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# Economic Capital as a Social Strategy in Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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**Abstract** Literature can be regarded as a reflection of social reality, particularly capitalism issue as social problem reflected on literature. This situation is illustrated in Adiga's *The White Tiger*. It narrates a story of Balram who struggles in achieving prosperity. This praxis offered as an ideology deals with how to live in capitalism arena. Therefore, this research aims to disclose economic capital in Adiga's *The White Tiger* as a social strategy in capitalist society. Theoretical framework of this research is Bourdieu's Economic Capital and Distinction. To analyse it, this research uses mimetic approach and the technique of analysis uses descriptive interpretative. The result reveals that Balram is successful in levelling his social class up with economic capital as the major factor to accumulate. Thus, it indicates how economic capital is significant in the strategy to survive in capitalism economic system.

**Keywords:** Economic Capital, social strategy, *The White Tiger*

## 1. Introduction

Capitalism is an aged phenomena rooting in the world society nowadays. Although Marx's notion on capitalism had been discussed in more than one century, it distributes helpful thought toward the world development recently. What can be discussed in this forehead is capital defined broadly by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu developed Marx's idea on capital which is implemented in accordance to problems in capitalist society recently. Bourdieu's criticism towards capitalist society showed that human is basically very individualistic[1]. Thus, from his critics towards capitalist society, this notion is close to Marxism. Marx gave insight for Bourdieu in understanding society; it is a relationship in the social world, not an interaction between an agent or an inter-subjective relationship between individuals, but objective relationship independently from the individual consciousness and free will [2]. It can be stated that the social relations are generated by condition, mode of production, and needs that dialectically create social class structure and praxis of capital ownership.

Social Praxis related to freedom and economic power explicate that the world is aggressively rooting the ideology of freedom. Indeed, the ideology of freedom with its economic system is supported by capitalism. In the capitalist system, the ownership of the material and the mode of production are essential, thus the capital strategy to accumulate is absolutely pivotal. This strategy in achieving prosperity should be implemented. One who does not use strategy cannot survive as we know that our world today is alarming; eat or get eaten up. This capital strategy is reflected in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008).

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*The White Tiger* (2008) [3] narrates a boy grows in a misfortune district in India. He discontinues his education and forced to make a living by his grandmother. He works as a servant in a restaurant, a coal breaker, and a private driver for the richest man in his region where he lives. His lord is a charitable and sympathetic person, then Balram kills him, steals his money, and becomes successful businessman. What he does is the most pivotal action. This is intriguing that implicitly explains how to survive in capitalist society. Furthermore, it is about strategy in sustaining the life. It is not about the radical action that Balram does, but his struggle in facing the reality.

Born in a poor environment, then working to sustain the life is the most stimulating and engaging Balram's spirit and courageous to live in a better condition. Education does not guarantee Balram's life, but economic strategy wakes him up how important class distinction is for the life in capitalist society. Balram is a real model of an economic system which controls someone consciousness. Balram experiences are reflections of our society in accordance to the arena you are living in. This is very intriguing phenomena to be discussed although discussing about capitalism in an old problem. On the other hand, one cannot sustain his/her life without strategy in achieving a better life for those who born in a particular or unfortunate life and circumstance.

This research is preceded by another research. Marder[4] found the psychological factor in Adiga's *The White Tiger* while this research seeks other perspective related to sociology in literature. Therefore, Bourdieu's concept of economic capital is pivotal in capitalist society recently. Economic capital triggers agent to compete highest social status [5]. In gaining the status, he has freedom to collect money to conquer the arena of capitalism. Thus, in accordance to Bourdieu's concept of capital, he coined the economic capital as the significant strategy.

## **2. Research Method**

The justification above shows that this research is conducted to disclose economic capital in Adiga's *The White Tiger* as social strategy in capitalist society. Theoretical framework of this research is Bourdieu's Economic Capital and Distinction. To analyse it, this research uses mimetic approach and the technique of analysis uses descriptive interpretative. Mimetic approach can be applied to comprehend literary works as mirror of the phenomena in reality [6]. Descriptive interpretative implemented to reveal the proposed problems [7]. Thus, from the result, individual can understand and practice the strategy in gaining the power and practices particularly in capitalist society nowadays as the mean to accomplish a social status and a better life.

## **3. Results And Discussion**

As an individual who lives in society, one cannot be separated by the interaction with others and there is a requirement to be accepted socially. Capital ownership is like an absolute requirements for one to be accepted. Balram is one among many people who struggles for his life. Instead of giving up to the condition, born from poor family is not an excuse for him to keep trying hard to achieve a better life for stepping up to a higher social level. He realizes that having economic capital will decide everything, so for getting money he has to be smart

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in looking at the situation. Although he doesn't have higher education, he is smart enough to use his logic. Thus, Balram does the action in acquiring the modes of capital. The result will drag the practices to a battle in the arena.

The practices characterize an individual's social praxis which eventually becomes a habitus; a collective disposition system (owned by individuals or groups that describe a class structure in social practice [8] while Hexis is the way social agents carry themselves in the world, such as how to step, move, flicker, choose words, etc. Disposition can be understood as a sense of the game that encourages the individual intuition to engage in social practices, with these dispositions, individuals create their own peculiarities [9], ranging from ways of thinking, tastes (food/clothing), tone of voice, and body movements. Disposition becomes a conditioned reaction to the social world that arises spontaneously and becomes a habit. The habit (habitus) is used for a tool to symbolize its position in the social arena. In short, for Bourdieu, [(habitus) (capital)] + arena = practice [10]. Balram does not only get money, but he also gets social relation, power and position, but first of all what he interested in is money. Having much money can change his life, breaking in his destiny to be sweet maker.

Trying to get much money through the salary of the tea shop is impossible, that is why Balram observes everything happens in his surroundings. Starting from people talk about the phenomenon in his city that everyone has cars and cars are everywhere and hearing of the salary that the driver gets, his instinct of capital starts to rise. He finally has an idea to learn driving and be a driver. He knows that being able to drive a car then becomes a driver is starting point to open many chances. "Everyone's getting a car these days—and you know how much they pay their drivers? One thousand seven hundred rupees a month!" [3]. Having realized that economic capital as the basic need in society to decide class, Balram competes with other drivers to collect money as much as possible because it decides his membership in his surroundings.

Only one driver will be taken along. And this driver will get three thousand rupees a month— that's how much they'll pay him in Delhi.  
The blow dryer fell out of my hand. "Serious? Three thousand?"  
"Yes." [3]

Changing a destiny is widely opened for everyone as seen in Balram's life. As an individual who belongs to the social creature, Balram goes beyond the limits to reach a better economic capital for climbing up into higher social level in social life. Although based on his culture he cannot go anywhere unless being sweet maker at his home, he doesn't reproduce that perception. From being waiter of the tea shop, he learns to drive although it costs so expensive, after being able to drive and be a driver, his effort to get much more money doesn't stop yet. After being a driver of the rich family, he wants to be the number one driver among another drivers in his masters' environment because being the number one driver is followed by the salary that he get then. He will paid higher than the other drivers. It shows his ambition in changing his destiny and refuses to reproduce what his destiny has determined.

Balram's effort in collecting money is a kind of effort to conquer the arena because it is a battleground for struggle and it leads the strategy used by people especially Balram to occupy a certain position or maintain his position. Having strong economic capital will increase confidence to the agents and Balram is one of them who practices it. In conquering production *arena*, he must know the taste in the society where he lives. It is very important for Balram who begins the effort to reach the higher social class because every class has its habitus which is different from other classes and Balram knows it very well. He has internalized schemes which is able to be used to perceive and judge the social world.

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As money is the requirement to be accepted in society and this perception is always reproduced in everyone's mind, that is why Balram shows his existence through being the doer in this practice.

“Seven hundred thousand rupees.

“It was enough for a house. A motorbike. And a small shop. A new life”

“My seven hundred thousand rupees.”[3]

As an agent, Balram is required to involve in the struggle to gain modal which is needed to get an access of power and position in the arena. Killing Mr. Ashok for carrying away his money shows Balram's effort to be able to be successful in one of the arenas in life. Being able to survive in this struggle for not being eaten by the upper class person like his master, Mr. Ashok shows that Balram uses the upper class action in pressing or even kill other lower class people for upper class' ambition and success because economic domination always brings injustice within and domination always bears resistance. Applying the same social value, kill or being killed, as what the upper class does facilitate Balram to get a capital, in this case economic capital.

Balram's main purpose in killing Mr. Ashok is not because he wants to release his hatred to his employer, except grabbing his money, because the visible economic capital is money. Getting the amount of seven hundred rupees is big enough for capital ownership. By that money, the material ownership can be owned. Balram conserve the habitus of the society which glorifies money and material. Through dominating money and belonging of capital allow him to get opportunities in life. He knows well that having economic capital, in this case money, and the same habitus as most other people have will be able to do his action or change a structure than these who don't have ones.

What has been done by Balram to Mr. Ashok shows the struggle among classes. Balram represents the people from lower class while Mr. Ashok represents the people from Upper class who will always keep and maintain the modal and dominate the lower class through mechanism in education or politics like what Mr. Ashok does while for the lower class like Balram, he keeps trying to grab the modal which he thinks as his right. They keep struggling to fight over the modal for their existence and it is the proof that the struggle between Mr. Ashok and Balram who represent each class is always traversed by a class clash.

Economic capital denotes to the individual finance or money [11]. The capital functions is a support function in a multidimensional social space. Thus, the capital becomes the power to individual who struggles in social arena as Balram does in this case. Arena itself is a kind of social space which is structured with rules, schemes, and modes in correspond to the social agents. Undoubtedly, the arena becomes an individual battle space to show class.

In the social arena, there are agents in some positions who compete each other to maintain or even to improve their positions through the domination of economic capital particularly the money because it brings much more force and power. The dominant social agent like Mr. Ashok who represents the upper class has power to decide everything, but there is still another agent from different class who offers a change and there is always possibility to play freely in the arena.

Over the next two weeks, I did things I am still ashamed to admit. 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.[3]

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The capital owned also articulates what kind of social relations. Financial strength, relationships, cultural status to science and education arise to a certain complex social relationship, in which agents (individual subject) carry out their social practices. These practices then indirectly grow up into an individual strategy to distinguish himself from others, which at the same time shows the power of his dominance in the arena.

Everyone has a chance in the arena and Balram uses the chance for a change because possibility of change is never impossible, so there will not be an absolute winner in the arena. Balram needs strategy to change the capital distribution through cheating his employer, Mr. Ashok. Balram takes the benefit from his employer's carelessness in grabbing the money although it is a kind of something risky. Balram's comprehension of the rules of the game is intended for his better achievement in gaining money.

Knowing well the arena where he struggles provokes him to collect extra much more money from his Master's carelessness because Balram far surer that he is ready to conquer and compete with others as he can play freely in the arena. There is no absolute winner in it. His better future is decided by himself that is why the amount of the economic capital becomes his main concern because the direct conversion of economic capital is money and it must be able to be manifested in his income. By getting high income, he can reach wealth. So economic capital is one of many capitals needed for achieving social world. Balram realizes that he can survive in the arena by having much money.

Cheating his employer can be said as his responsibility over his life. If he keeps being honest and kind, he will not be able to survive in that arena while people who have money or come from the higher class like his master are never doubt to do dirty things and be so slick to everyone even though to the poor one.

The competition between them are not equal while for those who cannot survive will be a loser. Those who have capital will be able to maintain or change the structure compared with those who do not have capital. The only one way for Balram to survive in this environment is play his part smoothly. Paying attention and looking for his master's weakness become his way to open the opportunity. By detecting his master's weakness, Balram can create the way to cheat him. For him, all his actions in cheating his master are kinds of reactions over his master's treatments. For he cannot change his master domination over his life, he uses other way to cut it off. Through cheating he can get extra money from his master without being noticed.

The demand of having economic capital makes him survive and having a better life. It also shows his existence in society. By having much more money, he can show his existence in social life which can drive him to choose his life style later based on his condition and social reality. Balram tries to define his identity through the capital economy he gets. All power fight each other based on capital economy they have because it is the symbol of power in society. As an individual, Balram is demanded to have a specific economic capital to be able to survive and have a better life. Cheating his master becomes Balram's strategy to fight with his master who has high economic capital because it is impossible for him to compete openly considered that the competition is not equal and it will be unfair, but both Balram and his master have no choice except fighting each other to maintain or to change their position in the society. "All of them belong to me—Munna, whose destiny was to be a sweet-maker! Once I was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers." [3]. After murdering Ashok his master and snatching the money cash, Balram starts being entrepreneur, and becoming Rich. As quoted above, Balram becomes a master of drivers after being a driver to a master. This condition collides the fact that he was the poor one but now he is a rich man. Furthermore, Balram was the poor Indian characterized as a thin and small man but now he is fatter and has potbellied.

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Fat and potbellied indicates how the rich a man is. Thus, as quoted “Thin” and “small”—ha! I am in better shape these days! “Fat” and “potbellied” would be more accurate now” [3] designates that he is a successful man who gains a better life. The poor and unfortunate situation that Balram experienced adheres him to jump out of the obscurity, subordination, weakness, slavery, and powerless. People in the darkness seems not want to get out of darkness and change their life, but Balram has a will to change and jumped out darkness. In addition, the most crucial thing that must be considered is that the strength of the economic capital is pivotal in an arena. Bourdieu noted that economic capital can be considered as an ideal weapon in the strategy of distinction [12].

Economic capital is considered advantageous to sustain the interests of the dominant class. This is what Balram does to accomplish and become a success man as the dominant class. The economic capital that Balram used is a great weapon to distinct his class to other, from poor to rich, from a driver to a master becomes the master of drivers. He owns business and enterprise in transportation. From the story, Adiga narrates the life of Balram a son of rickshaw-puller who competently climbs India’s social hierarchy to become a chauffeur and then a successful enterprise. In Bangalore, he finds a countless success creating a taxi corporation called *White Tiger Technology Drivers*. The poor later becomes the rich. Balram strategy in gaining money from the lowest to the highest ladder, cheating his master, stabbing Mr. Ashok by a broken liquor bottle and grabbing the money are the social strategies to be in the highest strata and make a distinction among the capitalist society in India. The way he achieves success may not be proper but the most prominent is that become a free man and experience a life as an essential entrepreneurial success story rather as a servant. It is in accordance to Bourdieu that economic capital marks the difference between classes. Balram will never be guilt and admit his crime. On the contrary, he represents the future of India, and presents himself as the white tiger, the foremost businessman.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the result that has been exposed, it can be concluded that capitalism requires people to stay in its system. Balram’s story proves that success is a term to define how capital is needed. Balram’s case implies a point that he just needed to have money to change his entire story, from a slum-dog boy in the poorest area in India to be a rich-tiger man; from sorrow to joy. It shows that economic power in society explains someone’s success. Capitalism changes romantic perspective that success is the happiness to materialistic view that economic capital is the true proof of success. Of course, money is not everything, but a lot of money is everything because things are earned from this material-system. To crystalize it all, Balram’s success (excluding his metaphorical kill to Ashok) open all eyes to stare, money can change things.

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