

**COVID CHRONICLES – RADIO 4’s ‘P.M.’**  
***Springtime Soothes the Plague***

No incoming mortar fire or the earth-shaking boom of not-so-distant explosions; just the symphony of chirpy birdsong and cherry blossom. As I walk down my street, happily laden with supermarket *non*-essentials, I relish the crisp, cleansing breeze across my cheeks. Amidst the martial cacophony of Covid-19 - Boris, Macron, Trump et al trumpeting from the “invisible enemy” playbook – I am safe in my bubble of serenity.

The first day of Spring is a beauty. At this moment, the thought of missing out on a hot yoga class or brunch with old friends doesn’t seem to affect my favourable outlook on the weekend. I spare a fleeting thought for the forgotten Syrians enduring their 10<sup>th</sup> year of ‘real war’ with countless legions of their fellow citizens ‘avoidably’ killed, whilst most of us in so-called Western Democracies have enjoyed decades of peace-time.

During a distant summer holiday of my youth, I was back home in The Gambia, when we all woke up one day to the alien voice of *Revolution* on the radio. This was a *coup*, a term then totally foreign to us chilled folk of “The Smiling Coast”. Thus, began a surreal siege, during which we were quarantined in the house for a week, relieved only by foolhardy forays over the wall to play cards nextdoor.

As a keen, French A-level student at the time, I was reading “*La Peste*” (‘The Plague’) by Albert Camus - usually cited as an allegory of the Nazi occupation of France during the Second World War - and I would extract quotes from that seminal work for my diary entries in those dark days. The novel features a quietly gruesome scene in which our hero, *Docteur Rieux* witnesses the dying convulsions of a lone rat and muses that, “*not all of them would die, but they would all be affected*”\*. I now recall the absurdist outburst of our eccentric, late father – a chest physician then recently retired from the WHO - “*Do they have to make so much noise?*” he cried, while *outside* pruning his beloved bougainvillea with the crack-crack of AK47s ricocheting around our neighbourhood.

Today, my little piece of London is basking in the sunshine – free of the regular rumble of traffic from land or air. I take sweet comfort in the candyfloss blooms against the azure sky, ignoring for several, selfish steps, the wisdom of the weary *Dr. Rieux*, who observed that the plague affords “*no time-off to the afflicted*”\*\*. ...The only, long-term remedy seems to be for us all to care for one another, at all times.



*\*ils ne mouraient pas tous, mais ils seraient tous touchés*

*\*\*Il n’y a pas de congé pour les malades*

**ACRM IV.MMXX**