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COVID-19 (POST)PROVERBIALS: TWISTING THE WORD AGAINST THE VIRUS

Abstract: This study fields a range of radical and newly-formed sayings, which are derived almost directly from traditional sayings, in a number of African languages, in reaction against or engagement with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The set of proverbial creations, otherwise referred to as COVID-19 postproverbials, showed the ingenuity of the human mind in its creative powers as a regenerative, defensive and even playful forge against the choleric force of illnesses. The radical imagination in these proverbial creations in particular language communities are evident of the philosophy of engagement with the pandemic, ranging from admonition and deflation to derision of the pandemic as well as the promise of triumph against the illness. Beyond their structural and lexical formations, a general analysis of the body of COVID-19 postproverbials indicates certain common reflections on the reality of the pandemic, the experience of lockdown, social distancing and hygiene as well as the invocation of the morbid potential and presence of the virus across in communities. Thus, COVID-19 postproverbials are creative expressions of the awareness of the virus as much as they are verbal jousts with the realities of its virulence and trauma.

Keywords: COVID-19, Postproverbials, Proverbs, African Languages, Pandemic, Virus

“Already we are familiar with the concern generated by “nervous diseases,” and the awareness that man becomes more delicate in proportion as he perfects himself. As the century advanced, the concern became more pressing, the warnings more solemn. Already Raulin had observed that “since the birth of medicine...these illnesses have multiplied, have become more dangerous, more complicated, more problematical and difficult to cure.” (Foucault 1989: 211)

1. Preamble: Tracing the Virus

COVID-19 stands for “Coronavirus Disease 2019”, a transmissible respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus which first broke out in the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, on November 17, 2019.¹ COVID-19, caused by the SARS-CoV2, is a new strain of SARS-CoV, i.e. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus. It was identified as an epidemic in 2002 in the city of Guangdong, China, affecting 26 countries with 8000 documented cases.² Unlike SARS-CoV, COVID-19 (SARS-CoV2), with over 2.4m cases in 210 countries across the world, has attained the status of a pandemic barely 150 days after its outbreak, with over 2.4m cases in 210 countries across the world.³

As researches on the origin, nature and volatility rate of the contagion continue, there have also been concerted, international efforts to contain its spread with the race for the vaccine to conquer the virus. While medical responses have been the most obvious to contain the pandemic, there have also been other responses to the ravaging illness, ranging from trado-medicinal, homeopathic, and the religious, to other conspiracy theorems, including the scare of the Biblical Armageddon, the end of days, the interrelation of the scourge with 5G wavelength radiation, and the counter-accusations of bio-terrorism which suggest an economic Third World War between the USA and China. Thus, the responses to COVID-19 have been notably medical, spiritual, philosophical, economic, political, sociological and soci-

¹ <https://www.livescience.com/first-case-coronavirus-found.html>; retrieved on September 14, 2020.

² <https://www.who.int/ith/diseases/sars/en/>; retrieved on September 14, 2020.

³ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>; retrieved on September 14, 2020.

olinguistic. Across the African continent, following healthcare instructions, most national governments introduced a combination of testing, contact tracing, social distancing, face-masking, sanitization, hand washing and, total or partial lockdown of the citizenry as measures to mitigate the pandemic.⁴ According to a United Nations Habitat Report (2020), the control measures of most African countries to curtail the spread of COVID-19 included “restrictions on inter-regional movements to total lockdowns at the local, provincial or national level” (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>).

2. Breaking the Outbreak

In the ascendancy of COVID-19, different categories of creative materials including memes, video and audio skits, GIFs, quips and proverbs are produced in the social media as parts of the larger sociological and psychological (motivational) responses to the disease. Particularly, some inventive turns have been served on a number of proverbs that they can be categorized as novel creations of the postproverbial imagination given the strains noticeable in the breaking and re-composition of the words. The concept of “postproverbial” is derived from the phenomenon of twisting and extending the forms of the conventional proverbs. It is an interesting, even if instinctive and inventive, practice among the users of the given proverbs in a given language. By extending or twisting the proverbs, by cutting off and replacing parts of the original proverb, the proverb is invariably revised and postponed. The term “postproverbial” is, therefore, a reference to both the theory and practice of proverbial transformations, and it is an apparent parallel to the term, “anti-proverb”, which was first used and popularized by Wolfgang Mieder and Anna Litovkina in their works on proverb transformation in European and American scholarships.⁵

⁴ The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Africa was found in Egypt on February 14, 2020; Nigeria had its first case on February 27, 2020; the first case in South Africa was announced on March 5, 2020; and in Ghana, the first two cases were reported on March 12, 2020. Details of country information are accessed from <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>.

⁵ Essays on postproverbials and anti-proverbs are listed in a section of this article.

Amidst the challenge and containment of the affliction, the strains of invented proverbs are phenomenal reactions of the people to the outbreak, deserving of attention and analysis. The radical imagination of the users of the proverb texts, within particular language communities, is evident of their philosophy of engagement with the pandemic. The postproverbial text itself is a cultural-linguistic ‘outbreak’, an *outgrowth* of the conventional text, thus, symbolically, a response to the viral outbreak.

3. Focus: In Search of the Deviant Text

The focus of this essay is to draw on the available range of post-proverbial responses to COVID-19, that is, the manner in which reactions to the scourge have been reconfigured in particular proverbial utterances in some African communities. An open call for contributions (OCC) was shared on March 15, 2020 on social media, including WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook platforms.⁶ Respondents were not limited to the number of entries that they could supply. In selecting the entries for this study, a consideration was given to appropriateness, logic and translation. In some cases where clarifications were needed, direct correspondence with particular respondents was initiated as follow-up. The proverbs were collected within four weeks (March 16 - April 15, 2020) by means of question and sampling from respondents. In addition to the open call, other examples or illustrations of coronavirus-related proverbs were drawn from available sources in news reports, Twitter and other platforms. Furthermore, permission was sought to cite all the collated entries only for academic purpose.

This study contains twenty-three postproverbials related to COVID-19 in six African languages including Hausa, Ibibio, Iggede, Igbo, Yoruba and Zulu. As it will be evident in the interpretation section of this essay, the collected samples are radicalized sayings (in the season of anomie), emerging as decidedly playful but instructive fabrications out of the welter of traditional African proverbs. Also, given the ethnic background of most of the

⁶ All the respondents who supplied examples of coronavirus-related proverbs did so freely and approved of the use of the illustrations. The interpretations of the postproverbials are without any prejudice to the respondents’ own comments and suggestions.

respondents, examples from Yoruba language are more predominating, representing up to three-quarter of the total number of the proverbs collected. The preliminary observation is that the collected responses are admonitions which draw attention and awareness to the dangers of the pandemic, and in other cases, they are verbal jousts against the virus itself. In relation to the basic principles of rift, suture and super(im)position of the theory of postproverbials, these are absolute creations of the radical imagination, with new values, new functions and different significations.

4. The Postproverbial Order

Transgressive paremiology is the study of innovations and transformations in contemporary proverb scholarship. Its crucial interest is to deal with significant structural violence done to traditional or conventional proverbs, the deconstruction of the idiomatic pathogen of the conventional utterance which invariably affects its meaning, transmitted knowledge and the overarching philosophy of life.

To be sure, conventional proverbs have never been dismissed as jaded, outworn or clichés in spite of their ubiquitous and repetitive use. Yet, the human penchant for creativity, modernist or iconoclastic energies, coupled with a critical detachment from the heritage of traditional wisdom, have questioned the sacrosanct status of the proverbial text in culture. The term, “*antisprichwort*” (German for “anti-proverb”), was first used by Wolfgang Mieder in 1983.⁷ Mieder would collaborate later with Anna Litovkina, the Hungarian sociolinguist, to publish the first major work on the tradition of innovation in the use and making of proverbs by publishing *Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs* (1999). In European and Anglo-American studies, proverb scholars have drawn on the label, “anti-proverb”, to signify alterations, transgressions and transformations. It is *anti(-)proverb* in French, *антипословица* in Russian, and *anti(-)proverbium* in Hungarian. In African proverb scholarship, the term “postproverbial”, was first coined in 1995 by Aderemi Raji-Oyelade in

⁷ Mieder, W. *Antisprichwörter*. Band I. Wiesbaden: Verlag für deutsche Sprache, 1983.

an essay that would be published later in *Research in African Literatures* in 1999.⁸

5. COVID-19 Postproverbials: Interpreting the Twisted Word

The set of COVID-19 postproverbials collected so far are verbal reflections on the reality of the pandemic, the experience of lockdown, social distancing, hygiene as well as the invocation and reification of the morbid potential and presence of the virus in the community. The interpretive minimum which runs through all but one of these radicalized texts is the personification of the coronavirus as subject and agency. As organized, each pair of proverb text for analysis contains the conventional proverb and the postproverbial retort engendered by the disease. Thus, the commentary that follows serves as contextual explication of the interrelation of the given proverbemes. In the basic structural pattern of the postproverbial act, a part of the conventional proverb – clausal, phrasal or lexical – is suspended and replaced by a newly extracted clause, phrase or lexis which directly presents coronavirus as an agent. In other cases, the conventional proverb remains intact but supplemented by a postproverbial retort. The double act of suspension and superimposition which takes place brings about a structural fissure, albeit, a locking down or twinning of the old with a new artifice which thus gives birth to a hybrid or rogue text.

⁸ Relevant publications on postproverbials or anti-proverbs include:

Raji-Oyelade, A. "Posting the African Proverb: A Grammar of Yoruba Postproverbials, or Logophagia, Logorrhea and the Grammar of Yoruba Postproverbials." *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship* 21(2004): 299-314; T. Litovkina, A. and Mieder, W. *Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs*. Burlington & Veszprém: The University of Vermont & The Pannonian University of Veszprém, 2006; Mieder, W. "Anti-Proverbs and Mass Communication: The Interplay of Traditional and Innovative Folklore". *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 52.1 (2007): 17-46; Aleksa, M. and Hrisztova-Gotthardt, H. & T. Litovkina, A. "The Reception of Anti-Proverbs in the German Language Area", in Soares, R. & Lauhagankas, O. (eds.), *Actas ICP08 Proceedings*. Tavira: Tipografia Tavirense, 2009. pp. 83-98; and Raji-Oyelade, A. *Playful Blasphemies: Postproverbials as Archetypes of Modernity in Yoruba Culture*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2012.

5.1. On Lockdown

The first set of proverbial retorts to the pandemic are devoted to the people's reaction towards the sudden change of lifestyle caused by the official declaration of lockdowns in most countries around the world. The lockdown was the first major regulatory act of governments and attendant upon it were other restrictions including self-isolation, quarantine, face-masking and social/physical distancing. Medical tourism, the practice of travelling for therapeutic treatment, became downgraded, and in its place was medical curfew, the restriction of movement of persons across state borders in order to control the acute contagion.

(1)

p1: *Ibi orí dá'ni sí làá gbé.*

A man's home is where he should reside.

p2: *Ibi orí dá'ni sí làá gbé, níí gba'ni l'ówóọ àtánkálẹ̀ kòró.*⁹

A man's home is where he should reside. Thus, one is saved from the spread of coronavirus.

Comment: The conventional saying is a philosophical reference to the destiny as well as the contentment of man who must submit to the natural order of birth. In troping on this, the postproverbial retort directly points at the need for man to remain within his location (locus) in order to be saved from the uncharted rout of the virus. The sense of the spiritual (fate) in the first proverb is replaced by the sense of the physical (home) in the prosthetic proverb. This truly is a lockdown postproverbial.

(2)

p1: *Akpa sangha isang isi diagha se mbon ufok edia.*

The one who walks about does not eat what those at home consume.

p2: *Akpa sangha isang abi m^m COVID-19.*¹⁰

It is the one who walks about that will contract COVID-19.

Comment: This is an apt example of a postproverbial that is induced by the sense of precaution. Whereas the conventional proverb points at the adventurous nature of man, the radical

⁹ Supplied by a respondent, @Olushola-Excel Oyadiji (Yoruba).

¹⁰ Supplied by a respondent, @Hanson Utibe-Abasi (Ibibio).

response in COVID-19 addresses the danger of indiscriminate wandering.

(3)

p1: *Ukwu n'aga wam wam wam marakwa na anya n'aga wam wam na eleya.*

The leg that walks about should know that the eye that looks around is watching it.

p2: *Ukwu n'aga wam wam wam mara kwa na COVID-19 na eche ya.*¹¹

The leg that walks about should know that COVID-19 is waiting for it.

Comment: In this example of a lockdown postproverbial, a person is admonished against aimless wandering and transgression that could lead to infection. The restrictive tone of the original proverb is retained in the new proverb; the warning is not about extra vigilance (“of the eye that looks around”) as it is about the presence of the virus (COVID-19) that lurks around the corner for the wanderer.

5.2. On Social Distancing

The act of lockdown, with the creation of physical and social boundaries, was the direct cause of the condition of isolation and dissociation. The popular term for the practice of regulated spacing and dissociation is social distancing. Social distancing is the accepted measure of remoteness between persons and groups of people, with a view to reducing or canceling any act of intimacy, especially for the purpose of medical (psychological or psychiatric) healing. It is noteworthy that most of the postproverbial creations in the season of the coronavirus reflect directly or indirectly on the logic and necessity of safe distancing.

(4)

p1: *Ká rìn ká pò, yíyẹ níí yẹni.*

Moving in unison brings honour and respect.

p2: *Ká rìn ká pò, pípa níí pani.*¹²

¹¹ Supplied by a respondent @Miracle Francis (Igbo).

¹² Composed in a special song released by Jubal Music entitled “Koro”; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqYnB9T9rUU>

Moving in unison brings death.

Comment: The original proverb here reflects on the joy of communal relations and association but the postproverbial admonishes against the danger of crowding which increases the rate of viral infection in COVID-19 time. The radicalized proverb is already used as part of a musical composition entitled “Koro” which was released on April 16, by Jubal Music (2020). The song is itself a persuasive melody drawing on the lesson of good hygiene, social distancing, counsel against overcrowding in the home and in public places. It is as well as an invocation of spiritual protection and hope for the future.¹³

(5)

p1: *Ara kii sá f'ára, bíí ti kúrúnà kó.*

Bodies do not run from bodies, not with scabies infection.

p2: *Ara kii sá f'ára, bíí ti kófídi kó.*¹⁴

Bodies do not run from bodies, not with the outbreak of COVID-19.

(5c): *Ara kii sá f'ára, bíí ti kórónà kó.*

Bodies do not run from bodies, not with coronavirus infection.

Comment: In the conventional proverb, a bacterial skin disease is the referent effect of non-cautionary physical interrelations; in the postproverbial creation, the discomfort of scabies is replaced by the stigma of coronavirus. Thus, COVID-19 is figured as the symptomatic repercussion of bodily interactions. The other post-proverbial variant here – *Ara kii sá f'ára, bíí ti kórónà kó* – is a direct pun of the phonetic similarity of corona/korona (English) and kúrúnà (Yoruba).

(6)

p1: *Ìsúnmóni, là á mò şe ẹni.*

Close association brings understanding.

p2: *Ìsúnmóni, àrùn níí dá sára.*¹⁵

Close association breeds illness.

¹³ In popular imagination, coronavirus is shortened as “koro” being the colloquial form of corona/korona.

¹⁴ Supplied by a respondent, @Tolulope Akinrinde (Yoruba).

¹⁵ Supplied by a respondent, @Ope Oyetunji (Yoruba).

Comment: This is a proverb on the virtue of close interpersonal relations and how affiliations make understanding and awareness of a person's character possible. But the postproverbial creation becomes a warning, a counsel about social distancing as crucial mitigation of the danger of infection and its spread. Therefore, as in the previous example, close physical association is a veritable source of illness and death.

(7)

p1: *Òde kii yá aláṣọ rè.*

Partying never tires the dresser.

p2: *Òde kii yá aláṣọ rè, l'áyé kòró kọ.*¹⁶

Partying never tires the dresser, not in the time of coronavirus.

Comment: The conventional proverb is apparently a praise of the material possessions of someone with a chest of clothes and who is, therefore, never tired of going to parties. A general stereotype of the Yoruba is that of a people given to hedonism and lavish celebrations. One of the effects of the lockdown is the absolute absence of social gathering. The supplement of the postproverbial text is predictably cautionary, inferring that interaction or partying is no longer fanciful or virtuous in the age of the coronavirus.

(8)

p1: *Igi gogoro má gùn mii lójú, àtòkèrè la tí n'wó.*

That we may not be blinded by the tall, pointed tree, one must watch it from afar.

p2: *Igi kòró má gùn mii lójú, àtòkèrè la tí n'júbà.*¹⁷

That we may not be blinded by the tall, corona tree, it takes a salute from a distance.

Comment: While the original proverb expresses the need for extra caution and prudence in all proposals and actions, the postproverbial discourages socialization and encourages extra care. In the new proverb, there is an attribution, the qualification of the presence of the virus in a material object of nature – “igi kòronà” (corona tree).

¹⁶ Supplied by a respondent, @Wale Oyedeji (Yoruba).

¹⁷ Supplied by a respondent, @Adeshewa Adekoya (Yoruba).

5.3. On Spread and Awareness

By the context of their creation and use, some postproverbials have served as disseminators of the existence of the pandemic in the society. They also serve as verbal evidence, admonitions or confirmation of the aggressive virus with its morbid power of fear and death among the people.

(9)

p1: *Ó jọ gáte, kò jọ gáté, ó fi ẹ̀sẹ̀ méjì lé lẹ̀ gáte-gáte!*

So steadily, so unsteadily, the matter plants its feet wobbly in the land!

p2: *Ó jọ gáte, kò jọ gáté, kòró má ò fi ẹ̀sẹ̀ mú lẹ̀!*¹⁸

So steadily, so unsteadily, the coronavirus is planting its feet solidly in the land!

Comment: In this example, both the proverb and postproverbial call attention to the awareness of a crucial matter or event, within the community, with the potential of becoming permissive and endemic. In the conventional proverb, reference is to an unnamed matter or situation; in the radical proverb however, the situation becomes known and named. Also, its presence is described as potentially grounded in the community.

(10)

p1: *Oun tó wà l'ẹ̀yìn Òfà, ó ju Òjé lọ.*

What is after the border of *Ofa* is more than the encampment of *Oje*.

p2: *Oun tó wà l'ẹ̀yìn kòró, ó ju ikọ̀ lọ.*¹⁹

What comes after the coronavirus is more than coughing.

Comment: The traditional proverb here is usually uttered as a caution against an action that has repercussions should the warning be ignored. In its historical context, *Ofa* was a Yoruba settlement in the northern border of old Oyo Empire; it used to be a major garrison of the warriors before the Fulani Jihad of 1804; beyond the old garrison was *Ójé*, another settlement which later developed into a huge encampment for warriors on strategic missions. It is therefore said, in military sense, that when a battle

¹⁸ Supplied by a respondent, @Lanre Oladoyinbo (Yoruba).

¹⁹ Supplied by a respondent, @Remi Akinpelu (Yoruba).

rages and ends in *Òfà*, there is a greater one with greater repercussion waiting in *Oje*. Thus, in the postproverbial turn of the conventional saying, the infection of the coronavirus is the initial battle but the minimum symptom of cough is itself the euphemism for death.

(11)

p1: *Ong ole kojuwa hwume gen gen ka gba chu gbei.*

Whatever is making the bush to shake must come to the road by and by.

p2: *Okumu nyi koro ole kowe hume gen gen aka dai lo gba chu gbei ka.*²⁰

The corona masquerade that is shaking the bush must eventually appear on the road.

Comment: The conventional proverb here notes that whatever is hidden even for a long time will eventually be revealed. But the postproverbial turns the general (“whatever”) into the specific presence of the pandemic which is personified as a masquerade (“okumu nyi koro”). This is a radical proverb not only about the awareness of the virus, but more about its impending outbreak and danger.

(12)

p1: *“Mai zan yi da abinda ya gagare wuta,” inji kishiyar konania.*

“I have no business with a fire fighter,” says the co-wife of a burnt woman.

p2: *“Mai zan yi da abinda ya gagare wuta,” inji kishiyar mai korona.*²¹

“I have no business with a fire fighter,” says the co-wife of a corona patient.

p2: *“Ba ruwana da asibiti,” inji kishiyar mai korona.*

“I have no business with the hospital,” says the co-wife of a corona patient.

Comment: “*Mai zan yi da abinda ya gagare wuta,* inji kishiyar konania” is a proverb that is generally used to address neg-

²⁰ Supplied by a respondent, @Maria Ajima (Igede).

²¹ Supplied by a respondent, @Rahila Luka (Hausa).

ligence and indifference. Its postproverbial other (“Mai zan yi da abinda ya gagare wuta, inji kishiyar mai korona”) addresses the negligence of the Kano State people towards the outbreak of COVID-19. Whereas the original proverb dwells on the negligence, as well as the complicity, of the wife in the misfortune of the co-wife, the postproverbial is used to focus on the reported cases of negligence and even denial of a cross-section of Kano State youths. In the third week of April 2020, there was a spike of mystery deaths in Kano, the main hub of the economy of Northern Nigeria. A record number of over 150 mortalities were reported within three days, followed by counter-statements about the cause of the death, especially of the elderly and high-profile individuals in the city.²² Weeks before the outbreak of deaths, scenes of crowds in different parts of the city defying the stay-at-home order were familiar and displayed in online sites and reported in conventional news channels. A virus-defying song was even composed by the predominantly youthful population: “Malam ya ce babu korona, muma mun ce babu korona” - “Malam says there is no corona, we also say there is no corona”.

(13)

p1: Girman kai rawanin tsiya.

Pride is the turban of trouble.

p2: Girman kai rawanin mai karya korona.

Pride is the turban of a corona denier.²³

Comment: In the symbolic use of an abstract characteristic as a sign for another condition, the original proverb is as metonymic as its postproverbial other. The attribute of pride (girman) in both proverb and postproverbial is employed as agency and cause. In the conventional proverb, pride is the crown (rawanin) of trouble; but in the postproverbial, pride becomes the handle, the carriage for the denial of the existence of the coronavirus.²⁴

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/28/nigerian-authorities-deny-wave-of-deaths-is-due-to-covid-19>

²³ Supplied by a respondent, @Rahila Luka (Hausa).

²⁴ ‘Rawanin’ is the Hausa word for the emir’s turban, which has the connotation of ‘crown’; ‘karya’ means lie, so the word used for denial in Hausa is karya, i.e. claiming that something is not true.

5.4. *On Invocation*

With its confirmation as a qualifier of the new normal in societies, the coronavirus becomes a major referent in daily dialogues and conversations that it becomes easily invoked and named in place of other material elements. Thus, a number of the post-proverbials supplied by respondents sound like invocation or qualification of the embodiment of coronavirus as an infectious disease which is drug-defying and has become a pandemic which is open to awe or derision according to the perspective of the particular speaker. The invocation of the virus itself points at its agency, volatility and morbidity.

(14)

p1: *Òkùnkùn kò m'eni òwò.*

Darkness does not recognize the noble person.

p2: *Òkùnkùn kò m'eni òwò, kòró lẹ́ ń'ke sí.*²⁵

Darkness does not recognize the noble person, the praise-name of coronavirus.

Comment: This is another classic example of a postproverbial text composed with a supplement. The conventional proverb is used to qualify the state or area of darkness as a place of anonymity which does not respect an individual's importance or class. In the postproverbial, the quality of darkness is invoked as the power or praise-name of coronavirus. As it were, the disease is thus infused with the epithetic and descriptive agency of "darkness" over man, irrespective of their standing, stature or status.

(15)

p1: *Uwar kishiya, kwadon kulle mai yawon banza.*

The mother (matriarch) of co-wives is a padlock for the restless wanderer.

p2: *Korona, kwadon kulle ma yawon banza.*

Corona, the padlock that keeps the restless wanderer at home.

²⁵ Statement made by an unidentified speaker on a live call-in radio programme (Yoruba).

Comment: Like the example before this, the Hausa postproverbial here is created as an invocation of the power of the coronavirus. In the conventional proverb, the “mother of co-wives” is actually the matriarch of the home, literally the senior wife who controls the home, and therefore described as “the padlock” to the restlessness of the co-wives. In the postproverbial, the power of the matriarch is attributed to coronavirus, signified as the padlock which restricts and confines the restless wanderer at home.

(16)

p1: *Nala kungheko iquhude liyasa.*

Even when the rooster is not present, the day breaks.

p2: *Nala Ukorona ekhona, usuku liyasa.*²⁶

Even when the corona is present, the day breaks.

Comment: The conventional proverb reflects on the eternity and constancy of nature in spite of other conditions, opportunities or challenges. The postproverbial is itself no less different in the philosophy of the natural law of existence that, in spite of the invocative morbidity of the coronavirus, the day will still break. In other words, the pair of proverbs here deflates the power of the disease with an underlying sense of optimism that, in spite of the darkness, the day will break.

(17)

p1: *Eni éégún ñlé, kó máa r'ójú; bó ti ñ're ará ayé náà ló ñ're ara òrun.*

He who is pursued by the masquerade should endure; as the human tires so does the spirit tire.

p2: *Eni éégún kòró ñlé, kó máa r'ójú, bó ti ñ're ará ayé náà ló ñ're ara òrun.*²⁷

He who is pursued by the corona masquerade should endure; as the human tires so does the spirit tire.

Comment: In this example, the deflation of the power of coronavirus is the subject of the postproverbial utterance. Both proverbs establish the importance and necessity of endurance in the face of adversity. The masquerade in the conventional proverb

²⁶ Supplied by a respondent, @Bernice Badal (Zulu).

²⁷ Supplied by a respondent, @Adetutu Olubummo (Yoruba).

becomes the corona masquerade in the radical proverb, but the impermanence of trials is the constant trope of the (post)proverbial text.

5.5. *On Hygiene*

In the new normal, one of the precautions against coronavirus is the hygiene of man and environment. In addition to social distancing and lockdown, the main measures of that precaution include the covering of mouth and nose with face masks and the regular washing and sanitization of hands. The responsibility to prevent the transmission of the virus, which is tied to hygienic orientation, has also been a subject of postproverbial creativity.

(18)

p1: *Àgbájọ ọwọ́ la fi ní'sọ àyà.*

[With] All hands together we beat the chest in solidarity.

p2: *Àgbájọ ọwọ́ la fi ní'wẹ ọwọ́.*²⁸

[With] All hands together we wash (the hands) to cleanliness.

p2: *Àgbájọ ọwọ́ la fi ní'sọ àyà; l'áyée kòró kọ́.*²⁹

[With] All hands together we beat the chest in solidarity; not in the age of coronavirus.

Comment: In the conventional proverb, the focus is on solidarity and collective action; whereas the first postproverbial points at the indexical and individual action of hand hygiene, the second example of the postproverbial functions as a declamation of the collective physical activity.

(19)

p1: *F'ọ̀tún w'òsì, f'òsì w'ọ̀tún, ọ̀wọ́ fi òmọ́.*

Washing the left with the right, washing the right with the left, makes the hand clean.

p2: *F'ọ̀tún w'òsì, f'òsì w'ọ̀tún, ló ní'lé kòró ọ́.*

Washing the left with the right, washing the right with the left, lays off the coronavirus.

²⁸ Supplied by a respondent, @Charles Akinsete (Yoruba).

²⁹ Supplied by a respondent, @Morounfolu Akinpelu (Yoruba).

Comment: This is a pair of proverbs that focuses on the physical activity of hand washing as a manual process of hygiene. While the conventional proverb is predictively embedded with the metaphor of solidarity and cooperation, the postproverbial directly affirms the necessity of hand hygiene as a crucial way of preventing coronavirus infection.

(20)

p1: *Tí ará ilé ẹ̀ni bá ń'jẹ̀ kòkòrò burúku, tí kò bá r'ẹ̀ni sọ fun un, hùrùhẹ̀rẹ̀ rẹ̀ kò ní jẹ̀ kí ará ilé gbádùn.*

When one's relation feeds on a forbidden insect without being warned, his restive reaction will not allow the neighbours to rest.

p2: *Tí ará China bá ń'jẹ̀ kòkòrò burúku, tí kò bá r'ẹ̀ni sọ fun un, kòrò kò ní jẹ̀ kí gbogbo àgbáye gbádùn.*³⁰

When the Chinese feeds on forbidden animals without being warned, the coronavirus will not allow the whole world to rest.

Comment: Literally speaking, this is a proverb that anticipates the symptomatic effect of harmful food-intake; it also draws attention to how a strain of poisonous food/object consumed by one person can affect the well-being of the other people around. In the postproverbial, the subject becomes specified as “the Chinese”, apparently echoing the widespread insinuation that the coronavirus disease emanated from an exotic animal market in China. Thus, the radical proverb is as cautionary as much as it is accusatory.

5.6. On Morbidity

The very absolute repercussion of coronavirus infection and spread is death. This is an awareness that has been a part of the scary reality of living with the pandemic. Therefore, through a number of postproverbials, the creative imagination is devoted to the fearful connotation of death and the sense of morbidity connected to the agency of the virus which is yet unyielding to the science of vaccine production.

³⁰ Supplied by a respondent, @El-Nasir Al-Amin (Yoruba).

(21)

p1: *A kii gbé'lé ẹni ká f'òrùn rọ.*

One cannot stay at home and get injured.

p2: *A kii gbé'lé ẹni ká f'òrùn rọ, òwe kòró kọ. F'owọ ẹ!*³¹

One cannot stay at home and get injured, no such proverb in corona time. Wash your hands!

Comment: The conventional proverb here is a terse figuration of the home as a place of comfort, security and safety. It is a philosophical assumption that no one gets involved in a ghastly accident while within the confines of their own residence. The accident is specified, that is, having a forced sprain to the neck (“f’òrùn rọ”). In the postproverbial utterance, the home is no longer given as safe or insulated from the scourge of the coronavirus. The original proverb is extended and doubly troped upon: first, there is the declamatory clause (“òwe kòró kọ”), followed by a full imperative statement which counsels physical hygiene (“F’owọ ẹ!”). In the postproverbial, the impact of injury (to the body or bones) is replaced with the trauma of an infection so that it is inherently implied in the radical utterance that the injury is not a somatic but a viral one.

(22)

p1: *Àtéléwọ ẹni kii tan ni je.*

One’s palm does not betray the bearer.

p2: *Àtéléwọ ẹni a má pa ni je.*One’s palm can become one’s deathtrap.³²

Comment: In the conventional proverb, the palm (àtéléwọ) is the symbol, the metonym for a person’s destiny; it is also the manual representation of the person’s ability by which his industry is determined. Thus, it is said that a man’s success or failure is dependent on the effort of his hand/palm. However, in the postproverbial text, the epistemic base of the original proverb is deflated such that the palm is no longer imagined as symbolic. Instead, the palm is taken literally as the inner surface of the hand between the wrist and fingers used for washing and cleans-

³¹ Supplied by a respondent, @Lanre Oladoyinbo (Yoruba).

³² On Twitter, <https://twitter.com/ajankoro/status/1250390293662380033?s=20> (April 15, 2020).

ing things. The palm is the site for physical hygiene and sanitization; if it is not duly taken care of, it may turn to the carrier of infection and death. In its brevity, the postproverbial utterance contains the dual resonance of counsel and threat: the palm can save, the palm can kill.

(23)

p1: *Bàòkú, ìṣe ò tán.*

When there's life, activity does not cease.

p2: *Bàòkú, ìṣekúṣe ò tán.*³³

When there's life, lustfulness does not end.

Comment: Here, the conventional proverb is otherwise rendered as “when there's life, there's hope”. In its radical form, it is turned over, punned on and infused with sexual undertones. Whereas the original proverb is motivational and positivist, the postproverbial stresses the possibility of promiscuity and the potential of lasciviousness *as long as there is life*. Contextually, being sexual or sensual is taken as an inevitable or primary human activity (even in corona times). This postproverbial creation was a direct inference from an unverified news item ascribed to a top official of the Ministry of Health in Uganda who reported that some quarantined coronavirus patients had been having sex with each other.³⁴ In spite of the possibility of being fake news, such seedy scenario is better left imagined as precarious and dangerously indulgent.

6. Values of the Postproverbials

The limitation of the study is that the data for analysis is highly topical: the postproverbials are volatile and, like the virus in its period of infection, incubation and spread, the deployment and significance of COVID-19 postproverbials would probably be active and virtually meaningful within the marked period of invention, currency and inscription. But ultimately, the values of COVID-19 postproverbials reside in the general attempt to create paramedical awareness against the pandemic, to express wis-

³³ Shared by a Nigerian author, Tade Ipadeola (April 15, 2020).

³⁴ <https://weetalknaija.com.ng/news/breaking-govt-raises-alarm-says-those-in-quarantine-have-started-having-sex-with-each-other.html>

dom in social or physical distancing, to underscore the danger of overcrowding and signify on the importance of sanitization, tracing, self-isolation, self-preservation and community hygiene.

7. Conclusion

Finally, I assert that these are inexhaustive samples of invented proverbs in the age of the coronavirus. There are four cardinal stems that may be added to conclude the interrogation of these strains of contemporary radical sayings, viz:

(a) As a category of postproverbials, they are the eponymous type, in the sense that they are deliberately invented proverbs identified with their initial “authorship” or traceable to particular individuals as referenced in this essay.

(b) As formalized utterances, these entries are essentially retorts, reactions or bluffs to extant African proverbial thoughts. Indeed, they are ingenious responses to the experience of medical affliction through the artifice of proverb-making. Thus, it can be said that the typical COVID-19 postproverbial is a verbal innovation in the age of illness.

(c) As literary and cultural materials in the possession of their users, they undergo a form of “genetic manipulation” and they become chromosomal mutants, aesthetically speaking, in relation to the conventional proverbial text.

(d) As sociolinguistic verbal acts, they bear the therapeutic functions of jest and relief, deployed as a coping or healing strategy against the choleric season with its attendant condition of trauma. Pragmatically so, these postproverbials are verbal communicative strategies of living with the life-threatening force of the respiratory virus.

In its creation, the typical COVID-19 postproverbial is invariably volatile and, like the virus in its virtual period of infection, incubation and spread, the deployment and significance of the radical text will probably be active within the lifespan of its invention, currency, inscription and usage.

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