



A Little White-Lie: Negotiating the Ethical Dilemma of Truth-Telling and Lying from an African Indigenous Religion Perspective

Goodluck Tamaramiye LAYEFA
Department of Media and Communication Studies
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
layefagt@abuad.edu.ng
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2273-2929>


Ngozi EZENAGU*
Department of Tourism and Events Management
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
ngoezenagu@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2296-5415>

Olumide OLUGBEMI-GABRIEL
Department of Languages and Literary studies
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
olumideog@abuad.edu.ng
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5283-0768>

Ibikunle Olayiwola AJISAFE
Department of Media and Communication Studies
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
ajisafeo@abuad.edu.ng
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9112-0822>

Ife Fiyinfolu AJEPE
Department of Languages and Literary studies
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
ifeajepe@abuad.edu.ng
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8675-7914>

Babatunde M WAHAB
Department of Intelligence and Security Studies
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
bmwahab@abuad.edu.ng
<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5543-7291>

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Abstract

Truth-telling is a cherished religious value in most African societies as opposed to lying. Thus, African indigenous religion upholds the virtue of truth-telling and abhors the vice of lying. This accepted religious virtue is promoted through various means, including film. The film, *A Little*



White-Lie pictures a chaste working-class lady who deceitfully arranges for marriage, a pseudo-spouse under intense parental pressure. As the plot gradually unfolds, the truth is revealed that the fiancé is a true exemplification of 'a little white lie'. Nevertheless, the film ends in a happy marital union contrary to the punishment for vices from the Afrocentric baseline as the film seems to endorse the vice of lying. The paper examines the art of lying and its verisimilitude in Nigerian society by employing a qualitative survey as the research methodology. Data were collected using focus group discussions. Most participants affirm that any form of lying is wrong and unnecessary from a religious perspective; others contend that lying though wrong is justifiable under some existential conditions. More so, some participants hold that the film reflects the culture and traditions of the Nigerian society. In contrast, a few others view the film as a negation of the religious values of the society it portrays. The study recommends that Nigerian film producers should endeavour to run storylines that align with the normative values of society.

Keywords: African indigenous religion, African values, Afrocentric paradigm, ethical dilemma, film.

Introduction

The rightness and wrongness of human conduct in traditional African society are guided by moral values deeply rooted in an indigenous religious belief system. Traditional African society is associated with certain cherished values (Ezenagu et al., 2022). These religious values are the benchmark that defines human relationships in an African society (Ezenagu, 2020). In other words, indigenous religions are the tenets of African life. This is because Africans exercise absolute belief in the Supreme Being and invariably it can be said that they live religiously (Ezenagu, 2016). Given this, Mbiti (1975) affirms that Africans are notoriously religious. Subsequently, the daily life of an African is religiously hedged to embrace truth-telling and what is religiously right. Thus, the idea of what to do and what not to do or what is right (truth) and what is wrong (lie) in the traditional setting has become controversial in modern African society. Accordingly, Onimhawo and Adamu (2021) lament the consequences of the pervading crisis of religious values in contemporary Nigeria's moral space. On the one hand, traditional African societies uphold and reward the virtue of truth-telling in all situations, while reprimanding the vice of lying. On the other hand, modern African societies embellish virtues and vices as and when necessary. This also informs the degree of rightness (truthfulness) and wrongness (white-lie, or red-lie) on display in certain situations which are contrary to indigenous religious tenets. The binaries often put African moral values in a state of dilemma. On this wise, Mbiti buttresses that:

moral deal with the question of what is right and good, and what is wrong and evil, in human conduct. African peoples have a deep sense of right and wrong. In the course of the years, this moral sense has produced custom, rules, laws, traditions and taboos which can be observed in each society. Their morals are embedded in these systems of behaviour and conduct. It is believed in many African societies that their morals were given to them by God from the very beginning. This provides an unchallenged authority for the morals. It is also believed or thought that some of the departed and the spirits keep watch over people to make sure that they observe the moral laws are punished when they break them(1971: 175).

From Mbiti's position, the place of morality which is a string of indigenous belief systems in African societies is unquestionable. Hence, one can agree with Idang (2015) that African culture is embedded in strong religious values. For this reason, truth stands for all that is good while lie stands for deception. These two basic standards are used to measure the rightness or wrongness



of human actions and inactions. However, with modernity came scientific inquiry into unknown phenomena, that is, ethics – a science that studies human conduct (Resnik, 1998). As a science of the rightness or the wrongness of human conduct and behaviour, ethics could be described as social norms that prescribe behaviour (Resnik, 1998). Chin et al. (2021) affirm that it codifies the moral principles that govern the concepts of right and wrong conduct. In other words, it could be described as a way of life and rules of conduct, which implies that it is concerned with proffering standards and evaluation of conduct in society. Thus, ethics studies moral behaviour in society while morality is the act of being able to differentiate good from bad or right from wrong. In this aspect, the ability to be concerned with truth-telling or lying on any issue is what people initiate out of their free will as their intellect guides them on laid down principles or values (Sims, 1992). This individual perception and ethical evaluation of behaviour negates the African religious view of the phenomenon.

Hence, patterned values described as African culture are non-negotiable as they comprise an amalgamation of religious beliefs and practices from diverse African ethnic groups with similarities when compared to non-African cultures. Across Africa, ethnic groups such as Akan, Ewe, Igbo, Wolof, Yoruba, and Zulu have similar religious beliefs and values on truth-telling and lying. These beliefs determine what is right and wrong, and what is important in life (Idang, 2015). However, concerning these beliefs and practices, some forms of behaviour, actions, and conduct are approved and rewarded (honesty, respect for elders, loyalty, and communality), while others are widely disapproved of (Idang, 2015) and severely punished such as lying, theft, murder, and disrespect for elders. This implies that African indigenous religion emphasises reward and retribution for individual action. This moral strictness of the African value system and the liberality of ethical science, the concepts of truth-telling and lying defy precision despite being supposed markers of rightness and wrongness. Resnik (1998) rightly observes that in any given situation, it is generally accepted that lying is unethical but lying is only illegal under certain conditions. The acceptability of lying in any situation is against African religious values. Thus, the varying conditions under which a lie can be legal or illegal, or situations where a lie can be substituted for truth-telling create a dilemma in modern Nigerian society and around the world. Therefore, this dilemma on the exactness of rightness and wrongness of truth-telling and lying respectively has attracted the discursive engagements across the globe.

Thus, societies across time and settings have developed ethical principles and employ vehicles to pass across these ethical principles. One such vehicle that societies have put in place for religious and cultural promotion is the film as a medium of communication (Ben, 2006). Films have increasingly become a medium of mass entertainment (Wang & Klein, 2022) and communication, which reaches a large mass of people. Accordingly, Payne (2023) concurs that visual mediums like film and television have a wider audience outreach. Hence, dramatised information communicated through films is a veritable platform for cultural dissemination. Subsequently, film and television shows have often been employed for the promotion of cultural heritage and preservation of the collective identity of a nation.

The Nigerian film industry through the dramatisation of the country's culture reveals that cherished virtues are rewarded and promoted, while vices are punished and de-emphasised. Thus, while juxtaposing virtues and vices across plots and settings with their attendant rewards and punishments, it is expected that virtue (truth-telling) is rewarded, and vice (lying) is punished within the framework of the African indigenous belief system.



The Synopsis

A *Little White-Lie* is a film set in Lagos, Nigeria and produced in 2016 by Royal Arts Academy to critical acceptance and acclaim. Directed by John Njamah, it deeply reflects the thoughts and perspective of the religious acceptability of lying in some acceptable circumstances (Alasdair, 2006). The narrative of the film centres on the marital journey of a young unmarried, chaste, and working-class lady (Winnie). In the plot, Winnie, the protagonist under parental pressure for marriage, resorts to deceit by engaging a pseudo-boyfriend as her fiancé. Under intense pressure, she is forced to lie to her mother about having a pseudo-boyfriend, John. The response of the protagonist to the mother's marital demand seemingly concurs with the fact that some certain circumstances may necessitate lying. Conditioned as untruthfulness, lying always involves the intention to deceive the addressee (Wiegmann & Meibauer, 2019). Mahon (2016) concur that lying is a believed-false statement to another person to make the other person believe the statement as the truth. Winnie did deceive the mother but not intentionally as Bryant (2008) rightly states that some lies are not as bad as others. In this perspective, Winnie employed white-lie as a means to end marital pressure from parents. Her intention to lie collaborates with Wang (2019) that speakers often use white lies to reach certain goals in each situation.

However, Winnie use of white-lie aligns with Bryant (2008) opinion that a white-lie can be described as a falsehood not meant to injure anyone. Though the response of the protagonist to her mother's pressure is false because there is no such boyfriend as John, it nevertheless partly comes under the category of lying that does not harm. However, the white-lie is exposed as the film progresses, when the parents visit Winnie to get to know their supposed future son-in-law.

Not surprisingly, the visit of Winnie's parents puts her in a dilemma between a little white-lie and truth-telling, which creates a twist in the plot of the film. At this point, the protagonist is left with two possibilities. On the one hand, bear the shame and tell the parents the truth; consequently, losing the trust of both parents. On the other, carry on with the white-lie and save trust. Thus, not wanting to loss parent's trust, Winnie continued with the white-lie. Consequently, she hires John whom she has a crush on to act as her pseudo-boyfriend. The scheme creates room for the white-lieto manifest as the truth. Thus, the film's plot validates the assertion that a white-lie is truly an unintentional lie. Winnie's scheme is successful at first but her father later discovers the deception surprisingly does not disapprove of it. The father's approval of the white-lie reflects the societal acceptance of strands of modernity at the expense of the principles of African values. In a twist of fate, she ends up with the pseudo-boyfriend. Notwithstanding the success of Winnie's scheme, the underlying white-lie cannot be said to be morally acceptable in traditional African society. Hence, the success of the film has placed African religious values in a dilemma, as it seeks to answer the question: "Should white lies be accepted as strands of truth in modern African society?".

Literature Review

Truth-telling and lying are two sides of the same coin and philosophers and scholars have attempted to define this twin concept. Truth-telling can simply be regarded as relating facts or information about something to someone. Conversely, it could be seen as expressions and interactions among humans devoid of any form of guesses or make-ups. It is the act of relating plainly and truthfully with someone. Truth as an abstract noun is a statement that is devoid of falsehood. In other words, any statement or action that is absolute is regarded as 'truth'. Given the correctness of truth, Alasdair (2006) emphasises that truth should never be contravened because of its relation to a stable society.



However, with modernisation and its attendant consequences, the absoluteness of truth is conditionalised. The acceptability of certain acts as truth or lie is adjudged from the perspective of the preconceived pattern of behaviour acceptable in the society. Peters (2018) observes that historically, and over time, the concept of truth has taken different dimensions with attendant changes in meaning. This implies that the rightness inherent in the concept of truth has changed with time; and as a result, lying has been categorised into different forms with colours to depict its nearness to the truth.

Thus, the term 'lying' is a universal social trend that appears regularly in various public and private circumstances for different purposes (Xu et al., 2010). Primarily, lying is falsehood, and the opposite of the truth. It implies any form of expression intended to deceive the other person. Bok (1978) defines it as any intentionally deceptive message often made verbally or in writing. In other words, one can lie by oral communication, by actions, or by appearance. Considering a lie as an oral communication form, Paul (1992) defines a lie as the intention to mislead another, doing so deliberately, without prior notification of this purpose, and without having been explicitly asked to do so by the target. He further states that to conceal and to falsify are two primary ways of lying. On the one hand, concealing involves withholding information without any element of deceit. On the other, to falsify involves an intentional misrepresentation of information with the purpose of deceit.

In other words, to falsify implies the refusal to acknowledge the truth (Laba, 2019). Thus, whenever the truth is known but not acknowledged either intentionally or unintentionally, it is simply referred to as lying. Biziou-van-Pol et al. (2015) opine that it is generally agreed that it is bad to tell lies. From a broad perspective, lying is the ability to convince a person to accept a make-believe or false statement as the truth (Mahon, 2008; 2009). Alasdair (2006) believes that lying violates trust and it is a crime against the truth. Wiegmann et al. (2016) affirm that the so-called untruthful condition which states that the information needs to be believed as false to constitute a lie, supports the subjective view of lying. This definition implies that truthful information may be believed as false. However, for an objective view of lying, a statement must be objectively false to count as a lie. A subjective view on lying presupposes a sort of incidental mistaken submission, though there is an intention to deceive.

Furthermore, considering the intentions of the speaker, Wang (2019) points out that lies can be classified into two categories: white lies (well-meaning lies) and black lies (malicious lies). In this case, Bryant (2008) avers that some lies are not as bad as others, while Laba (2019) claims that some truths are too painful. Subsumed in these instances is the position that a lie appears as an unintentional deceit thereby making it acceptable. Hence, these acceptable lies are labelled tactful lies, commonly known as white lies. A white-lie can be described as a falsehood not meant to injure anyone. Wang (2019) concurs that white lies embody the basic principle of being cooperative or polite in communication. In other words, a white-lie is a camouflaged truth or simply an unintentional lie. White lies might be a form of face work, which posits that people are motivated to act in ways that allow social interactions to occur smoothly by avoiding disagreements that could harm either person's image or pride (Bryant 2008). People are thus willing to fabricate or conceal information when the truth might cause tension, stress, or embarrassment or violate another person's expectations.

In addition to having the character of being tactful or polite, white-lies are commonly told to maintain the stability of a relationship to protect the psychological self-image of the person telling the lie. This position assumes that white lies are not necessarily seen as bad but as a necessity in some prevailing circumstances. The uses of white lies are so common that they are often not considered acts of lying but are accepted as normal behaviour. The ability to correctly use white-



lies has been called a communication competence and social lubricant, necessary for people to smoothly negotiate social interactions. People expect that others will know when it is necessary to tell the truth and when it is best to tell a white-lie(Bryant 2008). The credibility given to white lies in modern society creates a dilemma between truth-telling and lying. As Biziou-van-Pol et al (2015) rightly maintain, the opportunity to tell a white-lie generates a moral conflict between two opposite moral dictates; one pushing towards telling the truth always and the other pushing towards helping others.

Several studies give credence to the acceptability of some lies. Some of these studies are exploratory in form and content. Bryant (2008) explores how college students define and differentiate between types of lies using in-depth interviews and focus group data. The study found that the participants perceive real lies as unacceptable, malicious, self-serving, and a complete fabrication of the truth with inherent serious consequences. White-lies are perceived as altruistic and trivial, partially true, lacking malicious motives, and generally acceptable to use. Grey-lies are said to be ambiguous or hold the characteristics of a real lie but are still viewed as justifiable given the circumstances. Pasquerella and Killilea (2005) argue that an application of the just lie criterion to the study of defensible deception reveals the efficacy of these criteria in assessing the ethics of lies by public servants in at least some cases. Wiegmann et al. (2016) also argue that the accessible evidence is reliable with the standard subjective view if conversation pragmatics is considered. However, none of the studies examine lying through the prism of film against the background of the normative value of a particular society, or the African indigenous religion. The study fills this gap in the literature of film and ethical narratives.

Theoretical framework

The concept of rightness and wrongness of an act or action depends strongly on the values system of a cultural area, or religious system. Thus, the assigned value of an act is dependent on the culture of the area, or the dominant religious belief. African indigenous religious values are a body of knowledge that deals with the social world (Dei, 1994). In other words, the African religious value system is a constituted acceptable pattern of behaviour guiding the moral fabric of the community. Hence, the African virtue of truth-telling and lying is rooted in an Afrocentric paradigm.

Afrocentricity is a paradigm birthed in African-centered intellectual critique, which is also related to African philosophy (Fairfax, 2017). As a paradigm, Afrocentricity enthrones the centrality of the African, that is, black ideals and values as expressed in the highest forms of African culture and indigenous religious beliefs (Asante, 1998). The theory promotes the understanding of a phenomenon from a perspective grounded in African-centred values (Asante, 2017; Dei, 1994). Therefore, Afrocentric theory upholds and advocates the resilience of African culture, values, and religious beliefs as aspects of daily African life. Accordingly, the theory places African people at the centre of any analysis of African culture in terms of action and behaviour (Chawane, 2016; Oyebade, 1990).

Hence, the rightness and wrongness of an act or action should be adjudged from the African socio-cultural and religious perspective. On this premise, the African worldview or beliefs do not acknowledge the present variation of a lie (white lie, grey lie, and black lie). From the African religious perspective, lying as a vice has no strands, unlike the modern society where the variations determine its nearness to truth-telling. Consequently, the acceptance of variations of lies especially white lies which together constitute a modern strand of truth-telling places African cultural values in a dilemma.



Method

The study is an exploratory study that adopted a qualitative survey research methodology. This research methodology provides an appropriate platform to gain in-depth information about people's perceptions of a phenomenon or an event. Thus, Fink (2003) rightly recommends that qualitative survey analysis can be used for the exploration of meanings and experiences. Considering the above recommendation, the adopted research method is adjudged suitable for eliciting data from the respondents on their perception of the concepts - lying and truth-telling. Data were collected using focus group discussion (FGD). The population of the study comprised 80 fourth-level media students (Class of 2019) of Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. A sample size of 44 students who offered the course 'Film Review and Criticism' was purposively selected for the study. The findings were thematically analysed.

Findings

The findings of the study reveal contrary response on the film reflection of religious realities in Nigerian society. Most of the participants affirm that the film, *A Little White-lie* does mirror society. Few contend that some of the scenes are not real concerning Nigerian society and very few hold that the film does not mirror the Nigerian society. Hence, most scenes in the movie are seen as reflecting modern societal realities as not being religious as presented below:

Yes! The film mirrors modern society because, at Winnie's age, it is not unusual in African societies for mothers to start questioning their daughters about their romantic lives.

The film, *A Little White-lie* mirrors society where women are forced to settle down before age 30.

This movie reflects the modern emphasise on marriage where parents expect their children to bring home their supposed spouse(s) unlike traditional society where marriage is contracted. Secondly, Winnie pseudo fiancé reflects the many contract marriages of modern society.

Observably, a few of the participants contend that some of the scenes of the film, to a relative extent, reflect Nigerian society, while some scenes do not. One participant notes:

The film [...] to some extent mirrors reality, so it is yes. To support, yes. I cannot speak for the whole globe but in Nigerian society, once a girl is ripe for marriage from age 25, there is so much pressure from her family both immediate and extended family, external influence that is the society.

Amongst the very few participants who disaffirm that the film does not mirror society, two responses appear very strong in assertion:

No, the movie does not mirror reality, especially in the case of the setting being the Nigerian society, and several scenes can back up this answer. However, one scene that appears true is the scene where Winnie's (the main character) father admits to John that he knows about the fact that they are both lying about being in a relationship and there is no repercussion. A Nigerian father, no matter how carefree he is, will never take such a lie in that stead.

No, the film does not mirror the Nigerian society. A young woman would not go as far as getting her male neighbour to act as her boyfriend. In the end, even when the protagonist's father found out, he thanked John for



pretending to be his daughter's boyfriend, which is not the kind of reaction a Nigerian father would have.

However, on the necessity of white lie, most of the responses are in the affirmative and very few admit that it is necessary but not right. This is because the African indigenous belief system upholds the importance of truth in all situations as presented below:

I think the lie was unnecessary. Religiously, lying is wrong and I cannot possibly say it is right in any circumstance, especially the circumstances in which it was presented in the film.

No! I do not think it is necessary. She should have just told her parents the truth and she would not have had to lie.

The lie was not necessary.

All lie na lie (sic), whether white or black. There is no justification for lies.

However, few of the participants contend that lying is necessary though not right. Observe their responses:

It was necessary to lie at that point because of the pressure she was receiving from her mother as she did not know the lie was going to result in them coming over to spend a few days with her and her supposed boyfriend 'John'. But the lie was not right though considering our religious values.

The lie was necessary but religiously wrong. She could have told her parent the truth. But she had to lie to her mother because the pressure of marriage was too much to bear.

The lie was necessary and unnecessary in the real sense, but in the religious atmosphere, it is wrong.

Further, the study reveals the participants response on the film role in mass media communication. Participants are unanimous about the film fulfilling the role of the mass media, especially the entertainment role. The responses below are indicative:

In the case of entertainment, yes, the film does fulfil the role of the mass media because, despite the unrealistic premise, it is extremely interesting to watch. On the other hand, it fails to inform the audience of the stand of African indigenous religious on such issues or situation. The good ending negates this belief.

Not really. The role of mass media is to inform and educate, and the movie was entertaining but was neither educative nor informative regarding African indigenous religious beliefs.

Yes, it is entertaining.

In some sense, it did and in most sense, it did not. In mass communication, it did not fully fulfill the role of informing and educating (in the case of the kama sutra talk), and it was quite entertaining.

Yes, the movie fulfilled the role of entertainment.

Yes, the film is entertaining but fails to point out the consequences of lying as taught in African culture. The film was also educative by showing the effect of societal pressure on the religious value system. Winnie was forced to lie just to avoid the parental pressure for marriage.

Discussion

The findings of the study found that most scenes of the film have relative semblance of modern Nigerian societal realities. The concern of Winnie's parents, especially the mother of the



daughter's unmarried state, is commonplace in Nigeria. The affirmative responses to the film's capacity as a mirror of societal happenings agree with the submission of Mainasara (2017) that films allow the producers to articulate a series of issues affecting people's lives. Given this, most of the participants aver that the film's theme of white-lie does not mirror the African indigenous society. On the one hand, this negative view of the film is informed by Winnie's act of lying and consequently deceiving the parents, while on the other, is the success of the white lie, an act that is at variance with the religious values of Nigerian society. The African religious value disapproves and punishes lying as a vice while truth as a virtue is approved and rewarded. The executors of these values are parents in an African setting but in the film, the white-lie is ignored and not disapproved.

The responses of the participants to the second question reflect the modern-day dilemma in the discourse about truth-telling and lying. Some of the participants completely condemn the lie told by Winnie. They hold that lying is wrong and unnecessary in accordance with the tenets of African indigenous religious. This aligns with Biziou-van-Pol et al. (2015) submission that, generally, it is agreed that it is bad to tell lies. Also, the Afrocentric theory holds that lying is a vice that attracts punishment. In African society, and Nigeria in particular, elders and parents hold truth-telling in high esteem. Onimhawa and Adamu (2021) observe that in African traditional society, parents are the primary audience before whom children model a lifestyle of integrity. This is not to say that lying is tolerated when it is said by others, but the emphasis is on the fact that parents rarely tolerate lies told by family members, especially their children.

Nevertheless, some of the participants hold that the lie that Winnie told her parents was necessary. This aligns with Alasdair (2006) opinion that some types of protective lies are often endorsed in certain social orders. In this vein, it can be said that Winnie initiative of the pseudo-fiancé was a white-lie to end the marital pressure. This white-lie was supported by Bryant's (2008) findings that white lies are typically seen as unselfish and inconsequential lies.

Therefore, it is worthy of note that the responses of participants who profess that the lie Winnie told is necessary also hold that the lie is unnecessary. There seems to be an ethical conundrum here. It should be noted that this dilemma to either stand by the truth or rely on the white-lie to abate the marital pressure is a moral decision that Winnie could not avoid. As Biziou-van-Pol et al. (2015) affirm, moral decision-making in communication often concerns the choice of whether to tell the truth or to deceive. They further add that a prosocial person, when facing the decision of whether to tell a white-lie or not may experience a conflict between two diverging moral dictates; one pushing towards lying for the benefit of others and the other pushing towards telling the truth regardless of the circumstance. Despite, the African religious value standpoint on lies, in dramatic irony, the lie told by Winnie brings in John, a man she has a crush on and who she ultimately marries.

The end indeed justifies the means, the film seems to agree. This completely dislodges the reward for truth-telling as proposed by African indigenous religion and the Afrocentric paradigm. This implies that the film negotiates the rightness of African value of truth-telling and consequently, contradicts Omenughu et al. (2019) position that Nigerian film is a transmitter of values, culture, and history.

Ethical dilemmas of African indigenous religious value: 'Truth' vs. 'White Lie'

The virtue of 'truth-telling' is one of the building blocks of the moral fabric of African society which is on the verge of losing its place and precision to its vice – lie (Mbiti, 1975). Consequently, the



ethical dilemmas that the African religious value of ‘truth-telling’ encounters in practical human life cannot be overstated. In everyday life, truth-telling is beset with the challenges of maintaining its rightness. This conundrum is better exemplified in the film, *A Little White Lie* when Winnie is caught in the dilemma of telling the truth of not having a fiancé to her parents and upholding the white lie of a pseudo boyfriend. Many people are caught in the same dilemma in societies where parents pressurise their adult children into marriage. Thus, the difficulty in ascertaining the rightness of truth-telling has led to the proliferation and elevation of a lie with designated colours to determine its rightness. However, no matter the colour of the lie, the absence of truth is invariably the presence of the lie because both are two sides of a coin. African religious value emphasises the concept of truth which must always be told in all circumstances not minding the consequences (Mbiti, 1975). In daily matters of human conduct, Africans know what is right and good as well as what is wrong and evil (Mbiti, 1971). They endeavour to do that which is good and avoid that which is evil because religion is a source of motivation for their lives (Layefa & Ezenagu 2023). Therefore, religion and morals are encoded into peoples’ subconscious through the period of nurturing and observations of what other people do and do not do. In other words, Africans have the moral responsibility to make a distinction between good and bad; and by traditions, they are compelled to do well and desist from evil. Therefore, it could be said that in Africa as Janezica and Gallego (2020) posit, some people have a consistent preference for truth-telling even when lying is personally beneficial and not observable to others.

However, in modern African society, particularly Nigeria, where the science of ethics prevails what is morally right or wrong cannot be precisely determined by their rightness or wrongness rather by factors that surround them. This is because religious beliefs and traditions have been modified to accommodate new social realities (Layefa & Ezenagu, 2023). More so, modern Nigerian society which is influenced by foreign culture would see the film’s storyline as a prevailing norm in the society because the white-lie was not meant to harm anybody. Thus, white lie can invariably alternate truth-telling. This rightness of white-lie could be seen in the conclusion of the film with the coming together of Winnie and her pseudo-fiancé. Hence, the credibility given to white-lie in the film creates a dilemma between truth-telling and lying in African society. This is because the African religious value sees the alteration of truth in any form as lying. In other words, the African religious value does not consider the intent of a lie. Interestingly, this position aligns with the Christian teachings on the same subject as contained in the Holy Bible: “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. But those who deal truthfully are His delight” (Proverbs 12:22 NKJV).

Conclusion

The African worldview is hedged with religious values intended to create a balanced human relationship within a clash of vices and virtues. One of the religious virtues of the African value system is truth-telling against the vice of lying. But with modernity came the proliferation and different colours of lie which have ruined the moral fabrics of many societies, which are oftentimes caused by lying leaders, social media, Hollywood movies, etc. In other words, the various invented degrees of lie pose a formidable challenge to the religious value of truth-telling. In traditional Nigerian society, a white-lie is not a substitute for truth following the Afrocentric paradigm where behaviours are evaluated in tandem with the established religious belief system. Against this background, a white-lie is simply a lie. The white colour does not affect the altered communication content. Nevertheless, in this modern age the success rates of different degrees of lying challenge the rightness of truth-telling. As rightly observed by Mbiti (1975), traditional African society is built on the religious virtue of truth-telling. However, now, truth-telling has been given different social meanings. Thus, the truthiness of truth now depends on certain circumstances. Likewise, a lie is not considered an outright deceit. The wrongness of a lie is dependent on the extent of falsehood or intent.



Given this, lying as a vice now competes with the religious virtue of truth-telling in the adjudication of what is right and/or wrong. This dilemma creates different degrees of a lie which are privileged in the use of colours to illustrate the extent of falsehood. A black-lie is taken as an absolute or outright lie, while a white-lie is a camouflaged truth. The function and deployment of a white-lie as an unintentional lie is well dramatised in the film, *A Little White Lie*. In the narrative of the film, the success of Winnie's lie in the film is conditioned by and attributed to its degree. Therefore, the plot of films produced in Africa or targeted at an African audience must align with the prevailing and acceptable socio-cultural and or religious norms of African societies. The African truth-telling virtue should not be substituted with the modern virtue of white-lies.

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