

The Dynamics of Crime and the Contemporary World: Moral and Existentialist Dilemmas in Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to you by Chance*

Micah Okon Asukwo¹, Dele Maxwell Ugwanyi²

¹Department of English Akwa Ibom State University Obio Akpa Campus

²Department of English and Literary Studies Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu

ABSTRACT: Literature reflects the milieu and the moment, and echoes society's zeitgeist and the enabling contexts. It recreates society vividly with a view to projecting its positives sides and values and attacking its imperfections. Literature offers qualitative evaluation of contemporary trends in the society in a bid to retain the cherished and discard the obnoxious. These assertions constitute the thrust of this study which examines the depiction of crime and related trends in the contemporary Nigerian society as inscribed in Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. Specifically, the work interrogates the moral, economic, social, and existential circumstances that make criminal behaviours appear attractive or even necessary to an individual. The study, which adopts Existentialism as its theoretical framework, argues that contemporary crime has moved beyond judging the criminal to interrogating the conditions that produce, normalise, justify, or complicate criminal behaviour. The research finds unmitigated criminalities typified by advanced fee fraud, cybercrime, unbridled corruption, and decay/erosion of society's fundamental values as some of the amoral, cynical, and gloomy issues raised in Nwaubani's realistic artistry. The study submits that beyond being a mere willful act, behaviour or habit, crime, as depicted in Ubani's craft, is a consequence of social and economic pressure which is given impetus by the amazingly weak, vacillating, complacent, and inept political leadership as well as insidiously weakening societal values. Nwaubani's work aptly recreates existentialist and modernist dystopia in contemporary times characterised by pessimism, hedonism, anxiety, agony, nihilism, criminalities, despair, and death.

KEYWORDS: Crime, Existentialism, Despair, Anxiety

INTRODUCTION

The preoccupation of the earliest African literary writers was basically to challenge colonial narratives and stereotypes and correct distorted conceptions about Africa and her people. This was predicated on the belief that "Until the lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter" (cited in Agunbiade and Enongene, 8). Following the end of colonialism, albeit physically, in virtually every part of Africa, the leitmotifs of African literary writers gradually changed from precolonial African history and later decolonisation or anti-colonial and liberation struggles to the quotidian post-independence experiences or realities of the people of the continent. Contemporary African literature is entirely devoted or chained to these multifarious socio-economic and political issues/experiences that the people are confronted with on a daily basis. It could thus be deduced that as far as African literature is concerned, there is little or no room for art for art's sake projected by the structuralist/formalist school of literature in which literature only projects its aesthetic content and value. Rather, literature in Africa is wholly deployed to serve multifarious sociological and utilitarian needs. In the words of Ayo Kehinde (2009), African writers have "an enduring propensity for social and political commitment" even as contemporary African literature predominantly "depicts the postcolonial disillusionment in African nations" (1).

Every society or nation the world over faces one teething socio-economic and political challenge or the other, but the developing Third-World societies, typified in this study by Nigeria, appear more encumbered with an avalanche of ugly developments, challenges and trends much more than others. Their challenges range from poverty to unemployment, low life expectancy or high mortality rate, and social tensions as a result of unstable and unpredictable economic conditions. Others are unbridled corruption, high tendencies for migration, unmitigated criminalities, and a host of others. In Nigeria, to be specific, these ugly experiences and trends are exacerbated by the inept character of the ruling class which pays little or no heed to the welfare of the citizens and thereby treats with absolute levity issues of wider, social or collective significance. Their stock-in-trade is self-aggrandisement, perpetration and perpetuation. The unruffled, complacent, and narcissistic disposition of the ruling class and the sheer indifference towards the plights and needs of the citizens results in a situation where the latter covertly and overtly develop some unwholesome, detestable,

The Dynamics of Crime and the Contemporary World: Moral and Existential Dilemmas in Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to you by Chance*

uncanny, and aberrational means to survive notwithstanding the risks associated with them and the wider social and moral implications. There is thus an existential bent on the part of these people to survive irrespective of the risks involved even as their decision might have little or no regards for the laws of the land culminating in resorts that are reckless, creepy, and aberrational. Indeed, many Third-World societies are epicenters of crime, which criminalities are socially induced, nurtured, and exacerbated.

Unarguably, crime is a universal phenomenon which knows no boundary, language, ethnicity or culture. The implication is that crime abounds wherever human beings reside, dwell or exist. This is so because human beings tend to have a natural propensity for one criminal behaviour, tendency or inclination or the other. Indeed, crime is one of the most constant probabilities in every human settlement. In the light of this reality, many societies have deliberately and consistently engaged in activities, programmes and policies that are aimed at reducing tendencies for criminalities in their citizens especially when daily survival is at stake. Apart from ensuring that job opportunities are made available for citizens, some societies do give unemployment benefits to young people who are yet to be gainfully employed pending the time they would have job opportunities. Policies such as this aim basically at curbing criminal tendencies especially on the part of young people who are likely to negatively deploy their youthful energies in causing social unrest, disharmony or chaos in the society. On the contrary, however, other societies abound, especially among Third-World nations, which, in spite of humongous resources at their disposal, would not bother about the welfare of their citizens. Here, development revolves around a few persons in politics and bureaucracy instead of the larger masses. Rather than being felt by the people it claims to target, Third-World development is "a top-down narcissistic approach which treats fellow citizens as abstract objects and as statistical figures whose knowledge is required just for the sake of it" (Harrison, 30). The result is unmitigated criminalities especially by young people albeit in a bid to survive in a society that chooses exclusion and abandonment rather than care and inclusion.

Unequivocally, crime is one of the most persistent social realities of the contemporary world, manifesting in forms that continually evolve with changing social, economic, and technological conditions. From conventional forms of theft, fraud and corruption to technologically mediated offences such as cyber fraud, identity theft and online deception, criminality has become increasingly complex and difficult to separate from the structures of contemporary life. Beyond its legal implications, crime raises fundamental questions about human conduct, responsibility and the conditions that produce deviant behaviour. Underlining criminal activities are questions such as: Why do individuals violate established moral and legal codes? To what extent are criminal choices determined by personal greed, and to what extent are they products of poverty, unemployment, inequality, social pressure and the desire for material success? These questions become particularly significant in societies where economic hardship exists alongside conspicuous consumption and where wealth is often regarded as a principal indicator of achievement. The contemporary phenomenon of cybercrime, therefore, cannot be adequately understood merely as a violation of law; it also constitutes a moral and existential problem involving questions of choice, responsibility, conscience, freedom, identity and the meaning of worthwhile human existence. This is the thrust of this study which examines the depiction of crime and related trends in the contemporary Nigerian society as inscribed in Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. The study interrogates the moral, economic, social, and existential circumstances that make criminal behaviours appear attractive or even necessary to an individual.

Review of Related Literature

Published in 2009, Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* has enjoyed enormous critical reactions. Critical scholarship on Nwaubani's novel has concentrated largely on the novel's representation of cybercrime, socio-economic deprivation, corruption, youth-related problems, leadership problems, the style of the author, and the changing Nigerian social environment. Hamish Daley's (2013) study of the text alongside Teju Cole's *Open City* challenges the tendency to classify contemporary Nigerian fiction simply according to literary generations, and argues that such classifications can obscure the complex spatial and temporal dimensions of the two texts. In his reading of Nwaubani's text, Daley identifies the characters' attempts to establish "clear boundaries of ethical affiliation", thereby drawing attention to the moral choices confronting individuals within a socially compromised environment. Daley's observation is particularly relevant to this study because it establishes "ethical negotiation" as an important dimension of the protagonist's (Kingsley) experience. However, while Daley's primary preoccupation is the categorical conceptualisation of contemporary Nigerian literature, this study seeks an extended examination of the existential consequences of Kingsley's moral choices.

In "The Nigerian Email Scam Novel..." Peter Ribic (2019) provides a more direct examination of Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to you by Chance*, where he situates literary representations of Nigerian email scams with the broader history of the informal economy. Ribic's position is that the novel's representation of cybercrime cannot be totally detached from the economic structures that produce populations excluded from formal employment and economic security. In other words, the level of criminality a society witnesses is directly proportional to the level of neglect citizens face or experience in the hands of government. Ribic's submission is important because it complicates an exclusively individualistic understanding of Kingsley's criminality, for his involvement in cybercrime occurs within an environment where legitimate economic opportunities are highly restricted. However, the emphasis the critic places

The Dynamics of Crime and the Contemporary World: Moral and Existentialist Dilemmas in Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to you by Chance*

on the informal economy leaves room for further investigation of the philosophical tension between social constraint and individual responsibility, a tension central to the existentialist interpretation proposed in the present study.

Daniel Chukwuemeka (2021) develops this socio-economic motif further by examining the novel within the corpus of African "hustler narratives" and argues that the e-fraud in the novel functions as an alternative to an exclusionary postcolonial Nigerian economy. From the perspective of the critic, however, the apparent alternative is paradoxical because the e-fraudsters replicate, through sham and extraction, some of the same exploitative relationships that characterise the economic system they seek to circumvent. Coming from a literary stylistic angle, Isonguyo Akpan (2023) examines some creative artistic positions taken by the author in projecting leadership issues in Nigeria as espoused in the text. The work dwells on the author's apt deployment of characterisation and setting to expose the corrupt nature of political leaders in Nigeria especially "their gluttony, and the deteriorating nature of some public institution (sic)" (718). This approach is significant because it locates criminality within a wider environment of institutional and political failure rather than presenting the protagonist solely as an isolated moral offender. In the same vein, Omagu, Okun, and Umahi (2024) argue that Nwaubani's representation of Nigerian socioeconomic and political realities including unemployment, corruption, poverty, cybercrime, avarice and family pressures, gives the novel a significant social and didactic dimension. Both studies strengthen the socioeconomic and structural dimensions of the existing scholarship.

More recent scholarship on Nwaubani's novel continues to expand the critical approaches to the novel. For example, in "Food Symbolism and Cultural Identity in Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*", Isaac Udoh (2026) examines food symbolism and cultural identity in the text where he connects food with scarcity, identity, moral decadence and Kingsley's transformation from an innocent young man from a morally conscious background to an unconscionable fraudster. Udoh's work emphasises the socioeconomic and ethical dilemma confronting the protagonist (Kingsley) as he negotiates poverty and the attraction of wealth. On their part, Metu and Ogbodo (2026) examine Nwaubani's novel alongside Seffi Attah's "Yahoo Yahoo" through the Faustian Sequence concept. Specifically, their work focuses on the motivations, actions, and socioeconomic contexts of characters involved in cybercrime.

The works reviewed above demonstrate the continuing scholarly interest in the novel's treatment of crime, economic hardship, moral compromise and the seductive attraction of wealth. Thus, the works reviewed above predominantly approach Nwaubani's novel through postcolonial, Marxist, sociological, and stylistic frameworks. What, however, remains comparatively underdeveloped is the existential implication of Kingsley's movement from moral resistance to criminal participation, particularly the connected questions of freedom, choice, responsibility, despair, alienation, absurdity, and death. This is the focus of the present study which examines the moral and existentialist dilemmas produced when an individual confronts a social world in which legitimate aspirations appear increasingly incompatible with material survival.

METHODOLOGY

This research was designed to examine moral and existentialist dilemmas in Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. It is a qualitative research which involves analyses of texts. Data for the research are gleaned from two sources – primary and secondary. The primary source of data for the study is Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* while secondary sources include textbooks, journal articles, published and unpublished dissertations and theses as well as internet sources. The primary text, Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, was purposively selected because of its apt representations of moral and existentialist motifs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts Existentialism as its theoretical framework. Existentialism is a philosophical movement concerned with existence, freedom, responsibility, choice, and the predicament of the individual. It sprang from the thoughts and writings of European thinkers such as Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus, who were remarkably dissatisfied with traditional philosophy perceived as "superficial, academic, and remote from reality" (Oladipo, 90). As a philosophical viewpoint, Existentialism is frequently contrasted with Classical or traditional philosophy which Gabriel Marcel, for instance, describes as "a disease that divorced thought from life...highly abstract, lifeless and artificial, emptied of real content to such a degree that human beings no longer knew what it meant to exist" (Oladipo, 90). It developed prominently in the nineteenth and twentieth-century European thought, particularly in response to questions raised by religious decline, social upheaval, war, and the perceived loss of traditional sources of meaning. Existentialist thinkers generally begin with the concrete individual rather than with abstract systems of philosophy. They are interested in the individual's confrontation with such fundamental conditions as freedom, anxiety, absurdity, alienation, despair, responsibility, mortality, and the search for meaning (Nyong and Jenkwe, 1992). Although existentialists differ considerably in their philosophical positions especially as it affects theistic and atheistic predilections, they share an emphasis on humans as beings who must confront existence and make choices in within circumstances in which they find themselves.

Among the important precursors of Existentialism is Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher and theologian who focused predominantly on the individual's subjective relationship with existence, faith, choice, anxiety, and despair. He argued that genuine existence requires the individual to make personal and often difficult choices rather than simply conforming to society (Karl, 1970).

The Dynamics of Crime and the Contemporary World: Moral and Existential Dilemmas in Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to you by Chance*

Another important contributor to the existentialist philosophy is Friedrich Nietzsche. Although he did not call himself an existentialist, he exerted enormous influence on the movement. His critique of conventional morality and his declaration of "the death of God" raised profound questions about the source of values and meaning in a world where traditional religious certainties could no longer be taken for granted. Nietzsche's ideas concerning self-creation, individual freedom, and the overcoming of inherited values became important foundations for later existentialist philosophy (Karl, 1970).

In the 20th century, Existentialism was developed by thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir. While Heidegger examined the nature of human existence, which emphasises concepts such as anxiety, authenticity, being-in-the-world and being-toward-death, Sartre developed an explicitly atheistic existentialism, arguing that existence precedes essence (Gray, 2004). The implication is that human beings are not born with a predetermined purpose but must create meaning through their choices and actions. Thus, for Sartre, this radical action is inseparable from responsibility because individuals are responsible for the choices through which they define themselves. On her part, Simone de Beauvoir extended the existentialist ideas into questions of gender, freedom, oppression, and human relationships. Her argument that women are socially constructed as the "Other" became particularly influential in feminist philosophy and criticism (Beauvoir, 2011).

Another major figure whose writings are closely related to existentialism is Albert Camus, though he rejected the label. Camus is particularly important for his concept of the absurd, which arises from the conflict between humanity's desire for meaning and a universe that does not provide an obvious or predetermined meaning. Camus' contribution to the theory hinges on the purposelessness and meaninglessness of life in spite of man's effort at finding same. For Camus, the absurd in Existentialism denotes a sense of the radical contingency of all things that exist: the sense that everything might be otherwise than it is because there is no ultimate plan or purpose according to which things might be justified. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus explores how individuals can confront this condition without escaping into false certainty (Camus, 1991). Other important existentialist thinkers include Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, whose approaches incorporated religious dimensions. It is, however, safe to note that collectively, these thinkers demonstrate that existentialism is not a single, uniform doctrine, but a broad philosophical tradition concerned with the individual's confrontation with freedom, choice, responsibility, ambiguity, anxiety, and alienation. Other cardinal tenets or concerns of the theory include meaninglessness, fear and anguish, cynicism, nihilism, despair, and death. This study deploys these concepts in the analysis of Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* with a view to establishing the text's existentialist persuasion.

Crime and the Contemporary World: A Historical Overview

The history of crime in the world is essentially the history of how human societies have defined, committed, controlled, and punished acts considered harmful, immoral, or threatening to social order. Crime is therefore not only about acts such as murder or theft; its meaning has evolved and changed considerably across different historical periods and cultures. Unarguably, crime is almost as old as the human society itself. Even before the development of written laws, human communities had rules governing acceptable behaviour. In small hunting and gathering communities, social order was maintained largely through customs and traditions, kinship obligations, communal sanctions, religious beliefs, public shame and ostracism, as well as revenge and retaliation. Acts such as murder, theft, sexual violations, betrayal, and the destruction of communal property could provoke punishment. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, for example, Ikemefuna was given to Umuofia as part of a settlement for a murder committed by a man from Mbaino. In the text, an Umuofia woman had gone to Mbaino to trade, only to be killed by an Mbaino man. Because such an act was considered a serious crime, Umuofia sent an ultimatum to Mbaino, demanding that the community either give up the murderer or face war. Fearing the military strength of Umuofia, Mbaino chose negotiation rather than conflict. As compensation, they gave Umuofia a young virgin girl and Ikemefuna, who was essentially surrendered as a form of human compensation for the murdered woman. The virgin was given to the deceased woman's husband, while Ikemefuna was placed under Okonkwo's care (*Things Fall Apart*, 23, 46-49). This recreation of the pre-colonial Igbo society exposes, not only the complexity of the Igbo justice system, but also the fact that even when there were no written laws and formal courts, precolonial African societies did not tolerate criminalities; they had their own way of dealing with them.

With the emergence of cities, political institutions, and written languages, societies began to develop more formal systems of law. In Mesopotamia, for example, the Code of Hammurabi, associated with King Hammurabi of Babylon, emerged as one of the earliest ancient legal codes around the 18th BCE. The code addressed offences such as theft, murder, bodily injury, false accusations, slavery, and so on. Its famous principle of proportional retaliation is associated with the idea of *lex talionis*, or "law of retaliation", often expressed as "an eye for an eye" (<https://www.history.com>). Similarly, ancient Egyptian society was governed by the concept of *Ma'at*, which represented truth, justice, harmony, and cosmic order. Crime was therefore understood not merely as an offence against another person but as a disruption of social and cosmic balance. Authorities punished offences such as theft, robbery, corruption, and violence, while religious institutions also played an important role in maintaining social order (<https://www.egyptianmuseum.org>).

The Dynamics of Crime and the Contemporary World: Moral and Existential Dilemmas in Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to you by Chance*

During the Medieval Period, precisely after the decline of Western Roman Empire, religion became extremely influential in defining morality and wrongdoing. In Medieval Christian Europe, there was a considerable overlap between what may be termed crime, sin, treason, heresy or immorality. The church therefore played an important role in determining what constituted unacceptable behaviour. In most instances, punishments could include imprisonment, fines, corporal punishment, public humiliation or execution. One particularly important feature of medieval criminal justice was the use of public punishment intended not only to penalise the offender but also to frighten other members of society into obedience (<https://www.bloomsbury.com>).

A major transformation occurred between the 16th and 18th centuries as European states became increasingly centralised. The modern state increasingly claimed the authority to define and investigate crime, prosecute offenders and impose punishment. This represented a significant movement away from private revenge toward state-controlled justice. The development of police forces, courts, prisons, professional judges, and criminal codes gradually strengthened this system (<https://www.bloomsbury.com>). The Enlightenment Period which followed produced a revolutionary transformation in ideas about crime and punishment. One of the most influential thinkers of the Enlightenment era was Cesare Beccaria, whose 1764 work, *On Crime and Punishments*, argued against arbitrary and excessively cruel punishment. Very categorically, Beccaria posited that laws should be clear and that punishment should be proportional to the offence. He added that torture should be rejected, and that justice should be based on rational principles. His ideas helped establish what became known as the Classical School of Criminology (<https://www.bloomsbury.com>).

The 20th century witnessed dramatic changes in both crime and criminal justice. Aniekan Brown (2015) notes that new forms of crime emerged alongside technological and economic development which include organised crime, international drug trafficking, money laundering, kidnapping, terrorism, financial crime, cyber-related offences, human trafficking, among others even as organised crime became increasingly international during the period. Brown further notes that criminal organisations began operating across national borders, involving activities such as drug trafficking, illegal gambling, arms trafficking, extortion, money laundering, and smuggling, and concludes that globalisation made it easier for these criminal networks to move people, money, goods, and information across borders. Consequently, crime increasingly became an international rather than merely local phenomenon (24-25).

The contemporary world (21st century) has witnessed a leap-frogging transformation in criminal activities as a result of digital technology and globalisation. The internet has created new forms of criminal activities that range from cyber fraud to hacking, identity theft, and online financial scams. Others are cyberstalking, digital extortion, ransomware, online trafficking, and cryptocurrency related crime. At the same time, traditional crimes have acquired new technological dimensions (Brown, 25). However, one of the most important contemporary debates is the relationship between crime and inequality. Some criminologists argue that economic deprivation, unemployment, marginalisation, and unequal access to opportunities can create conditions conducive to certain forms of crime (Brown, 2026). This does not mean that poverty automatically produces criminality, rather, it suggests that crime must sometimes be examined within broader structures of economic inequality, unemployment, social marginalisation, and unequal distribution of resources. It is within this complex social and philosophical context that Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* becomes particularly relevant. As will be seen presently in the analysis, Nwaubani's novel provides a significant literary lens through which the dynamics of contemporary crime can be examined, not simply as a problem of criminal behaviour, but as a manifestation of the wider moral contradictions and existential anxieties of contemporary society.

Moral and Existential Dilemmas in *I Do Not come To You by Chance*

Nwaubani's novel presents moral and existential dilemmas, and subtly poses some fundamental questions about what may be deemed wrong or right by individuals and the larger society. The novel also presents the fact that tendencies for amoral and aberrational attitudes, behaviours, acts, and practices are predicated on the social and economic forces that pervade a society per time. The work projects the idea that poverty and systemic failure can push "good" people into making bad choices. Very specifically, the work shows how government failure, unemployment, and desperation do push some smart, educated, and highly prospective people into crime. The text seems to be posing very many pertinent, subtle, and somehow uncomfortable questions such as: "What does integrity cost and who can afford it?" Is it justifiable to commit a crime to prevent a greater harm to one's family? Can a good person do bad things for the right reasons? What really constitute morality? How do we define success? These questions and more constitute the preoccupation of Nwaubani's postmodern narrative.

In the text, Kingsley, the first son of Paulinus and Augustina Ibe, initially resolves to abide by his father's admonition to live a disciplined and integrity-filled life and by so doing make his father's heart glad. Paulinus, a British-trained Engineer, who works with the Abia State Ministry of Works, Umuahia, is an epitome of discipline, integrity, and uprightness. A committed Christian of the Catholic faith, Paulinus is averse to corruption and related tendencies, and frantically dissociates himself from those with such dispositions or tendencies (*I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, 63, henceforth, *Come by Chance*). He does not only preach these values but also inculcates same in his children – Kingsley, Godfrey, Charity, and Eugene. However, try as he may, Kingsley would later find that living an upright, disciplined and morally-sound life is indeed phantasmagoric and delusional especially in a society that

The Dynamics of Crime and the Contemporary World: Moral and Existential Dilemmas in Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to you by Chance*

does not reward hard work, integrity, discipline or excellence. Thus, for Kingsley, morality, discipline, integrity, and forthrightness are pieces of the ideal and therefore utopian in a society that cares little about the welfare of its citizens. He begins to examine the concrete realities of his society vis-à-vis those moral expectations normally projected by his father.

Very specifically, when Kingsley reminisces on the experiences of his father, an incorruptible and highly disciplined civil servant who ends his life a poor man in spite of having put in his absolute best in the service of his state; when he remembers the fact that the father's salary can hardly take care of the man's health when he develops diabetes and later, high blood pressure; when he remembers how he had to lose Ola, the love of his life, due to the fact that, several years after graduating as a Chemical Engineer and as the best student in his class, he can't find a job to enable him to take care of her and as well assure her of a formidable future, Kingsley begins to have a rethink. He has attended several interviews, performed creditably well, but would not be offered any job opportunity due to the fact that he does not have the requisite connections to have him placed somewhere. In one of those frustrating moments, he exclaimed before the mother: "Honestly, Mummy, I'm just tired. What is it I'm doing wrong? I always pass the tests and then they don't want me. I'm really perplexed" (Come by Chance, 33). Kingsley further explicates on the basis of his constant rejection by potential employers, particularly the latest one that caused him to go to the mother and express his utter frustration and disappointment thus:

This particular rejection letter was exceedingly painful because I had defied all the odds by getting as far as the last interview. But the way things worked in our society these days, besides paper qualifications and a high intelligence quotient, you usually needed to have 'long-leg'. You needed to know someone, or someone who knew someone, before you could access the most basic things. Still, I progressed from one stage of the interview to the other...Someone had identified that I graduated as best student in my Chemical Engineering class (Come by Chance, 33-34).

Kingsley seems to be deconstructing the father's avowed disposition that education – studying very hard and obtaining good grades at school – remains the most potent "recipe for wealth, the pass to respectability, the ticket to eternal life" (Come by Chance, 18). It is, for Kingsley, appalling to find that those who have little or no education, but who have the guts to do some amoral and socially aberrational businesses, are the ones that prosper in the society. In fact, the society holds them in high esteem. No one appears bothered about the source of people's wealth as long as they actually make it. A typical example of someone in this category is his mother's half-brother, Boniface. Perhaps, there is need to dwell a bit on the character of Boniface.

Popularly called "Cash Daddy", Boniface Mbamalu is Kingsley's charismatic and sophisticated maternal uncle who runs a highly organised email fraud "business" and recruits as well as mentors many desperate young men including university graduates into 419 scams, teaching them everything from psychology to money laundering and international travel. Behind the charm and designer suits, he exploits systemic failure and family obligation to justify the crime, farming it as redistribution of wealth. He is portrayed as flamboyant, extravagant, and extremely wealthy. He is known as Cash Daddy because of his extraordinary financial power and his willingness to spend money freely. His wealth comes principally from 419/internet fraud, through which he operates an organised network of scams. He sees the fraudulent business as a response to an unjust economic system. Perhaps, one of his strongest arguments is that the Nigerian economic system does not reward honest effort adequately, and 'pities' educated people such as Paulinus who struggle greatly despite their honesty, while people who are able to manipulate the system become wealthy. Boniface's philosophy may be summed up thus: If the legitimate system cannot provide opportunities for prosperity and survival, people will definitely find alternative means of achieving them. This is particularly significant for Kingsley. His father's life becomes an example of the failure of conventional morality: he served the government honestly and conscientiously, yet, retirement leaves him impoverished and vulnerable. Kingsley therefore begins to question whether education, morality, and hard work are sufficient for survival.

Another justification for Boniface's involvement in crime is the belief that the West has overly exploited Africa and it is therefore time for them to pay back. This is, perhaps, Boniface's most interesting ideological persuasion. He presents internet fraud as a kind of revenge against Western countries. Boniface sees the relationship between Africa and the West through the history of slave trade, colonialism, economic exploitation, and unequal global relations. In his reasoning, Western countries have taken advantage of African nations for generations, therefore, taking money from wealthy Europeans and Americans through scams is, in his mind, a way of **balancing the equation** (emphasis mine). In other words, Boniface transforms an individual criminal act into a supposed anti-colonial struggle (Come by Chance, 302-307).

Without mincing words, what gives Boniface the nerves to continue to thrive in the fraudulent business is the declining state of societal values as well as the corrupt nature of the Nigerian bureaucratic/political system. For example, the police authorities are aware of the kind of business Boniface is into, yet, instead of investigating and making him to pay for his fraudulent acts, they even assign him "fully armed" police officers to provide security for him especially during the period he declared his gubernatorial ambition (Come by Chance, 314, 365). Boniface is married. The woman knows the kind of business the husband is involved in but remains unperturbed as long she can continue to live in affluence in Lagos and enjoy undiminished inflow of cash (Come by Chance, 261). Apart from the wife, Boniface has other numerous girlfriends whom he spends lavishly on; he even imports girls from India (Come by Chance, 365). In the same vein, World Bank, Boniface's colleague in the internet fraud business has numerous wives

The Dynamics of Crime and the Contemporary World: Moral and Existential Dilemmas in Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to you by Chance*

and girlfriends on whom he spends lavishly on; he even boasts of marrying his three wives in one day (Come by Chance, 120). None of these women is bothered about the man's source of colossal wealth; all of them are simply interested in the money they get from him and not its source. Virtually all the women who have romantic affairs with these fraudulent men in Nwaubani's narrative are only interested in the money they get from them and not the source of the money, an indication of not just the materialistic nature of the society but also the loss of familial and societal values which used to serve the bedrock for a prosperous society.

Again, Boniface has very many costly cars with private registration numbers, one of which is Mercedes Benz SLK with number plate 'Cash Daddy 17' (Come by Chance, 113). In saner and well-regulated climes, private number plates are not issued at the beck and call of every Tom, Dick, and Harry; they are exclusively reserved for a set of senior and/or highly treasured citizens with genuine businesses and verifiable sources of income. But in Nigeria, as depicted in the novel, so long as you have the economic wherewithal, irrespective of the source of your wealth, you can smartly walk into a police station or any other relevant government agency and demand for a special or private number plate, and before anyone would spell Jack Robinson, your request would be granted. This is the porous social system Boniface, Word Bank, Kingsley, and other heavyweight cybercriminals in the narrative cash in on to perpetuate their nefarious activities without batting an eyelid. More disheartening is the fact that in spite of their criminal disposition, these fraud-loving syndicates are the ones who have the economic elbow to contest for public offices. A case in point is Boniface, who, in spite of his fraudulent background, contests to lead Abia State people as governor (Come by Chance, 258-259). Of course, with personalities such as the likes of Boniface in the corridors of powers, criminalities are bound, not only to perpetuate unabatedly, but to gradually become the "new normal" and what society would have to brace up to live with. This is perhaps the basis for the continuous thriving of criminalities such as armed robbery, oil, theft, cybercrime, kidnapping, banditry, and other categories of criminal activities that go on unabated in the Nigerian social space.

Anywhere in the world, the university remains not only the highest citadel of learning, but also epicentres of integrity, rectitude, and discipline. Admission of students into any programme is supposed to be on merit, and not on what anyone can offer. But in Nigeria, as Nwaubani's narrative recreates, admission of students into universities sometimes yields to foreign influences, resulting in unqualified candidates being admitted simply because of what they can offer. In Nwaubani's narrative, Charity, Boniface's younger sister, has an abysmally low score in her JAMB-conducted examination as attested to by Professor Buchi, but when Kingsley, her millionaire brother, approaches the former with a good sum of money, Charity is offered admission without ado, and with a promise that she would be switched from Philosophy to Law programme in the next academic session (Come by Chance, 254). This speaks to the level of decay in societal values in almost every fabric of the country's life. Nwaubani's narrative is a subtle reminder that no society thrives amidst corrupt and fraudulent activities whether in the private or public domain. Now, let's get back to the concepts of moral and existential dilemmas especially as it affects Kingsley's characterisation.

As earlier stated, Kingsley's father, Paulinus, in his hey days and prior to falling unprecedentedly ill, had a serious contempt, disdain or outright hatred for Boniface and what he represents. Of course, a disciplined and morally upright Paulinus would not want a known fraudster and an internationally acclaimed cybercriminal anywhere near him or his family. Paulinus would not Boniface anywhere near his family in order not to serve as a model for his children; he simply distances him (Come by Chance, 63). A turning point however comes when Paulinus' health challenge surpasses the ability of medics in the state government-owned hospital, where he is admitted, to handle occasioned by worn-out facilities and absence of relevant personnel (Come by Chance, 127). The available option is to transfer him to the Teaching Hospital in Aba. At this point, given the amount of money involved vis-à-vis the reality of the family's economy, the only lifeline of the family is Boniface, the 419ner. Boniface shows up without much ado and sponsors Paulinus' transfer to the teaching hospital where he begins to experience gradual convalescence (Come by Chance, 135-136). Paradoxically, it does not really matter to Paulinus' family where Boniface had the money he lavishly spends in the hospital neither does Paulinus himself feel bad about his gradual recovery occasioned by Boniface's financial intervention. This is where Nwaubani raises some fundamental moral questions for her readers to examine what actually constitute morality or the amoral in the society. Should ill-gotten wealth or money be rejected when saving life is involved? What about the beneficiary of the ill-gotten wealth? Should they praise or appreciate the donor of the ill-gotten money simply because such largess had been deployed to save life?

It is indeed amazing to find that at no point in the narrative does Paulinus condemn the in-law (Boniface) for using the ill-gotten money to save his life, especially so because he had been in comma right from when he was at the state government hospital; he only regained consciousness after being transferred to the teaching hospital (Come by Chance, 138). This scenario would have seriously influenced Kingsley's own concept of morality, integrity, and discipline vis-à-vis his father's primal expectation. His invitation by Boniface and his subsequent decision to join the 419 business are ultimately shaped by this familial and societal experiences. Morality, therefore, is not a graphic statute cast in stone; it is a relative concept that is subject to circumstantial hermeneutics.

On the first day Kingsley visits his uncle, Boniface, the envelop the latter gives him contains so much money that when he shows the mother the content, the woman exclaims with her two hands raised up to heaven, "Great is thy faithfulness O Lord" (Come by Chance, 122). Perhaps, Kingsley would have expected his mother to exclaim or scream at the sight of such huge amount of money and question its source knowing full well that her stepbrother, Boniface, does not have a genuine or categorically known business.

The Dynamics of Crime and the Contemporary World: Moral and Existential Dilemmas in Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to you by Chance*

Rather, she really appreciates the offer and even thanks goodness for it. This appreciation of Uncle Boniface's largesse by his mother, would have toughened Kingsley's resolve to accept the reality of his world, namely, that money answers all things (an allusion to the Bible), irrespective of how it's got. As the opara (first male child) of the family, he desires money to cater for the family's multifarious needs, especially now that his father is dead, leaving behind his mother and all his siblings in his care. This huge family burden, perhaps, remains the basis for Kingsley's acceptance to join Boniface in the risk-laden multimillion, multi-currency business that is traditionally antithetical to the father's wish and aspirations. At this point, Kingsley has no choice but to understudy his uncle and also make millions in spite of the moral and existential risks involved.

Kingsley has joined the kind of business that the late father would have overly frowned at irrespective how much it would bring. For a disciplined man in the class of Paulinus, it would be unheard of, inconceivable, unimaginable, and therefore, abominable for his child to ever contemplate, let alone join the 419 crew. In fact, the shock of such news or discovery would have sent him to his grave earlier than any diagnosable illness. But Kingsley has taken his decision and there are no two ways about it. Henceforth, what preoccupies his mind is his ability to raise enough money to respond to the enormous problems that the father's family is bedeviled with. After all, a person becomes a criminal "when the definitions favourable to breaking the law outweigh the definitions favourable to non-violation" (Brown, 27). Brown further posits that socio-economic factors such as pervasive poverty, high unemployment, and profound inequality serve as a fertile ground for recruitment into criminal groups (38). This latter explication on the basis for people's involvement in criminal activities tends to sit well with Kingsley. He had finished school with an enviable grade, applied to many companies for a job offer but found none, hence, his existential decision.

It is absolutely safe to state that Kingsley found himself in an existential situation, a terminology described by Henry Nordmeyer as "a situation in which the individual is really forced to take account of the ultimate reality of his own self" (590). He has taken the decision out of his own volition having taken "account of the ultimate reality" of his own life. It is his choice, not something that is forced down his throat. Of course, freedom of choice is fundamental to existentialism, for, by existence, Jean-Paul Sartre unambiguously states that man "chooses himself", that is, "he affirms his self in freedom, but only in such a way as he would, in good faith 'choose' all mankind" (cited in Nordmeyer, 586). For Sartre, freedom is an obligation, "the most stringent obligation there is, because we live in a world, not of contemplation or speculation, not of the past or of the trivial, idle present, but in the world of the future into which we unceasingly have to project ourselves with our entire being: a world of action" (cited in Nordmeyer, 587). Kingsley is tired of 'waiting for godot' in the guise of a formal employment when illiterates and neophytes such as Boniface, Azuka, and World Bank are making millions from various illegal businesses. He had to act. After all, he is an existentialist, one who believes that "Man is born to act. To act is to affirm the worth of an end, and to affirm the worth of an end is to create an ideal" (Oliver Holmes, cited in Nordmeyer, 585). By acting and accepting to take responsibility for his action, Kingsley may be said to have warded off existentialist fear, a state of subconscious tension characterised by dread, anxiety and unease. Very fundamentally, his action also wards off angst, described by Nordmeyer as "a religious and ethical force, experienced in the depth of the subconscious" (586). In the words of Sartre, existentialism requires that as individuals, we should all "take up our burden, each one of us his own" (591). Certainly, this typifies the courage of Kingsley who remains poised to change his life's narratives irrespective of what constitutes the family values.

However, in spite of the resilience to act or courageously take up one's "burden" as projected by existentialism, there is also the flip side to the philosophy – the fact that "Nothingness precedes, envelopes, and conditions all Beings", and that "our true condition is one of exposure: in reality, we are defenceless, naked to the winds of chance and blind accident" (Gray, 117). This is what Albert Camus refers to as the absurd, the inherent contradiction between humanity's desire for meaning and the apparent meaninglessness of the world. Absurdity also places emphasis on the individual's experience of uncertainty and ambiguity. This is the case with Kingsley when Boniface, popularly called Cash Daddy, dies suddenly, shockingly and unexpectedly of food poisoning (Come by Chance, 388). For existentialists, death may be likened to an inevitable shipwreck, which Martin Heidegger describes as "the most personal, the most detached, unrelated, and unsurpassable potentiality" (cited in Gray, 119). Though death is certain, some existentialists believe that "the hour of its coming is indefinite and indeterminable", and therefore, the need to "live always in the face of death" (Gray, 119). Gray further expatiates on the delusionary nature of life's inordinate pursuit thus: "Spiritually, we are exposed to the yawning abyss, the primal night which originates all and to which we all return. Only a small fraction of mankind ever recognises this to be their real estate, but it is no less true of because of that" (118). Certainly, Kingsley has come to terms with this reality.

For Soren Kierkegaard, human existence is marked by anxiety, despair, choice, and the search for meaning. For him, therefore, simply pursuing meaning or worldly happiness cannot resolve the deepest problem of human existence (cited in Nyong and Jenkwe, 1992). This explication absolutely captures the despondency that characterises Kingsley's world. Upon joining Boniface, Kingsley had foreseen happiness in making enough money to solve his father's family's entire problem, but he ends up melancholic, depressed, and traumatized when he realises the absolute futility of all his pursuits. His mother, a woman he loves and cherishes so much disowns him upon finding out the real source of his wealth (Come by Chance, 384). His girlfriend, Merit, whom he loves so much and spends lavishly on, calls off the relationship she had enjoyed with him upon finding out his real personality (Come by

The Dynamics of Crime and the Contemporary World: Moral and Existential Dilemmas in Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to you by Chance*

Chance, 376). One of his siblings, Godfrey, on whom he spends a great deal to be able to finish the university, abandons school. When Kingsley engages in a fight with him as a result of sheer disappointment, Godfrey challenges him to show evidence of his own education and certificates (Come by Chance, 378-379). All of this causes Kingsley to deeply reflect on his entire life as a cybercriminal who has made and spent so much money on his family and friends only to be rejected by them and treated as a pariah. At this point, Kingsley realises the futility of life's inordinate ambitions and sums it all, in the words of Gray as "a profound illusion" (Gray, 118). This is where he deeply regrets the choice he made. It is, perhaps, this realisation of the futility of life's irrational pursuits that contributes to his avowed refusal to inherit Cash Daddy's chains of business and opts for a renewed life altogether. "I continued shaking my head... For the first time in my life, I felt in control. I was the master of my destiny." (Come by Chance, 394). Through Kingsley's experience, Nwaubani explores the circumstances that make criminality attractive while simultaneously exposing its moral and psychological consequences. Kingsley's predicament reflects the contradictions of a society in which education and legitimate aspirations do not necessarily guarantee economic security, while material wealth commands admiration and social recognition regardless of its source. His gradual involvement in cybercrime consequently generates a profound moral dilemma: he must negotiate between his knowledge of the wrongfulness of his actions and his desire to overcome poverty, satisfy family expectations and attain the material success celebrated by his society. At the same time, his choices produce an existential dilemma because they force him to confront the relationship between freedom and responsibility, circumstance and agency, material success and moral integrity. The contemporary phenomenon of cybercrime, therefore, cannot be adequately understood merely as a violation of law; it also constitutes a moral and existential problem involving questions of choice, responsibility, conscience, freedom, identity and the meaning of worthwhile human existence.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the dynamics of crime in the contemporary world with emphasis on the complex relationship between crime, morality, social pressure, and individual agency through existentialist perspectives. Nwaubani's novel interrogates the moral and existential dilemmas that arise when individuals are confronted with the conflict between familial and socially prescribed values and the material demands of survival. The paper presents crime as a complex moral and existential problem arising from the intersection of poverty, unemployment, social inequality, materialism, and the desire for a meaningful and successful life. Nwaubani exposes the painful conflict between ethical integrity and economic survival, as well as between individual responsibility and the pressures imposed by a corrupt and unequal society. The paper represents crime not merely as an individual transgression but as a symptom of broader contradictions within contemporary society, and situates the protagonist's criminal choices within a complex network of poverty, unemployment, social inequality, family expectations, consumerism, and the seductive culture of sudden wealth. Ultimately, the novel does not excuse criminality but demonstrates how oppressive social condition can distort moral judgment and compel individuals to negotiate difficult choices between what is right, what is necessary, and what promises lasting happiness and worthwhile success. Through this moral ambiguity, Nwaubani invites readers to reconsider the nature of crime, responsibility and human choices in a contemporary world where the pursuit of material success often comes into conflict with conscience and moral values.

REFERENCES

- 1) Achebe, C. (1957). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
- 2) Agunbiade, O. and Enongene, S. (2026). *Postcolonial Disillusionment and Migration in African Literature in English*. New York: Routledge.
- 3) Akpan, I. (2023). Leadership Question and the Writer's Style: A Literary Stylistic Analysis of Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. *International Journal of Social Science, Humanity & Management Research*. Vol.2, Issue 07, July 2023.
- 4) Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany. Chevallier: Vintage.
- 5) Brown, A. (2015). *The Police and Organised Crime in Nigeria*: D.E. Agwanwo (ed). *A Political Economy of Policing in Nigeria*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, pp. 86-102.
- 6) Brown, A. (2026). *Crime in Nigeria: Let Us All Eat the Cake*. Uyo: University of Uyo.
- 7) Camus, A. (1991). *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. Vintage.
- 8) Chukwuemeka, D. (2021). E-fraud Economy as an Emergent Perspective towards the Corpus of African Hustler Narratives. *Journal of African Literature Association*, 15(1), 30-47.
- 9) Dalley, H. (2013). *The Idea of "Third Generation Nigerian Literature": Conceptualising Historical Change and Territorial Affiliation in the Contemporary Nigerian Novel*. Retrieved on 12th September, 2026 from <https://www.jstor.org>.
- 10) Gray, G. (2004). *The Idea of Death in Existentialism*. *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 48, No.5

The Dynamics of Crime and the Contemporary World: Moral and Existentialist Dilemmas in Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to you by Chance*

- 11) Harrison, P. 1993. *Inside the Third World: The Classic Account of Poverty in the Developing Countries*. London: Penguin Group.
- 12) Karl, J. (1970). *Philosophy: Existential Elucidation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 13) Kehinde, A. (2009). *The Modern Novelist and the Historical Sense: The Examples of D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf*. California Linguistic Notes, Vol. XXXIV, No.1.
- 14) Metu, J. and Ogbodo, J. (2025/2026). Faustian Sequence in Sefi Atta's "Yahoo Yahoo" and Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. In Bangura, A.K. (eds). *Knowledge Production and Management in Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- 15) Nordmeyer, H. (2015). An Existentialist Approach to Literature. *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol.33, No.8, pp.583-593.
- 16) Nyong, D. & Jenkwe, T. (1992). *Topics in Existentialism*. Ikot Ekpene: Donest Educational Publishing Company.
- 17) Nwaubani, A. (2009). *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. Lagos: Masobe.
- 18) Oladipo, O. (2016). *Core Issues in African Philosophy*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.
- 19) Omagu, S., and Umahi, D. (2024). Fictional Verisimilarities and the Didactic in Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention*, 11(10), 8302-8309.
- 20) Ribic, P. (2019). The Nigerian Email Scam Novel. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55(3), 424-436.
- 21) Udoh, I. (2026). Food Symbolism and cultural identity in Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. *UTUENIKANG: AKSU Journal of English*. Vol.3 (1) pp.47-60.