

**The Influence of Colonial Powers on Identity and
Cultural Resistance in Fadhil Al-Azzawi's The Last of the
Angels: A Foucauldian Study**

تأثير القوى الاستعمارية على الهوية والمقاومة الثقافية في رواية "آخر
الملائكة": دراسة فوكوية

Lecturer. Ahmed Ghazi Mohaisen

م. احمد غازي محيسن

Dept. Of English, College of Education for Humanities- University Of
Anbar

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة الانبار

Email: ed.ahmed.ghazi@uoanbar.edu.iq

Assist. Lecturer. Yousif Ismael Adwan

م.م. يوسف إسماعيل عدوان

Continuing Education Center, University Of Anbar

مركز التعليم المستمر، جامعة الانبار

Email: yousef.ismail@uoanbar.edu.iq

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of colonial power on identity and cultural resistance in Fadhil al-Azzawi's *The Last of the Angels*, utilizing Michel Foucault's theoretical framework from *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. The research focuses on how British colonial authority influences individual self-perception and a clear cultural identity of the novel like Iraqi in the context. Through an examination of Hameed Nylon's experience and the Chuqor neighborhood, this study shows how surveillance and disciplinary mechanisms of colonial rule are creating self-regulation and cultural humiliation of the identity and social dynamics. It also looks for acts of collective defiance and social solidarity in the community as the Chuqor residents protest symbolically and perform shared religious practices in a bid to resist colonial oppression. Based on this, the Findings validate Foucauldian ideas of power and counter-conduct in al-Azzawi's representation of resistance in which communities under colonial oppression ascribe to agency and affirm resilience in a cultural identity. By exploring this relationship in a postcolonial literary light, this study contributes to the discourse of postcolonial literary discourse of speaking of the complex relationship between colonial power and indigenous agency while at the same time illustrating the capacity of cultural resilience in oppressive systems.

Keywords: cultural resistance, colonial authority, Michel Foucault, Identity, Nylon

المستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في تأثير القوة الاستعمارية على الهوية والمقاومة الثقافية في رواية فاضل العزاوي آخر الملائكة، مستعينةً بالإطار النظري لميشيل فوكو في كتاب المراقبة والمعاقبة: ولادة السجن. تركز الدراسة على كيفية تأثير السلطة الاستعمارية البريطانية على تصور الأفراد لذواتهم وعلى هوية ثقافية واضحة للرواية مثل الهوية العراقية في سياقها. ومن خلال تحليل تجربة حامد نايلون وحي جقور، تُظهر هذه الدراسة كيف أن آليات المراقبة والانضباط في الحكم الاستعماري تخلق آليات ضبط ذاتي وإذلال ثقافي للهوية والديناميكيات الاجتماعية. كما تتناول الدراسة أعمال التحدي الجماعي والتضامن الاجتماعي في المجتمع، حيث يحتج سكان حي جقور بشكل رمزي ويؤدون ممارسات دينية مشتركة في محاولة لمقاومة القمع الاستعماري. وتبيناً على ذلك، تُثبت النتائج أفكار فوكو حول السلطة والمقاومة في تصوير العزاوي للمقاومة، حيث تنسب المجتمعات الواقعة تحت الاضطهاد الاستعماري قدرةً على الفعل وتؤكد على الصمود في هوية ثقافية. من خلال استكشاف هذه العلاقة في ضوء الأدب ما بعد الاستعمار، تُسهم هذه الدراسة في الخطاب الأدبي ما بعد الاستعمار الذي يتناول العلاقة المعقدة بين القوة الاستعمارية والقدرة المحلية، في الوقت نفسه توضح قوة الصمود الثقافي في مواجهة الأنظمة القمعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المقاومة الثقافية، السلطة الاستعمارية، ميشيل فوكو، الهوية، نايلون



1. Introduction

Central to the themes of postcolonial literature is the enduring impact of colonial rule on personal and cultural identity often involving the ways in which colonial powers impose social and cultural norms that recast self-perception and that form the ground for community solidarity. As narrated by Fadhil Al-Azzawi in *The Last of the Angels*, the lives of Iraqi characters constricted under British colonial pressures are explored especially Hameed Nylon and his community's handling of sociopolitical pressures of their particular time. As Edward Said (1978) shows, colonial powers purposefully influence cultural and people's identity and accordingly shaping their behavior on the outside, while keeping the identity inside (p. 63). Likewise, Young (2001) finds colonialism to be a pressure that pushes indigenous people to internalize imposed identities and thus to abandon a self-perception and communal coherence (p. 150).

Michel Foucault's theory in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* provides a robust framework through which to analyze these themes, particularly his ideas of surveillance, disciplinary power and resistance. Foucault's theory of power as present in all areas of life (Foucault, 1977, p. 29) and the notion that resistance is a quality of power dynamics allows a more complex reading of Al-Azzawi's narrative. Reading British colonial rule in Iraq through a Foucauldian lens, we observe that it functions as a disciplining force and as a generator of resistance, guiding both the identity forms of individuals and communities in both a singular and plural sense (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002: 45). In that regard, as colonialism Mach threads. Memmi (1965) explores that the colonized' identities through humiliation and resistance, they are always at some stage submerged into proving their worth in a repressed setting (p. 110). According to Loomba (1998), colonial hierarchies have a psychological force which operates to influence how indigenous communities relate to and resist imposed norms (p. 112). In this sense, this study contributes to the postcolonial discourse by showing how colonial power and indigenous identity interact and cross, most prominently as evidenced in Al-Azzawi's work.

2. Theoretical Framework



Both the personal and the national identity are significantly constituted by British colonial influence in *The Last of the Angels*: the personal and the cultural identity of the Iraqis. Theoretical framework of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* is used to explore in detail colonial power through disciplining, surveillance, and counter conduct. The concepts of disciplinary power, visibility, and counter conduct which Foucault had given, are helpful concepts to use while examining identity under colonial rule (Foucault 1977, p. 136). This is extended by scholars like Bartky (1990) according to which, following Foucault's 'docile bodies', individuals subjected to subjugation internalize societal norms that constitute hierarchies built upon imposed norms and change identity (p. 63).

Foucault sees disciplinary power as both direct oversight, but also as internalization of norms that order social interaction and individual behavior and identity (McNay, 1994, p. 76). In the colonial context these disciplinary mechanisms build a new cultural identity and force cultural identity to conform to the foreign standard. Such processes marginalize indigenous identities subsumed under Western norms. It should coincide with Hameed's relations with British authorities, upon whom he tends to tailor his behavior according to their role (Gandhi, 1998, p. 91). The disciplinary power of which Hameed speaks was still prevalent, for instance, having worked as a driver for Mr. McNeely, a British engineer. Aware of his employers' expectations, Hameed learns to self-regulate in order to adjust his behavior to British imitative (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 33). Hameed's self-censorship and internalized colonial standards are evident Foucault's 'panoptical model' that presupposes that body adapts towards behavior on the presumption of surveillance by authority (Foucault, 1977, p.201).

Furthermore, Foucault's theory of surveillance points to the necessity of colonial power to produce visibility, thereby a context in which the colonized watch and punish themselves behind the backs of the colonizer (Foucault, 1977, p. 170). This dynamic is shown in Hameed's encounters with Helen, the British engineer's wife, who is sensitized to Hameed's class status and knows what to do, and is traumatized because he regulates his thoughts and actions "He did not dare protest or refuse the invitation" (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 11), he



expresses the scale of his internalized subjection. According to Bhabha (1994), the process described here is one in which colonized subjects learn to exercise control over their behaviour in order to avoid transgressing social boundaries, and such surveillance is internalized (p. 122). This kind of self-discipline merely amplifies the colonial hierarchy at a psychological level, since all Hameed is expressing are the values that have been imposed upon him, but he is unable to express any kind of frustration because it would lead to him being further subjugated.

3. Discussion

3.1. Foucauldian Power Dynamics in Colonial Contexts

Michel Foucault's power theory, as he developed it, particularly in *Discipline and Punish*, returns to the idea of modern power as more than force and argues that modern power is a force of subtle control and shaping of behavior that causes people to self-regulate (Foucault, 1977, p. 31). This disciplinary power in fact gives its users a reason to discipline themselves, regardless of whether or not there is a direct authority figure in place. This power is present within a colonial context, and works within the lives of the colonized to subtly exert cultural dominance and social hierarchy (Stoler, 1995, p.78).

In *The Last of the Angels*, British colonial authority is such a psychic presence that it shapes the personal and professional tides of the Arab characters. Hameed, as a driver for the British engineer Mr. McNeely always had to adapt and adjust his behavior according to the British expectation thus experiencing Foucault's surveillance and self-regulation (Foucault, 1977, p. 201).

According to Scott (1995), governmentality enforces compliance through colonial authority which creates a social context in which individuals self-regulate themselves according to an implicit gaze (p. 196). Hameed's role is an excellent example of one that was; "felt humiliated most of the time as he sat behind the steering wheel, waiting for Helen to leave an assignation" (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 11), which exposes psychological depth of the internalized subjugation. Berman (1983) emphasizes that the colonial power establishes hierarchies which compel the individuals to organize themselves around a subject position of subordination, the colonized, who are both the objects of



control and participants in their subjection (p. 155).

This is exactly what Hameed's experience as a 'docile body' shows in being both at one with the colonized and in private resisting the colonizer, thereby embodying Foucault's notion of power as monolithic, transitioning agency and self-perception in the colonized. Such resistance is described by Terdiman (1985) as a form of counter discourse, Hameed's symbolic resistance as he appears to abide by British norms (p. 203). Finally, in *The Last of the Angels* the colonization setting demonstrates Foucault's notion that power produces identity and behavior by forcing psychological boundaries that the colonized take ownership of.

3.2. Hameed Nylon's Experience of Control and Self-Regulation

The Last of the Angels parallels Hameed Nylon's experiences in captivity and colonial paradigms of control and self-regulation. As a British an engineer's driver, Mr. McNeely, Hameed is always under the gaze, or undesired, omnipresent surveillance of a colonial employer who demands that Hameed interiorize the normative and expected of his colonial employers. Hameed is made to sit under constant scrutiny which, over time, is and deforms his sense of who he is and what he is able to do as an individual or institution. Foucault's 'docile body' theory identifies how the individual will come to accept the authority and self-regulate in line with all that is expected of them, which Hameed performs on a daily basis within a colonial context (Foucault, 1977, p. 136).

As a driver he is in the closest physical proximity to British authority figures, and as a result he becomes acutely aware of his position within colonial hierarchy. How he interacts with Helen, Mr. McNeely's wife, shows the subtext and force of his life. Hameed is intensely aware of the gaze of his employers and what they are expecting, even when they're not there; "humiliated most of the time as he sat behind the steering wheel, waiting for Helen to leave an assignation" (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 11). This acute awareness of his subordination to authority is therefore an expression of Foucault's idea of surveillance, in which humans are betrayed of themselves to become 'instruments' of their own disciplinary watch (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). Hameed doesn't obey his self-discipline through direct order, but of a



pervasive sense of inferiority and shame of the presence of his employer. Hameed finds his true calling as a revolutionary in an Iraq that is destined for a sea change. Also bent on bucking the system is Hameed's brother-in-law, the money-scheming butcher Khidir Musa, who runs off suddenly to Russia to find two brothers who have been missing since World War I. And the key to their fate is held by a seven-year-old boy, Burhan Abdallah, who stumbles upon an old chest in his attic that allows him to speak with three white-robed old men, beings who inform him that they are, in fact, angels.

The feeling of internalized shame Hameed feels is psychological effect of colonial power. Fanon (1967) acknowledges that colonialism relies on both physical oppression and its creation of the feeling of a basic inadequacy among the colonized pressing them to assume that they are inherently inferior. In light of his growing awareness of the social boundary with his British employers, Hameed's interactions with Helen exemplify this: "uncertain about his standing with her, wanting her but lacking the audacity to cross the line separating them" (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 12). This issues is in line with Fanon's (1967) remark, that colonized individuals often experience 'self-alienation' when they 'internalize' the hierarchy of power wielded by the colonizers, resulting that they actually do not exist or may not claim rights for the sake of their self (p. 91).

The public symbol of his subjugation is reinforced by the label 'Hameed Nylon' which implies that sense of alienation for him. In attempting to impress Helen with nylon stockings as a gift (a gift that elide the reality and Helen's world) he is mocked; Hameed Nylon is the name given to him as means to exclaim his apparent inferiority. "Even innocent children always called him by this name—Hameed Nylon" (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 12). According to Foucault (1977) this label is a Foucauldian one of label as power for disciplining individuals with identities that reproduce social hierarchy, and as part of the subject's self-concept (p.125). Hameed's nickname functions as a kind of social punishment, reminding everybody else and Hameed himself that he has been relegated into a subordinate position in the community, and that this relegates him to the position of a servant to be mocked and swindled, so to speak, by those in the colonial structure.

Moreover, Hameed's self-regulation is not just restricted to his



behavior he actively suppresses his thoughts and his emotions in order to avoid breaking social expectations placed upon him. Hameed, though increasingly exasperated and foreshadowing attraction to Helen, forbears from following through on his feelings and so we glimpse the weight of his own internalized submission. "He did not dare protest or refuse the invitation" (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 11), all this shows that Foucault is right which conforms to his ideology that power has had an influence on the behavior of people and brought psychological limits on the people, so that the people are itself forced to commit some subjugation. According to Butler (1997), this form of self-censorship becomes a way in which authority extends their control when people learn to repress their want and their desire so as to conform to societal norms (p. 72). In Hameed's case, he is unable to express his discontent in public, presumably because colonial authority has insinuated itself into his psyche and dictated his way of dealing with even the most personal segments of his disposition.

Hameed's inner struggle is also reflected in his fantasies of regaining his dignity of his own, in that of asserting his dominance. He secretly hopes to take his revenge on her by proving his 'superiority' to Helen: "He was sure he would show her in bed that he was superior to all her other lovers. He would thus avenge himself and erase the humiliation he felt" (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 12). The way Hameed fantasizes dominance is a symbolic form of resistance, one in which he fashions an idea of how he might reassert control over his life and feelings. But such forms of resistance, says Foucault (2003), are also usually constrained to staying just in the imagination of the individual, never materializing in the exterior world, insofar as power permeates the entire world (p. 108). Hameed's fantasy is a powerful one, though, revealing the horizons of his agency: the colonial power structure stymies him from challenging it openly.

Hameed's attempts to accommodate Western norms serve to put him on the same level as authority, despite the fact he internalizes colonial authority, and is struggling to cope with feelings of inferiority and alienation. He shows how colonial cultural standards have influenced his world view through his interactions with British social norms and behavior, such as how the women; "how they wore undershirts and



shorts in the presence of their cuckolded husbands, who bragged about their wives to one another.” (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 11). In this scene we see how Hameed becomes both an observer and an agent of colonial hierarchy, changing his identity—his orientation in the colonial sector—to make it serve his colonial bosses. This is where Foucault’s idea of power becoming visible here as, Hameed is continuously made aware of his social standing in this hierarchy, to internalize the expectation that he needs to conform to a Western value and repress his own culture.

Hameed’s deep seated, self-regulating and self-adherence to colonial expectations culminates in Hameed’s symbolic silence where Hameed does not question being treated in such a way although feeling humiliated. He admits ; “He assumed it not unlikely that she would fancy him someday and invite him to sleep with her, but that day never came” (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 11). Hameed imagines this imagined reversal of power in which he envisions himself as Helen's equal, which harks back to the limits of his social position. His fantasies of breaking away from the limitations put upon him by colonial authority are also evidence of the limitations he lives with in his interactions with his British employers. Hameed’s refusal to engage the power structure directly is, then, in Foucault’s terms, symptomatic of how colonial authority steals personal agency, such that he becomes an ‘instrument’ of his own subjugation incapable of pursuing equality.

However, his experience of control and self-regulation becomes a marker of the broader psychological effect of colonialism on individual identity. His is a story of how colonial power acts, not just in the external control of the colonized, but also in the internalization of inferiority, in shaping the colonized view of selfhood, or in instilling the colonized with the thought that he is inferior. Hameed internalizes the psychological barriers because the degree of colonial authority which penetrates in his conscience is signaling how much he has internalized the actions, the desires, the very self he possesses, all tipped in the light of the colonial authority imposed obligations on him. Hameed’s is a journey of submission, self-discipline along with an internal rebellion over the complex ways in which colonial power penetrates the private lives of those it is subjugating, marking their sense of identity and agency.



3.3. Cultural Resistance and Collective Agency in the Chuqor Neighborhood

The Last of the Angels helps us to understand a powerful structure of cultural resistance and collective agency against the force of British colonialism. Hameed Nylon's dismissal from his job is an example of how shared cultural values and collective response from the community base a strong countervailing force to colonial pressures. Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of "cultural hegemony" is reflected in the neighborhood's cohesion, where oppressed groups exercise agency by creating a strong collective identity of which the individual grievances become a communal cause (p.245). The mutual struggle of the residents of Chuqor against foreign rule makes itself apparent by mobilizing in defense of Hameed, who has been summoned by the British authorities.

Chuqor's unity resembles Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of a hybrid community, where a people that has been penetrated by the colonial culture attempts a negotiated articulation of a cultural identity, while at the same time creating a space for resistance under the weight of external control. The effort of the residents of Chuqor to negotiate the impact of British influence without fully giving in to them exhibits what Bhabha terms a 'third space' of cultural negotiation where identity and resistance merge (p. 143). Mullah Zayn al-Abidin, a revered religious figure in the community, invokes this solidarity by framing Hameed's struggle as a moral obligation: "Since all Muslims constitute a single body, when one member suffers, the rest of the body rallies on its behalf" (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 14). And this statement describes the community's sense of how all of us are connected, which clashes with the feelings of isolation and division that colonial powers sometimes try to instill.

Even with their protest against Hameed's firing, the Chuqor neighborhood is steeped in religious and Cultural symbolism adding to their sense of identity while avoiding the colonial values imposed on them. In fact, Edward Said (1994) contends that cultural resistance based on heritage give a community greater resources to counter colonialism, by drawing on common symbols and rituals as basis for reclaiming agency (p.160). The residents showed this cultural resilience by staging a protest that inters supporters'; "Athletes from the Chuqor



neighborhood...carried signs written in a variety of scripts...‘There is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God,’” alongside supportive messages like “Hameed Nylon’s Innocent” and “Long Live Hameed Nylon!” (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 14). The messages meld their collective strength with their political defiance and their cultural and spiritual beliefs to interconnect those calls for justice. As Memmi (1965) suggests, solidarity in the colonial society is a defiant act, and the commonality of values assures community belonging against the dominance of the power Colonial (p. 130).

The protest also consists of types of theatricality and theatrical display, showing that the protest, itself, is a theatrical means of amplifying its perceived (political) messaging, and is a public spectacle beyond the mere political opposition. The participation of dervishes by brandishing swords and chanting religious slogans is a source of defiance as it is the label of the cultural tone and endurance of this community. Foucault’s (1977) conception of resistance as constituted by the very fabric of cultural identity renders this ritualistic, dramatic display a clear manifestation of Foucault’s view of resistance as serving in communities to breach and contest dominant power structures (p. 210). By including dervishes, or the spiritual leaders of the community, political protest becomes a cultural performance of strength and solidarity. In effect, the dervishes’ performances are aimed at re-affirmance of not only economic and political agency but also the values and honor of the community, turning the resistance in Chuqor into not only a spiritual but a cultural affair.

Chuqor’s resistance has a collective nature over generations, and reflects its commitment to preserving its cultural symbols. Essential to this protest are women and children who each make their continuing part in multi-regeneration of shared purpose. It has been women in the neighborhood who ululate and sprinkle rose water on the crowd while blending traditional practices and contemporary acts of defiance, that Said (1994) refers to as a ‘cultural affirmation’ that helps allow communities to erect their identity against the weight of colonial influence (p.160). Sprinkling rose water as part of a protest fuels it into a ceremonial act that bares retort and pride. Ululations amplify the atmosphere of solidarity, and make sure that the struggle against colonial authority is not gender or age based; that every member of



community has a role in that fight.

Chuqor is a collective who takes in children, too, who actively participate in the protest, showing the fervor of Chuqor's collaborators with resistance; "The children saw these, they rushed home and returned with any scraps of cloth they could find. They tied these to sticks, which they began to wave as they hopped about inside the crush of people or at the front" (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 14). Children reclaim their place in twisted memorials and join the voice and expression of solidarity through the creation of their own makeshift flags, serving as the metaphoric embodiment of cultural pride and resistance both within the generations. By crafting flags from scraps we see this community act of resourcefulness to not only survive but also to create powerful visuals of resistance when little means can be so easily transformed into strong symbols. Besides, children's involvement in this act of defiance captures the hope of the future, as the culture of resistance just like the culture of pride over this would not die out during the time of colonial rule in Chuqor. According to Nandy (1983), resistance in colonized societies is often based on the deeply lived cultural bonds that precede individual experiences uniting communities through a shared history of struggle and resistance (p. 92).

They additionally go further than dismissing Hameed to commit to maintaining their values against British attention. The British oil company wants to build a road to cross a Muslim cemetery and the neighborhood unites to face this Movement which perceives them as an attack on their traditions and as a sacrilege of sacred space. This opposition is declared by Mullah Zayn al Abidin as 'jihad in defence of what Muslims hold sacred' (Al-Azzawi, 2007, p. 90), but shows how spiritual duty and cultural preservation are fused in resistance. The community is demonstrating, in this act, how, as subjects are subjected to drastic disciplinary control, they manage to resist and continue to proclaim their cultural identity. Foucault's concept of counter conduct appears Here, as it becomes apparent that power structures always produce resistance within said population, that they wish to control, by turning back to the community's values, religion, and organized defiance (Foucault, 1977, p. 208).



Equally the actions of the neighborhood reveal that they are aware of the power of colonial influence permeating into local authority structures. Suspicion is even raised that Mullah Zayn al-Abidin has taken bribes from the British, and the community starts to doubt his loyalty, a symptom of their especial sensitivity that colonial power might corrupt even the most faithful. Such suspicion reflects the community's resolve to keep local activity in the hands of those living on the ground, and to keep all internal and external threats in check. A sophisticated form of agency, both resistant to overt colonial control and to colonial control that takes more roundabout forms by infecting indigenous institutions, is demonstrated in the community's ability to critique indigenous leaders who have become complicit with colonial forces.

Ultimately, the actions of the Chuqor neighborhood embody the essence of Foucauldian resistance: a counter power out of the margins, drawn from pride in the cultural and with a solidarity based on the collective. Through shared values, traditional practices and cohering against colonial authority the residents of Chuqor mobilize themselves from passive subjects to agents of cultural resilience. Chuqor, as portrayed in Al-Azzawi's work, proves persistence in defensive and cohesive form of being and the consequence of the power structure being oppressive is reaffirmation of their value and the oneness in the community which is a powerful narrative against being oppressed and the impulses of power.

4. Conclusion

Fadhil Al-Azzawi gives a tragic story about how colonial power impacts individual identity and the unity of the community through *The Last of the Angels*. We deepen our understanding of these dynamics through application of Michel Foucault's theory in *Discipline and Punish*, which explains how colonial authority enacts control through disciplinary mechanisms driven by the compulsion to self-regulate and internalized shame. Hameed's character shows the effects throughout the humiliation and social alienation unfairly thrown at him by his British employers. But the village's collective response in the Chuqor neighborhood is a reminder of the strength of the cultural identity and the ability of the collective resistance.



by applying Foucauldian theory, this analysis shows how European colonial power both illustrated and produced cultural resistance, positioning the domination of the indigenous village as simultaneously the means to the end of marginalizing and controlling the culture of the colonial enterprise while also inadvertently provoking the culture. With this examination of the ways in which colonial subjects negotiate identity and agency, Al-Azzawi's novel both ends with an assertion of cultural resilience in the face of oppressive power structure and is a rich exploration of that resilience.

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