

## Adiga's *The White Tiger* as World Bank Literature

Abdullah M. Al-Dagamseh  
*Yarmouk University*

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**Abdullah M. Al-Dagamseh,**  
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**Abstract:** In his article "Adiga's *The White Tiger* as World Bank Literature" Abdullah M. Al-Dagamseh reads Aravind Adiga's novel within the context of global neoliberal capitalism, especially as radical neoliberal reforms took root in India in 1991. Al-Dagamseh argues that *The White Tiger* read as world bank literature provides critiques of the globally hegemonic discourses of success story narratives by exposing the contradictions of different, but overlapping facets of neoliberal ideology. Further, Al-Dagamseh demonstrates that the novel serves to reveal the contradiction between mythical global narratives and the reality and nature of "success" and "development" achieved through violence, crime, and destruction and posits that fictional representations of violence challenge hegemonic success story narratives and development projects which turn out to be disappointments, delusion, inequality, class/caste division, corruption, violence, and uneven geographical development.

## Abdullah M. AL-DAGAMSEH

### Adiga's *The White Tiger* as World Bank Literature

The designation "world bank literature" is an emerging category of scholarship that raises questions about the role of literary narratives in exposing the contradictions of what is publicly promoted and what is materially practiced. In the article at hand, I use the term as a "provocation," "a metaphor," and "an agent" to emphasize the idea that the world bank and other international financial institutions (IFIs) are influential global institutions and actors which contributed to shaping and structuring "third world" countries in the post-World War II era (see Kumar xvii, xix). I posit that it is vital for postcolonial studies to engage with the legacies of such imperial institutions. Further, studying counter-hegemonic narratives as world bank literature allows us to register that the neoliberal policies and ideologies facilitated by IFIs are not to be taken as development and progress for all, but that they are rather socially debilitating economic policies restructured and orchestrated by such global, imperial institutions. I read Aravind Adiga's 2008 Booker Prize winning novel *The White Tiger* as a counter-narrative that participates in both constructing and reconstructing our understanding of devastating global processes and thus forming a collective will which might form part of a worldwide resistance movement working to both imagine and bring about alternative futures.

Following Amitava Kumar's volume, *World Bank Literature*, I use the designation "world bank literature" not only as "provocation," "a metaphor," and "an agent" (xvii; xix), but also as an approach and theoretical notion. As an approach, world bank literature serves not only to connect the historical, political, and economic forces and conditions surrounding the production of literary texts, but also to treat narratives as historical documents which represent the socio-economic and political consciousness of the post-World War II era. This approach allows one to make a connection between ideologies and hegemonic discourses and ongoing social struggles and economic crises experienced by a majority of the world's population and embedded in socio-economic, political, historical, and cultural forces. This kind of approach informing my analysis of *The White Tiger* is close to what Paul Smith called "a logic of totality ... [an] attempt to show the interrelations amongst the several realms of social life — the economic, cultural, and political" (2). As a theoretical notion, world bank literature serves to focus on how contemporary global literary narratives read as such reflect the critiques and protests which social movements create and expose the ideological contradictions between the utopian promises of neoliberalism promoted by international financial institutions and the material inequities it produces. Such narratives read as world bank literature make us see the IFIs' policies "as real as an airplane hitting a building" (Robbins 298).

*The White Tiger* addresses the intersections of specific social, economic, and political contexts in the context of global neoliberal capitalism. By situating the novel against forces which operate globally to refute the "world picture implanted in our minds and all false promises used everywhere to justify and idealize" the promises of the new world order (Berger xv), I contend that the novel read as world bank literature provides penetrating critiques of the globally hegemonic discourses of development and free market fundamentalism. The fictional representations of images of violence inherent in "success story" narratives challenge the hegemonic narratives of global neoliberal capitalism, especially the myths about freedom, development, success, and equality by exposing the violent processes of exploitation, commodification, privatization, and ruthless capital accumulation. Just as the text challenges the hegemonic narratives of success stories and reveals the omissions in such dominant narratives, it exposes the promises of development, which turn out to be more disappointment, delusion, inequality, class/caste division, corruption, violence, and uneven geographical development: "Freedom of thought, profession, money, and time are never accessed by these millions. Their time is filled up by tasks within society's definition of them" (Waller 4).

As the radical neoliberal reforms took root in 1991 in India in the form of cutting back public industries, reducing tariffs on imports, removing compulsory licensing of the private sector and foreign investment, and cutting back social services and subsidies a high tech boom and stock-

market bubble were produced as a result of such reforms. Similarly, some major Indian cities became global epicenters such as Bangalore, Hyderabad, New Delhi, Pune, and Chennai. Mike Davis explains that "GDP grew at 6 percent during the 1990s, while the capitalization of the Bombay Stock Exchange doubled almost every year — and one result was one million new millionaires, many of them Indian engineers and computer scientists returned from Sunnyvale and Redmond" (170-71). This is the dominant image that represents India as a great success story and such an image flows in the dominant political and economic discourse. However, the underside of the economic boom has been buried and obscured. In fact, India's experience was scarred by poverty, illiteracy, poor health, class/caste division, and deep inequalities, diseases, slums, and corruption. For example, "India gained 56 million more paupers in the course of the 'boom' ... the early 1990s may have been the 'worst time for the poor since Independence,' as deregulated food grain prices soared 58 percent between 1991 and 1994" (Davis 171). Moreover, the liberalization process promoted during the 1980s as a way of modernizing India and of integrating it into the global neoliberal economy, was not targeted at improving the conditions of the worse-off. On the contrary, such processes "increase inequalities in three ways: across the country, it would widen the gap in social opportunities available to rich and poor; it would sharpen the divide between rural and urban India (urban incomes are around three times the size of rural ones, while female literacy rates in cities are more than double those in the countryside); and it would increase the already pronounced imbalances and differences among the regions, which gave the richest of them per capita incomes three times higher than the poorest ones" (Khilnani 101). Given these devastating circumstances, *The White Tiger* contributed to exposing and challenging the fissures and omissions of the dominant culture which perpetuates selective exclusion that goes with late capitalist narratives.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator mentions that he narrates his "success story" of every successful entrepreneur in India: "When you have heard the story of how I got to Bangalore and became one of its most successful (though probably least known) businessmen, you will know everything there is to know about how entrepreneurship is born, nurtured, and developed in this, the glorious twenty-first century of man" (4). The "success story" turns out to be the transformation of the main character into a murderer, thief, exploiter, and businessman. He benefits from the success of other entrepreneurs who, in turn, become successful by illicit means represented by some cultural practices inherent in the social, religious, and political system of India, as well as in the global economic system. Success stories are "key elements of its self-representational strategies" and represent a "specific genre of narrative promotional document" that narrates rags-to-riches tales and a transformation of the poor through hard work and by adopting the World Bank's neoliberal policies (Benjamin 144-45). Such success stories become ideological myths for the reproduction of "productive global citizens" (Benjamin 146). Such success stories "work to naturalize a very particular notion of development and to write the World Bank as the eternal protagonist of the narrative ... The Banking bildungsroman announces itself as consistent with, in fact constitutive of, the development of the ethically refined, socially conscious, liberal, global citizen — a citizen who is figured by a character from the Global South but who is more likely embodied by the consenting, consuming subject in the over-developed North. Character, author, and reader are all rendered as developing, but developing along entirely different vectors, each of which sustains and protects the central precept of development itself, and therefore the eternal role of the World Bank" (Benjamin 155, 163).

Adiga traces the transformation of the main character, Balram, and his rise from rags to riches similar to the characters represented in official success stories. However, the process of transformation exposes what is buried in the hegemonic discourse: violence and crime. Balram's transformation into a murder, thief, exploiter, and briber to be a successful entrepreneur belies the hegemonic global narratives represented in neoliberal orthodoxy and global capitalism. Moreover, this kind of violent transformation is represented because of the unjust socio-economic, religious, and political system that contributes to Balram's and his family's poverty, oppression, marginalization, and exclusion. Thus, the novel exposes the destructive omissions and fissures of these hegemonic success stories when Adiga's text refigures the hegemonic narratives of late capitalist development and economy. Doing so, the novel reveals the contradiction between the

mythical global narratives and the reality and nature of "success" that is achieved through violence and crime. To use György Lukács's words in "Narrate or Describe?" Adiga creates a central figure who is "the product of a particular social, political, [and economic] environment" (141).

As in a *Bildungsroman*, Balram — marginalized by the local and global economy — develops and integrates into business society where he comes to own a prosperous taxi service in Bangalore. Balram is able to integrate into society only when he becomes involved in some illicit or violent acts: using Ashok's car to pick up paying passengers, murdering Ashok, robbing his money, using the money to set up a taxi business, bribing the police to put his competitors out of business, cover up a death caused by one of his drivers, etc. Balram "is paradoxically an anti-hero and, in keeping with India's new fangled economic strength, 'a modern Indian hero' who features in 'a parable of the new India'" (Mendes 279). It is the socio-economic system that enforces certain realities on this "modern Indian hero" to achieve success: the more Balram becomes violent, the more possible it becomes for him to accumulate wealth and to achieve success. For example, in the beginning Balram is involved "only" in petty ways such as using his employer's car to pick up paying passengers: "I siphoned his petrol; I took his car to a corrupt mechanic who billed him for work that was not necessary; and three times, while driving back to Buckingham B, I picked up a paying customer" (195), but when he is involved in the horrendous acts of murdering and robbing his employer, he is able to set up a successful business. Thus, Balram's transformation into a murderer and thief and at the same time a successful business entrepreneur is a result of the unjust socio-economic system that contributes to his family's poverty and misery and enriches him illicitly. This is an indictment of the whole socio-economic and political system that produces and reproduces Balram and Ashok.

The neoliberal principles and rationality of privatization and outsourcing force those in business to engage in fierce competition to survive the market and to accumulate more wealth. Here is an example from the novel: one of the Balram's drivers hit a child and ran away and "The next day ... I called Mohammad Asif to the office. He was burning with shame over what he had done — I didn't need to reproach him. And it was not his fault. Not mine either. Our outsourcing companies are so cheap that they force their taxi operators to promise them an impossible number of runs every night. To meet such schedules, we have to drive recklessly; we have to keep hitting and hurting people on the roads. It's a problem every taxi operator in this city faces. Don't blame me" (266-67). This quote makes clear that certain neoliberal policies enforce market values which prioritize profits over human lives and relations. Moreover, the new market values register the horrors of the emergent hegemony of neoliberal rationality "all dimensions of human life ... in terms of a market rationality," not only by "submitting every action and policy to consideration of profitability," but also describing "all human and institutional action as rational entrepreneurial action, conducted according to a calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction against micro-economic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and moral value-neutrality" (Brown 40). Wendy Brown points out that "neoliberalism does not simply assume that all aspects of social, cultural and political life can be reduced to such a calculus" but rather it requires the development of "institutional practices and rewards for enacting this vision ... [so it] produces rational actors and imposes market rationale for decision-making in all spheres" (40-41). Here the novel offers instances of such institutional practices which characters adopt to make profits. The first thing Balram does after murdering Ashok is to steal the money and start a taxi business to serve "outsourcing companies" (255) realizing that this is the only way to succeed and to be an entrepreneur in post-independence India, and hence guaranteeing his actions, horrendous as they are, are rewarded: "yes, it's true: a few hundred thousand rupees of someone else's money, and a lot of hard work, can make magic happen in this country" (258).

The counter-narrative of success stories serves as an indictment and critique of neoliberal policies which sponsor, intensify, and perpetuate market values, which devastate human and social relations. Further, the emergent hegemony of neoliberal rationality should be read as building upon a residual set of cultural practices based on the corruption of the elites and the exclusion and manipulation of the less privileged and economically oppressed and who are conditioned to be silenced and repressed. Balram thrives only after he participates in the violent system by committing acts of violence: "Haven't I succeeded in the struggle that every poor man here should

be making – the struggle not to take the lashes your father took, not to end up in a mud of indistinguishable bodies that will rot in the black mud of Mother Ganga" (273). Balram insists that his violence is no different from others in the world who become successful. In other words, his violence is part of the global economic system dominating Bangalore, New Delhi, and other parts of the world: "But isn't it likely that everyone who counts in this world ... has killed someone or other on their way to the top? Kill enough people and they will put bronze statues to you near Parliament House in Delhi" (273). Thus, Adiga exposes and challenges the dehistoricized, decontextualized, and liberal representation of success stories and neoliberal rationality constructed by the World Bank.

Just as the text challenges the hegemonic narratives of success stories and reveals omissions in such narratives, it exposes the promises of development: "People are caught in the deadlock of development: the peasant who is dependent on buying seeds, yet finds no cash to do so; the mother who benefits neither from the care of her fellow women in the community nor from the assistance of a hospital; the clerk who had made it in the city, but is now laid off as a result of cost-cutting measures. They are all like refugees who have been rejected and have no place to go. Shunned by the 'advanced' sector and cut off from the old ways, they are expatriates in their own country; they are forced to get by in the no-man's-land between tradition and modernity" (Sachs xviii). Adiga's text engages with various instances which show that the narrative of development is socially, economically, and ethically flawed as the very people and communities which are promised to gain from development are excluded, marginalized, impoverished, and even punished by development projects. Moreover, the text demonstrates not only how the failure of development has carved new realities which support the corporate interests of the global and local elites, but also how its success has cast into oblivion other realities which include the majority living in India.

One aspect of development in India is privatization, which, in reality, results in uneven geographical development. In this regard, Adiga employs juxtaposition to expose the myth of development represented, for example, in privatizing publicly owned institutions, reducing tariffs on imports, and building huge high-tech stores, business offices, and malls in metropolitan cities. The juxtaposition highlights the unequal geographical development inherent in the global economic system that exacerbates class/caste division in post-independence India. Here are two examples: Balram's father, who gets seriously ill, dies in a public hospital, but is never seen by a doctor there and in the second scene Balram's employer's brother, the Stork, who has a little pain, but receives treatment in a private hospital as if he would be treated in a five-star hotel. The narrator describes how the wealthy are taken care of in private hospitals for just minor pain: "One morning he [the Stork] had a little pain in his stomach, so the Mongoose made me drive him down to Max, which is one of Delhi's most famous private hospitals. I stood outside and watched as the Mongoose and the old man went inside the beautiful big glass building. Doctors walked in and out with long white coats, and the stethoscopes in their pockets. When I peeped in from outside, the hospital's lobby looked as clean as the inside of a five-star hotel" (154). The extravagance displayed in a private hospital where local elites are treated for minor pain is contrasted to the miserable and poor conditions of the public hospital where the less privileged are supposed to be treated. Here the narrative exposes the unjust system of development. For example, the death of Balram's father in the hospital exposes two related issues: the corrupt public system represented by the elites who are backed by international loans and the horrible uneven geographical development resulting from Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) such as diminishing social protection, reduction in welfare provision, and privatizing public institutions. This is based on the fact that most "third world" countries continued borrowing from the World Bank until the debt crisis hit most of these countries in the early 1980s and when such countries had to get more loans to repay their old loans and interests along with reforming their economies. Thus such countries had to adopt SAPs which include the following: currency devaluation, import control reductions, government social subsidies reductions, financial deregulation, dropping protectionist measures to promote and increase free trade and to attract foreign capital, wage contractions, publicly owned institutions privatized, public workers laid off, economic growth promoted, tax cuts and lax regulations for multinational corporations, and providing trade incentives. The World Bank's and the International Monetary Fund's assumption is that these economic reforms will increase economic efficiency and

productivity and then this will lead to increased employment and decreased poverty and hence distributing wealth equally. In the novel, this situation is narrated that Balram's father has "been ill for some time, but there is no hospital in Laxmangarh, although there are three different foundation stones for a hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections ... when he began spitting blood that morning, Kishan and I took him by boat across the river. We kept washing his mouth with water from the river, but the water was so polluted that it made him spit more blood" (39). This can be read as an indictment of a connivance between the corrupt local elites and IFI-funded development projects which not only contaminate and dispossess human beings, but also the environment. The hospital itself is no better than the polluted river as there are so many patients in there, but there are no doctors and not enough beds. Then the narrator explains how the whole system is corrupt:

There was no doctor in the hospital. The ward boy, after we bribed him ten rupees, said that a doctor might come in the evening. The doors to the hospital's rooms were wide open; the beds had metal springs sticking out of them ... "Why isn't there a doctor, uncle?" I asked. "This is the only hospital on either side of the river." ... "See it's like this," the older Muslim man said. "There's a government medical superintendent who's meant to check that doctors visit village hospitals like this. Now, each time this post falls vacant, the Great Socialist lets all the big doctors know that he's having an open auction for that post. The going rate for this post is about four hundred thousand rupees these days ... There's good money in public service. Now, imagine that I am a doctor. I beg and borrow the money and give it to the Great Socialist, while touching his feet. He gives me the job ... Next, I call all the junior government doctors, whom I am supposed to supervise, into my office. I take out my big government ledger. I shout out, "Dr. Ram Pandey. ... Now, you — Dr. Ram Pandey — will kindly put one-third of your salary in my palm. Good boy. In return, I do this ... You can keep the rest of your government salary and go work in some private hospital for the rest of the week. Forget the village. Because according to this ledger you've been there. You've treated my wounded leg. You've healed that girl's jaundice." (40-41)

Thus the narrative makes clear that development projects never benefit those who are economically oppressed and excluded. Further, the narrative shows that the promises of development and progress never improve the lives of the economically oppressed; on the contrary, the lives of these people deteriorate and get worse. For example, the text describes how those who are deprived of their original jobs end up having degrading, backbreaking jobs: Balram's father ends up in an unprotected and low-wage informal service industry, a rickshaw puller, a residue of the colonial era and a service mainly for the elites and tourists: rickshaw service in Asia is "a notorious emblem of the degradation of labor," "the harshest form of urban labor," and most rickshaw pullers "perished of heart attacks or tuberculosis within a few years" (Davis 188-89). Of course, the liberation movements and "revolutionaries ... denounced the rickshaw and promised a day of liberation for hundreds of thousands of rickshaw coolies, but in some parts of Asia, this day has been long postponed. Indeed, informal man-powered transit, including old-fashioned rickshaws and bicycle-based pedicabs ... probably employs and exploits more poor men today than in 1930. (Davis 189). Depicting a rickshaw puller who perishes of tuberculosis and left without medication in a hospital is an indictment of the whole process of development, progress, and modernity and that contributes to the degrading, low-wage, informal economy which is, in fact, symptomatic of the inherently exclusionary and marginalizing nature of the neoliberal capitalist system. Also, underlying his death of tuberculosis is "a piece of appalling reality — the fact that nearly a thousand Indians, most of them poor, die every day from tuberculosis" (Adiga, "Conversation" 285). Moreover, representing a rickshaw business, a colonial practice during India's grim colonial period, in contemporary India raises many questions about independence, development, progress, and SAPS that allow us to see that neoliberalism as a historical era has strong continuities with older moments of colonialism and of repressive economic relations. To make the idea of an ongoing process of exploitation and degradation clear, the narrator states that "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. To sum up — in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies" (54).

Similarly, those who work in other sectors are not better off. Adiga uses various animal metaphors to describe the laborers' lives and work (see Schotland). For example, the men working in a tea shop are referred to as "human spiders" who "go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still 'boys'" (43). In other scenes, the rickshaw pullers are compared to 'hogs' and 'stray dogs' while they "parked their vehicles in a line outside the tea shop, waiting for the bus to disgorge its passengers ... they were not allowed to sit on the plastic chairs put out for the customers; they had to crouch near the back; in that hunched-over, squatting posture common to servants in every part of India" (20). Or when Balram starts to work as a chauffeur for Ashok and his wife, his fellow servants tell him that "the rich expect their dogs to be treated like humans ... they expect their dogs to be pampered, and walked, and petted, and even washed ... [as] they're worth more than you are" (67). The drivers are compared to monkeys while crouching and jabbering "waiting near the parking lot of the hotel" for their masters (170). Thus, these animal metaphors comparing the dispossessed Indians to dogs, hogs, donkeys, and monkeys reflect the degrading status these poor people experience in a daily life. Moreover, such metaphors reflect the social relations between the excluded and the exploitive class of Ashok and his family members who are associated with more aggressive and devious animals such as the buffalo, the stork, the raven, and mongoose. Thus, the narrative invites readers to see that colonialism and colonial relations never left India and it is carried out by the local elites who are supported by global aid and loans.

The text refers to a billion-dollar construction work that is going on in major cities in the name of development along with aid projects. In a wider context, such development projects and aid might be read as a metaphor of the World Bank's development projects and aid in India as "India has been the World Bank's single largest borrower since the institution's inception" (Kirk xv). For example, the narrator describes the construction work that is going on in India to construct what is called a "world city": "There is construction work in any direction you look in Delhi. Glass skeletons being raised for malls or office blocks; rows of gigantic T-shaped concrete supports, like a line of anvils, where the new bridges or overpasses are coming up; huge craters being dug new mansions for the rich. And here too, in the heart of Connaught Place, even in the middle of the night, under the glare of immense spotlights, construction went on. A giant pit had been excavated. Machines were rumbling from inside it" (133-34). Then, the narrator describes the disastrous effects of such development projects through a series of metaphors. For example, commenting on the development projects of building more malls and other office buildings in Delhi which "is going to be like Dubai soon," Balram compares a crane to "a monster, sitting at the top of the pit with huge metal jaws alternately gorging and disgorging immense quantities of mud" (134). This metaphor serves to critique the brutality of development and its tools as they "gorge" or devour the poor and pollute the environment. Here, the narrator uses another animal metaphor to describe the miserable life of those laborers who work in construction: "Like creatures that had to obey [the machine or the monster], men with troughs of mud on their heads walked in circles around the machine; they did not look much bigger than mice. Even in the winter night the sweat had made their shirts stick to their glistening black bodies" (134).

Thus, such development projects, promoted as modernizing projects, not only destroy the poor and the environment, but also never benefit the majority. Here the narrator asks a rhetorical question: "There is no water in our taps, and what do you people in Delhi give us? You give us cell phones. Can a man drink a phone when he is thirsty?" (230). Not only is uneven geographical development dominant in rural areas, but also within the "India of Light" where the division between those who have and those who do not have is clear and deep: "Remember, Mr. Premier, that Delhi is the capital of not one but two countries — two Indias. The Light and the Darkness both flow into Delhi. Gurgaon, where Mr. Ashok lived, is the bright, modern end of the city, and this place, Old Delhi, is the other end. Full of things the modern world forgot all about — rickshaws, old stone buildings, the Muslims" (215). Then the narrator says that "thousands of people live on the sides of the road in Delhi. They have come from the Darkness too — you can tell by their thin bodies, filthy faces, by the animal-like way they live under the huge bridges and overpasses, making fires and washing and taking lice out of their hair while the cars roar past them" (99).

According to Davis, "of the 500,000 people who migrate to Delhi each year, it is estimated that fully 400,000 end up in slums; by 2015 India's capital will have a slum population of more than 10 million" (18) and Davis associates neoliberal policies of SAPs with increasing poverty and slums in Bangalore: "Bangalore advertises itself as a 'prosperous garden city,' and its southern suburbs are indeed a middle-class Shangri-la. Meanwhile, draconian urban renewal programs have driven underprivileged residents from the center to the slum periphery, where they live side by side with poor migrants from the countryside. As estimated 2 million poor people, many of them scorned members of the scheduled castes, squat in 1000 or so fetid slums, mostly on government-owned land. Slums have grown twice as fast as the general population, and researchers have characterized Bangalore's periphery as 'the dumping ground for those urban residents whose labor is wanted in the urban economy but whose visual presence should be reduced as much as possible'" (172). Thus the text serves to expose the myths of development in post-independence India by exposing another reality obscured by ideology of modernity, development, progress, and privatization. This kind of exposure highlights the idea that neoliberalism has continuities with older moments of oppressive economic relations imposed on India by colonialists. In this regard, Aijaz Ahmad argues that "decolonization within a global capitalist framework had, of course, greatly contributed to the unification of a single global market as well as to the intensification of capitalist relations in individual countries, for it had meant the dissolution of protected markets for individual colonizing countries — India for Britain, Niger for France, and so on — into a single market open to circulation of all commodities on a global scale. The national bourgeoisies which took hold of the newly independent countries have favoured the generalization of capitalist relations to whatever extent it is possible" (314).

In conclusion, although Balram breaks the rules and frees himself from bondage, oppression, and servitude, he ends up being another capitalist who starts a taxi business and uses the same corrupt means to get richer: violence replaces one capitalist master with another capitalist master and hence the unjust system remains unchanged. Representing violence — be it physical, emotional, political, or economic — as the only way characters can survive and succeed, the narrative sends two different, but overlapping messages: Adiga represents the whole socio-economic and political system as an inherently violent system based on market values as the only determining force of that order. But, second, Balram's act of violence is represented in such a way that it sends a warning: if the hegemonic ideological forces persist and socio-economic and political neoliberalism define social relations and prioritize profits over human lives and relations, violence remains. Thus, what I suggest in this study is how reading counter-hegemonic narratives — with regard to class, caste, race, gender, etc. — as "world bank literature" contributes to the activist mode of expression relevant today.

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Author's profile: Abdullah M. Al-Dagamseh teaches literature and literary criticism at Yarmouk University. His interests in scholarship include contemporary global literature and culture. To date Al-Dagamseh published a book review article of Jaafar Aksikas's *Arab Modernities: Islamisms, Nationalism, and Liberalism in the Post-Arab World* in the journal *Socialism and Democracy* (2012) and "Adiga's *The White Tiger* as World Bank Literature," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* (2013). E-mail: <[dagamseh@yu.edu.jo](mailto:dagamseh@yu.edu.jo)>