Traveling Orality, Digital Media and Narrative Mobilities on Facebook

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Abstract

Many oral genres of communication such as riddles, folktales, epics, songs, chants, legends, myths and proverbs have increasingly negotiated their existence away from their essential oral derivations to other alternative communication modes. However, these negotiations and transitions have been largely overlooked in scholarly research. With the ubiquity of digital media today, these oral forms live an autonomous, privileged existence on digital platforms on which they freely and virtually travel. New media platforms like Facebook, blogs, Twitter, You Tube, Instagram, etc. have provided veritable virtual cartographies where these oral media enact their communicative energies in a world of digimodern (digital modernity) possibilities. In this paper, therefore, my governing concern is to navigate these oral traditional modes of social media/communication and their travelling habits on the digital ecosystem. As part of the process to achieve self-perpetuation, I argue that these oral forms transcend their essentialised oral provenance to assume alternative modes of existence. One of the tactics for transcending is to migrate from their oral habitus to digital environments that guarantee them the lineaments and investments of a lived digimodern life. By travelling through digital spaces, they undergo the transformative process from the protocols of orality to digimodernity which impose on them a more assured, dynamic and enlarged existence through digital memories or archives. This strategy of self-renewal helps the oral media modes to navigate new modes of experience and to situate themselves within the fabrics of digital existence which assure them a foothold beyond the precariousness of human memory or primary orality. This in itself inaugurates a unique transition from primary to secondary and tertiary orality. The focus in this paper will be on folktales as veritable means

of cultural media and communication. It is my intention to demonstrate how folktales get produced, reproduced, transmitted, received and consumed on the internet via Facebook and the impact this has on narrative mobilities and cultures.

Key words: *Oralty, Digital Media, Facebook, Virtual Travel*

Introduction

Scholars have for long expressed apprehension about the resilience and tenacity of the oral/spoken word in relation to the written tradition or print culture. This enduring apprehension is fed by the fact that the oral word is significantly more ephemeral and so its longevity and continuity cannot be relied upon like the written/printed word. Traditional or folkloric forms of media and communication which thrive on the oral word have as such suffered from this charge of transience or incapacity of permanence. This is largely due to loss of memory or the death of individual practitioners as oral forms were not codified in pre-industrial societies. Oral forms such as folktales, proverbs, riddles, epics, myths, legends, songs, etc. have suffered the unenviable and uncertain fate of vanishing aspects of verbal intellection without an assured future. This is largely because of the frailty of human memory which is strategic to the preservation of folklore. Against this backdrop, oral creations have been considered generally "as beneath serious scholarly attention" (Ong 2002, 8).

Consequent upon this, some scholars have constructed artificial hierarchies between the oral and written traditions to foreground the fundamental lack of the former. In this hierarchical system, orality is associated with a pre-scientific, pre-industrial existence while writing has been adjudged as belonging to modernity (Havelock 1991, 11). Orality is consigned to the fringes or margins of culture and civilisation while writing occupies a central place in the order of modernity. Writing becomes synonymous with culture while orality remains monumentalised in the eaves of pre-history. This perspective stubbornly insists that orality and writing are mutually exclusive. In other words, the two do not share any commonalities or possess similar properties of language as the science of signs (Chinweizu et al 1980, 24). The bias against orality or folklore fails

to appreciate the fact that orality actually antedated a print culture or written tradition. Human memory, no doubt, can be fragile and fleeting and so frequently at risk because the durability of memory work cannot be guaranteed due to "the limits of human memory" (Rubin 1995, 7). However, it can be argued that archival documents are also likely to suffer a similar fate. They may, and quite often, disappear in raging flames and natural disasters such as floods, violent winds as well as man-made catastrophes like wars and conflicts. Thus, though print and scribal cultures are more durable as they can be stored in retrievable systems that are frozen and recoverable, they are as vulnerable as oral forms that are received, preserved and transmitted through memory archives.

 Digital archives themselves, though equally vulnerable, hold the greatest assurance for preservation and durability. This is why the transition from oral traditions through writing and print technology to digital cultures has incredibly improved and enhanced the fortunes of the oral word in a digimodern dispensation. This is because oral forms have now transcended their essential primary existence as they are increasingly engaged in rites of transition as they traffic their way to digital domains on the internet. Today oral forms cannot be considered as an endangered species quarantined in the prison-house of prehistory. Through the instrumentality and the ample space provided by digital media apparatuses, the oral word or folkloric tradition is alive, active and dynamically enacting its vitality and energies as it participates in the proceedings on digital domains.

Thus, as new publics consume, manipulate and connect with digital archival repositories of linguistic and cultural content, their involvement raises important practical and ethical questions about access, authorship, and permanence (Turin et al 2013, xv). Lately, however, it has become obvious that folkloric elements have found their way in their travelling patterns to the Internet. To appropriate the metaphor of the cat with nine lives, oral or folkloric tradition has survived the onslaught of a scribal tradition and print culture and has inscribed its distinctive identity on the Internet. This act of self-presencing and the protocols which it fosters

underwrite and endow folklore with a unique survivalist instinct which commends itself to scholarly inquiry. In recent times, therefore, this enactment of creative energies and vitality by folklore on the digital ecosystem has been receiving healthy scholarly study. There is growing unanimity of academic opinion that folklore is consistent with writing, print culture and digital technology (Blank 2009, 7). Orality, it has become received knowledge, goes into writing, print and digital technology. These technologies are also co-eval with orality as they mutually reinforce each other. On the other hand, since all knowledge is folk knowledge because it originates from the people, there is the unmistakable and undeniable presence of folklore in domains that may be considered scientific and technological and so far removed from the folkloric. This is what John Dorst calls the "cybernetic imaginary" or "cybernetic ideal" (2016, 127) which represents an enlargement of the disciplinary concerns of folklore beyond its narrow confines to incorporate its active presence and participation in cyberspheres or cyber-cultures.

The cardinal concern of this paper is to negotiate the migratory patterns or narrative mobilities of folktales from their oral provenance in folk cultures through cyberspere. Particular focus is on the social media platform Facebook. The motivation for the research springs from my personal encounter of the presence of folkloric forms on the Internet with specific reference to Facebook. Many Facebook users post folk narratives on their pages that represent a unique travelling pattern of this distinctive folkloric form from its aboriginal oral homeland to the digital sphere suggesting a transitional strain and the adoption of an alternative existence for the folktales.

The questions the paper raises as a result of this development gravitate to the following concerns: how do folktales as narratives navigate their way through the digital ecosystem and how is this migratory pattern executed? In what ways do these narrative mobilities shape the digital spaces they occupy and how do the digital spaces shape the folk narratives? How can the online communities implicated in the transactions involving the folk narratives be constituted as *folks* in the same way they are characterized in oral cultures? What transformations can be distilled from the folk

narratives after they have executed their nomadic passage from orality to the digital world? How do we validly assert that the transition assures the folk narratives an enlarged life and ensures their preservation and permanence that might be lacking in oral contexts?

Orality and the Digital Ecosystem
Among other things, the scholarly interest in folklore in the past has always gravitated to the dangers associated with its precariousness and the assurances of its preservation. However, this obsession is slightly shifting to a new realization in scholarship that folklore is not static but changing with technology and digital innovations. Appropriately, therefore, the attention of scholars has shifted to this fascinating self-assertion and self-affirmation of folklore on the digital media. Folklore with a digital technological genealogy or ancestry is becoming increasingly ubiquitous even though its authentic ancestry can be traced to oral tradition. Trevor Blank observes that with the development of digital media to facilitate communication, folklore has emerged as recognizably on it as it did in the real world and that from the earliest moment of its history folklore has been a central component of the domain (Blank 2012, 2). He further argues that the internet does not diminish the potency of folklore; instead, it acts as a folkloric conduit.

Following Blank, we can argue that, tablets, Facebook, Twitter, and wireless Internet connections are the latest technologies to have become entrenched in modern culture with visible and powerful impact on folkloric expressions. Although traditional scholars have maintained that computer-mediated communication and cyberspace are not congruent with folklore, Blank envisions the digital world as fully capable of generating, transmitting, performing, and archiving vernacular cultures (Blank 2009). For instance, oral forms like folktales were transformed into motion pictures (*The Lion King*), and others now exist on the Internet.
Violetta Krawczyk-Wasilewska also posits that digital folklore transcends even the boundaries of cyberspace and has very real effect on our everyday life in today's interconnected global world. Through digital television series such as Cartoon Network, the everyday lives of

individuals particularly children are significantly impacted by such visual forms of entertainment. Much of the content from these series is generated from folklore. She insists that online and digital cultures are perhaps the most vivid aspects of globalization and that while global multimedia culture may on the one hand endanger traditional folklore, there is no doubt that it creates new folklore as well (Krawczyk-Wasilewska 2017) Also, Alan Dundes observes that folklore has kept pace with developments in the digimodern world through its self-inscription in digital development patterns. According to him, folklore "continues to be alive and well in the modern world, due in part to increased transmission via e-mail and the Internet" (Dundes 2005, 406).

To further strengthen his perspective on the impact of digital technology on folklore, Dundes again insists that "technology isn't stamping out folklore; rather it is becoming a vital factor in the transmission of folklore and it is providing an exciting source of inspiration for the generation of new folklore" (Dundes 1980, 17). This perspective validates the position that folklore is not a dying or withering cultural activity but a dynamic and resilient aspect of cultural production in an increasingly digimodern era. To Bermejo, the World Wide Web has introduced new ways of communicating over the Internet and has facilitated the use of the net. This has led to its popularization and also facilitated and promoted its commercialization (Bermejo 2007, 73). This digital turn has greatly benefited folklore in unimaginable ways as folklore has etched its signature traces on the internet through oral forms like digital television talk shows, cartoon series, video games, song performances, stand-ups, etc. all of which are veritable beneficiaries of the oral word. Russell Frank observes that the inherence of folklore in digital spaces cannot be denied. To him, the interaction between folklore and the internet is authentic and indubitable because there is "so much folklore being produced and transmitted on computers" (Frank 2011, 9). Even though oral tradition (folklore) may not be exactly consistent with Internet technology, John Miles Foley states that they share some kinship in that the Internet through its digital domains provides a space for the existence and thriving of oral tradition (Foley 2012). In enriching the debate, Michael Dylan Foster and

Jeffrey Tolbert through the concept of *folkloresque* challenge and redelineate disciplinary and generic boundaries when they underscore the soulful interaction among folklore, digital media and popular culture and suggest productive new approaches for interpreting folklore, popular culture, literature, film, and contemporary media (Foster and Tolbert 2015). To further underscore the intersection between folk and digital cultures, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett also states that rather than threaten each other, the two cultures are mutually self-sustaining and that mass culture uses folk culture and folk culture mutates in a world of technology (1998, 307). She further notes that "the very technologies that threaten to displace oral traditions are also the instruments for preserving them" (1995, 70). Participatory media, notes Howard, offer "powerful new channels through which the vernacular can express its alterity" (2008, 192).

It is against this important regard that Bruce McClelland argues that the boundary between the actual and the virtual has become blurred (2000, 182). As a result of the interpenetration of folklore with digital media, users of many sorts continue to develop the Internet as a significant medium for the generation, transmission, documentation, and preservation of folklore. Thus, as much as digital media have shaped folklore, folkore has also shaped digital media and the two are locked in symbiotic, dialectical relations. Many folkloric narratives have travelled from their oral origins through digital routes and have found themselves in virtual domains such as digital television talk shows, video games, cartoon animations, films, and on You Tube. An example is Walt Disney's *The Lion King*, a distinctly African epic story that narrates the life of Sundiata, the emperor *of Old Mali in West Africa* which has been turned into a cartoon (Snodgrass 2010, 78). It tells the story of Mari Jata, the Lion King who defeated Sumanguru, the sorcerer king of Susu and restored Malian sovereignty.

The Folk in the Lore and the Lore in the Folk on Facebook
The semantic possibilities of the term *folk* in traditional epistemology applied only to rural, frequently poor and illiterate peasants. Morphologically, therefore, *folk* refers to simple, ordinary people who

usually live their lives in the countryside away from enlightened society. *Lore* means their ordinary circumstances and the ordinary activities they are engaged in. It was closely associated with earthy, bucolic or provincial peoples and environments in the backwaters of modern culture and civilisation. Such peoples were considered as marginal or peripheral and outside the orbit of digital modernity.

Folklore etymologically meant ordinary people doing and saying ordinary things in their ordinary circumstances and situations. This definition was exclusionary, patronising and paternalistic. However, there has been a significant shift in the semantic boundaries of the term in modern hermeneutics. A more modern definition of *folk* is a social group which includes two or more persons with common traits, who express their shared identity through distinctive traditions. The Africanist scholar,

Isidore Okpewho has deplored the politics which structurates the "folk as uneducated, and therefore irrational and unimaginative dwellers of small communities" (1992, 164) and found it to be a misrepresentation of the authentic worth of such peoples and a belittling of the creativity and virtuosity of their artistic and cultural productions. Consistent with the modern perception, folklore can be said to be an artistically heightened form of communication. It is also the expressive body of culture shared by a particular group of people and includes oral traditions such as tales, proverbs and jokes as well as other aspects of the material culture of such a group which may include their dances, rituals and even architecture. From this modern understanding, folklore becomes an omnibus or hybrid term which incorporates the fulfill range of the spoken, sung and acted aspects of a people's culture and tradition as they negotiate their lives and existence in the spatio-temporal continuum. It emphasizes the communalistic as against the individualistic; it is also dynamic and often in a state of flux rather than fixed or frozen.

This expanded social definition of *folk* supports a broader view of the material, i.e. the lore, considered to be *folklore artifacts*. These now include all "things people make with words (verbal lore), things they make with their hands (material lore), and things they make with their actions

(customary lore)" (Wilson 2006, 85). Folklore is no longer circumscribed as being chronologically old or obsolete. It is a living, dynamic act and art. Thus, freezing folklore as an antiquated art form is tantamount to sentencing it into a semantic prison-house which invariably limits its meaning or signifying possibilities particularly in the age of the Internet. Therefore, the idea of the folk has transcended its narrow etymological confines or limits to include people in metropolitan spaces who live their ordinary lives in ordinary situations and circumstances in cities and produce, consume, and circulate their lore in a bid to negotiate the everydayness of their lives and the contradictions they are enmeshed in and the aspirations and expectations they nurse.

Arising from the etymological concerns of folklore, how do we establish that the users of Facebook qualify as the folk in oral traditions? What makes them folks? Can we state categorically that they are ordinary people in ordinary places and ordinary circumstances? Who then are the folk, *cyberfolk* in cyberspace? What makes them different from the traditional folk? What are the conditioning constraints or exigencies that dictate how they carry themselves in an Internet context? It is safe to argue that as long as folklore exists in digital domains, there is a *digifolk* present in cyberspace. This is because folklore is interminably intertwined with the city just like the city is intertwined with folklore.

Many individuals who produce and consume folkloric content in digital spaces have backgrounds rooted in traditional cultures. They, therefore, have a folk consciousness which may not necessarily be "primitive" or earthy but is consistent with folk knowledge and ways of seeing reality. Besides, individuals on the Internet, whatever their backgrounds may be, also constitute a "folk" category which may not be in the traditional sense but by virtue of their interconnectedness and social habits in cyberspace. Thus, many texts produced in the city have a folkloric character as much as those produced in the countryside.

McClelland simplifies folklore by describing it as a communicative behaviour whose primary characteristic does not 'belong' to an individual or group and in the modern context therefore transcends issues of

intellectual property. This implies that it is transmitted spontaneously by word of mouth and face to face, from one individual (or group of individuals) to another under certain conditions, frequently without regard for remuneration or return benefit. As it is transmitted, it often undergoes modification, according to the inclination of the re-transmitter (2000, 184).

Howard touches on the concept of vernacularity in relation to folklore. He observes that norms and forms can be properly termed *vernacular* when they "signal local or 'home born' qualities of a particular human communication" and that vernacularity "can only emerge into meaning by being seen as distinct from the mass, the official, and the institutional". He further maintains that "there is a class of online discourse that is properly termed 'vernacular' because it invokes characteristics that are recognized as distinct from those recognized as 'institutional,'" (Howard 20) adding that while "this conception might frustrate our desires to rigidly locate discrete documents that are amateur or professional, traditional or mass mediated, its flexibility provides the theoretical language necessary for speaking about the inextricably intertwined nature of public and private, personal and commercial, individual and group in the communications that new technologies have made possible" (2008, 194–95).

On his part, Bronner distinguishes between a folk and an elite Internet, with the former characterized by user-generated material and cultural tropes. These include youth-orientation; expressions of the Internet's visual character; the use of initialisms and responsive threads; themes that generate beliefs and narratives related to death, sex, security, and identity; and a tendency toward scatology (13). The folk group is not individualistic. It is community-based and nurtures its lore in community. However, it is important to state that this is not limited to the folk offline or in rural milieu. Even though online communities may be dispersed or scattered in diverse localities, the digital space they occupy provides a veritable virtual avenue where as online communities, they produce and consume and circulate their lore transnationally and globally without any inhibitions. They do so as individuals but also as a community

meaningfully united and productively engaged in the negotiation of their private lives and the articulation of their public concerns as digital citizens (Tsaaior 2016, 6). Folktales, the subject of analytic category in this paper, are a sub-genre of folklore. The folktale or folk story is a narrative usually with a supernatural orientation with details which concern fantasia and exotica. According to Stith Thompson, they are "fictional stories or narratives, oral or written, which are transmitted from generation to generation. They are rich and varied form of culture and are intended to satisfy human yearnings for amusement, entertainment or excitement, information, religious edification, incitement to heroic deeds and for release from the monotony of everyday life (Thompson 3). Its characters comprise human beings, animals, plants and spirits. They together constitute an organic universe. Even when other creatures besides human beings are implicated in its characterology, it is usually with an anthropomorphic consciousness as they are mere metaphoric extensions of humanity.

This distinguishes folktales from other narratives like fables which are composed mainly of animals. In this paper, the framing concern is to discursively engage the folktale with the intent to find out what transformations, if any, that take place when it migrates from its oral habitat and find its way to the digital mode. In what ways does the folktale behave differently on digital media from when it is in oral traditional settings? How is it received and circulated and consumed when it adopts a new homeland on the digital domain? What new traits does it acquire away from its indigenous environment on the digital ecosystem? No one tale is the same even if told by the same raconteur under different contexts and situations. What happens to a folktale on Facebook in terms of versions? Verbal variability, flexibility or fluidity is a norm when tales are told orally (Manovich 2001, 28). How is this flexibility possible on the digital media?

Two folktales will constitute the units of analytic category in this present paper from the many I have collected on Facebook. They were posted on 25 June, 2018 and 15 July respectively on two different Facebook accounts. This is due to spatial constraints and analytical depth. The folktales are

from Nigeria, a land home to a multiplicity of ethnic groups, languages and rich in culture and the tale-telling tradition. They are from the Tiv and Yoruba cultural groups which roughly represent the North and South of Nigeria. The tales have been deliberately chosen because of their aesthetic qualities, narrative fluidity, stylistic sophistication, and thematic gravitations. Also, the world of folktales is integral with human, spiritual, animal and plant characters and the two proverbs mirror this world. In each of the tales, the central theme yields a religious significance which is as a result of the growing tendencies of Pentecostal new religion in Nigeria.

As such, every phenomenon, including folktales, is explained in the light of religion. This in itself brings into focus the intersection between folkways as represented through the folktales and a new ethos which is represented by digital modernity and new religion. However, this does not imply that to every folktale in Nigeria can be ascribed a religious interpretation. In the first folktale, Baby Mosquito was asked by Mother Mosquito to report how his inaugural flight went. She happily responded that it was a great and hilarious adventure and she enjoyed it very very much. Mother Mosquito also asked her to report how human beings reacted to her inaugural flight. With obvious excitement, she told the mother that human beings joyously serenaded her and clapped and clapped and clapped as they were spellbound by her accomplishment. Mother Mosquito was not amused. Rather she wore a straight face which suggested grave worry and an agitated mind. She asked Baby Mosquito:

"What else did human beings do?" Innocently, the baby answered that as they were clapping and clapping and clapping, they were also looking at one another and murmuring some inaudible comments which appeared to be words of commendation for its successful outdoor flight. Mother Mosquito now opened up to her baby and told her in clear, unambiguous language: "Human beings are our enemies, eternal enemies. The enmity did not start today. It did not start yesterday. It did not start day before yesterday. It started since creation. They were not hailing you. They were not serenading you, either. Far from it. They were trying to kill you. The more they clapped and clapped and hailed and hailed and serenaded and

serenaded, the more they wanted to kill you. The earlier you know this the better for you and the chances for you to survive their relentless onslaught on our clan. Do you hear me? Do you hear me?" The folktale ends on a didactic note with a moral extrapolation by the poster. He states with philosophical sagacity: "In life, not all the people who celebrate you are well wishers... So, be careful. PRAYER: O! Lord, deliver me from those who love me in the eyes but plan evil against me in the mind. May the Lord deliver you from them....let me see your Amen." As it is often the case, there are variants of this folktale in other contexts with subtle differences. In some, it is the Father Mosquito that is involved and not the Mother Mosquito. In others, there are two or more Baby Mosquitoes.

However, the very structure of the folktale and its thematic gravitation remain the same namely that the folktale appropriates entomological metaphors to negotiate a distinctively anthropological concern. There is the philosophical issue of appearance and reality implicated in the folktale whereby the world of mosquitoes serves as a metaphoric approximation of the universe of human relations. In the main, the people who appear to be working in your favor and cheering you may actually be plotting against you. In other words, the construction of the face does not always represent the abundance of the mind. The cultural context for this folktale is the Tiv of central Nigeria.

The Tiv are renowned for their oral arts and performances including the Kwagh-Hir which is a composite term for the folktale, riddle and their masquerade and puppet theatre. Tiv folktales, like many indigenous African folktales, refract the cultural grammar of the people and their perception of reality in the world around them. As master storytellers, the Tiv mobilize folktales to negotiate everyday existential realities such as love, goodness, honesty, integrity, greed, jealousy, justice and retribution. The above folktale embeds the powerful lesson children or young people need to learn to grow their wisdom and experience. Even on Facebook, the folktale retains some of the features consistent with it in oral habitats. For instance, the repetitions of certain words such as "clapping" and "serenaded" as well as expressions like "did not start today", "did not start yesterday" and "did not start day before yesterday" are intended to

serve the rhetorical strategy of emphasis so as to bring home in unequivocal language the treachery and murderousness of human beings against mosquitoes and the longevity of the enmity between the two. There is also the pedagogic dimension to its closure. It is also populated with mosquitoes, insects that cause pathological conditions like malaria in human beings and it is quite natural that these insects and human beings are yoked together as eternal enemies in the folktale. This brings out the character of verisimilitude in this folktale as it is true to life and so compels our credulity and suspension of disbelief. However, as the folktale has travelled from its oral milieu to the digital sphere, it has undergone certain transformations.

On Facebook, an individual user makes the post that gives it a distinct authorial identity and signature. This is different from the anonymity and communality which exist in oral contexts and hence the corporate ownership which is attributed and imposed on folktales. This authorial naming expresses the notional identity of the poster as the real owner of the folktale even though it can be argued that the poster has drawn it from the communal pool or corpus of folktales. Also, the response which the post elicited was swift and instantaneous. Within minutes of the post, there were reactions from many different users through likes, comments, pictures, and even shares. One comment posted the picture of a well-fed mosquito full of human blood. It can be argued that this spontaneity in audience reception of folktale performances is also present in oral settings. This is a valid position even though what happens on Facebook is more phenomenal and spectacular. In oral surroundings, the cognitive responses of audiences to performances of folktales are restricted to a particular geography. This may be the family hearth, household or compound, or the village square. If it is in a village setting, it can be reasonable to expect that the audience can be variegated and so some people may carry the folktale in their memories to their households thereby giving it latitude in terms of its geographical spread or dispersal. But this may not be as temporally instantaneous and spatially widespread as one would expect to have on a digital platform. What transpires in digital spaces is that the responses of users to folktales are immediate and

a lot faster as they travel with speed and are much more dispersed. In this folktale, for instance, apart from the 187 likes and 172 comments it instantaneously generated, there were also six shares in a matter of minutes. The travelling pattern and speed of the folktale can only be better imagined. The users who responded through shares constituted veritable nodes and networks through which the narrative mobility of the folktale was significantly enhanced. Through this, it became instantly distributed and consumed over diverse spaces globally as each share resulted in other shares in an ever-expanding and widening virtual territory. On Facebook it may not be possible to record changes in the performer's voice or vocalisations, gestures or paralinguistics, audience responses or reactions – only words (Haring 2013, 5) but this is compensated with the vivacity of responses usually generated from the *digizenship* of online communities through likes, comments and shares that travel vast geographies which cannot be contemplated in oral contexts. Many of the comments are accompanied by visual images like a mosquito, human beings clapping or laughing or standing and watching with keen interest. Others are in the form of emoticons suggesting feelings of laughter, happiness, surprise, excitement, etc. which introduce a new expressive language on digital media which is distinctively visual and spectacular. In the same way, the comments that were produced and *re*produced added value to the signifying possibilities of the folktale in a virtual environment which could not have been possible in a secluded setting composed of a few individuals involved in the performance experience.

 For instance, there were comments which fore-grounded the relative inexperience and innocence of the Baby Mosquito: "The earlier she learns, the better for her"; "Baby Mosquito is new in town"; and "Na die she wan die". The last comment is couched in Pidgin English, a demotic language of convenience popular with Nigerian speakers and used for humorous purposes. The use of Pidgin suggests the possibilities of linguistic experimentation on the part of Facebook users to widen the participatory character of the discourses generated and to endow it with a popular undercurrent. As a language of the folk, Pidgin as used in the comment re-imagines discourse in ways which gesture to the popular and the everyday

and the wider appeal it has among many of its users in Nigeria. Other comments juxtapose the power of experience over youthful exuberance as testified by the dispositions of the Mother Mosquito and Baby Mosquito. Some of the comments in this category include: "The mother knows that human beings are wicked"; "Baby Mosquito should know that all that glitters is not gold"; "Mother Mosquito can tell the difference between clapping and killing"; "What the mother can see sitting, the baby can't see while standing"; and "Mother Mosquito knows it all".

These comments underwrite some fundamental tenets about the participatory temperament of Facebook and other social media platforms. There is always a variety of instantaneous interpretive possibilities to an issue based on the often contestatory and contradictory positionalities individual users bring to bear on a particular discourse. Those comments become permanent and more enduring than in oral contexts where commentaries generated during performances may be easily forgotten. These discursive and hermeneutic centers enrich and refine the production, circulation and consumption of knowledge. Also, the Tiv have a rich corpus of proverbs with which they dress their thoughts in words. Proverbs are oral speech surrogates, and they have been deployed here for felicity and aesthetic purposes to spice and vivify the language of the folktale. Through the deployment of proverbial language, especially through the comments generated, the message of the folktale is more persuasively expressed and rhetorically articulated. Comments like "all that glitters is not gold", and "what the mother can see sitting, the baby can't see while standing" are highly evocative and dramatic and help to amplify the moral of the folktale. Narrative mobilities in the form of folktales on Facebook are interactive, reflexive but are also fundamentally performative as they make available enormous resources for creatively using new technologies which are stylistically artistic, poetic, and rhetorical thereby enabling viewers to fill in the material itself (Hansen 2012, 194).

By their very nature, folktales are narrative commentaries which navigate the human condition with its corpus of existential realities and contradictions and the concomitant moral lessons that attend them. This

applies to folktales in both oral and digital manifestations. However, when a proverb crosses the threshold of orality and inhabits the digital alcove, its morality sometimes shifts in terms of the authorial intentionality and positionality. In this folktale, the Facebook user who posted it seemed to have a religious impetus or spiritual motivation. Clearly, he is pointed and undisguised in the ventilation of this religious persuasion which is evidently Christian in nature.

This is not strange as many users appropriate Facebook and other social media platforms for the purpose of evangelization and religious proselytization and edification. The poster appropriately invites other users who are his friends and the general public who visit his wall to pray against enemies who hide under the façade of cheerleaders and benevolent friends while they harbor hatred and malice against you. The invitation to prayer as a religious rite is instructive as the prayer embeds the message of the folktale and serves the function of a fortress or stronghold against evil conspiracies, fears, anxieties and the malevolence of enemies. In this regard, folk narratives have often been a subject of great interest among folklorists, since they convey societal fears, hopes, expectations, and celebrations (Blank 2012, 13).

The poster is also interested in winning over his friends by asking them to join him in thunderous "Amen" to the prayer. Graphically, attention and emphasis are placed on prayer as it is written in upper case: "PRAYER", a strategy which is made possible by writing on the web. It can be argued that though oral raconteurs are interested in the social and religious value of folktales, they are somewhat different in their religious persuasions and sympathies as to openly canvass for prayer as it has happened in this folktale on Facebook. Thus, the invitation to prayer and the repetition of "Amen" introduce a new mode of saying things in folktales and hence a meta-language which is consistent with digital media where old conventions are disregarded. The invitation to prayer elicits appropriate responses as many users type "Amen" to identify with the poster and benefit from the prayer. This in itself is an acknowledgement of the fact that we all have enemies who may pretend to be friends and the message

of the folktale resonates strongly among users. By its very nature and character, folktales, like other verbal art forms, are highly interactive, participatory and performative and stimulate audience reception of performances. Folktales are, therefore, cultural units which provide a veritable site for such performativity and interactivity on the Internet especially on Facebook (Murray 1997, 72).

The second folktale was collected on 15 July, 2018. Within minutes that it was posted, there were 221 comments and 243 likes and there were 19 shares. In the second folktale, we encounter a fascinating story which narrates the activities of a king and his servant with a lesson on the inscrutable workings of providence. As the folktale goes, "A King had a male servant who, in all circumstances always said to him: 'My king, do not be discouraged because everything God does is perfect, no mistakes.' One day, they went hunting and a wild animal attacked the king. The servant managed to kill the animal but couldn't prevent his majesty from losing a finger. Furious and without showing gratitude, the King said: 'If God was good, I would not have been attacked and lost one finger.' The servant replied: 'Despite all these things, I can only tell you that God is good and everything He does is perfect. He is never wrong.' Outraged by the response, the king ordered the arrest of his servant. Later, the king left for another hunt and was captured by savages who used human beings for sacrifice.

On the altar, the savages found out that the king didn't have one finger in place. He was released because he was considered not 'complete' to be offered to the gods. On his return to the palace, he authorized the release of his servant and said: 'My friend, God was really good to me. I was almost killed but for lack of a single finger I was let go. But I have a question: If God is so good, why did He allow me to put you in jail?' He replied: 'My king, if I had gone with you, I would have been sacrificed because I have no missing finger. Everything God does is perfect, He is never wrong.' Then the poster adds: 'Often we complain about life, and the negative things that happen to us, forgetting that nothing is random, and that everything has a purpose. God knows why he chose you to

receive this message today. If you believe that God is on your side as you begin this new day, then press "like" & write, "AMEN" if you mean it!!! Share with your friends.' It is important to establish the cultural context of this folktale. It is from the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria. Ancient Yoruba society was made up of empires and kingdoms prominent among which was Oyo. As a result, there were wars of supremacy for imperial expansion. There was also a warrior tradition among the people and many of them were hunters. Concomitant with this warrior tradition was an expressive oral culture manifest in war poetry, recitations, rituals and folk narratives. Songs were composed to celebrate heroes and to idealize their lineages so as to buoy their martial spirits. These kingdoms have now become modern cities or states within Nigeria.

However, the folk compositions have endured in a modern and technological age and many of these folk forms have been transmitted onto digital domains including the present folktale. This second folktale seeks to answer the question which centers around why things happen the way they do. It belongs to the typology of folktales known as "why" tales. The tales that fall into this classificatory paradigm are explanatory of phenomena and existential conditions based on causality. There is usually the spiritual dimension at the core of their thematic preoccupations. One noticeable feature of this folktale is that it avoids the repetitiveness which is characteristic of the performative essence of tales in oral contexts. Clearly, this is a logical consequence of the migratory rite of the folktale from its oral habitat to the digital environment. The Facebook user who posted the folktale was conscious of the spatial constraints he had to contend with due to the length of the folktale and avoided or expurgated some of its salient features such as repetitions, formulae and other expressions which he found effusive and unwieldy. Through this editorial intervention, the folktale emerges as a cleaned or severely purified version of the original because of its transformation from its original oral source. Orality is repetitive through the use of formulae. Its very soul is performance through which it is realized. It also has an auditory character and force not shared by the written word. Equally too, spatial limitations on a media platform like Facebook may interfere with the telling of a tale

whereas this is not always the case in oral contexts and situations. Also an unnecessarily long tale may put off potential readers who are always in a flighty mode and multi-tasking and so do not always have the patience to read through a lengthy tale. A great sense of immediacy and urgency on the side of the performer who has little or no time to reflect properly and so falls back on improvisational telling patterns; formulae or stock phraseology; mnemonics or memory work are requisite coefficients of oral texts. This tale is somewhat lacking in these verities of the oral word as it represents an edited text bereft of what can be termed as clumsy and redundant expressions by the written and digital traditions especially when confronted with spatial limitations. With the scrupulous editorial process this folktale has undergone, its soulfulness has been lost even if it ends up telling a fascinating and compelling story about the unbelieving King and his omniscient servant.

The folktale has as its framing concern the aetiological imperative about why things are the way they are. For instance, why would the king lose only a finger while he was attacked during a hunting expedition? Why did the savages want to offer a complete person to the gods as a sacrifice? Why did the king have to pay his dutiful and conscientious servant with imprisonment instead of gratitude? Why does providence choose to be kind to some people who apparently do not deserve such a kind dispensation like the king? These questions lie at the heart of the folktale as they institute a discursive possibility which borders on the inscrutability of fate and the intricate workings of providence. But what is more focal is whether the folktale would have been more effective in its communicative intentions had it not undergone the transformations imposed on it by its crossing of the threshold of orality to the digital domain of Facebook.

One thing which must not be overlooked is that the pedagogic content of the folktale remains intact despite the obvious transformations. However, a few details like repetitions, paralinguistics such as movements, facial expressions and running commentary usually associated with oral performances could have been emphasized in an oral situation but these have been left out due to the acquired medium the folktale has inhabited.

It is important to observe that though this tale differs from the first tale, it also shares certain commonalities with it. The two folktales differ markedly in narrative kinesis and eventual execution but have a confluence in their closure or resolution. The two narratives end on a theological note which underscores the religious proclivities central to both folktales. They are both open invitations by the two posters to other Facebook users to embrace a certain religious orientation which acknowledges that God is omnipotent and dominant in the affairs of humanity. The first tale ends with the poster impressing on his network of friends that it is not all who celebrate with you that have beneficent intentions towards you and calls on his friends to join him in prayer to God to shield them from their unsuspecting enemies who pretend to be friends but are wolves in sheep's clothing.

He concludes by asking them to echo "Amen" as a fitting closure to the prayer as a sure mark of its efficacy. This crusading and evangelizing zeal with the use of online communication that authorizes conformity with the religious persuasions of others is what Howard calls online vernacular web of communication that authorizes a shared belief with their reading of scripture and practices (Howard 2012). The second tale also closes on a similar rhythm of prayer even though the poster does not overtly invite his friends or those in his network to pray. This is suggested by the urge to type "Amen" which is a logical response to Christian/Islamic prayer. What is however, remarkable with the second tale is that the poster provides an explanatory basis to the tale regarding its didactic significance, an explanation which throws into relief the omniscience of God especially through his protective power over human beings even in seemingly negative situations which ultimately turn out to be in favor of human beings. The poster then proceeds to invite specific esponses from his coterie of friends in the form of affirmation by asking them to press the "like", "Amen" and "share" buttons. This ring of religiosity or spirituality appears to be the impetus or motivating force for the two folktales as they function as conduits for religious education and edification of *netifolks* (internet folks) in the networks of friends belonging to the two posters.

One important point that needs to be made is that the response to the invitation to comment, like or share does not always end up being affirmative. There are occasions when audiences disagree with the performer or poster in which case the corrective feedback from the audience is immediate (Dorst 2016, 132). For instance, in this second folktale, some of the responses show disapproval to the attitude of the king to his servant and find it inhumane, oppressive, and even dictatorial. They use emoticons which express feelings of sadness and disappointment with his behavior. However, some are happy, excited and thankful that the servant's faith in the providential has been justified or vindicated.

Through the employment of signs and symbols in the form of emoticons which are mainly visual in nature, the responses to the folktales point to a new direction in language use which is more expressive in character. There is, therefore, active communication between the audience and the performer, online and offline. However, the communication online is more enduring and lasting as it is frozen and stored and can be retrieved. Those that happen offline are transient in nature and irrecoverable except when they are recorded with electronic media gadgets. The performer is presenting to the audience. The audience in turn, through its actions and reactions, is actively communicating with the performer (Sims and Stephens 127). As it happens in oral contexts, the audiences are aggregators and co-creators of content in the digital domain, a dynamic and vivacious online community willing to function as an adjudicator. The user who posts becomes the performer while those who respond through their likes, comments or shares become the audience that participates in the proceedings of the performance.

Clearly as Monica Foote has stated, digital folks have developed their own folkspeech patterns since online communities function according to their own sets of customary behavior (2007, 27). Through its narrative mobilities, the oral text gets *re*produced in significant ways when it travels from its oral source to the digital domain. It becomes a cybertext or

digitext (Aarseth 1997, 63). Its narrative motions or kinesis shift and become defined and mediated by a meta-language. As observed in the folktales in this paper, the meta-language thrives on linguistic experimentation in the form of abbreviations and shortened words like Lol (Laughing out loud), the ampersand (&) in place of "and"; as well as visual representations in the form of pictures and signs/symbols like emoticons which express various emotions such as love, sadness, happiness, grief or loss. This makes narratives today to be more visual and sensuous as words no longer seem to carry conviction without a picture or image that conveys them (Botler 2001,58).

Conclusion

It may appear presumptuous, even extravagant, to argue that there is ample "folkness" on cyberspace considering the fact that the idea of folkness may not be consistent with or does not suggest compatibility with a digital or technological culture. However, "there is an in-born "folk" presence in cyberspace by virtue of the fact that people are behind nearly every symbolic interaction that takes place online and through new media technology" (Blank 2012, 2). The idea of *cyberfolk, digifolk* or *netifolk* can be said to exist on digital media because folklore itself exists on digital media platforms like Facebook and its powerful presence is no longer in doubt.

These netizens, digizens, online inhabitants or cyber troubadours constitute themselves into online communities as they produce, consume and circulate cultural products through narrative mobilities. As virtual, online communities, they function in a condition of co-presence even though they exist in dispersed, transnational spaces. They also cultivate a cybertiquette or netiquette which is their own peculiar mode of communication practices and methods of producing, *re*producing and circulating knowledge systems, along with verbal and visual art, which identify them as a distinct community and heighten the discourse and practices with which they engage. Digital media, therefore, can be said to be a fresh territory, a veritable playground for the flourishing of folklore. From the folktales that have been analyzed in this paper, it is obvious that folktales execute a migratory journey from their oral origins to

cybersphere through the activities of digizens who post them online. Through the participatory and interactive character on digital media platforms, these posts elicit diverse reactions from audiences who respond in the form of likes, comments, shares, emoticons and other signs and symbols thereby instituting a discursive existence online which reflects the diversity and full range of issues that embed the original posts. It is not unlikely that in exceptional cases, there is a marked departure from the discursive thread and a tangential issue is implicated in the discourse which veers the discussion in a different direction.

For instance, in the discussions regarding the tales in this paper, one user may introduce a counterpoint to the discourse by advertising a product, commenting on an important political matter or even on sports, a celebrity or a trending musical recording. Digital media is changing the ways in which people learn, share, participate, and engage with others as they adopt technologies to complement and supplement traditional means of vernacular expression. But behavioral and structural overlap in many folkloric forms exists between online and offline, and emerging patterns in digital rhetoric mimic the dynamics of previously documented folkloric forms, invoking familiar social or behavioral patterns, linguistic inflections, and symbolic gestures. Whether it is what Marc Prensky calls digital natives who are "'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet" (2001, 1) or digital immigrants, an earlier generation alien to the Internet, their interaction with folklore as cyberfolks is real and incontrovertible so long as they produce, consume and circulate the narrative mobilities on digital media.

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