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How 'Good People' turn 'Evil' in Maik Nwosu's *Alpha Song*: A Luciferian Analysis

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Abstract

This paper seeks to understand through an analysis of Maik Nwosu's *Alpha Song* how good people turn evil. The paper is predicated on the need to reappraise the basis for the moral judgments that often lead individuals to being labelled as evil. It adopts a Luciferian framework (which engages with the idea of evil, situations that create it and the systems that birth it) for the analysis. The study establishes that self defense in reaction to certain stimuli is an attribute of human existence throughout the living world which is not limited or determined by time, space, culture, religion, sex, and species. It argues that pursuant to the circumstances of its occurrence, these reactions are not always societally acceptable and may often be termed evil. It claims that the transition processes in humans are patterned after a prototype which involves the manipulation of situations and that there is a general link in the wrongs which happen all around. While the centripetal motifs of vices are essentially one, particular situations take on immensities on greater or lesser scales depending on the immediacy of the situation, the exaction of force by the system, and the individual's resistance.

Keywords: Evil, Good, Luciferian, Wrong, Resistance

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1. Introduction

Individuals who have a general sense of financial, social and psychological security and are thus free from some of life's desperate situations such as a need to provide parental support or earn a steady income often have a tendency to judge the lives of others much more easily and engage in name labeling such as calling people evil. However, it is common knowledge that experience is the best teacher because when such individuals lose some of the aforementioned privileges, their perspective about what is labelled evil or good tend to change or at least in some cases oscillate. The new perspective leads to a questioning and even a reproach of the standpoint from which the individual had hitherto acted as an adjudicator over other people's moral conduct.

Even though these changes in perspective are infrequent, when they occur, it is noticeable that things that would have been referred to as dishonest are things that are constantly contemplated and often lived out by everyone. Thus, previously unconsidered options, often regarded as evil, become the new common sense. Often, the need to stay alive justify these 'evil' thoughts and the consequent actions override every sense of morality.

The big question which requires an answer is, why would it be strange for people, who have had to live through more desperate circumstances, with minimal or no external support to tend towards evil, if it is easy for others to become evil through a brief period of exposure. What this means, then, is that it is easier for people whose "consciences" are dead to deviate from societally constructed moral paths. It can thus be construed as excessive any approach that insists on the guilt of other people without probing further into the causative circumstances that predisposes them to evil, the role which the socio-political and economic system has played in the affair, the availability or otherwise of other options to individual as well as their capacity to resist evil.

2. Theoretical Framework

Philip Zimbardo (2007) challenges the idea held by many that it is incredible that the decision to do evil (steal, kill and destroy) can be

outside the power of the individual doing evil. He argues that the "unwillingness to accept any of the many mitigating circumstances [being] detailed" which:

contributed to [the] abusive behavior and should have reduced [the] harsh [criticism of erring individuals]. The prosecutor and judge refused to consider any idea that situational forces could influence individual behavior. There was the standard individualism conception that is shared by most people in [the Western] culture. It is the idea that the fault was entirely 'dispositional.'" (Zimbardo, 2007, p. x)

The use of sociological as well as psychological theories as critical tools for the evaluation of this text offers a more inclusive explanation for the damning response of characters to situations. "The Machiavellian Treatise" aptly generalises the human survival instinct when it suggests that "every aspect of human nature has a Machiavellian undercurrent, no matter how seemingly innocuous or benign." (Cheshire, 2011, pvii) This, it believes, is "the very essence and nature of powerful people" because "all of humanity is Machiavellian to one extent or another and that it is a necessity to have some Machiavellian traits in order to survive in society." This insight is quintessential to this novel study as it supplies the foundation upon which to build a global study into every art form and across every culture.

Sociology and psychology, the fields with the largest body of literature on crime and deviancy, have come up with a number of theories which they believe account for the way people behave and some more for why they deviate. Psychology theories focus on an individual and how one's family members may influence an offender or deviant. Psychology creates an analogue among crime and every other form of deviance. In this sense, it is corroborative of sociological theories which aver that deviancy is subject to social mores and is dependent upon its statutes in determining what is right and wrong and who a deviant is. Secondly, it aligns its beliefs with

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sociologists in accruing some blame to society for its contributions in the formation of deviants and the perpetration of evil.

In psychology, theories such as the psychodynamic theory (Luborsky, 1991; Strupp, 1984; Horowitz 1976), behavioural theory (Watson, 1903, 1925; Crain 2010) social learning theory (Bandura 1963, 1971) and cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; Holt and Brown 1931) support this claim. Sociologically, the differential theory (Scarpitti, Nielsen and Miller, 2009), neutralisation theory (Siegal, 2005), labeling theory and conflict theory (Knapp, 1994) also uphold the stance that deviant behaviour is subservient to circumstances/situations and the system. On the other hand the proponents of the systemic functional theory believe that deviance is necessary to move society forward. Philip Zimbardo disagrees with them and argues that, in concurrence with the control theory (Galvin, 1975), a person has control over his or her actions and should try to correct them. In this way, he concurs with some religious groups on the retardational place of moral and economic vices.

3. Maik Nwosu's Alpha Song in Context

Indeed for many religious sects existence is incomplete without the assistance of a supreme being or other creatures of that supreme being, like angels for instance, who are less in power but yet supersede humans — totemism. These religious suppositions are often contradicted by the sciences, which theorises that matter can neither be created nor destroyed. Science argues that this indestructible matter converts into something else which fills up the void left by another and seem to assert that this is how the balance of life works. Thus being human is especially 'sine qua non' with being dependent on others. While the degree of the need for dependency or affiliations with or to others may definitely vary, there is a need nonetheless. When people make decisions of who to help satisfy that need, they pick people who they hold in high esteem - parents, role models, or lovers. This position gives the 'picked' a high level of control over the picker — the picked possess the ability to make the picker feel better about themselves or worse than anybody else can.

The consequence is, as we find in the story of Taneba Taneba in Maik Nwosu's *Alpha Song*, that when the picked leaves or makes desultory or condemnatory remarks about the picker, she or he receives a mental message, as in the beginning. This time the message is negative and because of the pedestal upon which the person has been placed, the message is hyperrealised. The person's mind is told that their flaws supersede their attractiveness. They are made to feel inferior and therefore insecure. Hence the person's self esteem is depleted and they withdraw into any group whatsoever which would welcome them.

Taneba, son of Chief Elias Brass and a mother whose name is rarely ever mentioned and whose union was always a bone of contention, begins his life like most people, with best wishes for his future. He imagines that based on his situation at the time of his wishful thinking, when he becomes twenty five years, he would be celebrating his birthday at "a swank party with plenty of food, wine and women... living in a posh area of Lagos, with a respectable garage, a cheerful bank account and a confident job or enterprise." (p4-5) The adjectives he chooses in describing his fantasy, indicates a striving after pleasure and is thus very surreal. His use of such language signifies high hopes and an existential attachment to the objects of his desire. His next sentence, however, indicates a ghastly dashing of hopes: "At twenty five, my reality was different." (p5)

What chanced? At twenty five he had become an outcast whose only refuge was his maternal uncle, his mother's only sibling, "who it was who saw to my university education. But even with him, there were often reminders that I really belonged somewhere else." (p5) He attests to being an orphan whose orphanage had lasted long before the loss of both his parents because one of his parents had turned to a "serial monogamist" (p5) and could really care less about him. In addition, the other family members had rejected him long before he was even born, especially because he is the only child of that union. He, thus, reflects on his loneliness, when he says that:

... the union [between his mother and father] was
apparently an unwelcome deviation from the

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tradition of corporate marriages in which one business PR political interest married into another and thus strengthen its base or widened its universe.
(p. 5)

Initially, the assumption would be that his father did some caring about what happens with his son and his mother because of "that outburst" (p5) until the reader discovers that "[h]e had always been fond of whistling, like a man searching for a musical key... It seemed... that he w-histled more afterwards and ironically paid less attention to my mother." (p5) "At the time he died," the narrator records, "he was said to be contemplating a fourth marriage." While his father swooned in and out of love, producing heirs to supplant his first son from an inheritance, the son was left to deal with loneliness. As a result the systemic power of his father's relatives had orphaned him before his parents died. After his father's death, they banished him outright:

Shortly after my father's death; his family had made its leaning on the matter very clear via a front-page newspaper announcement:

"The Brass family of Kaiama Creek has noted diverse claims, including those yet to be expressly stated, to the legacy of Chief Elias Brass. The Brass family wishes to clearly state that it recognises only the claim of Madam Antonia Brass and her two male children, all of Kaiama Creek Incorporated. The Brass family spans a long period in history, right down to the source of the seas, and it is prepared to take any action to safeguard this noble lineage. All bogus claimants are therefore warned to channel their energy into more profitable ventures."

Even before the advertisement, I had taken the view that I had lost the battle even while my father was alive and had stood by while his first other wife demonized me... Why the fight for another man's inheritance when I could be my own inheritor? (p. 6)

Being dehumanised by his own family, it becomes clear to him that 'he is on his own' and had to make his own path. His path from then on generally involved a withdrawal into self and a detachment from society; a product of a lot of introspection which ends up leaving him without "any real talent for making friends." He says:

I loved people - especially observing them, from a distance. In the university... my circle of acquaintance had named me Alien because they said I had a manner of self-detachment that worked against close relationships. (2007, p. 6)

This pattern of distancing from others extended even to the household of his maternal uncle; an household which he describes as a "claustrophobic apartment, bursting from corner to corner with children and maids, [where] I was more or less an absent resident." (p7) Being turned away from home, he turns to his "single-minded passion" for the night and the criticism of him by people begins. He claims:

There are some that concluded that because I loved the night so much, there must be some evil about me. Often, people rail against what they don't understand... but to live with mystery as a revelation is some significant sort of comprehension. (p. 2)

At once, attention is shifted to a spiritual source for his "deviancy" which, considering the ample evidence provided by the narrator of a thriving supernatural sphere, can be conjectured as possible, even though the evidence to the contrary is overwhelming. The narrator agrees that he has the night in his blood (p2) but his narrative is replete with examples which suggest the presence of systemic powers which create situations that nurture that longing for the night; with night here representing the urge to do evil. Taneba attests to being a triumvirate; in a manner similar to the Christian belief in a trinity

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during his decade of rendezvous with the night: "Taneba the father who judged the mayhem of the night, Taneba the son who revelled in its 'vaganza, and Taneba the spirit who descanted its mysteries." (p. 3)

For Taneba, like most people in a state of grace bestowed with the favour of the system, it is almost impossible for him to see clearly how deviancy could exist outside of some spiritual means or a foolhardy obstinacy. On the other hand, Taneba the father, standing at a distance judges the night with some degree of his brand of objectivity. From that purview, it is as if everyone who partook in the mayhem of the night as he calls it, is unworthy of association and so he stays far away trying his best not to get involved in anything shady. As judgmental as he tries not to be, he finds himself measuring and appraising peoples worth by his own scale of preference.

Tamuno, who is perhaps Taneba's closest friend in all the narrative, is first adjudged as "the biggest truant in our class. He missed class as if it was a requirement for obtaining a degree... Whenever he returned, he had plenty of money and a parade of girls at his beck and call." (p9) This is obviously a lifestyle which Taneba desires but obviously concludes is immoral and is perhaps one of the reasons why his friendship with Tamuno was "[a]t best, we were acquaintances — until we were assigned to the same thesis supervisor." (p9) His previous chagrin nearly disappears as soon as he becomes a beneficiary of Tamuno's generosity. The generosity was not got freely, it was earned. "Apparently, I had worked for Tamuno than I had worked for myself because I sorely needed the money we had agreed on as a fee." Here, Taneba begins to suffer some of the judgment he has dished out on other characters.

Indeed as a result of his own pecuniary needs, he gets involved in malpractice which entailed not just writing assignments for Tamuno but others as well during his stay at the university and which could have ended his educational career and made him a total castaway. He imputes so much of his effort into it that everyone who reads his work considers the writer a genius. Writing for others was clearly not the only thing he was willing to do for money. He ventures into voodoo by selling his dreams to Mama Rekia, the woman who buys dreams at a night market and rationalises his decision by "[r]eckoning that she

must be afflicted with sleeplessness and, more important, that I [need] the money."

As Taneba the son, he slowly begins to dabble into the deep waters of the 'night', a spirit which "possesses different people in different ways but mostly by freeing them from their daytime inhibitions." (p12) He testifies to this at the beginning of the book when he asserts that "the more man contrives to forsake nature the more he contrives against himself." (p2) This assertion seemed to be the product of some reflection occasioned by his newfound reasoning that "we are what we become. We are what happens to us" (p2); that he "still needed the money, and at that moment" (p11); that the night "uplifts me above the tedious sanity and grinning treachery of daylight" (p2). He thus resolves to relish in the stark enjoyment of the night and to forsake the pretences of decorum which daylight presents, braving its mayhem which presents itself as what it is not like a green snake would in green grass.

The first decisive act of his choice to 'become' is his movement out of his uncle's home and his exit from the employment he had into a boat that headed for Liberia with Bantu who has also been invited to work on contract basis as a / one of the stewards with the caterer on board. He admits that:

There was no completeness about my understanding, but I think the decision was not so much between the post office and the ship; it was more between my maternal uncle's house and The Owl. Perhaps it was also between the 'vaganza of Tamuno's world and the tame nights of my neighbourhood. (p. 41)

Finding himself in a quagmire when his expected income is denied him, he is stranded in Liberia and returns with his proverbial tail between his legs to beg his uncle and soon he leaves off again to partake in one of Bantu's tours of Nigeria. There, he begins to count time's passage through the white hairs beginning to appear on his head. He returns to Lagos to recover some lost time and he encounters in his

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ensuing night time rendezvous a few women who have undergone Luciferian transformations themselves, a realisation which reassures him that "on the streets several things are not all what they seem and the hard life out there sometimes makes people what they're not or would rather not be." (p. 48)

It was on one such drives, down the famous Allen Avenue — long on promise, short on its redemption — that I saw this innocent-looking girl standing by the side of the road... [who] carried her strap-on bag like a school kit. With her sleeveless black shirt, bright blue jeans and white sneakers, she could have been, but then it was almost eleven o'clock at night. (2007, p. 64)

He takes this child prostitute home and sleeps with her in order to get her comfortable. His not giving a thought to the fact that he was having sexual relations with a minor is indicative of the broken trust which negates his intention or pretension to providing any solace to the young girl and concretizes/deepens the young girl's bountiful mistrust in the humanity of humankind. As a result, while some others judge her and her kind as evil for their lifestyle, she also judges them for their perceived and perhaps proven hypocrisy and breach of trust. This young girl, Mairo, has been turned out of home exactly like Taneba except unlike him she does not have a loving maternal uncle to take refuge with, since even her mother encouraged her in the direction of the 'international flesh market', a choice which she vehemently refuses and for which she runs away from home to "the Mecca of opportunity prospectors: Lagos." (p66)

It seems to me this borders on how private spaces could be reclusively 'dark', even in the day, and how the darkness in public spaces could offer some brightness, depending on who the occupiers are — as found in the example of the mother and her friend respectively. You may, therefore, want to interrogate the idea of the rejection of a trusted private space, and the acceptance offered by a precarious non-ordinarily reliable public space.

In Lagos, Mairo resides with a friend who seems to be better off, although not by a lot. This friend welcomes her to stay and with time introduces her to the night life, a life she had ran away from, when she chose to come over to Lagos. Having nowhere else to run, she succumbs to her friends temptation and from the money she earns sets aside some for her mother. Even though Taneba later tries to save her, she relapses into the overpowering habits that held her; habits which were made possible by "the stunting politics of the day that had steered her into the refuge of the night. I blamed the dazzle of the night that had blinded her to the possibilities of true self-fulfilment." (p82) We thus become exposed to the de-individuation which the system causes even though it is nowhere near the crime scene and hence cannot be held accountable. It is this daunting situation which forces Taneba to ask:

How could so much beauty of the flesh cohabit with so much ugliness of the spirit? Why was it easy for her to thumb her nose at other people and call them "sly air" and "prostitutes" when she was in essence no better than they were? Why could she not be happy with her charmed and sometimes charming life without putting other people down and appearing to derive her appreciation of herself by denigrating others?... How much sacrifice or appeasement would ever be enough for her? Why was it that those who told me the robins will sing another day or that life is smoke appear to be happier than me in my season of bonding? (104) Being the material girl that she was, I considered, would she probably not have been part of that night life if she had not been fortunate to be under the tender care of a father who worked in a multinational company? (2007, p. 107)

He continues on this path of questioning and his questions multiply when his bosom friend is killed. He concludes, then, that "you can never know the full measure of a man, without the prompting

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circumstances.” (p117); those circumstances are what he sings about as Taneba the descanter.

4. Conclusion

This study has asserted that the archetypal nature of behavioural transmutation furtively reveals that as the individual is influenced for evil, the reverse is holistically achievable. It submitted that a general understanding of deviancy and deviant from a general perspective of what factors may promote it, in addition to individual idiosyncracies, could greatly complement efforts aimed at the correction and rehabilitation of individuals that the society has termed as evil.

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