

Betiel Wasihun (Hrsg.)

## Narrating Surveillance – Überwachen erzählen



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Herausgegeben von  
Betiel Wasihun

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ERGON VERLAG

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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek  
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der  
Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im  
Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

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Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem Papier.  
Korrektur: Kohei Suzuki und Edward Wright  
Umschlaggestaltung: Jan von Hugo

[www.ergon-verlag.de](http://www.ergon-verlag.de)

ISSN 1869-9030  
ISBN 978-3-95650-594-2 (Print)  
ISBN 978-3-95650-595-9 (ePDF)

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# The Unique Identity Project: Surveillance Society and Democratic Culture in Aravind Adiga's India

Jeffrey Clapp (Education University of Hong Kong)

## Abstract

Am 24. August 2017 entschied der Oberste Gerichtshof Indiens, dass die Privatsphäre zu den Grundrechten gehört, die durch die indische Verfassung garantiert werden. Der unmittelbare Anlass für die Entscheidung zum Schutz der Privatsphäre war die rasche Verbreitung von Aadhaar, dem biometrischen Identifizierungssystem, das von der *Unique Identification Authority of India* (UIDAI), einer gesetzlich festgelegten Behörde, verwaltet wird. Die UIDAI bietet dauerhafte zwölfstellige Identifikationsnummern als zentralen Bestandteil eines Systems, das Bewohnern Indiens eine einzigartige Identität und eine digitale Plattform zur Verfügung stellen soll, sich jederzeit und überall zu authentifizieren. Kritiker haben eingeräumt, dass Aadhaar durch die Erfassung von biographischen, demographischen sowie biometrischen Daten nicht nur gegen Grundrechte verstößt, sondern auch den Weg zu einer ominösen Überwachungsgesellschaft ebnet. Die Urheber und Verteidiger dieses Systems dagegen bestehen darauf, dass Aadhaar offen und egalitär ist. Vor dem Hintergrund dieser Konflikte werden in diesem Aufsatz drei Romane des indischen Schriftstellers Aravind Adiga im Kontext der Neoliberalisierung Indiens behandelt. Obwohl Adiga nicht explizit auf Aadhaar eingeht, möchte ich behaupten, dass Neuerfindung, Neupositionierung – und sogar Neoliberalisierung – demokratischer Konzepte wie Privatsphäre, Empowerment und Inklusion im Mittelpunkt seiner Romane *The White Tiger* (2008), *Last Man in Tower* (2011) und *Selection Day* (2016) stehen. Darüber hinaus stelle ich die These auf, dass Adigas Romane durch „Erneuerungen“ innerhalb einer antimodernistischen literarischen Tradition die laufenden soziotechnischen Innovationen in Indien unterminieren.

*Stirner nennt den Einzigen  
und sagt zugleich: Namen nennen dich nicht;  
er spricht ihn aus, indem er ihn den Einzigen nennt,  
und fügt doch hinzu, der Einzige sei nur ein Name;  
er meint also etwas Anderes, als er sagt . . .*

Max Stirner, "Recensenten Stirners," 149

On 24 August 2017, the Supreme Court of India determined that privacy is among the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian constitution. This epochal decision, which reversed several previous verdicts, has brought Indian law in line with many national jurisdictions and international rights regimes, including the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which numbers privacy among its "inalienable" rights. In the months and years ahead, this decision will likely have a substantial impact on governance in India. But the immediate occasion of the privacy decision was the rapid expansion of Aadhaar, India's biometrically-enabled identification and authorization system, which was introduced in 2009. The Aadhaar system is administered by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), a legislatively-established statutory authority which provides permanent 12-digit identification numbers to residents of India. These numbers are the central component of a verification system that is intended "[t]o empower residents of India with a unique identity and a digital platform to authenticate anytime, anywhere" (UIDAI, "Vision & Mission"). Critics have contended that by gathering together identity information, demographic information, and biometric information, Aadhaar not only contravenes fundamental rights, but also augurs the emergence of an ominous surveillance society. Its originators and defenders, on the other hand – among them, leaders from India's booming IT sector, and major advocates of neoliberal development, like the World Bank – contend that Aadhaar is inclusive and egalitarian, offering a singular opportunity to remake Indian society in keeping with democratic and humanitarian values. In order to consider the nature and outcome of these conflicts in more detail, this essay looks at three novels by the Indian writer Aravind Adiga, each of which is set directly in the context of India's neoliberalization. Although Adiga has not written directly about Aadhaar, I argue that a central project of *The White Tiger* (2008), *Last Man in Tower* (2011), and *Selection Day* (2016) is the reinvention, repositioning, and even the neoliberalization, of the concept of privacy. I also show that Adiga has explored how categories like freedom, empowerment and inclusion mutate within democracies as they undergo neoliberalization. Finally, I argue that by "innovating" within the anti-modernist literary and philosophical tradition extending from Dostoevsky to Pankaj Mishra's recent history *The Age of Anger* (2017), Adiga's novels rival the sociotechnical innovations under way in India with regard to the notion of "unique identity." Through these arguments, I attempt to move past the debates – tending toward repetition – about whether Adiga got India

right, or whether he had the right to represent India, in his prize-winning book *The White Tiger*. Intriguing contributions to this conversation, I propose, are now on offer in *Last Man*, in *Selection Day* – and in the Aadhaar system.

### 1. Foundations

“Aadhaar” is the Hindi word for “basis” or “foundation,” and it is indeed the increasingly foundational quality of the Aadhaar system that has now provoked a legal backlash on privacy grounds. Aadhaar authentication can be accomplished in several ways: through checking demographic information, through the use of a one-time passcode, and, centrally, through several types of biometric identification, including photographs, fingerprinting, and iris scanning (UIDAI, “Authentication”). Although India has had a series of previous individual identification schemes (including the Multipurpose National Identification Card, rolled out as recently as 2007), Aadhaar has been adopted on a completely unprecedented scale. The fact that the system is formally neutral as to its purpose and context of application has enabled its quick expansion beyond its original role in the administration of large-scale social service programs, so that Aadhaar has become the default choice wherever it is convenient, efficient, or profitable to “uniquely identify” an individual. The result has been a rapid proliferation of “linkage” exercises in government, industry, and society at large. For example, in order to pay income tax in India, one must link one’s Permanent Account Number or PAN card to one’s Aadhaar number. New bank accounts in India must be linked to an Aadhaar number. So must cellphone SIM cards.<sup>1</sup> There have been constant reports of new fields, activities, and processes being made contingent on Aadhaar linking.

At the same time, the Indian Supreme Court has already ruled several times that Aadhaar cannot be made a legal requirement for the accessing of government services or welfare entitlements, and the UIDAI eagerly foregrounds this technicality, despite the practical necessity of having and using Aadhaar in many aspects of daily life. This double movement has had the benefit of fending off legal challenges while protecting the “network effect” which requires Aadhaar to be comprehensive in order for it to be useful. And Aadhaar has been useful; UIDAI can offer many instances of its success. Aadhaar can ensure that social service programs are run efficiently, that entitlement schemes are not defrauded, that more Indians have access to the formal sector of the economy. The government continually releases new reports of the huge numbers of “Aadhaars” that have been issued and includes in these reports large amounts of government monies said to have been saved via this process. On the other hand,

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<sup>1</sup> This is particularly important, given the way that cheap cellphones have also enacted a recent remapping of Indian society. See Doron and Jeffrey.

there have been many problems. Different types of data leakage and creative forms of fraud have impugned the reputation of the system. The established legal principle that Aadhaar not be required in order to access services is widely flouted, so that the hungry can be denied food aid, and the ill can be refused admission to hospitals, because of problems like faulty fingerprint readers or sketchy internet connections.

Thus, there are burgeoning critiques of Aadhaar from above (on constitutional grounds, in the Supreme Court) and from below (on practical or humanitarian grounds, often in rural areas). If the specific present configuration of the Aadhaar system violates the newly discovered fundamental right to privacy in the Indian constitution – a question not answered by the 24 August 2017 verdict – the spread of Aadhaar will be checked in at least some contexts, and the UIDAI may have to reorganize the way the system is structured and administered. The Supreme Court case that will decide this point, which opened in January 2018, began with the petitioners asking “whether the Constitution of India sanctions the creation of a surveillance state and surveillance society.” They assert that via Aadhaar, “the State is empowered with a ‘switch’ by which it can cause the civil death of an individual.” This, they contend, is “reminiscent of totalitarian regimes” (Writ Petition No. 829). But despite the intensity of these claims – and their plausibility – it does not seem likely that Aadhaar is simply going to go away. What does it mean to remap and remodel the social world, “linking” its dimensions through the process of “unique identification”? This, it seems, is really at the heart of Aadhaar’s own uniqueness: unlike previous identification systems in India and elsewhere, Aadhaar can credibly offer to uniquely identify individuals, at low cost and high speed, anywhere in India, for any purpose, at any time. This distinguishes Aadhaar sharply from single-domain, single-purpose identifiers, like drivers’ licenses, social security registrations, or taxpayer identification numbers. It also vastly reduces the practical barriers to frequent or even pervasive authentications. Other nations are said to be watching (Raj and Jain). If the biometric identifiers and the database technology are sufficiently mature to result in a large-scale sociotechnical transformation, as appears possible, Aadhaar will almost certainly have imitators both regionally and globally.

Aadhaar’s momentum depends upon a subtending historical development: India’s onrushing neoliberalization. After a balance of payments crisis in 1991, India accepted World Bank loans, disassembled its state-led economy, and unleashed the forces of global finance capital into the Indian labor market.<sup>2</sup> As in other parts of the world that have been subjected to “structural adjustment,” India has been radically transformed in the intervening years, in ways that improve its standing in some developmental rankings tables while producing un-

2 For an economist’s account of this process, see Chandrasekhar; for an ethnography, see Corbridge and Harriss.

precedented cultural and social dislocation, as the market exploits the power of the state to dispossess and uproot other forms of life. One tall shoot that emerged from this overturned earth was the corporation Infosys, India's first homegrown information technology giant. It is not by any means a coincidence that this company's founder, Nandan Nilekani, became an architect of Aadhaar and the first director of the Unique Identification Authority. As a 2017 article in the *Harvard Business Review* by one of Nilekani's successors reveals, the UIDAI likes to regard Aadhaar not merely as a layer of government bureaucracy, but instead as a sleek, smart, contemporary social network, going so far as to point out that Aadhaar has more users than any global network environment outside of Facebook (Gupta and Auerswald). Nor is this comparison purely tendentious. The article goes on to describe what it calls the "India Stack": a set of network technologies which, like the TCP/IP protocols that direct web traffic, offer means by which businesses, organizations, and other agents might approach the Indian populace through a ready-made and standardized set of information technology tools, with Aadhaar as their firm "foundation" (IndiaStack). It is not too much to say that Aadhaar is "disrupting" the identification "industry" in India.

Aadhaar, therefore, exists not only as statist project, and not only as a developmental one, but also as a business proposition. In this way it proffers the image of a triumphal synthesis, in which the state and private enterprise simply dispense with their longstanding dispute over ends and means. In so doing they not only produce a spectacle of the "capitalist realism" (Fisher) which questions whether there are any viable alternatives, but also disarm specific avenues of criticism, particularly those arising from various aspects of democracy. As Nandan Nilekani himself emphasized in a 2016 World Bank video promoting Aadhaar, the "first justification" of the system is its capacity to "include" persons (World Bank).<sup>3</sup> In the wake of the recent Supreme Court case, Nilekani has stepped back into the debate, arguing that there is no privacy problem, because "universal access means universal oversight" (Nilekani, "Open Up"). His rhetoric of "inclusion" and "universality" presents a significant challenge to those who would confront Aadhaar on the basis of claims to rights and freedoms, which are themselves interdependent with values like universality and inclusion (Young). Even to Aadhaar critics like Kalyani Menon Sen, who filed one of the petitions against UIDAI in the Supreme Court's privacy case,

[A]ccess and inclusion are merely the functional elements of the Aadhaar story. The more emotive script is that Aadhaar gives an identity to millions of faceless, voiceless, documentless people in the country. The identity may only be a number, and the benefits may not flow automatically—still, the thought of millions of people standing up straight and proudly flashing their Aadhaar cards is one that brings a lump to the throat of the patriotic

3 The rhetoric may be as much the Bank's as Nilekani's; see Sharma on the World Bank's use of the concept of "inclusion" in the neoliberal "empowerment" of Indian women.

Indian, even without the national anthem playing in the background. . . . It seems almost churlish to question and critique such a noble idea, or to ask what value a numeric identity, however unique, will add to the lives of those millions of supposedly invisible Indians. (101)

Here Sen fights with her own rhetoric. Her critique plays out what Anthony Giddens noted in *The Nation-State and Violence* (1987): “the oppressive possibilities of surveillance cannot be countered merely by appeal to class dynamics, or to the extension of democracy, and there is no obvious and simple political programme to develop in coping with them” (310). This is because surveillance and democracy both fundamentally consist in cultivating and acting on knowledge about the individual – for example, by recognizing an “identity” or by listening to an individual’s “voice.” Due to this underlying commonality, technologists like Nilekani can readily make Aadhaar appear democratic, just as its opponents in the Supreme Court can make it appear totalitarian. As Pramod K. Nayar has recently argued with specific reference to India, democratic public spheres are increasingly produced by forms of digitally-mediated surveillance (8). Aadhaar, one might say, returns that emergent digital reality, primarily associated with social media spaces, back into the physical world.

This essay is premised on the idea that the interference of Aadhaar with the democratic culture of contemporary India is not merely an example of regulatory capture by scheming capitalists, nor a purely tendentious effect of different parties’ rhetorical strategies, but instead represents an emergent ideological interference that challenges long-held assumptions about democracy, surveillance, privacy – and the novel. David Harvey, Wendy Brown, and other recent critics of neoliberalism have charged that this new manner of arranging the economic and social worlds is profoundly undemocratic (Harvey; Brown). This is indisputable. But as the privacy ruling in India intimates, this story has an arc: neoliberalism can both produce and destroy aspects of democracy, just as it wreaks creative destruction elsewhere. That production and destruction, particularly of concepts like privacy, inclusion, and democracy, has been the focus of the three novels Aravind Adiga has published in the last decade. Like the Aadhaar system itself, these books refigure the relationship between individual identity and social reality in neoliberal India.

## 2. The White Tiger

In Aravind Adiga’s breakout novel *The White Tiger*, which won the 2008 Man Booker prize, Balram Halwai, of the caste of sweet-makers and tea-shop “boys,” journeys from rural poverty in tiny Laxmangarh to the tech hub of Bangalore, describing his progress thus: “You see, I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in Darkness” (14). His choice of metaphor offers an immediate point

of connection with Aadhaar, which UIDAI designates by a fingerprint imposed on the sun (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The Aadhaar logo.

This cheerful symbol, which has been widely derided online, visualizes Balram's argument throughout *The White Tiger*: namely, that he has escaped his relegation to the darkness of poverty and of caste, becoming a unique individual by emerging into the light of the big, wired city. Nor is this just any city. Bangalore is widely understood to be India's software capital; it is home to Nandan Nilekani's Infosys.<sup>4</sup> Balram's trajectory is a highly determinate one, and the location of the story's middle phase in the luxurious suburb of Delhi called Gurgaon, is equally so. As Rana Dasgupta has argued in his remarkable *Capital: A Portrait of Twenty-First Century Delhi* (2014), the emergent synthesis of globalized finance capital with the Indian state is centered in Gurgaon. It is via Gurgaon, therefore, that Balram begins to find his way to the light. First, he manages to get a job as a driver for an upper-class-and-caste family which has ancestral ties to Laxmangarh. This family is in need of another driver because their scion, Ashok, has returned from the United States, and here Adiga again locates his book within a highly specific historical topos: it is precisely the market reforms of the 1990s that made it possible for people like Ashok to claim, as he does in *The White Tiger*, that "things have changed so much in India. There are so many more things I could do here than in New York now" (89).

When Balram decides to kill Ashok, steal his bag full of bribery cash, and abscond to Bangalore, Adiga is offering a map of neoliberal India from the perspective of one who was nearly left behind. Interpreting *The White Tiger*, therefore, depends greatly on understanding what becomes of Balram in Bangalore, because it helps us understand Adiga's critique. Is it directed at caste violence or that of neoliberalism? In Balram's own understanding, he is now an "entrepreneur," operating a fleet of cars that move workers to and from call-center jobs attuned to other time zones. Balram keeps correspondingly odd hours in a flat filled with MacBooks and chandeliers – the latter, a luxurious touch that signifies to Balram the "Light" into which he has emerged, and his right to indulge in *nouveau riche* absurdities. Thus, Balram's triumph is to be up all night in his light-flooded apartment, managing the business he founded on the basis

4 See Heitzman. For an integration of both Bangalore and Infosys into a narrative of Asian neoliberalization, see Ong.

of “skills” he acquired during his training as a driver. The most pertinent of those skills is Balram’s manner of justifying his decision to kill Ashok: he sees this, too, as the work of a “social entrepreneur” (177). This same entrepreneurialism, Adiga implies, also taught Balram how to use readily-bribed police to push business rivals out of the way, and how to evade the slightest consequence when one of his employees runs over and kills a young man. The entrepreneurial approach to this latter difficulty was learned directly. When Ashok’s wife, Pinky, also killed somebody with a car, the family’s lawyer immediately tried to outsource responsibility to Balram. This business-oriented family might well be proud of their student, absent Balram’s murder of their son.<sup>5</sup>

“I am in the Light now,” Balram declares at the end of the book (313). But as will already be apparent, *The White Tiger* cannot be read so straightforwardly, because the book produces an “ironic gap between the entrepreneurial ideal and the actual enterprising subject” (Anjaria and Anjaria 197). Indeed, Adiga’s leverage on India’s contemporary situation depends on a specific displacement between ideal and reality. His powerful renovation of the modernist trope of the “underground man” has much to do with the successes of *The White Tiger*.<sup>6</sup> Balram’s compulsive communications arise from much the same complex of inchoate self-hatred and egotism that Dostoevsky’s 1864 novella *Notes from Underground* identified as one typical response to the excessive “premeditation” (5) of modernizing Russia, as typified in the planned, open avenues of St. Petersburg. In the course of the underground man’s corrosive screed against utilitarian argument, rational planning, civil service, military officers, and polite society, he directs a constant sneer toward an imagined jury of “gentlemen” (Dostoevsky 15). For these worthies, Adiga has substituted a concrete (non-) interlocutor: Balram’s entire story is told as a series of unsendable letters to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, who is said to be interested in India’s cultivation of entrepreneurial spirit. As he harangues the Premier, Balram is at once disdainful and fawning; he personifies a new birth of *ressentiment*.

5 Nandan Nilekani’s effervescent *Imagining India* (2009) begins with a chapter diffidently titled “Notes from an Accidental Entrepreneur.” *The White Tiger* is readily understood as a critique of this kind of discourse, as Abdullah M. Al-Dagamsah (2013) and other critics have shown.

6 In *Literature and the Creative Economy* (2014) Sarah Brouillette offers an influential alternative explanation: that *The White Tiger*, along with Adiga’s habit of describing it as a *mea culpa* for his previous career in international finance journalism, along with the large marketing campaign that accompanied it, essentially monetized questions of cultural authenticity, central among which is the author’s right to represent Balram and India itself. Indeed, such intractable or even interminable questions have been taken up energetically by Ana Cristina Mendes (2010), Barbara Korte (2010), and a number of subsequent critics. To this debate I would add only that enduring interest in interpreting the novel depends substantially on what Adiga took from Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*. As Joseph Frank (1961) once argued, the question of whether Dostoevsky *meant* the critique he put in the mouth of the “underground man” has beset interpreters – and sustained interpretation – of this enigmatic text.

Deborah A. Martinsen (2013) has described how Adiga adopts a tone of voice, and a style of critique, from Dostoevsky, Dostoevsky's many imitators, and in general from what amounts to a tradition of churlish indictments of modernity that extends from Rousseau to Beckett. One specific link between *The White Tiger* and *Notes from Underground* is Adiga's renovation of Dostoevsky's metaphor of the "chicken coop." Dostoevsky's narrator sneers at his imaginary interlocutors that:

You believe in the Crystal Palace, eternally indestructible, that is, one at which you can never stick your tongue out furtively . . . Don't you see: if it were a chicken coop instead of a palace, and if it should rain, then perhaps I could crawl into it so as not to get drenched. (25)

As many have noted, Dostoevsky's visit to the Crystal Palace in London's Great Exhibition in 1862 was a major point of origin for *Notes from Underground*. A crucial link between Dostoevsky and his underground man is that they both perceive an unsupportable triumphalism embodied in this building, in its breathtaking scale and its alarming implication that it brings a course of historical development to perfection. From this point of view, Dostoevsky's book seems targeted not only at belated, imitative Russia, but at the presumptions of modernity as such, embodied not only in the Crystal Palace, but in the whole ethos of smooth progressivism typified by Nikolai Chernychevsky's *What Is To Be Done?* (1863). The filthy chicken coop, and the deliberately stupid willingness to shelter there, is one transvaluation of this overconfident structure of thought. Like the "underground" itself, the coop is preferable to the Crystal Palace because the former does not demand surrender, acknowledgement, or deference.

In *The White Tiger*, Adiga extensively develops the notion of an Indian "Rooster Coop." Balram uses the Coop to designate the ways in which Indian society contrives to prevent its enduring inequality from producing entrepreneurial murderers:

Now, a thinking man like you, Mr. Premier, must ask two questions.

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. (176)

As Balram explains, the Rooster Coop accomplishes its task by making clear to its inmates that their fate is determined in advance, by showing to the living chickens the butchering of each bird taken from the coop. The only reasonable course of action, therefore, is to stay in the coop as long as possible. The cruelty of this system becomes a touchstone for Balram in his evolving conviction that

violence might offer freedom, even if it results in gruesome revenge against his extended family back in Laxmangarh. But this is also the point at which Adiga begins to open space between his snide narrator and Dostoevsky's underground man. Rather than choosing the coop, Balram breaks out. As Adiga has said, his book is "about how a man becomes free, about how violence can be something liberating" (2014).

How are we to read Balram's self-liberation? It is not as though, in leaving the Coop, he has truly chosen the Crystal Palace. Adiga makes clear that the rooms in Bangalore that Balram has built for himself to be free in are an ironic inversion of the light-filled public sphere. They directly conjoin this image of "enlightenment" with the entrapment of the Rooster Coop itself. Balram's struggle to convince himself that he has successfully dissolved the contradiction between the two, that he has moved from Darkness to Light, might stand as the novel's painful, twenty-first century innovation on Dostoevsky. But there is another intertext here as well, one Adiga has announced explicitly: "Balram is my invisible man, made visible" (Jeffries, "Roars of Anger"). In Ralph Ellison's previous rewriting of Dostoevsky in *Invisible Man* (1952), the African-American protagonist, after his many adventures, many attempts to gain recognition, and many attempts to shelter in the crystal palaces on display in the midcentury United States, resolves instead to await a more just world in an underground room, brightly lit, just like Balram's. Perhaps it is significant that Ellison's invisible man is taking the power for his room's profusion of light bulbs by tapping into the public utility company, "Monopolated Light & Power" (5). Balram's chandeliers and MacBooks contrast with the invisible man's grim, glib decision to poach light and power from society. Instead, Adiga's underground man apes the ethos of idealized amorality on display in neoliberal theory.<sup>7</sup> He is up all night making his fortune.

Quite an inheritance, then, in *The White Tiger*. But Aravind Adiga is not the only Indian writer to connect Dostoevsky and the antimodern tradition to India's neoliberalization. In his much-lauded 2017 book *The Age of Anger: A History of the Present*, Pankaj Mishra specifically proposes to explore how Dostoevsky, as an "educated young Russian, lurching between the artificial world of francophone Petersburg and the greater abject mass of pre-modern Russia, outlined the emotional and ideological spectrum that many young Asians and Africans inhabit today" (29). Connecting Rousseau, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and other skeptics of modernity to Balram's real world antecedents, Mishra argues that since it is becoming clear that the glistening palaces of modernity will never actually be extended past the gates of housing complexes and the vigilant guards

7 Caren Irr (2017) has noticed that Adiga and other recent writers have a persistent and ungenerous manner of placing "orphan entrepreneurs" in situations which makes it possible to turn their desires for individuality and self-determination into a critique of neoliberalism.

of shopping plazas, globalization's winners are engendering an enraged underclass of unprecedented proportion.<sup>8</sup> Because, according to Mishra, "the Crystal Palace now extends all over the world, encompassing the non-West and the West alike, literally in the form of the downtown areas of hundreds of cities, from radically 'renovated' Shanghai to the surreal follies of Dubai and Gurgaon" (75), Balrams the world over can contemplate directly whether "entrepreneurialism" is actually available to them.

Mishra's reading, in which the Crystal Palaces of global capital are both ubiquitous and unavailable, is one manner of appropriating Dostoevsky's anti-modern disdain for the twenty-first century. But for the cultural theorist Peter Sloterdijk, who has also recently dwelt on the Crystal Palace, the pertinent reading is not that the majority can only behold, but not enter, the Palace; instead, he argues that the palace can never be departed. In what Sloterdijk terms capitalism's "world interior," the Palace circumscribes the life-world:

[I]t seem[s] likely that communism was a stage on the way to consumerism. . . . as for capitalism, we can only now say that it always meant more than the relations of production. . . . it implies the project of placing the entire working life, wish life, and expressive life of the people it affected within the immanence of spending power. (176)

This account rings true of India, and particularly of India under the decentralized "inclusion" of Aadhaar. For although never communist, state-led growth throughout the long middle strophe of the twentieth century has given way to an unprecedented targeting of the Indian consumer (Rajagopal; Oza) and to what Aravind Adiga himself has described as a corresponding outpouring of "entrepreneurial energy" (2014) that has implicated all Indians in new idioms of producing and consuming. Though Balram and his peers are excluded from India's sprouting malls by a profusion of security guards, they are nonetheless fully entitled to join the Aadhaar system, to use their number to buy a cheap SIM card, to use that SIM card to give and receive e-payments, and increasingly to "be included" in the "formal sector" of the economy. Aadhaar "recognizes" all comers, ensures that they are offered bank accounts, and might even put something in them, because the Aadhaar roll-out is accelerating discussion of universal basic income in India (Devarajan). From this point of view, Aadhaar looks very much like another Crystal Palace, and Adiga looks like a new Dostoevsky. But as Adiga's divergences from Dostoevsky and from Ellison intimate, *The White Tiger* struggles toward a contemporary version of the antimodern ethos. Ultimately, it "frees" Balram into the neoliberalism it critiques – almost as though Adiga had not noticed that this freedom is merely "inclusion."

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8 Mishra's book is a sweeping historical companion to Arjun Appadurai's partial retraction, in *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (2006), of the argument that globalization can mean modernity for everyone.

### 3. *Surveillance and the Novel*

To see what Adiga has done about this awkward resolution, it is helpful to read *The White Tiger* not only alongside *Notes from Underground*, but against Mikhail Bakhtin's epochal reading of that novella in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963). There Bakhtin produces a democratic politics of the novel precisely out of the unpromising material of the underground man's *ressentiment*. Bakhtin begins from the concept of discourse. Discourse – which is to say, speech that comes from somewhere, and that bears the presuppositions from whence it is derived – may be treated with careful attention to its origins and presuppositions, as in the “dialogic” novel, or instead as in the “monological” novel, may be treated as an object, “like the person who goes about his business unaware that he is being watched” (189). But for Bakhtin there actually are no such persons. To write as though there were is for Bakhtin a fundamental distortion of the nature of social reality, because in reality discourse is “profoundly personalized,” (9) – or to put it another way, each discourse emerges from within a pervasive and continuous awareness of being watched.

But what distinguishes the dialogic novel from the monologic one? How is the author's treatment of discourse registered in the text? Bakhtin answers that characters in the polyphonic novel are written in such a way that their speech reflects a pluralistic polyphony, because there is no way to have discourse of one's own except by learning from, adapting, repurposing, and generally responding to that of others: “To find one's own voice and to orient it among other voices, to combine it with some and oppose it to others, to separate one's voice from another voice with which it has inseparably merged – these are the tasks that the heroes solve in the course of the novel” (239). So the “dialogization” that interests Bakhtin, and which he argues is both Dostoevsky's special accomplishment and the central characteristic of the novel as such, occurs both at the level of its narrative, in which discourses come into conflict, and at the level of its characters, within whom discourses are mediated.

The central example of this process in *Problems* is Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. It illustrates perfectly, in its direct references to a host of onlooking, overhearing “gentlemen,” that the social world is a world of watching and listening; it illustrates that the individual consciousness consists largely in an effort to understand when and how others impinge upon oneself. But Dostoevsky's novel also indicates that determining the answer to this latter question is an abyssal, interminable task, so that any statement of the final relationship between oneself and the “gentlemen” is only temporary, unfinalizable, leaving always a remainder or “loophole” (196). As Caryl Emerson (2000) has shown, for Bakhtin this is not merely a theory of the novel, but also a philosophy, an ethics, and a politics. In fact, Bakhtin suggests that the polyphonic novel represents in fictional form what the enlightenment revolutions meant in social form: the

emergence of individuals defined in relationships with one another, rather than a society of subjects in subordinate relationships to priest or king. In other words, it represents the disappearance of a single, central focalizing perspective by which one might feel oneself to be watched, and the emergence instead of a world of everyday watchers. Because of this aspect of his work, Bakhtin has been enthusiastically taken up around the world as a literary-critical progenitor of a literary studies with an enlightened, democratic politics, one that can show how the novel's form is ineluctably identifiable with community, contingency, empathy, or other versions of a liberal humanist or communitarian ethos (a reception explored in detail by Hale). But given this reception, it is curious that *Notes from Underground* forms such a central example for Bakhtin. It is curious because any reasonable interpretation of Dostoevsky's novel will tend to impugn the very possibility of such a happy resolution of the restive individual with the modern ethos, with liberal humanism, or with communitarianism.<sup>9</sup> The fact that Bakhtin's theory of fiction, society, and selfhood, which concludes rhapsodically with the pronouncement that the dialogic novel can represent "the thinking human consciousness and the dialogic sphere in which this consciousness exists in all its depth and specificity" (272), emerges from *Notes to Underground* should matter more than it seems to do. One could wonder whether a contemporary rewriting of *Notes*, like Adiga's, might be described in a parallel way. Does Adiga render Balram's consciousness "in all its depth and specificity"?

In fact, the novel contains a striking approach to this problem, one embodied in its title. *The White Tiger* emerges from an episode in Balram's childhood. An inspector comes to Balram's deeply dysfunctional rural school. Testing the children, the inspector discovers that unlike the others who have learned nothing, Balram can read, can write his name, and can finally answer the question: "what is the creature that comes along only once in a generation?" When Balram states correctly that this is "the white tiger," he thereby proves, announces the inspector, that he *is* that white tiger (35). This anointing nomination originates the process of thought by which Balram will eventually conclude that he is an anomalous individual who can overthrow all of society's opinions about him and assume the discourse of the entrepreneur (and the murderer). Thus, the title as derived within the book itself. But in a 2014 interview, Adiga gave a somewhat different derivation. He described a white tiger in a zoo by which he professed to be fascinated. First, he was fascinated because of the animal's pacing, which Adiga understood as a kind of self-hypnosis that might make living in a cage possible: again, the "Rooster Coop." But the more crucial source of his fascination, Adiga claimed, was the impression of "parallax" produced as the

9 Nancy Ruttenberg's *Dostoevsky's Democracy* (2008) attempts to resolve this problem by showing the extent to which Dostoevsky's post-Siberian works produce images of community upon which democracy will ultimately depend.

white tiger moved behind its bars. The visual interference of barred cage and striped tiger, Adiga said, produced a shimmering: “as though the tiger were disappearing” (2014).

Balram is the white tiger, therefore, both by dint of “specificity” – one in a generation – and by dint of an abyssal “depth” that makes it possible to retreat before our very eyes. Each of these accounts of how Balram exists within *The White Tiger* fit within the novelistic form described by Bakhtin and perfected (per Bakhtin) by Dostoevsky. Both unique and irreducible, Balram is framed in and around *The White Tiger* in a way that richly illustrates the curious maneuver at the heart of Bakhtin’s theory of novelistic polyphony, by which a theory of individuation is grounded upon a theory of types. One has one’s own discourse, which is unique, but that uniqueness is founded upon a sufficiently pervasive conflation and preservation of the discourses of others. In other words, individuation is derived from types interacting: add sufficient complexity, and one conjures a sublime figure of infinite regression, a “loophole” via which typology is transcended and becomes individuality. This is what Bakhtin means in his double figure “consciousness in all its depth and specificity”: consciousness is both totally imbricated in a social world of discourses and has a totally specific manner of being so imbricated.

There is a strong homology between the Aadhaar system and Bakhtin’s theory of novelistic discourse. Both are founded on the concept of a social world of unique identities, all of which are irreducible to one another. But those identities are fundamentally comprised by a potentially infinite series of “linked” contexts, in which, or with respect to which, the individual plays a different kind of role, while always remaining exactly themselves. Like Mikhail Bakhtin, leaders in India like Nandan Nilekani or the World Bank think that this represents a solved conceptual problem, a means of offering a unified view of society that specifically via its distinctions and uniquenesses. But David Rosen and Aaron Santesso, in *The Watchman in Pieces: Surveillance, Literature, and Liberal Personhood* (2014) have given quite a different coloration to this species of conceptual tiger. Rosen and Santesso offer a powerful argument that neither literature – nor surveillance – can actually dissolve the conflict between the individual and the type in the way Bakhtin claims to have done. Literature can represent individual particularity by honoring the “truth of lived experience, the inner beings of other people” (274), which is called *realism*. Rosen and Santesso link the rise of realism in English-language literature directly to the rise of liberalism itself. Alternatively, literature can impose forms of typology that represent the individual as an instance within a category: in literature, this is called *allegory*, and it dominated societies that were viewed from a single point of authority – monarchical, theological – before the advent of liberalism’s investment in the individual. Rosen and Santesso then go on to argue that this polarity typifies not only literary forms, but also modes of surveillance, which can stand at any

point along a spectrum that extends from empathetic understandings (a *realist* pole) to totally abstract imputation of meanings (an *allegorical* pole). But just as in literature, the desire to achieve the former readily produces the latter. When putative liberals, or putatively liberal writers, or writers of realism, presume too far to offer final truths about individuals, they instead become allegorists, betraying both realism and liberalism. The history of modern and contemporary society is the story of how “allegory, and the imposition of meaning, [became] the demon in the system: liberalism’s other and constant temptation” (Rosen and Santesso 274). The historical return of this problem in English language literature, Rosen and Santesso argue, came with the 19<sup>th</sup>-century progressive movement, which resulted, in literature, first in a long series of utopian novels offering benevolently coercive social allegories, and then in a long backlash of dystopian novels that satirize the progressive presumption that the individual can ever be represented via social allegories. The former type is represented, for example, in H.G. Wells’ *A Modern Utopia* (1905), where it is argued quite sincerely that:

If the modern Utopia is to be a world of responsible citizens, it must have devised some scheme by which every person in the world can be promptly and certainly recognized . . . This is by no means an impossible demand. The total population of the world is, on the most generous estimate, not more than 1,500,000,000, and the effectual indexing of this number of people, the record of their movement hither and thither, the entry of various material facts [about them is not] immeasurably beyond comparison with the work of the post offices of the world today . . . The index would be classified primarily by some unchanging physical characteristic, such as we are told the thumbmark and fingermark afford. (112-13)

Like the UIDAI, which as of February 2018 is reporting that it has created 1.11 billion Aadhaar numbers, Wells’s utopians do the vast work of indexing precisely in order to ameliorate suffering, inequality, and disinclusion. For Rosen and Santesso, Wells falls directly into the trap set for liberal realism by progressive allegory. So progressives like Wells will always open themselves to critique on liberal grounds; when Aldous Huxley satirizes Wells in *Brave New World* (1932), he does so by making the heroic individual revolt against the organization of society into rigid, determinative categories.

While Rosen and Santesso do not mention Bakhtin or his account of novelistic discourse, it is not hard to position these two arguments with respect to one another. In short, where Rosen and Santesso describe a dichotomy that distances allegory from realism, liberalism from its opposites, Bakhtin simply asserts that the dichotomy may be transcended. Perhaps *The White Tiger*, and with it the Aadhaar system, might be well understood as contemporary attempts to prize open a path between Bakhtin’s dialectical optimism and Rosen and Santesso’s liberal melancholy. Huxley’s critique of Wells, after all, would be misplaced as a critique of a “unique identification” system, for the simple reason that unique biometric identification and rigid social typology are not the same

thing. And while it is quite obviously the case that one's "unique identity" as understood by a system like Aadhaar is not itself *identical* with the individual whose "lived experience" contains that person's truth, this does not necessarily mean that a social form founded on recognizing unique identity is equally vulnerable to the same critique Rosen and Santesso offer of allegory.

Thus Adiga's "return" to Dostoevsky (and the parallel returns of both Mishra and Sloterdijk to the Crystal Palace) becomes richly suggestive. These returns intimate that new modes of organization in contemporary Indian society have very relevant precedents in modernist texts, and in the social progressivism those texts alternately trumpet and satirize. Equally intriguing is the way that Adiga's gesture of return highlights the extent to which both Bakhtin *and* Rosen and Santesso offer specifically theoretical – which is to say, ahistorical – accounts of literary form. For Bakhtin, the monological novel was false to social experience because that experience always has been and always will be dialogic. Similarly, Rosen and Santesso deride the Foucauldian underpinnings of a literary and social theory that would suggest that in an allegorical or illiberal universe, the individual would also in some sense be an allegorical or illiberal one. Instead they argue that liberalism's account of the subject's fundamentally unavailable and autonomous interiority is simply true; no dispensation of literature, of surveillance, or of society can alter this fact about the human world. *The White Tiger* offers much evidence for this point of view simply by implicating itself in a modernity already at least 150 years old, and by reinventing *ressentiment* as a response to Indian neoliberalism. Perhaps this gesture of return is finally more definitive of the novel's meaning than the ways Adiga has tweaked Dostoevsky's chicken coop or Ellison's lighted room. And perhaps it does not even matter whether the reader determines the figure of the "white tiger" to have succeeded, following Bakhtin, in synthesizing its portrait of an individual – Balram – with a discourse – entrepreneurialism – or whether, thinking with Rosen and Santesso, the reader finds that Adiga has attempted to resolve the problem of his novel's realism via an allegorical fiat. A different act of fiat comes onto the scene in Adiga's two subsequent novels. It is the same conceptual fiat chosen by the Indian Supreme Court: the idea of privacy.

#### 4. *Privacy and the Novel*

Adiga's next novel, *Last Man in Tower* (2011), might accelerate the suspicion that there is not much to distinguish between Adiga and Dostoevsky, or between Aadhaar and the Crystal Palace. The "last man" in question is Nietzsche's, the same figure that appeared in the title of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), in which Fukuyama notoriously argued that with the advent of liberal, capitalist democracy, humankind's ideological evolution

had ended. The rest is implementation details. Tending to those details, Nietzsche's Zarathustra argued, is the responsibility of the "last men":

The earth has become small, and on it there hops the last man, who makes everything small. His race is as inexterminable as the flea; the last man lives longest.

"We have discovered happiness"—say the last men, and blink.

They have left the regions where living is hard; for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs against him; for one needs warmth. (46)

Such happy, loving, rubbing, blinking neighbors populate the "tower" in the title of Adiga's second novel. The tower, termed the "Vishram Society," is a genteel middle-class housing block which Adiga makes iconic of India's decades of languorous state-led economic development. The novel depicts the predations of an unscrupulous real-estate developer, typifying the new neoliberal India, and his ultimately successful effort to buy out all the residents of the Vishram Society, so that he can tear down their building and erect a much more remunerative glass tower. Yogesh Murthy, known as Masterji, the novel's protagonist, refuses to be bought out, even as his neighbors leave one by one with their pockets full of cash. In the end, violence triumphs: Masterji loses his life and up the new tower will go.

Compare Adiga on the Vishram Society to Zarathustra's stinging account of the "last man":

Tower A stands in reasonable chance of complete collapse in the next monsoon.

And yet no one, either in Vishram Society or in the neighbourhood at large, really believes that it will fall.

Vishram is a building like the people living in it, middle class to its core. Improvement or failure, it is incapable of either extremity. The men have modest paunches, wear checked polyester shirts over white banians, and keep their hair oiled and short. The older women wear saris, salwar kameez, or skirts, and the younger ones wear jeans. All of them pay taxes, support charities, and vote in local and general elections.

Just one glance at Vishram in the evening, as its residents sit in white plastic chairs in the compound, chit-chatting, fanning themselves with the Times of India, and you know that this Society is – what else? – pucca. (9)

Solid, dignified, unimpeachable, the Vishram Society hosts man after the end of history: nothing to ask for, no reason to begin to ask. The challenge for Adiga's novel, therefore, is to provide a motive for Masterji's resistance to the redevelopment project. Given the account above, what might that motive be? One way to describe it would be the disruptive arrival of privacy. The Vishram Society, Adiga makes clear, has long been privacy-free:

This cat prowled the waste bins that the residents left out in the morning for Mary to collect, in the process spilling beans, bones, and whisky bottles alike. So the residents of the

building knew from the rubbish who was a vegetarian and who merely claimed to be one; who was a rum-man and who a gin-man; and who had bought a pornographic magazine when on holiday in Singapore. The main aim of this cat – ginger and scrawny, according to some, black and glossy according to others – indeed, was to make sure there was no privacy in the building. (21)

The warm tone of the Vishram Society, in other words, does not result from these individuals' dignified habit of leaving one another alone. The sense of an endlessly intimate community is reinforced formally by Adiga's decision to write a book by populating a tower with a colorful cast of characters: the novel is itself like a building with one face removed, in which everything can always be seen. Disaster strikes, therefore, when the developer comes to call, bringing a corrosive privacy with him. Soon the residents are scheming against one another, pondering strategies, and in general keeping their machinations to themselves. One by one they betray one another and sell their flats. And so, despite his rather direct epilogue to the book, which promises in italics that "*Nothing can stop a living thing that wants to be free*" (419), Adiga's subtler intuition might be: privacy and neoliberalism can arise together.

In *The White Tiger*, Balram finally resolves to break out of the "Rooster Coop" after witnessing a group of men who have nowhere to defecate except "in the open." As Pramad K. Nayar has argued, this specific spectacle, "that India is notorious for" (86) is one reason that it can be difficult to understand privacy as a universal human right, when it is so much more obviously linked to class privilege and its defense. If these men's lack of privacy is what finally resolves Balram to take a wrench to his employer's skull, it is intriguing to discover privacy on the other side of the equation in the *Last Man*. No longer something to be coveted, constructed, and defended, now it is something that insinuates, destroys, and deprives.

Adiga carries the insight into privacy offered in *Last Man* much further forward in his recent novel, *Selection Day*: the new book begins "I, too, have a secret" (1). In other ways, however, Adiga's new novel represents a return. Like *The White Tiger*, the book describes a journey, and on its first page it invokes the notion of the "darkness," now termed "Kattale," the Kannada word, "so much darker than any English-language darkness" (1). And again, the journey is toward the light, now understood as the floodlight of celebrity. *Selection Day* is nominally a cricket novel, in which a desperately domineering father, Mohan Kumar, attempts to turn his two sons, Manju and Radha, into sport sensations. From rural backwater into Mumbai they go, to mount the ladder of youth sport, and as they begin to distinguish themselves, the novel approaches the "selection day" when the hoard of youthful strivers will be winnowed down to the few who can have a cricket career. By choosing this premise, Adiga is manifestly revising his earlier work: just as Balram encountered his own informal "selection day," when the school inspector dubbed him "the white tiger," so are youthful cricket stars with the mark of fate upon them termed "young lions." One does

not, however, become a young lion via *ressentiment* and murder; in *Selection Day*, Adiga discards the *The White Tiger's* anarchic, underground narrator. Yet he retains what Ulka Anjaria has aptly described as his distinctively “hieroglyphic” mode of social realism, in which the “realist impulse to represent social issues” is played off against “partial, elusive” renderings of characters (131,126).

*Selection Day* sets the process of culling cricketers specifically within emergent neoliberal logics of financialization and marketization. Radha and Manju Kumar become opportunities for investors who pick cricket talent in the same way that venture capitalists pick start-ups. These investors are in many ways the novel's real players: offering to support the paltry needs of families like the Kumars, they conspire to reap huge returns if a boy proves a star. The novel plays out at length the ways in which this system amounts, not so much to benevolent community work, which is how these “angel investors” sometimes see themselves, but to a kind of debt peonage.<sup>10</sup> Mohan Kumar smirks that “we can't even see *our* chains” (38); Anand Mehta, an investor in the Kumar boys, says privately that “The more money you give them [...] the less freedom they have” (114); Javed Ansari, another rising cricket sensation, pleads with Manju Kumar that he has become “a slave” (132) and that cricket is “brain control” (196). Moreover, Adiga does not fail to note that if youth cricket has become a market, its investors bear the risks that result from “incomplete information.” An aging cricket scout, Tommy Sir, wanders through the novel, reminding the cricket community that: “Ten years ago, we could say, this boy, from his stance, from the way he grips the bat, will make the team. Today, it's all different. Today, it's all a mystery, even to the selectors, who will make it” (81). In the terms preferred by neoliberal economists, youth cricket is a “market” in the sense of a meaning-making machine, producing “prices” and “picking winners” in a situation where the data is too overwhelming to read in any other way. As a result, the market for cricket talent is increasingly dominated by quantifiers and pattern-recognizers rather than by those with a theory (“the way he grips the bat”) that could make sense of market phenomena.<sup>11</sup>

Adiga is nothing if not consistent. The market's logicless logic begins to infect the novel itself. Adiga writes that “there is no ‘because’ in Bombay anymore. Things just happen to people like Mohan Kumar and his sons. No reason. No meaning. No ‘because’” (265). Like Max Weber's model Protestant, Benjamin Franklin, Kumar still fundamentally believes that if his boys rise early, bathe cold, and practice cricket until they can barely stand, they will put themselves in a position to succeed. But the reader can easily anticipate that Ku-

10 In this, *Selection Day* belongs alongside the canon of twenty-first century representations of debt culture described by Annie McClanahan in *Dead Pledges: Debt, Crisis, and Twenty-First Century Culture* (2017).

11 All of this is strongly reminiscent of the ongoing debate about statistical reasoning in sports in the United States, as summarized in Michael Lewis's book *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game* (2004) and the subsequent film of the same title (2011).

mar will be proved wrong; his theory will be falsified and his universe will disappoint. Formally, Adiga is therefore confronted by something like the same problem Kumar faces: a lack of “because.”<sup>12</sup> What can happen in this book? The boys can succeed or not – just as Balram can revolt or not, and Masterji can resist or not. The question of whether or not Radha or Manju will be selected does not actually build drama, for exactly the same reasons that Mumbai no longer needs cricket scouts: there is no particular way to know if they will be selected or not, and this very contingency makes clear that attempting to maintain a tense fascination about this climactic day is somehow beside the point of the book. For this reason, the most interesting aspect of *Selection Day* is the way that Adiga steadily depresses his reader’s interest in his book’s putatively central plot line. The highly artful deflection or muting that results is the central achievement of *Selection Day*. But it also leaves a yawning motivational deficit in the book. If this book is not going to posit a triumph – of violent flight, as in *The White Tiger*, or doomed but heroic resistance, as in *Last Man in Tower* – why should we read it?

So this cannot be where Adiga leaves the matter. After all, as the first sentence, spoken by Manju Kumar, has it: “I, too, have a secret.” The secret turns out to be that Manju is *not homosexual*. To explain this requires a bit of backtracking. Javed Ansari, the other aspiring young lion, and Manju Kumar are involved in an intimate and incipiently sexual tension throughout the book. Other boys can tell that their relationship is unusual, and Adiga sketches episodes of teasing and bullying. Javed, for his part, long before either of the Kumar boys, begins to discern that the path cricket offers from “Kattale” to “celebrity” is some kind of trap, and he discerns this, Adiga strongly implies, on the basis of insight resulting from his double minoritization: Javed is both gay and Muslim. By the time Manju Kumar reaches “selection day” and his fate is sealed, Javed is already living in genteel, bohemian remove from his former ambitions. So it is to Javed that Manju runs when his world falls apart on selection day, and after staying a few days with his old friend, the two are compelled to confront the possibility that they could be, and perhaps always could have been, partners – that what they felt for one another was not the pull of friendship, nor the push of class, caste, or religious disdain, but instead the push and pull of love. Manju sends Javed out for condoms; but when he returns, Manju peremptorily rejects and humiliates Javed and leaves. Manju has a brief, unspectacular cricket career. And the novel simply fades out:

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12 This aspect of *Selection Day* measures the distance between Adiga’s writing and the novels of Rohinton Mistry, frequently identified as Adiga’s progenitor in returning realism to English-language fiction in India. Eli Park Sorensen (2015) has argued that Mistry’s “postcolonial realism” is obsessively preoccupied with causes and effects; Adiga might be said to have attempted realism without causation.

Manju had long ago accepted—it had occurred to him one evening in the changing room of the Wankhede Stadium, after a particularly fine innings—that what he had known for Javed must have been what the film songs called love, and that his fear of this fact had driven him away from Navi Mumbai and back to cricket. After he wet his hair in front of the mirror and combed it with his fingers, Manju stretched *his neck first to the right and then to the left*, and accepted that he had been, and was still, attracted to men as much as to women: but knowing and accepting all of this had meant, in the end, not much. (327; emphasis added)

His neck to the right; his neck to the left. Manju's secret is that he is *not homosexual* – or that he is *not not homosexual* – for this novel, it does not much matter which. What does matter is the way that this highly ambivalent conclusion, this minor theme in *Selection Day* which becomes Adiga's means of both moving the novel forward and then bringing it to its end, displaces not only the cricket plot, but also the literary and philosophical formulae on offer in *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower*. One can imagine a quite different *Selection Day*: a book about a gay boy who becomes a cricket star (or not), or who is outed at the moment of his selection (or not). He could fulminate, like Balram, or enact a refusal, like Masterji. But in the book we have, these possibilities for moving and concluding the plot are deflected, despite the fact that they are positioned, as the quotation above suggests, as the only available conclusion to this story. This is no less true of Javed's double minoritization than it is of Manju's ambivalent bisexuality: nothing else brings this novel to its conclusion, but then nothing (except a conclusion) is made from these two characters' plural identities. It is very striking that there does not seem to be anything else in the world of *Selection Day* on which the plot, its conflicts, or its conclusion, could be predicated. The question of an identity's uniqueness, we might say, is the only question – but positing an identity is not an answer.

Where do we stand, then, with respect to the problematics identified by Rosen and Santesso, by Mishra, by Bakhtin, by Dostoevsky – by Aadhaar? Perhaps surprisingly, a manner of seeing what Adiga is attempting in *Selection Day* is indicated by one of the petitioners in the Aadhaar case still underway, as of this writing, before India's Supreme Court. Kalyani Menon Sen has argued that the practical deficiencies of the Aadhaar system are so pervasive that it will have net negative social consequences. But the rebuttal is ready to hand: every system that attempts to ingest a population of a billion persons will encounter problems in implementation. At the end of her critique, therefore, Sen substitutes a different kind of argument. She points out that many Indians' claims to identity are only in their interest in limited circumstances, and that the ability to claim and disclaim identity strategically is a major resource, particularly for many minority groups, including sexual minorities. "If a unique identity was indeed a guarantee of portable legitimacy," Sen writes, "the Aadhaar enrolment centres would have to work 24x7 to keep up with the rush" (102). This is a more fundamental critique of the Aadhaar system, one largely in keeping with the

critiques that would see modernity's crystal palaces as iron cages. It is also in keeping with Rosen and Santesso's sense that progressive visions are extremely likely to trample individuals in the process of trying to achieve beneficent social outcomes.

Finally, it is a critique that has been thoroughly internalized in Adiga's *Selection Day*. Early in the story, the brothers Kumar write something – we are not told what – on Javed Ansari's cricket chest guard when he is not looking. In the last pages of the book, it is finally revealed that what they wrote was: “homo” (302). The revelation of this act of harassment, which Adiga has positioned as dénouement, consolidates one critique of surveillance and one critique of identity: in interpellating Javed, the brothers Kumar force him either to mewling denial or to proud defiance. Adiga's novel will not make either mistake with Manju Kumar himself. Manju's acceptance of his plural sexuality means that he does not have to predicate anything about himself on his sexual identity. And neither does Adiga. Manju is not made into the “young lion,” as Balram was made into the “white tiger,” because to do so would be to purport to have solved the problem of unique identity by mediating successfully and finally the relationship between type and instance. But Manju does not “disappear” into an individuality intimated by an ineffable, profuse interference effect. Instead, in a moment of arbitrary arrest, Manju simply becomes *private*, unhappily and irresolutely, as the novel trails off. Everything that Manju “accepts” about his sexuality occurs to him fleetingly, one afternoon, while alone, in silence. No brilliant light of celebrity; no overlit-but-underground room, no proud defiance against an onslaught of exploitation; instead, the light of self-discovery becomes so nebulous and ambient that identity can barely even constitute a secret. The book refuses to presume that it has synthesized the individual with the society, as in Bakhtin, but equally it refuses to see typology only as damaging allegory, as in Rosen and Santesso. Instead, Adiga pauses before these weighty alternatives, and then does exactly what the Indian Supreme Court has recently done: chooses privacy. In this, *Selection Day* innovates in contemporary literary realism in much the same way Aadhaar has just innovated in Indian society: by putting such pressure on the notion of “unique identity” that it renders as byproduct the concept of privacy. From this point of view, *Selection Day* suggests that privacy is what we get – all we get – as the crystal palace encloses India's sky and history comes to another of its brave new ends.

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