



Is this it? Speculation on the end of a marriage during the COVID-19 pandemic

By Susan C. Frazier-Kouassi

This cannot be it... this cannot be how the story ends. I keep saying this to myself as the days continue to pass without any change in the situation. The country of France shut down and likewise, the Charles de Gaulle airport closed – no incoming nor outgoing flights. Similarly, the country of Ivory Coast (where my husband is now) closed its borders. The flight itinerary from Abidjan, Ivory Coast back to the USA routes through Paris. My husband of 37 years is stuck in Ivory Coast. There are no visible means for him to leave the country or for me to join him there. The COVID-19 pandemic has rendered most routes of international traffic impossible. I wonder, even though I will my mind NOT to go there... is this it? Is this the end of my marriage, ending not by separation or divorce, but by an invisible virus that has shut down entire countries across the globe. This feeling is unfamiliar to me. My spouse and I have lived in separate countries before, pursuing divergent career paths.... but always be assured that we were only a flight away from each other. This feeling is foreign to me. I wonder if this is what it feels like when your loved one is off to fight in a war, you cannot reach them nor they reach you, no matter how much you want that fact to be untrue.

In the early years of marriage, we became accustomed to the possibility of not seeing each for an extended block of time: he was finishing his Ph.D.; I was starting mine while simultaneously living in two different cities across the country. However, today in 2020, we can no longer count on the virtue and vitality of youth. We have aged, we are grandparents now, and we have our share of ailments, surgeries, and medications that make up our daily routine. The vision for our life and future together is now blurred... time is not on our side. The COVID-19 pandemic in its unpredictability has cast a frightening shadow of doubt on the survival of our marriage. Will we be able to be together to support each other in case one of us is stricken with the virus? Our sole means of communication was virtual – WhatsApp, Portal, and/or email, which were important means of communicating, yet, lacked the ability to really connect. The idea that my husband could be alone in another country sick or I could be here alone is a thought that I want so badly to vanish from my mind. However, it sneaks in every chance it gets. I want to stay positive; I want to have hope... but these days, as they drag on, our future together foggy was evolving into a sense of unfathomable uncertainty.

Imagine you live in a country that has closed its borders to the rest of the world; it has also shut down its access to the rest of the world and has closed itself upon itself. Imagine in this country, the resources and infrastructure to serve the medical needs of those who become infected with the COVID-19 virus are severely limited. I am not talking about the United States, where N-95 masks are in short supply to the overly

stretched frontline medical staff while at the same time a number of citizens are storming the doors of their capital protesting their right not to wear a face mask or their right to get a haircut. No, I am talking about an African country, like Ivory Coast, where the term “under-resourced” is in itself an understatement. I am talking about poor (often immigrant) women who have to sell their goods in an open market daily to be able to feed their families. I am talking about schools and universities closing its doors, meanwhile many individuals and families do not have the necessary tools to learn online (as many American students possess when their learning quickly converted to an online portal). Many families in countries like the Ivory Coast do not have computers at home, access to the internet, and at times even constant electricity. Maintaining a social distance of six feet is a joke when you live in households where numerous adults and children share a small space not only in the home but also in the surrounding neighborhood or compound.

This was my daily confrontation of truth... my husband was trapped in a country where the arrival of this new COVID-19 pandemic had the potential and power to spread like fire in a parched, dry land. This COVID-19 virus is intent on destroying anyone that has the misfortune to cross its path. Recognizing that there was nothing I could do within my finite humanness, nothing any of the governments involved could do, and nothing my husband could do to change that reality was a humbling revelation. However, it was this very revelation that brought a renewed spirit of faith, of hope, and of prayer, that

strengthened my belief that I would someday soon see my husband again face-to-face.
This was it, plain and simple – faith.

“Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. Matthew 17:20”.

