

There We¹ Meet: A Global Encounter in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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1. Literature as a Space for Global Conversation Among Nations: Cultural Globalization.

Globalization and, in particular, cultural globalization, is a key concept in our contemporary world. In the last decades of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries, the western world has been shelled by the need to change our view of the world as nation-divided, with a constant urge to break geographical barriers, especially in Europe, attempting to reinforce the idea of a strong Europe that would make its way in the world as one and united. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, the idea of a strong and unbeatable West has faded away. At that point the West began to recognize factors that were starting to shake the balance and sense of safety of the western welfare state, which relied on the fact that the US controlled the global movements, with all the positive and negative implications. Today, recent issues like the Brexit, which seems to have been the starting point to push forward immigration policies like Trump's and those of other European governments, are issues that make us go back to consider and maybe redefine the idea of the global in political and economic terms, but maybe not in cultural terms.

¹ José Luis Caramés Lage and I met when I was a third-year student of English Philology at the University of Oviedo in 1985. He raised my, at that time, inexpert intellectual curiosity towards the Indian cultural context. English Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures, and more specifically Indian Literature in English, have become my main field of research and teaching since then. José Luis was my mentor for thirty years and he will be present in my academic life forever. He believed in human beings and their connections among cultures and times. This article pays homage to *our* encounter and likewise to the evolution of Indian Writing in English throughout the years running parallel to our friendship.

Within this framework, I would like to emphasize that the concept of cultural globalization is one that would not change and, I dare say, should not change, because as Clark (2007) states, the human condition is connected with parts of the universe across time and space. Thus, we are global beings that constitute a global culture that is based on the very root of our human condition.

This idea of a global culture can be identified in the context of literature, since narratives are the reflection of the human life through time and space. In addition, the concept of glocalization² also becomes evident through literature, since any literary text is linked to a particular historical time in a particular cultural context. Literature, then, becomes an ideal space for illustrating the intertwining of the local and the global, and for identifying elements of the cultural globalization which prove that the human condition has been, is, and will always be global, despite the political and economic movements and tendencies that agglutinate specific circumstances all throughout our history and histories.

This article aims to show how Indian Literature in English lies at the core of cultural globalization and how authors project their views of the world through their stories. The literary text becomes, then, a space for a global/glocal encounter, because, as Aung San Su Kyi writes,

On the one hand literature is a reflection of current views and values... On the other hand literature could serve to shape social and political opinion by spreading new ideas and more important, by giving concrete verbal form to feelings and aspirations which might otherwise have remained at an inchoate level in the minds of many readers (2010: 157).

According to Paul Hopper (2007), there are different ways of approaching the concept of cultural globalization. Consequently he refers to three different “waves”: theorists, skeptics and transformationalists (2007: 2). In the same way, he alludes to different phases of cultural globalization: the pre modern period (up to 1500), the modern period (1500-1945), and the contemporary period (1945-onwards). In this framework, as previously said, the Indian Narrative in English, and in particular Aravind Adiga’s novel *The White Tiger* (2008), stands as an example of how the Indian novel turns into the site for the convergence of different elements of the Indian global which depict the last phase of evolution of the concept of cultural globalization, since “individual cultures and cultural forms now have a global reach” (Hopper 2007: 7).

Likewise, we also identify an evolution of the Indian social novel from the times of the so-called Founding Fathers; this reinforces as well the concept of the glocal, which might actually be more adequate to be used in the contemporary context of world political and economic issues. The current world is a hybrid place where interactive forces are at play and conform the global human condition. There is a constant exchange of selves which represent national societies that shape a global world system of societies where the essence of humankind lies. Therefore, “globalization involves the creation and incorporation

²The concept of glocalization has been explained by numerous critics like Roland Robertson in *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (1992), Arif Dirlik in *Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism* (2007) and George Ritzer and Zeinep Ataley (eds.) in *Readings in Globalization: Key Concepts and Major Debates* (2010).

of locality, processes which themselves largely shape, in turn, the compression of the world as a whole" (Hopper 207:16).

Taking this into account, we could consider that the universal can be contextualized and vice versa, making it possible to particularize specific elements of the universal experience which will reflect regional, local and other forms of distinctiveness, which conforms the glocal.

As Arif Dirlik (2008) discussed: "One of the most ignored aspects of the question of culture under conditions of globality is the hearing acquired by native epistemologies, which serve as the basis for claims to 'alternative modernities'" (32). Therefore, literature becomes a useful tool to challenge many current social problems in the contemporary world, being the lack of communication among human beings, paradoxically, one of the most serious issues and the cause for many violent episodes of confrontation among nations nowadays. As Dirlik says, "[...] it should be easier now than earlier to put native knowledge that is quite close at hand to practical use in the solution of social problems" (33).

We will frame our analysis of the novel within the last phase of development of cultural globalization. The intense global flow that characterizes the contemporary world, the rapid interconnection among nations have caused different reactions towards the possibility of defining the concept of globalization as a means to integrate or else to disperse and be cause of conflicts, as I have argued before. It has been frequently objected that identifying and isolating a cultural element does not mean that it should be found anywhere else and thus become an epitome of globalization. But what is clearly evident is that

To look for patterns and clusters as well as degrees of global interconnectedness, whether this is in the form of migration, intercultural contact, trade, the movement of ideas could be the most appropriate and productive way of conceptualizing globalization. Cultural globalization is not distinct from other dimensions of globalization, and is in fact intertwined with many forms of human activity. Thus, studying it necessitates undertaking an interdisciplinary approach. It is appropriate to conceive globalization as a plural rather than unitary phenomenon, as globalizations rather than globalization (Hopper 2007: 8).

Furhermore, the concept of imagination as the framework of the cultural imaginary gathers together symbolic and cultural elements that are linked to historical processes which are clearly contextualized. Consequently, we could conclude that imagination plays a fundamental role in the global order, since it becomes the space where social and cultural practices are organized and where the negotiation between the individual and the global takes place. This is why cultural identities cannot be dissociated from social and cultural imaginations which, in turn, drive the concept of imagination to a central core in the cultural histories of modernity, inevitably linked with literary representations (Su 2011: 3-19). According to this, we can understand imagination as a social practice where people are involved and get in touch with other experiences and conceptions of the world, with the aim of conforming collectivities. From here it can be inferred that the individual breaks barriers such as nation, race, religion and social class in a transnational process.

It is therefore justified my aim to consider the literary text as the space where the glocal imagination is represented. Literature becomes the space for conversation

among nations and it is therefore transnational. The relationship between literature and globalization is not something new. The 1980s constitute a significant landmark if we consider that it is from then that the emergence of postcolonial literature offers the possibility to link the concepts of culture and identity.

The social issues of the Indian context influenced by the different historical moments where they are framed have always found expression through the Indian English literary text. In this vein, we can talk of an evolution that leads us to our point of departure for our analysis of Adiga's novel, the place where an encounter between the social issues and specific cultural elements of the Indian context coalesce with the global.

Before approaching *The White Tiger*, it is necessary to set a frame in which this author finds the reference for his narrative and which shows the evolution of the Indian social novel into the contemporary and even the transnational. At this point we can establish a connection with works like *Money* (1984), by Martin Amis, and *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), by Tom Wolfe, altogether being the representation of how modern societies, and eventually individuals, become victims of corruption and ambition in a globalized context. These three novels capture the image and negative influence of cities, rather global megacities, like New York, as a western representation, and New Delhi, in the case of Adiga, as microcosms where the human being is devoured by the forces of greed and ambition.

In this respect, Aravind Adiga's novels become the paradigm of the global narrative. Greatly influenced by authors like Mulk Raj Anand in the context of the Indian subcontinent, according to R.B.H. Goh (2014), we can also place him "together with names of writers of mid-19th century such as Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins, Sheridan Le Fanu and Charles Dickens" (142). We can see here, that his narrative becomes the place where not only a global encounter takes place, but also becomes transnational. What we find in common between his novels and these writers is the social theme. All of them represent a society immersed in deep and rapid socioeconomic growth and transition, emphasizing specifically the contrast between the rich and the poor. For this purpose, we find in their narratives a special illustration of the social circumstances of a desperate working middle class, individuals that are incapable of establishing social relations based on ethics and moral behaviours, in consequence their protagonists are driven to extreme situations. We find that the novel becomes the representation of social anxieties with regard to the working class that is immersed in a sort of social dysfunction that causes situations of corruption, manipulation and, frequently, murder.

In the case of the novel under analysis, these social anxieties are reflection of a culture that has lost its identity. The Indian subcontinent is not postcolonial anymore. As Adiga's novels show, India has gone global, and the image of the Indian society depicted in *The White Tiger* and, also, in *Last Man in Tower* (2011), is framed within a social structure chiefly dominated by money.

2. Aravind Adiga as Paradigm of the Evolution of the Global and Social Indian Novel.

In my opinion, Adiga's narrative stands as the representative clash and encounter of the different contexts and times (late 19th century England, the 1930s

India, US 20th century and early 21st century India), which, as I have previously pointed out, seem to be related, precisely because his narrative is culturally global.

While the very late version of global capitalism operating in many Asian societies today differs in many respects from the nascent globalization and pre-Fordist capitalism in the England of the 19th century, certain similarities persist (Goh 2014: 150).

The background where the plot takes place not only in Adiga's narrative but also in other contemporary Indian writers, is the urban environment. Adiga depicts in a very accurate way the essence of the megacities. Cities like Mumbai, Delhi and Calcutta become the place(s) where we witness the decay of a working class affected by the culture of money and lacking ways to assimilate the arrival of consumerism and a false progress based on global capitalism. In this sense, it is clear the influence of Anand, who portrayed in his novels *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and others, the effects of industrialization in a traditional Indian society which found itself forced to categorize individuals according to their economic wealth, independently of their caste-based social organization. As Anand himself stated, "there are only two types of persons in the world: the rich and the poor" (*Coolie*: 149).

Balam, in *The White Tiger*, tells us his story, which stands for the story of many other Indians. He aims to be the representative contemporary image of half the population in the subcontinent. Using irony and intertextual reference, which reminds us of *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) by Nirad C. Chaudhuri, he says:

The Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian. That's what I ought to call my life story.

Me and thousands of others in this country like me, are half-baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling.

[...] The story of my upbringing is the story of how a half-baked fellow is produced (10-11).

Later in the novel we find the reality of a great majority of the Indian population depicted:

The rich live in big housing colonies [...].

Thousands of people live on the sides of the road in Delhi. They have come from Darkness too- you can tell by their thin bodies, filthy faces, by the animal-like way they live under the bridges and overpasses, making fires and washing and taking lice out of their hair while the cars roar past them (119-20).

Delhi is described almost like a monster which has absorbed places around, like for instance Gurgaon, which "is the most American part of the city. [...] Ten years ago, they say, there was nothing in Gurgaon, just water buffalos and fat Punjabi farmers" (122). This image contrasts with today's reality:

Today it's the *modernest* suburb of Delhi. American Express, Microsoft, all the big American companies have offices there. The main road is full of shopping malls - each mall has a cinema inside! (122).

In this megacity, the protagonist Balram fights his way to improve his stage in society. From being an illiterate man who never finished school, he becomes “a self-taught entrepreneur” (6).

This also reminds us of the main characters in the novels by Dickens: *Oliver Twist* (1837), *David Copperfield* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-61) etc., where we find the portrayal of a 19th-century England. Individuals of the lower classes of society tried to survive in the city of London, victims to the effects of the Industrial Revolution. Cities, thus, seem to be the common framework where plots develop; London is replaced by Mumbai, Delhi and Calcutta in Adiga’s narrative.

The concepts of the global, the glocal and the hybrid are clearly shaped within the context of the so-called “cosmopolis” or “global cities”, because it is precisely in cities where they originate. Cities are conformed by a mixture of communities racially and ethnically different which are spread along segregated and differentiated spaces. These cosmopolis are considered cultural locations which are understood and represented in the media and in literature as microcosms of the world. They are also linked to the idea of a “global conscience”, a cultural mosaic where different individuals coexist and inhabit the same location. This is where lies the global character inherent to cities, through the lives of individuals who stand as the main personification of the relationship between cosmopolis and globalization. According to Chambers (1993),

The city, the contemporary metropolis, is for many the chosen metaphor for the experience of the modern world. In its everyday details, its mixed histories, languages and cultures, its elaborate evidence of global tendencies and local distinctions, the figure of the city, as both a real and an imaginary place, apparently provides a reading map for reading, interpretation and comprehension (188).

This reality that I am here describing is currently understood as the idea of “the global city”, the city we find in contemporary Indian writing. It was Saskia Sassen who first labelled the concept in 2001, to establish a distinction with “the big city”. Sassen noticed the changes that cities were suffering under the effects of globalization, which were turning into representations of the global, losing in the process their local footprint. Therefore, we could conclude that contemporary metropolis or global cities symbolize the changes that are taking place globally in current times. Whatever happens in the world has an immediate global repercussion. In consequence, globalization also affects global social relationships which, in turn, bring closer different geographical areas. There is a reciprocal force that links all events happening all over the world (Held & Thomson 1990: 64). A good example are the effects of the terrorist attacks that are currently taking place such as in New York, Madrid, London, Paris. The western world seems to be joint together as a victim of yihaddist madness. This demonstrates, again, the interconnection of the global and the local, because “[...] around the world, local events bear the imprint of global processes. Local and global events become more and more intertwined. The local feeds into the global as well” (Lechner & Boli 2015: 4).

Some of the main characteristics of global cities are their big level population, the variety of their inhabitants, their role in the global context, and their cultural

relevance. The main feature of megacities is diversity. We frequently identify a dominant culture that constitutes the great majority of the space, but there are also other cultures and identities that shape the image of the city. This projects a cultural diversity that gathers a multiethnic and multiracial population coming from different nationalities which has been increased by the migratory flows happening all over the world. As a consequence, the global city represents a culture that originates through the contact of many different cultures and which has a fundamental role for a complete understanding of the contemporary culture (Hannerz 1996).

References to the image of Delhi as a cosmopolis are found all through Adiga's novel, and it is described as an aggressive environment. This image is shared by many other Indian writers, from Anita Desai in *Voices in the City* (1965), to more contemporary Indian authors like Kiran Desai, Amit Chaudhuri, Jeet Tayil or Jhumpa Lahiri.

The following description in *The White Tiger* reminds us of a portrayal of Bombay that Anand provided in *Coolie* through which the writer appeals to the senses of the reader:

Rush hour in Delhi. Cars scooters, motorbikes, autorickshaws, black taxis, jostling for space on the road. The pollution is so bad that the men on the motorbikes and scooters have a handkerchief wrapped around their faces- each time you stop at a red light, you see a row of men with black glasses and masks on their faces, as if the whole city were out on a bank heist that morning.

There was a good reason for the face; they say the air is so bad in Delhi that it takes ten years off a man's life (133).

If in the aforementioned novels we find individuals who end up overwhelmed by the urban environment, Balram learns how to survive in Delhi so as to avoid having to go back to the "Darkness" from where he has managed to "escape":

The main thing to know about Delhi is that the roads are good, and the people are bad. The police are *totally* rotten. If they see you without a seatbelt, you'll have to bribe them a thousand rupees (124).

The main character in *The White Tiger* could perfectly be taken from a picaresque novel, though we cannot consider him the typical trickster, nor the novel a typical picaresque narrative. He tells us the way he managed to flee from his social status and improve in social terms, and he describes himself as someone with hopes and expectations despite adverse circumstances. He has faith in himself. His father, who belonged to "the Dark side", had a plan for him and he managed to fulfil it, because, as children are taught: "any boy in India can grow up to become prime minister of India" (35). Balram, "intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in the crowd of thugs and idiots" (35), learns how to survive in the jungle, like "the white Tiger, the rarest of animals - the creature that comes along only once in a generation" (35). This can also remind us of the protagonist of *Q & A: A Novel* (2005), by Vikas Swarup (*Slumdog Millionaire*), who strives his way within the urban environment of Mumbai, and successfully escapes the slums. The difference here is that the main character in Swarup's novel is a positive figure as

opposed to Balram, who thrives in society making use of ingenious and skilful arts that even justify murder.

Balram has faith in himself, and also in the nation. The novel tackles the trope of time establishing a game between the past, the present and the future, the colonial the postcolonial and the global. He talks about the future of emerging nations and the race for power between China and India. He explains to His Excellency Wen Jiabao, Mr Premier; that:

Apparently, sir, you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect, except that you don't have entrepreneurs. And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy or punctuality, *does* have entrepreneurs. Thousands and thousands of them. Especially in the field of technology. And these entrepreneurs –*we* entrepreneurs– have set up all these outsourcing companies that virtually run America now (4).

It is here explicitly made evident the paradox of the subcontinent, where thousands of people are illiterate, being at the same time one of the most technologically developed nations in the world. We find an opposing attitude towards colonization: “[...] only three nations have never let themselves be ruled by foreigners: China, Afghanistan and Abyssinia. These are the only three nations I admire” (5); and also towards neo colonization. An emphasis is placed on the hopeful future of nations such as India: “don't waste your money on those American books. They're so *yesterday*. I am tomorrow” (6). He considers China a mirror where to be reflected:

Out of respect for the love of liberty sown by the Chinese people, and also in the belief that the future of the world lies with the yellow man and the brown man now that our erstwhile master, the white-skinned man, has wasted himself through buggery, mobile phone usage, and drug abuse [...] (5-6).

Adiga's novel portrays the idea of a modern contemporary India that shows that there has been an evolution, but in the wrong way. We find the dehumanization of individuals who belong to the middle-class, their anxieties, how they manage to survive in the complexity of Indian megacities, from a physical viewpoint and also, and most importantly, from a human perspective, immersed in a society where relationships are based mainly on money:

Money interposes itself between human relationships, whether in the form of dowries and family incomes in marriage matches, the labour migration that divides families, greed and ostentatious display in the wealthy class, or the spectre of corruption that haunts India's modernization (Goh 2014: 156).

Balram and his story, therefore, could be considered representative of Indian capitalism itself, and the fact that we can establish a clear relationship, as we have seen, linking the stories of different individuals placed in different contexts and historical times –Munoo (*Coolie*), Pip (*Great Expectations*), Oliver (*Oliver Twist*), Balram (*The White Tiger*) and Self (*Money*)–, makes literature a place where to identify the essence of cultural globalization, and the literary text becomes the

tool to isolate different elements that being local, can be extrapolated into the global. Adiga's novel in a clear evolution of the Indian narrative makes evident the existence of global cultural elements that conform the glocal image of India: the contrast between the rich and the poor, multiculturalism, the reality of megacities, crime in the city, terrorism, cosmopolitanism, lack of values in the new generations, ecology, technology. Adiga depicts an Indian reality that is the very real image of the cultural global of our times.

As we have previously stated, *The White Tiger* also stands as the confluence of the development of the social Indian novel. We find clear influence of several Indian writers, from the Founding Fathers to the contemporary Indian novel in English: Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan to Salman Rushdie or Arundhati Roy. Novels like *Coolie* and *The Untouchable* set the firm start of the social novel in the subcontinent. In *Coolie*, for instance, Anand's narrative lacks emotional tone, as in Adiga's. Anand's Marxist ideology is represented through the view of the world that he depicts. He aims to give a faithful image of the social reality of the subcontinent at the times of colonization with a direct judgement that turns quite often into a critical attitude of the Indian context. He uses no rhetorical forms and he tries to portray an image of India during the colonial period free from any sort of romantic idealism. The title of the book, *Coolie*, implies in itself the social stance of this writer, since it refers to the outcasts within the Indian social hierarchy. Munoo, the young protagonist, reminds us of Dickens's Oliver and Pip, in their effort to make their way as victims of their society. This is why he is considered the Indian Dickens, and here we also prove that cultural globalization is not a concept that only refers to present-day societies.

The cultural aspects that are more noticeable in his narrative stem from his interest for social problems and the changes that have taken place in India, mostly during the 20th century, due to the contact with western ways and beliefs. This interest is also shown through the symbols that can be identified in the book. The protagonist, Munoo, is a little boy who represents the typical coolie, he is the direct reflection of the social injustice that exists in India, then and nowadays; Bombay (Mumbai), the city, can also be considered a symbol as the place which unites altogether the diversity that characterizes India, with its multiplicity of races, religions and tongues. At some stage in the narration, the statue of Queen Victoria becomes the symbolic representation of the power exercised by British cultural imperialism during the times of colonization. Munoo moves throughout the narration in a constant dialogue with the environment that surrounds him, so the context informs our little boy about the contrasts between India and the West, Britain (people, means of transport, odours, shapes, sizes, sounds). In *Coolie*, Anand, seems to open to us, readers, the soul of the city of Bombay during those times, presenting the same kind of effects as the Industrial Revolution in 19th century England projected in the city of London precisely, represented by Dickens in his novels. We find in Anand's narrative, on the one hand, the socio-economic contrasts brought about by the effects of capitalism, based mainly on the following opposition: the poor *vs.* the rich, exactly the same as Dickens' narratives. And, on the other hand, the effects caused by imperialism, as viewed through the clash between the East and the West, based mainly on the western urge for materialism as opposed to tradition, or what is the same, the global and the local.

Adiga's *The White Tiger* stands, then, as a clear result of the evolution of the Indian narrative in English. The novel becomes the confluence of the social and the global, as we have said. It provides a portrayal of 21st - century India, a demystified image of the subcontinent free from any Western stereotypical bias:

[...] 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. But the river brings darkness to India—the black river (58).

But apart from Anand's influence we could also find the trace of the other Founding Fathers; we are reminded of Narayan's style, since the narrative shows a satirical tone with serious concerns underlying, in which we identify a stern criticism of contemporary India. There are many contextual references that prove the clear discontent with which Adiga sees the subcontinent. Balram is the "new guru". Narayan portrayed in *The Guide* (1958) how the community raises a person to the status of a guru for the common welfare; there is a sense of the collective in India and the need to make their hopes tangible in the person of fakirs, gurus, etc. Adiga shows ironically, the image of Balram as the guru of the 21st century:

About three years ago when I became, briefly, a person of national importance owing to an act of entrepreneurship, a poster with my face on it found its way to every post office, railway station, and police station in this country (11).

He becomes the new entrepreneur, product of the new India, where capitalism and technology have affected all spheres of life: "[...] we Indians just take to technology like ducks to water" (12).

India is presented in a very realistic way, and this can also be exemplified by the use that Adiga makes of Indian sacred symbols such as the Ganga River, also found in the novel. The image of the Ganga that appears in *The White Tiger* does not match with the spiritual image presented by Raja Rao in *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), where the sacredness of the river impregnates all the steps taken by Rama, the protagonist of the story, in his intellectual and spiritual search.

In *The White Tiger*, Balram ironically describes Mother Ganga, which, as he says, "[is] daughter of the Vedas, river of illumination, protector of us all, breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth" (15). But in contrast he describes the truth and reality of what the river really is: "[...] everywhere this river flows, that area is Darkness" (15), evidently influenced by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). He explicitly states that the government is tricky and tourists are deceived when they are urged to come to the place and find spiritual liberation, because "the Ganga is the river of emancipation" (15), and Benares is where they come ready to take photographs of the naked *sadhus*. Balram quickly recommends "not to dip in the Ganga, unless you want your mouth full of faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and seven different kinds of industrial acids" (15); this is the truth about the Ganga:

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 (14-15).

We also find in the narrative references to religion and Indian gods:

This is Hanuman, everyone's favourite god in the Darkness. Do you know about 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 (19).

Through this ironic explanation he tells us about the influence of gods and religion on Indian social behaviours, and goes on to tell us that "these are the kind of gods that have foisted on us [...] Understand now how hard it is for a man to win his freedom in India" (19), which tells us, once more, of the influence of religion and traditions in 21st century India in spite of the technological advance that has taken place in the subcontinent.

We also find references to the situation of women in India, where the strong patriarchal structure still keeps them on the margins of society. The distinction between men and women is made explicit in fragments like the following:

Once you walk into the house, you will see [...] the women. Working in the courtyard. My aunts and cousins and Kusum, my granny. One of them preparing the meal for the buffalo (21).

Meanwhile, "men and boys sleep in another corner" (21). We are told that we can still find in India the arrangement of marriages, and how the birth of a girl in the family can mean bankruptcy due to the payment of the dowry when she gets married. Adiga refers to the fact that Indian weddings might be very attractive for the west, where there are even trips organized from other countries "to get married Indian-style" (36); but the reality that underlies is the fact that "the family had taken a big loan from the Stork so they could have a lavish wedding and a lavish dowry [...]" (36).

The social caste also determines your destiny:

[...]what s your last name again?
'Halway.'
'Halway...'. He turned to the small dark man. 'What caste is that, top or bottom?'
And I knew that my future depended on the answer to this question. [...] That s my caste - my destiny" (62-3).

Even though it seems that the new India is ruled by more "modern" social rules, the truth is that the caste system is still firmly rooted in the social structure of India. People try to get rid of it, especially in urban environments, and tend to try and hide a reality that is still widely spread, and Balram considers that "he should explain a thing or two about caste. Even Indians get confused about this word, especially educated Indian in the cities, they ll make a mess explaining it to you" (63).

The issue of caste drives us into one of the most important aspects that the novel highlights and it is the contrast between the rich and the poor. Anand made this explicit in *Coolie* in the 1930s and Adiga confirms that nowadays. This contrast that in the times of the British colonization represented a new social definition in India, brought about by the influence of the west, nowadays is a fact.

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 (64).

Money is the new God, and the new social reality of India is defined in terms of wealth. We find how human relationships are influenced by the issue of money, which reminds us of Martin Amis' *Money* (1984). The new India has turned into a pseudo capitalist society.

Here, then, we identify the same contrast between the rural and the urban that characterized many settings in the Indian novels of the 1930s; but the contemporary urban has become the epitome of a country that has undergone an apparently great change, that seems to have lost the true essence of a nation that was once guided by Gandhian philosophy, which urged Indian people to maintain their traditions:

But...things have changed so much in India. There are so many more things I could do here than in New York now. [...] The way things are changing in India now, this place is going to be like America in ten years (89).

The corollary is that Indian people have been contaminated by money, and thus corruption has broken into all the spheres of life: politics, institutions, human relationships, are all infected by money, the new god of the new times:

The main thing to know about Delhi is that the roads are good, and the people are bad. The police are totally rotten. If they see you without a seat belt, you'll have to bribe them a hundred rupees (124).

So New Delhi is presented as the place where corruption takes place almost in a natural sort of way: "it seems like this is all I get to do in Delhi. Take money out of banks and bribe people" (240). Balram feels suddenly the reality of many of the inhabitants of the city, and at some point breaks into the narrative to tell us the change he feels he has experienced:

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 (197).

The Indian city of New Delhi becomes the representation of the global city, but it is the microcosm of India at the same time, with its past and with its present. As Balram describes it:

It is the capital of *two* countries - two Indias. The Light and the Darkness both flow in to Delhi. Gurgaon, where Mr. Ashok lived, is the bright, modern end of the city, and this place, Old Delhi, is the other end. Full of things the modern world forgot all about - rick-shaws, old stone buildings, and Muslims (251-2).

There are constant descriptions of the city all throughout the narrative which give the reader the idea of a spatial division between the rich and the poor: "the

rich people live in big housing colonies [...]”, while “thousands of people live on the sides of the road”, people who have come from the “Darkness” in search of new opportunities and just to find a crude reality of hunger and misery, which would be the best word to define the view of the metropolitan. The rush of the city is inferred, in constant movement and change to cope with the contemporary times. Individuals have to fight their way to survive, which reminds us, once more, of the protagonists in Anand’s and Dickens’ novels. The glocal and the global amalgamate in the view of New Delhi that Adiga provides the reader with. It is a cosmopolitan city, a human jungle which has inherited the good and evil of the subcontinent, and has intermingled with the inheritance of the western colonization that brought the country into its modern stage. The new reality is a place where even murder is justified in order to survive because “Delhi is a city where civilization can appear and disappear within five minutes” (281). And consequently Delhi is an international city full of grand hotels which can remind us of any American city: “a small bit of America in India” (203). Multiculturalism, worries about global warming and global terrorism; technology, homosexuality, lack of morals coexist with strong Indian traditions that affect the contemporary individual who aims for rebellion. There is a question posed: “An Indian revolution?” (304). India gained Independence in 1947 after 200 years of British colonization, but the truth is that nowadays we can talk about a neo-colonization through an americanization of life, which is reflected all over the western world. The end of the narrative leaves it open for the western reader to think:

White men will be finished within my lifetime. There are blacks and reds too, but I have no idea what they are up to – the radio never talks about them. My humble prediction: in twenty years’ time, it will be just us yellow men and brown men at the top of the pyramid, and we’ll rule the whole world.

And God save everyone else (305).

We find echoes from Salman Rushdie in the novel too. The main character’s development and story goes parallel to the country’s changing process. History and story are then connected as in *Midnight’s Children* (1981). Adam Sinai was characterized by Rushdie to cope with the historical circumstances, and Balram becomes the epitome of the trickster, the *picaro* who makes his way in the changing panorama of contemporary India to even end up committing a murder, because “all he wanted was the chance to be a man – and for that, one murder was enough” (318). The same as Adam Sinai was a child of midnight, Balram is a son of contemporary India who dreams for a hopeful future for his country, but who realizes it may all be wishful thinking, because in the times of globalization there is still a social reality that, as already stated, reminds us of the 1930s, as reflected by Mulk Raj Anand.

Conclusion

As it has been proved, we could conclude that the contemporary Indian literary text becomes the place for a global encounter. Through Adiga’s imagination we get the depiction of contemporary India: “dynamic and energetic”,

as he himself said in an interview (Goh 2014: 157). Likewise, the novel means the confluence of the past and the present, and becomes a transnational exercise, since we can also identify similarities with not only different historical circumstances, but also different contexts. *The White Tiger* is a local, global, glocal, and a transnational novel. The frame where all these converge is the global current capitalism and the way in which it has been shaped in the Indian context, which can be applied to the contemporary global. The cultural elements identified in *The White Tiger* become global, as part of the last phase of the evolution of cultural globalization, and its protagonist, Balram, stands as the symbol of the global individual, influenced by an urban environment. He is a product of the processes of socio-infrastructurel modernization and global competition.

Therefore, literature, and more specifically, contemporary Indian literature proves to be the space where the glocal imagination is represented. It becomes the space for a global and transnational cultural dialogue which, hopefully, should aim at a cultural understanding among human beings in the 21st century.

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