**Foucauldian Discourse of Homo Economicus in Aravind Adiga’s novel The White Tiger**

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**ABSTRACT**

What is *homo economicus*; This article tries to answer this question by concluding with the help of theoretical discussions and literary representations. The current study looks at Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* through the lens of the Foucauldian discourse of *Homo Economicus*. Aravind Adiga's satire on globalizing India, *The White Tiger*, parodies how neoliberalism normalizes misanthropic self-interest as the truth of society and human nature. *The White Tiger* is an entrepreneur expedition of Balram Halwai based on the four stages of The Entrepreneur Journey execute, systemize, scrutinize, and exit. An uneducated, half-baked Indian villager turned cutthroat entrepreneur, protagonist Balram Halwai rationalizes the deaths of seventeen family members to fund his start-up, thereby becoming one of globalizing Asia's entrepreneurial elite. Michel Foucault and Wendy Brown argue that neoliberalism is best understood as a new logic of governmentality that has brought a new economic subject, *homo economicus*. Michel Foucault identified this self-interest as a newly emergent form of rational choice, which shapes human beings into entrepreneurs of themselves. Michel Foucault bases his claim on Gary Becker's conception of the utility-maximizing agent, solely based on cost-benefit calculations.

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

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Michel Foucault is undoubtedly the foremost influential of all the French critics. Foucault's theories primarily addressed the link between power and knowledge and how they are employed to exert social control through societal institutions. Foucault focuses on the analysis of the impact of varied institutions on groups of individuals and, therefore, the role that those people play in affirming or resisting those effects 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 develops further the notion of biopolitics introduced in a previous lecture series, *Security*, *Territory*, *Population*, by tracing how the eighteenth-century political economy marked the birth of new governmental rationality. Biopolitics is political power exercised on whole populations in every aspect of human life. "These lectures focused on the *genealogy of the modern state*. Foucault deploys the concept of government or *governmentality* as a *guideline* for the analysis he offers by the way of historical reconstructions embracing a period starting from Ancient Greek through to modern neo-liberalism". *(Lemke, Thomas. "'The birth of bio-politics': Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on neo-liberal governmentality." Economy and society 30.2 (2001): 190-207.).*

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, Michel, Arnold I. Davidson, and Graham Burchell. The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979. Springer, 2008.*) 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. In the classical-liberal version, the freedom of the individual is the technical precondition for rational government, and government may not constrain such freedom if it does not wish to endanger its own foundations." (*Lemke 200*.)

**II. THE WHITE TIGER**

Aravind Adiga is an Indian novelist who wrote the novel *The* *White Tiger.* It was published in 2008 and won the 40th Booker Prize in the same year. The story offers a darkly hilarious view of India's class struggle in a globalized society through a retrospective narrative from a village boy, Balram Halwai. The tale delves into Hinduism, caste, loyalty, corruption, and poverty in India. The White Tiger is an entrepreneur expedition of Balram Halwai based on the four stages of The Entrepreneur Journey execute, systemize, scrutinize, and exit. An uneducated, half-baked Indian villager turned cutthroat entrepreneur, protagonist Balram Halwai rationalizes the deaths of "seventeen-family members" (*Adiga, Aravind. The White Tiger. Harper Collins, 2008*.) to fund his start-up and thereby become one of globalizing Asia’s entrepreneurial elite.

The novel is in the style of a long email address to the Chinese Premier, Mr. Wen Jiabao, who is visiting India soon. After hearing the announcement over All India Radio that "Mr. Jiabao is on a mission: he wants to know the truth of Bangalore'' (*Adiga 4*) to meet Indian entrepreneurs and to ''hear the story of their success from their own lips,'' (*Adiga 4*), Balram Halwai offers his own life story. In Balram Halwai's email, the address of origin is

''From the Desk of:

'The White Tiger'

A Thinking Man

And an entrepreneur

Living in the world's center of technology and outsourcing

Electronics City Phase 1 (just off Hosur Main Road),

Bangalore, India''. (*Adiga 3*)

Bangalore, officially known as Bengaluru, also known as India's silicon city, is the home foundation of its global cyber industry. By choosing it as the setting for Balram Halwai's narration, even though much of it happened elsewhere. "The Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian.' That is what I ought to call my life's story." (*Adiga 10*) Balram, who is also known as "*Munna*, *White Tiger*, *Coal, Country-Mouse, village idiot, driver of cars, connoisseur of sculpture, working-class hero,* and *original listener*, recalls his past during his successful entrepreneurship in Bangalore, the leading Information Technologies city of India. He is from Laxmangarh, a small, impoverished village in Bihar, which is symbolically part of the rural darkness that the author describes in the earlier quote, a polarized world that is unequally shared by the landowning class and the peasantry." (*Suneetha, P. "Double Vision in Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger." Ariel: a review of international English literature 42.2 (2011*).

**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.

A. **Execute**

The entrepreneurial journey of Balram began with the surprise visit of the inspector to the school. The inspector gives Balram a book entitled "Lessons for Young Boys from the Life of Mahatma Gandhi" (Adiga 35) and promises Balram will be awarded the scholarship to attend a good school in the city to fulfill his potential. But unfortunately, Balram is pulled out of school and asked to work in a tea stall to pay off his father's debt to their landlord. "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. The new protagonist is shown to be driven thoroughly by self-interest and embodies almost a total rejection of the community while evolving through class boundaries." (Shukla, Akansha. "Social Darwinism and Evolution of the Underclass Identity: A Study of Aravind Adiga’s The White Tiger." Creative Flight 2.1 (2021): 188.)

B. **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 satire 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 emblematizes the recent economization of human life, marking a once unimaginable homology across economics, society, and politics. By declaring competition the truth of all social relations within and outside the market, neoliberalism renders subjects entrepreneurs of themselves, defining all human activity according to market values. The regulation of society by the market (rather than the other way around) gives rise to an entrepreneurial form of subjectivity governed by the terms of self-investment, risk, and profit."(*Adkins, Alexander. "Neoliberal Disgust in Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger." Journal of Modern Literature 42.3 (2019): 169-188.*)

Balram began looking for driver employment after discovering the driving annoyance. "Any need of a driver, sir? I have got four years experience. My master recently died, so I-". (Adiga 59) After a lengthy search, Balram was, employed as a driver at Stork's residence in Dhanbad. "Mr. Ashok seemed to find this amusing. Only in India, he said. Your driver can also make sweets for you. Only in India. Start from tomorrow." (*Adiga 65*)

C. **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. First, neoliberalism entails a massive expansion of the field and scope of economics. Foucault cites Gary Becker on this point: Economics is the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternate uses. Everything for which human beings attempt to realize their ends, from marriage to crime, to expenditures on children, can be understood economically according to a particular calculation of cost for benefit. Secondly, this entails a massive redefinition of labor and the worker. The worker has become human capital. Salary or wages become the revenue earned on an initial investment, an investment in one’s skills or abilities. Any activity that increases the capacity to earn income, to achieve satisfaction, even migration, the crossing of borders from one country to another, is an investment in human capital. Of course, a large portion of human capital, one’s body, brains, and genetic material, not to mention race or class, is simply given and cannot be improved. Foucault argues that this natural limit is something that exists to be overcome through technologies; from plastic surgery to possible genetic engineering that makes it possible to transform one's initial investment. As Foucault writes summarizing this point of view: Homo economicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself." (*Read, Jason. “A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity*.” Foucault Studies, *2009, p. 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. "Modern corruption is said to denote behavior which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique), pecuniary, or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence. This includes such behavior as bribery (use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust); nepotism (bestowal of patronage by reason of ascriptive relationship rather than merit); and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private-regarding uses".) (Hill, Lisa. "Adam Smith and the theme of corruption." The Review of Politics 68.4 (2006): 636-662.)

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.

"**TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN,**

**I, BALRAM HALWAI, SON OF VIKRAM HALWAI, OF**

**LAXMANGARH VILLAGE IN THE DISTRICT OF GAYA, DO**

**MAKE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF MY OWN FREE**

**WILL AND INTENTION:**

**THAT I DROVE THE CAR THAT HIT AN UNIDENTIFIED**

**PERSON, OR PERSONS, OR PERSON AND OBJECTS, ON**

**THE NIGHT OF JANUARY 23RD THIS YEAR. THAT I**

**THEN PANICKED AND REFUSED TO FULFILL MY**

**OBLIGATIONS TO THE INJURED PARTY OR PARTIES BY**

**TAKING THEM TO THE NEAREST HOSPITAL**

**EMERGENCY WARD. THAT THERE WERE NO OTHER**

**OCCUPANTS OF THE CAR AT THE TIME OF THE**

**ACCIDENT. THAT I WAS ALONE IN THE CAR, AND**

**ALONE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THAT HAPPENED.**

**I SWEAR BY ALMIGHTY GOD THAT I MAKE THIS**

**STATEMENT UNDER NO DURESS AND UNDER**

**INSTRUCTION FROM NO ONE.**

**SIGNATURE OR THUMBPRINT:**

**(BALRAM HALWAI)**

**STATEMENT MADE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE**

**FOLLOWING WITNESSES.**

**KUSUM HALWAI, OF LAXMANGARH VILLAGE,**

**GAYA DISTRICT**

**CHAMANDAS VARMA, ADVOCATE, DELHI HIGH**

**COURT.**" (*Adiga 168*)

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. "A crucial part of this analysis was Foucault's interest in the American neo-liberal economic thought of the so-called Chicago School, exemplified in Gary Becker's foundational work in human capital and the economic analysis of crime and punishment. 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. Homo economicus captures the theory of subjectivity of neo-liberal governmentality and points to a greater understanding of the relationship between juridical, disciplinary, and bio-political power. Within our own milieu, homo economicus, figured as the rational, responsible, and governable figure of the late-liberal state, is the very condition of possibility for contemporary practices that, paradoxically, seems to resist being figured as such. Homo economicus allows the persistence of deep criminal subjectivity while at the same time providing a plausible deniability that such subjectivity exists." (*Dilts, Andrew. "Michel Foucault meets Gary Becker: criminality beyond discipline and punish." Carceral notebooks (2008*).)

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. "I thought, Maybe he's sick of Delhi now. Will he go back to Dhanbad? What happens to me then?" (Adiga 185) 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. This is such a fundamental shift that Foucault goes so far as to say that, In practice, the stake in all neo-liberal analysis is the replacement every time of homo economicus as a partner of exchange with homo economicus as an entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings." (*Dilts, Andrew. "From ‘entrepreneur of the self’ to ‘care of the self’: Neoliberal governmentality and Foucault’s ethics." Western Political Science Association 2010 Annual Meeting Paper. 2010*.)

D. **Exit**

Balram's entrepreneurial journey has come to the checkpoint of scrutinizing phase, where he has to formulate an exit plan. "The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me." (Adiga 231) 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 oscillates between these two excremental rhetorics—one directed against the neoliberal Indian state’s abandonment and abjection of the poor, the other against the poor as degenerate national subjects weighing down the march of progress. Importantly, this oscillation echoes a pivotal movement in the history of homo economicus—from Smith's subject of exchange to Foucault's subject of competition. We see this when, before he has decided to murder his employer in order to steal the funds necessary for his start-up, Balram stumbles into a slum behind an affluent New Delhi shopping district and finds indigent workers defecating in the open". (Adkins 6)

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. Balram signals the altered milieu of homo economicus—from the classical liberalism that posits mutual exchange as the general matrix of society to a neoliberalism that encourages workers to see themselves not as producers of labor who might benefit from cooperation, but as companies of one. This shift is in line with Foucault’s claim that the focus of eighteenth-century economic analysis on the historical logic of processes shifts in subsequent epistemes to a behaviorist emphasis on the analysis of internal rationality, the strategic programming of the individual’s activity. Adiga’s novel signals this transformation in subjectivity and economic theory; but it also adds important historical, contemporary, and contextual dimensions to Foucault's work on neoliberalism, which in the late 1970s was only in its infancy. As Jason Reed argues, Foucault’s analysis does not account for the dominance of neoliberalism in the present, particularly its dominance as a particular technology of the self, a particular mode of subjection. Wendy Brown finesses this critique, arguing that the anthropological story about the protean transformations of homo oeconomicus is incomplete because by treating interest as this character's essential and transhistorical drive,[Foucault] keeps us from seeing important implications of the shift from a classical liberal to a neoliberal formation." (Adkins 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. I rammed it three times into the crown of his skull, smashing through to his brains. It's a good, strong bottle, Johnnie Walker Black—well worth its resale value. The stunned body fell into the mud. A hissing sound came out of its lips, like wind escaping from a tire." (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 economicus 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, Wendy. Undoing the demos: Neoliberalism's stealth revolution. MIT Press, 2015*.)

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. "In the opinion of the neoliberals, a criminal is not a psychologically deficient person or a biological degenerate, but a person like any other. The criminal is a rational economic individual who invests, expects a certain profit, and risks making a loss. From the angle of homo economicus, there is no fundamental difference between murder and a parking offence." (Lemke 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 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. "Democracy reformulated by governance means that participants are integrated into the process of benchmarking, consensus building, policy making, and implementation. Civic participation is reduced to buy-in". (Brown 128)

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, "I'm a first-gear man, Mr. Premier. In the end, I'll have to sell this start-up to some other moron—entrepreneur, I mean—and head into a new line. I'm thinking of real estate next. You see, I'm always a man who sees tomorrow when others see today." (Adiga 319) Balram is an entrepreneur of themselves. "Maximizing behavior implies that individuals will use their capabilities or capacities to greatest degree possible in order to obtain from the context the largest economic gain." (Doucouliagos, Chris. "A note on the evolution of homo economicus." Journal of Economic Issues 28.3 (1994): 877-883.)

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 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*homo economicus* is an imaginary, fictitious, arbitrary, and absurd definition of human nature survive the reality tests of everyday economic interactions between different humans by becoming entrepreneurs of themselves. It could epitomize the fearful condition of humans between the rich and the poor in globalized India. Given that Bangalore is portrayed as an IT hub, the *homo economicus* references might underline its wilderness, despite its evolution and cutting-edge technology. *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 into the analysis of Adiga's novel The White Tiger.

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