

## There's a TINGLING IN MY THROAT: IS that you CORONA?

By  
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It's the tenth day of the lockdown over the coronavirus pandemic. It's been a dreadful ten days, and I've just exhausted my stock of groceries. The government told us to prepare for a fourteen-day lockdown in the first instance. I prepared. I purchased enough food stuff and toiletries to last fourteen days. There are at least four more days to endure the 'stay at home' order. If we are lucky. The Lagos state government is threatening to extend the lockdown "if Lagosians don't behave themselves." I'm an obedient Lagosian. I obey the rules. I endure the anxiety and paralysing fear of getting infected. There are rumours that the virus could be airborne. So I shut my windows and cascade in sweat, even when there's no electricity to power the fan or air conditioner that have become basic necessities. These measures, as tough as they are fail to take away the fear in me. Each time I feel a tingling in my throat, I ask: Corona, is that you? I jump around panicking, and pace about my room until I collapse into bed in exhaustion. I have been sufficiently educated to know that the virus comes stealthily with tingling. Then, it makes your throat itch, and consolidates its invasion by making you sneeze and cough before it takes total possession of your lungs. I self-regulate, stifling any sneezes and coughs attempt to betray my discipline. Traitors. Although I'm far away from the instruments for testing, each time I feel a tingling in my throat, I tell myself repeatedly that Corona will not invade my lungs.

My most pressing problem right now is that I have no food. I must re-stock. Have I been overeating? Have I gained weight in the wrong places? Anyway, this is no time to worry about weight gain. Surviving this pandemic is priority for now. Thankfully, the government says food and pharmacy stores are exempted from the lockdown. That means I can go to Q MART which is just five minutes' walk from my house. I put on short knickers, a T-Shirt, bathroom slippers, and a facemask. I am going out of my house for the first time in ten days.

I expected the street to be deserted. But people are milling around, and everyone seems to be moving with a purpose. Could this be the government's reference to Lagosians not behaving themselves? I join the swing, but soon realise that I am the only one wearing a facemask. I am stunned. I keep walking, hoping to come across other people like me who might be wearing a facemask. I become increasingly alarmed and uncomfortable as I find no one else. I feel

awkward. I decide to have a stopover at the nearest pharmacy. There are three attendants on duty. Relief sweeps through me when I notice that one of them is putting on a mask. But my feeling of relief does not last. It is absurd that auxiliary health workers openly demonstrate such disregard for their work ethics. Are people in the health sector not supposed to be exemplary in sensitising the general public? At the pharmacy I ask for analgesic, cough syrup, and Co-trimoxazole. I pay, collect my purchases, and step out. Outside, people are walking around as if there is no lockdown. Is everybody hungry, like me? Are they out for the sole purpose of restocking up? Suddenly, I notice the scent of bean cake in the air. I whirl around as I savour the aroma, then, I locate her – the one responsible for this gastronomic provocation. She's about two hundred metres away from me. With a long spoon in hand, she is bent double as she appears to bring out freshly fried bean cake from the frying pan. Four men surround her, arms outstretched, and all eager to be each served their orders first. Neither the woman nor any of her customers is wearing a facemask. I averted my eyes, and allow them to settle on my purchases. I have bought cough expectorant and Septrin not because I have cough. I have not been diagnosed with any respiratory infection, but everyone I know is buying and taking them for prevention. Better to be safe, you know. DIY. This is not the time for hospital visits. Prevention is better than cure. You do not want to wait until you have the symptoms of the virus. You simply self-medicate and do whatever social media directs you to do since you don't even have the chance to crosscheck these with your neighbours. In any case, even if you suspect you might have contracted the virus, what chances do you have of accessing medical care during this time of health emergencies? As we have seen, your chances are close to nothing with many hospitals firmly shutting their doors to the public. So we have become our own doctors and health providers, doing it ourselves. We tell ourselves from the tips circulating in social media that whenever there is a tingling in our throat, it is likely to be coronavirus. Like is often the case, we have devised our local remedies comprising ginger, lemon, and turmeric. We boil and drink with religious seriousness. We also take cough syrup and Septrin. I am clutching my purchases as I make my way to Q MART. I am on the lookout, but still have not seen anyone wearing a facemask.

I am standing in front of one of the two cashiers at the supermarket. I am holding a basket bearing my goods, ready to pay, but I do not have his attention. He is busy trying to sort out complications that I suspect must have arisen when he attended to the last customer. He is close to his female colleague. None of them is wearing a mask. They are so engrossed in their

conversation, with their mouths so close to each other that it appears they are about to share a kiss. I blink several times in revulsion. Social distance, folks! I scream under my breath, but outside, I manage to remain calm. I cast an inquiring glance across the entire supermarket. Not a single individual except me is wearing a mask. I feel odd and awkward now. Something must be wrong with me, or with everyone else. It must have been a situation like this that led traditional society to create the adage: “If you arrive your village fully clothed but meet all your town’s men and women in absolute nakedness, it is in your own interest to remove your clothes, set them on fire, and join your people in nudity.” Are my fellow Lagosians undermining the pandemic? Presently, the cashiers appear to have resolved whatever problem there was, and then one of them turns to me. I pay, he packs my groceries, and I head out the door.

Outside, people are moving in different directions. Again, I observe that the only person sporting a facemask is me. Should I remove mine, and be like everyone else? Am I imagining it? Everyone seems to be staring at me, making fun of my ‘I too know’ syndrome. Do they dislike, or feel pity for me for being too careful? No! I won’t remove my face mask, I resolve stubbornly as I head home. Perhaps, Lagosians have too many problems to be too worried about a pandemic. Perhaps they have no care left in the world. Or, could their seeming nonchalance be due to the strong faith they have in the local remedy?

Let me hurry home to boil my ginger, lemon, and turmeric. Thereafter, I will take the cough syrup and Co-trimoxazole.

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