

# FOUCAULDIAN DISCOURSE OF HOMO ECONOMICUS IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S NOVEL THE WHITE TIGER

## Abstract

In this article, *Homo economicus* attempts to address this inquiry by finishing up with the assistance of hypothetical conversations and scholarly portrayals. The present investigation examines Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* through the lens of the Foucauldian discourse of *Homo Economicus*. Aravind Adiga's parody of globalizing India, *The White Tiger*, spoofs how neoliberalism standardizes skeptical personal responsibility as the reality of society and human instinct. *The White Tiger* is an entrepreneur expedition of Balram Halwai in light of the four phases of The Entrepreneur Journey execute, systemize, scrutinize, and exit. An uninformed, insane Indian resident turned merciless business visionary, protagonist Balram Halwai justifies the death of seventeen relatives to finance his start-up, thereby becoming one of globalizing Asia's entrepreneurial elite. Michel Foucault and Wendy Brown argue that neoliberalism is best perceived as a new logic of governmentality that has brought a new economic subject, *homo economicus*. Michel Foucault recognized this self-interest as a newly emergent form of rational choice, which shapes people into business visionaries of themselves. Michel Foucault puts together his case concerning Gary Becker's origination of the utility-maximizing agent, exclusively based on cost-benefit calculations.

**Keywords:** Homo Economicus; The White Tiger; Michel Foucault; Wendy Brown; Gary Becker.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Michel Foucault is undoubtedly the foremost influential of all the French critics. Foucault's hypotheses principally tended to the connection between power and knowledge and how they are utilized to apply social control through cultural foundations. Foucault centers around the examination of the effect of shifted establishments on gatherings of people and, accordingly, the job that those individuals play in certifying or opposing those impacts in his works like *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973), *The History of Sexuality* (1978), *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (1972-77). *The Birth of Biopolitics* is a lecture series at College de France in 1978-79. Foucault grows further the notion of biopolitics introduced in a previous lecture series, *Security, Territory, Population*, by following how the eighteenth-century political economy denoted the introduction of new governmental rationality. Biopolitics is political power practiced on entire populations in each part of human existence.

In this lecture series on bio-politics, the concept of *homo economicus* is found related to civil society. "The *homo economicus* sought after is not the man of exchange or man the consumer; he is the man of enterprise and production." (Foucault, M., Davidson, A. I., & Burchell, G. (2008). *The birth of biopolitics: lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. Springer.) The Foucauldian discourse of *homo economicus* interacts with institutions among groups, individuals, communities, police, and the political system. The analysis rests on the structure of *homo economicus*, its various levels, interpretations, and the resistance that follows. "The economic individual who rationally calculates costs and benefits is quite unlike the *homo economicus* of the eighteenth-century liberal thinkers." (Lemke, T. (2001). 'The birth of bio-politics': Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on neo-liberal governmentality. *Economy and society*, 30(2), 190-207.)

*The White Tiger* depicts the accurate Foucauldian Discourse of Homo Economicus in a globalized world where the complexities of human reality emphasize critical parts of the economy. *The White Tiger* narrative introduces a new literary class that arises from the author's focus on economic occurrence, the economic tale, whose major storyline revolves around economic events. "The nexus linking characters to their economic environment is central in a new genre, the *economic novel*, that puts forth economic choices and events to narrate social behaviour, individual desires and even non-economic decisions." (Akdere, Ç., & Baron, C. (Eds.). (2019). *Economics and literature: a comparative and interdisciplinary approach*. Routledge.)

This article is an interdisciplinary attempt to explore how literature and economics intersect and uses *The White Tiger's* double look from literature and economics put forth in this essay for a better understanding of the concept of homo economicus.

## II. THE WHITE TIGER

Aravind Adiga is an Indian author best known for his work *The White Tiger*. The book was published in 2008 and won the 40th Booker Prize that year. The novel offers a darkly humorous look at India's class struggle in a globalizing world, with a retelling of local boy Balram Halwai. The story dives into Hinduism, caste, faithfulness, defilement, and poverty in India. *The White Tiger* is an entrepreneur expedition of Balram Halwai in light of

the four phases of The Entrepreneur Journey execute, systemize, scrutinize, and exit. An uninformed, silly Indian resident turned vicious business visionary, protagonist Balram Halwai rationalizes the deaths of "seventeen-family members" (Adiga, A. (2008). *The White Tiger*. HarperCollins.) to capital his start-up and thereby becomes one of the entrepreneurial elite in globalizing India.

The novel is in the style of a long email address to the Chinese Premier, Mr. Wen Jiabao, who is visiting India soon. Balram Halwai considers sharing his life story after hearing the news on All India Radio.

### III. ENTREPRENEUR EXPEDITION

The entrepreneur expedition of Balram Halwai is a notoriously rollercoaster ride based on the four stages of The Entrepreneur Journey execute, systemize, scrutinize, and exit.

- 1. Execute:** The entrepreneurial journey of Balram began with the surprise visit of the inspector to the school. The inspector gives Balram a book named "Lessons for Young Boys from the Life of Mahatma Gandhi" (Adiga 35) and assures Balram will be granted the funding to attend a decent school in the city to realize his true potential. Regardless, Balram is yanked out of school and asked to work in a tea stall to take care of his dad's obligation to their landowner. "The act of social Darwinism gives rise to a related theory of Foucault's *homo economicus* or the *economic man* in the figure of the new underclass protagonist." (Shukla, A. (2021). *Social Darwinism and Evolution of the Underclass Identity: A Study of Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger*. *Creative Flight*, 2(1), 188.)
- 2. Systemize:** Balram's entrepreneurial trajectory took a sharp turn after his father's death and Kishan's marriage. Kishan assisted Balram in realizing his ambition of becoming a driver. The entrepreneurial journey of Balram marks the completion of the first phase of execution and the start of the second phase of systemizing. Adiga's parody on globalizing India, "*The White Tiger* uses scatology to critique the *homo economicus* of neoliberalism. The term explains the theoretical figure of political economy. A primary example here is Adam Smith's eighteenth-century economic man: a subject who pursues self-interest through a *propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another*. Neoliberalism's *homo economicus*, by contrast, is what Michel Foucault calls an *entrepreneur* and *creature of competition* in a time when market logic becomes co-extensive with human nature and the whole of society. Neoliberalism's *homo economicus* emblemizes the recent economization of human life, marking a once unimaginable homology across economics, society, and politics." (Adkins, A. (2019). *Neoliberal Disgust in Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger*. *Journal of Modern Literature*, 42(3), 169–188. <https://doi.org/10.2979/jmodelite.42.3.10>)

Balram began looking for driver employment after discovering the driving annoyance. After an extensive pursuit, Balram was, employed as a driver at Stork's residence in Dhanbad.

- 3. Scrutinize:** Balram's entrepreneurial journey completes the second phase of systemizing, and the third step of scrutinizing begins. Balram eventually won the position following Mukesh Sir's scrutiny and after the approval of The Storks. Balram was thrilled to be

employed as the second driver, and his life began to speed up. Then one day, he learned that Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam would be traveling to Delhi, leaving only one driver behind. Balram detects an opening as an entrepreneur and desires to seize the opportunity, but his adjustments are precarious because to Ram Persad, the Stork house's number one driver. "What is more important for us is the way in which this shift in *anthropology* from *homo economicus* as an exchanging creature to a competitive creature, or rather as a creature whose tendency to compete must be fostered, entails a general shift in the way in which human beings make themselves and are made subjects." (Read, J. (2009). *A genealogy of homo-economicus: Neoliberalism and the production of subjectivity*. *Foucault Studies*, 25. <https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i0.2465>)

Balram was surprised to see that Ram Persad chopped the onion early in the morning and not eating together these days. These acts of Ram Persad made Balram suspicious, and he started to investigate the activity of Ram Persad and found that Ram Persad was a Muslim. So now he had an opportunity to get vengeance on Ram Persad for his prior misbehavior, and he made sure that he was the number one driver of the Stork house and should be going to Delhi. Balram meets the other drivers in Delhi, who teach him how to make money by duping his master by selling petrol, fabricating bogus maintenance invoices, selling Johnnie Walker, and converting a master's car into a freelance taxi.

Balram was not corrupt at this point; he was admiring the view of Delhi's towering buildings and learning about the city's traffic problems. Balram remained faithful to his master; aside from driving, he continued to undertake odd jobs around Mr. Ashok's residence. However, Balram's loyalty and trust took a drastic change after the accident done by Pinky Madam while driving the Honda City in a drunken status.

Balram received the confession letter thumped by his granny Kusum. Balram realized that he had to retaliate now because the family of Mongoose and Stork would gobble him up since they had a deep pocket to save the guards and throw the innocent behind the jail. "The central feature of this analysis is, according to Foucault, a re-introduction (and critical re-description) of the universal figure of the rational actor as a criminological category: *homo economicus*." (Dilts, A. (2008). *Michel Foucault meets Gary Becker: criminality beyond discipline and punish*. *Carceral notebooks*.)

Pinky Madam pushed Mr. Ashok to confess the truth before departing for the airport: no one had complained about the accident. Balram seemed happy and safe, but Mr. Ashok began to attack him, asking why he had dropped Pinky Madam off at the airport. These acts of wrongdoing had triggered Balram, and he was now waiting for the ideal opportunity to exact his vengeance. In the entrepreneur life of Balram, it is a critical juncture as he knew the need to mint money by fooling his master for survival. "Homo economicus, Foucault argues, ceases to be *one of the two partners in the process of exchange* and becomes *an entrepreneur of himself*." (Dilts, A. (2010). *From 'entrepreneur of the self' to 'care of the self': Neoliberal governmentality and Foucault's ethics*. *In Western Political Science Association 2010 Annual Meeting Paper*.)

- 4. Exit:** Balram's entrepreneurial journey has come to the checkpoint of scrutinizing phase, where he has to formulate an exit plan. Balram started to become corrupt in the globalized Gurgaon by selling the car's petrol, making false bills for car repairs, selling imported liquors, and making a freelance taxi from Gurgaon to Delhi to mint money. Throughout the novel, Balram sways between these two excremental talking points — one coordinated against the neoliberal Indian state's surrender and wretchedness of poor people, the other against the poor as ruffian public subjects overloading the walk of progress. This oscillation, importantly, mirrors a crucial movement in the history of homo economicus—the shift from Smith's subject of trade to Foucault's subject of contest. We witness this before he decides to murder his employer to take the cash needed for his start-up.

Balram understood he had to murder Mr. Ashok to have a brighter future, which could only come from a large sum of money that only Mr. Ashok had. "By exiting the outcast collective only to practice the blow he will later use to kill his boss, Mr. Ashok, Balram repurposes scatological obscenity to neoliberal ends in three ways. First, he switches ethical gears (from the communal to the individual), using sordid living conditions to justify his escape from rather than solidarity with India's underclasses. Second, he inverts allegorical frames (from collective-national to individualist) by replacing the prototypical villain of postcolonial allegory—i.e. the cunning global capitalism that thwarted anti-colonial projects from within—with the base subjects holding the nation back from development. Third, Balram switches political cynicisms (from working-class to neoliberal) by using a moment of solidarity with India's national abjects not as an opportunity to collectivize in response to wretched social conditions, but rather as a reason to cast off the masses, to assert his individual identity, and propel himself to kill his employer and complete his entrepreneurial rise." (*Adkins, 2019, p. 7*)

Balram had a lot of questions arising in mind at this moment after killing Mr. Ashok; what should be the exit plan from Delhi? "I rammed the bottle down. The glass ate his bone." (*Adiga 284*) Balram was simply waiting for the ideal moment to murder Mr. Ashok. On a rainy day, Balram gets the opportunity to break the cage by murdering Mr. Ashok, who was planning to bribe politicians with the money, but Balram convert the scene by murdering Mr. Ashok. "*Homo oeconomicus* is made, not born, and operates in a context replete with risk, contingency and potentially violent changes, from burst bubbles and capital or currency meltdowns to wholesale industry dissolution." (*Brown, W. (2015). Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution. Zone Books.*)

Balram's entrepreneurial journey has reached the last stage of exit. Balram's escape strategy following Mr. Ashok's murder was profitable and straightforward: zigzag my way out of Delhi through Hyderabad and eventually to Bangalore. "From the angle of *homo oeconomicus*, there is no fundamental difference between murder and a parking offence." (*Lemke, 2001, p. 199*)

Balram understood from a previous talk with Mr. Ashok that Bangalore is the future of the IT sector; therefore, he took the zigzag route to Bangalore. Balram's entrepreneurial career has reached its conclusion. "The last stage in my amazing success story, sir, was to go from being a social entrepreneur to a business entrepreneur." (*Adiga, 2008, p. 299*) Balram recognized Bangalore as an outsourcing hotspot; therefore, he opted

to outsource the taxi service for Bangalore's night call centers. After testing, he discovered that all contact centers provide taxi services, which alarmed Balram, but Balram knew something that no one knew: he understood the global language of cash. With this, he gained his first break at the call center, and Balram's start-up was off and running.

*The White Tiger*, a powerful novel, depicts Balram as a Foucauldian discourse of *homo economicus*, offering a genuine image of globalized India. At the end of the story, Balram presents an optimistic note to the Chinese Premier, starting him, "You see, I'm always a man who sees *tomorrow* when others see *today*." (Adiga, 2008, p. 319) Balram is an entrepreneur of themselves.

The entrepreneurial exit enabled him to achieve his ultimate aim of being a business entrepreneur, which would not have been possible without the assistance of money, which is a universal language in India. Balram and his newly founded start-up, white tiger-technology Drivers, had a good run after paying the inspector. Balram had a little issue at the start-up with the drivers since some of them had accidents. However, the inspector was always there to save Balram and his start-up, and Balram rose to become a member of Asia's globalizing entrepreneurial elite. "boss@whitetiger-technologydrivers.com." (Adiga, 2008, p. 321)

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the concept of *homo economicus* imagery scattered throughout *The White Tiger* lends itself to numerous and compelling interpretations. The assertions that the *Foucauldian* Discourse of *economic man* is an *imaginary, fictitious, erratic, and absurd* definition of human instinct to survive the real test of daily economic relations between different people by becoming entrepreneurs. It could embody the unfortunate state of people between the wealthy and the abject in globalized India. Considering that Bangalore is depicted as an IT center point, the *homo economicus* references could underline its wildness, despite its development and state-of-the-art innovation. *Homo economicus* continues to exist in an undesirable scenario, displaying steadiness like Balram, whose tenure as an entrepreneur is permanent to execute, systemize, scrutinize, and exit. In light of all these thought-provoking interpretations, *The White Tiger* artistically demonstrates a unique and multi-layered use of *homo economicus* imagery, providing fresh insights. The idea of *homo economicus* presented in this article is an interdisciplinary attempt to study how literature and economics overlap across generations of scholars ranging from Adam Smith to Michel Foucault to Gary Becker to Wendy Brown. The future scope of the present study on *homo economicus* contributes to a better understanding of over-arching topics like wealth, passion, interest, money, economic development, economic crisis, and social change.

Finally, the essay on the Foucauldian Discourse of *Homo Economicus* in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* suggests that connecting literature and economics can help find a common language to voice critical perspectives on cries and social changes for the betterment of societies.

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