

## *Confronting Bias in Third World Culture*

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**T**HE CREATIVE WRITER often senses – before a researcher – a given problem such as prejudice or bias in perspectives or methodologies. This concern gets translated into creative expressions which attempt to reveal and deal with a particular phenomenon. Bias against the Third World – a legacy of colonial world views – in intellectual spheres and methodologies is common knowledge: it is the theoretical translation, complement and correlative of racist practices and subordination of citizens in the Third World. Literature offers resistance to such biases and prejudices, sometimes even before a cultural movement of resistance is articulated; literature functions as a precursor for theoretical pronouncements addressing and combating such a destructive phenomenon. In artistic fields battles are fought without military weapons and cause no human casualties; rather, they offer an arena for the struggle over consciousness and values. Unlike military warfare, the literary domain does not need advanced technology, which is often monopolized by the stronger party and thus gives it a ready-made advantage over the Other, as we see in confrontations between unequal parties in the history of colonization. Literature, generally speaking, depends on stylistic techniques and artistic strategies which are not based on technological superiority of one over the other, but on equal access to the verbal and the conceptual. Literary expression does not correspond to the so-called dichotomy between advanced/backward or developed/underdeveloped. On the contrary, the oppressed and the marginal seem more creative and more productive on the artistic level than the oppressor and the powerful. This is because art is linked to the profundity of human vision rather than power mechanisms and methods of control.

Creative resistance against ingrained bias takes different forms, according to the circumstances of the writer in question. This chapter deals with three writers from the African continent – which has been a victim of racism – who have written in three languages: English, Arabic, and French. They are, respectively, the Nigerian Chinua Achebe, author of *Things Fall Apart*,<sup>1</sup> the Sudanese Tayeb Salih, author of *Season of Migration to the North*,<sup>2</sup> and the Moroccan Francophone writer Tahar Ben Jelloun, author of “I am an Arab, I am Suspect.”<sup>3</sup> I shall deal with these works in their chronological order.

In his novel *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe presents the unfolding of the tragedy of its protagonist Okonkwo from the Obi ethnic group, who ends up committing suicide before the onslaught of the conquering colonizer and the imposition of foreign values – a seemingly inevitable consequence, given his attachment to tribal traditions and indigenous African heritage. The protagonist ends up broken by the colonial advance. It is the story of a proud man from the Third World, attached to his traditions in an unwavering individual commitment to them, yet unable to mobilize the same degree of commitment from the rest of his community. The lack of collective resistance, among other things, leads to defeat before such a formidable enemy. The novel reveals the modalities of penetration, suppression and defamation of Nigerian tradition with the combined efforts of foreign institutions – military, economic, and religious – to deliberately dismantle the African cultural base by infiltrating it through its more vulnerable aspects. This novel strikes us as convincing and realistic because it does not present the struggle by pitting the African hero against the European villain or by presenting the drama as the opposition between good and evil. Instead, it analyzes the process of conquest step by step and on the many levels on which it is enacted – its synchronization and manipulation of gaps and weaknesses in African culture. This penetration is undertaken in order to dispossess and reappropriate the natives, not in order to interact with or learn from them; it dismisses their culture, and does not recognize its value to the world at large.

The changes that take place in Nigerian society following the British conquest and Christian missionary activity render the continuity of old values impossible. Okonkwo, the protagonist, is besieged: he can neither give up his own cultural traditions, nor can he adjust to the givens of his time or adapt to the values of the Other. When he resists the colonizer

who violates his sacred beliefs, he finds himself encircled, as he cannot mobilize others to join him in resistance, and he ends up using individualized and spontaneous violence against his enemy. This in turn leads to his punishment and humiliation; not finding a way out, he ends up seeking escape and resolution through death. Here opting for death is not martyrdom, sacrifice or resistance; it is a recognition of impotence and failure. This novel may be considered a parable of individual resistance that would not lead to liberation because it is now aware of the complexity of the task. It is also a condemnation of tribal society that is not able to achieve solidarity and cohesiveness leading to mobilization against the imperial tide. One of the most important features of ruling by dividing a community is the conqueror's use of weak points in the group and his appeal to the subaltern among them.

The novel uncovers African impotence while stripping bare imperial mechanisms to anchor its hegemony, disseminate prejudice, undermine and condemn the culture of the Other, and fragment lifestyles in the Third World. The distinguished novelist Achebe uses a variety of strategies and techniques in deploying creative resistance to such imperial culture. To start with, he does not respond to the colonizers by drawing an imaginary vision, painting an idea of indigenous African culture in contrast to a conquering European one. Armed with a high degree of critical consciousness, Achebe presents the imbalance inherent in the equation, and this is why his novel carries a realistic dimension and distances itself from simplifying binaries. From this perspective, there is a fundamental difference between the ethos of this novel and that of the Orientalist or exotic novel which uses the Other as a backdrop for the desires of the colonizer, a framework of sorts in which the colonial obsessions unfold. In such Orientalist tales, even when the Other from the Third World is present, his/her presence is depicted as incomplete, deformed or less human than that of the European. We often encounter Third World settings in Western literature used to create a fantastic ambiance that will charge and incite the imagination of the Western reader rather than introduce the Other in a humanizing way.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe contrasts African ideology with European ideology, and in this way he exposes and liberates both. By situating them on the same horizontal level, the author allows a fair comparison and dismantles racial hierarchy. In addition, Achebe subjects relations

and practices to painstaking scrutiny. He, for instance, subtly pits African institutions of justice against their parallel colonial institutions of justice. In African courts the administration of justice, which has local and religious dimensions, leads to peaceful compromise and settlement between the opposed parties, while in the English colonial and secular court, collective punishment is violently imposed to “teach a lesson” to the colonized. As for the symbolic and doctrinal differences between missionary European Christianity and the local African religion, the author presents them through an oblique contrast: while the Africans sacralize the snake, considering it an emanation from the God of water, the Christians do not hesitate to kill it. The author presents the two religions, the Christianity of the colonizer and the Animism of the Africans, as two manifestations of practically the same essence despite differences in dogmas. We gather from this that the author – through his fictional spokesman – finds religions to be varied formulas revolving around the principles of sacred and taboo, of Creator and creation. Akunna addresses the Christian missionary, for instance, by saying:

You say that there is one supreme God who made Heaven and earth ... we also believe in Him and call Him Chukwu. He made all the world ...<sup>4</sup>

This comparative approach makes it impossible for us to classify religions hierarchically or deny to some belief systems the attribute of religion, for all these faiths are to be found in the domain of the sacred even though they may differ in their formulation of the relation between the Creator and the created. In this approach we find the seeds of refutation of colonialism, which not only claimed racial and economic superiority, but spiritual and cultural superiority as well.

Among Achebe’s techniques which lure the foreign reader, only to lead him or her later to question his or her cultural presumptions, is his manipulation of intertextuality. The author borrows the title of his novel and his epigraph from the Irish poet William Butler Yeats’ poem *The Second Coming*. The title of the poem refers to the coming of Christ at the end of Time, when “things fall apart”:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre,  
The falcon cannot bear the falconer.  
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold,  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

In this poem, written in 1920 following the horrors of World War I, the Irish poet points to European civilization and its disintegration. But Achebe uses the citation to show how the invasive expeditions of the colonizers brought catastrophe to his homeland. Here intertextuality works, not to confirm the intention of this citation as it appeared in the Yeatsian poem, but in order to transfer it elsewhere and thus reveal the destructive role played by imperialism, presented as the White Man's Burden (i.e., Europe's putative responsibility to bring welfare and enlightenment to the dark continent).

This borrowing of a citation to use it for another objective corresponds to Achebe's use of a literary genre developed in Europe, namely the novel, to reveal African concerns. For *Things Fall Apart* is an African novel – African in topos, ambiance, and style – representing what may be called the “regional novel,” which uses local color, not to create a sense of the exotic, as in Orientalist literature, but to manifest a cultural identity. There is rich ethnographic data in it depicting customs, traditions, beliefs, practices, musical instruments, agricultural lore, and rituals – all of which make the novel a reference work and a document of a traditional culture threatened with extinction. The transfer of a literary genre, such as the novel, from one culture to another, may seem like an easy matter, but it is far from it. Literary history creates certain genres which relate intimately to the poetics and aesthetics of a certain civilization or culture, and to transfer such a genre from one place to another is no less difficult than transferring a plant from one soil to another. Achebe succeeds, however, in “Africanizing” the novel. By giving it an African ethos, he causes its structure, plot, dialogue and oral character to become an extension of African poetics and Nigerian civilization, even though it is written in English. Achebe does this by emptying the genre of one ideological content and restructuring it to accommodate another. The novel – as Lukács has said – is an epic of the middle class, but Achebe succeeds in making it the epic of African peasants; and this is no minor achievement. It goes beyond the writing of a novel about an African theme to Africanizing its form and the style.

Although Achebe writes his novel in the language of the colonizer rather than in the local Ibo language, he manipulates English syntax to conform to his own will and creativity without surrendering to its traditional rhythms; and as has been said of writers like him, he molds the

language rather than allow the language to mold him; thus he “writes-English” and not simply “writes-in-English.”<sup>5</sup> He transforms the foreign language into a radical weapon serving his own culture, as other African writers have done by writing back in the appropriated language of the colonizer.<sup>6</sup> Achebe makes frequent use of words and terms common among the Ibo which have no equivalent in English. Thus, his novel is replete with local idioms and expressions. At the end of the novel, we find a glossary of local idioms that will be unfamiliar to readers outside the culture. This appended glossary includes more than thirty frequently recurring words. At times, the author uses a local expression not because it is impossible to translate, but in order to hybridize English and charge it with a foreign touch. It is as if the colonizer has been invaded in his very language. Sometimes, Achebe uses the expression “nana aye” which means “our father” (p.18), easily rendered in English; at other times he uses terms such as “chi” which means something akin to a personal god, spiritual double or guardian angel, which is almost impossible to find an equivalent for in English (p.44). At other times, Achebe uses entire sentences in Ibo which make the dialog credible (p.97). There is also in the novel a song written in Ibo (p.54).

Here we find an attempt to Africanize the English language, a counter-offensive reversing what happened in Nigeria where English invaded local culture. The English language was imposed on the colonies; as such, it became the official idiom and the language of written literature, all the more because the local languages tended to be oral rather than written. This is why the Africanization of English carries the significance of poetic justice, that is, getting even culturally with the invader, so to speak. The novel, for instance, points to the white man’s bicycle as an “iron horse” (p.125), that is, it is described from the African perspective, and is expressed in terms of what can be apprehended by a countryside African. Furthermore, the novel refers to the passing of time through an African frame of reference, namely the harvest, which is calculated in lunar months:

He was very good on his flute and his happiest  
 Moments were the two or three moons after the  
 Harvest when the village musicians brought down  
 Their instruments, hung above the fire place. (p.4)

This mode of narration situates us within the local group and its worldview. Achebe also makes successful use of popular proverbs and animal fables, as, for example:

When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry  
for a walk. (p.10)

The clan was like a lizard, if it lost its tail it soon grew  
another. (p.155)

In other words, Achebe superimposes African signifiers and signs onto the linguistic fabric of the colonizers' language.

Resistance to cultural bias is distilled in Achebe's work through his effective deployment of metaphoric language to lay bare prejudice, which ultimately reveals itself for what it is. When Achebe makes comparisons, he elevates the "inferior" (in the context of a biased worldview) to the state of parallelism with the "superior." And when both are put on the same level, superiority is demystified and inferiority is revealed as no more than a projection by the colonial beholder. In this, he uses a mechanism of metaphoric language which binds and links what is separate and isolated, and thus he deconstructs hierarchy. Metaphor is nothing but a transfer from one domain to another, just as Achebe transfers the idea of "falling apart" from the European continent to the African continent, and as he transfers the expression of local complaints from Ibo to English.

When we turn to the Sudanese novelist Tayeb Salih, we find that his novel *Season of Migration to the North* exudes opposition to both colonialism and neo-colonialism. The novel resists northern prejudices and misrepresentation of the African through caricature-like exaggeration and *mu'araḍah*, or literary countering,<sup>7</sup> which takes up the essential drama but reinterprets it in a different light in order to go beyond the earlier mode of stating it. Tayeb Salih wrote his novel in Arabic to counter the Shakespearean tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice. Shakespeare presented the Moorish hero as separated from his roots and thoroughly assimilated in the expansive European Christian culture. His only problem was his marital jealousy and a rash temperament which led to the destruction of conjugal harmony. The problem of Othello, according to Shakespeare, is not a cultural dislocation or a crisis of coping with two types of cultural ethos, but rather, the primitive rashness, emotionality

and mindless rage which characterize the African hero and which ultimately lead to his undoing and to the destruction of his marital life, as he is convinced that his loyal wife Desdemona has not been chaste. It is true that Iago, who stages a mean intrigue to do Othello in, is responsible for the tragedy. However, Othello in the Shakespearean tragedy has a vulnerable spot and a weakness which the villain Iago uses to trap his chief, namely, his gullibility. This is the gist of the tragedy and the crux of the problem according to Shakespeare, who knew about Africans and Moors from varied sources and used Leo Africanus – who became a European citizen – as a model from which he drew the exceptional character of his Othello.<sup>8</sup>

What cannot be dismissed is that Shakespeare depicts the African as a hero in this drama and grants him nobility and bravery. However, despite his assimilation of Venetian culture, Othello remains a rash, primitive man who is swayed by the magic of the handkerchief given to him by his mother and believes whatever he is told without any attempt at verification; in other words, he is naïve and superstitious.

What we can gather from reading Shakespeare's drama is that Othello's acculturation to European life has not fully erased his simplistic, spontaneous dimension. Naiveté and rashness are attributes associated with southerners in European thought. It is no mere accident in Shakespearean tragedies that the contemplative and reflective hero is an educated Danish Prince (Hamlet) while the naïve, rash hero is a Moorish military leader (Othello). This stereotypical image of the Moor in Shakespeare's work is confirmed by the attributes that are associated with him in Iago's description of Othello's attachment to and love for Desdemona:

Zounds, sir, y'are robbed! For shame, put on your gown!  
 Your heart is burst; you have lost half your soul  
 Even now, now, an old black ram  
 Is tupping your white ewe. Arise, arise!  
 Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,  
 Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.  
 Arise, I say!<sup>9</sup>

Iago also uses animal imagery to depict Moorish kin relations:

Zounds, sir, you are one of those that will not serve  
 God if the devil bid you. Because we come to do you

Service, and you think we are ruffians, you'll have  
 Your daughter covered with a Barbary horse, you'll  
 Have your nephews neigh to you; you'll have  
 Coursers for cousins, and gennets for germans.<sup>10</sup>

And while Desdemona is also depicted through the use of animal imagery (a white ewe), the difference in the two images is striking. The ewe connotes humility and innocence, while the lamb specifically is the symbol of purity in European traditions (related to Christ's association with, and comparison to, the Lamb). Furthermore, white also signifies purity, while the ram or horse and especially the black ram and the Barbary horse imply the beastly and the savage. In this imagery, then, there is an implicit confirmation of the racial inclination in European civilization whose roots can be detected among the early Greek thinkers who thought all Others savages and used the term "Barbarian" for non-Greeks. Ibn Khaldūn quotes the Greek physician Galen as explaining the black men's rashness and light-headedness as being based on "a weakness in their brains which results in a weakness in their intellect" – a statement which, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is baseless and impossible to prove.<sup>11</sup>

Tayeb Salih wanted to oppose and correct this image of the African in Europe; he wrote his novel to deconstruct the image of Othello which was current not only in Europe, but in the Arab and Islamic worlds as well. The tragedy of Othello was the first dramatic work to be translated and performed on stage in the Arab world (in Cairo in 1884).<sup>12</sup> The drama has remained alive and has inspired Arabs from the Mashriq and the Maghrib, as well as Iranians, to express their concerns.<sup>13</sup> In an interview with Nadia Hijab, Tayeb Salih himself declared that one of the most important reasons behind writing his novel was to negate the image of Othello and to offer a rebuttal to Shakespeare's play:

One person will write a poem, and another will retaliate by writing along the same lines, but reversing the meaning – this is called *mu'āraḍah*. I did the same with Othello. From the beginning I thought Othello did not make sense. He was probably an Arab – they called him a Moor – someone very like the Sudanese. He came to Venice – the greatest European center at that time – and he was accepted completely. A man whose skin was dark was accepted by the establishment of Venice, became a general and married. Can you imagine an Arab becoming commander of the British army? Then

along comes Iago and tells him all those things; he believes him and kills Desdemona. This only makes sense if you hold the view that Othello never really accepted the Venetians, nor they him. Only then is his rage understood – it is a nationalistic rage, a clash of cultures. Mustafa Sa'eed (the protagonist of *Season*) is how I feel Othello should have been, and I use the same terminology and the handkerchief in my murder scene.<sup>14</sup>

In the novel, references to Othello abound, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly:

Professor Maxwell Foster-Keen continued to draw a distinctive picture of the mind of a genius whom circumstances had driven to killing in a moment of passion (p.32).

There came a moment when I felt I had been transformed in her eyes into a naked, primitive creature, a spear in one hand and arrows in the other, hunting elephants and lions in the jungles. This was fine. Curiosity has changed to gaiety, and gaiety to sympathy, and when I stir the still pool in the depths the sympathy will be transformed into a desire upon whose taut strings I shall play as I wish.

“What race are you?” she asked me. “Are you African or Asian?”  
 “I am like Othello – Arab-African,” I said to her (p.38).

I knew she was unfaithful to me; the whole house was impregnated with the smell of infidelity. Once I found a man's handkerchief which wasn't mine.

“It's yours,” she said when I asked her.

“This handkerchief isn't mine,” I told her.

“Assuming it's not your handkerchief,” she said, “what are you going to do about it?” On another occasion I found a cigarette case, then a pen.

“You're being unfaithful to me,” I said to her.

“Suppose I am being unfaithful to you,” she said.

“I swear I'll kill you!” I shouted at her.

“You only say that,” she said with a jeering smile.

“What's stopping you from killing me? What are you waiting for? Perhaps you're waiting till you find a man lying on top of me, and even then I don't think you'd do anything. You'd sit on the edge of the bed and cry” (p.162).

The Sudanese protagonist in *Season of Migration to the North* expresses his vision of the Western rape of his world and their bias against

him in an interior monologue, as he stands in the courtroom, having committed the crime of murdering his wife when making love to her:

The ships at first sailed down the Nile carrying guns not bread, and the railways were originally set up to transport troops. The schools were started so as to teach us how to say, "Yes" in their language. They imported to us the germ of the greatest European violence, as seen on the Somme and at Verdun, the likes of which the world had never previously known, the germ of a deadly disease that struck them more than a thousand years ago. Yes, my dear sirs, I came as an invader into your very homes: a drop of the poison which you have injected into the veins of history. I am no Othello, Othello was a lie.<sup>15</sup>

The protagonist in the novel of Tayeb Salih is a Sudanese student who travels to England to study. Women fall in love with him, throw themselves at him, and eventually are destroyed by this passion: Ann Hammond, Sheila Greenwood, Isabella Seymour and Jean Morris – all fall in his trap. Despite their different temperaments and backgrounds, they all became easy prey and are engulfed by this African. Even Mustafa Sa'eed's relationship with Mrs. Robinson – who is old enough to be his mother, and who embraces him as a small child and stands by him after he commits his dreadful crime – is not presented in the novel as that of an empathetic type exuding motherly concerns, but is marked by an erotic dimension:

Then the man introduced me to his wife, and all of a sudden I felt the woman's arms embracing me and her lips on my cheek. At that moment, as I stood on the station platform amidst a welter of sounds and sensations, with the woman's arms round my neck, her mouth on my cheek, the smell of her body – a strange European smell – tickling my nose, and her breast touching my chest, I felt – I, a boy of twelve – a vague sexual yearning I had never previously experienced.<sup>16</sup>

Tayeb Salih uses a complex strategy to deconstruct the ready-made image of the African. First he uses hyperbole and satire to depict the attributes which Europeans associate with the African, namely, his sexual virility and his rashness. He presents his hero as if he were an erotic animal with no objective other than to penetrate the Other and engage sexually with foreign women. This image is exaggerated in order to satirize the

Orientalist mentality. Often the women confess their feelings, which confirm that they are victims of the preconceived image of an African man:

She would tell me that in my eyes she saw the shimmer of mirages in hot deserts, that in my voice she heard the screams of ferocious beasts in the jungles...

“Come here,” I said to her imperiously. “To hear is to obey, O master!” she answered me in a subdued voice.<sup>17</sup>

We see in the novel how the protagonist, Mustafa Sa‘eed, plays his role superbly, telling the English women what they want to hear. He lies and turns his bedroom into a stage so that it will have Oriental, Shahrayar-like associations. He decorates it with carpets and incense and all the stereotypical details of the South and the Orient, of the Arab and the African, of the Muslim and all that excites a foreigner. The author lays bare, through props and dramatizations in the relations, the reciprocal making up and deformations. By depicting Mustafa Sa‘eed’s sexual triumphs in this exaggerated manner, Tayeb Salih satirizes the unrealistic, imaginary model constructed by academic and literary Orientalism. Needless to say, this sexual conquest in England leads only to crime and prison. The implied moral lesson in the novel is a by-product of the satiric deconstruction of a false image.

Tayeb Salih presents Mustafa Sa‘eed as a false hero; his falsehood is the product of a cultural union between oppressor and oppressed, between authority and dependency, and this is why the result is a hybrid who belongs neither to his homeland nor to the foreign land and culture. Despite Mustafa Sa‘eed’s academic excellence, he fails to achieve psychological balance, as a result of which all his relations end likewise in failure. Even when he decides to leave England and go back to the Sudan to start a new life as a farmer in a Sudanese village, he is unable to get rid of his wound and his foreign strand. He conceals it within himself; this is exemplified in the secret room which he constructs in his village house, and which is filled with artifacts from the colonizers’ culture. The secret English room in his home in the Sudan, with its fireplace and walls lined with English books, takes on a symbolic dimension, pointing to the impossibility of ridding oneself completely of the foreign element. It is the mirror image of the Oriental room which he had so proudly exhibited in

his home in London. The difference between the two rooms is that the Arabic room in England was on display, while the English room in Sudan remains a secret. In both cases, we find the room either locked up or staged, either dark or false, displacing reality and not representing a natural extension of its owner, as if it were below consciousness or above it. The novel's ending in murder and suicide is the literary equivalent of Frantz Fanon's vision of the inevitability of violence among the oppressed and against their oppressors. Through this the author confirms that there is no possibility of creative human interaction between oppressor and oppressed, between colonizer and colonized. Even the attraction which binds Mustafa Sa'eed and Jean Morris is nothing but the drive to suppress, control and erase the other; it is not the drive of complementarity, symbiosis or correspondence.

In addition to parody and satirical irony which pit hypocrisy against truth, image against reality, we find the author employing *mu'aradah* (literary countering) by presenting a reverse parallel of Shakespeare's Othello in the character of Mustafa Sa'eed. Tayeb Salih presents the details of the Desdemona-Othello relationship upside down. Instead of love and empathy, we find hate and provocation between Mustafa and Jean. While the tragedy of Othello is the result of his gullibility concerning the handkerchief which is falsely reported to him to have been given by his wife to her lover, we find Jean openly bragging about her lovers who leave their traces in the conjugal nest.

The conjugal murder in *Season of Migration to the North*, then, is not triggered by jealousy which has been engineered by an intrigue as in the play *Othello* but, rather, arises from an accumulation of resentment between two cultures, one of which is invasive. The issue is no more a matter of jealousy and misunderstanding on the part of a husband who commits a crime of passion, but is a violent crime intended and planned by a protagonist who has experienced a history of hostility. Mustafa's revenge, however, cannot be considered a liberating violence; on the contrary, it is an individual vengeance which leads only to further violence that crystallizes in his eventual suicide. Othello, too, commits suicide after murdering his wife, but in his case there is recognition of error and a guilty conscience. As for Mustafa Sa'eed, he does not regret his crime, but concludes at the end of his life that his trajectory was erroneous, that his effort to replant himself in his own land is virtually impossible after his

having been transplanted abroad. This is why he advises the unnamed narrator within the novel to protect his children from migration.

What Tayeb Salih is doing in his novel *Season of Migration to the North* is thus multi-faceted: he parodies Orientalists' characterization of the African/ Arab/ Muslim, revealing its falseness and demonstrating how practices and actions get based on such false images; the author also redraws the sick relationship between the subaltern and the hegemonic from the perspective of a citizen of the Third World.

In his moving story, "I Am An Arab, I Am Suspect," Tahar Ben Jelloun uses structural irony in which the reader knows more than the protagonist does. We find irony on the level of narrative structure which contrasts the simplicity of the subaltern with the meanness of society and the deviation of the world – all of which can be read between the lines of the work.

The title of the story summarizes its significance. The Arab is guilty until he proves his innocence in a Western world that is so prejudiced against him. The narrated story of Ben Jelloun opens with a first person account: "My name is Mohamed Bouchaid ..." <sup>18</sup> The narrator mentions his profession: window cleaner in Paris, then his nationality: Moroccan. He comments on how people make fun of his name, then describes himself as a dark man with a beard and wavy hair. He is the father of three sons, ranging in age from 15 to 20 years. The police are constantly after him, checking his identity and identification papers, as he is suspect everywhere and at all times.

I'm an Arab, a poor Arab, and I'm not at home. I'm also the classic type. I get checked systematically at the entrance and exit to the Metro. There's always a finger to point me out in the crowd. You'd think they were waiting for me wherever I go. <sup>19</sup>

The police are disappointed when, after searching him thoroughly, they find no explosives or drugs on him. Despite the fact that he has a beard only because he's too lazy to shave, a lot of people ask if he is a fundamentalist or an extremist: "I've often been asked, 'Are you a fundamentalist?' as if it were a race or a nationality," <sup>20</sup> as he says. He is surprised, as the term was not part of his daily lexicon before he migrated, and he does not understand why he is called an Islamic extremist: "Before I came to France I didn't know the word 'fundamentalist'. I think I heard

it for the first time on TV.”<sup>21</sup> It is true he fasts in Ramadan and abstains from eating pork, but from time to time he sips a glass of wine, and he does not pray regularly.<sup>22</sup> This sense of surprise in itself indicates to the reader how the evaluation of the Other does not necessarily spring from the behavior of the Other, but from preconceived accusations and ready-made condemnations.

This innocent worker asks himself why he is always suspect, and as he poses this question, the reader is moved to disapprove, if not condemn, the present set up with all its racial, sectarian and class prejudices:

So is it because I'm a Muslim that they find me suspicious, or is it because I'm not nice-looking? They say we wear beards to frighten them. Is my face frightening? Maybe it is! It's odd, the more care I take, the more I look after my appearance, the more I arouse the cops' suspicion. They say "I don't like the look of him." But what kind of guy would they like the look of? A well-dressed guy with white skin? What color eyes do we need to have to be nice-looking?<sup>23</sup>

The speaker goes on to describe French doubts and their asking him (just before the Gulf War) if he is one of Saddam's soldiers. The sparks of this destructive war moved from the Mashriq to the Maghrib and encircled this poor Moroccan worker at his very home and his livelihood; his boss insisted on preventing him from working in these circumstances, out of fear or malice:

Like a lot of people, I thought the war was going to happen on TV. I was wrong. The war was going to reach right into our workplace. On the day the war started I was due to be part of a team that was cleaning the windows of the Montparnasse Tower. The job had been arranged a long time before. There were two of us from North Africa and two Europeans, a Portuguese and a Frenchman. The foreman told me and my Algerian colleague, "No, not this time; you're going to stay put at the office. There's work to do here, like cleaning the toilets." I was surprised, especially since Martin's a pretty nice guy. That morning, there was nothing nice about his expression. He had some reason to take exception to us. Only we hadn't done anything wrong. My Algerian pal told me, "See, the war's really started now."<sup>24</sup>

This racism spreads even in schools as this Moroccan worker remembers what a school supervisor said to one of his sons, namely, that Arabs

are insects that should be exterminated; and he comments by asking what crime they have committed:

Are we vermin? I didn't know they called us that. Sure, they use "little rat" for the Arab, and "rat hunt" for an assault on an Arab. But what have we done to God and his Prophet to deserve all that?<sup>25</sup>

These disturbing interrogations abound, depicting the reality of treatment of the Muslim Arab minority in France, and portraying an extreme and deeply rooted racism projecting its own terrorism onto the Other.

Mohamed Bouchaid describes his feelings as he listens to the news from the Gulf War:

According to the radio – I always carry a little transistor with me – American planes have dropped 18,000 tons of bombs on Iraq. How many deaths is that, 18,000 tons of bombs? They didn't say on the radio. It must be so many people that they prefer not to say. I'm not an Iraqi, but it does something to me: I feel like there's a pain or a weight on my stomach. Those were Arabs, Muslims like me, under the bombs. On the radio and the TV they say we're fanatics. They're tough, these Americans: from high up in their planes they spot fanatics and send them greetings stuffed with bombs!<sup>26</sup>

In a splendid shot, the prayers and supplications of the Christians join the prayer of Mohamed Bouchaid to God and His Messenger for peace on earth and fairness to the Arabs, which demonstrates the spiritual magnanimity of our Moroccan worker and his humane opening unto the Other despite religious differences:

Notre Dame was crowded that day. Men and women were praying in small groups. They assembled in silence, begging God for clemency and mercy. It was moving. I felt like praying too. But I had to get to work. On the radio they were talking a lot about missiles and Israel. Up there on my scaffolding I prayed to myself. I invoked Allah and his Prophet Mohammed, that they might bring about the Kingdom of peace on earth, that we Arabs might be given greater consideration, treated with less suspicion, not necessarily loved but at least respected.<sup>27</sup>

The response of the French political institution to Hussein Scud rockets falling on Israel highlights the uneven reactions to victims and draws attention to double standards and moral schizophrenia. The story ends

with the Moroccan worker hearing on the radio that the President of France has called by phone to give condolences to an Israeli settlement's residents, expressing his solidarity with "the Jewish people in their predicament."<sup>28</sup> Our worker thinks to himself that a parallel solidarity with victimized Arabs is on its way and that he, too, will be receiving a message of support. So he goes home to wait for a phone call from Francois Mitterrand. Here the reader recognizes, first, the absurdity of such a wait, second, the double standard in behavior, and third, the innocence of this Moroccan worker.

Ben Jelloun does not come up with a conclusion or sermonize, but presents in a juxtaposed way the two faces of treatment, leaving judgment to the reader, while basing his narrative on the technique of dramatic irony. Ben Jelloun thus brings together what is normally viewed separately in order to reveal the reality of duplicitous standards. This juxtaposition between two modes of behavior moves minds and consciences, making the reader rethink what is taken for granted in his or her daily life. Although the double standard Ben Jelloun presents is a familiar practice, he nevertheless renders it unfamiliar and unacceptable by presenting it from the viewpoint of this simple worker. The shock which confronts the reader cannot be ignored or explained away. Here the technique of alienating the common and joining the separate makes the reader reflect and feel the shock of prejudice. Racist society attempts to normalize this prejudice and adjust the reader to its reception, while the creative writer attempts a reverse process placing racism in such relief that it cannot go unnoticed.

Thus we see how African writers have contributed to resisting bias, not only by denouncing it in critical essays but, in addition, by formulating it fictionally and creating identifiable strategies of resistance. These techniques of resistance and opposition can be summarized in three modes: (1) bringing together and comparing what usually is viewed as intrinsically different; (2) reinterpreting a master narrative by juxtaposing the motivation of an established hero onto that of a new one; (3) defamiliarizing the familiar and projecting it, thereby highlighting the grotesqueness of its bias. If we were to analyze what takes place in these modes, we would find two essential processes: (1) negating a vertical hierarchy and turning it into a horizontal relation which allows comparisons, contrasts and balanced judgments, and (2) displacing the center of the domi-

nant discourse by illuminating its peripheries and pockets, thus foregrounding the biases beneath its surface in such a way that they can no longer be covered up or neutralized. In this way, the creative writer presents a comprehensive view of existing biases while simultaneously deconstructing the grounds from which prejudice derives and on which it thrives.