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Intersections of Political Power, Religion, and Public Health in Africa: Covid-19, Tanzanian President Magufuli, and Nigerian Prophet T. B. Joshua (<http://somatosphere.net/2021/magufuli-joshua-public-health-covid-tanzania-meek.html/>)

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(<http://somatosphere.net/series/contested-truths/>)

This is the final piece in the [Contested Truths series](#) (<http://somatosphere.net/2021/contested-truth-covid19-africa-introduction.html/>), which has been edited by Jia Hui Lee, Laura A. Meek, and Jacob Katumusiime Mwine-Kyarimpa. This series analyzes the manufacturing, circulation, and interpretation of contested truths over Covid-19 in Africa, including the ways in which official, institutional, and/or scientific facts and recommendations about COVID-19 are challenged, ignored, or subverted at multiple scales, from the individual to the state.

Since we began our series on *Contested Truths over Covid-19 in Africa* (<http://somatosphere.net/2021/contested-truth-covid19-africa-introduction.html/>) in March 2021, much has changed in African nations' responses to the pandemic (see Lee, Meek, and Katumusiime Mwine-Kyarimpa 2021). This is especially true in Tanzania, where I conduct my research. On the very day that our series introduction was published in *Somatosphere*—March 17, 2021—the [Tanzanian President, John Magufuli](#), passed away (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/17/world/africa/tanzania-president-magufuli-dead.html>). There continues to be [widespread speculation](#) (<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/03/20/africa/john-magufuli-tanzania-covid-legacy-intl/index.html>) that he died from Covid-19, the same disease he insisted did not exist in his country. Although the official narrative is that he died from heart complications, many [within and beyond Tanzania](#) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/11/world/africa/magufuli-tanzania-president-covid-19.html>) doubt the veracity of this claim. Meanwhile, other high-ranking government officials in Tanzania, such as [Zanzibar's Vice President, Maalim Seif Sharif Hamad](#) (<https://mg.co.za/africa/2021-02-22-seif-sharif-hamad-historic-leader-peace-builder-and-unifier/>), are confirmed to have died of Covid-19 while Magufuli was censoring any mention of the disease by national media outlets.

Less than three months after President Magufuli's death, another prominent African figure passed away. [The Nigerian Prophet, T. B. Joshua](https://emmanuel.tv/about/about-tb-joshua/) (<https://emmanuel.tv/about/about-tb-joshua/>), who was arguably the continent's most influential charismatic Christian pastor and televangelist, died suddenly on June 5, 2021 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57727365>). Both of these men were critical in shaping their followers' responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, gaining notoriety and admiration in equal parts. In this piece, I reconsider their widespread influence for what it reveals about the intersections of political power, religion, and public health in contemporary Africa. First, I describe President Magufuli's (in)actions with regard to Covid-19 in Tanzania, the (racialized) international censure it prompted, and how the President's response was read by many Tanzanians as defiance against the coloniality of global health (see also Richardson 2020). I next explore how Magufuli was influenced in his stance by Prophet T. B. Joshua, a Pentecostal preacher whose church he had visited in Nigeria and whom he invited to Tanzania in 2015 to negotiate a peaceful presidential transition. I then recount how T. B. Joshua claimed to have prophesied the Covid-19 pandemic and to be able to cure Covid-19 patients around the world through the (televised) power of the Holy Spirit. Finally, I conclude by arguing that the populism of both these leaders stemmed, in part, from their ability to move Africa out of the "shadows" of global power (Ferguson 2006) and into the center of Pan-African and Pentecostal world-making.

Secularizing Sensibilities against Covid-19 Denialism

In response to Covid-19, former Tanzanian President John Magufuli—elected in 2015 and re-elected in the midst of the pandemic in October 2020—made the controversial decision not to impose widespread lockdown, or even encourage mask wearing or social distancing. Instead, in April 2020, he called for citizens to engage in [three days of national prayer to defeat Covid-19](https://www.voanews.com/a/covid-19-pandemic-tanzanian-president-declares-3-days-national-prayer-help-defeat-coronavirus/6187740.html) (<https://www.voanews.com/a/covid-19-pandemic-tanzanian-president-declares-3-days-national-prayer-help-defeat-coronavirus/6187740.html>). Then, in May 2020, Tanzanian authorities stopped regularly releasing figures regarding rates of Covid-19 infection in the country; what minimal figures they did provide appeared [highly suspect](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52723594) (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52723594>). This situation prompted the United States embassy in Tanzania to issue an [alert](https://tz.usembassy.gov/health-alert-u-s-embassy-dar-es-salaam-may-13-2020/) (<https://tz.usembassy.gov/health-alert-u-s-embassy-dar-es-salaam-may-13-2020/>)—in explicit contradiction of the Tanzanian government's position—warning that hospitals in Dar es Salaam were "overwhelmed," that the risk of contracting Covid-19 was "extremely high," and that "all evidence points to exponential growth of the epidemic in Dar and other locations in Tanzania." This alert remained on the Embassy's website for many months despite Magufuli's declaration that Covid-19 had been "[eliminated thanks to God](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52966016)" (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52966016>).

While President Magufuli was praised by some Tanzanians for his handling of the pandemic, the international response was less favorable. Western media in particular excoriated the president for his promotion of Christian and Islamic faith as more efficacious than laboratory testing or biomedical treatment for Covid-19. In April 2020, the president was described by the Canadian national newspaper *The Globe and Mail* as one of the "[notorious nine](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-the-notorious-nine-these-world-leaders-responded-to-the-coronavirus/)" worst leaders (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-the-notorious-nine-these-world-leaders-responded-to-the-coronavirus/>) in the world for his pandemic response. The same month, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Tanzania was the only country in the world to "[actively recommend its citizens attend religious services as a method to combat the virus](https://www.wsj.com/articles/tanzanias-leader-urges-people-to-worship-in-throngs-against-coronavirus-11586347200)" (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/tanzanias-leader-urges-people-to-worship-in-throngs-against-coronavirus-11586347200>). A Roman Catholic with Pentecostal and Charismatic ties, Magufuli was reported to have told a

congregation in Dodoma that “You haven’t seen me fearing to take communion, because corona[virus] is satanic and can’t survive in Jesus’ body (<https://allafrica.com/stories/202005060969.html>). It will be destroyed.”

However, international criticism of Magufuli’s pandemic response extended beyond the president himself. International news stories reporting high rates of church attendance in the country often employed not-so-subtle colonial and racist overtones in describing Tanzanians—evident, for instance, in the use of terms like “throngs (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/tanzanias-leader-urges-people-to-worship-in-throngs-against-coronavirus-11586347200>)” and “hordes (<https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7bzew/how-an-african-island-became-the-worlds-covid-conspiracy-capital>).” Such portrayals invoke an uncivilized, nonmodern mass driven by irrational beliefs not (yet) properly eradicated by the supposed gifts of European Enlightenment and reason (see Chakrabarty 2008, Keane 2007). For example, a passage in a *Wall Street Journal* article asserted that: “Historians say the arguments advanced by Mr. Magufuli and some pastors in the U.S. and elsewhere that faith should be mobilized to defeat the virus shows the endurance of ideas that can be traced back to medieval Europe (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/tanzanias-leader-urges-people-to-worship-in-throngs-against-coronavirus-11586347200>).” Even among anthropologists and scholars of religion in Africa, our own “secularizing sensibilities” (Engelke 2014: S300) risk reducing religious and spiritual responses to the ontological plane of metaphor (<https://theconversation.com/pentecostals-and-the-spiritual-war-against-coronavirus-in-africa-137424>), psychological coping strategy, or misguided belief (<https://religioninpublic.com/2020/04/03/pentecostalism-public-health-and-covid-19-in-nigeria/>) (see also Roberts 2016). It is against this denial of coevalness—the tendency of anthropologists to render subjects outside a shared temporal frame (Fabian 1983)—and its imperialist overtones that President Magufuli aimed his later critiques of Covid-19 laboratory tests.

Authoritarian Anti-Imperialism

President Magufuli was himself a scientist—with a PhD in chemistry—making his promotion of the “true healing of God” (*uonyaji wa kweli wa Mungu*) and his refusal to advocate for biomedical treatments for Covid-19 all the more surprising. Even more scandalously, Magufuli called the epistemological authority of science into question by testing the Covid-19 diagnostic test itself. He submitted several nonhuman samples to the National Health Laboratory for Covid-19 testing, labelling them with human names to disguise the experiment. The laboratory returned positive results for samples from a goat, a quail, and a pawpaw fruit (<https://allafrica.com/stories/202005060969.html>), seemingly proving the inefficacy of this diagnostic technology. On national television, Magufuli used this finding to insinuate that both laboratory staff and (opposition) politicians who were calling for Covid-19 lockdowns were secretly “on the payroll of imperialists (<https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/news/Magufuli--Why-I-don-t-trust-Covid-19-test-results/1840340-5542250-jjn1iaz/index.html>).” These moves were consistent with Magufuli’s political stance towards the Global North more generally: he refused to attend the UN General Assembly and he revived the independence-era term *beberu* (literally, “male goat”) to refer to such groups as “Western imperialists (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52983563?intlink_from_url=&link_location=live-reporting-story).”

Additionally, in a move that harkened back to an earlier era of socialist nonalignment in Tanzania (see Langwick 2010), Magufuli made waves by announcing that he would import an artemisia herbal tonic from Madagascar, whose President Andry Rajoelina provoked international ire (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53756752>) by claiming that the tonic cures Covid-19 (<https://time.com/5840148/coronavirus-cure-covid-organic-madagascar/>). The Presidents’ promotion of vernacular African healing practices rekindled independence-era narratives of African self-sufficiency, reminding many Tanzanians of their first president (<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/politics/article/2001406767/magufuli-in->

[the-footsteps-of-julius-nyerere-with-nationalist-agenda](#)), “Mwalimu” [Teacher] Julius Nyerere, who frequently ignored “advice” from Western nations, fighting against the imposition of structural adjustment policies until the very end of his presidency. As [Madagascar’s herbal therapy](#) (<https://www.africanews.com/2020/04/22/covid-organics-madagascar-launches-africa-s-first-cure-for-virus/>) was exported to the Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, [Tanzania](#) (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/tanzania-madagascar-anti-coronavirus-drink-disputed-200508164354282.html>), and other nations, supporters saw this as a resurgence of Pan-African innovation. Mwalimu Nyerere was a frequent point of reference for Magufuli, who explained his refusal to issue lockdowns by saying that “[Our founding father \[Nyerere\] was not someone to be directed to be told what to do](#)” (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56293519>)...Those who devise these kinds of rules [lockdown] are used to making these directives that our founding father refused.” Magufuli instead prioritized the need to keep the economy open, arguing that lockdowns, too, would cost lives.

Whether President Magufuli’s actions were driven more by faith or politics, his anti-imperialist and pro-religious stance contributed to his [widespread popularity](#) (<https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-tanzanias-magufuli-was-both-revered-and-reviled/a-56909357>) in Tanzania, despite the [numerous authoritarian measures](#) (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/28/tanzania-climate-fear-censorship-repression-mounts>) he implemented while in office. During Magufuli’s two presidencies, Tanzania’s political climate underwent a drastic repressive shift, as he imposed [media censorship](#), [arrested activists](#), [disqualified opposition party members from office](#) (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr56/0301/2019/en/>), [imprisoned LGBT individuals](#) (<https://time.com/5456826/tanzania-anti-gay-world-bank/>), and [barred pregnant girls from attending school](#) (<https://reproductiverights.org/press-room/the-center-for-reproductive-rights-denounces-arrest-of-pregnant-schoolgirls-in-tanzania>). It is possible that the October 2020 national elections played a large role in Magufuli’s response to Covid-19, as he attempted to win popular support by augmenting his authoritarian and anti-imperialist persona with a demonstration of his ability for “religious mediation” (Haynes 2018).

Religious Mediation and/as Political Power

Much of Magufuli’s rhetoric referenced Pentecostal notions of spiritual warfare, suggesting that the Covid-19 pandemic was not merely a secular threat. This was evident, for instance, when the laboratory tests proved faulty and he commented: “So many times, I have insisted that not everything that you are given is good. There could be people being used, that equipment could be used... but it [could also be sabotage because *this is warfare*](#)” (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52983563?intlink_from_url=&link_location=live-reporting-story.)” (emphasis added). While Western media outlets like [BBC News](#) (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52983563?intlink_from_url=&link_location=live-reporting-story) interpreted that statement as “lurching towards a conspiracy theory,” I heard echoes of the pervasive Pentecostal discourses on religious “warfare” against Satanic forces threatening the nation and its citizens. Indeed, political practices of religious mediation—via “efforts to keep God on the side of the nation” (Haynes 2018: 71)—are playing an increasingly central role in national leadership in and beyond Tanzania.

Magufuli had been demonstrating his ability for religious mediation since his first presidency. When he won the 2015 national election ([with 58% of the vote](#) (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34669468>)), the presidential transition was palpably tense and fraught with [accusations of vote rigging](#) (<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/oct/29/tanzania-announces-election-winner-amid-claims-of-vote-rigging>). (The U.S. Embassy in Tanzania stated that there were “[credible allegations of significant election-](#)

related fraud and intimidation (<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-tanzania-election-idUKKBN27E39Q>”). At that time, Prophet T. B. Joshua was invited to Tanzania as an honored guest of the state in order to facilitate reconciliatory talks (<https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/how-tanzanians-will-remember-nigerian-preacher-tb-joshua-3428466>) between incoming President Magufuli and the defeated opposition leader, Edward Lowassa (who had received 40% of the vote (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34669468>)). Years earlier, both men had made pilgrimages to T. B. Joshua’s church in Nigeria—Magufuli in 2011 and Lowassa in 2012 (<https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/how-tanzanians-will-remember-nigerian-preacher-tb-joshua-3428466>)—and both later referenced their relationship with the Prophet in order to gain political and social capital. Magufuli specifically claimed that T. B. Joshua had encouraged him to run for president. Later, after Magufuli’s hospitalization in Germany in 2019, some even mused that the president was healed precisely because of this relationship with T. B. Joshua, noting that: “President Magufuli openly acknowledges Joshua’s place in his life and leadership, even referring to him as a ‘mentor.’” (<https://www.maravipost.com/tanzania-magufuli-and-the-tb-joshua-factor/>)”

Meanwhile, T. B. Joshua led similar “peace-brokering missions (<https://allafrica.com/stories/201911180011.html>)” from Liberia in 2000 to South Sudan in 2019 (<https://www.icirnigeria.org/how-t-b-joshuas-influence-rubbed-off-on-african-politics/>), making him a prominent political (as well as religious) figure throughout much of the continent. He, in turn, was particularly deft at folding everyday occurrences and world-historical events into his sermons, using his prophesizing to position himself as a key player in a global, Manichean battle between forces of good and evil. For instance, in 2014, when a guesthouse at his church collapsed, killing over 100 pilgrims who had come to attend his services, T. B. Joshua declared that this was caused by (nefarious forces seeking to assassinate him (<https://www.news24.com/news24/Archives/City-Press/Building-collapse-an-attack-on-TB-Joshua-church-20150429>)). He pointed to recordings of a small plane flying over the guesthouse (<https://www.bellanaija.com/2014/09/see-photos-of-mysterious-aircraft-linked-to-synagogue-church-building-collapse/>) earlier that day, claiming that an “infrasonic weapon (<https://www.news24.com/News24/Infrasonic-weapon-caused-TB-Joshua-church-collapse-academic-20150728>)” had been used to intentionally blow up the building.

Transnational Prophecy and Deliverance

Temitope Balogun Joshua (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T._B._Joshua), or “T. B. Joshua,” was a prominent and controversial Nigerian charismatic pastor (<https://theconversation.com/tb-joshua-the-pentecostalist-televangelist-and-philanthropist-162297>) and televangelist who founded a Christian megachurch outside of Lagos. This church—named The Synagogue, Church of All Nations (SCOAN)—is part of a broader global Pentecostal and Charismatic movement, which is the fastest growing form of Christianity in the world (Anderson et. al 2010, Robbins 2004). Pentecostalism took hold in Africa during the 1980s and has since become widespread across the continent (Marshall 2009, Meyer 2004, Tazanu 2016, Tokunbo 2019). For my interlocutors, T. B. Joshua is a household name. During the years I have visited with local families in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania (2011 to 2018), T. B. Joshua’s television station, (Emmanuel TV (<https://emmanuel.tv/>)), was frequently playing in the background. This is one of the world’s largest Christian television networks with programming offered across Africa, North America, and Europe.

Aired across the world via Emmanuel TV were T. B. Joshua’s many prophecies about catastrophic events to come. He claimed to have predicted tragedies around the globe, ranging from the crash of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 (<https://emmanuel.tv/content/malaysian-airlines-mh17-plane-crash->

[prophecy-t-b-joshua/](https://www.facebook.com/tbjministries/posts/international-prophecy-boston-marathon-explosionsthe-video-of-prophet-tb-joshuas/381102712010511/)) to the [Boston marathon bombings](https://www.facebook.com/tbjministries/posts/international-prophecy-boston-marathon-explosionsthe-video-of-prophet-tb-joshuas/381102712010511/) (<https://www.facebook.com/tbjministries/posts/international-prophecy-boston-marathon-explosionsthe-video-of-prophet-tb-joshuas/381102712010511/>). On June 24, 2020, the [T. B. Joshua Ministries Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/tbjministries/) (<https://www.facebook.com/tbjministries/>) (which has over 5 million followers) shared a post describing how T. B. Joshua had foreseen the Covid-19 pandemic and had warned since 2008 that a “crisis would bring the world to its knees in humility.” In December 2019, T. B. Joshua predicted that this crisis would happen in 2020; that the “year 2020 will be a year of humility.” This Facebook post goes on to note:

The Director of the US CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), Dr. Robert Redfield, has just released a statement concurring with the prophecy of 2020 from Prophet T. B. Joshua concerning humility. He made this statement as he testified before the US Senate Judiciary Committee. Don't forget the Director General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, also gave the same statement about humility, as did Chief Justice John Roberts, of the US Supreme Court. This is what Prophet T. B. Joshua had warned the world about for over a decade.

(T. B. Joshua Ministries 2020)

Just 48 hours after this was posted, it had already generated 1,400 comments and 2,300 shares. As of November 2021, it now has 112,000 views and 13,000 likes. There are similar Facebook pages for the T. B. Joshua Ministries in several other languages, including Arabic, Spanish, French, Russian, German, Portuguese, Korean, and Hebrew.

Meanwhile, the [SCOAN website](https://www.scoan.org/) (<https://www.scoan.org/>) features a constantly updated list of testimonies from those who have been healed by pilgrimage to T. B. Joshua's church (SCOAN; see also T. B. Joshua 2009). As one of my Tanzanian interlocutors explained to me after returning from such a trip to Nigeria: “Some people are physically sick, but when they go to a hospital, they are told there is nothing there, that they are not sick. They are sick in another means.” This “other means” refers to the power of darkness—including witchcraft and spirit possession—for which only deliverance can provide a lasting cure (see Dilger 2007, Haynes 2017, Mohr 2012, Tokunbo 2019).

As I often witnessed during my fieldwork, Emmanuel TV viewers could also be delivered by touching the television screen at the Prophet's request, transforming the television itself into “an object with curative power” (Tazanu 2016: 45, see also Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu 2012). Indeed, T. B. Joshua claimed to have [cured people in Honduras of Covid-19](https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/world/2020-08-04-watch--theres-no-vaccine-for-covid-19-but-tb-joshua-healed-patients-through-virtual-prayer/) (<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/world/2020-08-04-watch--theres-no-vaccine-for-covid-19-but-tb-joshua-healed-patients-through-virtual-prayer/>) through such virtual prayer. Emmanuel TV aired images of these patients vomiting, removing the noxious “toxins” from their bodies (<https://www.citizen.co.za/news/news-eish/2334236/watch-tb-joshua-prays-the-covid-19-away/>). One patient could be heard saying: “I passed out a lot of foul substance; that was the power of the prayer.” For believers, Emmanuel TV thus acts as the “technological realization” (Meyer 2011: 34) of the Holy Spirit, literally bringing God closer to patients, enabling an experience of healing by divine presence. It also seeks to demonstrate the power of T. B. Joshua—and of a claim to Afrocentric spiritual prowess more generally—to heal people as far away as Honduras.

Destabilizing Colonial Tropes of Africa

While one could dismiss President Magufuli and Prophet T. B. Joshua's actions as irresponsible public health interventions and/or self-serving political maneuverings, such censure will not get us very far in understanding their widespread popularity in Africa. Rather, I argue, these two leaders were able to galvanize a repositioning of Africa within global power relations that brought the continent out of the "shadows" of global power (Ferguson 2006) and into the center of Pan-African and Pentecostal world-making. They contested Africa's marginalization by enacting the world otherwise, articulating Afrocentric forms of medical knowledge and spiritual prowess—from herbal remedies to deliverance—as critical life-saving technologies *from and for* the Global South.

In so doing, both President Magufuli and Prophet T. B. Joshua profoundly destabilized colonialist tropes portraying the continent as a space of lack, crisis, and victimhood. Such tropes have been reinvigorated by global health predictions that Africa would be devastated (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-africa-un-idUSKBN21Z1LW>) by the pandemic, "particularly susceptible" (<https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-health-ap-top-news-london-international-news-5facee56b507e5bedd30cc046ec8e330>) to the virus, inept in its response (<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/africa-will-be-hardest-hit-pandemic-regional-experts-warn>), and dependent upon philanthropy from the Global North for survival (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSVse07y2O4>). These predictions perpetuate the "African tragedy" (<https://africasacountry.com/2021/02/the-business-of-black-death>) in global health—"the uncritical epistemic industry that has long produced knowledge of African development as a monolithic and primordial tragedy" (Harper-Shipman and Bako 2021, Smith 2006).

Across diverse registers and geographic points of departure, each of the earlier pieces in our *Somatosphere* series have also contested such claims. Suglo and Sibiri (2021) debunk African tragedy narratives by showing how African nations have often responded more effectively (<http://somatosphere.net/2021/contested-truths-ghana.html/>) to Covid-19 than have many countries in the Global North. Meanwhile, Ng'weno (2021) probes the very practice of "predicting" across time and scale, arguing that "predictions, if made at all, cannot be abstracted, narrow, or universal" (<http://somatosphere.net/2021/covid-predictions-kenya-ngweno.html/>). Other authors in our series analyze how tropes of Africa's vulnerability obscure the *longue durée* of neo/colonial medical violence on the continent. These writers insist that vaccine hesitancy in Africa is a rational response to "grievous acts of racist human experimentation and medical coercion" (<http://somatosphere.net/2021/covid-19-vaccine-hesitancy-tanzania.html/>) (Nyalile and Loo 2021) and the ensuing "failure of biomedicine's moral legitimacy" (<http://somatosphere.net/2021/vaccine-hesitancy-zambia-moral-legitimacy.html/>)" (Haruyama 2021). A final set of pieces in our *Contested Truths* series asks us to think beyond colonial tropes by attending to the individual and collective agency (<http://somatosphere.net/2021/contested-truth-covid19-africa-introduction.html/>), of African actors (<http://somatosphere.net/2021/escaping-quarantine-uganda-covid-spire.html/>), where what might seem like "indifference" could actually be a form of resistance (<http://somatosphere.net/2021/uganda-covid19-government-protest.html/>) to neoliberal and necropolitical state power (<http://somatosphere.net/2021/peoples-war-uganda-covid-19.html/>) (Banjwa 2021, Katumusiime Mwine-Kyarimpa 2021, Spire Ssentongo 2021). It is from this perspective that we might also grasp the persuasiveness of the so-called "conspiracy theories" that followed in the wake of President Magufuli and Prophet T. B. Joshua's deaths.

Conclusion: "Cautionary Tales" and "Conspiracy Theories"

As mentioned above, many accounts within and beyond Tanzania revealed in the possibility that Magufuli died of Covid-19 (<https://www.reuters.com/article/fact-check-magufuli-covid->

idUSL1N2M11DF) as this would seem to prove the ineffectualness of his Covid-19 denialism, his anti-imperialist stance, *and* the promise of Pan-African solidarity and self-sufficiency. For some in the Global North, his death offers reassurance that our philanthropy and global health interventions are needed. BBC News (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56412912>) ended a piece on his passing with the sentence: “It is an irony that the pandemic he strenuously denied has outlasted him, turning his once-heralded presidency into a cautionary tale for the region and the continent.” While “cautionary tales” seek to make the workings of power transparent, “conspiracy theories,” on the other hand, are “discourses of suspicion [that] generally assert—contra transparency claims—that power is inherently ambivalent and that it operates in ambiguous ways” (Sanders and West 2003: 12). Across Sub-Saharan Africa, just such a discourse of suspicion has been proliferating.

So-called “conspiracy theories” around T. B. Joshua’s death insist upon a different truth; one in which (white) power is far from transparent in its machinations. Such accounts posit that the Prophet’s sudden demise was in fact an assassination orchestrated in order to prevent a Black leader from acquiring too much authority or influence. These narratives recall the *longue durée* of African leaders being extinguished by Western powers (<https://www.publicaffairsbooks.com/titles/susan-williams/white-malice/9781541768284/>), such as the CIA’s role in the assassination of the Pan-Africanist Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba (<https://africasacountry.com/2021/10/probing-the-depths-of-the-cias-misdeeds-in-africa>) (see Park 2021, Williams 2021). At first, news reports following T. B. Joshua’s death claimed that the pastor had predicted his own death (<https://www.africanews.com/2021/06/07/how-the-prominent-nigerian-televangelist-tb-joshua-died/>). Later, others claimed that T. B. Joshua’s was not a natural death at all. For instance, a Ghanaian cleric, Bishop Sam Owusu of Pottersville Church International, gave a sermon that later went viral (<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/08/video-tb-joshua-was-killed-bishop-sam-owusu/>), in which he told his congregation that T. B. Joshua was killed by “conspirators.” (<https://dailypost.ng/2021/08/03/tb-joshua-was-killed-i-have-details-of-those-responsible-bishop-sam-owusu-video/>). Owusu directly links T. B. Joshua’s death to global anti-Blackness and white supremacy:

“T. B. Joshua was killed, he didn’t die. He was killed because, by history, there is no Black man of God in the world that on YouTube, his followers are more than a country... They killed T. B. Joshua because, in the history of the Black race, there is no Black man that is popular as compared to T. B. Joshua... By the history of mankind, there is no Black man in Africa who has properties, a school in Israel, a school, land and property in the Philippines... there is no Black man... T. B. Joshua didn’t die, they calculated his death. What they used to kill him, I know and the person they sent, I saw.”

(Owusu, quoted in Opejobi 2021)

Whether portrayed as “cautionary tales” or as trailblazing Black leaders, the lived consequences of Magufuli and T. B. Joshua’s actions are still unfolding. Among their effects will be a multifarious range of material semiotic, embodied, political, spiritual, and social impacts. This includes both healing and sickness, deliverance and denial, anti-imperial aspiration and international condemnation, as well as the centralizing and decentralizing of power across multiple scales. Unfolding within even a single Covid-19 intervention are a multiplicity of divergent effects, which can include the buttressing of an increasingly authoritarian state and the mobilization of transnational African networks to challenge the hegemony of the Global North.

Afterward

Two days after Magufuli's death, Tanzania swore in a new president, the former Vice President, Samia Suluhu Hassan, who became the first female head of state in East Africa. Since coming into office, Suluhu has created a Covid-19 task force (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/6/tanzanias-new-president-says-not-proper-to-ignore-covid>), resumed releasing Covid-19 data (<https://www.voanews.com/africa/tanzania-publishes-first-covid-19-data-over-year>) for the first time in over a year, and implemented entry requirements (<https://tz.usembassy.gov/health-alert-u-s-embassy-dar-es-salaam-may-5-2021/>), including mandatory testing. This marks a radical departure from her predecessor's orientation (<https://africasacountry.com/2021/04/exit-the-bulldozer-enter-mama-samia>) to the Covid-19 pandemic, highlighting the enormous diversity among African leaders' responses, within as well as between nations. I thus conclude our series on *Contested Truths over Covid-19 in Africa* (<http://somatosphere.net/2021/contested-truth-covid19-africa-introduction.html/>) with a call for attending to this multiplicity of Covid-19 responses and the various political, public health, and spiritual aspirations they serve in (and beyond) Africa.

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