rhetoric (Oddo 2011), media coverage (Ali & Nordin 2016), fake news (Igwebuike & Chimuanya 2021), political speeches (Reyes 2011), online aggression (Lee 2020), gendered language (Yu 2020), protest speeches and online activism (Igwebuike & Akoh 2021) and immigration rejection letters (van Leeuwen & Wodak 1999). However, it has not been investigated in revolutionary discourses, albeit such discourses represent an important 'site' for the manifestation of legitimation strategies. Revolutionary discourses are "discourses that consist of the ideological, literary, academic and religious texts, as well as narratives and speeches that created the environment conducive to the revolution …" and can be referred to as "discourses of power due to their concern with the reproduction, resistance to or legitimation of the relations of power in the context of the interaction of religion [economics, culture and society] and politics…" (Alinejad 1999, 39). They constitute an important medium of political self-expression for political leaders who describe themselves as revolutionaries. Consequently, the role of legitimation in such discourses cannot be understated.

The present study thus addresses a gap in the literature by analyzing the legitimation strategies employed by Jerry John Rawlings, a Ghanaian revolutionary leader who spearheaded the June 4, 1979 and December 31, 1981 military coups in Ghana. From a theoretical standpoint, this paper adapts and extends van Leeweun's (2007, 2008) legitimation framework by discussing how legitimation strategies may be conditioned by spatiotemporal and sociocultural factors, including local politics and traditional values. Hence, in addition to contributing to the existing discourse-analytic literature on legitimations, this paper sheds light on the uses of new legitimation strategies and highlights how culture-specific politics shapes language and how, in turn, language shapes local politics. As we will demonstrate below, Rawlings exploits historical memory and the notion of sacrifice in conjunction with the strategies of authorization, rationalization and moralization to formulate his revolutionary rhetoric. By so doing, he draws on Ghanaian cultural values such as collectivism and communality and appeals to 'the will of the people' and the goals/effects of other revolutions.

Context: Jerry John Rawlings and the 1979 and 1981 revolutions in Ghana

Ghana's democratic development has been interrupted by military coup d'états since gaining independence in 1957. Following the 1979 revolution, Jerry John Rawlings emerged on the political scene both as a hero for the gains of the revolution and a villain for its misfortunes. His recruitment into the air force division of the army was a means to achieve his aim of making an impact and effecting change in Ghanaian society, a situation that stimulated his desire to seek both rational and pragmatic answers to the existential questions emanating from the life experiences of people around him (Shillington 1992; Yankah 2018). As Shillington (1992, 34) observes: "He had been brought up to believe that people in authority should display the highest level of integrity and yet everywhere [beginning with the leadership of the Supreme Military Council (SMC)], he saw numerous examples of people in authority illegally enriching themselves at the expense of the poor and the helpless…".

On May15, 1979, having observed what he described as gross indiscipline by the senior officers of the SMC, the widespread corruption in public service and the deepening inequality and social injustice evident in Ghanaian society, Rawlings led an uprising to overthrow the SMC government. Even though the mutiny initially failed, Rawlings and the revolutionary forces took over power on June 4, 1979. A couple of years later after handing over power to President Hilla Limann and the

People's National Party (PNP), Rawlings staged another coup on December 31, 1981 to overthrow the PNP administration for failing to uphold the ideals of his first revolution. He formed the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (which later morphed into the Provisional National Defense Council) and constituted a new government. In 1992, he resigned from the army and formed the National Democratic Congress and became the first president of Ghana's Fourth Republic. He left office after serving two terms, which is the limit provided by the Ghanaian Constitution.

Apart from his intention to addresses injustices in Ghanaian society and his hatred for corruption as reasons for spearheading the revolutions, Shillington (1992) asserts that Rawlings' concern for the poor and the 'underdog' was a major motivation in his revolutionary politics; hence, his declaration of revolutionary power to the people. The events that led to the Rawlings-led uprising in 1979 and 1981 and their aftermaths have defined Ghana's democracy, politics and socioeconomic relations till date. Various analysts and social commentators have different views on the revolution, with some describing it as a moral struggle, a reformist action, a pragmatic solution, a radical populist action and an unideological battle (Folson 1993). These views notwithstanding, Rawlings' discourse gives an indication that he was a socialist revolutionary and was largely influenced by revolutionary discourses elsewhere (Yankah 2018).

Even though Rawlings constructed his revolutionary discourse to achieve specific goals in Ghanaian politics three decades ago, an analysis of his discourse is relevant to contemporary politics as revolutionary discourses are still prevalent today and are being (re-)enacted by sociopolitical actors to justify violence and mobilize radical actions as evidenced by the recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Hence, as world politics stands today, 'pendulating' between globalization, nationalism and populism, the current study makes an empirical contribution to the growing scholarship on how political revolutions are conceptualized and discursively performed.

Analytic framework

The study is broadly situated within the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as it aims to explain how discourse produces specific social practices. The analysis of the discourse practices of politicians in CDA aims at making transparent the relationship between language, ideology and power (van Dijk 1993; Fairclough 2010). Specifically, we draw upon van Leeuwen's (2007, 2008) legitimation categories and apply them to a different dataset and context as well as propose new categories based on the findings of our study. By legitimation, we mean how speakers construct

their discourses and arguments in order to "explain why social practices exist, and why they take the forms they do" (van Leeweun 2008, 38). Our analysis is also informed by insights from Wodak's (2001) discourse-historical approach, specifically the topos of history (as teacher), which refers to the view that history sheds light upon reality and lessons from the past offer guidance to human existence. We have delineated below the legitimation strategies utilized in this paper. Together, these processes offer a moral, logical and an ideological basis for specific actions in respect of what is right and what is wrong.

Legitimation through authorization, moralization and rationalization

Authorization is the process of referring to authority to validate or discredit actions, situations or opinions. The authority that is referenced may include persons or public figures in whom some form of institutional authority has been vested (i.e., personal authority), tradition, custom or habit (i.e., authority of tradition), laws, rules and regulations (i.e., impersonal authority) and experts or specialists (i.e., expert authority). Moralization involves making direct or indirect reference to specific norms or moral value systems. This can be achieved by evaluation (i.e., direct moral evaluations of behaviors), abstraction (i.e., moralizing certain events or behaviors by linking them to discourses of moral values) and analogy (i.e., moral evaluation through comparison). Rationalization is legitimation that uses truth claims to (dis)approve of specific actions or social practices. It hinges on a shared assumption of what is considered rational and involves reference to knowledge, logic, arguments and claims in order to demonstrate why an action is rational or beneficial. Rationalization can be realized instrumentally (i.e., based on the goal, means and/or effect of an action/event) or theoretically (i.e., by providing definition, explanation and prediction).

Legitimation through historicization and the claim of sacrifice

Historicization in discourse occurs when sociopolitical actors claim that their decisions are based on historical reflection that has enabled them to situate a present action in the past. That is, history is used to justify current actions and to establish a connection between the past, present and future. Historicization is related to the topos of history (Wodak 2011), which argues that the outcome of previous actions (be it beneficial or terrible) can be related to similar actions in the present. Consequently, a 'new' action can be taken to achieve similar results if the present action is comparable to one in the past. As Wodak (2011), notes, discourse is invariably linked to something in the past or present. Consequently, once an event in a specific context can be associated with

another event in the past, sociopolitical actors are likely to invoke history to (de)legitimize the current action. In the present paper, historicization is linguistically realized by verbs of memory (e.g., 'remember', 'remind'), phrases that denote past time (e.g., 'gone are the days', 'history tells us') and clauses that refer to specific dates and events (e.g., 'June 4', 'the French Revolution').

Legitimation through the claim of sacrifice hinges on the view that the articulation of revolutionary ideology produces a polarized discourse that divides society into 'friends' and 'enemies' and the 'enemies' are portrayed as a threat to the goals of the revolution (Valentino 2004). Considered as regime opponents, these 'enemies' become scapegoats for the ills of society and they are presented as obstacles to the nation's interest (Weitz 2003). This representation provides a basis for punishments, including death, to be meted out to them (Walt 1992). We contend that the violence perpetrated against these 'enemies' (including execution in the present study) is legitimized through the claim of sacrifice. That is, persons whose continued existence (is likely to) pose a threat to the collective interest of the nation's welfare should be sacrificed for the greater good of society. This ideological view relates to the idea of 'destroy them to save us' (Semelin 2013) and is therefore associated with benefits to the nation, whether they be real or imagined. In the current study, legitimation via the claim of sacrifice is linguistically realized by deontic modality (e.g., 'have/had to', 'must', 'need(ed) to') and expressions that suggest having little-to-no alternative (e.g., 'we had no option').

Data and analytical procedure

This paper is part of a larger project on discourses of the Ghanaian revolutions in media and politics. For a detailed analysis, 30 texts produced by Rawlings in which he explicitly or implicitly explained the circumstances that led to the June 4, 1979 and December 31, 1981 military coups in Ghana have been selected for this study. These texts, including speeches and interview transcripts, were produced by Rawlings between 1979 and 1992. They discussed his role in leading the revolutions and, more importantly, why he did so. They were selected because they afforded Rawlings the space to justify what he termed a 'house-keeping and house-cleaning exercise' aimed at ridding Ghana of corruption, poor governance, frustration among the public and indiscipline within the Ghanaian army. It is important to state that even though Rawlings transitioned from a revolutionary leader to a democratically elected leader in 1992, our dataset includes some of his post-1992 texts, specifically speeches delivered during the annual anniversary celebrations of the

revolutions and interview transcripts that specifically throw light on his involvement in the coups. We have included these texts because they provide a broader context within which to analyze the legitimation strategies found in Rawlings' revolutionary discourse.

To identify the legitimation strategies used by Rawlings, we followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step procedure: 1) familiarize ourselves with the data, 2) generate initial codes while conducting analysis, 3) refine, collate and/or combine the different codes into final categories, 4) review the coded data under each category for consistency, 5) define and name each category in relation to their essence and 6) produce a scholarly report with illustrative examples. We adopted this process in a recursive manner and our annotation was based on the beginning and end of the semantic content. During the analysis, we also focused attention on the linguistic resources and rhetorical tropes used to express the strategies. We discussed the identified strategies with two CDA scholars before deciding on the final categories.

Legitimizing revolutionary discourse
The analysis reveals that the legitimation strategies Rawlings employed enabled him to construct himself as a selfless leader with noble intentions who will deliver Ghana from a quagmire of corruption, indiscipline, mendacity and mismanagement. Each of these strategies is subsequently discussed.

Authorization
Rawlings legitimizes his revolutionary discourse with an authorization strategy by referring to the authority of 'self'. He presents himself as a reliable authority with (divine) power, pontificates about the rewards and necessity of the revolutions and prescribes the code for the post-revolutionary period. Consequently, his authorization strategy can be analyzed as a form of self-glorification aimed at sociopolitical legitimation as the extracts below illustrate.

(1) *Those principles of probity and accountability which June 4 placed on our national political agenda will remain yardsticks for measuring dedication to the cause of our motherland. That era has therefore come to constitute a new chapter in our history*. It has defined among others, new parameters and code of behavior for those entrusted with the responsibilities at the political, community, management and workplace levels. (12th Anniversary of the 1979 Revolution, June 4 1991)

(2) ***Admittedly, there are others who have felt insecure since June 4 and 31st December Revolution***. Ironically, they are the very ones whose greed, arrogance and disdain for the common man were responsible for the insecurity of their own brothers and sisters in Ghana. ***Such persons have failed to realize that a new wind of change is blowing in Ghana today. They have found it difficult to realize that the ideals and principles behind the processes initiated by the June 4 and 31st December Revolution are irreversible***. (12th Anniversary of 1979 Revolution, June 4 1991)

(3) ***Let us remember today that the June 4 and 31st December Revolution linked together have created conditions in which the majority of our people can look forward to the future with hope***. Out of the numerous opportunities created for the economic growth and personal advancement, most ***Ghanaians now feel secure within their own country***. Gone are the days when some denied their Ghanaian nationality because of the level our nation had sunk to. Businessmen, traders, and others have recovered their sense of security, and they acknowledge that for the first time their investments are safe in this country. (12th Anniversary of the 1979 Revolution, June 4 1991)

Utilizing a number of positive declarative statements and the first-person plural pronoun 'our' as a form of inclusive discourse, Rawlings justifies the revolutions and suggests that they have been immensely beneficial to Ghanaian society. To authorize his claims and opinions, he makes a general reference to cross-sections of Ghanaian society, including 'businessmen, traders and others' (3), and also uses the expressions 'the majority of our people' and 'most Ghanaians' (3). These noun phrases can be analyzed as an authorization strategy that exploits the notion of conformity and thus provides legitimacy by referring to the majority (van Leeuwen 2007). Even though Rawlings does not advance any evidence to substantiate the claim that most Ghanaians and indeed businessmen and traders feel safe about their security and investments and can therefore be optimistic about the future, he articulates these views with absolute certainty. This lends credence to his authoritative posture and the subsequent framing of his revolutionary actions as acceptable.

To reinforce the significance and purported benefits of the revolutions, he asserts that the principles that informed the uprising 'will remain yardsticks for measuring dedication to the cause of our motherland' (1). The modal 'will' in combination with the verb 'remain' highlights the perpetual significance of the revolutions. That is, not only were the revolutions needed at a certain point in Ghana's history, but also the principles that undergirded them are still relevant and will continue to be relevant as far as Ghana's governance and political system are concerned. The attempt to give the revolutions permanence by linking them to Ghana's past, present and future enhances the authorization mechanism employed by Rawlings to validate his revolutionary actions. That is, he

sculpts himself in the mold of an authentic, dependable leader who has the authority to divine the fate or destiny of Ghana or to decide Ghana's true interests. It is this self-acclaimed positionality that enables him to declare that the '[revolutionary] era has therefore come to constitute a new chapter in our history and has defined new parameters and code of behavior for those entrusted with the responsibilities at the political, community, management and workplace levels' (1).

Drawing on an 'us' vs. 'them' distinction realized by the pronouns 'our' and 'others', Rawlings constructs the people who felt insecure because of the revolutions as conspiratorial enemies 'whose greed, arrogance and disdain for the common man were responsible for the insecurity of their own brothers and sisters in Ghana' (2). That is, they are a hostile out-group whose actions have harmed the in-group (Geis 1987). By calling them out and adding that they cannot stop the new wind of change blowing in Ghana, Rawlings again alludes to the desirability and irresistibility of the revolutions and implies that the earlier any opponents come to terms with them, the better it will be for them. Reinforcing this position, he states that 'the ideals and principles behind the processes initiated by the June 4 and 31st December Revolution are irreversible' (2). In another speech, he submits that "that on June 4, the people forced the door open for the ordinary man to assert his democratic right to participate in the decision-making process. That door will remain permanently open" (Rawlings 04/06/1991). The use of the adjective 'irreversible' and the adverb 'permanently' is instructive as it amplifies the absolute certainty with which Rawlings expresses his authority, thereby strengthening the legitimation of his revolutionary actions via authorization.

Rawlings' representation as a noble revolutionary also contributes to his authorization strategy. For example, he declares that "by becoming revolutionaries as you know we have imposed on ourselves standards which we must strive at all times to achieve, and we must also judge ourselves severely when we violate the code of the Revolution" (4/06/1991). He thus portrays himself as a selfless leader who has Ghana's interests at heart. The noble revolutionary that he claims to be, he indicates that he is not pursuing a personal objective and proceeds to articulate the standard of behavior for revolutionaries. He thus arrogates to himself the power and ability to prescribe the code of conduct for revolutionaries, dictate people's actions and determine Ghana's true interests. By so doing, he self-authorizes the revolutions as a worthy cause and suggests that they have momentous significance. By framing his revolutionary actions in honorable terms, thereby projecting himself as a noble revolutionary, Rawlings can be said to be engaging in a moral

character construction that implies his prioritization of the needs and concerns of the people of Ghana. That is, he appears to be "having the right intentions", "thinking right", "sounding right" and "telling the right story" (Charteris-Black 2014, 94).

Rationalization

Rawlings rationalizes the revolutions by proffering logical reasons aimed at explaining why the uprising was necessary. He thus advances various arguments and truth claims to prove that his actions were not only normal and natural, but also useful. The extracts below throw light on this view.

(4) ***In effect, 1979 was a reaction to the cumulative events that had been happening in the country***, there was hardly any electricity, failures all the time, no water. The situation was so volatile it was like lighting a match. ***There was no alternative***. (BBC Interview, March 1 2007)

(5) *My brothers and sisters, every nation on earth has, at one time or another, had to go through the cleansing experience that we undertook on June 4 1979.* (21st Anniversary of the 1979 Revolution, June 4 2000)

From the extracts above, it is evident that Rawlings provides rational arguments that seek to validate the revolutions by asserting that the uprising was a fight against corruption, injustice and inequity. Drawing on a cleansing metaphor (6), he implies that Ghanaian society was 'dirty' owing to corruption, indiscipline, mismanagement, etc. and hence needed cleaning or purification. He thus invokes the conceptual metaphor PURIFYING IS CLEANSING (Lizardo 2012) as an argumentative technique intended to give legitimacy to his actions. By associating the revolutions with the purgation of a corrupt and failed system (i.e., 'there was hardly any electricity, failures all the time, no water – [4]), Rawlings uses his conceptualization of an undesirable status quo (i.e., the circumstances surrounding the revolutions) to justify his military intervention, even if illegally. Such a logic constitutes a theoretical rationalization procedure that describes the process of achieving an action by performing another action. In other words, the completion or existence of action/situation A justifies action/situation B or as van Leeuwen (2008) puts it, 'I achieve doing Y because of X or X serves to give rise to Y'. This argumentation scheme realizes a persuasive function as it conceals the negative effects of the revolutions by suggesting that the benefits (to be) gained far outweigh any negatives such as the excesses of the revolutions and the loss of lives and properties.

To further build his argument, Rawlings frames his revolutionary actions as 'a reaction to the cumulative events that had been happening in the country' (4) and uses a fire metaphor to exaggeratedly assert that Ghana was on the cusp of an explosion. His comparison of the situation in Ghana to a volatile situation and a lighting match gives an impression of desperate times that required desperate measures like a revolution. From his point of view, thus, it stands to reason that the revolutions were a commonsense solution to a dire situation that needed an urgent strategy given the socio-politically and emotionally charged atmosphere. Based on this rationalization, it is not surprising that he maintains that 'There was no alternative' (4), implying that the revolutions were the only option and hence the logical thing to do was to lead them. The effect of this discursive positioning is the normalization of the uprising as a natural response to a series of events, thereby making the uprising an expected occurrence that is warranted (Fairclough 2010).

Moralization

Rawlings employs a moralization strategy to legitimize his revolutionary actions and condemn the actions of his (perceived) opponents. By so doing, he justifies the violent, punitive actions he meted out to individuals he classifies as exploiters, tormentors and economic vampires. The extracts below explicate this legitimation strategy.

(6) Let *our detractors* know that the revolutionaries in Ghana and Uganda stand in the same trench, *ready to die for the emancipation of the continent*. (Inauguration of Consultative Assembly, August 26 1991)

(7) The popular revolt of June 4, 1979 was part of *our struggle for moral decency* as well as for a democratic society in which the voice of each and every Ghanaian will matter in the decision-making process of government. (12th Anniversary of the 1979 Revolution, June 4 1991)

(8) You will find *them* everywhere and you ought to know *them* by now. He may be the departmental head, he may be the managing director, he may be the security officer or the distributor – if *you and I will* not assume the right to arrest *them*, let's not expect anyone else to do it for *us*. (A Message for the 1979 Revolution, June 4 1979)

(9) The little benefits that were opened to the ordinary man have evaporated, leaving us once again in the *unsympathetic hand of the economic vampires* in our society. It appears to me that this empty democracy which we are witnessing today is a way of preserving *the exploiter class against the exploited*. I wish to use this forum to call on all Ghanaians, who are today suffering from the *Jackboots of our economic tormentors,* that they should not despair. (2nd Anniversary of the 1979 Revolution, June 4 1981)

(10) The 31st December 1981 revolution was 18 months after an uprising that awakened the conscientiousness of the Ghanaian people. *The honesty and vigor of our action* was met with *the support and understanding of a vast majority of Ghanaians* who saw it as an opportunity to restore *the dignity* of the ordinary man. *The fallen heroes* we honor today expect of us in the least, never to relapse into those same old days. (Speech, 35th Anniversary of the 1981 Revolution, 2015)

(11) The events of June 4, 1979, were *a reaction against the failure* of those who, at that time, were the mature leaders in government, in the military, in positions of influence and power, to address the concerns of the common people. What took place on that day and the following three months was *a great cry of anger against* those individuals and institutions which *had failed* to stem *the tide of all-pervading corruption, ineptitude and injustice which was steadily strangling our people, or had pretended, from their secure and comfortable vantage-points, that it did not exist*. (14th Anniversary of the 1979 Revolution, June 4 1993)

Using lexicalization, Rawlings defines and contextualizes the semantic field of morality in his revolutionary discourse. His use of words like 'honesty' and 'dignity' (10) suggests that all aspects of the revolution, including the execution of top officials, have moral value and were therefore necessary. He also refers to the moral 'support and understanding' of 'a vast majority of Ghanaians' (10), thereby implying that his revolutionary actions were inspired by a collective moral persuasion held by Ghanaians. By signaling an underlying collective morality, Rawlings capitalizes on the notion of vox populi to present a moral evaluation of the revolutions (Moffitt 2020) and hence the rightness of what they sought to achieve. This view is further highlighted by the assertion that the revolutions were 'part of our struggle for moral decency' (7), a struggle for which he and the other revolutionaries were 'ready to die' (6). In addition to contributing to the construction of himself in heroic terms, this instantiation together with the phrase 'fallen heroes' (10) elevates his revolutionary discourse to a level of sacrosanctity that indicates that the revolutions were worthy of all forms of sacrifice, including death.

Revolutionary discourses articulate ideological views that typically lead to an ideological struggle between the dominant elite and the dominated masses (Alinejad 1999). Rawlings draws on this binary distinction, via the use of pronouns such as 'us', 'them', 'we' and 'they' (8) to dissociate himself from the 'immoral' political elite and identify with the 'moral' ordinary masses. In line with social identity theory, Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that the processes by which people are categorized are materially meaningful to social identity formation as this shapes society's organization and enables people to make sense of it. This contributes to our understanding of inter-

group dynamics but, more importantly, what we come to believe about ourselves and our social group. Hence, by differentiating an in-group from an out-group, Rawlings moralizes the revolutions as a sacred process he used to redress the moral failure of Ghanaian society, rectify the injustices perpetuated against the masses and purge the system.

Rawlings also employs a demonization and an (e)vilification strategy (Lazar & Lazar 2004) to construct the elite as 'economic vampires' (9) who are unsympathetic to the plight of Ghanaians and have thus become 'our economic tormentors' (9) who constitute the 'exploiter class' (9). The categorization of the elite as 'vampires' and 'tormentors' is noteworthy because it implies a metaphorical juxtaposition of forces of good vs. forces of evil. Specifically, it invokes intense emotions of morality (i.e., right and wrong) via religion by appealing to an external legitimate source of authority in whom there is no evil. As Graham et al. (2004, 204) note, this kind of religious judgement and membership categorization is usually effective and persuasive because religion is "the ultimate moral force within the societal order of discourse of the day". Hence, the negative descriptor designators 'vampires' and 'tormentors' function as a source of justification and validity for the revolutions since they express the view that if there is any appearance of evil, it must be nipped in the bud. Consequently, Rawlings presents himself and the other revolutionaries as the ones responsible for nullifying the evil, purging Ghanaian society and leading a social transformation agenda.

The phrase 'our detractors' (7) and the metaphorical use of 'jackboots' (9) intensify the depiction of Ghanaians as a people undergoing suffering owing to corruption, bad governance and mismanagement of the economy. By attributing the plight of Ghanaians to 'those who, at that time, were the mature leaders in government, in the military, in positions of influence and power' (11), Rawlings invokes strong emotions of moral and ethical values to mobilize social support for his actions and license his instigation of the revolutions. This attribution coupled with the phrases 'jackboots' and 'our detractors' heightens the cruelty of the elite and, more importantly, communicates the idea that since the corruption, ineptitude and injustice found in Ghanaian society stem from the failed leadership of those at the helm, the revolutions constitute a moral response to this failure and represent an ethical means of restoring dignity to ordinary Ghanaians. Realizing a hyperbolic use of language as part of an intensification mechanism, the verbal clauses 'was steadily strangling our people' and 'had pretended, from their secure and comfortable vantage-points, that

[the problems] did not exist' (17) further characterize the elite as unconscionable individuals who were inflicting severe physical, mental and social pain on Ghanaians. A negative threat, these exploiters must be eliminated, hence the revolutions. By identifying those he perceives as the saboteurs of Ghana's welfare, Rawlings legitimizes the revolutions as a necessary outcome of the moral responsibility of Ghanaians. Essentially, his description of a prevailing leadership crisis suggests that Ghana was on the verge of disintegration, thereby making his uprising an act of redemption.

Historicization

Rawlings uses historicization to legitimize his military interventions and their aftermath. He justifies his revolutions as necessary social practices that form part of every nation's history and foregrounds their usefulness despite their adverse consequences. Historicization suggests that history never dies; hence, it provides a reason for previous events to be partially or completely re-enacted. By utilizing historicization, Rawlings presents himself as one who is knowledgeable about Ghana's history and world events and hence situates his revolutions in the context of both national and global affairs as shown in the extracts below.

> (12) ***The very history of the world teaches us*** that whether it is Europe, America, Russia, China, Latin America, the North or South Africa, revolutions have taken place in the just struggle either for national political independence in demand for class or ethnic or religious equality, or for the majority's rejection of the gross abuse of power and exploitation at the hands of the privileged minority. (21ˢᵗ Anniversary of the 1979 Revolution, June 4 2000)

> (13) ***Where such historic political events like the 28ᵗʰ February 1948 Osu Cross- roads shooting incident and Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah's positive action set the scene for our struggle for freedom from British colonial bondage***, the June 4 Uprising and 31ˢᵗ December Revolution relocated the path of our nation building on the basis of concern for the welfare of the ordinary Ghanaian. (21ˢᵗ Anniversary of the 1979 Revolution, June 4 2000)

> (14) ***Our independence from British colonialism in 1957*** was exploited by our indigenous rulers in their own interests, June 4 reminded these rulers that real power should rest in the hands of the ordinary people. Where independence unleashed our insatiable thirst for freedom at the expense of justice, ***as happened through the 1960s and 1970s, June 4 reminded us that social justice for the majority and the probity of leaders should not be sacrificed for the privileges of a few*** (21ˢᵗ Anniversary of the 1979 Revolution, June 4 2000)

In the extracts above, Rawlings exploits historical memory and collective experiences for sociopolitical gain. He uses the topos of history as teacher to naturalize his revolutions by comparing them with revolutions in different parts of the world (12). Through this normalization mechanism, he suggests that revolutions are part and parcel of the sociopolitical life of all countries because they are aimed at protecting national interests. He thus implies that like other nations, the revolutions he led in Ghana constitute a form of inevitable rite of passage that phases out the old system and ushers in the new. The implication of this worldview is that Ghana's revolutions, like all other revolutions, served a justifiable cause and must therefore be favorably evaluated. We argue that this ideological perspective that lays claim to pursuing national interests does not only create historical correlates to justify the revolutions, but also neutralizes dissenting voices and invalidates any criticisms. To strengthen his argument, Rawlings states that "every nation on earth has, at one time or another, had to go through the cleansing experience that we undertook on June 4, 1979" (04/06/2000). Although the one-to-one mapping he establishes between Ghana and 'every nation on earth' may not be entirely accurate, it helps him to legitimize his revolutionary actions via the mechanism of historicization. Such an enunciation can also be analyzed as the hyperbolic use of language in the service of emotionalization of the facts to cultivate belief in the legitimacy of his revolutionary actions.

To further (re)contextualize his revolutions, Rawlings refers to significant events/periods in Ghana that serve as historical antecedents to validate his actions. In this vein, he uses expressions such as 'June 4', '31st December', '28th February 1948', 'in 1957', 'as happened through the 1960s and 1970s' and 'such historic political events' to transform the revolutions into a positively represented legacy despite their adverse consequences. Intertextuality and interdiscursivity are useful for historicization; hence, Rawlings' reference to past events such as 'cross- roads shooting incident' 'Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah's positive action' and 'our independence from British colonialism' highlights how previous experiences can be used to explain current social practices and how ideological motivations of past actions can shape new actions. The 'politics of memory' refers to the ways in which groups, collectives, and nations construct and identify with particular narratives about historical periods or events (Maurantonio 2014). Hence, Rawlings' association of his revolutions with some of Ghana's most salient shared previous experiences (e.g., colonialism and the struggle for independence) helps him to exploit Ghanaian cultural values such as collectivism and communality for sociopolitical gain.

It is apparent that Rawlings' revolutionary discourse borders on nationalism, national identity and nationalist struggle. This is evident in the extracts above via lexicalization such as 'nation-building', 'the welfare of the ordinary Ghanaian', 'the hands of the ordinary people' and 'social justice for the majority' and they enable Rawlings to promote himself as a nationalist whose task is to build the nation. This arousal of nationalistic sentiments is strategic as it is essential to revolutionary discourses, and it enables the masses to make sense of revolutions despite their unpleasant effects. The metaphorical use of 'nation-building' is instructive as it suggests that Rawlings conceptualizes the nation in concrete terms – i.e., as a physical building. This metaphor expresses the view that the sociopolitical and economic development of the Ghanaian nation is a process that begins with a foundation that the revolution has established. The end-product of this construction process is a 'new nation' with a solid foundation on which the new political and economic pillars of the nation firmly stand. By articulating this 'nation-building' ideology, as has been done by revolutionaries elsewhere, Rawlings ascribes to himself the founder of the new post-revolutionary nation of Ghana.

Claim of sacrifice

The claim of sacrifice is an effective appeal used by political leaders in constructing populist discourses that elicit a commonsense approval from the masses. It legitimizes an action by implying that something must be forfeited before a perceived benefit can be realized, and that what is forfeited is the high price to pay but less costly when compared to the anticipated positive outcome. In pursuit of radical social transformation, the discourse of revolutionary leaders can motivate ideological actions that "display an incredible indifference to costs in other to achieve their ideological goals" (Stedman 1991, 12). Rawlings utilizes this strategy to justify political enemy executions as illustrated in the extracts below.

(15) ***We had to contain it within the military so it didn't spill into the civil front – if it had it would have been terrible. We had no choice but to sacrifice the most senior ones*** – the commanders. I'm taking responsibility for it all. (BBC Interview, March 1, 2007)

(16) ***There were some of them who probably deserved it. Pardon me for putting it that way***. There were some of them who did not — very brilliant, beautiful officers. But we had no choice but to make that sacrifice. (BBC Interview, September 22, 2005)

(17) *I commend you all for your distinguished achievements and sacrifices for peace in the world*. My brothers and sisters of the revolutionary organs, l salute you also and commend you for the immense contributions you have made towards consolidating the gains of June 4. (12th Anniversary of the 1979 Revolution, June 4, 1991)

Legitimation that lays claim to sacrifice implies that if the perceived cost of an action is low, no matter the consequence associated with it, the risk to commit it is rewarding insofar as it saves us from a far worse outcome. We submit that this process begins by identifying supposed counter-revolutionary forces who are constructed as rivals of the so-called 'new order'. Based on this ideology, the killing of dissident groups perceived to be opponents of the revolutionary agenda is legitimized. The extracts show that Rawlings considered the execution of some top officials as 'the only way we could prevent the [social discontent] from getting out of hand' (15). After the 1979 coup, Rawlings established and became chairman of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Before handing over power to President Hilla Limann and the People's National Party, he and the AFRC ruled for 112 days and arranged the execution by firing squad of eight military officers, including general officers and three former heads of state. There were also reports of a much wider 'house-cleaning exercise' after both the 1979 and 1981 coups involving the killing and abduction of several Ghanaians. In the extracts above, Rawlings alludes to (some of) these killings and rationalizes them by intimating that some, if not all, were necessary to prevent the perpetuation of corruption and injustices (15), contain a situation and prevent a spill over (15) and make people suffer the consequences of their nefarious activities (16). In other words, the revolutions were necessary to avert a worse outcome of the people's anger against the individuals and institutions that had failed Ghanaian society. Rawlings thus makes an appeal to 'the will of the people' and claims that the executions were a necessary evil.

Making a claim to sacrifice also serves to understate the excesses of the revolution as it enables Rawlings to informationally de-emphasize the negative effects of the revolution. In the statement "here you have the list of innocent good people who would have to die to save hundreds" (13/07/2020), the predication 'would have to die' functions as a hypothetical construction rather than an actual event and thus conceals the emotional, psychological and social impact of the death of the people referred to. Rawlings then proceeds to offer a positive evaluation of the death of the innocent people as a sacrifice 'to save hundreds' of Ghanaians, thereby suggesting that the benefits of the revolutions are a justification for these deaths. When political leaders exploit a claim to

sacrifice, especially in the context of revolutions, the process of legitimation follows a commonsense approach that begins with demonizing the candidates for the sacrifice (Kim 2018; Reyes 2011). Consequently, they are assigned negative attributes that depict them as threats that ought to be nullified by any means possible, including death. Generally, the motivation for such legitimation is predicated on the premise that 'if we destroy the bad [ones], we will save the good [ones]'. However, as shown in extract (16), Rawlings asserts that 'there were some of them [very brilliant, beautiful officers] who did not deserve [to die]' but they had to be killed to safeguard the national interest. In this regard, Rawlings' justification of killing good people can be likened to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ – i.e., a good, sinless man dying as a sacrificial lamb for the salvation of mankind (cf., 1 Peter 1: 19). It will not be far-fetched to submit that Rawlings' exploitation of the notion of sacrifice derives from the sociocultural context in which his discourse is produced. Given that Ghana is a predominantly Christian nation, Rawlings' audience is likely to be familiar with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; therefore, it can be said that he capitalizes on the religious sensibilities of his audience to legitimize a callous and condemnable act in a way that makes him appear compassionate under pugnacious circumstances.

Conclusion

This paper has critically examined legitimation in revolutionary discourse, taking texts produced by Jerry John Rawlings, a Ghanaian revolutionary leader, as the medium of investigation. It analyzed the legitimation strategies used by Rawlings to validate his revolutionary activities, including a crackdown on corrupt practices and political enemy executions. It demonstrates how Rawlings exploited historical memory and the notion of sacrifice in conjunction with the strategies of authorization, rationalization and moralization to formulate his revolutionary rhetoric. These strategies enabled Rawlings to construct himself as a patriot, a nationalist and a selfless revolutionary with righteous intentions. He is thus positioned, via his revolutionary discourse, as one mandated by the people of Ghana to represent their interests, protect the motherland from evil forces and effect positive change aimed at social transformation. This study contributes to the scholarship on legitimation in political discourses by analyzing a discourse type that has hardly received attention. It thus provides new data that throws light on the applicability of van Leeuwen's discourse model of legitimation. Importantly, the paper extends van Leeweun's framework by discussing how legitimation strategies may be conditioned by spatiotemporal and sociocultural factors, including local politics and traditional values. Hence, in addition to contributing to the

existing discourse-analytic literature on legitimations, this paper sheds light on the uses of new legitimation strategies and highlights how culture-specific politics shapes language and how, in turn, language shapes local politics.

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