



On folklore

in times of Covid-19

“There is no greater sorrow than to recall, in misery, the time when we were happy”

Cicero 106 – 43 BC

COVID-19 catapulted itself upon the world with astounding chronological rapidity, putatively from incubation and hatching in Wuhan, a city in the People’s Republic of China that has become the notorious *caput mundi* of the virus, to a pandemic of spectacular proportion that dominated every medium and form of communication and activity in every conceivable locus on the planet that is occupied by invasive humanity. Its exponential proliferation was not only geographical, but also had geopolitical repercussions that were concussive to nation states, and as ‘the cartography of the world was flattened to *an earth*’ (Maake & Maake, 2020) ‘globalisation’ carried a new semantics of mutual blaming and self-exculpation. This tragedy occurred because early signals passed unheeded due to arrogance of world leaders, not least Donald Trump, the politically myopic President of the United States, a spawn of democracy characterised by incorrigible narcissism and egocentrism.

When the epiphany about the catastrophic potential of the virus dawned to all and sundry, both armchair and transformative intellectuals produced and generated a multiplicity of benevolent and conspiracy theories, speculation and conjecture, from a wide variety of convergent and multiple divergent directions. A wide spectrum of arguments that both of us read relied on tenets of deductive methodology by encyclopedically and in some cases

indiscriminately evoking historical human follies and natural catastrophes as a prequel to the virus. Some of these lines of argument encompassed earthquakes, the slave trade, slavery, bourgeoisie decadence (subservience by acculturation), socio-cultural norms (customs, rites, rituals and traditions), class distinction (discrimination against lower classes), colonialism (domination by imperial forces), racial capitalism (economic exploitation of the working classes on the basis of race), racism (stereotyping, exclusion and oppression on criteria of biological traits), apartheid (racial supremacy and oppression on basis of assigned race) and jingoism (aggressive national superiority complex). Those that deployed inductive methodology tended to be narrowly anecdotal and tendentious. Collectively the texts that we read were a compendium of historical and psychological truths, plausible and untenable propositions, which could endure or disintegrate under rigorous scrutiny, respectively. All participants were a ‘cosmopolitan populace’ (Maake & Maake, 2020). Our approach is conceptually an inductive, deductive and unconventional collage of heterodoxy.

In the context of a plethora of discursive frameworks that prevailed, we preferred to avoid engagement with polemic positions, but instead to restrict our approach to an apodictic proposition that regards Noah’s ark as an allegory of the lockdown imposed by the virus. Restriction of movement and selective activities created a folklore of themes. Our definition of folklore deviates from the conventional and asserts freedom of flexibility, so as to encompass texts of a body of narratives that gain thematic supremacy at any given historical point, and give rise to certain inclinations, beliefs, convictions and

customs, irrespective of whether they are evanescent or durable. We also demand elasticity of our definition to stretch from the spoken word to visual performance, i.e. video recordings. Therefore, all narratives that centripetally gravitated to COVID-19 as a main theme at the time of the lockdowns, we propose to include as folklore, for purposes of our discussion.

On 25th March 2020, South Africa subscribed to the domino effect of global imposition of prohibitions and taboos, by promulgating a lockdown period. This followed closely on nation states of the European peninsula such as Italy, Portugal, Spain, offshore Britain and in the Western hemisphere the United States, that were paralysed by COVID-19 in the primordial stages of its sudden and swift migration from Wuhan. The South African lockdown was extended from its original expiry date of 16th April 2020 to the end of the month, only to progress into another extended lease. The second extension was accompanied by relaxation of certain restrictions, tantamount to broadening the concept of ‘essential services’ to a flexible definition and interpretation. Thus, some restrictions of movement, commercial, industrial and economic activities were relaxed. However, domestic seclusion was prolonged, and of course for us, who are writing this article.

The writers of this article are part of a family of nine and an infant, who were marooned in one hermitage. Like thousands of other families who were subject to fully justifiable government restrictions necessitated by COVID-19, we found ourselves confined to a circumscribed space of Noah’s ark diminution. Besides limited activities and movement, the spoken word in conversations and dialogues amongst us became the dominant mode



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of 'activity' and 'drama' – performative. We intermittently stalked TV news, online news, took virtual excursions and held teleconferences with persons outside our nano-society. Sharing information, anecdotes, news, jokes, opinions and views, sometimes apropos of anything or everything or nothing, was transformed into a vehicle to transcend our spatial confinement. But COVID-19 obtrusively became a subtext of every conversation. At certain intervals some of us gravitated towards becoming archipelagoes of our jobs and external commitments, but we remained a unitary island, with little or no choice. Fortunately, we were privileged to have a library of more than three thousand corporeal books, that at certain periods served as a luxury of relief from the tedium of seclusion and current news.

'COVID-19' or 'coronavirus' became a super-ordinate, which reduced our lexicon to a narrow ambit and dialect of topics, and a collocational cohesive device across spoken texts. One day during one of our evening palavers it was proposed, impromptu, that we should reflect on our existential space by writing or recording our individual thoughts, ideas and activities during the lockdown, so that we could share them. As the period of our imprisonment got protracted by the imminent extension of the lockdown, the proposition waned in its early phase, and only two members of the restricted populace, the writers of this article, propelled it beyond its oral conceptual stage and rescued it from extinction. Initially the idea did not have a specific aim or objectives, let alone teleology. It was a means to no end. But as it evolved into a potential written project, dictates of conventional methodology inevitably emerged in the tête-à-tête of the two anchorites.

COVID-19 persisted in anchoring itself as a micro-universe in which it became

a thematic super-ordinate and folklore. The uber-narrative, narratives and sub-narratives, that is, the folklore of COVID-19 became preponderant and dictated a superstructure of ideas. The theme of this article chose us, rather than vice versa. By this we mean that we received unsolicited texts on our smartphones from relatives, friends and associates. As soon as we committed to satisfying the stimulus to embark on addressing these texts, serious concerns invited themselves to our attention, mainly ethical considerations. In order that our approach should prescind often unnecessarily prescribed and often prolonged processes of academia, we took a self-regulatory approach. The anonymity of the senders of the texts that we decided to analyse was to be held sacrosanct, and we would simply use two appellations, namely 'incognito' and 'familiar'.

The people who sent the texts to us unwittingly subverted the classic concept of the researcher as agent and participants as subjects. We shall expatiate on this point later. The agency, inadvertent as it was, derived from the senders of the texts that became the data of our discourse, in line with the human tendency to make sense of even incoherent inter-textual connections. An obvious but salient point that needs mentioning is that they were sent to us out of the senders' volition. The senders, as agents in sending them, implicitly expected responses, consciously or subliminally. In other words, the texts were 'conversational implicatures' (Brown and Yule, 1984). We suggest that these implicatures were socio-cultural – indirect invitation to conversation or dialogue or reciprocation. The senders (addressors) thereby became re-researchers of new responses from us as recipients (addressees), after having perhaps received other responses in cases where the messages were not sent out for the first time. Earlier responses that they might

have received, we hypothesise, might have been sent to them in the form of texts or succinctly in emojis or any available codes of communication. Our approach was pre-reflexive, reflexive and post-reflexive. While we became deconstructionists and interpreters of the texts, the senders were primary collaborative agents, simultaneously active (sending out messages) and passive (expectation of response), without necessarily being subjects. They became figurative celestial voices that infiltrated Noah's ark. In setting out to engage with these texts, we want to step beyond 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo, 2009) in order to perform a ritual of epistemic malediction.

Our method is the method of Hamlet. In Act II Scene ii of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Polonius makes an aside observation *sotto voce* about the protagonist: 'There's a method in this madness.' In this discussion, we are likely to find ourselves oscillating between method and madness (malediction of methodology). Our sin of omission in this discussion is that we abnegated responsibility towards the agents of this re-search, in that instead of responding to their texts directly to them, we decided to address an audience that was not part of the initial dialogue with them, a sin of commission. We undertook to study the content of video texts that we received over a period of two months from 7th March 2020 to 7th May 2020. This periodisation was partly in line with the beginning of the heightening of awareness about COVID-19 to the end of the first lockdown (Level 5) in South Africa, and partly arbitrary.

All the texts we received were sent by WhatsApp. During the two months one of the writers received 30 video texts and the other 21 that were specifically about COVID-19. We then categorised and classified them according to several criteria in order to make sense of them. The first set



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of criteria (Criteria 1) was 'Language', 'origin', 'commentary' and 'replication'; the second set of criteria (Criteria 2) comprised 'Form/channel', 'date received', and 'length of text' in minutes and seconds and the final criteria (Criteria 3) we allocated one sub-criterion, 'Tone of voice'.

Under Criteria 1, sub-criterion one, three video texts were in [sis]Zulu, with one of them code mixing with English, the third was in Setswana and fourth in *flytaal*. In the second sub-criterion we designated the texts according to the original source or the medium from which senders derived it, or whether it was forwarded or originally composed, supposedly. In the sub-criterion, 'origin', we thought that some texts might not bear the caption 'forwarded'. Thus, initially we naively decided to attribute these to originality of the sender, but later realised that none of the senders appeared as actants in the texts, so the decision was dropped. Most of the 'forwarded' texts were not accompanied by personal commentary or observation by the sender. In the fourth sub-criterion we tried to determine whether the texts were replicated, that is, the same message was sent to us by more than one sender. Under sub-criterion one we could have suggested that the aim or objective was to determine which language was predominant in communicating about COVID-19 and related subjects. Such an objective we could have easily excogitated, but it would have been facetious. Facetious because it is indubitable that in South Africa the predominant language of communication in digital media and other social spheres is English. This is regrettable, because it is thus even among people who cannot harness the language competently but do not scruple about embarrassing its decorum and themselves. Asking the cause of this piteous situation would merely be a rhetorical question, because a result of the acclaimed

fallacy that English is a language of social mobility. It would be a waste of time to argue the obvious, hence we mention this without much ado and *en passant*.

Under Criteria 2 we set out to record the medium of transmission of the texts, but this turned out to be redundant, because all of them were received by WhatsApp. In the final sub-criterion, we noted whether the sender was known to us or incognito. Although there was not much significance of this, we found it worthwhile considering the potential of trespassed boundaries of familiarity in digital communication to be faithful to our commitment of maintaining the anonymity of the re-searchers. Our epistemic malediction was not concerned with conventions of establishing reliability or validity of results.

Under Criteria 3, with one sub-criterion, we classified the texts according to the tone of voice, denoted as 'serious', 'neutral' and 'humorous.' The tone was determined according to our reception, but not the purported intention of the sender, even though that might have been the case. We relied on our inference, in order to avoid the trap of 'intentional fallacy'. The main thrust of this sub-criterion was meant for us to draw inference on how seriously or lightly the threat of COVID-19 was taken by senders. Under this sub-criterion the content, date and time of reception of the texts and length of the texts are also noted. We proceed to give a narrative (quantitative) of the texts, divided into tone, starting with 'serious', followed by 'neutral' and ultimately 'humorous'.

Here below we start with narratives of the content of our texts: Number one to 31 we regarded as 'serious' tone of voice, number 32 as 'neutral' and 33 to 51 as 'humorous'.

1. A scene in a setting that looks like India, where a woman approaches two men in a vehicle, gives them masks, which sedate them as soon as they wear them then she mugs them (March 19, 5:36 PM, 00:36).

2. Three actors perform a mock robbery to warn people of the dangers of buying masks from street peddlers. A driver and passenger are sold face masks laced with a sedative chemical. As soon as they wear them, they are knocked unconscious. The peddlers help themselves to their valuables (March 19, 8:55 PM, 00:36).
3. Outlining the publication of a researcher at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Zanjan University, the narrator informs viewers about pre-emptive measures to take in order to combat the coronavirus according to the researcher in question. The narrator alleges that the said researcher is at risk of arrest for 'telling the truth about coronavirus' (March 20, 1:17PM, 01:55).
4. Video clip of Cuban medical doctors arriving and receiving ovation at an airport in Italy (March 25, 12:16 PM, 00:44).
5. Clip of a medical doctor who introduces himself as an emergency physician working in a hospital in Canada, with a stethoscope around his neck. He explains how different the COVID-12 is more serious than other viruses. He argues that the statistics that are given are conservative and that the situation is going to get worse and strongly advises against social mixing (March 26, 11:20 AM, 04:42).
6. Two women singing a song in praise and support of the President of South Africa about the lockdown measures that he promulgated. As a prologue to the song she states: 'So this one is out to our awesome President. We want you to hear that we support you and we know that we are gonna get through this one together' (March 27, 2:54 PM, 2:31).
7. A rare selfie showed two police officers in a police vehicle, and one preaching a fervent sermon from the Book of



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- Isaiah 26:20, emphasising lockdown regulations as ordained by God (March 27, 7:11PM, 4:30). There is a combination of seriousness and humour, whereby the in certain instance the seriousness of the tone of voice adds a hyperbole and a sense of comedy.
8. Police and military man and women accost five young men, who are drinking at a bus shelter. One of the soldiers slaps and kicks one of them as they disperse (March 27, 5:48PM, 00:15).
 9. News clip about how China has recovered from COVID-19 and was now back in trade and asked whether China was profiting from the outbreak and refers to a 1999 book entitled *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America* (March 29, 6:29 PM, 8:31).
 10. A community uprising against police enforcement of lockdown regulations. People are seen hurling bricks at two stationary police vehicles as the officers make a hurried escape on foot, abandoning their vehicles. (March 29, 1:16PM, 0:27).
 11. A woman giving a lecture on nature as 'a great experimenter', and how it 'discards the species that is not supporting the whole [...] the Dinosaurs' etc. She emphasises that 'in the current situation China is not the problem, the people of Chinese people are not the problem [...] the problem is our consciousness...' (March 29, 7:58 AM, 4:57).
 12. Video showing a person standing in front of a white board, explaining statistics of projected rates of infection and its impact on the South African health care system and appealing for flattening the infection rates (March 29, 12:11 PM, 6:20).
 13. Fidel Castro's speech of several years ago in which he warned against chemical warfare and stated that Cuba sent 'doctors but not bombs' to other countries to kill but doctors to heal (March 30, 10:08 AM, 2:18).
 14. A woman gives a message about the exponential growth of the Coronavirus and what was done differently in the Czech Republic to significantly slow down the virus [...] Social distancing and stay at home Strict hygienic procedures everyone who has to leave their house has to wear a face mask...' etc. (March 30, 1:58 PM, 3:29).
 15. A man in Sesotho regalia reciting an eloquent praise poem warning people about the COVID-19 (April 7, 12:00 PM, 02:32).
 16. A bridegroom ushers his bride into the backseat of a police van. The couple is apparently under arrest for breaching lockdown regulations regarding public gatherings. The crowd murmurs in dismay. (10 April, 8:13PM, 00:23).
 17. Former President Barak Obama is making a speech during his tenure, and the caption of the speech states: 'We have to be ready to tackle a pandemic, Obama warned in 2014.' Obama says: 'We have to put in place an infrastructure [...] so that if and when a new strain of flew the Spanish flu crops up five years from now or a decade from now, we have made an investment [...] To be able to catch it [...] ' (April 13, 6:26 PM, 4:57). [see a parody in clip 44 below]
 18. A video recording of the African Union Ambassador to the United States, Dr Arikana Chihombori-Quao, who addresses a direct message to President Xi Jinping of China, about atrocities of Chinese landlords who evicted Africans from rented residences in Chinese cities (April 15, 9:10 PM, 05:19).
 19. A recording of an Australian woman who is warning Africans that China does not love African because 'they love your country and not you', and 'there is no vaccine for coronavirus [...] if China had it they would not send it to Africa' (April 17, 9:54 AM, 10:44).
 20. A video showing different scenes of vaccination in different African scenarios and expressing disgust at two French medical doctors who were engaged in a debate and expressed the view that a COVID-19 vaccine should be tested on poor Africans in Africa, and acquiescence of some African heads of state. The video uses inserts of an interview by a member of the South African apartheid regime, who was involved in infecting black people in South Africa and other countries with HIV inoculation. The operation 'was sponsored by foreign governments,' he says (April 18, 10:56PM, 9:09).
 21. The South African Ambassador in Spain giving a message explaining COVID-19 situation in Spain and expressing support of the South African President on lockdowns (April 18, 1:51 PM, 10:47).
 22. A scene entitled 'Xenophobic attack against People in China', showing ejection of Africans from apartments and herded away by militiamen in Guangzhou, China, with a voice over of an African man commenting, and *Vox Pop* of interviewees (April 18, 1:50 PM, 3:40).
 23. Selfie video clip of a woman furiously expressing her revulsion at the fact that African leaders are silent, that 'as of now Chinese nationals are maltreating and subjecting all blacks to inhuman treatment in China' and 'moved them out of the homes they have paid for ...' (April 18, 11:11 PM, 14:57).
 24. Video clip of a woman dancing with a bottle of alcohol in her hand and daring the Minister of Police: 'We are drinking liquor! What is Cele [Minister of Police]



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- saying?' in (isi)Zulu. In the background there are two men taking videos with their smartphones, and on the table, there are several bottles of alcohol and glasses. The accompanying message to the text explains that she is an ANC Councilor in Makhado Municipality and Brand South Africa member (April 20, 2:17 PM, 0:28).
25. Police officers stop a Chinese family in traffic check. Only one of the three travellers is able to communicate in a South African language yet, they allege to be holders of South African identity documents and the driver is said to be in possession of a South African driver's license. The officer instructs them to make phone calls to a third party who can provide proof of the aforementioned documents. On-lookers watch the scene in bewilderment. (April 23, 4:01PM, 2:12).
 26. Titled *Iceland's Plan To Stop COVID-19 Actually Works*, Bloomberg Businessweek interviews deCode Genetics CEO Kari Stefansson who shares information about crucial findings which allow for more effective tracing of the virus in Iceland, methods of testing and the relatively light regulations that govern the general public (April 24, 8:00PM, 7:33).
 27. A woman demonstrating with a lighter and tissue paper how flammable hand liquid sanitiser is (April 25, 10:54 PM, 03:25).
 28. A video clip showing police officers raiding a garden in which they find beer bottles stashed in a hole (April 26, 6:20PM, 00:39).
 29. News clip of a reporter interviewing a young woman who is apparently in her early twenties. With a reporter's microphone near her mouth she declares in (isi)Zulu that she is not interested in the coronavirus, but her concern is the closure of taverns and deprivation of access to liquor and the opportunity to go dating (April 26, 11:18 PM, 0:19).
 30. A news report video reporting on and showing satellite images taken from space to show how the lockdown 'have had an incredible effect on the environment' – in Milan, Delhi, Los Angeles, etc. and the Kruger National Park in South Africa etc. was cleared of pollution since the lockdown (April 26, 10:50PM, 01:40).
 31. This video advertises a contraption equipped with a pedal, used to spurt hand-sanitiser onto the hands in public areas eliminating the need to touch the bottle. We see a man standing at the threshold of an office entrance, he then proceeds to demonstrate its utility. (May 7, 6:47PM, 00:13).
 32. A large warehouse stockpiling face mask supply. Two men, presumably managers, are seen supervising the process. (28 April, 9:05PM, 0:14) [neutral].
 33. A woman doing laundry and thanking God aloud for 'at least you have given us time to socialise with our husbands' I am able to see my husband in one room... ' (March 26, 1:34 PM 02:08).
 34. A parliamentary session in Uganda, where a Minister advises that in order to avoid infection, people must avoid touching MEN (mouth, eyes and nose) and 'crowded spaces like boyfriends' (April 1, 12:36 PM, 0:18).
 35. A man playing cards against himself. There are two sets of playing cards on either side of a desk with a glass of red wine next to each set and two chairs. He plays a card sitting on one chair, takes a sip of wine, dashes to the opposite side, picks up cards, play a card, take a sip from the glass and runs to the opposite side to repeat the same action (April 3, 8:22 PM, 0:30).
 36. Impersonation of a medical doctor giving a message about a new vaccine and he pulls out a key and shows it to the viewer and says 'lock your door and sit in your damn houses; (April 3, 5:24 PM, 00:23).
 37. A man appealing in Setswana to the public to give advice on 'new styles' of lying down, because he was now tired of lying down (April 3, 11:08 PM, 0:10).
 38. The President of South Africa speaks humorously about the date on which the lockdown is said to end, during the initial lockdown lease of 27 March-16 April 2020. He jokes, '... Some people are saying the 16th of April, but... [that] I didn't say what year it would end.' (8 April, 1:50PM, 0:27).
 39. A video clip showing different families' activities from the first day of lockdowns through several days until the end of the lockdown, and how they will behave incongruously when they go out for the first time after the quarantine. The background music is upbeat (April 11, 3:05 PM, 3:10).
 40. Video of a woman who keeps her husband at arms' length by measuring the distance between them with a tape when they sit on a settee and get into bed. Later, when the man counts bank notes on a table, the woman advances but the man produces a tape and measures and does what she always does (April 12, 2:56 PM, 0:17).
 41. One was a Nigerian who recorded a prayer for God to send the virus to kill the Nigerian Parliament, 'possibly kill the whole cabinet' and corrupt African leaders, in Cameroon, Togo Republic, Chad, Guinea Conakry, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, etc. 'Hammer these people with coronavirus', he says, and 'thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (April 17, 9:54 AM, 5:38).
 42. Video of a baptizing ceremony in a



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- church where a priest/reverend dips a baby six times, head three times and legs three times in a fount of water and where he utters baptismal words voice is super-imposed, with 'sanitising' at every dip, in tsotsitaal/flytaal (April 18, 11:23 PM, 00:12).
43. A video clip showing 13 lionesses having a siesta in the middle of a tarred road that passes through the Kruger National Park, and vehicles not having the right of passage and some drivers turning back after waiting impatiently for a while. The video is entitled 'LOCK DOWN' (April 19, 11:39 PM, 6:08).
44. A shot of a split screen with a person who is apparently a teenager on the left side and Donald Trump on the right side, talking about 'a pandemic or epidemic of this proportion' and followed by Barak Obama (insert says: '5 years, 3 months and 17 days earlier') who predicts that 'there may and likely will come a time when we have an air borne disease that is deadly...'. While they are speaking the person on the left side of the screen points at them with an inscription that says: 'This is crazy!' (April 23, 11:14 AM, 0:30) [This is a parody of clip 17].
45. This is a personal recording of the local news on television. In the news clip President Ramaphosa makes light of his comical attempt to demonstrate how to don a mask during his lockdown address the previous night. He jokes that he will open a channel that will teach the public how to wear the masks correctly (24 April, 2:40PM, 0:23).
46. A stage-managed video of a man being interrogated by a speaker out of shot, who asks him where he is going during the lockdown. He responds that he comes from the clinic where he took a baby. The interrogators hands pages open the blanket that is hanging over his back and it reveals a bag with a bottle of brandy inside (April 26, 6:20 PM, 00:30).
47. A United States patrol officer stopping a vehicle and giving the driver a fine for speeding and the stupidity of wearing a mask 'with your nose sticking out', (April 29, 11:19 PM, 0:57).
48. A video clip of parliamentarians in the National Assembly of South Africa, singing jubilantly in unison (April 28, 7:19 PM, 0:30) and the second one following immediately at the same time, entitled 'This is the SOUTH AFRICA I LOVE... UNITY' and 'Lead us RAMAPHOSA' (7:19 PM, 0:59).
49. A woman singing 'Freedom is Coming Tomorrow', from the musical *Sarafina*, celebrating the relaxing of Level 5 restrictions from 1st May 2020 (April 30, 9:54 PM, 0:30).
50. A song created using selected audio cutaways of cabinet Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma's speech announcing government's decision to re-impose the sanction on the sale of cigarettes. Her 'vocals' are edited onto a disco-style instrumental. The portion of her speech sampled for the chorus section goes as follows, 'When people zol, they put saliva on the paper, and then they share that zol [...]' The video also includes a digitally doctored image of the Minister smoking a cannabis cigarette. (May 7, 4:50 PM, 1:59).
- We decided to summarise the content of the anthology of these video clips so that the reader should share indulgent degree of empathy with our judgement to use extremities of mood, 'serious' and 'humorous', with 'neutral' as median. Variations of 'serious' include tragic, pathos, sombre, and of 'humorous' comprise mimic, comedy, parody, satire, farce, melodrama, etc. We are cognizant that the choice of two extremities is impressionistic. Our purpose is satisfactorily served, because it gave us a sense of how serious COVID-19 virus was considered, and the significance is derived from the simple fact that over sixty percent of the video texts that were described above carried serious messages and the balance under forty percent was predominantly humorous. There is only one plausible inference that we could draw from this. It is that COVID-19 dictated and commanded such gravitas, and perhaps trepidation, that it dominated communication and asserted itself as a genre of serious folklore of narratives. This folklore took the form of sub-genres – information, reportage, enlightening, forecast and prediction (declarative), warning, conscientisation, persuasion and admonishment (imperative), advice and teaching (subjunctive).
- As for humorous messages, we inferred that the humour did not undermine the seriousness of COVID-19, but served as comic relief to evoke mirth, as a therapeutic mechanism. Humorous narratives, we further suggest, were an attempt to create a parallel world in a universe of misery. We observed that in certain humorous texts, especially texts number 33 and 41, there was an underlying poignancy that evoked political and social truths that enhanced the humour from comedy to satire. This aspect could either have been intentional in the creators or simply incidental. From our reading, as we suggested earlier, we took the perspective of the reader rather than the intention of the sender or creator of the text. Our epistemological malediction restrains us from delving into 'reception theory' or 'audience theory' as pioneered by Hall (1973) in television texts and Jauss (1982) in literary theory.
- We also noted two trends in the texts that we discovered by serendipity, because it was not in our initial agendum. The first



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was that the number of texts increased as COVID-19 intensified. In the first month there were 16 texts received and in the second month 35. This might suggest more awareness of the virus as the lockdown period was extended or as numbers of affected people rose. We also noted the number of texts received in daytime. The times of sensing/reception of the texts started slowly in the morning, rose and peaked in the after and evening/night. Between 10:00 and 12:00 there were eight texts received, from 12:00 to 16:00 there were 14, and between 17:00 and midnight there were 29. It is not ascertainable that these trends would have persisted over a longer period of observation of COVID-19 related texts. It is frustratingly ineluctable to draw final conclusions on this aspect, but prudent to leave the verdict unresolved, because it would be premature to draw any inference and promulgate authoritative conclusions, lest dogmatists of validity and reliability of research findings find room to denude our assertions. More so, our observations are apposite for the circumstances under which the texts were sent, received and studied. Our epistemic malediction does not make room for collusion with validity and reliability, for we believe that there are no general rules that do not admit exceptions. Another question that opens itself to being pursued is whether the dispatch of texts during the course of the day signified that during earlier hours of the day people were generally preoccupied with their paying jobs, and only engaged more later, at the end of the conventional working day. This is the subject of a different discussion, but by no means a reflection of investigative apathy or perfunctory attention on us.

There are several points with which we would like to close this article. Firstly, the concept of research (researcher), re-search (re-searcher) and participants;

secondly, the rise of folklore in relation to COVID-19; thirdly, the tone of narratives and significance of reception, and fourthly, re-assertion of our perspective. Conventional researchers often hide behind anonymity. The reader of their work is left in ignorance of who they are. In this article we removed the veil and exposed ourselves, by describing the conditions of our habitat during the lockdown. This exercise inverted the pyramid of authority by maintaining the anonymity of our re-searchers as agents, and by regarding their sending out of texts to us as selectors of the data of re-search, as already averred earlier. It also taught us humility when we became aware of the vulnerability of having to expose our identity and material conditions and circumstances. Nonetheless, our position in this regard was better than that of invited subjects or participants in conventional research projects, in that we could limit the extent of the information that we gave about ourselves. In conventional research methodology the volition of subject is often affirmed or assumed by the researcher, purportedly on the grounds that subjects are from the onset given the freedom to 'participate voluntarily' and can 'withdraw at any point during their participation'. There is nothing further from the truth. These statements of willingness are prefabricated for them and given to them as *fait accompli*. The starting point is that they are gullible and vulnerable, and this denudes them of any liberty whatsoever. That is partly why researchers never subject their own kith and kin to research. They hold their own space sacrosanct.

Moving on from that, we observe that every epoch-making event produces its own folklore, and this observation is not devoid of probability to the highest degree of comparison. We tested some of our primary preconceived notions (hypotheses if you wish) that communication about

COVID-19 created a folklore that dominated all forms of communication, especially or even particularly during the lockdown period. This is not new when it comes to epoch-making phenomenon. Furthermore, our prediction is that this folklore might dissipate a few months down the line, when the status of COVID-19 lapses from being 'novel' and becomes 'defamiliarised', like HIV/AIDS and other diseases and plagues that preceded it. This phenomenon happened with leprosy, the Spanish flu and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Each created an ephemeral zeitgeist. Our approach, as established at the opening of this discussion, was committed to a ritual of epistemic malediction, divorced from the aura or prestige of orthodox methodology. We must be consistent with our axiom of shunning validity and reliability of our results, lest we become susceptible to being haunted by poltergeist of methodologies and frameworks that we exorcised. However, if validity and reliability of our approach is confirmed in the near or distant future, we will be delighted. ☀

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