Can the Subaltern Right Wrongs?:
Human Rights and Development in Aravind Adiga’s The White Tiger

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In “Righting Wrongs,” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak contends:

‘Human Rights’ is not only about having or claiming a right or a set of rights; it is also about righting wrongs, about being the dispenser of these rights. The idea of human rights, in other words, may carry within itself the agenda of a kind of social Darwinism—the fittest must shoulder the burden of righting the wrongs of the unfit—and the possibility of an alibi.¹

Spivak’s quote makes two points: (1) human rights mean having or claiming and dispensing rights; (2) the stronger must right the wrongs of the weaker. At first glance, we might take these points as simply repeating what most human rights scholars and activists typically assume to be central premises of human rights promotion and protection. These central premises include (1) with rights come responsibilities; (2) the powerful—often the state—must protect the rights of the less powerful—the poor, the discriminated, and the tortured; and (3) the claim by the powerful to protect the less powerful can also be an excuse to dominate them. But a closer read suggests another interpretation. It opens the possibility that the unfit may claim and dispense rights for themselves: they may right wrongs for themselves. If human rights mean having or claiming and dispensing rights, then the subject of human rights—the holder of human rights—is (or can be) at once claimer and dispenser of rights. If the subject of human rights is (or can be) at once claimer and dispenser of rights, then the weaker need not rely on the stronger to right their wrongs, or be oppressed by the stronger who claim to have their interests in mind. Instead, the weaker may right wrongs by themselves, wrongs often perpetrated by the stronger. If the poor were to right wrongs, what wrongs would they right, and how would they do so?

This essay considers what the righting of wrongs by the poor might entail by analyzing Aravind Adiga’s novel, The White Tiger.² The first part of the essay examines the logic that leads the novel’s protagonist,
Balram Halwai, a poor subaltern, to identify the problem of the rich growing richer at the expense of the poor as the most egregious wrong, and to right this wrong by killing and stealing from his boss, Mr. Ashok. I suggest that Halwai’s thoughts and actions are informed by a logic where (1) underdevelopment is the main cause of class inequality, (2) modernization is the way out of underdevelopment and class inequality, and (3) neoliberal globalization is the inescapable hegemon that rules the world. I argue that the ruthless form which Halwai’s thoughts and actions take is but the logical outcome of a world where underdevelopment, modernization, and neoliberal globalization reign in tandem.  

Halwai, however, seems too seduced by the apparent benefits of neoliberal globalization to recognize either its costs or its hegemony; he also may be too desperately poor to care or too pragmatically realistic to resist. While Adiga has maintained in a separate interview that the worldview presented in the novel is not his, but his protagonist’s, it is unclear from the novel whether the particular myopia with neoliberal globalization in the novel is also only Halwai’s.  

It is difficult to discern whether Adiga is critiquing the predicament of subalterns trapped in a neoliberal system generally, or if Adiga himself accepts the structures and systems of neoliberalism as a suspect and regrettable, but ultimately unavoidable, reality.

The second part of the essay considers Halwai’s thoughts and actions in terms of the more recent paradigm that human rights offers an alternative way out of underdevelopment and class inequality. I contend that although killing and stealing are unethical actions, which the moral assumptions undergirding the principles of human rights would abhor, Halwai’s thoughts and actions may not be as ethically reprehensible if viewed from the perspective of the poor who have long-suffered the wrong of underdevelopment and class inequality. When viewed from this perspective, the logic of killing and stealing seems justified, even if the actions themselves remain immoral and criminal. Indeed, when viewed from this perspective of unrelenting underdevelopment and class inequality, the logic of Halwai’s thoughts and actions seem to be exactly what motivate human rights approaches to development. As with the argument in the first part of this essay, it is unclear from the novel where Adiga stands on this ethic and action for righting wrongs. Admittedly, the discourse and ideology of human rights is not specifically invoked in the novel. However, the lack of access to health and education experienced by Halwai and his family should call to mind what life is like when the social and economic rights enshrined in the 1948 United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) are undermined. Similarly, the torture and murder of Halwai’s family, as well as the illegal voting
practices of the political parties, should call our attention to the violation of the civil and political rights listed in the same document.

Before developing these arguments, however, let me clarify some possible misunderstandings. First, I discuss the idea that ethics might look differently whether one is rich or poor not because I think that all poor people have a lesser or essentially different sense of ethics from the rich. Rather, I discuss this idea because it reminds us as scholars and readers, and perhaps human rights workers especially, that one’s sense of ethics is not universal. Second, I raise the possibility of the weaker claiming and dispensing human rights for themselves, of righting wrongs for themselves and even perhaps for others, not because I want to relieve the stronger, especially the state, from their responsibilities or leave the weaker to their admittedly limited resources. I recognize that the poor, the discriminated, and the tortured often aren’t able to claim human rights, much less dispense them for themselves or others. I recognize too that being a subject of human rights does not always mean that one has human rights. Rather, it often means that one holds claims to human rights, rather than having the rights in any material fashion. Jacques Rancière accurately characterizes this paradox of human rights when he observes, “the Rights of Man turned out to be the rights of the rightless, of the populations hunted out of their homes and land and threatened by ethnic slaughter.” Still, I raise the possibility of the weaker righting wrongs for themselves because it allows us to re-imagine how wrongs might be righted, and by whom. It allows us to destabilize what Spivak critiques as:

\[\ldots\text{the presupposition [in human rights] that the reasonable righting of wrongs is inevitably the manifest destiny of groups—unevenly class-divided, embracing North and South—that remain poised to right them; and that among the receiving groups, wrongs will inevitably proliferate with unsurprising regularity.}\]

Perhaps more importantly, it allows us to tackle what is arguably the primary wrong that needs righting globally—the deep polarization of the world into the obscenely rich and the obscenely poor—by attending to the worldview of the poor, rather than that of the rich and middle-class. It allows us to address this global polarization of rich and poor which Spivak calls “worldwide class apartheid.”

**The White Tiger**

*The White Tiger* is a useful text with which to explore how the poor might right the moral wrong of class apartheid because it offers the story
of an individual, Balram Halwai, who seems to accomplish precisely that, but through methods that seem equally wrong morally. The novel traces how Halwai transforms himself from a poor tea-boy in the village of Laxmangarh into a middle-class owner of a taxi service for IT call-center workers in the city of Bangalore. Over the course of seven nights, Halwai writes seven memos to the Premier of China, Wen Jiabao, recounting his development from servant to entrepreneur. He relates how at first he was held back by his servant mentality: he believed he should serve his master and his master would take care of him. But Halwai soon learns that his master, Mr. Ashok, only cares for himself. He begins to understand that the master class in general has fattened itself at the expense of the servant class. He decides to rebalance the scales by turning the tables on his master. If the injustice of the master class was immoral, Halwai’s methods of redressing the injustice seems equally so. Halwai first begins to steal discreetly and incrementally from Mr. Ashok. But soon he hatches a bigger coup. He determines to kill Mr. Ashok and steal from him a bag carrying seven hundred thousand rupees. Mr. Ashok was going to give the money to different politicians in Delhi so that he would not have to pay taxes to the state. Halwai executes his plan and uses the money as capital to start his taxi service. He changes his name from Balram Halwai to Ashok Sharma, rents vans, and hires drivers. He also bribes the local police chief to revoke the licenses of a competing taxi service so that his company will have more clients. It is this particular morally-questionable, if not legally-criminal, trajectory that propels Halwai from being in the subaltern class with no access to social mobility, to being part of the upwardly-mobile middle class. It is this particular, ethically-suspect, if not rights-abusing, method that allows Halwai, as a subaltern, to right the wrongs of underdevelopment and class apartheid for himself. Two questions, thus, immediately arise: (1) Why is this morally-questionable trajectory the one that Halwai chooses to break out of class inequality? And (2) Is this ethically-suspect method the only viable option for a subaltern figure like Halwai to right the wrongs of class apartheid? To respond to these questions properly, it is helpful to turn to political economist Sankaran Krishna’s discussion of underdevelopment, modernization, and neoliberal globalization.

**Underdevelopment and the Rooster Coop**

According to Krishna, the underdevelopment thesis offers one explanation for unequal development and global inequality. It argues that...
the “developed” countries are richer than the so-called “developing” countries because they developed at the expense of the other. The underdevelopment school of thought holds that, “the third world was not undeveloped during the centuries in which countries like Britain, the United States, or Germany achieved their take-offs.”\(^{11}\) Rather third world countries were “actively underdeveloped by these Western countries during that time.”\(^{12}\) The underdevelopment argument is deeply rooted in the history of colonization, especially colonization by developed countries that were primarily “Western” in culture and geographically self-identified as “the West.” It acknowledges that the supposedly developing countries were, by comparison, othered—reduced to being culturally and geographically identified as the “East,” “non-West,” or even “the Rest.”

The underdevelopment thesis applies equally well in the context of contemporary imperialism, making the more recent term for labeling haves and have-nots—using “North/South” or “Global North/Global South” to “distinguish between affluent, privileged nations and communities, and economically and politically marginalized nations and communities”—equally relevant both geographically and metaphorically.\(^{13}\)

The “West/East” paradigm is suitable here when discussing underdevelopment, modernization, and neoliberal globalization because it is this particular paradigm that informs these theories of progress and development as discussed by Krishna, and because, as Chandra Mohanty acknowledges, the Western/Eastern and First-World/Third-World paradigms keep the history of colonization at the fore.\(^{14}\) Although Adiga’s villains are not colonizing British officers, but exploitative Indian landlords, the privileging of the West prevalent in the novel is a legacy of British colonization in India. At the same time, however, the “Global North/Global South” paradigm is also, if not more, suitable for Adiga’s novel since Halwai addresses, not a Western superpower (“the white-skinned man”) such as Britain or the United States, but a rising Eastern superpower, China.\(^ {15}\) He identifies India (“the brown man”) as the next superpower, and China (“the yellow man”) as a likely ally.\(^ {16}\) The have/have-not divide then is not just East/West, it is also Global North/Global South. The novel, thus, captures the palimpsestic way in which legacies of underdevelopment overlay themselves upon individuals, communities, and nations.

While Krishna uses underdevelopment to explain global inequality—socioeconomic disparity between nations—we can use it to better understand Halwai’s analysis of local inequality—socioeconomic disparity between classes in postcolonial India. From this perspective, even drawing on both the paradigms of East/West and Global North/Global
South may not be enough. In bringing the underdevelopment thesis to the micro level of individuals in local communities, rather than the macro level of cities and countries, it is helpful to add Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash’s concept of “One-Third/Two-Thirds World.” Esteva and Prakash use this paradigm to distinguish the haves and the have-nots based on their quality of life, regardless of their geography (East, West, North, or South) and/or ideology (First World, Second World, Third World). The middle and upper classes in the North and elites in the South comprise a “social minority,” the One-Third World, while the rest of the world’s population make up a “social majority,” the Two-Thirds World. Their paradigm is especially useful here because, as Mohanty observes, it not only “draws attention to the continuities as well as the discontinuities between the haves and the have-nots within the boundaries of nations and between nations and indigenous communities,” but it also “incorporates an analysis of power and agency that is crucial.”

For Halwai, there are two kinds of underdevelopment in India that lead to inequality: (1) the rich underdevelop the poor; and (2) the poor underdevelop each other. Both these kinds of underdevelopment can happen because of a phenomenon Halwai symbolizes in a metaphor of “the Rooster coop”:20

Go to Old Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid, and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench—the stench of terrified, feathered flesh. On the wooden desk above this coop sits a grinning young butcher, showing off the flesh and organs of a recently chopped-up chicken, still oleaginous with a coating of dark blood. The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. 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.

In this extended metaphor, the young butcher represents the rich, while the hens and roosters represent the poor. Both the butcher and the chickens are aware that the one is profiting from the life-blood of the other, but neither attempts to change the situation. The butcher is profiting too much from the situation to want to alter it. The chickens are fighting
too much amongst themselves to be able to change it. This is how the Rooster coop phenomenon allows the rich to underdevelop the poor, and the poor to underdevelop themselves. To compare the rich to a human being—“the young butcher”—and the poor to animals—“pale hens and brightly colored roosters”—is ironic and suggestive. The irony is that the literal act of killing the chickens, a rather cruel symbolic example of exploiting another for one’s own benefit, is committed by a human being, a creature supposedly more intelligent, and more evolved than animals. The suggestion in the analogy of the poor as chickens is that the poor are somehow akin to animals—they are less evolved, less intelligent than human beings—and thus it is their destiny to fatten the rich as labor in the same way that chickens feed human beings literally.

Halwai makes a strong case that the rich rely on the Rooster coop phenomenon to enrich themselves and further enslave the poor:

Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many . . . A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent—as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way—to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man’s hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse.22

In Halwai’s discourse of a few growing rich at the expense of many, of a few masters keeping the many in inexplicable servitude, we hear distinctly the discourse of underdevelopment that Krishna frames within the context of global inequalities based on colonization and neo-colonization. In the novel, a clear example of how the rich in India underdevelop the poor is seen when Halwai is strong-armed into taking the blame for Pinky Madam’s accident. Halwai explains that India’s many poor servants have been forced to fall (literally and figuratively) by their rich masters: “What I am describing to you here is what happens to drivers in Delhi every day . . . The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters.”23

Halwai clearly recognizes not just economic underdevelopment as a reason why poor Indians are poor. He also identifies the psychological and emotional underdevelopment of poor Indians. These other aspects of underdevelopment extend to other arenas of Indian society where poor Indians are excluded from access to real political power, civil society organizing, and even legal justice.

The second kind of underdevelopment which Halwai identifies emerging from the Rooster coop phenomenon may be more controversial. For
him, it is not only the rich who underdevelop the poor, the poor also underdevelop each other. Again, it is worth reflecting on his description in full:

Why does the Rooster Coop work? How does it trap so many millions of men and women so effectively?
Secondly, can a man break out of the coop? What if one day, for instance, a driver took his employer’s money and ran? What would his life be like?
I will answer both for you, sir.
The answer to the first question is that the pride and glory of our nation, the repository of all our love and sacrifice, the subject of no doubt considerable space in the pamphlet that the prime minister will hand over to you, the Indian family, is the reason we are trapped and tied to the coop.
The answer to the second question is that only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed—hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters—can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature.
It would, in fact, take a White Tiger. You are listening to the story of a social entrepreneur, sir.”

In Halwai’s reasons for how and why the Rooster coop mentality works, we see also his reasons for how and why the poor underdevelop each other. Such underdevelopment takes the form of a deep sense of communal feeling with one’s family and community, what Halwai shortforms as “the Indian family.” In other words, it is a sense of ethics towards family and community. It is a form of ethics that values people as social and human beings, the antithesis of ethics in the mode of neoliberal globalization, which values people, not as human beings, but as individual consumers and sources of labor. As with the earlier analogy of the butcher to the rich and the chickens to the poor, this comparison of a “social entrepreneur” to a “white tiger” is also revealing. To escape both the butcher’s knife and the rooster cage, to escape these two simultaneous threats of being underdeveloped by the rich and by the poor, one must go against the norm, nature, even humanity. One must be “a freak,” “a pervert of nature”: one must not, indeed cannot, be a “normal” human being. In Halwai’s remedies for escaping the Rooster coop mentality, we begin to discern his faith in modernization as the way to development, and his embrace of neoliberal globalization. He identifies “the Indian family” as the reason Indians are trapped in underdevelopment. And he identifies “a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed” as the individual
who can free himself from the cage of underdevelopment. Halwai’s rise from rags to riches, from subaltern to entrepreneur, then is one that identifies a narrative of underdevelopment as the problem, and proposes a narrative of modernization as the way out. But is modernization really a way out of individual poverty, or is it a path that leads to other forms of impoverishment?

**Modernization and Balram Halwai**

According to Krishna, modernization theory offers a different explanation for unequal development and global inequality than underdevelopment. It argues that the West is richer than the non-West because it possesses the attributes critical to developmental success, especially the ability to act in “rational, self-interested ways to better one’s own life.” In the novel, we are shown that Halwai rises from rags to riches because he cultivates these attributes of modernization.

The first attribute of modernization, according to the conventions of modernization theory, is “understanding the world in scientific rather than spiritual or religious terms, and seeing it as amenable to human action and change, rather than as incomprehensible.” Halwai is shown to have this first attribute in his ironic take on the powers of gods, religion, and prayer. For example, he describes “praying” as “kissing some god’s arse,” and he compares gods to power-hungry, unproductive politicians: “all these gods seem to do awfully little work—much like our politicians—and yet keep winning reelection to their golden thrones in heaven, year after year.” By referring to prayer and gods with such irreverence, it is clear that Halwai places little faith in religion. Instead he prefers to rely on human actions, believing that his life has been shaped by others (his family and his master), and that it can be changed through his own actions.

Although Halwai is skeptical about the powers of divine intervention—itself a sign of rational thought, he is also reasonable enough to know that in an India which esteems gods, appearing to pray to gods will serve his interest:

My country is the kind where it pays to play it both ways: the Indian entrepreneur has to be straight and crooked, mocking and believing, sly and sincere, at the same time.

So: I’m closing my eyes, folding my hands in a reverent Namaste, and praying to the gods to shine light on my dark story.
Halwai’s motivations for praying to gods are mostly pragmatic. He wants to cover all his bases. His pragmatism shows that he has another trait of modernization, which Krishna describes as “acting in rational, self-interested ways to better one’s own life and to get the most out of interactions with others and with nature.”

Although the gods, like the politicians, seem to do little work, Halwai still keeps up the appearance of respecting the gods and praying to them because doing so allows him to optimize his interactions with others who might be religious. A similar pragmatism towards religion can also be seen in Ram Persad, the Muslim driver who pretends to be a Hindu because he needs work, and his master, a Hindu, is prejudiced against Muslims.

More than his pragmatic take on religion, the most poignant example of Halwai’s capacity to act in “rational, self-interested ways to better one’s own life,” is his determination to profit from his post as a driver/servant for his master, Mr. Ashok: “Over the next two weeks, . . . I cheated my employer. I siphoned his petrol; I took his car to a corrupt mechanic who billed him for work that was not necessary; and three times, while driving back to Buckingham B, I picked up a paying customer.” Although Halwai feels ashamed at first, he soon feels justified in capitalizing on his master’s car to turn a profit. He feels less guilty for taking advantage of his master because he realizes how his master and others of the master class have historically underdeveloped him and his servant class. In place of shame and guilt, he seethes with “rage”: “The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me.” Halwai’s rage stems not only from his sense of righteous indignation that those in the master class like Mr. Ashok have so much, while those in the servant class like himself have so little. His rage lies also from his sense of historical injustice that subalterns like himself have so little because the elite like Mr. Ashok have so much. The one has lived to serve and enrich the other.

Halwai’s business transactions with Mr. Ashok’s car suggests that he has a third attribute of modernization, which Krishna characterizes as “being free of medieval prejudices against profit, interest, usury, commerce, or speculative investments.” That Halwai begins to feel he is justified in capitalizing on his master’s car suggests that he has no problem with turning a profit. More importantly, his decision to be an “enterprising driver” shows that he has yet another trait of modernization, “the tendency to evaluate oneself and others through achievement or accomplishment in the material world rather than what has been inherited or by other criteria of social status such as family, ancestry, caste, or color.” For Halwai, material accomplishment is everything. He decides he will not let his predetermined lower status limit him in his quest to improve his wealth.
and class. Critically he believes such social mobility is possible, even necessary, in a postcolonial India ruled by “jungle law”:

Thanks to all those politicians in Delhi, on the fifteenth of August, 1947—the day the British left—the cages had been left 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 didn’t matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim, or an untouchable; anyone with a belly could rise up.41

“Rise up” is precisely what Halwai does; he eats up Mr. Ashok, and he grows a big belly. In the new two-caste system of postcolonial India, Halwai rejects the caste of the small-bellied men whose fate is to “get eaten up.”42 He claims instead a place in the caste of the big-bellied men whose destiny is to “eat.”43

There is but one more attribute of modernization left, which Krishna describes as “the capacity to defer consumption or enjoyment and use one’s savings for investment in productive activities that would multiply the initial capital.”44 I have saved this attribute for last because it resonates in less straightforward ways with Halwai’s narrative of development. Halwai seems at first to have this trait well in hand: When his grandmother, Kusum, insists that he marry, he decides that the short-term benefits of sex and a dowry are not worth the long-term benefits he could reap if he remained single without the burdens of wife and children. He characterizes his position as a servant to be similar to that of an “ass” working at a construction site, and realizes that no better fate would await his children if he were to marry while he was still a servant: “I was like that ass now. And all I would do, if I had children, was teach them to be asses like me, and carry rubble around for the rich.”45 So he resists his grandmother’s demands that he marry, and determines to improve his socioeconomic position.

But Halwai seems to lose his grip on this attribute of modernization—deferring present enjoyment for future gains—when he first starts to develop some capital: He receives 4,700 rupees from Mr. Ashok’s wife, Pinky Madam, to drive her to the airport away from her husband and marriage, and he starts to cheat Mr. Ashok by using his car to make money. But he does not save or invest his windfall. Instead he blows 7,000 rupees on twenty minutes with a “golden-haired” prostitute.46 However, Halwai learns quickly from this misadventure. He hears his grandmother’s voice
echo in his head and feels her fingers wring his ears: “Do you know how many water buffaloes you could have bought for that much money?” He never repeats this error again. When his grandmother, Kusum, sends another letter arranging the terms of his marriage, he resolves to sacrifice marriage for social mobility. He tells her, “I can’t live the rest of my life in a cage.” Despite this slip-up, Halwai is soon back on the path of development forged by modernization theory.

Indeed, even Halwai’s mistake of choosing short-term enjoyment with a “golden-haired” prostitute is in keeping with modernization. In the modernization school of thought, the attributes of modernization critical for developmental success “happened to be more prevalent among individuals in the societies of Western Europe.” Halwai’s desire for a fair-skinned, golden-haired woman over the darker-skinned, black-haired Indian woman then could be read as an attempt to possess the superiority Western Europeans are believed to have over non-Europeans. Halwai’s desire to be superior manifests itself not only in his choice of women, but also in his choice of appearance. He literally trains himself to become, if not exactly Western European, at least more like the superior class in India, the wealthy elite. He begins to mimic his master, Mr. Ashok, who had been educated and living in the U.S. He buys a plain, white T-shirt, with a small design in the center similar to the kind Mr. Ashok wears. He also buys himself black shoes similar to the kind he sees the wealthy elite of India wear in order to enter a shopping mall frequented by the upper and middle classes of India. He stops chewing paan and starts to brush his teeth with whitening toothpaste. He also stops scratching his groin.

In the name of development according to a discourse of modernization, Halwai strives to change his appearance and habits from those of the subaltern poor to those of the wealthy elite.

The main impetus for these self-improvements is Pinky Madam’s criticisms: “You’re so filthy! Look at you, look at your teeth, look at your clothes! There’s red paan all over your teeth, and there are red spots on your shirt. It’s disgusting!” Because fair, Westernized, and wealthy elite class Pinky Madam is disgusted by these aspects of him, Halwai identifies them as disgusting too: “Why had my father never told me not to scratch my groin? Why had my father never taught me to brush my teeth in milky foam? Why had he raised me to live like an animal? Why do all the poor live amid such filth, such ugliness?” The self-critique and self-questioning conundrum that Halwai faces on his path to development and modernization is what Adiga identifies as the crisis of the moment in postcolonial and globalizing India. He writes, “The past fifty years have seen tumultuous changes in India’s society,
and these changes—many of which are for the better—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.”

Based on how Halwai embodies and practices the key attributes modernization theory identifies as critical for individuals to develop successfully, we can understand the path of development Halwai takes from subaltern to entrepreneur to be that prescribed by modernization theory. On top of these values and actions of Halwai as protagonist, the storytelling form invoked by Halwai as narrator (the memo) and his addressee (China’s Premier, Wen Jiabao) also point to how deeply Halwai’s mode of development is governed by modernization theory, a set of ideas that Adiga subtly shows to be wanting when it comes to dealing with human beings in all their complex manifestations. Although a memo seems appropriate as a medium of communication between state leaders or business partners, that Halwai uses the memo, a form of communication almost exclusively associated with work and business transactions, underscores how his social interactions are conceived as business transactions. However, that Halwai’s narrative overweights the facts-only, bare-bones constraints of a business memo suggests how human lives—their personalities, identities, as well as personal and social aspects—cannot be neatly contained or ordered by structures and systems of business. If it does, it does so only by violating the organic nature of human lives. Adiga subtly conveys this in the way that Halwai’s memos grow less formal, and more revealing, over the course of the seven nights over which he relates his life story.

As with the choice of the memo as a form of communication, that Halwai addresses his life narrative to Premier Wen is no less revealing. While the form of the memo captures the tension between business transactions and human relationships that modernization theory contributes to when practiced, his choice of addressee alerts us to Adiga’s, if not Halwai’s, concern that economic reform needs to come in hand with social, civil, and political reform. That Halwai writes to Premier Wen, a figure associated with “supporting economic reform and growth but also pointedly calling for greater emphasis on social equality for those who have been left out of the country’s ‘economic miracle,’” gestures toward Adiga’s, and perhaps Halwai’s, recognition of this indivisibility. Although Halwai seems resigned to his immoral choices, that he relates the dilemmas of his choices to the Chinese Premier known to be “something of a populist,” having expressed “concern for the plight of ordinary peasants and laborers, whose disaffection has manifested itself in an alarming increase
in social unrest” in China, suggests perhaps that Halwai recognizes how his life, and those of others like himself, will only truly improve if their civil, political, and social situations improve as well.55

It is difficult to say for sure whether Halwai identifies Premier Wen as a fellow social entrepreneur, a future business partner, or a development and modernization ally, but he does seem to recognize that they are of the same “kind,” and 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, cell phone usage, and drug abuse.”56 He seems to recognize that China, like India, is also galloping along the race-course of development, through modernization and neoliberal globalization policies.57 But since Halwai is such an unreliable narrator—his grasp of facts and knowledge is questionable, his narrative tone is mostly ironic, and his narrative perspective often myopic—it is may be going too far to suggest that Halwai hopes his story will serve as a cautionary tale for the Premier as he continues to work towards China’s economic growth. It is clear, however, that Adiga seems to prompt us as readers to question whether Halwai’s story is in fact a successful one. Although the path of modernization theory does allow Halwai to rise up socioeconomically, the novel underscores in subtle, but multiple, ways how this means to success comes at a heavy cost.

**Neoliberal Globalization and Ethics**

Practically speaking, developing according to modernization theory does seem to serve Halwai well. The material conditions of his life improve significantly once he owns his own taxi service business. He has a comfortable enough income even to consume conspicuously by hanging a chandelier in his office, and two in his apartment—“one in the drawing room, and a small one in the toilet.”58 He can also feed his young nephew, Dharam, who had come to live with him, a glass of milk every night and ice cream on Sundays. He can send Dharam to a good school in Bangalore, “an English school” where his nephew learns to pronounce “pizza” in English “like a rich man’s son” and to enjoy the taste of it just as Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam did.59

However, Halwai and others associated with him pay a high price for his socioeconomic development. Mr. Ashok dies, while Halwai’s family in Laxmangarh are likely tortured then killed, and Halwai becomes a murderer, robber, and hunted criminal. In other words he sacrifices himself, his family, and his community to get ahead. To return to the
three chandeliers that symbolize Halwai’s newfound wealth for example, we learn that they are poor replacements for Halwai’s family members: “I should talk a little more about this chandelier. Why not? I’ve got no family anymore. All I’ve got is chandeliers.” Such is the high price of developing according to the principles of modernization, which privileges the individual, especially the individual driven by reason and self-interest in a capitalist, free-market system. Such are the violent acts that form the dark side of modernization.

According to Halwai, however, these violent acts are but a temporary and unavoidable price that must be paid to rise up. Once he is rich, his wealth and position allow him to act ethically, or so he claims. As an established businessman in Bangalore, Halwai finds he has the option, even the duty, to be good, something he claims is impossible as a subaltern in Laxmangarh:

> It is not as if you come to Bangalore and find that everyone is moral and upright here. This city has its share of thugs and politicians. It’s just that here, if a man wants to be good, he can be good. In Laxmangarh, he doesn’t even have this choice. That is the difference between this India and that India: the choice.

The most telling instance of Halwai’s so-called improved moral options as a businessman happens after one of his taxi drivers accidently hits and kills a boy. Although Halwai bribes the police into blaming the victim, he also tries to atone for the boy’s death by offering the boy’s parents 25,000 rupees. He tells the victim’s parents:

> “First of all, I want to express my deep sorrow at the death of your son. Having lost relatives myself—so many of them—I know the pain that you have suffered. He should not have died.”
> “Second, the fault is mine. Not the driver’s. The police have let me off. That is the way of this jungle we live in. But I accept my responsibility. I ask for your forgiveness.”
> “There are twenty-five thousand rupees in here. I don’t give it to you because I have to, but because I want to.”

This money, as Halwai sees it, is not a bribe, a pay-off for their son’s death. It is penance: Halwai is trying to atone for causing their son to die, for the loss of their son. To this discourse of atonement, Halwai adds that of benevolence. He offers to take their other son under his wing by offering him work and care: “I want to help your other son . . . He is a
brave boy. He stood up to the police the other night. He can come and be a driver with me if you want. I will take care of him if you want.”

From this mix of corruption, atonement, and benevolence, a sense of Halwai’s ethics comes into relief. He explains his actions in almost moral terms: “But I had to do something different; don’t you see? I can’t live the way the Wild Boar and the Buffalo and the Raven lived, and probably still live, back in Laxmangarh. I am in the Light now.”

The Wild Boar, the Buffalo, and the Raven are nicknames the villagers of Laxmangarh have for their three landlords who control the main sources of production in their village—farming land, rickshaws and roads, grazing land. Together with the Stork, who controls the river for fishing and travel, these landlords exploit and oppress the villagers. As with the analogy of the butcher and the chickens in the rooster coop, the metaphor of landlords as animals here also suggests that these landlords gain power and wealth by controlling and profiting off of the resources of others—the labor and lives of their workers and servants. Although the animal imagery aptly indicates the particular resource which the landlord controls (the Wild Boar controls the farming land, the Buffalo controls the rickshaws and roads, the Raven controls the grazing land, and the Stork controls the river for fishing and travel), its particular animals also significantly suggests more primitive forms of capitalism—natural resource extraction such as farming, mining, and fishing—rather than more modern modes of industrial capitalism such as factory production, or financial capitalism such as stock trading. The more primitive nature of the landlord’s activities is captured in the savage and predatory natures of their nicknames: Wild Boar after all is a feral beast, the Buffalo is known as a beast of burden, and the Raven is a scavenger bird which feeds on refuse and carrion. The landlords, in other words, uphold a kind of modern-day form of feudalism where they are the masters and the villagers are their servants. When Halwai kills Mr. Ashok and uses his money to start up his own business, he sees himself as breaking with that feudal tradition, and joining a modern capitalist system. Instead of an oppressive master-servant relationship, there is a contract between a boss and his employees. Halwai perceives this capitalist system to be ethically superior to feudalism, and strives to act accordingly. He refuses to behave in the same exploitative way as the feudal landlords. If for them being wealthy, being “in the Light,” means they have the freedom to oppress others, for Halwai, it means that he has the freedom to, if not help others, at least the freedom to exercise his conscience.

Halwai’s reaction to this car accident bears similarities and differences to the reaction his master’s family (Mr. Ashok’s father—the Stork—and
Mr. Ashok’s brother—the Mongoose) have to an earlier car accident, where an intoxicated Pinky Madam runs over and kills a poor child. When we compare the two accidents, one of the key factors we notice is how, in the second accident with his driver, Mohammad Asif, Halwai’s response is similar to Pinky Madams, and dissimilar from Mr. Ashok’s family. Like Pinky Madam who wanted to track down the family of the dead child and offer them compensation, Halwai visits the parents of the dead boy and offers them money. Although like Mr. Ashok, the Mongoose, and the Stork, Halwai also bribes the police, unlike his former bosses, he does not force his driver, Asif, to take the blame as they made him. Instead, Halwai accepts the responsibility of the accident himself. In these ways, Halwai does “do something different.” His being in the rich India, or what he calls “the Light” instead of the poor India, or what he calls “the Darkness,” does seem to allow him to act more ethically.

However, when we take a closer look at Halwai’s so-called ethical actions, we see that they are not fully ethical or moral, and that his choices are not wholly free or open. His actions and options are constrained by a social and economic system that functions as a free-market economy, catering first to individuals who can best serve themselves, rather than to individuals who most need serving. His actions and options are also restrained by a civil and political system that, following the dictates of a free-market economy, serves mainly individuals who have the financial and cultural capital (i.e. money and influence), rather than those who most need civil protection and political voice. In short, Halwai’s actions and options are limited by a system of being that puts economic growth over social justice and political participation. They are confined by what Krishna calls “neoliberal globalization,” a form of globalization that naturalizes and depoliticizes the logic of the market. For Krishna, “neoliberal globalization is the intellectual and political child of the modernization school.” He contends that modernization fosters not just globalization—“a movement that is suffusing the entire world with a form of production based on free-market capitalism and an attendant ideology of individualist consumerism.” It fosters a neoliberal form of globalization.

To understand how Halwai’s ethical development is limited by neoliberal globalization, let us look closely at his response to the second accident by his driver, Asif. A careful examination reveals that his actions are structured as financial, business transactions, rather than emotional, human connections. Halwai’s method of corruption, for instance, is monetary: He bribes the assistant commissioner of police. His means of atonement too is financial: He pays 25,000 rupees in exchange for a
young boy’s life. Even his mode of benevolence is business-based: He hires the dead boy’s brother. Each action is framed in the discourse of a system of neoliberal globalization that values people and interacts with them as goods, services, or labor, rather than ethical, social, and equal human beings. Importantly, although Halwai’s mixed responses of corruption, retribution, and benevolence are not entirely ethical in theory, they feel ethical in practice because they follow the hegemony of a neoliberal globalization that naturalizes this disabled form of ethics. According to a system where a free-market is god, these handicapped actions and options appear to be the only reasonable possibilities.

Indeed, Halwai’s entire rise from rags to riches, especially where he kills and steals from his master should be morally reprehensible, if not outright criminal. Yet in the prevailing logic of neoliberal globalization, it is stealing and killing that allows him to prosper. It is stealing and killing that enables him to redress the imbalance of class apartheid. Halwai’s killing and stealing are the logical destinations of a narrative of development like modernization, which privileges people as individuals making rational, self-interested choices in a free market economy. His actions are also the logical outcomes of a worldwide hegemony of neoliberal globalization, which prizes individuals over community, profits over people, and man over nature. In such an environment, the only way to rise-up is to play by the often ruthless rules of modernization and neoliberal globalization. As Adiga himself recognizes: “There are lots of self-made millionaires in India now, certainly, and lots of successful entrepreneurs. But remember that over a billion people live here, and for the majority of them, who are denied decent health care, education, or employment, getting to the top would take doing something like what Balram has done.”[71] Admittedly, these rules of modernization and neoliberal globalization do not force Halwai’s hand to kill and steal, but they do reduce him to severely limited options. Still, is Halwai’s ruthless mode of development the only option for the poor to right the wrong of socioeconomic inequality in the context of neoliberal globalization? A human rights approach to development would say no.

**HUMAN RIGHTS AND AN ETHICS OF THE POOR**

Since at least the 1970s, a human rights centered narrative of development has emerged to try and tackle the problem of global and local inequality, which a history of underdevelopment created and which programs of modernization such as the World Bank’s structural adjustment policies
of the 1980s exacerbated. Unlike underdevelopment and modernization processes that contributed to global inequality, a human rights approach seeks to redress this global polarization of the rich and poor. And unlike modernization theory, which defines development primarily as economic growth, a human rights approach takes a more comprehensive view. It takes into account the indivisibility of human rights for and as development. Adopting Amartya Sen’s definition of “development as freedom,” this approach believes that improving civil and political, social and economic, cultural and environmental freedoms of people will improve their overall development, and vice versa. And it seeks to translate this principle into practice.

Halwai’s narrative, however, throws into relief a fundamental dilemma for a human rights approach to development. Although Halwai claims and dispenses human rights for himself when he develops from a subaltern to an entrepreneur, he violates the human rights of others such as his family members and Mr. Ashok. He takes their life indirectly in the first case and directly in the second. Herein lies the dilemma for a human rights approach to development in theory and practice. In theory, this approach presupposes that individuals, communities, and states should act ethically. In practice this translates into the presupposition that a right to development does not include a freedom to kill and rob those who have repeatedly developed at your expense. That is, a human rights-based form of development does not presume or condone an eye-for-an-eye approach. Rather, it presumes an ethical approach. But whose ethics are presumed? To return to Spivak’s quote that I cited in the first section of this essay, it is ethics as understood by the class that presupposes they have the manifest destiny to right wrongs. Those who have wealth, social standing, and power—those that live in Esteva and Prakash’s One-third World—typically dominate the theory and practice of human rights and development at global and local levels. They determine how to right the wrongs faced by those with less wealth, social standing, and power. They decide what is ethical and what is not. Keeping Halwai’s phenomenon of the Rooster coop in mind, can human rights and development work for the poor if their policies subscribe to what the rich think is ethical? Might a human rights approach to development work better for the poor if their policies followed an ethics of the poor instead?

A theory and practice of human rights and development that is ethical according to the poor is one way to characterize what Halwai envisions and enacts in The White Tiger, although perhaps a troubling one. This is a kind of human rights approach to development that recognizes human beings as rights holders and rights dispensers. It does not just conform
to the traditional modes of human rights and development identified by Jacques Rancière, where the rich dispense rights to the poor that the rich themselves no longer need, while the poor receive only the rights the rich throw at them. In short, Halwai’s actions are actual claims for human rights, not acts of humanitarianism or pity. And they are concrete actions for development, not acts of charity or mercy. By Halwai’s account, what he has done is claim and dispense his rights for himself. He redressed the wrong of socioeconomic inequality inflicted on him through centuries of underdevelopment and modernization in colonial and postcolonial India. To right so deep and wide a wrong, one wrong has to be committed:

Haven’t I succeeded in the struggle that every poor man here should be making—the struggle not to take the lashes your father took, not to end up in a mound of indistinguishable bodies that will rot in the black mud of Mother Ganga? True, there was the matter of the murder—which is a wrong thing to do, no question about it . . . But isn’t it likely that everyone who counts in this world, including our prime minister (including you, Mr. Jiabao), has killed someone or other on their way to the top? Kill enough people and they will put up bronze statues to you near Parliament House in Delhi—but that is glory, and not what I am after. All I wanted was the chance to be a man—and for that, one murder was enough.

Although Halwai’s sense of ethics here sits uneasily with the moral aspirations of a human rights approach to development, they rest squarely within their egalitarian motives. He is struggling against his own poverty, oppression, and inhuman misery. He strives for his own socioeconomic security, freedom, and humanity; for his “chance to be a man.” His language is rife with a discourse of human rights and development that not only recognizes the primary wrong of our globalized world—the polarization of the world into the obscenely rich and the obscenely poor. It also identifies reasons for class apartheid that are similar to those held by human rights and development supporters—underdevelopment.

Against this legacy of unethical underdevelopment, Halwai adopts his own praxis of ethics. Although Halwai regrets his crime of killing Mr. Ashok, he feels that his actions are, in part, morally justified. Not only that, but they are justified by the very theories of development discussed in this essay. Underdevelopment, modernization, and human rights may not overlap on many points, but they each recognize in different ways that individuals succeed on the backs of others, their communities, and the environment; the rich become rich at the expense of the poor, and the
powerful grow powerful at the expense of the powerless. If each of these narratives of development function within these parameters of inequality and injustice, and strive to recalibrate such disequilibrium, then Halwai’s narrative of development, however counter-intuitive, is not only valid, it is also ethical. Although somewhat extreme, it is arguably a form of human rights-based development that is truly, if uncomfortably for most human rights and development groups, coming “from below.” If Halwai’s thoughts and actions are in a way the “active agency of the oppressed” that Harsh Mander and others have deemed essential for rights-based approaches to development, then why is Halwai’s path a troubling model of human rights and development?77

Aside from the immoral, even criminal, acts that Halwai’s approach involves, which I discussed earlier, his method is also troubling because it does not address the greater problems of social injustice and economic inequality. What it does is raise Halwai to Estev and Prakash’s “One-third World” discussed earlier: it absorbs Halwai into the “social minority” that subscribes to the Western norms of development and modernization, without really improving the lives of the “Two-thirds World,” or the “social majority.”78 And it does so at the expense of his family’s life in that “social majority.”79 If anything, Halwai’s approach, entwined as it is with models of development, modernization, and neoliberal globalization, models which contributed significantly to the gap between rich and poor at local and global levels, seems on course to widen and deepen even further the abyss between the haves of the One-third World and the have-nots of the Two-thirds World. Halwai’s particular method is further unsatisfying as a rights-based approach to development because it only focuses on developing the economic situation of the individual, not all aspects of the individual. For example, Halwai’s financial status may have improved, but the conditions of his civil and political rights have not. As Halwai informs us: “I am India’s most faithful voter, and I still have not seen the inside of a voting booth.”80 The problem of corruption in business and government at the local and national level also persists.

But perhaps a more subtle, yet equally significant, reason why Halwai’s rise from rags to riches is troubling lies in the way his narration of his method forces us to destabilize our assumptions and confront our, if not complicit, then at least implicated positions as subjects of the One-third World. Halwai’s narration troubles our assumptions (or more crudely, our prejudices and/or stereotypes) by at once showing them up (by conforming to them), and showing them to be misplaced (by altering them). In other words, he repeats our expectations of the Two-thirds World—the impoverished, the subalterns, and even the entrepreneurs-
in-the-making like himself—but with a difference. For example, when Halwai describes his condition and that of other subalterns as being in “the Darkness,” while those of the landlords as living in “the Light,” he repeats the colonialist discourse of the colonizers as enlightened and civilized, in contrast to the colonized as regressive and savage. But that Halwai attaches the element of darkness to the poor and of the light to the wealthy forces us to acknowledge that such ideas and discourse of a lesser class (in colonialist discourse, less civilized; in human rights discourse, possessing less rights; in development discourse, less privileged) persists in our contemporary postcolonial, globalizing world. Moreover, the remapping of colonialist paradigms to class apartheid pushes us to recognize that even though we may not be directly exploiting a class of people deemed lesser, our values and practices nevertheless are premised in some way on their position as lesser subjects, and impact how and why the rich live in “the Light” of the One-third World and the poor in “the Darkness” of the Two-thirds World.

This pattern of repeating our assumptions, but twisting them in order to trouble them, is most pointed when we consider that it is Halwai who is the narrator of his own coming-of-age-story, or bildungsroman. At first glance, we might read this bildungsroman as Spivak’s subaltern finally speaking for himself. Halwai’s self-proclaimed unreliability as narrator, however, forces us to question our initial reading, and our desire to read his story redemptively. The unreliability of Halwai’s narration is not just the usual biased perspectives that inevitably occur in cases of self-representation, or even one where the narrator bluntly declares: “My country is the kind where it pays to play it both ways: the Indian entrepreneur has to be straight and crooked, mocking and believing, sly and sincere, at the same time.” Rather our distrust of Halwai rests in the way he seems to be ignorant, misinformed, or misguided on what we might consider general knowledge, an informed worldview, or even rational thought. His irrational distrust of cell-phones, his misplaced belief that “Chinese are great lovers of freedom and individual liberty,” and the incorrect answers he gives to Mr. Ashok’s general knowledge questions such as “how many planets are there in the sky?”; “who was the first prime minister of India?”; and “What is the name of our continent?” are but a few of such troubling moments in the novel. Halwai’s display of irrational superstition, an unenlightened perspective of China, and a lack of general knowledge shows up our perhaps unacknowledged assumptions that the poor are generally less educated, less informed, and would benefit if they learnt from those who have had the privilege of formal education that promotes and cultivates rational thinking, moral
values through respect for universal human rights, and knowledge of physics, politics, and geography. A careful reflection on these assumptions cannot help but prompt analysis of our other assumptions such as why we privilege rationality, and de-privilege superstition; whether our perspective of China and other countries in the world are not also limited by our worldview; and what we count as general knowledge.

Despite what we might consider to be failings of Halwai as a reliable narrator, Halwai insists that he is the perfect guide to the real India; he is best suited to tell us “the truth about Bangalore,” India’s outsourcing miracle city. Halwai asserts his authenticity as guide—his authority is based on lived experience—to educate us, to produce knowledge for those at the center of knowledge production: He identifies himself as Wen Jiabao’s “Midnight Educator, on matters entrepreneurial.” Because of these representations of Halwai as narrator—ignorant and authentic in precisely the stereotypical ways we may unwittingly assume and expect the poor to be—we are subtly pushed to acknowledge that our desire to read Halwai’s narrative as that of an empowered subaltern speaking for himself stems from our perhaps equally unacknowledged subject position and values as “White humanitarian” readers, or to be more exact in this case, “One-third World humanitarian” readers.

The matter of The White Tiger’s reader—the professed addressee, Premier Wen, and the implicated reader, the One-third World humanitarian—is another area wherein Halwai’s narrative pattern of destabilizing our assumptions comes into play. That the professed addressee is Premier Wen, rather than the typically implied addressee of the “White humanitarian” reader, unsettles this very class of readers: Why have we been displaced by a political leader, and one from China’s government at that? Although Wen Jiabao is a Chinese leader who, as a populist politician, seems to share the support of the citizens whom he serves, isn’t he still a part of the machinery that is China’s government, a government that enlightened members of the One-third World know to be a violator of universal human rights? To borrow Makau Mutua’s savage-victim-savior (SVS) metaphor with which he characterizes dominant human rights narratives, this government is the “savage” from which the human rights “saviors” from the One-third World seek to save their “victims”—the multitude of oppressed Chinese citizens. Halwai’s direct address to Premier Wen leaves the typically implied “White humanitarian” reader feeling not only unceremoniously displaced by a “savage” of whom they perceive themselves to be the better, it also underscores their seeming irrelevance. This subaltern, Halwai, has no need for a “White humanitarian” knight to save him from his distress. He is saving himself; and he seeks to teach others to do likewise.
Moreover, that Halwai replaces the typically implied “White humanitarian” reader with Premier Wen inadvertently urges this same group of readers to compare themselves to the Premier, and to notice some discomforting similarities. Like the Premier, the “White humanitarian” reader may also be concerned about the welfare of those left out of neoliberal globalization’s economic miracle. But like the Premier too, the “White humanitarian” reader, as part of the One-third World, is part of the oppressive class, if not the direct oppressor. The rhetorical move of persuasion in Halwai’s bildungsroman then, is not an appeal of pathos to sentimental readers schooled to feel sympathy or even empathy for the plight of those like Halwai, and to respond through humanitarian charity. Rather, the rhetorical logic is one of ethos. It is an appeal to the moral character of readers, be they “White humanitarian” or non-White but members nevertheless of the One-third World, to revise their self-image as humanitarians and righters-of-wrong that happen elsewhere, and to consider instead how they are implicated in a global system of class apartheid.

_The White Tiger_ is admittedly not exactly Halwai’s bildungsroman. The protagonist and narrator, Halwai, is, as Adiga notes, “a composite of various men” he met while traveling through India. Halwai’s story is also admittedly not precisely a real or even representative example of how a poor subaltern might right wrongs. The novel (and its protagonist-narrator) is only a fictional representation, and one that arises out of the imagination of Adiga, who as someone “raised partly in Australia,” who “studied at Columbia and Oxford Universities,” and who has written for British publications such as _The Financial Times, The Independent, _and_ The Sunday Times_ is hardly subaltern. But even as a representation, it compels us to reexamine our presuppositions about the work of human rights and development, as well as our implicated subject positions as members of the One-third World. We are also challenged to re-imagine what human rights and development efforts might look like according to an ethics logical to those most in need of the freedoms of human rights and development. If we are to take seriously Spivak’s critique of “the presupposition [in human rights] that the reasonable righting of wrongs is inevitably the manifest destiny of the groups . . . that remain poised to right them,” the same groups that comprise the “social minority” of haves, then we must attend to the discomforting aspects of Halwai’s narrative—both its ideology of underdevelopment, modernization, and neoliberal globalization; its form of memo and bildungsroman, and its implicated readers of the One-third World—“White humanitarian,” Indian, and Chinese alike.
NOTES

8. Ibid., 529.
10. Ibid., 16.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 149.
23. Ibid., 144–45.
24. Ibid., 150.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 10.
34. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 196.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Krishna, Globalization & Postcolonialism, 9.
46. Ibid., 196.
47. Ibid., 200.
48. Ibid., 239.
51. Ibid., 123.
52. Ibid., 128.
55. Ibid.
59. Ibid., 271.
60. Ibid., 97.
61. Ibid., 262.
62. Ibid., 268.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., 269.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
68. Ibid., 9.
69. Ibid.
72. For a useful overview of the emergence of rights-based approaches, as well as their critiques, see Paul Gready and Jonathan Ensor, eds., Reinventing Development? Translating Rights-Based Approaches from Theory Into Practice (London: Zed Books, 2005), 1–44.
76. Ibid., 274.
78. Esteva and Prakash, *Grassroots Post-Modernism*.
79. Ibid.
81. Ibid., 12.
82. Ibid.
83. For an excellent analysis of the relationship between the *bildungsroman* and the international human rights project, see Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 270–316. My analysis on *The White Tiger* as a *bildungsroman*, Halwai as a rights-asserting, stereotype-troubling self-narrator, and of the implicated readers of other *bildungsromane* such as *The White Tiger*, which feature protagonists from developing countries who succeed despite the odds, is drawn from Slaughter’s insightful analysis of the growing popularity of this genre and its connections to human rights discourse.
86. Ibid., 3, 7. Admittedly, Halwai may only be praising China for being a freedom loving country because his professed addressee is the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.
87. Ibid., 2.
88. Ibid., 37.