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Discourse of Entrepreneurship in The White Tiger

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Discourse of Entrepreneurship in *The White Tiger*

by

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A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

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Discourse of Entrepreneurship in *The White Tiger*

Date Approved

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DEDICATION

To my mom and dad: the bravest and the kindest.

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ABSTRACT

The White Tiger (2008) is a novel by Aravind Adiga that tells the story of an Indian entrepreneur in Bangalore whose rise comes at the expense of many others, some of whom lose their lives as a direct result of his entrepreneurial acts. This thesis examines the novel's critique of entrepreneurship as a way through which the system reproduces itself, challenging the common narratives about entrepreneurship as a means to achieve freedom and independence for the common man. This thesis aligns Balram Halawi, *The White Tiger*'s protagonist, with a tradition of literary entrepreneurs that precedes him, and discusses the nature of entrepreneurship that further exploits the dominated classes through the example his story provides. Balram's alignment with a literary tradition of Western entrepreneurs allows for an analysis of entrepreneurship that goes beyond the spectacle of modern-day India.

Discourse of Entrepreneurship in *The White Tiger*

1. Introduction

The key to Aravind Adiga's novel, *The White Tiger* (2008), is its eponymous protagonist and sole narrator, Balram Halawi, who assumes many names throughout his narrative and embraces the White Tiger as his alter and ultimate ego. Balram controls the narrative, deciding what is said, when, and to what purpose. He chooses to introduce himself as an entrepreneur and his story as a story about entrepreneurship in India. Through Balram, *The White Tiger* tasks itself with debunking myths about the glories of entrepreneurship and high-tech-based economy in India. The novel cannot be understood without demystifying Balram's paradoxical character, a character who exists within a set of dichotomies and incorporates irreconcilable ideologies, some of which subscribe to notions of class solidarity while others iterate the hegemonic notions that oppress and exploit disadvantaged classes disguising injustice in many different ways to justify an inherently unjust system.

Balram's narrative operates within the paradigms of individual enlightenment and individual liberation. His story is that of reaching the light—and he calls it that—by means of entrepreneurship, in what seems to be a Western-style rags-to-riches story. Adiga combines this story with an enlightenment narrative from the Eastern literary tradition to create what might seem at first like an Indian hero. This enlightenment narrative aims at making Balram Halawi an Indian hero and also helps situate his story in a global context, making it the product of two traditions that can be woven together—against the common belief that East is East and West is West.

Balram's recollection of the Lord Buddha enlightenment story comes near the end of his narrative, allowing him to conclude that he has become enlightened, that he has seen something others could not see, and that his vision justifies his deeds—somehow:

There is a story I think I heard at a train station, sir, or maybe I read it on a torn page that had been used to wrap an ear of roasted corn I bought at the market – I can't remember. It was a story of Buddha. One day a cunning Brahmin, trying to trick the Buddha, asked him, 'Master, do you consider yourself a man or a god?'

The Buddha smiled and said, 'Neither. I am just one who has woken up while the rest of you are still sleeping.'

I'll give you the same answer to your question, Mr Jiabao. You ask, 'Are you a man or a demon?'

Neither, I say. I have woken up and the rest of you are still sleeping, and that is the only difference between us (Adiga 315).

Balram relates this story after he speaks about the probable extermination of his family in his village: seventeen members of his family—all his family but one surviving nephew—are murdered by the family of his former employer. They are murdered because Balram killed his old master, a crime he talks about in the beginning of his narrative in a boastful and self-congratulatory tone:

Calling myself Bangalore's least known success story isn't entirely true, I confess. About three years ago, when I became, briefly, a person of national importance owing to an act of entrepreneurship, a poster with my face on it found its way to every post office, railway station, and police station in this country (Adiga 11).

Balram talks about his wanted poster for killing his master. That is his first "act of entrepreneurship." His confession of his crime comes early in his narrative, not in a regretful, somber register, but in a cheerful tone. Regardless of tone, the murder is, indeed, an act of entrepreneurship through which Balram is able to gain liberty and seed money to build his start-up and to reach the point at which the narration begins.

Balram's narrative—which is told in a cheerful, albeit sardonic, tone—is unsettling: nothing is what it seems. His mind is always changing, and his positions shift.

He often contradicts himself, making it difficult to believe what he says. He is not aware of his contradictions for most of the time, but he knows that he is afraid of being caught and brought back to a life of servitude, and that he still acts like a servant at times. His fears and weaknesses are always in the background of his bold, sarcastic narrative. These fears and weaknesses are at odds with his disguise as a class hero, as a thinker, a guru for most of his narrative.

He labels murder an act of entrepreneurship and describes himself as a man who has reached the enlightenment. He is serious when he says that. He believes that his liberation and enlightenment come through murder, and that the murder is his first entrepreneurial act. He believes in individual salvation and practices it in a heinous form, but he keeps commenting on the general status of his original class, the poor class. Thus, he expresses the hypocrisy of a middle-aged, self-made member of the bourgeois class who believes that he has a higher truth and who speaks of social justice while he subscribes to the same ideology that iterates hegemonic notions and reproduces hegemony.

Balram's enlightenment and liberation come from his understanding of how the system works. He utilizes the system to his own benefit, and in the process he becomes the loneliest monster, the white tiger: a rare and magnificent beast that feeds off the flesh of other animals. In his awakening, Balram victimizes not only his direct kill but also his own family and—by extension—his whole class. He understands that the system cannibalizes the lower classes—his among them—in order for the upper classes to lead a privileged lifestyle, and, although he does not speak of his development in this way, he joins the cannibals to rise above his class.

Cannibalizing the impoverished lower classes takes many forms: some are as simple as direct deprivation of infrastructure and access to services and resources. Some are a step more complex, such as imposing grueling work hours with bare minimum wages and undefined work chores. The ideological form of cannibalization is far more complex, and it disguises itself in a way that makes it difficult to pin down the exact mechanisms through which the upper classes practice their oppression of the lower classes.

Balram—who comes from one of the most abused communities in India, a place he calls the Darkness—makes a clear reference to this theme of cannibalism when he returns to his village, Laxmangrah, with his master. He sees how the living conditions of his family have debilitated his older brother, Kishan. He cannot eat the special meal that his family cooks for him in celebration of his gainful employment because he sees his brother's flesh in it:

There was red, curried bone and flesh in front of me—and it seemed to me that they had served me flesh from Kishan's own body on that plate (Adiga 85).

This grim realization, however, does not keep Balram from later causing the death of his brother, grandmother, and entire extended family. He knows that when he kills Ashok Ramdev—his master--Ashok's family is going to retaliate. He has seen it happen before, in his very own caste:

I have not told you yet, have I, about what the Buffalo did to his domestic servant. The one who was supposed to guard his infant son, who got kidnapped by the Naxals and then tortured and killed. The servant was one of our caste, sir. A Halwai. I had seen him once or twice when I was a boy. The servant said he had nothing to do with the kidnapping; the Buffalo did not believe him and got four of his hired gunmen to torture the servant. Then they shot him through the head. Fair enough. I would do the same to someone who let my son get

kidnapped.

But then, because the Buffalo was sure that the man had deliberately let the child be kidnapped, for money, he also went after the servant's family. One brother was set upon while working in the fields; beaten to death there. That brother's wife was finished off by three men working together. A sister, still unmarried, was also finished off. Then the house where the family had lived was surrounded by the four henchmen and set on fire. Now, who would want this to happen to his family, sir? Which inhuman wretch of a monster would consign his own granny and brother and aunt and nephews and nieces to death?

The Stork and his sons could count on my loyalty (Adiga 66).

Balram realizes that loyalty does not stem from a sense of honor or from affection, but from self-preservation. It is preserved by the unspoken threat of sheer brutality. Servants do not choose to be loyal: they are coerced into loyalty and submission. And Balram does not take issue with the system for he wants to retain this power of coercing people into submission. At this point of the novel, Balram has already said that he murdered his master, and this story foreshadows what happens to his own family, and functions as a prologue to his rendition of the Lord Buddha enlightenment story. He wakes up, sees how the system works, and sacrifices his entire family in order to get ahead: to become a master.

Balram believes that the fate of the Halawi who lost the child in his care is just. He evades commenting on whether the fate of the family of the Halawi who lost the child is just—as that would correlate to the fate of his own family. Balram also acknowledges his own guilt in his family's murder, calling himself “a virtual mass murderer” (314), yet he is at peace with their death. He views their fate as unavoidable collateral damage, as a risk he is willing to take in order to execute his scheme to get rich and free himself from whatever that ties him to a life of servitude. In doing so, he becomes one of the oppressors, one of the great cannibals he describes in details throughout the novel.

Keeping his argument away from the system, Balram does not say a word about the ones who carry out the actual deed: the Ramdev family. He does not indict them for murdering his entire family. He accepts that he is the only one culpable in the whole matter. His problem—again—is not with the hegemonic paradigm that allows for such cruelties to happen without questioning them, but with his place within this paradigm. He would rather be in the place of Ramdevs, obligating the families of people who offend him. This adds to the viciousness of his premeditated act of murder. He sacrifices eighteen people—his direct kill and his family—to achieve his individual liberation, his devious form of enlightenment.

The White Tiger is not, then, about Balram's confessing his crimes. He admits the murder of his master in his very first letter—although he does not describe the dreadful deed until the last third of his narrative—and he does so without showing remorse. His early description of his murder as an entrepreneurial act is not a euphemism. His speech is often sarcastic but this is not the case with his description of the murder he committed. The murder was, indeed, an entrepreneurial act. It provided him with the seed money necessary to reinvent himself and to create a start-up in one of India's most thriving cities. It is in no way different than a highway robbery, but Balram puts it in terms of entrepreneurship: this is an ultimate form of dehumanization. The life of Ashok Ramdev and the lives of seventeen Halawis end in order to provide one man with a chance to make a better living. They are reduced to commodities, given up in order to provide one man with money and means of travelling freely.

This is the triumph of *The White Tiger*: it is a detailed study of the psyche of the way entrepreneurship functions to reproduce hegemonic classes to ensure that people

come to be seen as commodities that can be traded, risked, destroyed in the name of business success, job creation, and social mobility. As such, *The White Tiger* is a critique of entrepreneurship that goes against the common narrative of entrepreneurship as means of social mobility and as a sign of social justice (in that this common narrative suggests that anyone can become an entrepreneur).

In recent decades, virtual cults have evolved around entrepreneurs—especially in technology-related fields—that hail them not only as components of economic systems, but as champions of social change and self-liberating breakers of the status quo. *The White Tiger* depicts a de-glorified entrepreneur, a crude version of the international entrepreneur who is still in a position where he can stain his hands with the blood of a victim he can see eye-to-eye. Balram Halawi is not a *bad* entrepreneur: he is just an entrepreneur. He is the *anyone* who makes it and keeps *everyone* else down; for entrepreneurship is a tool the system uses to renew itself. Entrepreneurs like Balram do not create a new class and race reality, but rather they reaffirm the status quo. They do not enable the oppressed, but join the oppressors.

Through the consciousness of Balram Halawi, *The White Tiger* dismantles the discourse of entrepreneurship on a global level. The novel shows how hegemony renovates itself through entrepreneurial individuals whose consciousness shifts from that of the oppressed into that of their oppressors. Entrepreneurship is not independent of hegemony, but exists within it. It shows how the discourse that glorifies entrepreneurship disguises the inherent injustice in the system that is based on pushing certain classes to the margins, to subhuman conditions, in order for other classes to thrive. It brings the people victimized by entrepreneurship into the picture.

2. Reading *The White Tiger*

Early reactions to *The White Tiger* were not generally favorable. The first reviews in major literary publications did not appear until it won the prestigious literary award, Man Booker Prize, against odds. Its winning of the Booker surprised many figures in the literary scene, especially in the United Kingdom¹.

Both Kevin Rushby from *The Guardian* and Akash Kapur from *The New York Times* agreed that the novel is a superficial social commentary on India's socio-economic status. Kapur concludes in his review of the novel that:

The problem with such scenes isn't simply that they're overdone. In their surfeit of emblematic detail, they reduce the characters to symbols. There is an absence of human complexity in "The White Tiger," not just in its characters but, more problematically, in its depiction of a nation that is in reality caught somewhere between Adiga's vision and the shinier version he so clearly — and fittingly — derides. Lacking this more balanced perspective, the novel feels simplistic: an effective polemic, perhaps, but an incomplete portrait of a nation and a people grappling with the ambiguities of modernity. (Kapur)

The polemic of *The White Tiger*, according to Kapur, is that "an Indian hero," Balram Halawi, speaks for an India today that lingers between modernization and brutal old ways. Adiga creates Balram and his world solely to fulfill the purpose of being a case in point in his argument. This renders the novel monotonous and simplistic to the point of defeating its purpose. In line with this critique comes Rushby's review which ends on a note about Adiga's view of India:

My hunch is this is fundamentally an outsider's view and a superficial one. There are so many alternative Indias, uncontacted and unheard. Adiga is an interesting talent. I hope he will immerse himself deeper in that country, then go on to greater things. (Rushby)

¹ Charlotte Higgins, "Out of the Darkness: Adiga's *White Tiger* rides to Booker victory against the odds", *The Guardian* 14 Oct. 2008, Web, 6 May 2012.

Rushby's note on the "many alternative" Indias is a reflection of Balram Halawi's—and Adiga's—claim that he represents the *true* India that is left outside of the metanarrative. Adiga represents one India, believing it to be the only true India, and this appears in his other book, *Between the Assassinations* (2008), whose writing overlapped with writing *The White Tiger*.

Between the Assassinations is a collection of snippets from a fictional city, Kittur, that are fitted together to create a mosaic of what Aravind Adiga considers to be "real India" within a historical frame (1984-1991). Some of the snippets he uses are recycled into *The White Tiger* (or taken from it): a poor child who is sent to work in the city in a teahouse leaves the teahouse in pursuit of a more lucrative employment. This child, much like Balram himself, creates a narrative for himself that separates him from his class and he swings to the verge of murder. Another story that happens to Balram is the central hit-and-run and the subsequent cover-up, which also exists in *Between the Assassinations*. More than that, there is a story of a servant—much like Balram—who thinks about stealing his master's money. Balram is the one who carries out *all* these deeds in the other book: he commits the murder, he steals the money, and he is the center of the cover-up after the accident. This could be read in two ways: that Balram is a literary tool to explore all these possibilities, or that the 2000s are the time when the pressure that has been building up through 1980s and 1990s is at a stage when it requires immediate resolution. In all cases, this is a clear indication of the vision that Aravind Adiga has about what constitutes "true India." This is also an indication of a larger agenda to his writing—a working toward social justice.

Yet, *The White Tiger* continues to draw negative reviews that critique what is perceived to be its didactic and simplistic view of India, even from reading communities that are not trained in literature or postcolonial theory such as Goodreads.com² and Amazon.com³. The reviews of the novel on these websites are filled with phrases like “India bashing”, and “a slice of India”, which are shortcut phrases that express a view of the novel as a voyeuristic work of literature that capitalizes on the image of India as a savage and filthy place. Such discontent among readers with no training in literary criticism may indicate that the novel misses its social justice mark, leaving its worth to be judged solely by the pleasure it presents its reader with, a pleasure that could be described as macabre.

Similar critiques appear in the scholarly readings of *The White Tiger*. The most common lens through which the novel has been studied is postcolonial theory, but this does not absolve the novel from being called on its outsider view. Nandini Bhautoo-Dewnarian comments on the “seemingly voyeuristic western interest with the explosion of gory third world realities giving the lie to the narrative of economic success which India seems to be keen on projecting to the world” (65).

Adiga defends his novel against the accusation of being a voyeuristic treat aimed at a western reader who seeks ghoulish pleasure from the misfortune of the third world. In doing so, he states his social justice agenda loud and clear:

At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society. That's what writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens did in the 19th century and, as a result, England and France are better societies. That's what I'm trying to do - it's

² http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1768603.The_White_Tiger

³ <http://www.amazon.com/The-White-Tiger-A-Novel/product-reviews/1416562605>

not an attack on the country, it's about the greater process of self-examination ("The White Tiger provokes roars of anger in India").

Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal calls Adiga on this very statement: "This branch of literature is not for social reform. How can the vices present in an Indian character be eradicated in an alien tongue?" (92) Agarwal's question is legitimate: when Adiga evokes Balzac and Dickens, he overlooks the fact that each one of them wrote in the tongue of his countrymen to his countrymen. The audience of *The White Tiger* in India is limited: it is the elite who speak fluent English and consume literature written in English rather than that written in Hindi or Urdu. Such an elitist community tends to be privileged to the point of creating a colonialist class within a postcolonial community. To a privileged reader, the world of Balram Halawi may serve as a source of morbid pleasure, rather than as a call for reform—especially with Balram's muddled discourse that could be read as that of a bourgeois defending his status.

It is possible to argue for *The White Tiger's* voyeurism by pointing out that literature is voyeuristic by nature, but this argument ignores many dimensions to the context within which *The White Tiger* exists. The tradition that the novel looks at is a western tradition, yet it claims to present something that is uniquely Indian. This contradiction is deepened by the fact that Balram—who comes from the bottom of Indian society—talks in English to a foreigner, within a paradigm created by a political sound bite: India and China are about to take over technological entrepreneurship in the world. The novel is also within the tradition of Indian literature written in English. It has a diaspora quality to it for Adiga lived a large portion of his adult life in the West where he was educated and where he worked as a journalist for *Time* magazine. He writes about his return to India, and how New Delhi gave him the idea for *The White Tiger* in an essay

titled, “City of The White Tiger.” In this article, Adiga describes his experience in the city as a foreigner, someone who is taken with being stopped by a pimp who can provide him anything: girls, boys, dope, or cocaine. He explores Delhi with an exposé mentality that manifests itself in Balram Halawi’s letters.

Kumar Agarwal denounces Adiga as a new link in a chain of novelists who write to reproduce colonialist visions from the nineteenth century, novelists who come from the former colonies and who have internalized the view of colonial masters and reproduced it for the approval of those colonial masters:

The Empire lures/promotes the fictional writers from the East by selecting them for their best awards. Puffed at the thought of being awarded by the master, the novelists from the subject classes start to participate in the colonial agenda of destabilizing the cultures of the East. (90)

The claim about “destabilizing the cultures of the East” seems like a stretch at face value, yet it has some merit. Generations of writers who write within this paradigm are bound to impact some aspects of culture in a given society. The organic unity of culture is broken down into individual units, all contained within pre-defined conditions: some are put on display as glorified ethnic peculiarities, and some others are put on display to invite scorn as uncivilized ethnic peculiarities. *The White Tiger* is a newer example of this paradox: it displays isolated parts of Indian culture: a cruel, corrupt India that has no chance in becoming a livable place, and a fossilized India of great poets that is no longer relevant, and that only fulfills a decorative purpose.

The White Tiger has this trait: it does not only put India’s worst on display as a spectacle for the former empire, but it also pulls in the opposite direction, feeding a false sense of national pride—in its protagonist—and coming from a meta-narrative about the inevitability of Indian supremacy. This does not make it a balanced view of India or a

novel that is aware of the intricacies of Indian culture. *The White Tiger* trades on the catch phrases, buzzwords, and easy-to-follow preconceived notions of what constitutes an Indian identity. It presses many hot buttons—poverty, filth, corruption, blasphemy, economic change—but it does very little to penetrate deeper or to move beyond the India of national newspapers or the India that appears in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), where two American tourists bribe a young guide at Taj Mahal to show them “the real India.” He takes them to the slums so that they could purify their souls by the sight of horrendous poverty. Their car gets dismantled and its parts stolen, so their driver/bodyguard beats up the young guide for setting them up. They express their humanity by giving the young guide a hundred dollar bill, claiming that it is from “the real America”.

What is to be discussed is not *The White Tiger*'s authenticity as an Indian narrative. Although Adiga claims this novel is an authentic narrative about the India that is left out of the narratives of Indian democracy and economic success, and Adiga's critics dismiss this claim altogether, this matters little to the context of this thesis. There is a realistic sense to the novel that makes it acceptable to the common reader, who accepts that what Balram narrates is true. Whether it represents India or not is another subject. Balram is accepted as a narrator who narrates events that are likely to happen where he says they happen, this makes him rooted in reality, and therefore, capable of becoming a polemic of entrepreneurship.

The significance of this novel comes from its critique of entrepreneurship and its identification of people who become direct victims of entrepreneurial acts. This critique is not bound to India, but it applies to global entrepreneurship, making the discussion about the novel's authenticity as an Indian narrative irrelevant. This critique happens

despite its protagonist, Balram Halawi, who does not subscribe to the social justice agenda put forward by the novel—his own narrative. Balram does not care for the victims of his entrepreneurship, and he does not intend to critique the notion of entrepreneurship. His initial intention is to critique the official narratives about entrepreneurship that the Indian government uses as propaganda. To him, entrepreneurship is about the individual talent of the entrepreneur and his extraordinary ability to become a master; therefore, the state, any state, has nothing to do with entrepreneurship, and has no right to use it for propaganda purposes. Nonetheless, through the discrepancies between Balram's views and actions in different situations and between his ideologies in different places, it is possible to piece together what might be a full picture of how hegemony works through entrepreneurship to preserve a system that survives on victimizing dominated classes.

3. Reading Balram's Character

Though there is no other narrative that rivals Balram's in *The White Tiger*, his narrative is self-contradictory on so many occasions that it creates a schism similar to what could have been created by a rival narrative. This makes Balram a paradoxical character whose paradox should be resolved in order to make sense of his story. Because there is no other narrative voice than his, and there is no one but himself at the foreground of the novel, the existence of others—his victims—is marginal, and is further marginalized by the fact that only three of his eighteen victims are individually identified: his master, Ashok Ramdev (his direct kill), his grandmother Kusum of whom he speaks bitterly throughout his narrative, and his brother Kishan of whom Balram cannot say anything bitter or spiteful.

Balram's account of his victims is manipulative. He deliberately makes the names of his family members unknown. He wants to dissuade his addressee from thinking about them by letting them be reported as unidentified victims. He knows their names. Early in his narrative, he lists the names of his aunts: Rabri, Shalini, Malini, Luttu, Jaydevi, and Ruchi (Adiga 16) who were calling him to follow them, as a child, after the funeral of his mother. Those same aunts are killed, eventually, as a result of a crime he has committed, and he does not grant them a mention at the end. They are only worthy as human beings when they call him as a child, when they clap for him in order not to lose the way. Otherwise, he treats them as a number, a collective number that sums up unidentified victims.

He also disguises his class agenda in statements that seem to be concerned with the poor classes—the class to which he belongs in the first place—while he subscribes to

a class ideology that does not sympathize with the plight of lower classes. Sometimes, he is not aware of the gap between what he seems to be saying, and where he stands. Thus, creating instances as this one:

“If you taught every poor boy how to paint, that would be the end of the rich in India.” Balram’s ingenuous trust in education as a tool able to get away from the henhouse-cage arises from an ironic and pessimistic discourse about an utopian perspective of future, as a pleasant oversight given to hope. Utopian, because, just from the beginning, the same person who had declared that painting would be able to eradicate social inequalities, charges against his own education, restricting his effectiveness. “I’ve always been a big believer in education—especially my own”. Of course, Balram is not talking about school (Castellano 55).

The face value of Balram’s statement could be that he believes in the ability of education to liberate young boys from the trap of their class and the functions ascribed to it in society. He says that he is a believer in education, especially his own in the context of non-standard education, of being a self-taught, half-baked entrepreneur (Adiga 11). Yet, this statement is not utopian in the sense that it imagines a different world where poor children are taught to appreciate beauty. It is utopian because it has a wistful tone to it. It is also an example of his self-contradictory musings. He believes that he has taught himself everything worth learning in life because he is an original listener (Adiga 11) and he paints a miserable picture of his own school when he was a child. Yet, there is no reason to believe that Balram does not hold his school with special affection and does not dream about a different version of his reality. After all, school was the only place in his life where his talents were appreciated and where he was recognized as an individual with great potential. School is the place that gives Balram his identity: his name and his alter ego.

Before going to school, Balram was simply known as Munna (boy). His teacher—who is not exemplary—gave him his name, the name he has come to be known by for most of his narrative:

See, my first day in school, the teacher made all the boys line up and come to his desk so he could put our names down in his register. When I told him what my name was, he gaped at me:
'Munna? That's not a real name.'
He was right: it just means 'boy'.
'That's all I've got, sir,' I said.
It was true. I'd never been given a name.
'Didn't your mother name you?'
'She's very ill, sir. She lies in bed and spews blood. She's got no time to name me.'
'And your father?'
'He's a rickshaw-puller, sir. He's got no time to name me.'
'Don't you have a granny? Aunts? Uncles?'
'They've got no time either.'
The teacher turned aside and spat – a jet of red paan splashed the ground of the classroom. He licked his lips.
'Well, it's up to me, then, isn't it?' He passed his hand through his hair and said, 'We'll call you... Ram. Wait – don't we have a Ram in this class? I don't want any confusion. It'll be Balram. You know who Balram was, don't you?'
'No, sir.'
'He was the sidekick of the god Krishna. Know what my name is?'
'No, sir.'
He laughed. 'Krishna.' (Adiga 13-14)

Balram's teacher is filthy and he does not seem interested in the boy beyond giving him a name that does not confuse his records; yet, he gives Balram a name, and a story for his name. This naming ritual, this name, and this story are all that Balram has. He has them from school, and without school he would not have been named after a sidekick of a major god. The name gives Balram assurance about his social role in the school's hierarchy: he is no longer a loose end, a boy whom nobody pays attention to. He is recognized, not only with a name, but also with a rank. He knows whom he should follow and where his place is.

The recognition that school has given to Balram extends beyond its borders. Before his becoming a student, a good student, Balram does not mention having any kind of relationship with his father. However, school has given Balram's father the chance to stand up for his son. When Balram quits school over a large lizard that lives in the classroom—he has a phobia about lizards—his father steps in and goes to school with him to kill the lizard because he believes in Balram (Adiga 30).

When Balram Halawi introduces himself to the Chinese Prime Minister, he does not use the name Balram Halawi. He uses a nickname, the White Tiger. This becomes his grand narrative; the way he identifies himself. However, this nickname, this identification with a white tiger, is not Balram's original invention. He is compared to a white tiger in school, too, as a reward for his ability to read. He is awarded the title of a white tiger for he is the one who could read among his peers.

So I stood up and read, 'We live in a glorious land. The Lord Buddha received his enlightenment in this land. The River Ganga gives life to our plants and our animals and our people. We are grateful to God that we were born in this land.'

'Good,' the inspector said. 'And who was the Lord Buddha?'

'An enlightened man.'

'An enlightened god.'

(Oops! Thirty-six million and five—!) (Adiga 34)

The passage that Balram reads foreshadows the association between his becoming a white tiger, and the story of Lord Buddha's enlightenment. He later directly responds to this passage and to the inspector's correction about Buddha's god status when he appropriates Buddha's story with the Brahmins to justify his morbid deeds. He takes over Buddha, making himself parallel to him, thus expanding the limits of his jungle:

'In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals – the creature that comes along only once in a generation?'

I thought about it and said:

‘The white tiger.’
“That’s what you are, in this jungle.” (Adiga 35)

The inspector is specific about the title he bestows upon Balram: he is the white tiger of Laxmangrah, a small village in the Darkness that is owned by four landlords. His exceptionalism ends within the limits of his class: the children of the masters—who live in the city—can read and among them he is not exceptional. Among them, he has no worth. This is an underlying theme which Balram himself does not realize: when he philosophizes about the killing of his master, and when he presents his final resolution to the murder, he puts forward a different strand of reasoning that seems unrelated to his schooldays. He presents the wisdom he believes he learned on his own.

When Balram presents his argument justifying murdering his master, the final two incidents that led to the murder are his learning that Ashok is looking for another driver to replace him, (Adiga 268) and his realization that he is a more fit master than Ashok is (Adiga 280). However, he feels compelled to tell his story from the beginning, as a story of every man in the Indian Darkness, and he feels he has to make comments on the general status of his class and his country. Hence, he comments on teaching little boys how to paint. He feels he has to say something that shows he does not approve savagery, that he is not a beast by nature, but that he is made a beast. He believes that he is the representative of ordinary men from the dominated classes, and at the same time, he believes he is the exception to them: that he is a white tiger, a unique animal among his species.

Balram’s utopian view of education does not hide the sinister nature of his comments. He does not prophesize the end of poverty, or the end of accumulated wealth at the expense of lower classes. He predicts the end of the rich, alluding to his own crime.

He is a believer in education, especially his. And he believes in his own private myth: that he is capable of realizing beauty while his class cannot. He is the only one who can appreciate the beauty of the old deserted fort that overlooks his village. He is the only one who looks up to it and to the sky (Adiga 19-21).

I guess, Your Excellency, that I too should start off by kissing some god's arse.
Which god's arse, though? There are so many choices.
See, the Muslims have one god.
The Christians have three gods.
And we Hindus have 36,000,000 gods.
Making a grand total of 36,000,004 divine arses for me to choose from
(Adiga 8).

Balram does not care for religion of any sort, and has not much use for the divine. To him, gods are just more masters who must be served and appeased. He uses religion to go along with Ashok, his master, who shows a colonialist interest in the religion of the “common folks”, and their sacredness (Adiga 44). Ashok is supposed to be Hindu, and it is hinted that his wife is Christian. This is not because Ashok believes in tolerance and acceptance per se, but more because he lives in a post-religion moment when all religious practices are equally alike. He is not an atheist. Atheism requires mental effort that Ashok never shows signs of. He just takes all religions as objects of curiosity.

And Balram picks that up from him—on a subconscious level. More than just amusing his master with a religion show, Balram considers all gods equal—although he is a Hindu—and pay them tributes—sometimes—to leave him alone. He does not believe in them equally, but he is not an atheist, because he does not embark on the mental journey that is required for reaching a final decision about the existence of the divine. Also, he is not an atheist because he needs religious stories to appropriate and to use in order to define himself and his social roles.

She would sit in the back, and the two of them would talk, and I would drive them wherever they wanted, as faithfully as the servant-god Hanuman carried about his master and mistress, Ram and Sita (Adiga 46).

In his mind, Balram visualizes a perfect picture where everything fits neatly: his handsome master and beautiful mistress are like the most prominent Hindu god, Ram, and Ram's wife, Sita. Balram is still a servant, but he is a servant-god. This is the way of the world for him. There are humans who are naturally the masters, and there are humans who are naturally the servants, just like gods. Balram may not care for religion, but he uses religious narratives to create a vision of the world that justifies his position: he gives himself a narrative about why he has to submit, and why he is the one driving them around while they enjoy a nice talk. He does not talk about economic differences, because wealth, in his view, reflects on one's position in the plan of creation. At that point of the narrative, the reader is aware that Balram has killed Ashok, but is bewildered as to why since Ashok is assigned the role of the single most powerful figure in Hindu mythology, and Balram is assigned the role of his faithful servant.

Mythology does not exist in vacuum. It tells something that is deeply embedded in the psyche of the people who have created it and who subscribe to it. Myths about servant gods—and sidekick ones—enhance the caste system. They do not pre-exist the caste system: they shape an *a posteriori* system that allows the caste system to reproduce itself throughout thousands of years. The caste system changes, and castes transform, but the original idea is a meme that manifests itself in different ways: one of them is Balram's vision of himself as a sidekick (god), and as a servant to an omnipotent figure.

However, Balram's view of himself changes during his narrative. He arrives at a point when he no longer sees himself as a servant god. He comes to link himself to an

independent, and presumably omnipotent figure: Lord Buddha. Balram resembles Lord Buddha in that he oscillates between two states, without being fully one of them at any given time: Lord Buddha is a man and a god. Balram is a subaltern and a bourgeois.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* introduces a completely new narrative voice to the novelistic fabric. It introduces the voice of this paradoxical creature, the 'articulate subaltern'. The very premise of subaltern consciousness is that the subaltern is not aware of his capacity for agency that the inscription of subalternity is fortuitous and dependent on circumstances haphazard and incidental (Bhautoo-Dewnarain 67).

In Bhautoo-Dewnarain's view, Balram is a unique creature: he is the articulate subaltern. He is articulate in that he is aware of his agency, and he is capable of expressing and exercising this agency. When he does so, however, he departs from the subaltern group and moves into that of the bourgeoisie. He is no longer a subaltern, for the articulate subaltern does not exist. Yet, Balram is still moving between the two positions: subaltern groups and the bourgeoisie, which makes him a paradoxical creature, a unique creation.

Balram goes as far as acknowledging sole agency for the murder of his entire family, though he is not the one doing the deed: the Ramdev family are. He views their actions as an inevitable response to his own violence. They have to retaliate if he kills their son. In his view, he is the only one who has agency, and he exercises his agency, carrying his will over Ashok, over the Ramdevs, and over the Halawis. He emerges victorious—in a sense—on the bodies of his class members.

Sara D. Schotland compares *The White Tiger* to Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and finds similarities between their protagonists. According to her, both Balram Halawi and Bigger Thomas fit the subaltern mold despite coming from two separate societies and histories in two distinct geographies. Both characters come from a low class and belong to a race/caste that has been discriminated against for ages. They both live in

highly segregated societies and are employed by relatively good people. They both kill the child of the family that gave them gainful employment in a society where chances are rare for people like them. They both claim the killing as a liberating act.

Race can function like caste, indeed. It is arbitrary and controlled by mythology. Schotland spends some time situating African-American experience within the context of colonized people in order to read both Balram and Bigger as subalterns in a post colonialist context. This reading is possible, but it misses the unique feature about Balram: that he begins as a subaltern, but that as he progresses through his life, he moves from the subaltern category and joins the dominant classes. Bigger claims his unpremeditated murder in the name of his class: he begins as a subaltern and continues to be a subaltern—inarticulate and dependant on the terms provided to him by his lawyer to express his subalternity. Bigger is a subaltern who cannot speak. Balram considers himself, at times, a representative of his class, a subaltern, but he does not claim his murder in the name of his class or caste. He claims it to liberate himself *from his group*, an act that frees him to join the oppressors. When Balram kills Ashok and steals his money, he expands his domain as the white tiger from Laxmangrah to the whole of India. He becomes an exception to the whole dominated class, and in his view, that earns him a place among the masters.

Although Balram hits the weakest link in the family of masters, the family is not without the ability to retaliate. The Ramdevs can both assert their dominance through sheer brutality and can resort to the law to seek Balram and “justice”. The power of the Ramdevs and the fate of the Halawis are not accounted for in Schotland’s work and are not accounted for in any of *The White Tiger* studies that are included in this study’s

bibliography. It is not possible to look at subaltern identities without looking at the types of power that are exercised against subaltern groups. Balram's family, the seventeen dead Halawis, is the subaltern, and their agency is taken from them. They are direct victims of hegemony exercising its dominance in the most brutal way. They have been faithful to the system, and to their masters, but they were wiped out entirely, without being given a chance to act. If the Halawis were given a chance to react to what Balram did, they would have probably disowned Balram, speaking in the subaltern voice that Gayatri Spivak talks about when she asks if a subaltern can speak. The Halawis would have accepted that Balram must meet his demise, and would have refused any meddling from any well-intended third party that might offer them a legal defense for Balram, or speak to them about social justice and class war. The Halawis are not given a chance to exercise their subalternity. Balram makes sure they do not get this chance because he has already decided that he must leave the panopticon of his class and caste, and he cannot do so unless he gets rid of them so that they would not block his way out.

3.1. The Panopticon

Balram's class exists within a panopticon in which everyone is watching everyone else and keeping them within the prison. This panopticon takes many forms, and occurs through many metaphors, most prominent of them is that of the jungle: Balram sees the world through a metaphor of the jungle, a view he inherited from his surroundings. The four landlords that own Laxmangrah are described as animals: the Stork, the Buffalo, the Crow, and the Wild Boar. When Balram first meets Mukesh, son of the Stork, he believes that his village would call him the Mongoose (64). The school inspector who commends Balram describes him as the white tiger of [Laxmangrah's] jungle (35). This view is pervasive, and Balram subscribes to it right from the beginning.

To say that 'men' define and shape their whole lives is true only in abstraction. In any actual society there are specific inequalities in means and therefore in capacity to realize this process. In a class society these are primarily inequalities between classes (Williams 108).

And Balram is the product of his society: his views of the world are the defined by where he was born, and by whom he was brought up. The notion that the world is a jungle is a symptom of deep-rooted injustice. It is not clear whether the masters view the world the same way, but Balram carries this view with him as he rises. He uses it when he becomes a member of the bourgeoisie to justify his rising above his class and to justify his killing of his master.

For most of the narration, Ashok is the only one who is not associated with an animal. Ashok is the only human in Balram's world. He is compared to the god Ram and placed at the top of Balram's world as the source of all that is good. The moment when the reversal of fortune takes place for Ashok is when Balram finally assigns him an animal: "*If you were back in Laxmangrah, we would have called you the Lamb.*" (142).

Balram does not only state that Ashok is a lamb: he slaughters him like a lamb in a brutal scene. Dehumanizing Ashok comes when Balram's lust for his wife, Pinky Madam, awakens. He brings his idol down and smashes him to rise into being a man. He, then, lashes on his now dead father—the man who killed the lizard for him to help him continue his education:

Why had my father never told me not to scratch my groin? Why had my father never taught me to brush my teeth in milky foam? Why had he raised me to live like an animal? Why do all the poor live amid such filth, such ugliness? (Adiga 151)

Balram's father did not know any better, and Balram knows that, but he does not excuse him. This is the first sign of Balram's departure from his class into Ashok's class: he believes that his father raised him to live like an animal, that his class live like animals and do not recognize that they are living as such. Because they do not recognize that their life is not different than that of animals, they do not deserve better. Balram spells that out when he describes the final days before he killed his master: "Let animals live like animals; let humans live like humans. That's my whole philosophy in a sentence." (276).

His means of becoming a man—a man that a woman like Pinky Madam would recognize and submit to, and a man who can have all the blond, foreign prostitutes he desires—is becoming a deadly predator. This is an irreconcilable paradox that defines Balram's liberation.

Because it is a distortion of being more fully human, sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of humanity of both (Freire 26).

This is not the case with Balram Halawi, who lives within this historical distortion. He dehumanizes Ashok and kills him, and he dooms his family, his caste, and his class into death or exile because he believes that they are not human, and they do not deserve to live. Balram sees himself as their antithesis, the *Thinking Man* in the jungle, but because he strips them of their humanity, he also strips himself of his humanity. He does that on a conscious level, creating a white tiger alter ego for himself. If he lives in a jungle, surrounded by animals, his only way to rise is by devouring these other animals. This is what he does.

The White Tiger is Balram's mythic symbol of transition into the class of the masters and of cutting ties his ties with his original class. He takes his nephew, Dharam, to the zoo to see the white tiger there, and when Balram sees a white tiger eye to eye, for the first time of his life, he faints. He instructs his nephew to write to his grandmother that he fainted before the white tiger (277). This is Balram's way of delivering a secret warning that he alone understands. He faints before the white tiger, the actual animal, and rises as *the* White Tiger, the beast that would devour all in his way. The letter to his grandmother, and the coded warning, is another one of his cruel jokes.

In addition to the myth of the white tiger, Balram has another myth through which he justifies his rise above his class: that he alone recognizes beauty. Beauty is used not as a means for realizing sublime truth, but as a sound bite to justify his dehumanizing of the class from which he rose. His idea of beauty is as absurd as the notion that Apple Inc. products are objects of beauty: they are used to disguise the ugliness of exploiting thousands of workers who have no other means of survival, and in the case of Balram this notion of beauty is used to hide the terrible ugliness of his deeds and his beliefs.

Balam uses “beauty” to determine whether his nephew—who lives with him during the time of the murder—is to be taken with him to the light. He takes him to see an ancient fort and makes sure that the nephew appreciates the “beauty” of this fort. The nephew’s “appreciation of beauty” ends up being the reason why Balam believes he is a human, worth saving. This is arbitrary and as ugly as it gets. The monuments of the past are considered objects of beauty. Balam takes his nephew with him because he has shown some interest in objects, rather than human beings.

The centerpiece of Balam’s theorization about human and animals—and the centerpiece of Aravind Adiga’s observation on the nature of the oppressed classes—is the Rooster Coop, Balam’s version of Michel Foucault’s observations on the Panopticon featuring animals within a cage, and not animals within the metaphoric borders of the jungle:

Go to Old Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid, and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on each other, jostling for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench—the stench of terrified, feathered flesh. On the wooden desk above this coop sits a grinning young butcher, showing off the flesh and organs of a recently chopped-up chicken, still oleaginous with a coating of dark blood. The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they’re next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop (Adiga 171).

This theory is not Balam’s understanding of the plight of his class and his call for class solidarity. It is his justification for his departure from his class: they are animals that see their fellows gutted and do not move for themselves. They do not rebel because the Rooster Coop is similar to the Panopticon: each animal/prisoner watches for the others. Everyone is watching and is being watched at the same time, and all are kept in their

place by an arbitrary system that they cannot see. The servants' class members only see each other: Balram says that if the Ramdevs did not kill his family, the village would have forced them to move out because they have a bad seed within them (315). They are unable to see the butchers: they believe that the system has no agents, that it exists on its own, and that it has been in existence forever.

Balram sees himself like the enlightened philosopher in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave": he ascends from the bottom and sees what is beyond the shackles. He sees who moves the shadows and how people are kept in the cave/panopticon/coop. Instead of returning to warn his fellows, and to share his enlightenment with them, Balram blows the cave up. He then counters the Platonic allegory—which he does not seem to know, but that does not change the fact that his actions contradict its prophecy about the returning philosopher—with his appropriated enlightenment allegory, in which his awakening does not make him responsible for waking up the rest.

In addition to that, this is another of Balram's cruel gestures. He believes that those people in the coop deserve what befalls them. He is different from them. He lives in the Light. He is an individual. He is a member of the bourgeoisie. He embodies the values of entrepreneurship: he is self-made. He represents the value of work and reaps the fruit of the collective labor in his start-up. Balram moves to an upper class where his labor has meaning, while the labor of the masses below has no meaning. They are faceless, disposable, and too thick to see their plight. They deserve their plight.

3. 2. Bourgeois Views

At some point during the three years between his killing his master and his writing his letters to the Chinese Premier, Balram adopts a new vision of the world that befits his new class. The vision he writes from is different from that which he had during the events he relates. When he starts writing, he is a bourgeois, but when he killed his master and escaped with the money, he was still a subaltern—although he has begun his shift towards becoming a bourgeois. As time progresses, his views on caste change, and he presents a new version of the caste system from his new position, a new vision about his *fate*. He continues to subscribe to a morphed caste system that befits his new position, this time through a new narrative—less than seventy years old—that reproduces the meme of caste system.

And then, thanks to all those politicians in Delhi, on the fifteenth of August, 1947—the day the British left—the cages had been let open; and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law. Those that were the most ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up, and grown big bellies. That was all that counted now, the size of your belly. It didn't matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim, or an untouchable: anyone with a belly could rise up. My father's father must have been a real Halwai, a sweet-maker, but when he inherited the shop, a member of some other caste must have stolen it from him with the help of the police. My father had not had the belly to fight back. That's why he had fallen all the way to the mud, to the level of a rickshaw-puller. That's why I was cheated of my destiny to be fat, and creamy-skinned, and smiling (Adiga 63).

Balram's made-up version of caste system is a simple story with a complex code: to him, this is a pure, unadulterated version of caste system. This is the *original* caste system, his *original* fate. His fate is not that of a servant god. In order to do rise above his current class, he creates an imagined point in time when his whole caste fares better, making sweets and maintaining a bourgeois status that renders him fat with a lighter skin—

similar to that of Ashok. He does not that for the benefit of his caste, which he gives up when he changes his name, but rather to create a personal myth for himself. Balram is unaware of how British colonialism manipulated caste system and used it for its own benefit, not because of his education, but because he needs to find a fixed point when things went wrong for his caste. Balram does not believe in freedom, except the freedom of making money, and he is in favor of a rigid caste system as long as he is from a caste that can conduct business and fare well.

This is an *a posteriori* model that Balram creates in order to respond to his earlier vision of his rank in the world, and also to respond to the moment when Thakur Ramdev (Ashok's father) interrogates him about his caste, and Balram pleases him by placing himself at the bottom. In all versions of caste system, Ramdev's caste would have fared fine. There is no version of caste system that would place Thakur at the bottom, and what Balram tries to do is to break the tie between the Halawis and the Ramdevs by imagining them as independent businessmen. Business, especially small business, always enjoys some kind of independence. In theory, there is no caste system—no system at all—that could prevent small businesses from operating: making sweets does not need a supply chain. Sweets' components—especially traditional sweets—are available at the most local level and acquiring them requires simple transactions. The work of the Halawis and their ability to make goods (sweets) is their own, and the product of their work is their own. They can sell their sweets to whoever will buy them and acquire as much money as they can. It is true that the state can tax them on their profits, but when they own their means of production and their products no one else can put them at a disadvantage. And

in a caste system where only the Halawis can make sweets, the competition is limited. It is a huge, family/caste run business.

What we have to see is not just 'a tradition' but a selective tradition: an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification (Williams 115).

This version of pre-Independence class system is Balram's selective version of the tradition. He believes that if this selective tradition had been kept, it would have shaped his present in a different, better way. Balram is oblivious to the fact that there is already a selection process happening to choose which tradition is kept, and the current selected version of the tradition is one that keeps his caste at a lower position than that of Thakur's. He has no say in what tradition is kept and what tradition is left because he is not part of the hegemony—until he subscribes to it with his new version of the caste system. Thakur Ramdev is also capable of choosing a selective tradition that allows for him to exploit Balram—and people from bottom castes—without him having to submit to the caste tradition himself: his elder son, Ashok, marries a Christian without dowry in a stark disrespect to caste rules.

The tradition of caste system has no original form. It is a meta-narrative that can be appropriated to serve the means of the hegemonic classes. It is used to preserve hegemony, and to keep the economic interest of the upper classes by controlling the consciousness of the dominated classes, keeping them believing that their economic disadvantage is their fate, and that their role as subalterns is set in stone, and predefined by divine powers. Balram, without realizing what he does, appropriates the narratives of class system to his benefit: he creates an *original* narrative in which it becomes his *fate* to be a fat bourgeois.

The novo-bourgeoisie, Balram's new class, seldom acknowledges humble origin—except in the case of new countries, such as the United States. Instead, this class usually links itself to an imagined past when they were linked to prominent families, or their families and castes were middle class and upper middle class. They tend to allocate the change in their class in a moment in the past, when the good, old system was broken. With that in mind, it is not strange that Balram voices sympathy towards the British Occupation while he attacks the new Indian independent regime and its grand narratives. When he does so, he voices a middle-class sentiment, a sentiment of his current class. This middle-class needs an overwhelming power with a strong military arm to *keep order*. In other words, to keep their gains from being taken over by the upper classes—or the lower classes, for one of the recurring nightmares of the bourgeois is a revolution of the hungry.

Balram, like his new class, is not interested in equality and freedom. It does not worry him that some castes, like the untouchables, have suffered unjustly for thousands of years. He disguises economic struggle in speeches about caste and fate. And through his version of the caste system after the British occupation, he justifies becoming a predator. In his view, his grandfather and his father have been devoured by the system that allowed animals larger than themselves to devour them, and Balram is going to reverse his fortune by becoming the predator: by devouring his people and his caste, and he is doing that within the same system, the same frame, that allowed his father and grandfather to be devoured. He has no problem with the system, and although, at times, he speaks against the system, his deeds are preserving the status quo. In this way, Balram asserts his departure from the class where he is a marginal subaltern to the bourgeoisie

where he can appropriate tradition and meta-narratives to justify his exploitation of other human lives for business success.

3. 3. The Entrepreneur

When Balram moves from being a subaltern to becoming a bourgeois, he becomes “an entrepreneur” as he first introduces himself. Entrepreneurship is about individualism, and Balram is an extreme example of individualism. And because of the individualistic nature of entrepreneurship, only one man can rise to the top, while many suffer the loss of their livelihood. In Balram’s case, his family members lose their very lives. When looking at Bigger Thomas, it is possible to make another comparison: much like the lower castes and classes in India, African Americans have been victimized as groups by individual acts of entrepreneurship. In *Slavery by Another Name* (2009), Douglas A. Blackmon describes how a few entrepreneurs led the industrialization of the American South at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, and how the process of industrialization did not help to alleviate the abject poverty that was widespread among the majority of Southerners, black and white (159). Eventually, freed slaves and black farmers were trapped into mining and building railroads, similar to slavery, through a conspiracy between individual entrepreneurs and state authorities. Entrepreneurship, in the case of the American South, was a catalyst for a continuation of the system of enslavement. It was not, in any way, a means for liberation, except for the few entrepreneurs who made great fortunes and “legacies.”

One of entrepreneurship’s dearest myths is that the entrepreneur is an individual who is always against the state. This myth is probably popularized through the example of Henry Rearden from Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). Rearden is a scientist/entrepreneur, who creates a new metal akin to stainless steel, and starts a

business making his steel, only to be harassed by the state that limits his access to raw material, and forces him to relinquish his patents in an exaggerated communist-like state.

In actual America, a real steel entrepreneur, Charles Schwab, had a productive relationship with the state. The majority of Bethlehem Steel Corp.'s business involved government contracts, especially during the two world wars. To protect the company's investments, he financed a public campaign against government's plans to manufacture steel (Folsom 75). Schwab is often glorified in writings about his tenure at Bethlehem Steel Corporation, and in his chapter in *Entrepreneur vs. the State*, he celebrates his pressuring the American government and lobbying to stop the government from investing in steel manufacturing. There is no mention of labor and labor rights in Schwab's chapter, not even to show how his leadership appeared through important moments such as the 1910 strike or other strikes. The only mention of labor comes within the context of Schwab's battle with another entrepreneurial group in the Lehigh Valley, the heirs of Asa Packer. In 1898, Schwab hired Fredrick W. Taylor, a scientist who devised new production modes and cost-cutting strategies that would decrease the number of men needed at different stations in the steel plant. The Packer heirs were the biggest landlords in South Bethlehem, a city populated mainly by steel plant workers, and the plan to reduce labor hit them in one of their largest investment, so they battled Schwab and Taylor to stop these measures (Folsom 69-70).

Unlike what Rand suggested, the interaction between the entrepreneur and the state leads, in most cases, to a situation when entrepreneurs incorporate themselves in the system that has the ability to absorb them, changing only slightly to accommodate the transformation in economy and modes of production. And, in most of the cases, the

workers who produce whatever goods or perform whatever services a certain enterprise requires are unnoticed. They are alienated from their work, as in the original Marxist understanding of workers.

The laborers are not the only ones who are left out in familiar entrepreneurial narratives: entrepreneurship changes the way of life of many people in many different ways that are unaccounted for. *The White Tiger* is most extraordinary/innovative in its determination to expose and account for the victims of entrepreneurship by naming a specific direct kill by Balram Halawi and the seventeen other kills that result from his deed. The novel thus introduces a polemic that rivals the straw man in Ayn Rand's polemic of communism.

The failure of postcolonial studies of *The White Tiger* to account for the victims of Balram's entrepreneurship and their ignoring the fate of the Halawis can be a sign of a deeper issue within the field. Balram is instantly described as a subaltern, or an articulate subaltern, but without realizing that he departs from the subaltern group at a certain point to join the hegemony. This could be a remnant of Ranajit Guha's definition of the make-up of upper classes in postcolonial communities as dominant groups who do not practice hegemony. In this view, the lack of hegemonic ideologies within the upper classes in Indian society calls for a new form of social mapping (Guha). In this mapping, the bourgeoisie can be the most effective power that pushes towards a more socially just community: the bourgeois is better educated than the lower classes, and because the community is free of hegemony, the bourgeoisie has no ideological stakes in preserving the status quo, and its existence does not depend on the continuation of the status quo.

This thesis argues to the contrary: that postcolonial communities are as controlled by hegemony as Western communities. The ways through which hegemony functions in different communities are different, but the fact remains that there is no dominance without hegemony, and that the bourgeoisie is always dependent on the continuation of the status quo: that is social injustice. Vivik Chibber argues to that end, and to that the bourgeoisie everywhere is against the interests of the lower classes, and that the freedoms that are finally gained in the West are taken from the very hands of the bourgeoisie. In other words, he argues that liberation from hegemony cannot come through the bourgeoisie:

In fact, it fought tooth and nail against them for centuries after the so-called bourgeois revolutions. When those freedoms were finally achieved, it was through very intense struggle by the dispossessed, waged against the heroes of Guha's narrative, the bourgeoisie (Interview).

This is to iterate that Balram ceases to be a subaltern, and joins the bourgeoisie. He subscribes to the same class, and the same consciousness that fights against collective rights for the majority of people. He is in the same union-busting, spirit-breaking mold that has been putting labor—be it industrial, farming, or service—at a disadvantage for ages.

Schotland sees through the futility of Balram's violence in terms of creating a better society for himself, and for his class, in her conclusion:

The injustice and corruption of twenty-first-century India is so deep rooted and so pervasive that the only way a poor man can better himself is by an act of aggression, even the extremes of theft or murder. But what has Balram's violence really achieved? Balram has bettered his own condition, but he has not created a better society (19).

Balram's violence achieves what it is initiated for: Balram's liberation and economic success. He introduces himself as an entrepreneur, and commits his murder in order to

advance above his class. He does not claim his murder in the name of people victimized by the system, but in the name of his worthiness of being an oppressor. Entrepreneurs do not wish to change the system that produces them. Their genius is their ability to identify the services or the goods that the system may require at a point when it evolves. They are willing to provide that service even at the expense of their own people.

In Isabel Alledne's novel, *The Island Beneath the Sea* (2011), for instance, Violette Boisier is a quadroon courtesan in Saint Domingue who escapes to New Orleans amidst the Haitian Revolution. Boisier sees opportunity in New Orleans where there is a large population of colored people and also a large number of wealthy plantation owners who would never marry a woman who is not purely white. Boisier, being the entrepreneur she is, decides to start a semi-prostitution business, where she supervises mingling parties between young and wealthy plantation heirs—and sometimes, old plantation owners—and colored girls, handpicked and groomed by her. The purpose of these parties is for the wealthy white masters to choose groomed concubines for as long as they wish. Boisier gets a commission, the girl gets a sponsor, and the man gets sex.

To Boisier, her business is not only legitimate, but also visionary: white men will never marry colored women. Colored men want to advance their social standing by marrying above their class, and even if they do not, they are still poor. In her vision, she is a savior of many a beautiful colored girl who could have ended a prostitute or a poor man's wife if not for Boisier. When the Americans buy Louisiana, and take over New Orleans, Boiseir is the first to befriend them in order to secure her business, and to learn their ways, so that they may benefit her. Boisier is not worried about abolishing slavery, the end of segregation, or any social justice agendas. The continuation of institutions such

as slavery and segregation, and the continuation of prejudice conceptions about blood purity, serves her well for her business will continue to flourish.

The irony is not only that Boisier herself is a quadroon, but also that she is the widow of a white French officer and has with him an adopted son, a freed mulatto slave, the son of a French plantation owner and a black slave. She guards her son's secret well, and she is proud of her husband. If someone should know about the evils of slavery and segregation, and about the hope for a better society, it should be Violette Boisier. Instead, she considers herself the exception, just like Balram Halawi, and builds her fortune over the inherent injustice in the system.

True, historical entrepreneurs who travelled down the Mississippi were opportunists, much like her and Balram Halawi, whose attributes are well summarized by David Dary in his introduction for his book, *Entrepreneurs of the Old West* (1986):

It [the army of people moving to the West] comprised people with such qualities as imagination, optimism, self-reliance, initiative, ingenuity, individualism, and resourcefulness, qualities we still prize. On the other hand, because there were few societal restraints and because profit was involved, many of these early entrepreneurs were also greedy, unscrupulous, ruthless, devious, and even downright dishonest (ix).

In the same mold are other prominent fictional entrepreneurs: James Gatz does not become a social reformer, but a bootlegger. He runs business with the most dangerous people in New York City during the Roaring Twenties. He changes his name—like Balram Halawi—into Jay Gatsby, and models himself after a true rich man who teaches him gentle manners. Gatsby's ultimate dream is to be reunited with his idealized love interest, Daisy Buchanan. It could be argued that Gatsby's romantic optimism and his tragic end separate him from other entrepreneurs; however, it is a matter of a narrative curve: in Gatsby's story, all that is not related to his encounter with Nick Carraway is not

there for the reader to see. In Balram's case, he is not yet as rich as Gatsby, and as free to pursue romantic dreams as Gatsby. Balram does not have the charm that could make someone write his exploits in the form of a hagiography.

There is a reference point that binds Gatsby to other entrepreneurs such as Balram Halawi and Violette Boisier—though they are colored children of colonies, while he is a white American: Trimalchio. Nick Carraway's interest in Gatsby peaks as his career as a Trimalchio comes to an end. (Fitzgerald 93) Trimalchio is a figure from *Satyricon* by Petronius: a freed man who makes wealth for himself. That Trimalchio was not free at the beginning of his narrative is a cultural meme that copies itself and reproduces itself through ages. Gatsby, too, is not a free man, and part of his quest to woo Daisy is to free himself from the shackles of his poverty and his humble origins. He does not do so by fighting the system, but by finding an entry point to the system. He runs a bootlegging enterprise among other illegal activities. It is possible to condemn Gatsby as a criminal—as it is easy to condemn Balram.

4. Entrepreneurship and Class

Despite being repeatedly accused of being a vehicle for Western voyeurism, *The White Tiger's* protagonist is an undisputed Indian “hero.” The lack of dispute around this statement is a self-defeating prophecy: what is uniquely Indian about Balram Halawi that does make his story uniquely Indian?

The caste system is just a cultural component that creates a context for Balram story: it has to happen somewhere, and this somewhere happens, in this case, to be India. No matter how *realistically* Adiga tries to depict India, the fact remains that the India in the text is a mental construct, is one instance of multiple co-existing instances of India. The heart of Balram’s story is universal: it could happen anywhere, and everywhere. It even happens in the case of rich societies that did not suffer colonialism: Jay Gatsby is one instance. James Arnold Ross, Sr.—a major character in Upton Sinclair’s novel, *Oil!* (1927)—is another. He comes from obscure origins, and achieves prominence through means of entrepreneurship in oil extracting. His quest leads him through a tangled web of deceit and exploitation of religion and ignorance, taking an advantage over labor and farmers in towns where his wells are. Ross ends up escaping the country because his deeds lead to a Congress investigation in his business that is borderline criminal at times.

Adiga operates through a paradigm articulated in a lecture delivered by the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, in Bangalore, 2005. Jiabao said that India and China would lead world’s technology in the 21st century (“India+China Will Beat the World in IT”). The novel begins with Balram’s taking issue with Indian national media at the eve of Jiabao’s visit to Bangalore. The Indian official narrative about Jiabao’s visit to Bangalore is that he wants to learn about Indian entrepreneurship. It is then that Balram

Halwai opens his word processor to write the first letter to Wen Jiabao, to “teach” him about real entrepreneurship, without taking issue with the notion that the future will be for the brown man and the yellow man—as Balram says, half-jokingly.

A joint leadership of the world in terms of technology is a good sound bite. However, that does not lead to the vision where India and China inherit the world of technology. The Technology-based economy is not just Silicon Valley and consumer electronics. And even in the case of Silicon Valley and consumer electronics, this type of economy is too global to be contained and shaped by two countries.

The Technology-based economy is international by definition. It does not flow in one direction, and does not transfer completely from one place to another. It has the ability to exist in multiple places at once. It is a complex space of interactions and competing concepts, ideas, and patents that make it impossible—for practical reasons—to have only a nation or two to lead it. In consumer technology, there is no West vs. East dichotomy, for it is the sum of international supply chains that extend across the globe. Consumer technology is at times chaotic for it shows the traits of what could be described as global locality: a state when international operations are tailored to fit different jurisdictions and settings, with instances of being subject to more than jurisdiction at once.

As for transference of technology on a state level, the process is subject to international treaties that control the flow of technology. India is part of many of these treaties, beginning with Uruguay Round that led to GATT agreement on 1994, and then to World Trade Organization the following year (Sahu 225). These treaties control the transfer of technology between countries, and limit the scope of local innovation with

local and international patents. Sovereign countries push against patents registered in other countries in order to protect their local innovations and corporations by enforcing certain regulations. This does not only limit the process of transferring technology from one country to another, but whether consumer technology could be sold in a certain country or not.

Thus, the international status of the market will remain the same—unless a major breakthrough on an unprecedented scale happens—which helps entrepreneurs like Balram Halawi, who feeds off this decentralized economy without having to hold patents or to invest in infrastructure. In the foreseeable future, it is possible for a nation—or more—to slightly bend the supply chains, but it is not possible to change the entire economy.

Although Balram Halawi does not fully comprehend the global scale of the economy that fosters his entrepreneurship, he has some wisdom that enables him to see that the masters of the niche his enterprise serves are overseas. He wants to tell the Chinese Prime Minister the *truth* about entrepreneurship, succumbing to the national discourse that China is without entrepreneurship. Who starts and runs the various factories that manufacture Silicon Valley gadgets among other goods if not entrepreneurs? Entrepreneurs appear wherever there is an opportunity for gain. Sometimes, they are not called by other names, but all the same, there is no country and no culture, even the Soviet Union, without entrepreneurship.⁴

⁴ For more on that, see: *Entrepreneurship in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union* (1983), by Gregory Guroff and Fred Castensen, Princeton: Princeton UP.

The spirit of entrepreneurship is about finding an opportunity and seizing it. It would not be too judgmental to call entrepreneurs opportunists. As a matter of fact, there is a scholarly division of entrepreneurship that includes opportunism as a type of entrepreneurship:

Necessity Entrepreneurship:

People undertake necessity entrepreneurship when there are few, if any, other options for finding suitable work. (With little or no financial resources).

Opportunity Entrepreneurship

People undertake opportunity entrepreneurship when they perceive an opportunity in the market, which can include underserved, poorly served, or newly emerging niches. Knowledge of these niches can be considered a form of human capital typically gained from industry experience. (Burton et al. 2002). In addition, people embedded in wide-ranging and diverse social networks have greater access to such knowledge. Opportunity entrepreneurship probably depends more than necessity entrepreneurship on the position of human capital. If so, then opportunity-based endeavors provide the greatest potential for individual mobility, organizational growth, and job creation. Therefore, opportunity entrepreneurship will be, on average, more beneficial to economies and societies than that arising out of necessity (Lippmann, Davis and Aldrich 10-11).

India has been officially fostering the first type of entrepreneurship, that of necessity. In 1983, Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDI) was created in Ahmedabad as an autonomous, non-government body that aims at fostering entrepreneurial culture in India. The Institute has a declared mission:

To become a catalyst in facilitating emergence of competent first generation entrepreneurs and transition of existing SMEs into growth-oriented enterprises through entrepreneurship education, training, research & institution building.⁵

The EDI is supported by national financial establishments in India, and has a network that spans through most of the world, with the exception of North America. Though the EDI does not define entrepreneurship at any point, most of its activities include various

⁵ EDI Official Website: <http://www.ediindia.org/doc/EDIataGlance.pdf>

forms of training for aspiring entrepreneurs. It works with national and international NGOs, but it also provides what business schools usually provide: training for creating business. Emphasizing that the EDI is within the context of necessity entrepreneurship is that it provides special training tracks called: “training of rural poor as entrepreneurs”.⁶

Balram Halwai definitely fits in the category of the rural poor, but he is not the child of an institution. This is, perhaps, why Balram believes that the Indian official narrative about entrepreneurship is not true. He is an opportunist, and he believes that institutional entrepreneurship is worthless: it creates copies of the same model according to what the government believes necessary. Therefore, ignoring many opportunities for more lucrative income that are available elsewhere. In such controlled entrepreneurship, the goal is the benefit of most people, while in true entrepreneurship (as Balram recognizes) the goal is to make the entrepreneur wealthy and celebrated.

This also signals another inherent injustice in the system. It would not be fair to accuse Balram of being a cold-hearted opportunist without saying that Laxmangrah is far from Ahmadabad, and although part of the EDI’s mission is to help the rural poor, Balram—and Laxmangrah—do not receive any help. To Balram, it does not matter how far the EDI affiliates and associates expand. He did not receive any help. He had to make it on his own.

Balram is both a product of the system and a force that keeps it going. The system that produced Balram has traits that make it particular to India; however, everywhere on earth there is a system that produces entrepreneurs by different names. Entrepreneurship operates within the paradigm that anyone can become wealthy and recognized, but not

⁶ Ibid.

everyone. And throughout the ages, there have always been exceptional individuals who achieved wealth and recognition despite coming from humble origins in an unwelcoming environment, some of whom were able to bequeath their accumulated wealth and fame, like in the case of the Medici Family, while others died and their wealth died with them.

4.1. Balram and the Chinese Premier

Despite being an individualistic opportunist, Balram often meditates on the state of his original class (the low class) in a way that makes him appear interested in the collective welfare of the low class. He meditates on abject poverty, and on the acts through which the members of the lower classes are stripped of every shred of dignity they have. He starts by the obvious, the lack of reliable infrastructure, and then progresses to noticing the human interactions through which hegemony is exercised. The main addressee of his speech is a foreigner, the Chinese Premier, and the discussion of why Balram addresses him, and why he writes to him in English can further inform the argument of Balram's change of position from the subaltern to the bourgeois.

The language that Balram speaks, and his definition of himself are an a posteriori creation. Growing up, Balram does not speak English. When he kills his master, he does not speak English. Even when he arrives at Bangalore, he does not speak English. Yet, the first line of the novel—right after the addresses and titles—reads: “Neither you nor I can speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English” (Adiga 3). The addressee in this line is the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao whose visit to India in 2005 provides occasion for Balram Halawi's narrative and for the novel. There is nothing in Balram's narrative that can only be said in English. His only example of something that can only be said in English is a profanity he learned from his master's wife, “*what a fucking joke!*”

American profanity is pervasive in the world, regardless of education level or knowledge of the language itself. Through American movies, music, and shows a global recognition of American profanity has been created in the whole world, and it is not

strange to find children saying, “fuck you!” to each other, or adults cursing at each other using the same phrase, or any variation of it, anywhere in the world. What used to be a four-letter bomb has become instantly recognizable and widely used in different languages. Therefore, it would not be strange if Balram mixes this profanity with his speech in Hindi. In all cases, the Chinese Premier—should he read the letters—would need translation, so why not write in Hindi?

There are many explanations for why Balram speaks in English, but none of them is enough to justify Balram’s choosing of English language: this could be because Aravind Adiga cannot write in a language other than English, since the literary tradition he is looking at is that of Indian Diaspora. His audience, regardless of what he says in his rebuttal of accusation of serving Western voyeurism, is largely international. This could be because Balram uses the language he learns in Bangalore to secure his position as a bourgeois. It could be because he believes that his understanding of English enabled him to understand Ashok’s phone conversation, and to realize that Ashok was looking to replace him, which made him decide to kill him before that is done. (Adiga 268) Yet, none of what Balram says can only be said in English. It can be said in any language, and in every language in the world.

Balram’s myth debunking narrative is in itself dependent upon a new set of myths that Balram subscribes to: that he is a tech-entrepreneur who is in the heart of the world’s fastest growing cyber-city, and that he is a unique creature who has been chosen by nature to rise above his class. In doing so, he rises above the language, and uses the language of the new world he has inserted himself into. He still retains his affection for the four poets who taught him about beauty, but this is inherited from the writer who

states that these four poets are his favorite (“City of the White Tiger”). In general, this is a trait of people who subscribe to a new culture, but retain affection for a glorious, old moment in their original culture, as a souvenir, a cultural relic that substitutes for their inability to fully assimilate in their new culture. They fashion for themselves a hybrid-identity. This, perhaps, is one of the stark moments in which Balram’s change of class ideology manifests itself.

At the top of the very first letter, Balram introduces himself to the reader and to the Premier:

From the Desk of:
‘The White Tiger’
A Thinking Man
And an entrepreneur (Adiga 3)

The fact that Balram sends his letter “from the desk of” indicates that he places himself at an equal position to the Chinese Premier. He does not write from the position of inferiority. He is a teacher, a guru who has a greater truth that he is about to convey. He presents himself as “The White Tiger,” signaling that he writes from a position of full transformation. He is no longer Balram Halawi, the coal breaker and the servant—although Balram will be the name he uses for the rest of his narrative.

Another paradoxical aspect of Balram’s narrative is his apparent naïveté when he writes to the Chinese Premier: that he assumes that the Chinese Premier is going to read his letters eagerly, and that he seems to ignore the historical animosity between India and China.

This address to the Chinese Premier brings a certain naïveté to the voice of the narrator, showing indeed Balram’s half-baked understanding of the political history of Indo-Chinese diplomatic relations and their current state of rivalry in terms of economic growth (Bhautoo-Dewanarian 68).

This statement is rooted in the factual world—like the narrative, which uses the actual visit of the Chinese Premier to India as an occasion. The 2005 visit was the first for a Chinese official of that capacity to India since the Sino-Indian War (1962), in which Chinese forces caused great losses to the Indian forces alongside the Northern borders, especially the trajectory of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. Sikkim ended up becoming Indian Territory, while Nepal and Bhutan retained their independence, and China expanded its dominion over what used to be India's Northern extensions, and parts of Western Pakistan, the Aksai Chin territory (Calvin). Since then, Indian and Chinese relationships have been sour.

Balram may not know the intricate details of the Sino-Indian War, but he is a Northerner, and he knows that the Chinese are not friends. Throughout the novel, he enumerates instances of prejudice against Nepalese people, or Nepali-looking people in the North. (His greatest shock comes when his idol, Ashok Ramdev, rekindles his relationship with an old flame, a Nepalese woman. It is not the adultery that disturbs Balram the most, but the fact that the woman whom Ashok loves—or seems to love—is Nepalese).

She was a slant-eyed one, with yellow skin. A foreigner. A Nepali. Not even of his caste or background. She sniffed about the seats—the seats that I had polished—and jumped on them. Mr. Ashok put his hands on the girl's bare shoulders. I took my eyes away from the mirror. I have never approved of debauchery inside cars, Mr. Jiabao (Adiga 205).

He does not explain why the Nepalese are so much hated in the North, presuming that the Chinese Premier understands. Some things are best said in English, and some things are best left unsaid, especially when the addressee is aware of them. The Chinese Premier has to know that Nepalese people are not trusted because their features resemble

those of Chinese people, and because, during the War, they were either open or covert supporters of the Chinese army. It could be that the political reasons are forgotten, but fear, loathing, and distrust have rooted themselves in the minds of those who live in Northern India, where the War took its toll.

And Balram is aware of Chinese involvement in the north. “To hell with the Naxals and their guns shipped from China” (275). He knows that China supports the Naxals—a terrorist group of fundamentalist Marxists that fight on the Northern borders of India. However, he is now in the South, with a new name, a new language, and a new world full of opportunities, so the Chinese can be friends in this world. Besides, the Indian government itself is welcoming the Chinese Premier as a friend, and its propaganda machine is talking about his learning from the Indian experience. Balram does nothing other than show the Chinese Premier what he holds to be the true Indian experience. He both adheres to what his government does and contradicts it at the same time. He refers to a statement he reads on a government building in Bangalore, *GOVERNMENT WORK IS GOD’S WORK* (297), and complies with God’s work the same way he complies with the Lord Buddha enlightenment story. He twists it, appropriates it, and, because of his personality, he does it in a sarcastic, sacrilegious manner.

Balram’s naïveté could lie in his belief that, just because he writes to the Chinese Premier, the Chinese Premier would listen to him. This could be occasion for narration, only, but it can also be seen as a sign of Balram’s identification with power figures. At the moment that he writes, he has a start-up that is doing relatively well. He eats well and has a good house and a good office, full of chandeliers that he likes. He lives in the Light,

literally. He is living in the light, but he is not living up to his full potential. He wants more, and in his incriminating biography—should he send it—are the seeds of his ascension.

Balram describes entrepreneurs, himself included, as half-baked men, made of half-baked clay (11). His proclamation best describes entrepreneurship, which is made of conscious and subconscious class angst, mixed up with romantic aspirations, pseudo-science, and pseudo-intellectualism. This goes against the notion that entrepreneurs are visionaries, or the paradigm set by Robert F. Hebert and Albert N. Link in their book, *The Entrepreneur: Mainstream Views and Radical Critiques* (1988), where, right from the onset of the book, entrepreneurs are put in the same category with artists, scientists, and thinkers, and their social and economic role is viewed through this lens-- that they push society in the same manner, and whatever change they bring, they cannot be held responsible for.

Visionary in terms of entrepreneurship means the ability to innovate and predict what people would want next--and providing this product or service, without listening to people who tend to be stuck in the present. It is best summarized in a quotation that is often attributed to Henry Ford, "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses." The notion expressed in this quotation reproduces itself through history: entrepreneurs predict change and apply it. Asa Packer made his fortune when he predicted that railroads would take over the ferries he had been making: he was a carpenter. Charles Schwab bought the American rights for a European patent to make stronger and cheaper steel. Larry Ellison read a scientific paper on databases that was intended for IBM and saw the possibility in it. Steve Jobs predicted that personal

computers would become widely used. Bill Gates predicted the split between software and hardware, and created a licensing system that had not been in existence before, by which customers only buy temporary licenses to the systems they pay for, while the mother company keeps control over the software and the code that makes it. He is, unlike the other entrepreneurs, a hacker who can write code himself, and can qualify for the entrepreneurs/scientist model as dreamed up by Ayn Rand and popularized by Herbert and Link. However, he did not write the first DOS system he licensed to IBM. When Microsoft was created, it hired coders and hackers to do the work (Freiberger and Swaine 328-45). Gates, then, set the road map for information-based economy in his seminal book, *The Road Ahead* (1995). The results of this book can be seen in Bangalore as well as in Silicon Valley.

There is a symbiotic relationship between entrepreneurship and science as evidenced in these examples. There is also a symbiotic relationship between arts and entrepreneurship: art dealers, publishers, toolmakers are all dependent on artists and artistic visions. This does not make the entrepreneur a scientist or an artist—with the exceptions of Alfred Nobel and Damien Hirst. Before entrepreneurship became such a buzzword, entrepreneurs were simply called merchants and businessmen. They were known for their ability to acclimate themselves to any conditions, and they created change through trade. Entrepreneurs do that, but with a mythic narrative that makes them assume a status similar to that of artists and scientists.

But there is a game of concealment here: this narrative hides the fact that railroads need labor to dig and build them, cars need labor to be built and assembled, code needs labor to be written, computers and phones need labor to assemble them. Labor is always

omitted from this narrative. Steve Jobs did not make iPhones; Chinese workers on minimum Chinese wage make them. Henry Ford did not make the Model T, poor American workers made it. Bill Gates did not write Windows Operating System, but thousands of programmers that Microsoft hired did and continue to do.

Labor means management, wages, and the lives of other people, be they a dozen or a thousand. However, entrepreneurship narratives overlook systematic practices like de-skilling workers in order to make it easier to “downsize” them—a practice that prevails in every single industry, be it automobiles, computers, or software. Those narratives ignore the firing at will, the cutting of wages, the extra hours without proper compensation, and the dismemberment of workers at workplaces—which has evolved into suicide rates in some hardware factories in China.⁷

Balram is a visionary entrepreneur; his start-up serves a particular niche, call center workers whose hours of business are outside the normal hours of business in India. He identified their needs and predicted what they need: a fast, secure, and shared taxi service that provides them with an easy commute at a relatively cheap rate. He used what he knows, just as other real and fictional entrepreneurs do: he is a driver, and he knows all about driving; yet, he does not drive. He could be said to be a better employer: he speaks about people who work with him and steps in to help them when problems happen.

That he is a good employer is a debatable matter: he believes he is and gives an example in his dealing with the incident when his driver, Mohammad Asif, hits a boy and

⁷ Joel Johnson, "1 Million Workers. 90 Million iPhones. 17 Suicides. Who's to Blame?" *Wired.com*, Conde Nast Digital, 28 Feb. 2011. Web. 26 July 2013.

killed him. This accident is similar to the incident that made Balram realize that he is a disposable object: when Pinky Madam, Ashok's wife, drunk, hits a child and leaves him/her, and the Ramdev family (Thakur, the father, and his two sons Ashok and Mukesh) decide to blame it on Balram, forcing him to sign a statement that he was driving the car at the time of the accident. In Mohammad Asif's case, he hit the boy because he was driving at top speed to comply with the company's policy of fast delivery. Balram calls the police, whom he has already bribed, and with whom he has built a strong relationship. The police do not even register the case. However, Balram mitigates the losses to the family of the victim by offering their other son employment, which they eventually accept. (Adiga 304-10)

In his mind, Balram is a good, charitable person. He offers their other son employment because he believes that life is too harsh to be sentimental: the victim's family is poor, poor like he used to be, and he gives them very little in return for what he—or his driver—taken from them. This is another moment that manifests Balram's change of class ideology. He joins the oppressors, and he complicates the oppression of hegemony by providing the victims of his enterprise a means for living. This is not charity, or social justice: this is exploitation that serves only to strengthen Balram's myth. It is a common mindset: entrepreneurship could create victims, but what else could people do? There is no other chance for employment, so they work for their oppressor, at the worst conditions, and they provide their oppressor a moment of self-congratulations for being such merciful master/employer.

Balram, here, reproduces the exact terms of his previous enslavement. He becomes Ashok Ramdev, less educated, but equal in thinking that he is being a good,

charitable employer. Ashok steps in when Mukesh blames Balram for things he cannot help—like getting lost in a new city. Balram steps in when his driver hits someone due to things he cannot help—the company’s policy of fast delivery. Ashok gives Balram signs of approval and promises of financial security in order to ease his guilt about sacrificing him so easily, while Pinky Madam, his wife, gives Balram money to relieve her conscience. Balram gives the family of the victim money and employment to relieve his conscience—if he still has any. When he gives them money and employment, he robs them of their grudge against him, and instead making them in his debt, unable to fight back for themselves. He *takes care* of them as Ashok and his brother took care of him when he was their servant. This *fucking joke* is aggravated to utmost cruelty by the fact that Balram renames himself: Ashok Sharma (301).

Balram could have sacrificed his driver, turning him in for the accident. He, after all, did the deed. Usually, start-ups have a few employees at the beginning, all of whom are indispensable—especially when they show competence and initiative. Eventually, when the start-up grows into a full-fledged corporation, those indispensable first employees are either rewarded or brutally pushed out of the company—sometimes both. Asif seems to be Balram’s first and most trusted employee at the moment of narration. He is indispensable, but he will not be so for long. As a matter of fact, Balram’s paranoia manifests itself early, when he starts thinking that his employees would see him weak for what he does in the case of the boy (Adiga 313). It could be a sign that he will soon cut Asif out of the company.

The fact that Asif is a Muslim does not mean that Balram has become more tolerant of Muslims or that he is trying to make up for the time when he cost the

Ramdev's first driver his job by telling his employers that he was, in fact, a Muslim. He, probably, does hire a Muslim to be his most trusted driver because he takes to his heart what his old driving instructor says about castes and driving: Halawis, like Balram, do not make good drivers. Driving needs fighters like Muslims, Sikhs, or Rajputs. (Adiga 56) Balram may believe himself to be the exception—he is as aggressive as it takes to kill a man with a broken whiskey bottle—and may even release himself from his caste with changing his last name, but he still believes in castes when it comes to hiring people to work for him. He becomes Thakur Ramdev, too.

There is a tone of boastfulness in Balram's narrative, a deep viciousness in his description of how he carries out the morbid deed. He details his crime and his escape plan. He also confesses to lesser crimes such as bribery and covering up for murder. Should he send his letters to the Chinese Premier, since they are bound to be intercepted by the Indian government? Even if they pass, and the Chinese Premier reads them, they still incriminate Balram in two countries that carry capital punishment. This seems foolish, and it is perhaps the reason why most of the novel's scholars take it as a mere narrative device. Balram would rather send the letters: he is an adventurer, and a large part of entrepreneurship is taking risks. He takes a risk in killing his master, he takes a risk by going to Bangalore and befriending the police, and he takes a risk by writing these letters. He is aware of that risk, that he might lose his gamble and end up in jail. However, he is too full of himself. He wants his song to be sung and his deeds to be recognized. Also, being a half-baked man allows him to see the opportunity without seeing the historical ramifications that full-baked men—such as scholars—see. He sees that China can be a business partner, and that they will be in need of the services of a man

like him, who can fly under the radar and succeed. He shows that he understands *real* India and that he is worthy of being a business partner, a spy, or whatever the Chinese might offer him. If the Indian government intercepts his letters, they might appreciate his talents, and his understanding of Northern India, and pardon his crimes, or give him a short sentence so that he could get out of prison and enjoy a successful career in politics or in business, with his song sung in movies and books and newspaper articles. It happened before in India and will happen again. The government pardons bandits from time to time, and some of them can make a big move, like Phoolan Devi, who became a parliament member, and the subject of a film, *The Bandits Queen* (1994), and of many books. Glory—what Balram believes is his—can be waiting for him.

And he could be hanged for the crimes he confesses, and for aiding an enemy. It is like a coin toss, but a man like Balram will take the risk. He is not a scholar, he is not a social reformer: he is an entrepreneur. He takes risks and needs recognition. He believes himself to be a new sort of hero, a gutsy hero who can do what others fail to do. He is the antithesis of the intellectual hero who is unable to act: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* who succumbs to a life of social invisibility and random acts of violence. *Invisible Man* is an intellectual, and he will never write a letter to the American President—or, to make it more daring, the Soviet President—to confess his crimes. He is content to live in a basement, stealing from the electricity company what he believes is light. *Invisible Man* lives in an invention of his mind, while Balram lives in the factual world. They both want to be seen, and they go about it in different ways.

4.2. Revolution

One of the reasons that allow Balram to disguise himself as a class hero—or as a Thinking Man, at least—is his prophecy of a coming revolution, led by the people on the bottom. He might seem like a sympathizer with the revolution, but that is not true: a revolution from the bottom would take him down. He has joined the masters' class, and in the event of a revolution from the bottom he would be slaughtered like a chicken, the same way he slaughtered Ashok.

His prophecies about the revolution of the masses might reflect his class anxiety: the fear that the system would be broken and that their easy lives would be lost. The upper class is also afraid of losing their fortunes in the event of socio-economic upheaval, but usually, the richest of the rich manages to escape with large sums when the need arises, unlike middle classes and upper middle classes. Balram's prophecies seem to be warnings: he warns the Chinese Premier that there will be a revolution because more people are aware of the causes of their poverty, more aware than Balram himself. They are enlightened prophets who will gather up the roosters out of the cage. He warns Indian surveillance agents—they must be reading his letters to a foreign official—that there is movement on the street. He showcases his talent and his street smarts when he does so. Balram is an opportunist, and he wants to cut himself a better deal. He is offering his talents for hire, to whomever will be more interested in doing business with him: the Chinese or the Indian.

Outside of Balram's selfishness and opportunism is Adiga's message of social justice. He sees movement in the society, and he wants to draw attention to it: an ideal revolution by the people inside the coop that is in the making. This could be true: there

could be a revolution coming, but a class revolution from the bottom is not foreseeable. The class struggle has been diluted with that of caste, and—as it has been discussed earlier—postcolonial studies have enforced the notion that there is dominance within hegemony in India. Therefore, India—and postcolonial communities in general—is outside of class struggle. A revolution has to come first to bring back the class struggle to the surface, and then a true revolution from the bottom would be foreseeable.

This remains the final message of Balram's narrative: that in a class war, those at the bottom have to rise for themselves. Entrepreneurial grand narratives only serve to strengthen the system of oppression, providing it with new oppressors who have new justifications for continuing to feed on the classes below them.

5. Conclusion

The Abbasid caliph, Al-Ma'mun, once declared, "Class is kinship. The noblemen are kinsmen in class, and the commoners are kinsmen in class." The Abbasids caliphs, especially, had an acute sense of class, and took Al-Ma'mun's adage to their heart. Regardless of religion, language, or color: class is what matters the most. This reigns true through different ages, and in different places in the world. In spite of myths surrounding race, black slave owners were kinsmen to white slave owners, and their survival depended on the existence of the institution of slavery. To this day, people of color from upper classes sometimes do not identify with people who share their color and race from lower classes. They identify with people of their class and share their value system—even when their estate is built upon their image as poor, marginalized people who have risen to the top to speak the pain of the common man, as in the case of the Hip Hop artist Jay Z.

When Balram's class changed, his awareness changed. Yes, he is still afraid of being brought back to servitude, and he feels sometimes like a servant. But these are the psychological scars of his traumatic past. If he rises more, if he secures himself a pardon for his crimes, Balram would become a full-fledged oppressor, a man from the upper class, who sympathizes with their pains and shares their goals. His old self would just disappear for he will have nothing to fear. This could be one of the reasons he writes his story.

It is unfortunate that this class discourse was ignored by *The White Tiger* studies that are consulted for this thesis. This could be a sign of what Vivek Chibber accuses Subaltern Studies of: reproducing the condition of colonialism by refusing to put post-colonial societies in a global class struggle context. He rightly observes that the

improvement of labor conditions in the West was not the product of the bourgeoisie's caring hearts, but the product of labor unions, strikes, and other actions of class solidarity on the part of the lower classes. It is a form of what Paulo Friere describes as a means of true liberation for the oppressed and the oppressor alike:

Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human. This distortion occurs within history; but it is not an historical vocation. Indeed, to admit of dehumanization as an historical vocation would lead either to cynicism or total despair. The struggle for humanization, for the emancipation of labor, for the overcoming of alienation, for the affirmation of men and women as persons would be meaningless. This struggle is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed. (26)

However, the globalization and defragmentation of the supply chain makes it difficult for workers—or farmers—to unite against those who control the means of production. This defragmentation of the supply chain is a form of preemptive union busting, making the workers unable to create a union in the first place. This was accompanied with the rise of the grand narrative of the entrepreneur: entrepreneurs are held as heroes and builders, while the actual providers of labor are pushed to the margins. The individualistic survival replaced the class survival. This individualistic survival—as it is shown in *The White Tiger*—only serves to strengthen the system that victimizes the masses (or the 99%).

It is not likely that *The White Tiger*'s deconstruction of the discourse of entrepreneurship will have a great effect: those absorbed in the entrepreneurship-lore would not read it, and those who are not would be caught in its voyeuristic style. Scholars—so far—have missed this aspect of it altogether. The rise of a new class of entrepreneurs in Asia might be the coming hot topic: Mohsin Hamid has a novel that is

called, *How to Become Filthy Rich in Asia* (2012). Whether this subject draws more interest or not, and whether it will signal a true move towards not only deconstruction of the entrepreneurship discourse but also rethinking fields such as Subaltern Studies is yet to be seen. And, perhaps, new discourses will emerge then.

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