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**THE SEMIPERIPHERAL SUBALTERN AND LITERARY EXPRESSION:  
NARRATIVES FROM TURKEY AND INDIA**

**Recommended citation:** Doğangün, Simla. “The Semiperipheral Subaltern and Literary Expression: Narratives from Turkey and India”. *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 9.1 (2023). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24193/mjst.2023.15.01>.

**Abstract:** The onset of neoliberal capitalism has endowed the concept of “peripherality” with significant relevance for literary scholars investigating the dynamic interaction between aesthetic structures and the consequences of evolving socio-economic and political terrains. Building on the theoretical foundations of subalternity, world-systems theory, and theories of combined and uneven development, I intend to present a comparative, constructive exploration of three distinguished novels from India and Turkey. These include Latife Tekin’s *Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills* (*Berji Kristin* hereinafter), Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (*Small Things* hereinafter), and Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (hereinafter *White Tiger*). My analysis delves into the intricate intertwining of familial dynamics, communal relations, gender violence, and patriarchal norms with the mechanisms of neoliberal market operations. In doing so, I strive to delineate the manner in which semiperipheral subalternity surfaces as a consistent theme of discourse within the distinct cultural landscapes of Turkey and India.

**Keywords:** semiperiphery, India, Turkey, subaltern, world-system, neoliberalism

## **Introduction**

According to Immanuel Wallerstein, a world-system is a spatial/temporal entity that integrates numerous political and cultural units into an economically interconnected zone (Wallerstein 17). Wallerstein's framework emphasizes market-centred unity rather than political centrality, showcasing the essential dynamics and relations governing the global economy. This division of labour demonstrates the forces and relations that shape the world's economy. Wallerstein's model depicts the capitalist world-economy as a hierarchical triad: core, periphery, and semi-periphery. Core regions, governed by powerful states, establish unequal trade relations, extracting surplus value from the exploited periphery reliant on low-wage labour exports and mono-agriculture. The semi-periphery, represented by countries like Turkey and India, acts as a buffer, easing tensions between the core and periphery. Wallerstein's analysis highlights the geographical and international nature of this global division of labour, assigning distinct roles to regions and countries within the system.

Moretti's world-systems analysis reveals a genre of literature that captures the constitutive power of the world, particularly observed in semi-peripheral works from countries like Turkey and India (Moretti 67). While Wallerstein views the semi-periphery as stabilizing, Chase-Dunn sees it as a source of social change and resistance to capitalism (65). Johnston and Biro argue against a singular universal time or space for semi-peripherality, emphasizing historical and spatial variations (65). The concept of the semi-periphery serves as a constructive analytic category, allowing for comparison and exploration of subalternity and resistance against global culture. Adopting the Warwick Research Collective's innovative perspective, I delve into the complex web of world literature, applying Marxist economic theory to reveal the uneven development patterns under capitalism reflected in literary styles and themes. This fusion allows for an exploration of world literature as a socially influenced practice shaped by temporal and regional socio-economic conditions. The Warwick Research Collective (WReC) proffers a compelling interpretation of modernity, postulating that it might be apprehended as the experiential realization of capitalist social relations. These experiences, however, differ in every instance due to the unique nature of each social circumstance. This perspective transcends a simplistic chronology or technocentric

comprehension of modernity, instead linking it intrinsically to the material conditions and experiential realities fashioned by capitalism.

WReC's conceptualization acknowledges the heterogeneity and subtlety that characterize human experiences within the framework of capitalism. It highlights that while capitalism wields global influence, it does not yield homogeneous social relations or experiences. Rather, local cultural norms, historical contexts, and social structures interact with capitalism to generate a spectrum of "lived" modernity experiences. Moreover, when this unique interpretation of modernity is applied to the understanding of the novel as a literary form, it is perceived that the novel serves as a paradigmatic representation of combined and uneven development, a key feature of their conceptualization of modernity, and is highly visible due to its fundamental linkage to the rise of capitalism (16). This approach underscores the novel's role not just as a cultural artifact but as an integral component of modernization, similar to technological advancements like the importation of automobiles. This aligns with their idea of modernity as the lived experience of capitalist social relations, characterized by heterogeneity across different contexts.

In societies on the periphery or semi-periphery, the novel, much like other imports, becomes a tool of modernization, and its reception and adaptation are part of the lived experience of modernity under capitalism. Hence, the manner in which novels are embraced, transformed, or even resisted in different societies can illuminate the complex dynamics of capitalist modernity, illustrating the uneven development and diverse experiences that WReC emphasizes in their conception of modernity. This understanding is particularly pertinent when considering literature as a global phenomenon and as a lens for examining cross-cultural interactions and exchanges.

This comprehension of modernity, as a multifaceted lived experience, challenges monolithic or Eurocentric viewpoints. It acknowledges the diversity and plurality inherent in modern experiences, progressing beyond linear, progressive narratives towards a nuanced, context-dependent understanding. This approach bears significant potential to catalyze more inclusive and globally conscious discussions about the implications of living in a modern world, recognizing the diverse manners in which capitalism and modernity are experienced and navigated across varied contexts. This perspective also harbors substantial potential for fostering discourses that are both

inclusive and globally oriented, reflecting upon the myriad ways in which capitalism and modernity are navigated and experienced across disparate contexts. Echoing this perspective, my ensuing exploration of the chosen novels will endeavor to underscore these variegated experiences of capitalist modernity, thereby enhancing our nuanced comprehension of the intricate nexus between literature, capitalism, and the condition of modernity.

Semi-peripherality varies across geographical and cultural contexts, encompassing diverse subalternities within the world system. Three novels — *Berji Kristin*, *The White Tiger*, and *Small Things* — depict specific subaltern experiences. Comparing *Small Things* and *The White Tiger*, I explore the marginalization of disenfranchised groups under British colonialism and neoliberal capitalism respectively. In *Berji Kristin*, I analyze subaltern positions in a different context. The semi-periphery holds significance in Wallerstein's world-system, as it occupies a middle position in the global division of labour. The novels shed light on overlapping subaltern positions in India and Turkey, offering insights into the challenges faced by the urban underclass in the era of capitalist globalization. Published in translation in 1993, *Berji Kristin* masterfully portrays a group of marginalized individuals in Istanbul who, despite facing societal exclusion, resiliently establish a vibrant community amidst a garbage heap. With courage and humour, they weave their stories with elements of mysticism, offering a powerful allegory of their unwavering quest for survival and dignity in the midst of severe poverty and the indifference of the wider society. The narrative opens with the struggle of squatters in Istanbul:

One winter night, on a hill where the huge refuse bins came daily and dumped the city's waste, eight shelters were set up by lantern-light near the garbage heaps (Tekin 9).

Plastic bags and baskets provided roofs for the huts; homes were built part rubble, part moulds, part shards. In the morning, the wreckers kicked them to the ground. By night the hut people had erected mounds from all kinds of materials they had salvaged during the day from the garbage: metal, stone, wood. But in the morning the wreckers returned and razed them all to the ground again. [...] The destruction went on for exactly thirty-seven endless days, and after each raid the huts became a little smaller and gradually lost all resemblance to houses (Tekin 22).

That the story begins in a garbage site where the city's leftovers are dumped is striking; the inhabitants settle at a place that marks the end of all things. The analogy between humans and waste here is a poignant one. Living inside, surrounded by, and being treated like garbage, "the hut people seemed no longer human, smeared with dust, mud, garbage, their clothes in rags" (Tekin 22). Victims of circumstances beyond their control, they have been robbed of any remaining sense of decency and integrity. Living under such dehumanizing conditions, they have ceased to live like human beings, and have instead become human waste. This status has condemned them to the margins of society, away from the eyes of the elite who have no patience for such scenes of desolation.

The semi-periphery reflects the ongoing transformation of the global economy under globalization, but there is no universal time or space for semi-peripherality. Global restructuring has had a significant impact on semi-peripheral countries like Turkey and India, resulting in integration alongside social exclusion and marginalization. This process has led to the growth of marginalized subalterns in urban areas of developing countries. This notion aligns with the narrative of Balram Halwai, the protagonist of Aravind Adiga's novel *White Tiger*, the Booker Award winner in 2008:

The rich of Delhi, to survive the winter, keep electrical heaters, or gas heaters, or even burn logs of wood in their fireplaces. When the homeless or servants like night watchmen and drivers who are forced to spend time outside in winter, want to keep warm, they burn whatever they find on the ground. One of the best things to put in the fire is cellophane, the kind used to wrap fruits, vegetables, and business books in: inside the flame, it changes its nature and melts into a clear fuel. The only problem is that while burning, it gives off a white smoke that makes your stomach churn (Adiga 159).

How many thousands of such beautiful things there must be to see in Delhi. If you were just free to go wherever you wanted and do whatever you wanted (Adiga 159).

The rich enjoy comfort while the poor endure hardships. Financial constraints and social status limit the poor's mobility and aspirations, trapping them in an oppressive

society. Balram highlights the stark divide between the rich and the poor in the city, perpetuated by an unequal economic system. As he drives through, he sees slum dwellers all huddled around a stove inside one tent, “lit up by a golden lamp” (Adiga 188). This scene represents the plight of squatters, an overlooked figure in the urban landscape of global cities like Istanbul and Delhi.

Class divisions in India intersect with global capital operations and country-specific factors, further amplifying daily struggles. The entrenched caste system intensifies class oppression, as reflected in Balram's surname, Halwai, which reveals his status and predetermined “destiny,” exposing everything about him “at once” (Adiga 63). The naming process within the caste system binds individuals to their past, future, and identity, reinforcing a hierarchical social structure. This theme of caste is also prominent in Arundhati Roy's acclaimed novel, *Small Things*:

Equally, it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendancy, before Vasco de Gama arrived, before the Zamorin's conquest of Calicut. Before the three purple-robed Syrian bishops murdered by the Portuguese were found floating in the sea, with coiled sea serpents riding on their chests and oysters knotted in their tangled beards. It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag.

That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how (Roy 33).

Roy emphasizes the far-reaching influence of the caste system on all aspects of life in India, portraying it as an everlasting and inescapable presence. Caste laws, which govern social and sexual interactions, are described as ancient, predating European colonization, inter-rite conflicts, and even the Christianization of Kerala. Doreen D'Cruz argues that in *Small Things*, the caste system is depicted as a system of exploitation and marginalization that exists both before and after the colonial era (56, 71).

Class distinction and oppression are historical and concrete developments. The assertion of the caste system's historicity in India by Cruz is questionable, considering the impact of almost four hundred years of colonial history. Colonization has undeniably

influenced the structure of the caste system. Nicholas B. Dirks highlights the role of colonialism in shaping the caste system, stating that before British colonial rule, the political and religious domains were separate, and caste structure was dependent on power relations (Dirks, *Hollow Crown* 4-5). Dirks asserts that the caste system as we know it today emerged from the historical encounter between India and Western colonial rule. According to Dirks, it was under British influence that caste became a single term capable of expressing and systematizing India's diverse social identities and communities (Dirks, *Castes of Mind* 5).

When considering the historical evolution, the condition of the 'hut people', perceived as societal residue (or referred to as the lumpenproletariat within the framework of Marxist theory) may be fruitfully juxtaposed and differentiated with the plight of the subjugated strata within the Indian sociocultural milieu. In the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty, the 'first in Europe, then elsewhere' paradigm implies that 'different non-Western nationalisms would later produce local versions of the same narrative, replacing Europe by some locally constructed centre' (*Provincializing Europe* 7). The shared framing of Europe as the source, paradigm and catalyst of progress and history for various non-Western countries, then, makes it possible to discuss both similarities and differences between the two contexts.

### ***Small Things and History***

*Small Things* revolves around a forbidden relationship between Ammu Ipe, a Syrian Christian divorcee, and Velutha, a low-caste carpenter. The narrative of the book alternates between two pivotal periods in the Ipe family's life: the two weeks leading up to tragic events in December 1969, and a retrospective reflection on those events by Ammu's daughter, Rahel, who returns home in June 1992. The novel highlights the pervasive influence of History (with a capital H) as a powerful force that shapes various social aspects, including family dynamics, intimate connections, and emotions. In her interview with David Barsamian, Roy suggests that:

*Small Things* is a book which connects the very smallest things to the very biggest. Whether it's the dent that a baby spider makes on the surface of water in a pond or the quality of moonlight on a river or how history and politics intrude into your life, your

house, your bedroom, your bed, into the most intimate relationships between people (Barsamian 11).

Here, we can see the ways in which *Small Things* not only underlines the subaltern positioning of India in terms of the logic of capital, but also how it shows local difference (in the form of the caste system), which is itself molded by the precepts of capital. The small things of the title are at first “little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted”, that suddenly become “imbued with new meaning [...] the bleached bones of a story” (Roy 32). Susan Comfort underlines this relationship between large forces and small events and claims that ‘the novel is insisting on a re-examination [of this relation] between the universal and the particular, according to which in dominant logic the “small things and particulars are all but subsumed, destroyed, or brutalised” (17).

Indeed, Roy intriguingly brings to life an individual from the most marginalized strata of society as her protagonist, a purported Untouchable, Velutha. On one dimension, the nuanced intricacies are unveiled through the prejudiced challenges Velutha navigates along the socio-cultural corridors of caste, epitomized by his metaphorical invisibility permeating the narrative. Velutha “left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors”, as the person people “never thought about”, or of whom people “have no memory at all” (Roy 250). Velutha’s circumstances resonate with those of subaltern subjects, individuals bereft of the opportunity for metamorphosis - a liberatory potential inherent within the chronicle of History. In order to elucidate the intricate interplay between the minutiae and the monumental, between Velutha and History, it becomes imperative to juxtapose personal and private realities within the context of the historical – the process whereby History fortifies itself, paradoxically, through the systematic marginalization of subaltern identities. The narrator explains the process of historical subjugation,

The real secret was that communism crept into Kerala insidiously. As a reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to. They offered a cocktail



revolution. A heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy (Roy 64).

Roy subtly suggests that Eurocentric archive often eclipses regional narratives. Aijaz Ahmad disputes this notion, positing it reflects the novel's political ideology, with its anti-communist undertones and a portrayal of the erotic as a realm of rebellion. Ahmad also criticizes Roy for limiting the world to body politics, whilst recognizing her as a distinguished intellectual representative of contemporary India (7). Anuradha Dingwaney Needham argues that *Small Things* is deeply ingrained in broader cultural, political, and intellectual currents (370). These critiques set the stage for my examination of the subaltern stance in *Small Things*, where the narrative's political subtext, marked by minor events, allows for a reinterpretation of History.

Roy subtly suggests how Eurocentric constructs of History often overshadow local narratives. Through a unique stylistic technique, the narration encapsulates events from 1969 and 1992 within a non-linear framework, utilizing flashbacks and a montage-like assembly of diverse narratives. The protest march exemplifies "circular narration", comprising stories from different time frames (Benoit 98). It initiates with the diverse protesters' arrival, including the caste-system-excluded Untouchables. It starts with the approach of the marchers, who belong to various strata of Keralan society, including the Untouchables who exist outside of the caste system. The non-linear narration reveals an underlying complexity and contradiction below the surface of things. When the twins Rahel and Estha recognize Velutha in the crowd, the narrative goes back to explain how communism infiltrated Kerala. The reader is then presented with Chacko's memories about his father teasing him for being a Marxist. The family gets trapped in their car in the midst of the demonstration, accompanied by allusions to the election of Brahmin Namboodiripad's Communist Party, and the government's intention "to enforce land reforms, neutralise the police, and subvert the judiciary and Restrain the Hand of the Reactionary anti-People Congress Government at the Centre" (Roy 65). In addition, a Syrian-Christian wedding party, Hindu pilgrimage buses, war veterans, and fruit vendors are all mentioned. This condensing of different time frames with diverse small stories can be read as an attempt to re-think the relationship between the minutiae of everyday life, and the larger forces of History.

Anglophilia of the family also speaks to the connection between the trivialities of quotidian existence and the grand dynamics of History. The narrator reveals the Ipes as Syrian Christians from Ayemenem, a Kerala village. Their status comes from ancestor Father E. John Ipe, blessed by the Patriarch of Antioch in 1876. Prosperous as landowners under British rule, their fortunes have waned post-independence. In highlighting the Ipes' privileged position, the narrator contrasts them with Velutha the Paravan and his forebears. Despite Velutha's father largely amassing the family's wealth, Chacko's mother, Mamachi, believes Velutha owes everything to [the] family', given his place at the Hindu caste system's lowest rung. Prompting the reader to reflect on the historical genesis of Velutha's station, Mammachi recollects an era from her youthful days when "Paravans were obliged to retract in a crawling posture with a broom, erasing their footprints to prevent Brahmins or Syrian Christians from inadvertently desecrating themselves by stepping into a Paravan's footprint" (Roy 71). She continues by recalling that in her day, "Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads" (Roy 71).

The Ipes have perpetually harboured an affinity towards the Anglo culture. Reverend E. John Ipe and his wife, the eldest living generation of the family, manifest this tendency. Seven-year-old twins, Estha and Rahel, reside with their divorced mother, Ammu, and her kin. The Ipes uphold Western culture and education as their collective point of reference: Estha idolizes Elvis Presley; the children communicate in English; Uncle Chacko received his university education at Oxford, England; and the twins are escorted to the cinema for a viewing of "The Sound of Music," a film whose lyrics they already have committed to memory. History, seen as a normative archive, dominates their societal interactions. Presented as a pervasive force exacting retribution for breaches of its laws, History, as Chacko expounds to Ammu's twins, is like an old, lamp-lit house with whispering ancestors (Roy 51). This history, influenced by British colonialism, has the Ipes, a family of Anglophiles, trapped outside their past. Their predicament, a direct colonialism consequence, hinders their full understanding of the West as the centre of modernity. Consequently, Chacko perceives the Ipes as marginalized, living in a separate, inferior realm, an impression shaped by prior colonial ideologies.

As a woman entangled in societal norms and biases, Ammu's voice offers a powerful critique of Anglophilia as a form of colonialism. When Sophie Mol, Chacko's half-British daughter, arrives, Ammu feels objectified by Sophie's mother's remarks and chooses not to participate in the elaborate reception. Her experiences make her sceptical of History and its influences, saying "[m]ust we behave like some damn godforsaken tribe that's just been discovered?" (Roy 171). Ammu embodies the subaltern by challenging societal norms through divorce, rejecting Anglophilia, pursuing a relationship with an untouchable, and contesting her gender's inferior status. Constantly subjected to social hierarchies, she has developed a rebellious impatience, fuelled by anger against the established order. However, when the police discover Ammu with Velutha, her usual rebellious stance gives way to powerlessness. The police disrespect her by touching her and labelling her a "veshya" (Malayalam for prostitute). Ammu's objectification, coupled with her inability to respond verbally, magnifies a power dynamic that deprives the subaltern of individuality, bodily autonomy, and political agency. Ammu and Velutha's bodies bear the silent weight of the subaltern, transgressing caste boundaries within the History House, once owned by Kairu Saipu, an Englishman who assimilated into the local culture. The house symbolizes the site where "History collects its dues," a place where the calculated and ruthless nature of power prevails (Roy 292). Originally, the image of History House is fabricated by Chacko to illustrate to the twins the situation of the Anglophiles in the context of British colonialism in India; however, it also happens to be the place where the "Love Laws" are violated, where Ammu and Velutha cross caste borders. The house also serves as the setting for the dire consequence of the infraction, the place where History catches up with Velutha, as he is beaten to death by "History's Henchmen," a reference to Ayemenem's police power (Roy 292). His death, like his footprints, is swept away, erased from hegemonic historical accounts.

The fact that Velutha is beaten to death in History House reveals the relationship between oppression, and the bitter reality of the caste system. Considering that History House is located in a former colonial rubber estate, the murder takes on a charged significance. It implicates the capitalization of land within the specific history of imperialism in India. As Gail Omvedt notes, "[t]he accumulation of the earth's resources for the increase of capital has imposed many facets of a money economy and the logic of

production for profit on regions throughout the world, but not primarily by turning people into wage labourers,' but by 'force and violence against nonwage labourers' (Omvedt 20). Even so, those forms are embedded within a system of dominance within, and not outside of, a capitalist imperialist economy and history. Reading *Small Things* in this framework allows us to notice the ideological dimensions concealed within this history, as well as their enduring legacies in the postcolonial present.

In 1992, years after the murder of Velutha, Rahel returns to Ayemenem and sees that History House has been transformed into an international holiday resort, which:

Could no longer be approached from the river. It had turned its back to Ayemenem. The hotel guests were ferried across the backwaters, straight from Cochin. They arrived by speedboat, opening up a V of foam on the water, leaving behind a rainbow film of gasoline [...] The view from the hotel was beautiful but here too the water was thick and toxic. No swimming signs had been put up in stylish calligraphy. They had built a tall wall to screen off the slum and prevent it from encroaching on Kari Saipu's estate. There wasn't much they could do about the smell (Roy 119).

This passage depicts how Rahel's childhood playground has transformed into a marketable commodity, aligning with the changing times. In the late twentieth century, History House gains value as a tourist attraction. However, its earlier emotional and cultural significance, which cannot be monetized, is lost. The House now faces away from Ayemenem, representing an irretrievable past. Moreover, the contamination caused by the steamboat symbolizes the broader issue of environmental degradation in the era of advanced capitalism. Stripped of its charm, the House becomes a mere tourist attraction, disconnected from its authentic surroundings. It exists in isolation, separated from "the slum" by an artificial wall. The new inhabitants of the site are to be recognized from the 'smell' that also marks their status as garbage, similar to the 'hut people' in *Berji Kristin*. The presence of *slum people* neighbouring the (now re-named) "Heritage House" hints at a new reality; a new kind of subaltern has been born of neoliberal, postcolonial globalization. Thus, the house becomes the site where colonial, postcolonial and globalized forms of power intermingle. The fact that the area around History House has been portrayed as "God's Own Country," and that the House has been re-labelled

Heritage House, demonstrates the drastic transformation that has taken place in Kerala, as well as the rest of India, within twenty years.

As I have shown, in *Small Things*, the state of the *old* colonial and postcolonial subaltern both marks, and is marked by, a historicity that brings us back to a conception of history as “both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experience of political modernity in non-Western nations” (Chakrabarty 16). When reflecting on History, small narratives form a vital part of comprehending class- or culture-specific circumstances. Moreover, class oppression – whether rooted in colonial or country-specific circumstances – continues to exist, albeit in different forms, which I will further discuss in the next section in relation to Aravind Adiga’s *White Tiger*.

### **The New Subaltern**

A decade subsequent to the publication of *Small Things*, Aravind Adiga’s *White Tiger* (2008) delineates the contemporary tensions intrinsic to class dynamics. This work provides an astute depiction of the prevailing caste system, articulating its contours in the words of Balram, “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” (Adiga 64). The excerpt highlights a significant turning point in India’s economy in 1991, marked by the adoption of a robust neoliberal policy framework. This approach included elements such as trade liberalization, foreign capital inflows, corporate tax reductions, privatization of public services, erosion of labour rights, and reduced public spending on healthcare and education. Despite the subsequent economic growth, India continues to face a growing poverty problem, with alarming statistics revealing its high prevalence. India holds the unfortunate distinction of having the largest population of individuals suffering from hunger, surpassing all other countries globally, and ranking low in the UN’s Human Development Index.

The narrative is chiefly driven by Balram, the protagonist, who employs the stark reduction of castes in India to ‘two’ as a metaphorical commentary on escalating inequality. He ingeniously encapsulates the metamorphosis of the caste system under the contemporary influences of neoliberal globalization, an echo of neo-imperialistic

forces. This restructured caste hierarchy is perceived to deepen the marginalization of the subalterns, an element which receives prime attention in the novel. Balram's journey delineates the emergence of new forms of subalternity in the context of Indian society. The novel propounds that the intensifying disparity between wealth and poverty is not solely an artifact of the rigid caste system; it implicates the reverberating impact of global capitalist operations, which yield profoundly detrimental outcomes for the Indian subaltern. Despite Balram's efforts to push against the confines of the oppressive caste system, he finds himself irrevocably ensnared within the prevailing oppressive circumstances.

The initial chapter acquaints the reader with Ashok Sharma, a self-made entrepreneur, through his epistolary dialogue with China's President, Wen Jiabao. Ashok's ascension to success, underscored by his audacious act of murdering his employer and pilfering his wealth-filled bag, is gradually unveiled. His true identity, as Balram Halwai, the offspring of a rickshaw puller and a member of the Halwai caste of confectioners, emerges as he discloses his life history through his correspondence. Balram maintains that his personal narrative offers a more illuminating depiction of India than what Jiabao might glean from the country's political leadership. His tale commences with his inaugural school day, a juncture that highlights his absence of both a formal name and an official birth date:

See, my first day in school, the teacher made all the boys line up and come to his desk so he could put our names down in his register. When I told him what my name was, he gaped at me:

"Munna? That's not a real name."

He was right: it just means "boy."

"That's all I've got, sir," I said.

It was true. I'd never been given a name.

[...]

"Well, it's up to me, then, isn't it?" He passed his hand through his hair and said, "We'll call you...Ram. Wait—don't we have a Ram in this class? I don't want any confusion. It'll be Balram." (Adiga 13).

Bestowed his name by a schoolteacher and predetermined by the caste system, Balram's individuality is homogenized, hindering social mobility. Seeking to break free, he reinvents himself as Ashok Sharma, an entrepreneurial pursuit deeply rooted in capitalist commodification. His company's motto, "We Drive Technology Forward," underscores the intrinsic connection between commodity production and oppressive capitalist imperialism. By highlighting his newfound wealth, Balram delineates the stark contrast between his destined past as a sweet maker, "Munna," and his present, encapsulating the contradictions of capitalist societies.

Balram's narrative is emblematic of the triumphant urban subaltern, an entrepreneur who ascends to the summit, illustrating the potential for socioeconomic emancipation offered by neoliberalism. Nonetheless, this ascent is not without its tribulations; it demands an alignment with an ethos that espouses the legitimacy of any means to achieve one's ends, bearing in mind Balram's prosperous business venture materializes only through acts of larceny and murder. He says, "[y]es, it's true: a few thousand rupees of someone else's money, and a lot of hard work, can make magic happen in this country" (Adiga 301). The juxtaposition of prosperity and moral deficiency is symptomatic of capitalism's shortcomings: the current capitalist dynamics and skewed ideologies engendered by neoliberal reforms exacerbate the oppression experienced by the subaltern. Political corruption leads to an increasingly asymmetrical capital flow, further privileging the wealthy whilst the marginalized continue to be deprived of essential human necessities. This glaring disparity not only creates a fertile ground for criminality but also induces a profound sense of guilt. As Balram eloquently expresses, his deeds have irreversibly tarnished his spirit, indicating that "all the skin-whitening creams sold in the markets of India won't clean my hands again" (Adiga 318).

The pervasiveness of capitalism engenders a dichotomous reality, what Balram labels as "an India of Light, and an India of Darkness" (Adiga 14). His ascent is not merely a testament to entrepreneurial prowess but also encapsulates his personal experiences as an emblem of India's impoverished class. Balram hails from Laxmangarh, a diminutive, destitute village in Bihar, marked by stark disparities between the landowning elite and peasantry. Immersed in this "Darkness" like his rural peers, Balram's kin become casualties of landlord exploitation. His academic excellence garners admiration from the school inspector who, recognizing Balram's intellectual

acumen, lauds him as “The White Tiger,” symbolic of a singular, generational talent. The inspector gifts Balram a book titled “Lessons for Young Boys from the Life of Mahatma Gandhi,” and assures him a scholarship for city-based education to realize his potential. Yet Balram is pulled out of school and made to work in a tea stall to pay off his father’s debt to their landlord. Balram calls his landlord Wild Boar, a man who:

Owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh. If you wanted to work on those lands, you had to bow down to his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages. When he passed by women, his car would stop; the windows would roll down to reveal his grin; two of his teeth, on either side of his nose, were long and curved, like little tusks. (Adiga 25).

The agrarian populace, seeking to avail themselves of basic necessities such as animal grazing, transportation routes for their carts, fishing, and ferrying water, find themselves obligated to make payments to the feudal landlords. Bereft of any alternatives, they succumb to the avarice of their predatory proprietors. Akin to their domineering demeanor, these landlords — known as the Wild Boar, Buffalo, Stork, and Raven — bear designations reminiscent of fauna. This de-personification helps the narrator to express his loathing for the landlords, who “fed on the village, and everything that grew in it, until there was nothing left for anyone else to feed on” (Adiga 26).

The chasm separating the peasantry and the landlord class is a product of not only the entrenched caste disparities, but also the subsequent introduction of capitalism. Historically, the institution of landlordism is rooted in caste dynamics that predate the period of British colonialism. The principal revenue stream for the government was constituted by land taxation, the collection methodologies of which varied widely across the country. The land tenure system was structured around three main paradigms: Zamindari (landlordism), Raiyatwari, and Mahalwari. As noted, British colonialism orchestrated a reformation and systematization of the caste system, driven by its proprietary colonial objectives. However, the post-colonial epoch has witnessed a further exacerbation of these conditions. As Adiga observes:



The past fifty years have seen tumultuous changes in India's society, and these changes have overturned the traditional hierarchies, and the old securities of life. A lot of poorer Indians are left confused and perplexed by the new India that is being formed around them. ("Excerpted Interview").

The narrator of *White Tiger* yet again utilizes animalistic symbolism to emphasize the consequential aftermath resulting from two centuries of British colonial dominion:

Thanks to all those politicians in Delhi, on the fifteenth of August, 1947 – the day the British left – the cages had been let open; and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law. Those that were the most ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up and grown big bellies. That was all that counted now, the size of your belly. It did not matter whether you were a woman or a Muslim, or an untouchable: anyone with a belly could rise up. (Adiga 64).

The narrator delineates how the erstwhile intricate caste system has been supplanted by a stark binary, divided between men possessing corpulence – a symbol of affluence, and their antithesis – the belly-less men, embodying marginality. This wealth-based dichotomy subsumes all marginal entities against the opulent landowners, politicians, and others who harbour vast wealth. Balram's watershed moment arrives as he secures employment as a chauffeur for the progeny of an affluent village landlord, their daughter-in-law, and their pair of Pomeranian companions, Cuddles and Puddles. This job ushers him into the affluent suburb of Gurgaon, a satellite city orbiting Delhi. Balram perceives Delhi as the metaphorical bastion of light, where amidst slums, crawling vermin, call centers, the pantheon of 36,000,004 deities, glimmering shopping complexes, and debilitating traffic congestion, he becomes increasingly conscious of the colossal wealth and opportunities surrounding him. In the tug-of-war between his familial loyalty, servitude obligations, and an aspiration for self-betterment, Balram discovers a new moral compass – one oriented towards the materialism and self-indulgence that pulsate at Delhi's core. His desire for upward social mobility is best understood in terms of the motif of the Rooster Coop Syndrome from which he wishes to escape:

The greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop [...] Go to Old Delhi [...] and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages [...] They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country (Adiga 173).

This extract explores Balram's navigation through his subalternity, where rigid caste hierarchy is exacerbated by capitalism. In this system, anyone, even an erstwhile untouchable, could potentially ascend socio-economically. Simultaneously, Balram asserts his individualism, determined to escape the "Rooster Coop". A fleeting encounter with a caged white tiger in Delhi's National Zoo mirrors his servitude, igniting his resolve to emancipate himself. This prompts his drastic actions of theft and murder, a dark path to liberty. As global capitalism evolves, so does the form of domination, paradoxically enabling subaltern upward mobility and a voice to narrate their own history.

A closer look at *Small Things* and *White Tiger* shows that small narratives are an integral part of History, as they inform us about class issues or culturally specific circumstances. The two examples also show how the subaltern shifts in the context of modern capitalist relations. They demonstrate that class inequalities cannot solely be explained through the current operation of the caste system in Indian society. Whilst the historical legacy of castes should not be ignored, it is likely that similar class inequalities can be found in other countries at similar stages of economic development. As a developing country that has no history of colonialism and no caste system of its own, but that is nevertheless under the influence of modernity as a political and economic project, I propose that Turkey offers a case study which might help to identify the new subaltern, who emerges in the context of global, neoliberal capital. Discussions of subalternity within Turkey should consider its positioning in terms of the West, its historical background of modernity and its link with present modalities.

### **The Urban Subaltern in Turkey**

Turkey's rapid industrialization in the 1950s led to significant internal migration driven by various factors. These included high population growth, agricultural mechanization, land ownership shifts, limited educational and healthcare services, a desire to escape rural pressures, and improved transportation and communication. In *Berji Kristin*, the characters migrate from rural areas to urban centres in the 1970s due to soaring inflation, high unemployment, underutilized industrial capacity, and the government's inability to meet financial obligations. The persistent poverty in Turkish villages resulted from the failure of modernization to address feudal structures. Furthermore, Turkey's underdevelopment and reliance on more advanced nations, influenced by global socio-economic and political dynamics post-1950s, were further stimulated by factors such as the Marshall Plan.

Internal migration in Turkey has produced communities of displaced subalterns from various backgrounds – ethnically heterogeneous but socio-economically homogenous – inhabiting the margins of the city. Forms of subalternity in Turkey are different from those in India because of the absence of a caste system. However, economically speaking, both Indian and Turkish subaltern positions are marked by global operations of capital. For instance, the Flower Hill people in *Berji Kristin* earn their livings by collecting garbage and working at chemical factories nearby. As mentioned in the introduction, the hut people who feed on others' waste are, themselves, treated like waste. In *White Tiger*, we can see the same urban subalterns as in Old Delhi, such as men “selling small fish trapped in green bottles full of brine” (Adiga 251-252). The inhumane consequences of accelerated industrialization and free-market policies become especially evident in the fourth chapter of *Berji Kristin*, in which “[s]howers of pure white from this factory began to pour over Flower Hill” (Tekin 27). The showers affect all forms of life, including the children that “turned dark purple as drugged and fell into a deep sleep. One of the sleeping children never woke up” (Tekin 28).

As mentioned at the outset of this article, *Berji Kristin* narrates the struggles of the urban subalterns who, after battling with the wreckers for thirty-seven days, name the area Battle Hill. The iconic reference is to be changed after two months, by two “official-looking” men rename it “Flower Hill”. There is more to this alteration than

revelation of the dichotomy between the modern and the traditional in Turkey's development. Indeed, the hut people are pre-modern: they have their own habits, rituals and customs that do not comply with the pace of modern Turkey. But the naming of the hills with the qualifiers, either "battle" or "flower," matter more in that they accurately demonstrate the aesthetic codification of urban planning strategies in the absence of the welfare state and how they influence collective rights of individuals. In both, the inhabitants are alienated from the places they belong to, they own. This is the true outcome of combined and uneven development (WRec 6).

Situated within the global neoliberal era, Turkey holds a complex relationship with the West. The hut people of Garbage Hills have travelled from Central Anatolia, the Black Sea region, and the East of Turkey. According to Cihan Tugal, the Westernized elite continue to see them as uncivilized and backward, and the true cause of Turkey's slow modernization (23). On the other hand, as Turkey resituates itself within world politics and economics, the hut people are articulated into the flow of global capital as a cheap source of labour; they are the subalterns of the country, both culturally and socio-economically. The situation is evident from the following passage:

At the time the men of Flower Hill were struggling to find work, a shiny blue sign – 'Nato Avenue' – was hung on the wall of one of the chocolate factories up Rubbish Road. United by curiosity they marched with their sideways walk until they arrived under the street sign, but as they could not figure out what the writing on it stood for or why it had been put up, they turned back... they decided that this road could not be an 'avenue'. Discussions went on, and they finished up by speculating on the meaning of 'Nato'. Some said that once upon a time the papers had written about Nato, and others that the radio played folk songs from Nato. One said it meant 'Armed Force', another, 'bombing'. The hut people were upset by this talk and did not warm to the name. (Tekin 37).

"Nato Avenue" symbolizes Turkey's integration into global politics, but the Hut people reject it. Excluded from transnational mobility and national benefits, they suffer the consequences of globalization in Istanbul's marginalized neighbourhoods. The interconnected chapters in the book prioritize the collective experience of slum dwellers, emphasizing their shared struggles (Irzik, "Narratives of Collectivity" 160). The use of

the simple past tense in the novel accentuates events as part of an unreachable past. According to Nurdan Gurbilek, this tension between small-scale occurrences and overarching narratives is also present in Arundhati Roy's *Small Things* (39). Similarly, *Berji Kristin* lacks a plot or climax, which can be read as a reminder for readers in directing their attention to the distinct content found in each chapter, each small account.

The ninth chapter of the novel presents a focused examination of Mr. Izak, the proprietor of a factory, with particular attention paid to the physical appearance and structural elements of his establishment. Drawing parallels between the construction and maintenance of the factory and the huts prevalent in Flower Hill, a connection is established between these two settings. Initially, Mr. Izak treats his workforce with respect, fostering a sense of collective collaboration and actively participating alongside them. However, as production escalates, his discipline wanes and he begins arriving late, accompanied by a shift towards brutal treatment of his employees, resorting to violence against those who broach topics such as insurance, unions, or compensation. In response, the workers unite and join a union. In an effort to discourage unionization, Mr. Izak hires a factory manager who institutes a system of wage rates, categorizing workers based on their skills and dedication, ultimately determining their eligibility for monthly salaries as regular employees. Concurrently, a proliferation of fraudulent factories arises, manufacturing counterfeit cleaning products that prove ineffective, strategically established to evade strikes. Over time, the site becomes known as Flower Hill Industries. This chapter sheds light on the process of integrating into modes of production while enduring systematic exclusion from the rights associated with de facto citizenship. Additionally, it alludes to the potential for upward mobility among entrepreneurial subalterns, such as Balram, who are willing to exploit others for personal gain.

The eleventh chapter focuses on Kurd Cemal of Flower Hill, who decides to establish a political party and spreads the word that he will find a job for everyone who signs up to his party. The Garbage Grocer's authority has been undermined ever since it was made public that he accepted a bribe from Cemal for the construction of new worker huts. In order to recover his popularity, he builds a primary school and appoints a teacher to work with the students. On the day of the election for the headman of Flower

Hill, Nylon Mustafa and Garbage Grocer announce their candidacy. The grocer writes down the reasons why he thinks he should be elected, while Nylon Mustafa tries to educate the people of Flower Hill. In order to guarantee the position of headman, the Garbage Grocer promises to distribute title deeds for the huts. The Flower Hill people sell their votes in exchange for title deeds. Thus, corruption coupled with nepotism develops into a new form of survival and morality for the subalterns. This way of living is underlined by Mike Davis: “[s]quatters very often are coerced to pay considerable bribes to politicians, gangsters, or police to gain access to sites, and they may continue to pay such informal rents in money and/or votes for years” (Davis 38).

Chapter twenty commences with the residents of the huts receiving an ominous government correspondence, forewarning them of an impending demolition scheduled thirty days hence. Anticipating their eviction, the residents assign scouts to seek out potential new locations for their huts. Meanwhile, the government discloses that the disputed land is owned by an entity referred to as a Foundation and mandates a settlement fee of seventy thousand liras from each resident. This scenario mirrors a process known as legalization, a strategy implemented by the Turkish government as a means of managing slum and squatter settlements. Premised on the assumption that secure tenure would catalyse an improvement in living conditions for most squatters, the Turkish government initiated the legalization process in the 1980s. Anticipated benefits of this approach included the collection of local taxes by registering occupied lands, resolution of boundary conflicts, and stimulation of the housing sector. However, due to local administrative inefficiencies, illicit alternatives often prevailed to satisfy housing demands. This chapter concludes with a poignant portrayal of government corruption: individuals masquerading as Foundation officers collect the stipulated settlement fee, offering counterfeit receipts in return. It is later unveiled that these seemingly authoritative figures are mere impostors, underscoring the realities of an unjust integration into global capitalism.

The ensuing narrative introduces coffee houses, gamblers, and gangs, indicative of Turkey's alignment with global markets and the demands of the indigenous bourgeoisie. This capitalist infiltration is evidenced not only by the establishment of hut factories by enterprising locals but also by the emergence of banking institutions within the community. Subsequently, Flower Hill witnesses the addition of a new street —

dubbed “Bank Avenue” — signifying the relentless advance of capitalism. In the face of contemporary globalization and late capitalism's pervasive influence, the subalterns seem to find themselves defenceless, encapsulated in a reality where global forces permeate every facet of their quotidian existence.

Remembering Chase-Dunn's views on the possibilities inherent in the semiperiphery, subalternity in *Berji Kristin* should be rethought by way of the opportunities it presents in the novel. As the semiperiphery is only half-integrated into the capitalist core it is thus riven by alternative discourses and ways of life that merge with capitalist development in unpredictable ways. The novel's portrayal of the socioeconomically disadvantaged class offers a foundational narrative that encapsulates the emergence of the subaltern within a semiperipheral context. The subaltern has the potential of transforming and adapting itself. It illuminates the subaltern experience in a new context, showing the local implications of what Chakrabarty's terms the “first in Europe, then elsewhere' paradigm, and its ramifications” (7). Turkish subaltern experiences have both similarities and differences from those in India. One major similarity can be found in the results of Turkey's neoliberal adjustment program, which can be observed in *Berji Kristin*.

In conclusion, the intricate concept of semi-peripherality, despite its diverse manifestations across geographical and cultural contexts, encapsulates varied subaltern experiences within the world system, as elucidated through a nuanced examination of three novels — *Berji Kristin*, *The White Tiger*, and *Small Things*. The comparative analysis of *Small Things* and *The White Tiger* sheds light on the plight of disenfranchised groups under British colonialism and neoliberal capitalism, while *Berji Kristin* offers insights into the subaltern positions in a contrasting context. Acknowledging the pivotal role of semi-periphery in Wallerstein's world-system theory due to its intermediary status in the global labor division, these novels illuminate the intersecting subaltern realities in India and Turkey. They provide invaluable perspectives into the struggles of the urban underclass in the era of capitalist globalization, emphasizing the importance of understanding these complex experiences and prompting further critical discourse on socio-economic disparities in our increasingly globalized world.

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