

Reconstructing the Powercube: Resistance and the Native Intellectual

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Abstract

“When the colonialist, who had tasted the sweets of their victory over [the] assimilated people, realize that these people whom they considered as saved souls are beginning to fall back into the ways of niggers, the whole system totters” (Fanon 220) is what the author of The Wretched of the Earth says about decolonization with the involvement of the native intellectual. Johanna Spyri narrates such a mode of decolonization in Heidi where the protagonist turns out to be the native intellectual. She resists the colonization that results out of the exercise of power which tries to implant in her mind those aspects which are against her conscience. She attempts such a movement through the education that she gained from Grandmama who attracts her by showing her certain symbols of ownership, the most prominent among them being the book which has the picture of a shepherd and his flock. Here, the Grandmama practices John Gaventa’s three-dimensional approach to power which “explains that B does things that he would not have done had it not been for A because A influences, determines and shapes B’s will” (Sadan 42). Grandmama makes care and education tools to colonize the child, the attempt which gains success in the beginning, but the same that transforms Heidi into a native intellectual, wishing to get away from the suffocating clutches of the new culture. The old lady plans to attract and colonize Heidi as she finds out that Miss Rottenmeier’s forced colonization is not working upon the child. Spyri shows how at the end the colonizer is turned out to be the colonized, with the cure of Clara’s disability. Till then Clara was psychologically colonized by the impairment, which made her act according to others’ wishes and not her own. At the point where there occurs cure the grandfather is presented as a benefactor the thought that compels the colonizer be obliged to him and Heidi.

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“Power...is measured...by the ability to implant in people’s minds interests that are contrary to their own goods” (Sadan 37), is what Lukes opines. It is in the same manner that colonialism spreads its ideologies everywhere thus expanding its roots. What happens in colonialism in its traditional sense is, establishing forcefully its power over the different colonies. Plundering is the main target of the traditional approach. The myriad historical incidents show that such forceful colonization results in revolution from the part of the colonized who try to retrieve their pre-colonial past. In order to prevent such an issue from taking place the colonial masters make use of the indirect modes of colonization for which they seek the help of the natives themselves.

Each individual has got an identity of her/his own which s/he gains from the different symbols of ownership present in their tradition. In indirect colonization the colonizer makes use of these symbols in order to attract the natives, which are then transformed in the manner that pleases the colonizer. Most usually, after this process the natives are given the idea that their original culture and tradition are much inferior to those of the colonizer. This reminds one of the Europeans establishing the supremacy of their literary works in the colonies, as Nayar says. At the end the natives are transformed into mimic men with the help of whom the colonizer gets widespread popularity.

Sometimes it happens that instead of becoming a mimic man the colonized turns out to be a native intellectual, the concept which is introduced by Fanon. For the colonial master the native intellectual is a saved soul; but at the end it may not be so, as they engage in decolonization and resistance. Decolonization with the participation of the native intellectual takes form in three stages. “The native intellectual at first refuses the view that colonized peoples had no meaningful culture prior to the arrival of the colonizers” (McLeod 85). As the first step towards the development into a native intellectual the colonizer erases from her/his mind the idea that the colony had a meaningful culture which it owns from time immemorial. “In so doing the cultural traditions of the colonized nation are ignored as the native intellectual aspires to reproduce the cultural fashions of the colonizing power” (McLeod 86). This detaches the native intellectual from her/his culture. In the second phase, called ‘just-before-the-battle’, the native intellectual searches for the original culture to which s/he belongs. In simple terms there is a backward movement. At this point as well, there is no direct relation between the indigenous masses and the native intellectual. In the final phase, the ‘fighting phase’, the native intellectual directly partakes in decolonizing by using various reformed strategy.

What plays a major role in automatically colonizing the people, including the native intellectual, is John Gaventa’s powercube. The form dimension of the powercube is the one that mainly operates in indirect colonization. It tells about three forms in which power operates, which may be listed as visible power, hidden power, and invisible power, in the exact order of their appearance. In indirect colonization the colonizer first practices visible power, which allows the natives also to engage in the different decision-making processes.

This engagement, at the end creates some barriers which do not let the people take part in further discussions, thus allowing hidden power to operate in the society. Finally the people feel that they are helpless and powerless when compared to the colonizer, which compels them to become subservient to the colonizer. This is the invisible power, which is the internalization of powerlessness.

Internalization of powerlessness happens when one is not aware of her/his basic rights and ability to question the dominant ideologies. But to resist colonization, or even to decolonize, such internalization should never happen. As Ashish Nandy points out, the first group of colonizers were plunderers, but the second consisted of missionaries who colonized the bodies and minds of the people. In more specific terms the latter group made use of invisible power. In *Heidi* Deta becomes a slave to invisible power when she willingly goes to some place, which attracts her with money and social position, where she is sure to be colonized. She has a feeling that she is powerless when compared to the rich. The lady attempts to inject into Heidi the same idea when she decides to take the child to Frankfurt to become a companion to Clara of the Sesemann house. As far as she is concerned, even if Heidi gets destroyed psychologically, she may possess a high social position, which gets evident when she tells Alm Uncle, “for one never knows what might happen in such a case....” (Spyri 43). But for the Grandfather detachment from one’s culture is destruction, and if Heidi becomes a mimic personality, her mixing up with the natives will bring harm to the whole village of Mayenfled, and even to himself. That is why he says, “Take her and ruin her, but do not bring her before my sight again. I do not want to see her with feathers in her hat and wicked words like yours” (Spyri 43).

In the Sesemann house Miss Rottenmeier wants to transform Heidi into a mimic being. For her Heidi looks strange and unsophisticated with “her hat and shawl...looking up at the lady’s head with innocent wonder” (Spyri 48). Her first move at colonizing Heidi is calling her Adelheid, which the latter dislikes. Unlike Deta the child has the ability to question the powerful though it remains unfruitful at the beginning. The whole household is planning to exercise the form dimension of the powercube by using different strategies. While Clara and Grandmama let Heidi take decisions on her own, which is an instance of visible power, they are hopeful that the same will create some sort of barriers that allow hidden power to operate. In such cases, at the end internalization of powerlessness takes place and Heidi will become one-in-chains. More than anyone else, Miss Rottenmeier is careful in not letting Heidi make use of the claimed space which may result in a revolution which puts an end to her plans. That is why when Heidi tells Sebastian, the butler, that he looks like Peter, Miss Rottenmeier becomes horrified and sends the children to the dining room. Similarly, “the butler...was told to place the dish on the table and leave the room. When he was gone, Miss Rottenmeier explained to Heidi in many signs how to help herself at table. She also told her never to speak to Sebastian unless it was very important” (Spyri 51).

Sebastian's wish to possess the claimed space gets evident when he saves Heidi's old straw hat which is rubbish for Miss Rottenmeier, and when he promises "to look after the [kittens] and prepare...a bed for them in a basket" (Spyri 59). When the child is scolded by the housekeeper he asks, "what has happened, little one? Do not take it to heart, and cheer up...but we must not get discouraged....Don't give in! Don't be so sad! You have been so courageous till now...Come up now, and when the lady's away we'll go and look at the kittens...." (Spyri 64). The kittens and the straw hat are symbols of ownership for Heidi, of which Sebastian is aware. When he says "we must not get discouraged...." (Spyri 64), his wish to retrieve his native culture gets evident.

Miss Rottenmeier attempts colonization in its traditional form by forcing Heidi to do what is expected of her without questioning. She never allows the child to take a decision on her own. That is why when Heidi decides to go home she yells at her, "What, you want to run away from this house?...what is it that does not suit you here? Don't you get better treatment than you deserve? Have you ever before had such food, service and such a room?...For mercy's sake the child is crazy!" (Spyri 56). But Heidi is willing to sacrifice anything to clutch on to her culture, even though they may be of great importance to the colonizer. Just like the colonizer never minds her culture and wishes, she too does the same to the former. Forced colonization finds no success in making Heidi powerless. Only the grandmother is able to transform Heidi into a mimic being, which gets evident when Mr. Sesemann writes, "...my mother is coming very soon to stay here, and she will help you manage the child, for there is nobody in this world that my mother could not get along with...." (Spyri 69). Finding out that forced colonization is not possible anymore, Grandmama uses caring as a tool to bring an overall transformation in Heidi. She even allows Heidi to handle some power when she permits the child to call her *Grandmama*, just like Clara, and at the same time calling the child *Heidi*, instead of *Adelheid*. By calling the woman Grandmama Heidi is unconsciously mimicking Clara.

In a very subtle manner the old woman implants in Heidi's mind the feeling that her native culture is something which should not be followed, as it has the capacity to destroy her. When the child tells that Peter had told her reading is impossible for Heidi as it is difficult, Grandmama says, "You have not learnt to read because you have believed what Peter said. You shall believe me now, and I prophecy that you will learn in a very short time as a great many children do that are like you and not like Peter" (Spyri 72). By saying this Grandmama is trying to create in Heidi the feeling that she is different from those who share her psyche and that, instead of sticking on to the native culture she should start accepting and following the alien culture without revolting against it. This care results in Heidi realizing that "it would hurt her kind friends if she tried to go home again. She knew now that she could not leave, as her Aunt Deta had promised, for they all, especially Clara and her father and the old lady, would think of her ungrateful" (Spyri 73). This obligation is what the

colonizers usually want as this will help them create mimic men who will act as their helpers by spreading the colonizers' culture as better than the native ones.

As mentioned earlier, for the new mode of colonization to happen the person to be colonized should not be forced but should be attracted to the new culture, for which the native symbols of ownership should be presented before them in a appealing manner. Heidi also confronts such a situation when Grandmama shows her a book which has the picture of a shepherd and his flock, which reminds her of Peter. Using this symbol Grandmama makes her decide to learn how to read, thus making her get accustomed to the new culture. In a similar fashion the lady asks her to pray to God the father, which reminds one of colonization through missionary activities. Heidi falls a prey to all which Grandmama desires: "Heidi was sitting close to Clara, reading her a story; she seemed amazed at the strange, new world that had opened before her" (Spyri 74). Along with this, the child is given a book which is something that makes her stay with the Sesemann family without opposition. All these made Heidi feel that she should stay with them. "But the burden grew heavier in her heart and she lost her appetite, and got paler and paler....only in her dreams she would be happy" (Spyri 73). Heidi is confused as to follow the new culture or be who she really is. Since she does not hold power, for the time being she decides to remain dormant, for at least in the books she can keep in touch with her native culture. That is why she stops crying forever at the Sesemann house when Miss Rottenmeier says, "Adelheid, now you have screamed enough. If I hear you again giving way to yourself in such a noisy fashion, I shall take your books forever!" (Spyri 73). To a certain extent it can be said that Heidi decides to follow the ways of the colonizer so that she can make use of all of them for the good of those who she loves. Even then, the child constantly is attached to her native culture. It gets evident when she keeps the straw hat with her; for she remembers "her grandfather's words to Deta about her feather hat..." (Spyri 93). Though she wishes, she does not get an opportunity to revolt against the new culture and those who try to turn her out into a mimic being. These events have a traumatic impact on Heidi, which causes her to walk in her sleep. Heidi's words to the doctor stand proof for the fact that instead of getting transformed into a mimic being, she has turned out to be a native intellectual: "Oh, I have the same dream every night. I always think I am with my grandfather again and can hear the fir-trees roar. I always think how beautiful the stars must be, and then I open the door of the hut, and oh, it is so wonderful! But when I wake up I am always in Frankfurt" (Spyri 85). Thinking of the native culture by formerly following the colonizer's is the second stage followed by the native intellectual, which ultimately leads to decolonization.

For the colonizer a colony or any place considered suitable to be made into one is a land of magic and cure. The same phenomenon is presented in *Heidi*, with the arrival of the doctor to Mayenfeld. For him, who does not share the psyche of the people at Frankfurt, the village is not a place to colonize, but a place of healing. It never occurs to him that he should loot the place or the minds of the natives, but he wants to be one among them so that he can

be happy always. In his own words, “...one never has a sad heart here. Only one gets unhappy in Frankfurt....It is beautiful up there. Body and soul get strengthened in that place and life seems worth living again” (Spyri 119,122). The doctor thinks that even a symbol or at least a single person from the village can save him from his present condition. That is why, though he knows that Heidi will not accept it, he asks her to go along with him. In turn, Heidi, who is adamant in sticking on to her tradition invites the doctor to stay with her and the others in the village for, she knows what is awaiting her in Frankfurt.

The arrival of the guest creates in Heidi the insecure feeling that she and the whole village may be forced to get colonized in no time. As a native intellectual, she feels it her responsibility to save them all by resisting colonization tactfully. For that she seeks the help of Peter, asking him to learn how to read so that they may come to know about the ways of the colonizer which will enable them to use the same knowledge against the former. When Peter refuses, she presents a threatening picture of Frankfurt before him:

“With flaming eyes she planted herself before the boy and said: ‘I’ll tell you what will happen, if you don’t learn. Your mother has often said that she will send you to Frankfurt. Clara showed me the terrible, large boys’ school there, where you’ll have to go. You must stay there till you are a man, Peter! You mustn’t think that there is only one teacher there, and such a kind one as we have here....There are whole lots of them, and when they are out walking they have high black hats on their heads...’” (Spyri 132,133).

The fear which took possession of his mind compels Peter to learn so that he can resist being colonized. The insecurity in him is unfathomable which is revealed from the words of the teacher who says, “‘For a long time I tried to teach you with all my patience, and you were not even able to grasp the letters, but now that I had given you up as hopeless, you have not only learnt how to spell, but even to read...’” (Spyri 135). The same fear haunts him when he gets the news that the Sesemann family has decided to arrive Mayefled. Unlike the two children the grandfather is not the least afraid of getting colonized. His strength in resisting the colonizing approach, and ability to make the colonizer follow *his* ways is clearly presented in a conversation between himself and Heidi, “Heidi, thoughtfully looking at the backless chair [made by grandfather for the guests] remarked: ‘Grandfather, I don’t think [Miss Rottenmeier] would sit down on those.’” “Then we must invite her to sit down on the beautiful green lounge of grass,” quietly answered the old man” (Spyri 137,138).

Clara’s each attempt at becoming a part of the village is looked upon with suspicion by Peter who “kept away, only sending furious looks at the ...girl...” (Spyri 145). Heidi is very much willing to accept Clara as one among them which Peter sees as her accepting the attempt at colonizing them all. “When he passed in the hut in the morning, Heidi was always busy with the strange child, and in the evening it was the same. All summer long Heidi had not been with him a single time....And today she was coming at last, but again in the company of this hateful stranger” (Spyri 151). Just as the colonized as got certain symbols of

ownership which give them their sole identity, the same are there for the colonizer as well. For Clara, her rolling chair, being an object of ownership, gives her the identity as a lame child, though the same does not seem a positive symbol. The destruction of the symbols of ownership ruins the identity of the owner, which ultimately causes the complete destruction of the individual. Unconscious of this Peter pushes the rolling chair down to the valley of the mountain. "Looking down, he watched his fallen enemy tumbling downwards, downwards" (Spyri 151), which gives him the feeling of gaining triumph over the colonizer.

One reason why there pops up no attempt from Clara to colonize Heidi, but be a part of Mayenflid is that, she is a physically colonized being. The physical impairment she suffers from is turned out to be a disability as a result of which she is forced to do what those around her desire. She is given the feeling that without the help of another person even a decent survival is impossible for her. Her losing the rolling chair gives Clara some relief, though it was not so formerly when she regarded it as her lifelong companion. Sitting on the grass she "felt a sensation of contentment such as she had never before experienced. A great desire rose in her heart that hour. She longed to be her own master and be able to help others instead of being helped by them" (Spyri 154).

A sense of obligation and accepting someone as benefactor have the risk of getting colonized easy, the same which happens to the Sesemann family. Heidi and Peter together help Clara to escape from the clutches of physical colonization by helping her stand and walk on her own, making her independent. Thus "Clara's greatest wish, to be able to be well like other people, had been fulfilled at last" (Spyri 156). The same sense of obligation is felt by Grandmama and Mr. Sesemann when they see their child as a free and independent being. Grandmama even calls the grandfather their *benefactor* which is something that gives power to the village as a whole. The limitless obligation compels Mr. Sesemann in asking grandfather what he should do to show his gratitude. The grandfather who well knows that since Clara too has become one like the others in the family, there is a chance that they together may colonize them, and more than anyone else Heidi, tells them, "...If you would give me the assurance that Heidi will never be obliged to go into the world and earn her bread, you would amply repay me for what I was able to do for you and Clara" (Spyri 169). Though this seems to be an opportunity given to Mr. Sesemann to thank grandfather, he constantly reminds the family that it is only because of him and the children that the whole family is saved from being labeled as disabled, which has the strength to make the later inferior to those around them. Time and again the family is forced to think of Heidi and her village as equally powerful as them, which makes them shed from their minds the plan to transform Heidi into a mimic being.

At this point there arises the question of who to be considered the colonizer and who, the colonized. Both are equally powerful and threats to each other. A balance evolves in between the two parties, and willingly they accept each others' strengths and weaknesses. Even then internalizing powerlessness seeps into the minds of the colonizer thus turning them

out to be the colonized. In short a decentering of the powercube happens, which is in a sense reconstructing the same.

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