



Apocalypse then and now! – Political and religious interpretations of tribulations in apocalyptic mind-sets

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.10217>

Abstract

The article has three parts. Firstly, we give an overview on how the Greek-Hellenistic imperialism provoked apocalypticism as a way of resistance to colonization (e.g. Egypt and Judah). Secondly, we show how the early African apocalypticism is very similar to that of the Ancient Near East. In many African countries, colonization was perceived as an apocalyptic phenomenon. Within this mind-set, apocalypticism became an information system that speculated about the true nature of time, space and being. This information system also gave solutions to how the coming destruction could be ameliorated by human ingenuity and actions. This ideology informed liberation movements like the Chimurenga and others. Thirdly, we analyse how the anti-imperial apocalypticism was calmed by an imperially formatted Christianity. Elements like the belief in heaven created a naïve world-denying attitude: 'this world is not my home I am just passing through.' Within the African apocalyptic mind-set, COVID-19 is an ambivalent phenomenon. Initially, it was perceived as God's judgment on the ungodly West, but perceptions quickly changed as it later ravaged Africa. Many government officials voiced that COVID-19 is a well-promoted hoax by fake news of prominent western media houses. Some dismissed the existence of the pandemic while others declared that the vaccine is the dreaded 666 mark of 'the beast' or the protective masks were blamed the masks of 'the beast'. COVID-19 apocalypticism thus can be understood as an anti-modern, xenophobic way of constructing identity.

Keywords: Ancient Egypt, Apocalypticism, Bible in Africa, COVID-19, Early Judaism, New Testament.

Introduction

While the recent COVID-19 pandemic is tantalizing global humanity, one can see very different answers to this challenge. There are merely technical, scientific and/or administrative responses given by governments (China, Russia, Europe, now also USA) which ideological backgrounds differ a lot – ranging from dictatorial administration to libertarian politics of 'offering' medical help. However, science-oriented crisis management is only one aspect of dealing with the perils of a pandemic. The other side of the coin is how human beings (government officials as well as normal people) try to cope with the sudden changes prompted by the disease. As humans are not only interested in just to survive but also tend to live in a fuller sense, it cannot be a surprise if spiritual, religious and cultural strategies will be used to integrate the pandemic crisis into the framework of thinking, feeling, believing, and acting. Usually, humans cannot leave dramatic changes of life without any interpretation; things have to make sense in one way or the other. This sense building is a constructive work of interpretation done by individuals, cultural and religious groups, and societies. It happens in conversations between family members and neighbours as well as in TV shows, literature, songs, public speeches, Twitter posts, and many media more. This article tries to analyse the apocalyptic way of this sense-making work and follows the line from Antiquity to African



Christianity of today. Of course, the character of the sources is different in the epochs we are treating. While in ancient times we have literature, which was produced by and for the small group of literate persons, the sources in later times sometimes are less formal, meant for a broader audience. Modern mass media may influence a higher number of people in a much shorter time than in times before. The number is of producers and receivers is high and we can thus give only some samples for recent apocalyptic sense building of the pandemic.

1. Ancient apocalypticism as a reaction to Hellenistic imperialism

The termini technici 'apocalypse' and 'apocalypticism' derive from the Greek word for 'revelation, disclosure of truth, manifestation' (ἀποκάλυψις). The fact that we still use Greek-based words in fact makes good sense as Hellenistic culture plays a major role in bringing apocalypticism into existence.

'Apocalypse'¹ originally is used for texts about how a visionary/ prophet receives insight into divine/ heavenly truth. This truth is veiled to others but unveiled to the seer by God/ angels/ the spirit. Unveiling/ revelation is necessary for the audience of the text as otherwise they would not be able to understand the true meaning of what is going on in the world.

'Apocalypticism, as the background of such texts, means a specific, negative worldview (cf. Koch, 1972; Hanson, 1979). The world is in chaos, there is no fair order, no justice; everything and everybody is under the rule of sin and chaos. Those who do not want to lose their faith and fall in desperation must understand what is the deeper meaning of all the chaos and trouble? Why do all these bad things happen? What is the divine plan behind all this? Is there a purpose, a meaning? – These are typical questions which apocalypticism tries to answer via apocalyptic texts.

The idealtypisch concept of history in apocalypticism

- In the beginning/ in former times the world was in proper order, according to the divine will. Heaven and earth, nature and humans, humanity and God/ the gods are living in perfect harmony.
- Then, something happens that destroys this harmony and throws the creation out of its well-balanced order. From then on death, evil and injustice take over and control the world. This epoch can be seen as long or short, can be seen as a uniformed era or have different stages of development. Often apocalyptic texts expect and orgiastic climax of evil towards the end of history. The final battle between good and evil is horrible.
- Finally, a radical turn is expected, caused by the triumph of the divine good; a new era of harmony begins. The old world of sin and evil is destructed to set up justice, freedom and a good life for all. This dramatic turn often is connected with the idea of a final judgement where sin and evil are punished and the good ones are rewarded to re-establish justice, bitterly missed for so long. Final judgement and the new world order can be linked with the activity of a royal figure (good king, messiah, son of man, son of god, judge) who acts in the name of god/the gods. The connection between the new world and such a redemptive agent of the divine derives from the monarchic tradition in so many cultures which cannot think of a good world-order without a good ruler.

¹ The Challenge towards defining *Apocalypse* was first raised by Klaus Koch in the 1970s, who then attempted classification and categorizing between *Apocalypse* as a generic designation and *apocalypse/apocalyptic* as a literally type and as a Historic movement (cf. Koch (1972). Paul Hanson took up the challenge and succinctly fulfilled the clarion call of Koch. Hanson classified designated *Apocalypse* as a literary genre, then *Apocalypticism* as a worldview and then *Apocalyptic eschatologies* as distinct literary compositions (cf. Hanson 1979). Throughout this article we understand apocalypticism as a worldview. We highlight its negative aspects conceptualized by those who see themselves as the weak and socially disfranchised.



The conditions under which apocalypticism originates

People who are seeing themselves as the losers/victims of the status quo although they are the good ones usually develop this negative world-view. Therefore, the status quo must be unfair and cannot be the realisation of the divine order. These people can no longer believe that the existing order on earth is the proper representation of the divine order who punishes evil and rewards the good in justice. Typically, apocalyptic times are times of colonisation, alienation, and repression – culturally, religiously and economically. For example, the indigenous elite of ancient Egypt starts producing apocalyptic texts under Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman domination. As a state without king is unthinkable as the king is the central link between the world of the gods and that of the humans. Only the king can guarantee the harmony between these two worlds and between humanity and the cosmos. Without a king, there is nothing that can give sense and meaning to human life. That is why it was necessary to integrate the foreign rulers into the traditional framework of religion, culture, and politics. Yet it was clear that they were foreign oppressors, enemies of the gods that actually did not fit into the role of divine kingdom. Their rule does not make sense, neither to Egyptian religion nor to individual life. The rule of foreigners is violating cultural identity.

This critical scepticism results not only in repeated acts of rebellion but is obvious also, where the local elite is cooperating with the strangers. For example, in many temples of the Hellenistic period inscriptions do no longer mention the name of the ruling king. Instead, the royal cartouches are filled with the title “Pharaoh” (*per-a’a* = Great House/ Palace) or were even left empty. The façade of the Horus temple at Edfu shows the dilemma: on one hand the king, Ptolemy XII. is depicted in the traditional pose of defeating the enemies of the gods, while on the other hand the hieroglyphic texts lists the Greek and many other nations to identify these enemies. Thus, the Greek king, so to say, defeats himself – what a bitter sarcasm in this clandestine critique of the king publicly displayed on a royal monument! In Early Judaism it is also the experience of being colonised, suppressed under foreign rule, which fires the production of apocalyptic thinking and writing. After the Babylonian exile, Israel/Judah permanently stood under the rule of foreign powers, firstly the Persian, then the Hellenistic-Egyptian, then the Hellenistic-Syrian and finally the Roman. Major parts of the local elites saw this whole period as a permanent threat to religious and cultural identity. Fighting this danger, they produced a high number of apocalyptic texts. One can say that between ca. 300 BCE and the time of the evangelists, apocalypticism is the most important mind-set if not the Jewish mainstream, even. John the Baptist, Jesus and early Christianity share into the world-view of Jewish apocalypticism.

The apocalyptic texts of resistance

Apocalypses, produced by Egyptians and Jewish authors expect a good king according to the monarchic tradition and to what was seen as the divine, good, and fair world-order. In Egypt (cf. Assmann, 1996: 418-430) the Demotic Chronicle (300-150 BCE) expresses the hope for expelling the foreign rulers, seen as agents of chaotic powers, and the reestablishment of a truly Egyptian kingdom based on *ma’at*, the divine cosmic order. Stressing traditional ideals of order and justice, the text intends to stabilise the threatened identity of the indigenous elite and to preserve their traditional claim for a ruling role in society (cf. Kügler, 1994). The Potter’s Oracle, dating from around 150 BCE, tells about a potter (= the creator god Khnum?) receiving a message of doom. A catastrophic future is ahead, an evil king will found a new city (=Alexandria) and will introduce a new god (Sarapis). These sacrilegious acts will have awful consequences that affect human life as well as natural and cosmic order.



The river will flow without enough water, with insufficient, so that the land ... will be inflamed, but against nature. For in the time of the Typhonians² they will say: 'Wretched Egypt, you are wronged by terrible iniquities wrought against you.'

The sun³ will be darkened, not wishing to look upon the evil things in Egypt. The land will not welcome the sowing of the seed. These ... will be blasted by the wind. And the farmer did not sow on account of this, but tribute will be required of him. They are fighting in Egypt because of the lack of nourishment. What they till, another reaps and takes away. [...] In this generation, there will be war and murder, which will destroy brothers, and husbands and wives. [...] Friends will murder friends. There will be weeping and their ills will be worse than those of the others. And men will perish at each other's hands. [...] Much death will fall upon pregnant women.

(cf. www.attalus.org/egypt/potters_oracle.html)

However, an end of disaster is in sight. The unjust and unnatural rule of the godless foreigners will come to an end. A new, golden age will start and Egypt – human society together with nature – will return to normal life under the good reign of the perfect king who truly is the son of Ra:

And then Egypt will increase, when for fifty-five years he who is well disposed, the king the dispenser of good, born of the Sun⁴, established by the great goddess Isis, is at hand, so that those surviving will pray for the resurrection of those who died before, in order that they might share in the good things. At the end of these things, trees will bear leaves and the forsaken Nile will be filled with water, and the winter having been stripped of its natural dress, will run its own cycle. And then the summer will take its own course, and the winds shall be well-ordered and gently diminished.

(cf. www.attalus.org/egypt/potters_oracle.html)

When we come to Early Jewish apocalypticism, the Book of Daniel is of high importance. In Dan 7:13 we find, for the first time, the mentioning of a "son of man". At first, the term "son of man" is not a title but simply the description of the person who is acting as final and highest judge. However, later texts more and more use the term as a title for the divine agent of the Last Judgement. Among the extra-biblical apocalypses one can mention the Books of Enoch, the Psalms of Solomon and many more. Within the New Testament, we find apocalyptic patterns in the synoptic Jesus tradition (e.g. Mark 13:8-27), with Paul (e.g. 1.Thess. 4:16-17), the Fourth Gospel (e.g. John 5:28-29), and last but not least the Revelation of John, which is completely written in the literary form of an apocalypse.

2. African apocalypticism compared with that of the Ancient Near East

The basic apocalyptic makeup in Africa is like that of the Ancient Near East. Although each society established its apocalypticism by incorporating borrowed nuances into local components, the basic similarity to ancient times is the fact that apocalypticism is a resisting reaction to colonialism. African apocalypticism also contains peculiar elements. For example, the Shona have different elements of time, space, and being. There is the land of the living, the land of the living dead, the land of the living dead awaiting to join the ancestors. Being is also peculiar, and it is not obliterated in death. The dead are alive as the living and they must be restored to their family after a year through the *kurova Guva* ceremony (Mwandayi, 2011: 114). Within the interregnum of the already dead but not yet an ancestor, one has to be

² Typhon refers to the god Seth. While originally Seth was the divine counterpart, competitor and opponent to Horus, in the Ptolemaic period Egyptians attributed to him the role of a diabolic anti-god. Thus, labelling the Greek as "Typhonians" characterises them as agents of the diabolic evil.

³ The sun is the incorporation of the highest god Ra, symbol and motor of cyclical cosmic order.

⁴ As the Egyptian word *msj* as well as the Greek *γεννάω* make no difference between the fatherly begetting and the motherly giving birth, „born of the Sun“ characterises the coming king as „son of Ra“, god-king according to the dogma of indigenous Egyptian tradition.



transmigrated into a sacred bull before attaining a living dead ancestor status. Early socialisation and interaction with other religions like Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, African apocalypticism remained resolute as it was altered and improved to make more sense. The ambivalent new normalisation that emerged with colonisation was exacerbated by long-held radical apocalypticism characterised by violent resistance. Out of these profligate worldviews, indigenous prophets uttered apocalyptic oracles about future colonisation. Within the African apocalyptic thinking, colonisation was considered as an apocalyptic event, a harbinger of the extermination of cultural traditions, norms and values. Colonisation was considered a deadly phenomenon that would annihilate pillars of life. It would inverse the power structures, and those with access to power would be powerless. The eschatological community would fall under severe deprivation, disfranchised of dignity and become a group of incarcerated victims in the whirlpool of socio-economic and religion-political crises.

Apocalyptic movements also heralded colonisation as a divine punishment for the proliferation of evil, digression from cultural norms and values. In Zimbabwe, Chaminuka's prophecy about the coming of the white people symbolised as (*Vasina mabvi*) the people whose dressing covers the knees is a case in point. Within this mind-set, apocalypticism became an information system that speculated on the true nature of time, space and being. The information systems from the indigenous apocalyptic worldview gave warnings to the dire threat to life, culture and gave solutions to how the coming destruction could be ameliorated by human ingenuity and actions. This ideology formulated liberation movements like the Mau-Mau, the Maji-Maji, and the Chimurenga. These resistance movements incorporated thoroughgoing characteristic of apocalypticism like the last judgement, eschatology, dualism, symbolism, and many more.

Sub-Sahara Africans interacted with foreigners from international communities. The long-established trade relations with China, India, and others introduced African communities to different cultures and religions. However, the hegemonic agenda of colonisation caused rejection (Gundani, 2019). The new normal, which was coupled with the colonial ideology, demanded new forms of interaction of dominance or resistance. This drive to usurp means of production by conquest and introduction of new identities was utterly rejected. Within the colonisation process, the new realities and ideologies inspired liberation movements that were apocalyptic in the strictest sense. While there was an ambivalent fascination with Western advanced gadgets and easier ways of doing things, colonisers demeanour was altogether strange, dubious and needed resistance. In general, Africans were divided on how much of Western ways could be accommodated. This dilemma is beautifully highlighted by Chinua Achebe's lament in his novel 'Things fall Apart'.

It is already too late, said Obierika sadly. Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion, and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the white men in Umuofia, we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power? [...] We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together, and we have fallen apart. (Achebe 1962)

The colonial agenda became more deliberate and fiercer. African gods like Mwari, the Shona god, were colonised and transformed to a redacted biblical/ Christian God properly understood through the spectacle of the colonial master.⁵ The crisis of religio-political and socio-economic hegemony invoked radical, violent resistance movements, which were inspired by long-held apocalypticism. In Zimbabwe, locals on the morning of colonisation witnessed new realities. Land, a sensitive inheritance – belonging to Mwari and administered by the ancestors through the hand of the kings and mediums, was for the first time privatised and distributed by

⁵ One should always keep in mind that missionaries and colonisers not simple brought *the* Christian religion to Africa. What they brought was the peculiar 19th-century, Victorian interpretation of Christianity with all their bias towards patriarchy, imperialism, prudery and stuffiness.



foreigners among themselves. Worse still, this happened without paying regard to traditional customs or respect for the sacred sites. Mass displacement and looting of cattle added injury to insult. The outbreak of drought and the rinderpest disease were interpreted as signs of doom, an apocalyptic omen of an angry god enraged by the whites.

In mitigating new realities and power struggles, new counter methodologies of survival were activated. In Kenya, the land was a significant problem, as was in Zimbabwe and Namibia; treatment of locals with hostility and contempt, mistreatment and oppression evoked apocalyptic ideologies expressed in combative messianic and apocalyptic language (cf. Worsley, 1957). In respect of all Mau-Mau oath ceremonies, the tendency has been to do things, which are in direct contradiction to established Kikuyu law and custom (Branch, 2009: 28). The overarching response by the British colonialist to resistance movements highlighted that 'Africans were under an apocalyptic myth [...] they were experiencing a crisis of modernity, or a psychological retreat into the primitive past brought on by an inability to cope with the rapidly advancing pace of modern world' (Leman, 2020: 3). It was on this thinking, that laws were passed; suspects were detained, tortured and killed.

Further counter-cultural narratives and new strategies in response to colonial laws constructed new realities. In the thick of the conflict, new beliefs were conscripted. The Mau-Mau revised traditional belief systems conscripting new messianic ideologies. Within the Maji-Maji, one introduced new mystical and apocalyptic motifs of armed struggle combined with messianic myths. Spirit mediums directed strategic operations and claimed that magical drinks would turn bullets into water. In Zimbabwe, at the battle of Mbembesi in 1893 when the Imbizo, Ihlathi and Isiziba regiments fell victims to the power of the maxim gun. They believed that their animal hides could withstand the bullets; they shouted to each other, '*Vala Ngebhetshu*', as they charged to their demise.

The colonisation process its counter-resistance left a trail of apocalyptic terror and trauma, making after-colonial Africa a post-apocalyptic Africa. In Zimbabwe, it enacted the four agents of apocalyptic terrors of war, conquest, famine and death featured in the four horsemen of the apocalypse. The same can be said of Kenya and Tanzania, where it left footprints of blood, terror and trauma. In Namibia, German colonisation also left dark genocidal memories of the total annihilation of the Namaqua and Herero tribes. Within the Mau-Mau uprising, the brutal severe deprivation administered by the colonial government inspired open revolt. The highly organised resistance tactics utilised by the Mau-Mau resemble what we find in the Jewish war scroll from Qumran. Adding to the traumatic loss of land by the Kikuyu people, inhuman atrocities, decapitation, castration, and torture before death, persecution by being forced into a sack and thrown to drown in wells, plucking of eyes, mutilation, ripping apart the stomachs of pregnant women, and raping with glass bottles became the order of the day. Harsh conditions within the detention camps dubbed 'British Gulags' escorted violence, sickness and hunger.

In Tanzania, the socio-economic and religio-political crisis incited the Maji-Maji uprising, which was responded to by severe deprivation and despondence caused by heavy taxation, loss of fertile land, raping of women and displacement of thousands of people and executions. The carnage, which was experienced soon after the Maji-Maji uprising, was also experienced in Namibia, especially in the genocide of the Herero and Namaqua tribes. After his victory against the natives at Waterberg, German general Lothar von Trotha gave an extermination order (*Vernichtungsbefehl* also known as *Schießbefehl*):

The Herero are no longer German subjects [and] must now leave the country. If it refuses, I shall compel it to do so with the [great cannon]. Any Herero found inside the German frontier, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I shall spare neither women nor children. Such are my words to the Herero people (BArch, 1904: 7).



After this order, German colonial troops⁶ descended and burned alive the old people and crippled those left behind in escape. They followed in hot pursuit towards the retreating, defeated Herero and Namaqua into the wasteland and waterless Omaheke desert, killing the injured and exhausted men, women and children. The majority was left to die of hunger and starvation. Those who survived the extermination order were rounded up and put into concentration camps (*Konzentrationslager*) – an instrument of colonising introduced by the British in South Africa. Within the camps, survivors became slaves. 60-80% of the Herero tribe and 50% of the Namaqua population died from hunger, exposure, torture, and relocation. The rest of the two tribes was closed in the desert. The colonial troops further poisoned the few wells in the desert, killing thousands already starving. One also implemented steps to racially segregate Africans and Germans. Paul Rohrbach, Germany's Settlement Commissary (*Ansiedlungskommissar*), articulated the specific intentions behind racial segregation (*Rassentrennung*):

Our task is to divest [the Herero and Namaqua]... of their specific ethnic and national characteristics and gradually meld them with the other natives into a single coloured workforce. [...] This is to be a society based on work. (Rohrbach, 1907: 21).

In South Africa, the Sharpeville massacre, apartheid, imprisonment and the murder of Steve Biko, among many other atrocities more, led Allan Boesak to conclude that the situation of South Africa's majority during the apartheid era resembled that of Christians under Nero (Boesak, 1987: 36). Within the Shona uprising, strategies were loaded with apocalyptic nuances comprising symbolic language and coded war council briefings packaged as snuff trade or consultations on finding solutions to the grasshoppers (Ranger, 1967: 81-225). This well-organised resistance, however, was met with savage brutality from the settler government, resulting in scores of indigenous population being subjected to barbaric mass murder, a majority of them being women and children (Ranger, 1967: 268-310). While the number of casualties cannot be ascertained, it is known that Africans were mercilessly butchered without any consideration of morality. The leading figures of resistance were slaughtered. Caves full of people were blasted with dynamite until the last pockets of resistance were utterly crushed. The suppression was an unusually brutal process, even by the standards prevailing during the 'Scramble' (Palmer, 1977: 268-310; cf. Vengeyi, 2013: 202).

Terror and trauma characterising colonisation were accompanied by an ideological shift that altered the conceptualisation of realities. Africans were confronted with the reality of traditional religions' shortcomings and realities about new forms of understanding the divine, time-space and being. Within altered realities, Christianity is found wanting, firstly guilty of being a forerunner of colonisation and then secondly as paralysing pacifier to the wounded memories of the brutalities of colonisation. Herein Christianity became the preface and the epilogue of colonisation.

3. After-colonial African apocalypticism and COVID-19

In many African countries, Christianity quickly infiltrated indigenous apocalyptic thinking – a religious epilogue to the success of colonisation. Victimised by colonial powers, the African worldview revised and reviewed concepts of time, space and being, conscripting them in the wake of a new enemy which demanded new ideologies and concepts of reality. The land (space) issue, which had brought many African countries to revolt, was altered into new realities. There was a new space, the realm of God trickled into the collective perceptions. As the colonial masters amassed fertile land, Africans were banished to barren lands, but with a new reality of heaven, a world beyond the sky, where there is no suffering. They had to stay in

⁶ From the perspective of the colonised it is a bitter sarcasm that these troops were called 'protection troops' (*Schutztruppe*). The term, however, is perfectly right in the colonisers' view: the *Schutztruppe* was protecting the interests of the German *Kaiserreich*.



the infertile lands because soon, the world of suffering would one day pass. On that day, the Shona would be reconciled not to their ancestors but to Mwari, the creator of humankind whom their very ancestors worshipped. Biblical texts like John 14:1-3, motifs like 'this world is not our home we are just passing through' and that those who truly loved God are 'strangers and pilgrims in the land' (Hebrews 11:13). More so, those who believed should be in a perpetual state of seeking a city where God was the builder maker (Hebrews 11:10).

Colonial faith abused early Christian apocalypticism by conscripting its cathartic aspects to calm nerves wrecked by colonial violence and traumatising atrocities. Intertwined to new realities of space was the altered realities of the time. Time became unidirectional, linear and finite, with history coming to a cataclysmic halt. The intersection of time and space converging within the cosmic conflict between good and evil. Old realities of being (human existence) were transformed, the tendency of being stubbornly earthbound was transformed to another extreme of being stubbornly heaven bound. Wealth was encouraged to be stored in heaven where there is no moth and dust (Matthew 6:19-20). Saints and biblical patriarchs replaced ancestors and evil was embodied by Satan. Heavenly beings like angels became a new phenomenon. The world known to be under the control of ancestors on behalf of Mwari was transformed into a world under the threat of sinister forces. Ancestors, spirit mediums and diviners became agents of satanic powers. This notion now has cascaded to world leaders, especially western leaders and elites who have inherited the sway of evil, focused on an agenda to annihilate humanity.

The colonial interpretation of Christianity diluted the violent African apocalypticism by turning it into a more docile non-active resistance: resentment. However, this resentful worldview turned against its fathers. Apocalyptic resentment in after-colonial Africa interprets feminism, changing gender roles, LGBTQ-activism, Tsunamis, the 09/11 attacks, the current migration crisis, wars, socio-economic problems, and political changes as apocalyptic signs of doom. Western countries are perceived as the dark destructive power who manufactures satanic tools of destruction like AIDS and Ebola. Within the inherited African apocalyptic mind-set, COVID-19 is an ambivalent phenomenon falling into a pedigree of other preceding pandemics like AIDS and Ebola.

Responses to the COVID-19 within this matrix of apocalyptic mind-set sustains the anti-modern harboured perceptions. A further onslaught on humanity as AIDS. Only this time, God has protected Africa from severe COVID-19 casualties. Initially, government officials voiced that COVID-19 is a well-promoted hoax by fake news of prominent western media houses. The late president of Tanzania, John Magufuli, dismissed its actual existence⁷ (Nakkazi, 2020). At the height of COVID-19 in Western countries, the Zimbabwean Minister of defence Oppah Muchinguri highlighted that COVID-19, 'which has left thousands dead across the globe, is sanctions against the countries that have imposed sanctions on us Zimbabwe (Shumba, 2020). God is punishing them now, and they are staying indoors now while their economy is screaming like what they did to ours by imposing sanctions on us' (Fedschun, 2020)⁸.

Unscientific beliefs – like those of the Maji Maji in former times – comforted some Africans saying that because of melanin, black people could not be affected by COVID-19. As, however, the pandemic started ravaging Africa and Afro-Americans, perceptions quickly shifted from denial to acceptance. The new realities redirected the attacks on new aims. There was an uproar after some Western doctors suggested COVID-19 vaccines to be tested in Africa. Now, vaccines were seen as racist weapons to kill Africans. The chief justice of South Africa, Mogoeng Mogoeng, echoed prophets like Emmanuel Makandiwa⁹, who declared that the COVID vaccines are the dreaded '666 mark of the beast'. Getting a vaccine shot was perceived as receiving the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:16).

⁷ Cf. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52966016>

⁸ Cf. <https://video.foxnews.com/v/6142002207001> and Shumba (2020) for the analysis.

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/11/south-africa-chief-justice-unrepentant-link-vaccines-satanism-coronavirus>



Other conspiracy theories promoted blamed the 5G technology (Jolley, 2020), and declared the protective facemask to be the 'mask of the beast'¹⁰ The banning from entering supermarkets or public places without a mask is seen as the fulfilment of 'no-one shall be able to sell or buy without the mark of the beast' (Revelation 13:7). Plans of having a vaccine certificate for international travel were interpreted as opening a way for the new (satanic) world order. Since world leaders are agents of dark forces controlling the world, the whole pandemic and its vaccines are seen as belonging to the grand scheme of things. The new hybrid apocalyptic worldview, which incorporates indigenous apocalyptic thinking and borrowed Judeo-Christian apocalypticism, transfix many Africans into an apocalyptic appetite that interprets the zeitgeist through apocalyptic glasses. The technological revolution, socio-economic upheaval, and secularism, which corrodes the way of life, are all harbingers of the world's ultimate destruction. Within the contemporary African worldview, the Apocalypse is NOW.

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¹⁰ <https://www.truthorfiction.com/mask-of-the-beast/>



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