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**Adiga's *The White Tiger*: A Dialectical Exploration of
Modern Servitude and Social Transformation**

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Dedication

To our beloved mother, who believed in us even in the darkest of times, our light and source of inspiration, this couldn't be done without you. To our backbone and biggest supporter, our dear brother Oussama. To our nephew Omar, who brought joy to our lives. With gratitude and love, we dedicate this work to you all.

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* portrays the socio-economic inequalities of postcolonial India through the journey of Balram Halwai, whose transformation from impoverished servant to entrepreneur exposes the realities of class oppression, social mobility, and systemic exploitation within a deeply hierarchical society. The main aim of this research is to analyze the power structures and identity struggles depicted in the novel within a postcolonial context. The focal point behind the current work is to offer a dialectical reading of the text that integrates Hegelian, Spivakian, and Fanonian perspectives to illuminate the complexities of power, agency, and subaltern transformation in contemporary India. Employing a qualitative textual analysis, the study examines Balram's transformation through the lens of Hegelian dialectics, with particular attention to the dynamics of domination, self-consciousness, and resistance. It further draws on Spivak's concept of subalternity to explore questions of voice, representation, and social mobility within hierarchical power structures. Furthermore, Fanon's concepts of violence and decolonization are employed to examine violence as a potential form of resistance against systemic oppression and social domination. The findings suggest that Balram's violence is shaped by systemic injustice rather than personal resentment, making his rebellion a response to corruption, inequality, and exploitation in postcolonial India. Ultimately, the study concludes that the novel exposes the harsh realities of social division and neoliberal exploitation while presenting freedom and identity as attainable only through struggle and resistance. The study also highlights the limitations of individual liberation within deeply entrenched systems of oppression that often comes at significant moral and social cost.

Keywords: Hegelian dialectic, modern slavery, postcolonial studies, subaltern narrative, *The White Tiger*

Le résumé

Le roman *Le tigre blanc* d'Aravind Adiga illustre les inégalités socio-économiques de l'Inde postcoloniale à travers le parcours de Balram Halwai. La transformation de ce dernier, d'un serviteur misérable à un entrepreneur, révèle les réalités de l'oppression de classe, de la mobilité sociale et de l'exploitation systémique au sein d'une société profondément hiérarchisée. Cette recherche vise principalement à analyser les structures de pouvoir et les luttes identitaires dépeintes dans le roman dans un contexte postcolonial. L'objectif principal de ce travail est de proposer une lecture dialectique du texte à travers les perspectives hégélienne, spivakienne et fanonienne, afin d'éclairer la complexité des rapports de pouvoir, de l'agentivité et de la transformation des populations subalternes dans l'Inde contemporaine. S'appuyant sur une analyse textuelle qualitative, l'étude examine la transformation de Balram à travers le prisme de la dialectique hégélienne, en s'intéressant particulièrement aux dynamiques de domination, de conscience de soi et de résistance. Elle mobilise également le concept de subalternité de Spivak pour explorer les questions de voix, de représentation et de mobilité sociale au sein de structures de pouvoir hiérarchisées. De plus, les concepts fanoniens de violence et de décolonisation sont mobilisés pour examiner la violence comme forme possible de résistance à l'oppression systémique et à la domination sociale. Les résultats suggèrent que la violence de Balram est façonnée par l'injustice systémique plutôt que par un ressentiment personnel, faisant de sa rébellion une réponse à la corruption, aux inégalités et à l'exploitation dans l'Inde postcoloniale. En définitive, l'étude conclut que le roman expose les dures réalités de la division sociale et de l'exploitation néolibérale, tout en présentant la liberté et l'identité comme ne pouvant être atteintes qu'au prix de la lutte et de la résistance. L'étude souligne également les limites de la libération individuelle au sein de systèmes d'oppression profondément enracinés, souvent assortis d'un coût moral et social considérable.

Mots-clés: Dialectique hégélienne, servitude moderne, études postcoloniales, récit subalterne, *Le tigre blanc*.

المستخلص

تُصوّر رواية "النمر الأبيض" لأرفيند أديجا التفاوتات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية في هند ما بعد الاستعمار من خلال رحلة بالرام هالواي، الذي يكشف تحوُّله من خادم فقير إلى رائد أعمال عن واقع القمع الطبقي، والحراك الاجتماعي، والاستغلال المنهج في مجتمع هرمي متجذّر. يهدف هذا البحث بشكل أساسي إلى تحليل بنى السلطة وصراعات الهوية التي تُصوِّرها الرواية في سياق ما بعد الاستعمار. يركز العمل الحالي على تقديم قراءة جدلية للنص، تجمع بين منظورات هيغلية، وسيففاكية، وفانونية، لتسليط الضوء على تعقيدات السلطة، والفاعلية، وتحوُّل المهتمّشين في الهند المعاصرة. من خلال تحليل نصي نوعي، تتناول الدراسة تحوُّل بالرام من منظور الجدلية الهيغلية، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على ديناميكيات الهيمنة، والوعي الذاتي، والمقاومة. كما تستند إلى مفهوم سبيفاك عن التبعية لاستكشاف قضايا الصوت، والتمثيل، والحراك الاجتماعي ضمن بنى السلطة الهرمية. علاوة على ذلك، تُوظَّف مفاهيم فانون عن العنف وإنهاء الاستعمار لدراسة العنف كشكل محتمل من أشكال المقاومة ضد القمع المنهج والهيمنة الاجتماعية. تشير النتائج إلى أن عنف بالرام يتشكل بفعل الظلم المنهج لا الاستياء الشخصي، مما يجعل تمرده رد فعل على الفساد وعدم المساواة والاستغلال في الهند ما بعد الاستعمار. في نهاية المطاف، تخلص الدراسة إلى أن الرواية تكشف الحقائق القاسية للانقسام الاجتماعي والاستغلال النيوليبرالي، بينما تُصوِّر الحرية والهوية على أنهما لا تُنالان إلا من خلال النضال والمقاومة. كما تُسلِّط الدراسة الضوء على محدودية التحرر الفردي في ظل أنظمة قمع راسخة، والتي غالبًا ما تأتي بتكلفة أخلاقية واجتماعية باهظة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جدلية هيغل، دراسات ما بعد الاستعمار، العبودية الحديثة، سرد التابع، النمر الأبيض.

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General Introduction

Literature has long served as a reflection of society and a means of exposing social, political, and economic inequalities. In postcolonial literature, writers frequently depict the struggles of marginalized individuals who attempt to resist systems of domination and oppression. One of the contemporary Indian writers who critically portrays these issues is Aravind Adiga. His novel *The White Tiger*, published in 2008, presents a realistic image of modern India divided between wealth and poverty, power and subordination, masters and servants. Through the story of Balram Halwai, Adiga reveals the harsh realities of social inequality and the oppressive structures that govern Indian society. Moreover, *The White Tiger* updates Indian social realism by showing how Balram's ruthless murder of Ashok, the employer who seems liberal yet still reflects upper-class indifference, highlights the way he turned victimhood into vengeful agency.

Social realism is defined as "a literary trend that aims to portray the socioeconomic reality of its era, frequently criticizing oppression, inequality, and the hardships of the underprivileged" (Akram, 2023, p. 2). The novel follows the journey of Balram Halwai, a poor villager who works as a servant for a wealthy family before eventually murdering his master and becoming an entrepreneur. Balram's transformation from a submissive servant into an independent figure reflects a struggle for freedom, recognition, and identity. The novel also reveals the oppressive structures that dominate Indian society and maintain class hierarchy.

Socioeconomic tensions in Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) attract analysis of power imbalances and subaltern experiences. While prior research addresses exploitation and identity, it neglects Hegel's master-slave dialectic, which frames domination as interdependent, with the master's power hinging on the slave's labor and affirmation, paving the way for potential upheaval.

Economic critiques align closely yet diverge in emphasis. Hussain and Azam (2019) attribute India's class division to elites' perceptual dominance over subordinates, paralleling Patel's (2018) depiction of a thriving minority preying on the mute masses amid rising inequalities. Both highlight systemic predation—cognitive for Hussain and Azam (2019), material for Patel (2018)—but portray it statically, overlooking Hegel's mutual reliance. Postcolonial perspectives offer contrast. Singh (2021) faults the novel for pandering to global markets with sensationalized Indian chaos, while Pham Tran Thuy Anh (2021) foregrounds the underclass's dialectical formation, suffering, silence, and

retort. Singh externalizes blame on Western gaze; Pham Tran Thuy Anh internalizes subaltern dynamics, gesturing toward dialectics without Hegel's recognition struggle.

Golchin Pourqoli and Ameri (2018) complement these via Butler's performativity, tracing character's fluid self-constructions. This enacted identity lens echoes Pham Tran Thuy Anh's (2021) focus but contrasts Hussain and Azam's (2019) top-down control by stressing agency in performance. Scholars further argue that *the White Tiger* subverts Hegel's master-slave dialectics as Balram resists subservience and asserts agency against his employer, thereby challenging entrenched power relations (Bilwai and Singh, 2017).

Existing scholarship on *The White Tiger* has largely approached the novel through isolated thematic and theoretical perspectives, without sufficiently integrating Hegelian dialectics, Spivakian subaltern theory, and Fanonian psycho-political concepts into a unified analytical framework. Consequently, the complexities of power relations, subaltern subjectivity, and psychological transformation in Balram Halwai's journey remain insufficiently explored.

This study investigates the contradictory transformation of Balram Halwai in *The White Tiger*, focusing on his struggle for freedom, independence, and social mobility within a deeply unequal postcolonial society. Although Balram attempts to resist oppression, class hierarchy, exploitation, and subaltern marginalization, his rise to power is achieved through violence and domination. The research problem therefore lies in examining whether true liberation and agency can exist within social structures built on inequality and oppression, or whether resistance inevitably reproduces the same systems of power.

The present study aims to analyze the master-slave relationship in *The White Tiger* through a Hegelian perspective while also examining the representation of the subaltern through Spivak's theory and the themes of violence and oppression through Fanonian thought. By combining these theoretical approaches, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of power and resistance represented in the novel.

The objectives of the study in hand are to examine how power relations in *The White Tiger* become unstable through their internal contradictions, to analyze the role of labor in the development of self-consciousness within systems of exploitation, to evaluate whether Balram Halwai can meaningfully "speak" as a subaltern subject, and finally to

assess his transformation through Frantz Fanon's concept of violent decolonization and its limitations.

To reach the aim of our research, the following research questions were posed:

- 1 - How does the master-slave dialectics destabilize power dynamic in *The White Tiger*?
- 2 - How does the bondsman's labor generate self-consciousness and transform domination into reversal?
- 3 - Can Balram be read as a subaltern figure, and if so, does he speak in the sense theorized by Spivak?
- 4- How does Fanon's understanding of violence and liberation inform Balram's transformation?

This study is motivated by an interest in how *The White Tiger* portrays the complexities of power, class inequality, and identity within postcolonial India. It is further driven by the relevance of philosophical and postcolonial theories in understanding how systems of domination shape individual consciousness, resistance, and social mobility.

In our research, we have opted for an interdisciplinary theoretical approach converging Hegelian dialectics, particularly the master-slave dialectic, to analyze power, labor, and consciousness. In addition to Postcolonial Theory by applying Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subalternity, voice, and representation. along with Frantz Fanon's concepts of colonial violence, liberation, and psychological alienation.

The research adopts a qualitative textual analysis, employing close reading of *The White Tiger*. The study will trace dialectical structures within the narrative and examine character development, and narrative voice in relation to socio-political contexts. The work is divided into two chapters; a theoretical and a practical one. The first chapter is dedicated to contextualizing Indian landscape, theoretical foundations, and key concepts in this study all together with a synthesis of Hegelian dialectic, Spivakian Subaltern theory, and Fanon's Decolonization theory. Whereas the second chapter constitutes a close reading that integrates philosophical dialectics, postcolonial Subaltern theory, and decolonization as a

psychological rupture systematically to examine narrative architecture, character transformation, and metaphorical systems.

Chapter One

Theoretical and Contextual Framework

1.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the interdisciplinary theoretical framework that underpins the present study, drawing primarily on the dialectical philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, alongside Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's conceptualization of the subaltern and Frantz Fanon's theorization of decolonization and violence. The aim of this chapter is not merely to review these theoretical positions in isolation, but to establish a coherent framework through which class oppression and resistance in *The White Tiger* can be systematically analyzed. To this end, the chapter first examines the key principles of Hegelian dialectic, with particular attention to the dynamics of recognition and reversal within hierarchical relations, before turning to postcolonial reinterpretations that extend and, at times, challenge these concepts. By mapping the intersections and tensions between these theoretical perspectives, this chapter ultimately lays the conceptual foundation for the analytical chapter that follows, arguing that the dialectical transformation of the subaltern subject cannot be fully understood without accounting for the historical conditions of coloniality, violence, and contested voice that shape it.

1.2. Contextualizing Domination: Class, Coloniality, and Resistance

Literature is the body of written works, particularly those recognized for the lasting artistic or intellectual value, covering diverse genres that reflect human experience, and culture across socio-historical contexts (Eagleton, 2008). Within this broad framework Indian literature can be understood as the written and spoken expression of the intellectual and spiritual life of the Indian subcontinent over roughly three thousand years (Winternitz, 1927). Moreover, it arises from a vast geographical region stretching from the Hindu Kush in the north to Cape Comorin in the south, covering an area comparable in size to almost the entire European continent. From ancient times, Indian literary and intellectual traditions have influenced countries far beyond India's borders, including regions of Central Asia, Tibet, China, Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and the islands of the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Winternitz, 1927). Contemporary Indian literature frequently engages with the legacies of caste, hierarchy, and internalized obedience, thus producing narratives that expose how lower caste subjects are conditioned to accept domination (Silva, 2024).

Among the many branches of Indian literary production, Dalit literature occupies a significant position. It encompasses writings by India's Dalit ("untouchable") authors documenting caste oppression, resistance, and the reclamation of identity, emerging

prominently with the Dalit Panthers movement of the 1970s (Mukherjee, 2000).

Contemporary Indian literature frequently engages with the legacies of caste, hierarchy, and internalized obedience, producing narratives that expose how lower-caste subjects are conditioned to accept domination (Silva, 2024).

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* exemplifies this perfectly through Balram Halwai's internalized self-loathing as a servant in the "rooster coop" where he internalizes caste-based domination until his rebellion subverts it (Silva, 2024). For instance, the contemporary Indian landscape is defined by a paradoxical coexistence: the successful globalizing shining India, and the enduring, profound darkness of its rural areas. Furthermore, according to Levy Economics Institute (2005) and International Association for Research in Income and Wealth (2024) the caste system explains 62% of India's 1,250 trillion wealth variance, with Scheduled Castes holding 9.2% national assets. Despite 22.5% population share, the upper castes control 52% alongside 51,000 annual Dalit atrocities. The social inequality in India remains deeply intertwined with the caste system, which continues to form life experiences much differently than those models of equality enshrined in the Constitution (Nite & Dash, 2022; Sharma, 2006). Although the Indian state has introduced strict measures against untouchability, the idea that certain groups are inherently superior or inferior still shapes daily life, and access to resources across society (Dholakia, 2015). In this sense, caste is not an ancient tradition but a living structure of power that coexists with modern institutions, markets, and discourses of citizenship.

Casteism denotes the discriminatory ideology and practices rooted in India's varna system, sustaining hereditary inequalities that intersect with class under neoliberalism, a political-economic model that extends market logic and competition into almost all areas of life, which, in India, post-1991, amplified inequality and entrepreneurial myths (Harvey, 2005; Adiga, 2008). Additionally, caste in India originally organized people into ranked groups defined by ritual status, occupation, and patterns of commensality and marriage (Sharma, 2006). Over time, these categories hardened into a system of graded hierarchy in which Brahmins stood at the top, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras, while Dalits and Adivasis were placed outside or at the bottom of this order (Dholakia, 2015). Even though legal reforms and social movements have disrupted the most explicit forms of caste based control, the underlying logic of ranking and exclusion has not disappeared; instead, it has become more flexible, less visible in some domains, and more contested in others (Nite & Dash, 2022). This transformation means that caste now operates in

combination with class, region, and urbanization, producing complex and overlapping forms of advantage and disadvantage.

Economically, caste continues to influence who has access to stable, well-paid work and who remains trapped in precarious, low security labor (Sharma, 2006). Historically, Dalits and many Adivasi communities were concentrated in the most physically demanding and devalued occupations, from agricultural labour and manual scavenging to informal sector work with little legal protection (Dholakia, 2015). In contemporary India, while some individuals from these groups have moved into better-paid jobs, they are still overrepresented in vulnerable, poorly protected sectors and underrepresented in high-status professions and managerial positions. This subjugation extends to the political sphere, where caste identities have become central to Indian democracy, shaping party strategies, electoral promises, and public debates (Nite & Dash, 2022).

Culturally, Dholakia (2015) notes that caste continues to shape practices of inclusion and exclusion, from religious rituals to everyday habits of eating and socializing. At the same time, the rise of Dalit and Adivasi intellectual, and literary movements has produced powerful counter narratives that emphasize self respect, dignity, and the right to narrate one's own history (Kumar, 2018). In the same vein, Sharma (2023) positioned *The White Tiger* as a mediator between local caste realities with global capitalism through Balram's rise from driver to entrepreneur, critiquing neoliberal India's fusion of feudalism and markets through a transnational text linking national hierarchies to global inequality. Ultimately, social inequality and caste dynamics in India are inseparable from the way power, respect, and belonging are distributed across the national landscape. Caste shapes who is seen as worthy of dignity, who has access to education and employment, who is represented in politics, and how individuals understand themselves in relation to others (Dholakia, 2015).

Minor literature _as introduced by Deleuze and Guattari (1986) in *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*_ emerges not from a minor language but from a minority's transformative use of a major one; like Prague's Jews writing in German, a tongue already deterritorialized from its territorial roots. They frame Kafka's core 'impass' as three interlocking impossibilities: not writing at all (since national consciousness, even oppressed, demands literary expression); writing in any language other than German (due to irreducible distance from Czech territoriality); and writing effectively in German, which for this

minority becomes a detached, artificial 'language of paper' spoken by an oppressive elite from which Jews are both part and excluded, like "gypsies who have stolen the German infant from the cradle" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 6). They also argue that this strong coefficient of deterritorialization defines minor literature's essence, priming it for strange, collective uses similar to what marginalized groups today might do with dominant tongues. Additionally, Gupta (2020) framed Balram's narrative as a minority discourse, thereby redefining the meaning of servility and resistance against the elite group.

World Literature can be understood as a concept shaped by globalization and transnationalism, where literary works move beyond the limits of single nations and reflect multiple cultural influences. As discussed by Pizer (2006), it increasingly includes texts written by bilingual and bicultural authors living in exile, whose works challenge the idea of fixed national literatures like French or German. These transnational writings emerge from experiences between homeland and exile, preserving cultural memory while blending identities across borders. Unlike older forms of exile literature that tried to leave origins behind, this contemporary literature maintains a connection to them, creating a space where different cultures interact. In this way, World Literature today refers to a body of writing shaped by cultural exchange, displacement, and hybridity, reflecting the interconnected nature of the modern world.

1.3. Hegelian Master-Slave Dialectic: Power Dynamics

Master-Slave dialectic, as presented in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1777, illustrates self-consciousness emerging from a life and death struggle between two forms of consciousness. The victor becomes the master, reliant on the slave's labor for recognition, while the slave, through transformative work, gains true independence and dialectical progress. This ontology of recognition (*Anerkennung*) highlights class relations as inherently unstable, always subject to negation and synthesis.

Hegelian dialectic reveals power as relational negation where dominant consciousness requires subordinate recognition, generating unstable hierarchies inverted through labor's transformative negation (Canivez, 2019).

1.3.1. German Idealism and the development of Hegelian Dialectics

It encompasses the era from the 1770s into the 1840s, known in Germany as 'Classical German Philosophy'. Its philosophers were divided between the critical/transcendental idealism of Immanuel Kant, and the absolute idealism of some other

prominent German thinkers who preceded him, such as Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. The works of these German Idealists continue to influence different fields; like religious studies, literary theory, politics, and art. It also addresses a clear gap arising from the conventional views of philosophy alongside challenges building from the unquestioned dominance of modern science (Ameriks, 2000).

Hegel's time in Jena from 1801 to 1807 marked a key turning point in his development. Hölderlin's critique of the subjective limits in Fichte's_ and by extension Kant's_ starting points reshaped his views. Earlier, as a young scholar, Hegel had focused on extending Kant's philosophy to European politics rather than its more abstract elements. However, Hölderlin inspired him to see that his work as a public thinker had overlooked the essential problem (Pinkard, 2000). Indeed, this realization transformed his approach, and freed him from prior simplifications; he explored post-Kantian depths, linking individual consciousness to historical change. Consequently, Europe's revolutions and Hölderlin's insights on human division spurred methods to reconcile opposites, leading to systematic writings that connected personal and collective development (Pinkard, 2000).

1.3.2. Thesis: Recognition, Self-Consciousness, and the Assertion of Independent Being

The Hegelian dialectic specifically the Master-Slave dialectic in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel, 1977) describes how self-consciousness develops through recognition of opposites and heated struggle. For instance, Hegel holds that self-consciousness cannot exist alone, but only when it is recognized by another self-conscious being; furthermore, it arises and endures through a reciprocal process of recognition, in which each consciousness requires the other's acknowledgment in order to achieve full self-awareness. Building on this, dialectic is the drive of every concept to negate itself through internal contradiction, passing into its opposite and thereby grasping concrete unity.

In addition, Hegel (1977), in his formulation suggests that power is not a static property but a relational and dialectical process: one self-consciousness becomes a Lord precisely by negating the other, turning it into a dependent or subordinated being. As a result, structures of power emerge through oppositions between master and servant, _dominant and marginalized_, where each position is defined by its negation of the other. Nevertheless, these structures are not fixed; instead, they are continually contested, inverted, and reconfigured, through dialectical struggle (Hegel, 1977).

In this regard, Pinkard (1966) presents the dialectic as a concrete historical process wherein self-consciousness transitions from an isolated desire to interdependent sociality. Initial claims to that are tested against communal normative practices. As these conflicts arise as participants offer opposing justifications, negating prior shapes of awareness and driving transformation into more adequate forms of shared rationality. Far from abstract logic, this movement bridges personal agency to collective norms, therefore advancing objective spirit through recurrent struggle and resolution.

To elaborate on the abstract stage, Self-consciousness realizes its full "in and for itself" nature only via recognition from another: "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and only by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (Hegel, 1977, p. 111). Consequently, when two self-consciousnesses oppose, after inevitable exposure to one another, they each negate yet affirm the opponent, achieving mutual certainty and recognition: "They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another" (pp. 111).

In this connection, the initial stage begins with the appearance of what is called thesis or being at the initial triad. Here, the process begins when a primary concept, state, or motion materializes as the starting point. This thesis represents an affirmative presence "being" that asserts itself within a specific, bounded context or background. It is the first "all" in the sequence, carrying an intrinsic positivity or completeness at its outset, yet poised for development precisely because no idea exists in isolation (Ma, 2018). Moreover, Pinkard (1966) denotes that the dialectic's first affirmative moment appears via a desire to reach independence, presuming solitary completeness. However, it is implicitly self-contradictory, because it needs external validation it cannot provide itself.

1.3.3. Antithesis: Negation, Conflict, and the Emergence of Lordship and Bondage

In contradiction, the antithesis emerges its own negation within the thesis, as Ma (2018) explains it produces its own opposition because of the inherent limits or deficiencies in the value or quality of the conditions from which that opposition emerges. This emphasizes that the contradiction is not external but instead born from the thesis' own limitations, such as flaws in its value, quality, or scope. Moreover, this opposing force, known as antithesis or nothing, embodies negation or absence. Particularly, it arises specifically within the same contextual boundaries as the thesis, highlighting the internal

dialectic: the thesis' very existence provokes its counterpart by revealing what it lacks or suppresses. This step underscores a core dynamic of tension, where this context creates conflict.

In the negative stage this mutual recognition ruptures through a fight, producing a hierarchy that promotes a disparity in their chain: "The inequality in this reflective relationship between them; between the two who have met one another in combat, constitutes the basic definition of lordship and bondage" (Hegel, 1977, p. 115). In turn, Hegel (1977) demonstrates that the identical self-consciousness spread into the victor whose the Lord and the surviving Bondsman, negating symmetry after going through a fierce, detrimental battle that posits who will sovereign over the other.

By the same token, the antithesis reveals the initial shape's limitations through concrete opposition, most starkly in the recognition struggle exposing hidden dependence. This negating force dismantles abstract freedom, forcing confrontation with social reality's demands. (Pinkard, 1996). In essence, Hegel (1977) elucidates, "This negation produces the Lord (*Herr*): the former is the independent Lord, the latter is the dependent Bondsman" (p. 115), soon this dynamic flips thereby the bondsman becomes a pure 'being-for-itself', linking to the world only via "a thing as such, the object of desire, and to the consciousness whose essential nature is thinghood"; this reveals complete dependence on the bondsman's labor (p. 115).

He also achieves apparent independence through victory in the life and death struggle for recognition. By subjugating the bondsman, the lord relates to objects indirectly _via the bondsman's labor_ positioning itself as pure "being-for-itself" that negates both nature and the other. Yet this independence proves superficial: the lord's self-certainty depends entirely on the bondsman's one-sided acknowledgment, lacking genuine social reciprocity or transformative engagement with reality. Consequently, the lord does not develop and his freedom is superficial and vulnerable to dialectical reversal (Pinkard, 1996).

In contrast, although the bondsman (*Knecht*) seems in charge of ruling this system, it appears to be another new self-aware being who mainly develops self-awareness through labor, unlike the master whose detachment from the tangible productions deprives him of development; "in this enjoyment, however the lord does not achieve the truth of his self-consciousness" (Hegel, 1977, p. 115). Moreover, Pinkard (1996) elaborates the

bondsman's role as the consciousness preserving life through submission, shaped profoundly by fear of the lord's absolute power, and compelled to labor, the bondsman shapes nature into stable, enduring objects that persist beyond instant need. Clearly, through labor, the bondsman overcomes the unformed nature and develops genuine self-awareness, also his involvement in the world helps him to discover his power to shape reality and overcome its negativity. This creates concrete independence that surpasses the lords' empty dominance. Thus labor becomes the pathway to genuine self-consciousness.

Additionally, Pinkard (1996) shows the lord-bondsman relation as an asymmetrical structure of recognition in which the bondsman, through labor, provides the practical mediation that sustains the lord's self-certainty, while the lord remains dependent on this recognition without achieving a genuinely reciprocal relation, since he relates to the bondsman only in a mediated way. He also frames this historical dynamic as a necessary, yet temporary phase wherein social inequality triggers reason's advance toward reciprocal interdependence and communal maturity.

1.3.4. Synthesis: Mutual Recognition, Transformative Labor, and the Reversal the Bondage

Ultimately, the synthesis combines opposites into a richer unity, preserving vital insights while overcoming flaws. Despite not being Hegel's terminology, it captures movement toward mutual recognition as self-consciousness's higher historical form. (Pinkard, 1996). In other words, in this stage the slave's minor control over the labor provokes a dialectical reversal, primarily by the overcoming of his anxiety and death fear through gaining self-mastery. Moreover, the bondsman's labor reveals the lord's dependence, whilst freeing him from his fear (Hegel, 1977).

In this perspective, during the concrete stage, the conflict deepens as the opposing force or antithesis confronts the thesis until a resolution arises that goes beyond both. This struggle concludes in a new stage where the synthesis, or process of becoming takes shape by recognizing the value in each side, maintaining their strengths, and eliminating their weaknesses. Therefore, synthesis is not a mere compromise but a more comprehensive unity that combines the constructive aspects of the thesis with the critical insights of the antithesis, moving past any one-sided perspective. This stage of becoming represents a dynamic transformation, a new reality that overcomes the prior pair; preserving what is valid while negating what is insufficient (Ma, 2018).

1.4. Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is an interdisciplinary field that examines the historical, cultural, political, and social effects of European colonialism on formerly colonized societies. While the term originally referred to the period following national independence after the Second World War, it later developed into a critical approach that analyzes how colonial power and representation operate in literary, and cultural texts (Cuddon, 2013). More broadly, the term postcolonial is used to describe all cultures impacted by imperialism, from the beginning of colonization up to the present day. In this sense, it highlights the ongoing concerns that have persisted since European powers began their expansion. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the term is particularly suitable for the emerging field of cross-cultural criticism and the discussions that shape it (Ashcroft et al., 2004).

Historically, colonialism involved powerful European nations expanding their territories and exerting control over lands in Asia, Africa, and the Americas from the late fifteenth to the twentieth centuries. During the nineteenth century, the British Empire emerged as the largest imperial power. This dominance continued until the end of World War II, after which India gained independence, followed by other colonies (Tyson, 2006). However, even after political independence was achieved, the effects of colonial rule remained deeply embedded in institutions and social structures. Consequently, postcolonialism as a field of study focuses on how these historical experiences continue to shape cultural identities and power relations.

In literary studies, postcolonial criticism functions both as a subject of analysis and as a theoretical framework. As a subject, it examines literature produced by cultures shaped by colonial rule, spanning from the moment of initial contact to the present. Although some of these works are written by colonizers, the majority originate from colonized or formerly colonized communities. Therefore, any study of such texts regardless of the theoretical approach applied can be considered postcolonial criticism. A central idea in postcolonial theory is that colonial discourse frequently portrayed colonized societies as inferior, uncivilized, or incapable of self-governance. Such representations served to legitimize colonial domination while marginalizing Indigenous cultures and systems of knowledge (Parker, 2019).

Finally, postcolonialism also addresses the economic and political challenges faced by newly independent nations. In many cases, the promise of independence was compromised by local elites who exploited the instability and divisions left by colonial

rule. These leaders often reproduced similar patterns of domination by concentrating wealth and power, suppressing democratic processes, and exacerbating social tensions. As a result, a new form of control commonly referred to as neocolonialism emerged. This system perpetuates colonial patterns of exploitation while involving both local elites and external actors, such as multinational corporations. Under the guise of globalization, neocolonialism continues to reinforce inequalities and extend the legacy of colonial domination (Parker, 2019).

1.4.1. Spivak and the Notion of the Subaltern

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a leading postcolonial scholar whose thinking reflects both India's anti-colonial socialist traditions and the lasting effects of British colonial education. She graduated with top honors in English and Bengali literature from Presidency College, University of Calcutta, and later moved to the United States in 1959 for graduate studies at Cornell University, followed by a fellowship at Girton College, Cambridge. Spivak's work examines how English literature in colonial India contributed to sustaining imperial rule. In addition, she focuses on the marginalization of women, rural communities, and tribal groups. Drawing on Indian leftist thought as well as European critical theory, she explores the difficulty of giving subaltern groups a voice without imposing Western notions of authority or subjectivity (Morton, 2003).

The term subaltern, meaning people of lower or subordinate status, was introduced by Antonio Gramsci to describe social groups dominated by the ruling class's power and influence. These groups include peasants, laborers, and others excluded from positions of authority and control within society. Because history is often shaped and recorded by those in power especially through state institutions Gramsci was concerned with how the experiences and histories of marginalized, subaltern groups could be understood and represented (Ashcroft et al., 2025).

Furthermore, Gramsci argued that the history of subaltern classes is just as complex as that of dominant classes, even though the latter is typically recognized as official history. However, the history of subaltern groups tends to be fragmented and episodic because they are continuously influenced and constrained by ruling groups, even during moments of resistance. As a result, these groups have limited access to the means of controlling their own representation and fewer opportunities to participate in cultural and social institutions.

Building on Gramsci's concept, the Subaltern Studies Group incorporated the term into postcolonial studies by systematically examining subaltern issues in South Asian history. The term was expanded to refer broadly to various forms of subordination related to class, caste, gender, age, and social position. The group, founded by Ranajit Guha, included scholars such as Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, and Gyanendra Pandey (Ashcroft et al.2025).

Spivak first gained recognition through her English translation of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. In her own scholarship, she combines deconstruction with feminism, Marxism, and postcolonial theory. Importantly, she argues that imperialism has been a central force in British history and culture, yet it has often been overlooked in traditional literary studies. Consequently, this omission has helped conceal its influence. She suggests that examining imperialism in the literature of colonizing nations reveals how the so-called Third World has been 'worlded' through these processes. Therefore, Third World literature should not be treated as separate from Western culture; rather, due to cultural hybridity and interconnection, both are deeply intertwined and mutually constitutive (Parker, 2019).

A key concern in Spivak's work is the concept of epistemic violence, which refers to the way Western systems of knowledge production impose meanings on non-Western societies. According to Spivak, Western academic discourse often serves its own economic and ideological interests by constructing knowledge systems that justify colonial domination. In this framework, the West positions itself as the dominant 'Subject' while marginalizing the 'Other,' including non-Europeans, women, and the poor. Thus, what is accepted as truth is shaped by Western epistemological frameworks.

From both historiographical and epistemological perspectives, Spivak argues that the representation of subaltern histories is frequently distorted by these dominant frameworks. In engaging with thinkers such as Deleuze and Foucault, she critiques their failure to fully account for the relationship between desire, power, and subjectivity. More specifically, she criticizes them for overlooking internal contradictions and, in doing so, unintentionally reintroducing a unified subject. As a result, she accuses them of perpetuating epistemic violence by imposing Western modes of thought onto non-Western populations.

Spivak's concerns about representation culminate in her influential essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, where she questions whether the subaltern can truly have a voice within existing power structures. First, she critiques the assumption that subaltern groups are autonomous, arguing that even attempts to define them rely on essentialist assumptions.

Second, she explains that the identity of the subaltern is always constructed in opposition to the elite, meaning it cannot exist independently (Ascroft et al., 2025).

To illustrate these issues, Spivak discusses the example of sati, the controversial Hindu practice of widow burning. This practice created a moral dilemma for British colonial rulers, who sought to present themselves as both liberal and respectful of local traditions. Ultimately, they resolved this contradiction by allowing sati only when the widow appeared to give consent. However, the concept of consent itself is problematic. Since sati translates to “good wife,” a widow’s choice may reflect internalized patriarchal norms rather than genuine autonomy. Thus, it becomes difficult to determine whether the subaltern woman is truly “speaking” or merely reproducing dominant ideologies (Parker, 2019).

Moreover, Spivak argues that there is no single, authentic voice representing all subaltern groups. For example, African American women, Indian women, or any marginalized group cannot be reduced to a unified identity. Such generalizations oversimplify their diversity and reinforce stereotypes (Parker, 2019). This critique is closely related to the concept of essentialism, which assumes that all members of a group share fixed, inherent characteristics. Essentialist views of race and gender have historically reinforced hierarchies by portraying certain groups as inferior. Consequently, these ideas have supported both colonial and patriarchal systems of domination (Eide, 2016).

Nevertheless, Spivak introduces the concept of strategic essentialism as a pragmatic political tool. In this approach, groups may temporarily adopt simplified identities to achieve specific political goals, such as resisting oppression or securing rights. However, she cautions against relying on essentialism in the long term, as it risks reinforcing rigid identities and deepening divisions. Therefore, strategic essentialism should be used carefully and critically, as a temporary strategy rather than a theoretical foundation (Eide, 2016). Another important aspect of Spivak’s work is her critique of colonial historiography. She argues that colonial narratives often misrepresent subaltern experiences to justify imperial rule. For instance, the British used the practice of sati to portray themselves as rescuers of Indian women. Similarly, the case of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri demonstrates how subaltern voices are misunderstood when they are not allowed to represent themselves.

Ultimately, Spivak highlights the complex position of Third World women, who are caught between patriarchy and imperialism, as well as between tradition and modernity. She emphasizes that the subaltern lacks full agency and cannot easily “speak”

within dominant systems of representation. Even when they attempt to express themselves, their voices are filtered and reshaped by those in power (Garg, 2019).

Finally, Spivak reconceptualizes silence not merely as absence but as a potential form of resistance. While silence often reflects exclusion and marginalization, it can also function as a deliberate refusal to be misrepresented. In this sense, silence becomes both a condition imposed by oppression and a strategy of defiance. Thus, she challenges the assumption that oppressed groups can easily articulate their experiences within existing structures, arguing instead that their voices are systematically constrained (Akhter, 2025).

1.5. Fanon and the Paradox of Decolonization

Fanon's theory of violent decolonization in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) radicalizes these ideas by framing violence not as a mere reaction, but as a necessary psychological rupture for the oppressed to reclaim their humanity from colonial structures. For Fanon, colonial powers are sustained through cultivating inferiority complexes in the colonized subjects, making nonviolent resistance ineffective; thus, class oppression demands physical upheaval for existential liberation.

In this reading, decolonization is not reduced to a moral endorsement of violence, but is instead framed as a disruptive process that exposes and destabilizes the conditions through which colonial subjects are produced. Hofmeyr (2025) argues that Fanon's account highlights how colonial power persists through embodied and institutional forms of domination that structure perception, identity, and agency. From this perspective, liberation involves a fundamental reconfiguration of subject formation, where colonial frameworks of inferiority are dismantled through radical transformation.

1.5.1. Psychoanalysis from Freud to Fanon

First, Hook (2005) portrays that general psychoanalysis, as developed by Sigmund Freud, establishes that subjectivity is structured by unconscious mental processes, including repressed desires, intra-psychic conflicts, and instinctual drives such as the libido and the death drive. These dynamics manifest indirectly through dream-work as symbolic wish-fulfilment, parapraxis that reveal latent intentions, and neurotic formations such as phobias and compulsions, as well as through transference, whereby earlier relational patterns are reproduced in present interactions. ;Freud therefore conceptualizes the psyche as a tripartite structure consisting of the id, the ego, and the superego, whose tensions are

regulated through defense mechanisms including repression, projection, sublimation, and denial (Hook, 2005).

Second, Hook (2005) explains that the existential psychoanalysis, particularly in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, shifts from Freudian determinism toward an emphasis on situated freedom and ontological responsibility. It distinguishes between being-in-itself, as inert and fixed existence, and being-for-itself, as conscious and self-reflective existence capable of transcendence. Within this framework, the fundamental project refers to a pre-reflective orientation that structures an individual's mode of being and action. However, individuals frequently engage in bad faith, a form of self-deception through which they deny their freedom by appealing to fixed roles or external constraints. Consequently, existential psychoanalysis prioritizes lived experience and intentional praxis over the analysis of unconscious drives (Hook, 2005).

Third, Frantz Fanon (1963) extended psychoanalysis into the colonial context through a sociogenic framework, in which sociogenic oppression refers to the socially constructed domination encoded in identities, psyches, and institutions by the colonist, distinct from biological determinism, demonstrating how racism and colonial domination shape subjectivity (Hook, 2005). He argues that colonialism imposes a historical-racial schema that disrupts the body-schema and produces epidermalization, understood as the reduction of the subject to racialized corporeality.

This process generates alienation, inferiority complexes, and neurosis that cannot be explained solely by ontogeny or phylogeny, but must instead be understood as socially and historically produced (Fanon, 2008, as cited in Hook, 2005). As Fanon 2008 illustrates in the colonial encounter_“Look, a Negro!”_the subject experiences a form of psychic fragmentation and corporeal dislocation (as cited in Hook, 2005). Ultimately, sociogeny necessitates decolonial praxis, whereby the transformation of colonial structures enables the reconstitution of subjectivity and the emergence of a new humanity beyond the Manichean world that describes the extreme split between the colonizers' occupied spaces, while casting the colonized in rural areas, which reinforces postcolonial economic disparities, and the division between colonizer and colonized (Fanon, 1963).

1.5.2. Fanon's Decolonization Theory: From Psychic Colonization to Social Reconstruction

To begin with, Frantz Fanon (2004) defined decolonization as a fundamentally transformative and conflictual process. According to Fanon, decolonization is "the violent

clash between two opposing forces, colonizer and colonized," (p. 65), a struggle born directly from the oppressive conditions of colonial rule. This clash is not merely physical; it is also psychological, as the colonized struggle to reclaim both their minds and social spaces from the colonizer. He further explains that "the colonist fabricated and keeps fabricating the colonized subject," (p. 65) shaping the identity and psychology of the oppressed through systematic exploitation.

Within this framework, Fanon's major works, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952/2008) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004), present a clear intellectual progression explaining colonial domination and liberation. Fanon moves from the colonization of the mind, to racialized structural hierarchy, and finally to violence and decolonization as total reconstruction, while also warning about the dangers of neocolonialism after independence (Bradshaw, 2023; Khedhri, 2013).

1.5.3. Internalized Oppression and the Colonization of the Mind

Moreover, Fanon explained colonial domination at the psychological level through what he calls the colonization of the mind. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he argues that colonialism does not merely control land and resources but also reshapes the consciousness of the colonized, producing what can be described as internalized servility. Colonized individuals begin to adopt the perspective of the colonizer and evaluate themselves through the oppressor's gaze. As a result, colonial domination produces a profound inferiority complex, in which the colonized internalize the belief that they are inherently inferior (Bradshaw, 2023).

Furthermore, Fanon emphasized that this psychological condition is not natural but deliberately produced by colonial power. As he writes, "It is the colonist who fabricated and keeps fabricating the colonized subject" (Fanon, 2004, p. 65). Through colonial education, culture, and institutions, the colonizer gradually shapes the identity of the colonized while simultaneously erasing indigenous cultural foundations.

Also, this process leads to what can be described as epistemic subjugation, where colonized individuals are pressured to abandon their own knowledge systems in favor of colonial ideology. In order to assimilate the colonizer's culture, the colonized subject "has had to pawn some of his own intellectual possessions" and learn "the way the colonist bourgeoisie think" (Fanon, 2004, p. 76). Consequently, colonial domination creates psychological complicity, where the colonized unintentionally reproduce the very system that oppresses them. This dual process of mental colonization and complicity demonstrates

how deeply colonial power infiltrates both personal identity and social life (Jilani, 2025; Pillay, 2017).

1.5.4 Racialized Colonial Hierarchy and Fanon's Critique of Hegel

Building on this psychological domination, Fanon next examines the structural dimension of colonial power. In particular, he challenges the philosophical framework developed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, especially the master-slave dialectic, which suggests that domination between master and slave involves a reciprocal struggle for recognition. However, Fanon argues that this model does not accurately describe colonialism because the colonizer refuses to recognize the colonized as an equal human subject. Instead, colonialism creates a racialized hierarchy in which the colonizer occupies the position of the unquestioned master, while the colonized are denied full humanity.

As a result, the Black colonized subject lacks what Fanon calls “ontological resistance,” meaning the capacity to challenge the colonizer as an equal participant in a reciprocal relationship. As Fanon explains, “the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man” (Fanon, 2008, p. 110). Colonial domination therefore destroys the cultural and metaphysical foundations of the colonized subject, forcing them into an identity entirely defined by the colonizer. Scholars have noted that this reconfiguration of Hegel's master-slave dialectic underscores the racialized and one-way nature of colonial domination (Khedhri, 2013).

Additionally, this hierarchy is reinforced through the Manichean structure of the colonial world, where society is divided into two radically opposed spaces. The colonizer's zone represents order, civilization, and superiority, while the colonized are confined to spaces associated with chaos, darkness, and moral inferiority. Through this rigid division, colonial power maintains absolute authority while legitimizing exploitation (Bradshaw, 2023).

1.5.5. Violence as a Decolonial Act

Consequently, because colonial domination affects both the mind and social structures, Fanon argues that liberation cannot be achieved through negotiation alone. Instead, decolonization requires a radical rupture with the colonial system. In this context, Fanon famously describes decolonization as a violent historical transformation. As he writes, “Decolonization is quite simply the substitution of one species of mankind by another... total and seamless” (Fanon, 2004, p. 64). Within the colonial Manichean world,

the colonizer consistently portrays the colonized as evil or uncivilized in order to justify exploitation and domination.

Therefore, the colonized reclaim violence as a historical and psychological act of liberation. As Fanon describes, "The colonized swarm into the forbidden cities... to blow the colonial world to smithereens" (Fanon, 2004, p. 69). Scholars have emphasized that this violence functions not only as destruction but as psychological and historical reclamation of agency (Khedhri, 2013; Bradshaw, 2023). In engaging in this struggle, the colonized also begin to dismantle the inferiority complex and ideological domination imposed by colonial power (Jilani, 2025).

1.5.6. Decolonization as Psychic and Social Reconstruction

Following this revolutionary rupture, Fanon conceptualized decolonization as a process of total reconstruction. Political independence alone is insufficient; genuine liberation requires transformation at both the psychological and social levels. First, psychic decolonization involves dismantling the internalized mental structures created by colonial domination. Colonized individuals must reject the need for recognition from the colonizer and reconstruct their identity through their own cultural and historical experiences. Through this process, the inferiority complex produced by colonial ideology is gradually eliminated (Pillay, 2017).

Second, social reconstruction involves rebuilding society on new foundations of equality and collective participation. Colonial hierarchies and divisions must be replaced by social systems that prioritize justice and solidarity. As Fanon notes, the demand for this transformation arises from "the lives and consciousness of colonized people," (Fanon, 2004, p. 64), who actively seek to reconstruct their world after colonial destruction. Scholars argue that social reconstruction also involves denaturalizing colonial knowledge systems and integrating indigenous epistemologies to achieve true epistemic justice (Pillay, 2017; Jilani, 2025). Ultimately, the revolutionary energy that once fueled anti-colonial struggle becomes a force for building a new society grounded in dignity, autonomy, and collective responsibility.

1.5.7. Pitfalls of National Consciousness and Neocolonialism

However, Fanon also warns that independence does not automatically guarantee genuine liberation. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004), he identified the pitfalls of national consciousness, particularly the emergence of a national bourgeoisie, the capitalist

middle class that exploits labor while upholding ideological hegemony, as adapted by Fanon to neocolonial elites (Fanon, 1963). They mainly replace colonial administrators while preserving colonial structures. In many cases, this new elite simply imitates the behavior of former colonial rulers. Instead of transforming society, they prioritize personal wealth and political power while maintaining an economic dependence on former colonial powers.

Furthermore, this class often manipulates ethnic divisions and glorifies a romanticized national past to legitimize its authority. As a result, colonial hierarchies continue to operate in new forms, producing neocolonialism, where political independence exists without true economic or social transformation (Bradshaw, 2023; Khedhri, 2013). For Fanon, avoiding this outcome requires a radical restructuring of society that prioritizes collective development, equality, and social justice rather than elite control.

Finally, Fanon's theory of decolonization follows a clear intellectual progression. Colonial domination begins with the colonization of the mind, producing internalized inferiority and epistemic subjugation. This psychological domination is reinforced through racialized hierarchy and the Manichean structure of colonial society, which denies the colonized subject recognition and agency. Because colonial domination is total, liberation requires revolutionary violence, which destroys colonial structures and restores historical agency. Therefore, decolonization must lead to psychic and social reconstruction, creating a new society free from colonial hierarchies. Nevertheless, Fanon's final warning reminds us that without deep structural transformation, political independence risks collapsing into neocolonial stagnation, reproducing the very systems it sought to dismantle (Bradshaw, 2023; Khedhri, 2013).

1.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this theoretical framework combines Hegelian Dialectics, Spivak's subaltern, and Fanon's theory of decolonization in order to analyze key figures and social hierarchies in *The White Tiger*, as well as the protagonist Balram. Together, these perspectives provide a strong lens to understand power, oppression, and rebellion in Adiga's narrative, guiding the analysis in the following chapter. Ultimately, These theories converge on the concept of subjectivity under domination: Hegel's dialectic provides the foundational theory, Spivak identifies its discursive barriers, and Fanon supplies the violent resolution. Together, these ideas bridge philosophy, postcolonial and

psychoanalytic studies, allowing for a nuanced analysis of the complex forms of oppression in Adiga's novel.

Chapter Two

From Servitude to Agency: A Postcolonial Reading of *The White Tiger*

2.1. Introduction

This chapter applies the preceding theoretical framework that is mainly centered on Hegel's Master-Slave relations, Spivak's notion of the subaltern, and Fanon's decolonization theory through a close reading of Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* to investigate how Balram Halwai's narrative reflects the journey of self-recognition through a fierce struggle with the other; the internalization of caste and class domination; also the violent reclamation of an independent identity, and the emergence of a new subjectivity shaped by neoliberal India and global literary circulation. Structured around the key themes of the novel, some events and key episodes such as the "rooster coop," the murder of Ashok, and Balram's letters to the Chinese Premier, this analysis aims to explore these highlights further. Through this reading, the chapter aims to demonstrate how *The White Tiger* simultaneously exemplifies and questions the models of recognition, subalternity, and resistance.

In what follows, the chapter begins by applying Hegel's master-slave dialectic to Balram Halwai's early life as a servant and displaying his development throughout the story. It then turns to Spivak's concept of the subaltern to showcase his individual journey of liberation, and how he breaks his silence through controversial letters to the Chinese Premier. Finally, Fanon's decolonization theory describes the main character's psychic revolution after the murder of his employer, Mr. Ashok, to reach freedom and catharsis. Although each section foregrounds one theory, they will be kept in dialogue, since the same events in the protagonist's life can be read through all three lenses to show how selfhood, class, caste, and resistance shape Halwai's new entrepreneurial identity.

2.2. Balram's Development through the Hegelian Master-Slave Dialectic

In Adiga's novel, *The White Tiger*, the protagonist Balram Halwai's bond with his employer, Mr. Ashok, mirrors a Hegelian dynamic that emerges through three pivotal stages: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, where each sets the ground for the other; furthermore, this will be examined in the novel through a close reading of some scenes.

2.2.1. The Accepted Bondage

Firstly, Hegel holds that self-consciousness cannot exist alone, but only when it is recognized by another self-conscious being (Hegel, 1977, p. 111); to explain it more, the existence of Balram revolved around serving a master, and the position of a family's personal driver helped him to find one: "the moment I saw his face, I knew: This is the master for me" (Adiga, 2008, p. 33), this recognition established the essence of their relation by setting a hierarchy that separates their two worlds.

This Hegelian structure is nourished by the dominant system that shames the poor and limits them to doing physical tasks, and glorifies submissive slaves who idolize their master:

"Do you know Hanuman, sir? He was the faithful servant of the god Rama, and we worship him in our temples because he is a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion. These are the kinds of gods they have foisted on us, Mr. Jiabao" (p. 11).

On one hand, the urge for reciprocal recognition is the core of the master-slave co-dependency; furthermore, Hegel said that when two self-consciousness oppose, after inevitable exposure to one another, they each negate yet affirm the opponent, achieving mutual certainty and recognition (Hegel, 1977). On the other hand, this exposure does not display the equality of these two parts, or condemn the master of any sort of gratitude, respect, or sympathy, but in contrast to that, it gives him full rights of enslaving the opposing object that identifies with the role and preform it with dedication as follows: "She gave me a big smile_I knew it well: it was the smile a servant gives a master" (Adiga, 2008, p. 138).

Also, the entanglement that surpasses the body and reaches the soul is prominent throughout the story; for instance, Balram's sharp observance that the poor irrationally avoid risks. Moreover, this kind of discourse reflects internalized fear and the agony of past experiences where misfortunes become a trap for those who are in need of facing the other. In addition, this kind of fear and hesitation is built up by the horrid void they cannot imagine without their master, as well as the consequences they will face in case of disobedience.

Finally, the Internalized servitude appears in Balram's direct identification as a substitute where he asserts his understanding of proper servant conduct, this is a witness to his readiness to sacrifice mixed with selfless intentions towards the master who he recognizes as worthy of absolute submission; this also positions the act of serving the other as a birth right acquired by the upper hierarchy on advantage of the poor whose devotion is imprinted in their enslaved bloodline. Also, the chain of slavery is not a secret to those who are trapped inside, they protect it: "the coop is guarded from the inside" (Adiga, 2008, p. 114), the 'Rooster Coop' symbolizes the inescapable socioeconomic trap in *The White Tiger*, where the oppressive system that rules modern India, dividing it into two parallel worlds; one is for the privileged, upper-caste men, and the second is a dirty prison that carries the poor.

Although, they suffer from what has been implanted in their minds they never doubt it: "because the desire to be a servant had been bred into me: hammered into my skull, nail after nail, and poured into my blood, the way sewage and industrial poison is poured into Mother Ganga" (p. 114). Moreover, this bond is reliable: "The trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy" (p. 102). This also proves its defiance throughout time and space as an engine for the forces of labor in India, whose fidelity and dedication function as a solid pillar in the master's success.

2.2.2. Fear, Labor, and Self-Awareness

Pinkard elaborates the bondsman's role as the consciousness preserving life through submission, shaped profoundly by fear of the lord's absolute power, and compelled to labor, the bondsman shapes nature into stable, enduring objects that persist beyond instant need (Pinkard, 1966). This elucidates that the familiar co-existence between the two physically separate being that are inherently recognized as dependent entities create a sense of fear of independence that is deep for both but only privileges the master; whilst degrading the slave and filling him with fear of an obscure future that does not include servility, and orders from the presumably knowledgeable other.

Moreover, the fear entangles Balram and blinds him from considering other choices other than submission to his master, the routine generates passivity that blocks any thought of possible change or upgrade: "The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They

see the organs of their brothers...They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country" (Adiga, 2008, p. 101).

By subjugating the bondsman, the lord relates to objects indirectly via the bondsman's labor, positioning itself as pure "being-for-itself" that negates both nature and the other. Yet this independence proves superficial (Pinkard, 1966). This idea positions physical labor as the highest form of dedication, where the bondsman tires his body to satisfy the lord's orders, and win his external validation, and his permission to exist in his fragile protection: rivalry brews between the two drivers in the Stork household as they compete to be the master's favorite; his hate for the fellow servants originates from an internalized experience of unworthiness, a shakable self image, and an expectation from the master to protect him: "He was an old-fashioned master. He knew he had to protect his servants" (Adiga, 2008, p.104); however this protection was not free of charges as the servant was expected to attain certain criteria: "I don't gossip about my masters, I don't steal, I don't blaspheme" (p 34).

The glorification of the master on behalf of one's dignity might appear as an act of self-sabotage, but for a slave, labor is just a simple extension that might only show one edge of his sacrifice; some slaves, like Balram, would undoubtedly accept their role at first. At home Balram performs menial tasks like washing dishes, sweeping floors, cooking, massaging the Mongoose, scrubbing, selling drugs, and eagerly reading Murder Weekly. This submissive mentality is derived from the group where: "Servants have to keep other servants from becoming innovators, experimenters or entrepreneurs. The coop is guarded from the inside" (p. 114), and that is the key component of their shared need for their masters.

The beginning of the self-awareness journey is not separated from the tangible service the lord expects from his servant; furthermore, through labor, the bondsman overcomes the unformed nature and develops genuine self-awareness (Hegel, 1977). In addition, this reflections continue to set the ground for a coming action; where a life and death struggle becomes the catalyst in Balram's future ambitions as he describes:

" It squeezed my heart to see him suffer like this_but where my genuine concern for him ended and where my self-interest began, I could not tell: no servant can ever tell what the motives of his heart are. 'Do we loathe our masters behind a facade of

love_ or do we love them behind a facade of loathing?' We are made mysteries to ourselves by the Rooster Coop we are locked in" (Adiga, 2008, p. 110).

Pinkard (1996) frames this dynamic historically as necessary yet temporary phase wherein social inequality triggers reason's advance toward reciprocal interdependence and communal maturity. To illustrate the bondsman is an excellent student to the superficial master, but once he no longer identifies with his lord and devoid him of all his exaggerated holiness, he finally opens his eyes to a new truth where he becomes the master of himself and he embodies the shiny image of the grand powerful master in an attempt to write a new chapter in his fate; gradually the oppressed break free from 'the Rooster Coop' by cheating his master: "the more I stole from him the more I realized how much he had stolen from me" (Adiga, 2008, p. 135).

Furthermore, the awakening of Balram did not only make him doubt his master's worthiness of owning luxuries but also fueled an intense desire of stealing them. Balram's hypocrisy was driven by envy and doubt of traditions imposed by the system; therefore, his awareness was a fight against the whole slavery system, as he claims that institutions like landlords, police, and government exploit people like him. This turn was pivotal, where the undeclared war and struggle against the lord will soon turn real.

2.2.3. Life and Death Struggle

In this negative stage this mutual recognition ruptures through a fight, producing a hierarchy that promotes a disparity in their chain (Hegel, 1977). The inevitable struggle between the two rivals is a consequence of the slave's awareness of his master's reality where he starts seeing him as a burden that feeds on his energy, and he has to eliminate this obstacle to see forward and reach a new level of transcendence; hence Balram feels liberated the night he kills Ashok. He also starts thinking outside the circle of servitude: "They remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world" (Adiga, 2008, p. 23); hence he develops other priorities other than the master's comfort, and starts to plan a wicked plan: "for every step he'd take, I'd take two" (p. 159).

Although, this comes with many risks he accepted them, because for him it is preferable to be a dead lion than a living dog. He chose death for the master instead of himself, because he started cherishing his free self; although this move was a risk Balram did not hesitate because he saw it as a ticket to freedom, and a chance to write his own life

story: "I was destined not to stay a slave" (p. 24); this highlights his inner dialogue and novel perception of himself. This struggle resulted in many decisions like cutting ties with the exploitative Indian system.

As Pinkard (1996) explained, this negating force breaks down the illusion of abstract freedom forcing individuals to confront the demands of social reality, this notion of opposition paves the way for what is next; he also precedes by saying in reference to the bondsman: he also achieves apparent independence through victory in the life and death struggle for recognition, for further explanation this rebellion highlights the clash between the lord and the bondsman where it is set into an action that resulted in the death of 'Ashok', and the survivor Balram is the victor.

2.2.4. Reversal: the Former Bondsman Becomes the Lord

In this stage, the slave's minor control over the labor provokes a dialectical reversal, primarily by the overcoming of his anxiety and fear of death through gaining self-mastery (Hegel, 1977). The reversal of roles is fueled by the action of violence: "I'm a man of action and change" (Adiga, 2008, p. 02). This shows that Balram created a new self-image that is somehow different than before; his entrepreneurial future started giving him self-respect as a free man, an ex-slave, and a master of himself. Also, he reversed roles by the murder: "I protected his good name when I was his servant, and now that I am (in a sense) his master" (p. 26), and this depicts a complex journey of transformation from past desires of recognition to the present state of freedom.

Although this change seems sudden, it was actually gradual where the protagonist admitted his corruption: "The rest of today's narrative will deal mainly with the sorrowful tale of how I was corrupted from a sweet, innocent village fool into a citified fellow full of debauchery, depravity, and wickedness" (p. 115). This supports the emergence of Balram's new entrepreneurial identity, reflecting Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's dialectical idea that the antithesis struggles against the thesis until a new synthesis is achieved beyond both positions (Ma, 2018), and emphasizes on the urging need for a solution beyond what is known and familiar.

Next, the turn in the story and the big escape is a witness of the antithesis as Balram avows himself *the White Tiger*, born in darkness but awakened to light; this version of

Balam is an unexpected one where he becomes the new master in the Rooster Coop to other slaves whom he exploits but this does not eliminate his past as a slave: "(I confess, Mr. premier: I am not an original thinker_ but I am an original listener)" (Adiga, 2008, p. 26). Finally, Balam proudly announces his victory by saying: "I am my own master" (p. 136); this declared the birth of the neoliberal character that identifies as the future: "I am tomorrow " (p. 03). This self-made man takes pride in being the first of his kind to escape the grip of slavery and become an entrepreneur, as he describes, "I am a self-taught entrepreneur" (p. 03). His pathway is altered as he seeks any approval from the once beloved master, as he stands now in a different place: "I am in the Light now" (p. 186).

In conclusion, Balam's transformation follows a Hegelian dialectic in which the slave, through struggle and self- realization, overturns the master-slave hierarchy and reclaims agency over his life.

2.3. Balam as Subaltern: Spivakian Voice and Silence

2.3.1. The Term Subaltern

Spivak's core question: Can the Subaltern Speak? Exposes how power structures silence the marginalized, forcing their voice into elite frameworks that distort it beyond recognition. In *The White Tiger*, Balam Halwai's first-person narration appears to offer a form of subaltern speech through his account of escape from the "Rooster Coop". However, from a Spivakian perspective, the very possibility of narration raises a paradox; where Balam can tell his story only after acquiring literacy, wealth, and social mobility, which complicates his status as a subaltern speaker.

2.3.2. The Subaltern Condition: Darkness vs. Light

In *The White Tiger*, the protagonist Balam depicts life in India as a sharp division between two separate worlds, one of Light and another of Darkness:

"I am talking of a place in India, at least a third of the country, a fertile place, full of rice fields and wheat fields and ponds in the middle of those fields choked with lotuses and lilies, and water buffaloes wading through the ponds and chewing on the lotuses and lilies. Those who live in this place call it Darkness. Please understand, Your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings Light to my country. Every place on the map of India

near the ocean is well of. But the river brings darkness to India_the black river" (Adiga, 2008, p. 8).

Light represents the heaven of those who have power and money, situated in some Indian cities; whilst Darkness: It denotes rural ignorance and servitude in *The White Tiger*, representing Balram's reality alongside many other lower-caste servants.

This binarity reflects the structural inequalities that define subaltern existence. Balram spent his early life in the village of Laxmangarh, in the darkness, which represents rural poverty, as well as lower social mobility and illiteracy:

" Which black river am I talking of_ which river of Death, whose banks are full of rich, dark sticky mud whose grip traps everything that is planted in it, suffocating and choking and stunting it? Why, I am talking of Mother Ganga, daughter of the Vedas, river of illumination, protector of us all, breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth. Everywhere this river flows, that area is the Darkness. One fact about India is that you can take almost anything you hear about the country from the prime minister and turn it upside down, and then you will have the truth about that thing!" (p. 8).

Balram's life in Laxmangarh exemplifies subalternity as described by Spivak. He was deprived of education and a chance at social welfare: "Me, and thousands of others in this country like me, are half-baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling" (p. 6). He was taken out of school to work at a tea shop, to pay the debt of marrying off his cousin suggesting that he follows his family's way of servitude without questioning anything, he couldn't leave even if he wanted to because servitude was internalized: " I was looking for the key for years... but the door was always open" (p. 151).

In the novel, Balram refers to the system that controls the poor as the Rooster Coop: "The greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop" (p. 102).the Rooster Coop is a metaphor used by Balram to describe the psychological and social system that keeps India's poor obedient and trapped in servitude. Just as roosters in a market watch others being slaughtered yet make no attempt to escape, servants remain loyal to their masters despite exploitation because they are conditioned by fear, family responsibility, and social hierarchy; they know that any act of rebellion could bring severe consequences not only for themselves but also for their families. The

metaphor highlights how oppression is maintained not just through physical force but through internalized control, making the poor complicit in their own subjugation. Being trapped by dominant power structures, Balram initially embodies the subaltern by accepting his role without resistance.

Early on, Balram and other servants are made aware of the stark difference between the different castes and the inequalities they have to face:

"That's my caste, my destiny. Everyone in the Darkness who hears that name knows all about me at once... wherever we went. The owner thought, Ah, they're Halwais, making sweets and tea is in their blood. But if we were Halwais, then why was my father not making sweets but pulling a rickshaw? Why did I grow up breaking coals and wiping tables, instead of eating gulab jamuns and sweet pastries when and where I chose to? Why was I lean and dark and cunning, and not fat and creamy-skinned and smiling ... The man called a cowherd tended cows...Landlords were kind to 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. And only two destinies: eat or get eaten up" (p. 36).

2.3.3. Strategic Essentialism: From Servant to Entrepreneur

Spivak introduces the concept of strategic essentialism as a pragmatic political tool. In this approach, groups may temporarily adopt simplified identities to achieve specific political goals, such as resisting oppression or securing rights. However, she cautions against relying on essentialism in the long term, as it risks reinforcing rigid identities and deepening divisions. Therefore, strategic essentialism should be used carefully and critically, as a temporary strategy rather than a theoretical foundation (Eide, 2016). That is, in a sense, marginalized people may temporarily perform identity to gain power.

Balram at first plays the role of a loyal servant to his master Ashok: "From the start, sir, there was a way in which I could understand what he wanted to say, the way dogs understand their masters" (Adiga, 2008, p. 66). He was truly the embodiment of a perfect servant: "I don't gossip about my masters, I don't steal, I don't blaspheme" (p.34).

Despite Balram recognizing the oppressive system his master was part of, he still considered it his duty to serve him faithfully until he could rebrand himself as an entrepreneur: " It squeezed my heart to see him suffer like this_but where my genuine concern for him ended and where my self-interest began, I could not tell: no servant can ever tell what the motives of his heart are' 'Do we loathe our masters behind a facade of

love_ or do we love them behind a facade of loathing?' We are made mysteries to ourselves by the Rooster Coop we are locked in" (p. 110).

Balam strategically performs different social identities throughout the novel initially, he adopts the role of the loyal servant in order to survive within the social hierarchy. Later he reinvents himself as a businessman, imitating the attitudes and practices of the elite. This transformation illustrates his ability to navigate the structures of power through self-fashioning rather than an example of strategic essentialism in Spivak's original sense.

Also, mimicking the behaviors and attitudes of the upper-class masters in order to escape the poverty of the Rooster Coop, adopting their voices and their elite mindset to climb the social ladder and become a successful entrepreneur. Unfortunately, half-baked entrepreneur whose trapped by the incomplete process of education that creates generations of semi-literate workers unfit for upward mobility (Adiga, 2008). Yet that is not the exact case of Balam as he explains: " Many of my best ideas are, in fact, borrowed from my ex-employer... I am not an original thinker, but I am an original listener" (Adiga, 2008, p. 28). This emphasizes his consistency, and observance.

In his letters, Balam confesses to the Prime Minister that he can no longer return to being his old self, a servant: " The moment you recognize what is beautiful in this world, you stop being a slave" (p. 166). He identifies himself with the figure of The White Tiger, presenting himself as a rare and exceptional individual whose uniqueness justifies his rebellion against the social order. Later on, Balam also takes on the identity of an entrepreneur to rebel, securing success in Bangalore. Yet, he reinvents himself as Ashok Sharma. Balam's new entrepreneur identity is mythologized, as he remains complicit with the very corruption he claims to escape, becoming stuck in elite mimicry. According to Spivak, this short-term win risks essentializing subalternity as neoliberal winning, silencing its radical difference, which she warns against.

2.3.4. Epistemic Violence: Misrepresentation

A key concern in Spivak's work is the concept of epistemic violence, which refers to the way Western systems of knowledge production impose meanings on non-Western societies. According to Spivak, Western academic discourse often serves its own economic and ideological interests by constructing knowledge systems that justify colonial domination. In this framework, the West positions itself as the dominant "Subject" while marginalizing the "Other," including non-Europeans, women, and the poor. Thus, what is accepted as truth is shaped by Western epistemological frameworks (Ascroft et al., 2025).

Western knowledge systems that overwrite subaltern realities, positioning the marginalized as voiceless Others, Balram embodies this when he describes poor bodies: "A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours are different. My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in villages to pull water from wells; the clavicle curved around his neck in high relief, like a dog's collar; cuts and nicks and scars, like little whip marks in his flesh, ran down his chest and waist, below his hip... The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen" (p. 17). Its history is fragmented and somatically unrecorded by official narratives, thus revealing how Postcolonial India sustains colonial erasure; Balram's scars speak truths elites ignore, yet they remain unintelligible outside power's gaze.

Subalterns either get silenced, misrepresented as other people define them, or essentialized, reducing them to stereotypical, autonomous groups. In the novel, Pinky Madam, the wife of Mr. Ashok, the master of Balram, drove by night and accidentally hit a child, then drove away without looking. In the following scene, Balram is summoned by his employers to sign a paper, claiming him as the murderer of that child. He is used as a scapegoat for his employer:

"Can you read, fellow? "Yes, sir." I took the paper from his hand and read: 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... Smiling affectionately at me, the Mongoose said, "We've already told your family about it" (p. 98).

Balram is expected to take full responsibility for a crime he didn't commit, showing the level of devotion and sacrifice expected from him as a servant, pointing out that his opinion doesn't matter, as the people in power have already decided on his behalf,

therefore silencing him and rendering him into an emotionless, thoughtless being without agency over his own life choices.

Even threatening servants with their family's well-being and paying them bribes to agree to go to prison:

"Yes, that's it. Kusum. I drove down to Laxmangarh; it's a bad road, isn't it? and explained everything to her personally. She's quite a woman. He rubbed his forearms and made a big grin, so I knew he was telling the truth. Then he proceeded: 'She says she's so proud of you for doing this. She's agreed to be a witness to the confession as well. That's her thumbprint on the page. Balram. Just below the spot where you're going to sign.' 'If he's illiterate, he can press his thumb,' the man in the black coat said. 'Like this.' He pressed his thumb against the air. 'He's literate (p. 100).

Portraying the systemic corruption and inequalities that servants are facing every day.

Additionally, epistemic violence is present in the novel in the way that masters abuse their servants and decide it's what they want from them, beating them, name-calling them, as well as belittling them: "They expect it from us, Ashok. Remember that_ they respect us for it"(p. 41). Masters essentialize servants into religious pious beings, further reinforcing their control over them as they view them as completely harmless and easily manipulated into a lifetime of servitude and systemic oppression. In the novel, systemic corruption is another way of keeping the lowest caste and the upper caste separated. A big part of corruption is through the voting system, as it is prevalent in the text, during elections, people are promised many good things, including proper representation, only to be let down as another form of epistemic violence, their voices are not heard in the political sphere: "The great socialist himself is said to have rigged every single election in this state. He owns all the roads, the buses, the trains, and even the politicians" (p. 20).

In his letters, Balram speaks in English to the Chinese prime minister, Jiabao despite it not being his first language: "Neither you or I speak English, but there are some things that can only be said in English"(p. 1). This suggests that Balram's self representation is mediated through a language associated with power, global capitalism, and elite communication.

Whilst, leaving his old identity behind: "I was a servant once you see" (p.2). Balram embraces his rupture from the Rooster Coop and decides to become an

entrepreneur: "Don't waste your money on those American books, they're so yesterday. I am tomorrow" (p. 3). Balram adopts entrepreneurial cynicism and literacy gained from Ashok's world." The story of my upbringing is the story of a half-baked fellow. But pay attention, Mr Premier! Fully formed fellows, after twelve years of school and college, don't go around with one hole full of air in their heads...." (p. 8).

Balram reinvents himself as Ashok Sharma, his former boss, mimicking his behavior and thought patterns . "It's amazing. The moment you show cash, everyone knows your language " (p. 180). After murdering Ashok, Balram steals his money and becomes the owner of a taxi driver company; however, it is through corruptive acts that Balram becomes a successful entrepreneur, highlighting his deep enmeshment in the world of the elite with their crooked ways of amassing wealth.

First, Balram commits murder. Afterwards, he steals the bag of money his master used to bribe politicians with. Third, Balram cuts ties with his family, and flees to Delhi, taking the name of Ashok, suggesting that Balram's newfound identity is nothing but a reiteration of his former employer's. Balram narrates his life to the prime minister in the first-person point of view; however, he chooses to completely ignore the marginalized people he knew, not narrating their struggles to the world and focusing only on his success. Subalterns are not represented through Balram's words, only his methods of success and ascending social strata.

Despite Balram becoming literate and wealthy, his way of life suggests he is still trapped in the rooster coop. Living a life of a fugitive hiding from the police in a new city. He narrates in broken English to a foreign elite; the Chinese Premier, his words are pre-mediated by colonial elitism disguised as neoliberal thinking, which Spivak exposed as patriarchal ventriloquism rather than agency. The latter is defined by Cambridge University Press as the ability to speak without moving one's lips, so that the voice appears to be coming from another source. (, n.d.).

Finally, Balram can be read as a subaltern figure because he originates from conditions of caste oppression, poverty, and social exclusion. However, in the strict Spivakian sense he cannot speak as a subaltern. The narrative voice heard throughout the novel emerges only after he acquires literacy, economic power and social mobility. By becoming Ashok Sharma, he gains access to speech, but only by leaving subalternity

behind. Thus, Adiga illustrates Spivak's paradox: Balram speaks, yet the subaltern remains unsaid.

2.4. The Murder of Ashok as Fanonian Decolonization

In *The White Tiger*, Balram's transformation journey can be examined through the psychological view of the decolonization theory. Fanon's ideas of psychic colonization, inferiority complex, the Manichean world, violent clash, and social reconstruction could help explain how oppression generates violence as a way of resistance. This section will aim to investigate how each stage of this process appears in the novel.

2.4.1. Psychic Colonization, the Inferiority Complex, and the Manichean World

In this realm, Fanon says: "the colonist fabricated and keeps fabricating the colonized subject, shaping the identity and psychology of the oppressed through systematic exploitation" (Fanon, 1963, p. 65). This process of shaping the colonists' being through violence is present in one scene where the grand master abuses his servant Balram and declares against any objections: "They expect it from us. Ashok. Remember that—they respect us for it" (Adiga, 2004, p. 41). Furthermore, this systematic programming internalizes violence as an efficient way of communication for the current master, and his servant in the future.

This sets a foundation for some dominant beliefs about the worthiness and strength of the master, and his need to tame the animalistic being who is the servant. In other words, this creates a certain dynamic where the master is considered civilized, educated, wise, and burdened with his servant's constant expectations of transmitting knowledge, orders, and even protecting him from himself. The servant's identity is shaped by the hands of his oppressor, as Balram shares: "A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, White and soft and blank. Ours are different" (p. 15). This difference in perceiving the other's reality through the eyes of his servant is deeply rooted in an inferiority complex, where Balram identifies with those he serves. He even precedes by stating his position in the dark: "Half-baked cities built for half-baked men" (p. 29); moreover, his self-image revolves around not being sufficient for belonging in a free men's world yet, therefore, reinforcing his sense of incompleteness and exclusion from full humanity.

This division is not only psychological, but also spatial, where we witness a manichean world parted between two; in his letter, Balram says that: "India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well off" (p. 8). This co-existence is apparent in Adiga's description of Indian territories, where caste, wealth, education, and politics draw lines between citizens of the same nationality; in different words, the light holds those who are free, whilst the darkness carries their obedient servants.

To emphasize, Fanon's idea of the inferiority complex is related to this division, where belonging to the lower castes creates your position as a secondary citizen, and obliges you to serve the upper class; it helps those in the light to gain more money and wealth out of your physical labor. This creates chains that the servant willingly wears. However, this inferiority will eventually result in deep hatred for the superior master, like Balram's comments about the reading habits of servants: "Just because drivers and cooks in Delhi are reading *Murder Weekly*, it doesn't mean that they are all about to slit their master's necks. Of course, they'd like to. Of course, a billion servants are secretly fantasizing about strangling bosses" (p. 70).

This reflects a hidden desire to kill the colonist whose exploitation wrenches the souls of those who live to serve him. This disparity creates an unequal competition that could never set the two on an equal ground: "These days there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and men with small bellies. And only two destinies: eat—or get eaten up" (p. 36). This world is black or white, shred between two extremes: The rich who work less and earn more, and the poor who deserve less according to their masters. This psychological war devalues human beings: Balram's father said: "My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine, at least one should live like a man" (p. 17). This will be a major reason for Balram's transformation and his escape into the Light district: "I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in the Darkness" (p. 8).

2.4.2. Rage as Psychological Rupture

The oppression of the colonist generates anger, rage, and defiance; moreover, according to Fanon (1963), he radicalizes these ideas by framing violence not as a mere reaction, but rather a necessary psychological rupture that allows the oppressed to reclaim

their humanity from oppressive colonial structures. In Balram's case, this rupture is gradual, formed through repeated experiences of humiliation and injustice. Fanon's passage positions violence not as a simple reflection of the master's violations towards his substitutes, but as an inevitable psychological event, where the servant's internal conflict ruptures into the real world through a violent act; as Balram confesses: "Instead of guilt, what did I feel? Rage" (Adiga, 2008, p. 135).

This state of being within the story describes his psychological turmoil through his internal discourse: "That was when it hit me, in a way it never had before, how the rich always get the best things in life, and all that we get is their leftovers" (p. 137). This clear comparison is an implied declaration of an upcoming revolution against the traditional servant's duties, marking a turning point in his consciousness, transforming passive awareness into active resentment, and the whole system that encourages this exploitation.

This turn in the story introduces us to a new Balram whose fueled with rage towards the traditional slavery structures, hence, rage becomes the emotional catalyst that destabilizes his internalized inferiority, allowing him to reinterpret his state not as fate but as exploitation. Balram begins to detach psychologically from the chains of the Rooster Coop, claiming his right to break free. In Fanonian terms, this moment represents the collapse of the colonized subject's acceptance of domination, paving the way for violent resistance as a means of self-assertion.

2.4.3. Violent Clash: Slaying the Master

The psychological rupture soon turns into a determined action of decolonization as Fanon (1963) explains: "decolonization is 'the violent clash between two opposing forces, colonizer and colonized, a struggle born directly from the oppressive conditions of colonial rule. This clash is not merely physical; it is also psychological'" (p 64). Hence, the protagonist's confession: "I had been ready to slay my master" (Adiga, 2008, p. 157), declares the start of the decolonizing act, accompanied by eagerness for freedom, also signaling his transition from contemplation to action, marking the point at which resistance becomes inevitable, guided by the urging need for a new start as a man.

Balram becomes an ideal for subversion where the violent act broke the duality of existence with the master, whose death set an end to the enslavement of his fellow servant.

The termination of the opposite force via a fight was an unnegotiable event to Balram, whose hesitation comes from an instinct of protecting himself only; his patience only concluded in a final combat with an unarmed force: "Eight months later, I slit Mr. Ashok's throat" (p. 24). This planned act is justified in the eyes of those who are oppressed because it equals freedom, yet is inhumane in the eyes of the colonizer. Hence, the murder was his grand escape from the 'Rooster's Coop' towards the entrepreneurial world of business: "All I wanted was the chance to be a man_and for that, one murder was enough" (p. 190). It is both an end and a beginning, the end of his life as a servant and the initiation of his existence as a self-determined individual. By committing murder, Balram embodies Fanon's notion of violence as a transformative force that enables the colonized subject to assert his humanity.

2.4.4. Decolonial Praxis and Social Reconstruction

Finally, the violent clash between the two rivals extends in a broader form; furthermore, Fanon (2004, as cited in Hook, 2005) states: "beyond Manichean settler and native binarism... sociogeny necessitates decolonial praxis: counter-violence precipitates psychic catharsis to constitute new humanity.", that advocates an egalitarian vision that fosters mutual recognition among decolonized peoples, transcending colonial binaries (Fanon, 1963).

This praxis of organized violence is also a fight against sociogenic oppression that shapes and contributes to the suffering of those at the bottom of the hierarchy: "Now the great socialist had been the boss of the darkness for a while... He had come to clean things up, but the mud of Mother Ganga had sucked him in" (Adiga, 2008, p. 55). Even people from the darkness supported these violations.

This leaves the colonized in a state of constant fear, dehumanization, and absence of independence: "That is the difference between this India and that India: the choice" (p. 182). The act of decolonization through a violent execution directed towards the colonist, particularly 'Mr. Ashok' in this story accelerates a psychic catharsis where Balram's soul is purged, and his body defuses the past humiliation to embrace a new self: "He answered the inspector's question about the animal that comes once in a generation: The White Tiger" (p. 20). Now, Balram is the true White Tiger, an exceptional individual who defies social

norms and limitations through violent resistance, embodying exceptional escape from the rooster coop.

Social reconstruction is highlighted by the existence of the entrepreneurial character that has power, connections, and even servants; hence, this kind of authority promotes a new order of life, and a promise for a different future for those who follow the master Balram; he dreams of starting an English school full of White Tigers. This new identity was a reflection of an old infatuation with a master: "I call myself these days... Ashok Sharma, North Indian entrepreneur" (p. 179). This mimikery is a way to cope with the loss of a life-long relation between two poles whose bonding was never genuine, but in need for a tragic end: "Once I was a driver to a master, but now I am master of drivers" (p. 180). This embodiment of the colonists' identity is apparent through acts of corruption where Balram bribes the Policeman: "Sir, I want to make a small offering of my gratitude to you" (p. 178). This forces the new master to unconsciously follow the old patterns of his past lord: "What would Mr. Ashok do? I wondered" (p. 178). This contradiction depicts the hardships of adapting to a decolonized situation that could potentially lead to repeating oppressive dynamics.

In conclusion, Balram is a distorted new man. He has escaped the coop but has not destroyed it, exemplifying Fanon's critique of a postcolonial elite that replaces the master-servant structure, although Balram resorted to violence as a purifying act to free himself from servitude, yet, his decolonization was incomplete, his journey portrays Fanon's theory of decolonization as a process driven by violence and psychological transformation yet limited by the persistent inequalities in the very system he tried to overcome, leaving him stuck in the world of his masters as he follows their footsteps, he left the coop only to become a version of his master marking an incomplete decolonization. As he exercises his power within structures that remain largely unchanged.

2.5. Conclusion

This analysis of *The White Tiger* has demonstrated the dialectical struggle between master and slave through Balram Halwai's journey against class oppression, subalternism, and social inequality in a deeply corrupt neoliberal India. Through the theoretical perspectives of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subaltern theory, and Frantz Fanon's decolonization theory. The

chapter has shown how structures of domination silence and marginalize the oppressed while simultaneously pushing them toward resistance.

Ultimately, the analysis illustrates that the novel exposes the realities of caste and class oppression in modern India, and the hardships of escaping the structures of the modern slavery system in India, even through violent resistance.

General Conclusion

The White Tiger follows Balram Halwai, a poor villager boy who rises from poverty to become a wealthy entrepreneur through ambition, manipulation, and crime. The novel exposes the harsh realities of class inequalities, corruption, and the struggle for freedom in modern Indian society. This thesis has shown that Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* presents Balram Halwai's journey as a struggle against class oppression, marginalization, and social inequalities.

The problem this study addressed lies in the paradoxical nature of Balram Halwai's transformation in *The White Tiger*, where the struggle for freedom and selfhood is achieved through violence, domination, and the reproduction of oppressive structures. Although Balram resists social and economic marginalization, his transformation ultimately blurs the boundary between liberation and complicity within systems of power.

Through Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic, Spivak's subaltern theory, and Fanon's decolonization theory, the novel portrays power dynamic and identity struggle that pushes slaves towards resistance. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the research aimed to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the structures of power and forms of resistance depicted in the novel, and how Balram Halwai's transformation reflects the tension between servitude and self-consciousness within postcolonial Indian society.

Critical interpretations of *The White Tiger* remain fragmented because existing scholarship has not yet unified Hegelian master-slave dialectics, Spivak's subaltern theory, and Fanon's psycho-political ideas into a single analytical framework. This has led to studies of power, subjectivity, and transformation in the novel being carried out in isolated ways, overlooking the complexity of Balram's narrative voice and his negotiation of agency within systems of domination and resistance.

In *The White Tiger*, the Hegelian master-slave dialectic destabilizes power by revealing the mutual dependence between master and servant, where Balram's labor and recognition initially sustain the hierarchy but eventually expose its instability. Through fear, servitude, and close observation of the master's corruption and dependence, Balram gradually develops self-consciousness and awareness of his oppression. Labor becomes the process through which he transforms from a submissive bondsman into an independent

subject who rejects the Rooster Coop, overturns domination through rebellion, and ultimately reclaims agency by becoming the master of himself.

From a Spivakian perspective, Balram's empowerment remains deeply paradoxical. Although he gains a voice and narrates his own story, his narrative is addressed to a global capitalist audience, namely the Chinese Premier, rendering his voice performative and strategically constructed, preventing him from articulating an authentic subaltern consciousness. Balram initially is presented as subaltern due to his social, economic, and political marginalization. However, after attaining wealth, agency, and narrative authority, his position as a true subaltern becomes conflicted. Rather than representing collective subaltern resistance, Balram prioritizes individual advancement and ultimately reproduces the very structures of domination he seeks to escape. Consequently, Balram embodies the paradox of the speaking subaltern; he gains a voice only by assimilating into the very structures that silence others.

Furthermore, Fanon's concepts of violence and decolonization provide a deeper understanding of the novel's social divisions and the aftermath of Balram's rupture from the system. Balram's escape from the Rooster Coop represents an individual act of liberation rather than a genuine process of collective decolonization. Although Balram commits murder and violently rejects his master and breaks free from servitude, he doesn't dismantle the exploitative structures of the system. Instead, Balram rebrands himself as a neoliberal capitalist, and ultimately reproduces the same relations of domination that once confined him, this reflects back to Fanon's warning that the postcolonial elite merely replaces the colonizer without transforming the oppressive system itself. Thus, Balram's decolonization remains incomplete.

This analysis also shows that Balram's violence is not a matter of personal grudge, but the result of an unjust system that entangled him. In this sense, his murder of Ashok becomes a form of rebellion against a system that has denied his dignity, freedom, and voice. Hegels' dialectic highlights Halwai's journey of gaining self-consciousness Through an exposure to the other; whilst Fanon's idea of decolonization via a violent act explains Balram's transformation, and Spivak's subaltern theory highlights the reality of misrepresentation of those who are voiceless. Together, these theories make Balram's story more than a personal rise; they reveal it as a response to a deeply corrupt system in India,

furthermore, each theory illuminates a different facet of his struggle, as they *unveil The White Tiger* as a systematic dismantling of caste oppression in modern India.

Finally, this study concludes that *The White Tiger* exposes the harsh reality of a divided India; in which the rich are feeding on the physical labor of the poor. Balram's movement from servant to entrepreneur reflects neoliberalism. Adiga suggests that in an unjust world going by the rules is impossible to those who are marginalized, because it is never in their favor. Thus, Balram's story becomes a powerful tale of how claiming voice, and identity is through active resistance against oppressive norms, and how freedom in such a world may come only through struggle, and subversion.

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary interpretations of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, due to restricted access to her primary texts. As a result, some of Spivak's complex terminology and theoretical nuances may not be fully captured in the analysis. Moreover, because this research relied on an abridged edition of *The White Tiger*, some research points and textual details may have been limited or absent. Furthermore, the study focuses primarily on the protagonist in *The White Tiger*, which narrows the scope of interpretation. Consequently, the experiences of female and other marginal characters are not extensively explored, particularly from a subaltern perspective.

In addition, the application of Frantz Fanon is selective, emphasizing key concepts such as violence, the Manichean structure of colonial societies, and the inferiority complex. Other relevant aspects of Fanon's work remain beyond the scope of this study. Finally, the study is shaped by its use of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's master-slave dialectic as a central framework, which may privilege certain interpretations of power relations while excluding alternative critical perspectives. Future research could address these limitations by engaging directly with Spivak's primary texts, expanding the analysis to include female characters, and applying a broader range of Fanonian concepts to the novel as well as doing a comparative study between traditional and modern slavery in India.

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Appendix

1.1. The biography of the writer

Aravind Adiga was born in 1974 in Chennai, India, into a Kannadiga family from Mangalore and spent his early life in southern India before continuing his education in Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. He studied English literature at Columbia University and later at the University of Oxford, he went through some experiences that shaped his global outlook and influenced his literary engagement with issues of modernity and globalization (Agrawal, 2019).

Before becoming a novelist, Adiga worked as a journalist for international publications such as *The Financial Times* and *Time*, which contributed to his realist narrative style and his focus on social inequality, corruption, and economic transformation in India. His debut novel, *The White Tiger* (2008), won the Booker Prize and brought him international recognition as a leading voice in contemporary Indian English literature. The novel is widely noted for its critique of caste oppression, poverty, and neoliberal capitalism. Adiga's later novels, including *Between the Assassinations* (2008) and *Last Man in Tower* (2011), further explore urbanization, class struggle, and political corruption in modern India, reinforcing his reputation as a writer of social realism and postcolonial critique (Agrawal, 2019).

1.2. Synopsis of the White Tiger

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) is a first-person epistolary narrative written through a series of letters addressed by Balram Halwai to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao over seven nights. Born in the impoverished village of Laxmangarh, Balram grows up within what he calls the "Darkness," a social environment characterized by poverty, caste discrimination, illiteracy, and economic exploitation (Adiga, 2008). Coming from a lower-caste family of laborers and rickshaw pullers, he is deprived of educational opportunities and forced into labor from an early age before eventually becoming a chauffeur for a wealthy landlord's family.

Throughout the novel, Balram explains the condition of India's poor through the metaphor of the "rooster coop," in which servants remain psychologically trapped by fear, obedience, and social conditioning despite being aware of their exploitation. This metaphor

exposes the rigid structures of caste and class that continue to shape Indian society. After moving to Delhi to work for Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam, Balram becomes increasingly conscious of the corruption, hypocrisy, and moral decay of the wealthy elite. Simultaneously, he begins imitating their language, manners, and capitalist values in order to survive and maneuver within the system. (Adiga, 2008)

The major turning point of the novel occurs when Balram murders Mr. Ashok, steals the money entrusted to him, and escapes to Bangalore, where he establishes his own taxi business (Adiga, 2008). His transformation from servant to entrepreneur symbolizes both resistance against oppression and participation in the same exploitative structures he once condemned. Although Balram achieves economic mobility, his success is founded upon violence, manipulation, and moral compromise, thereby reflecting the contradictions of neoliberal capitalism and social mobility in contemporary India. As Manav Ratti (2020) argues, the novel presents justice, class, and violence through the perspective of a subaltern subject who attempts to reclaim agency within an unequal social order.

More broadly, *The White Tiger* can be interpreted as a major work of Indian Writing in English that critiques globalization, postcolonial modernity, and socioeconomic inequality in India. By narrating his story in English to an international political figure, Balram positions himself simultaneously as a marginalized subject and an active participant in global capitalist discourse. In this sense, the novel exposes the tension between India's global image as an emerging economic power and the lived realities of exploitation, servitude, and class conflict experienced by the lower classes. Consequently, Adiga transforms Balram's personal journey into a wider social critique of caste hierarchy, neoliberalism, and the unequal distribution of power in modern India (Adiga, 2008).