

# Neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and communication for social change: A culture-centered agenda for the social sciences

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## Abstract

Interrogating the role of knowledge structures, methods, and practices of communication in the formation, reproduction, and reification of neoliberal modes of global governance, this essay looks at the ways in which intervening in bodies of communication knowledge offer pathways for structural transformation. Drawing upon the framework of the culture-centered approach (CCA), it suggests tentative theoretical and methodological anchors for listening to voices of subaltern communities at the global margins of neoliberal political economies. Collaborations and conversations with subaltern social movements, it suggests, provide possibilities for alternative imaginaries grounded in interpretive frames from the subaltern contexts in the global South.

**Keywords:** Neoliberalism; Subaltern Studies; Postcolonialism; Social Change; Neocolonialism; Culture-centered approach

Situated within the overarching framework of the Cold War social sciences written within the functionalist agenda of persuasion, much of the theorizing of communication has inherited the colonial agendas of knowledge production (Dutta, 2011; Melkote, 1991; Shah, 2011). The role of communication knowledge has been constituted within this structure as a framework for disseminating innovations in target communities in the global South, driven by the notion that innovations manufactured in the West would bring about development in the global South and thus prevent mass mobilizations that threaten the global structures of capitalist domination. Development innovations such as agricultural biotechnologies, fertilizers, and contraceptive technologies have been disseminated in the global South under the conceptual foundations of capitalist colonialism, built on the idea that controlling population growth and facilitating agricultural

productivity in the global South would diffuse capitalist values, ensure economic growth, and minimize geosecurity threats to the global power structures of the US and UK (Dutta, 2008; 2011). Simultaneously, the privatization of these technologies and the incorporation of their products in global commodity chains, in circuits of speculation, and in structures of risk-profiteering is intertwined with the strategic deployment of communication as development.

The agenda of a dominant body of communication scholarship, framed under the diffusion of innovations framework and funded under the umbrella of development communication by agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has been constituted at this intersection of capitalism and neo-colonialism, seeking to reproduce across globe spaces pro-capitalist attitudinal orientations in target populations, captured in the notion of the innovative

“Modern Man” committed to small family size and experimenting with new innovations of agricultural technologies (Dutta, 2006, 2008). Critiques offered to this dominant paradigm of communication scholarship emerging from the global South have been co-opted into the dominant structure of communication scholarship, formulated as the new paradigm of participation-driven communication scholarship (Huesca, 2008).

Participation, as the new buzzword for communication, has therefore played an integral role in establishing the global hegemony of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, as a global political and economic framework of organizing, works through the hegemonic role of experts in producing knowledge and in developing programs and policies on the basis of the instruments of data gathering, implementation, and evaluation, simultaneously deploying participatory tools to secure community buy-in into top-down programs of social change serving the agendas of transnational capitalism. Moreover, intrinsic to the ideas of neoliberalism is the individualization of human life, reducing human aspirations to the fantasies of freedom and liberty conceived at the individual level, and reproduced in co-opted forms of participation. Participatory forums, community activities, and community organizing structures are incorporated into the overall structures of neoliberal reforms directed at weakening nation states, minimizing public welfare programs, and removing regulations on private activities. In this essay, we argue that the dominant framework of communication theorizing operates on these twin frameworks of individualization and the co-optation of grassroots participatory processes.

In this essay, we argue that the neoliberal framework of individualism and expert-driven targeting of public

opinion that constitute the bulwark of communication science is driven by a colonial impulse. A critical engagement with this literature in the social scientific theorizing and practice of communication serves as the basis for outlining the culture-centered approach (CCA) to communication as an organizing framework for listening to subaltern voices at the global margins and for inverting the specter of theorizing located in elite, expert-driven global structures of knowledge production. Building on the tradition of subaltern studies theory that interrogates the erasure of subaltern agency from structures of knowledge production, this essay grapples with the question: What might a social scientific endeavor look like when informed by the spirit of subaltern studies? What would be the overarching goals of such an endeavor?

### **Neoliberalism and functionalist framework of Communication**

The debate between functionalist or empirical school and critical school in communication research, although old, is still relevant today, even as communication research enters new knowledge domains such as climate change, participatory health communication research, cognitive theories of relationship management, engagement, new media participation, and the role of agriculture biotechnologies in the realms of sustainability. For example, one of the most engaging debates between the two schools of thought was between Paul Lazarsfeld and Theodor Adorno during their collaboration with the Rockefeller-funded Princeton Radio Research Project, when the former was the director of the project and had employed Adorno to supervise a study of music in American culture (e.g., Morrison, 1978). Adorno (1945), critiqued the

emphasis on administrative research, defined to serve the interests of industry and government, or how to “manipulate the masses” (p. 194), distinguished between exploitive and benevolent administrative research.

According to this framework, rooted in persuasion, exploitive administrative research is guided by the desire to induce the masses to buy a certain commodity, whereas benevolent research aims to diffuse “good” things among the masses, without critiquing the implications of what is “good,” and what values are embedded or promoted by such terms. In spite of this recognition, much of communication research has focused on understanding and manipulating attitudes, “without considering how far these attitudes reflect broader social behavior patterns and, even more, how far they are conditioned by the structure of society as a whole” (Adorno, 1945, p. 195-196). As Slack and Allor (1983) pointed out, “For Adorno, not only the processes of communication but the practice of communication research itself had to be viewed critically” (p. 211), a key issue that they claim continues to be ignored in the dominant communication research paradigm. The taken-for-granted assumptions of value remain un-interrogated within this mainstream framework of communication research.

Historically, communication research has largely been directed at the diffusion of such “good” attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors through micro-analytic methods such as individual surveys. For example, one of the most popular theoretical frameworks in communication research is the diffusion of innovations framework (Rogers, 2003), aiming to rapidly diffuse new technologies among the public by changing their beliefs, attitudes, and

behaviors. Specifically, research in diffusion of innovations, the genesis of which lies in the adoption of new technologies by farmers—adoption of the hybrid seed corn—has played a key role in the dominant knowledge structure of communication campaigns that seek to improve the conditions of the poor, especially in developing countries (Rogers, 2003; Schramm & Lerner, 1976). Such research, however, assumes that technological advancement is inherently good, and that the benefits of technology are distributed uniformly, that the target audiences are technologically challenged and are in need for *development*.

Using pejorative terms such as “innovators” and “laggards” to distinguish the target audiences, this framework sees the adoption of “new” technologies as solutions to problems of under-development, for example, as solutions to agriculture challenges, without really interrogating the proposed benefits of these technologies and without critically engaging with the structural organizing of the agricultural sector in targeted societies. The absence of critical interrogations of the broader geopolitics of agricultural technologies and networks of profits thus obfuscate critical questions such as the health and wellbeing consequences of the farmers, the profit motive driving the diffusion of agriculture technologies, and the colonization of agriculture in the hands of transnational agribusiness. Communication practice, and the scholarship of communication play integral roles in the financialization and corporatization of agriculture, framing these processes of financialization as development. Worth noting here is the co-optation of the critical narrative into the development paradigm that rhetorically suggests a position of self-critique and yet fundamentally co-opts these critiques to

invent participatory processes of diffusion to more effectively carry out the corporatization of agriculture while at the same time giving the appearance of democratic processes.

The capitalist structures of political economic organizing are integral to the conceptualization of communicative processes in mainstream communication research, theory, and practice. The focus of much of communication research is at the individual-level, ignoring the role of systemic structural changes that both constitute and govern an individual's ability to change, or respond to, and more importantly, participate in, larger social and political changes. In other words, empirical research tends to champion the status-quo, where tinkering with existing models is believed all that is necessary for social good, with the overarching framework of communication focusing on individual change. For example, although several new theories of communication interrogate the linear-hypodermic model of sender-message-receiver, they nevertheless only add new variables to this explain the relationship (Slack & Allor, 1983). This functionalist linear model, however, largely ignores the intertwined nature of communication processes with larger social, political and economic institutional processes. Moreover, the model remains complicit in propagating the unquestioned agendas of the powerful actors that fund communication research and practice.

Moreover, funding for such research is often from governments or private organizations, whose essential aim is stability and profit, respectively. In such a model, social and political change, even an overhauling of the existing economic system, is relegated as unimportant, or even unnecessary. Recently, for example, several communication

scholars are investigating how best to increase public understanding and acceptance to issues such as climate change, and increase support for climate change policies and other emerging issues such as agriculture biotechnology. Without dismissing the noble intentions of climate change communication researchers, the focus on individual attitudes and behaviors in much of this research ignores the larger economic process and policies that have caused the problem of unregulated industrialization in the first place (e.g., Klein, 2014). Similarly, much of the research on public attitudes towards biotechnology, often funded by the biotech industry, is limited to diffusing the technologies, without interrogating its effects on either agriculture sector, or on human health. In other words, the dominant framework of communication, from its historical roots to its contemporary forms of practices, remains complicit within the dominant structures of corporatization, commoditization, and incorporation of subaltern lives into the market logics of transnational capital, albeit shrouded in the narrative of development.

One critical question that needs to be continually foregrounded is whose purpose does communication research serve? Herbert Schiller (e.g., 1992), for example, critiqued the use of mass media to further the interests of the US military-industrial establishment across the world. Communication technology, and its associated research projects, became central to spreading the ideals that the US championed, namely promoting a certain type of political economy across different countries that suited the US economic and political interests. For example, both manufacturing and opening of national economies, in the name of free trade, provided immense opportunities for US companies, including media companies, to quickly control the production

and distribution apparatus. As Schiller noted, “American power, expressed industrially, militarily, and culturally, has become the most potent force on earth and communications have become a decisive element in the extension of United States world power” (1969, p. 206-207), with the development of new technologies increasing the “perimeter of American influence, and the indivisibility of military and commercial activity operates to promote even greater expansion” (p. 80). Culture-centered projects of social change intervene in this elite world of theorizing by seeking to co-create spaces for subaltern theories emerging from the global South, referring to theories that emerge from hitherto erased communities in the global South, and interrogating the underlying economic logics of this new imperialism. That communication research, theorizing, and practice are intrinsic to the global reproduction of financial capitalism and to the project of neocolonialism is a key theoretical argument in the CCA.

### **Interrogating economic logics of new imperialism**

Critiques offered to the dominant paradigm of communication scholarship emerging from the global South have been co-opted into the dominant structure of communication scholarship, formulated as the new paradigm of participation-driven communication or participatory action research (PAR) or community engaged scholarship. Participation, as the new buzzword for communication, has therefore played an integral role in establishing the global hegemony of neoliberalism, attached to the language of democracy and incorporated into the expert-driven networks of

power. The community has been incorporated into neoliberal programs of economic structuring only to be deployed as a marker for the weakening of state-led programs, infrastructures, and public welfare programs. We argue that neoliberalism, as the contemporary global political and economic framework of organizing, works through the dominant role of experts producing knowledge and developing programs and policies on the basis of the instruments of functionalist knowledge, while at the same time incorporating participation and empowerment into the structures of resource consolidation to provide the façade of democratization to neoliberal processes of exploitation.

### **Co-optation of participation**

Participation is a key ingredient in the global hegemony of financial capitalism. The languages of the “bottom of the pyramid,” micro-credit, and self-help have been integral to processes of market consolidation, with subaltern communities having been incorporated as new markets of profiteering by financial capital. Communication scholarship that pins blind confidence in participation and thus loses its critical distance in examining its own theoretical, methodological, and practice pitfalls inevitably becomes an instrument of neoliberal hegemony. The voices of the margins become incorporated into the dominant power structures of knowledge production, engaged through the tools of community participation.

High theories of communication are often judged based on the continuation and innovation of the existing theoretical discourses within the field, which exclude the subaltern voices unless such can be used as raw materials for informing the academic gaze. In

other words, a Cesarean attitude of “I came, I saw, I conquered (read in any combination of ‘I entered the field, I examined/interviewed/participant observed, I wrote, submitted, and published’)” occupies the dominant frameworks of participatory communication research. Participation enters the language of neoliberal hegemony in various aspects of communicative life. As observed by Williams, hegemony:

..is not limited to matters of direct political control but seeks to describe a more general predominance which includes, as one of its key features, a particular way of seeing the world and human nature and relationships... and that ways of seeing the world and ourselves and others are not just intellectual but political facts, expressed over a range from institutions to relationships and consciousness. (Williams, 1976, p. 145)

Deep in its economic development facade, it has embraced many social forces and relations, including social science and communication research projects that have not clearly distanced themselves from the hegemonic powers of global neoliberalism, often thus being built into the structures of neoliberalism. For instance, projects of health communication emphasizing individual attitude change and changes in lifestyle have been incorporated into the neoliberal culture of self-help and personal modification. Participation has played an integral role in these projects. Similarly, the newly emerging language of new media and social movements within the mainstream structures of communication scholarship co-opt new media as instruments of neo-imperial configurations of democracy.

Theoretical constructions of the Arab Spring or other forms of new media resistance in the mainstream are constructed in the image of US-style democracy,

simultaneously erasing the resistive voices in these movements and obfuscating the fundamental challenges to the prevailing political economy of global organizing raised by movements such as Occupy Wall Street at the very heart of financial capitalism. Communication scholarship vocal about promoting democracies, building civil societies, and nurturing free media technologies elsewhere in the globe remain characteristically silent about the very politics of resistive democracy at the heart of neoliberalism, the US Wall Street. This scholarship also remains characteristically silent about the challenges to the façade of democracy brought about by the uses of the police-military apparatus within the US in silencing the Occupy movement.

#### **Neoliberalism’s natural dependence on structural inequity**

Although neoliberalism often poses a benign, or even beneficiary, position in its emphasis on market demands and lesser government, its model of development continues to reside firmly on the old world structural differences and international, national, and regional forms of uneven development. Not only neoliberalism as a whole, but also each and every transnational companies that have utilized regional differences of natural and social resources, international and regional differences of wages, or even inter-municipal differences in specific development policy have all participated in the continual prosperity of neoliberalism, and thus contributed to the perpetuation of old structural inequities and/or the formation of new ones. Structural inequalities constitute the power of the experts that lie at the heart of the neoliberal restructuring of the global order. The market emerges as the trope for consolidating power in the hands of

the global elite, further reifying the broader inequalities that constitute neoliberal modes of governance.

Such a feature of neoliberalism, i.e. its pretense of free market as the solution to inequalities, and its simultaneous inevitable parasitic existence upon structural inequity, is integral to its power as a framework of global political and economic organizing. Neoliberalism has to take such a feature with it as a snail takes its shell, in every step of its development and in every breath of its existence. Thus, importantly, the incorporation of participation in the reproduction of inequalities within neoliberalism makes it impossible to expose the problems of neoliberalism yet evade its residence on, and continuing construction of, broader structural inequities.

### **CCA and structural transformation**

As noted in the previous section, the beguiling posture of neoliberalism is deeply connected with its surface benignity. How could you blame an economic belief, and upon it, a political one, that pronounces its freedom from government controls and its readiness in meeting market demands? Isn't such a belief, and the social and political entities based on that, forming a very incarnation of freedom, independence, and pay for hard work? Doesn't it pose a way of natural existence -- that because of demands, therefore, facilitates production, development, and growth?

The Culture-Centered Approach (CCA) intervenes into this seemingly seamless logic of neoliberalism and continues to strike on the systemic structural inequity that is integral to the neoliberal project, laying it visible, depicting its connections with an uneven and unequal development scheme that it

contributes to and resides in, and doing so through the act of listening to the voices of subaltern communities that are the sites of neoliberal extraction and exploitation (Dutta, 2013). The act of listening to subaltern voices, understandings, and opinions challenges the economic logic/hegemony of the neoliberalism where the subaltern certainly participates but does so to carry out the exploitative agendas of neoliberal privatization couched in the language of development (Dutta, 2011, 2013; Harvey, 2005).

In contrast to neoliberalism's dependence on an unequal international, national, regional, and local structure of resources and labor that are inevitably connected to the social relational inequities that further reinforce its powers through elite collaborations, the CCA foregrounds the struggles of subaltern communities challenging these inequities. By all means, this counter-structure may not exist in its full materialized physical forms, in the formation of built environment, or documented laws, or issued policies. They do not exist even in fabrics of everyday living. For instance, in Singapore, there has not been an everyday practice, not even imaginable, for the domestic workers to participate in decision-making of when and how to take care of the hosts' daily meals, their children, and family chores. However, importantly, it is through the existence of voices on the subaltern's part, and respect of such voices on the researchers' part, that a still vulnerable, yet incomplete, and uncertain possibility can be collaboratively envisioned.

Although such a gathering of subaltern voices, often in the forms of published white papers, peer reviewed papers, book chapters, or books, does not differ much with the research that considers participation to be the very remedy of ivory tower academia, it differs

from the latter by offering an alternative structure, a structure that is qualitatively different from the structure and logic of neoliberalism, intervening in the processes of knowledge production and making alternative claims grounded in subaltern rationalities. Intervening in the structures of knowledge that are deployed daily to disseminate neoliberal interventions offers an entry point for structural transformation. Thus, instead of treating its incompatibility with the readily-acceptable worldviews of the elite structures as a point of disengagement, the CCA considers it vital to intervene within these very structures, noting the erasures, and disrupting the assumptions that constitute the mainstream.

### **Interrogating neoliberalism: Structural transformations**

The logic of neoliberalism is a lie widely accepted: that it is only about economy but not about politics. However, looking at every quintessential example of neoliberal development shows that the economic development is, not at any moment detached from a politically yielded structural inequity. Such a structural inequity is historical as it is on-going. It permeates industrial production, political planning, and everyday living of the subaltern classes. It crosses national borderlines and establishes yet another international, political, economic, and social relation on the basis of collaborations between elite actors across global spaces. The collaborations in the CCA invert this logic of neoliberalism by seeking to depict the ways in which the notion of economic freedom in neoliberalism is not at all free from the politics of unequal development and from elite controls. Subaltern's voices, therefore, are not to be considered

as sheer testimonies that can be seen in many participation-based communication projects. Instead, they must be considered as alternative rationalities pointing toward qualitatively different social, political, and economic forms of organizing.

### **Co-construction and subaltern theorizing**

A key element of the CCA as an intervention is the co-creation of material and symbolic spaces for subaltern articulations in conversations with subaltern communities. The co-creation of symbolic resources is tied to the struggles voiced by subaltern communities within the broader context of neoliberal development interventions. That subaltern communities have historically spoken and continue to speak out against structural injustices is an entry point for the CCA, emphasizing the transformative opportunities for changing the registers in the mainstream. Listening offers a methodological entry point for imagining a politics of solidarity in collaboration with subaltern communities.

Subaltern theories emerge through conversations among subaltern communities, activists, and academics; the emphasis on developing theoretical entry points as co-constructions between researchers and subaltern communities is in transforming the structural inequalities that constitute the landscape of development written into the dominant narratives of freedom, liberty, and economic growth. Empiricism, attending to the expressions of materiality in everyday lived experiences, is integral to the formulation of theories within the meta-theoretical framework of the CCA, attending to the material relationships in access to various forms of material and symbolic resources, and the differences in access to powerful structures. Emergent theories voiced through articulations of lived experiences by



subaltern communities are grounded in the everyday understandings, interpretations, and actions negotiated by community members. Thus, the solidarities that emerge through co-conversations are grounded in a search for an alternative politics of the material that challenges the fundamental ideas of neoliberalism.

Culture-centered projects seek to collaborate with subaltern struggles with material resources by creating material interventions at local-national-global spaces, working through a variety of communicative strategies aimed at transforming the unequal structure. These material interventions first and foremost directly intervene into the inequities that constitute subalternity. Practice thus lies at the forefront of culture-centered interventions, tied to the struggles of subaltern communities in the face of large scale piracy of subaltern knowledge and resources, usurping of subaltern land, and exploitation of subaltern labour in neoliberal market economies. Projects grounded in the CCA thus take variety of forms ranging from creating community clinics, to building community resources such as areas for community play and community interactions, to participating in solidarity with subaltern struggles to resist unhealthy policies/structures, all grounded in the needs, aspirations, and solutions as voiced by subaltern communities. Thus, in the ambits of the CCA, the theorizing of social change must first hand struggle through the contingencies, constraints, and fragmented journeys of structural transformations, working with the impossibilities of listening to subaltern communities. These first hand struggles form the bedrock of the theoretical frames that emerge from the CCA, having been tested empirically through fieldwork in solidarity at the

margins. Journeying alongside subaltern communities and participating in the processes of social change offer entry points into solidarity, reflexivity, and humility.

However, beyond the ground of social change that is created through partnerships with subaltern communities, culture-centered studies seek to intervene in the structures of material production of knowledge, interrogating the intersections of the imperial and financial structures of neoliberal organizing. Culture-centered theorization of processes and phenomena bring forth the agency of subaltern communities as theorists and as legitimate producers of knowledge, not as artifacts for generating second layer theories in the hands of academics, but as legitimate participants who participate in the processes of knowledge making. The inversion of the material layers of theorizing is a fundamental element of the CCA, arguing that the very elite structures and processes through which knowledge is produced need to be interrogated and inverted through collaborations at the grassroots. Democratizing these elite structures calls for re-articulating the notion of theorizing, what it means to theorize, and who can legitimately participate in enunciating knowledge claims.

### **Theorizing and reflexivity**

As noted in the previous section, the focus on theorizing in the ambits of the CCA is in disrupting the knowledge networks, the taken-for-granted assumptions in these networks, and the hegemonic conceptual categories that are circulated within the status quo. Theorizing thus is not simply an act of reading the archives for erasures or deconstructing the erased subaltern agency in legal documents; rather it is a turn toward conversations with subaltern

communities amid the crises of the present, intervening materially and symbolically into the very structures of neoliberal knowledge production that legitimize the exploitation of subaltern communities. Theorizing thus cannot be limited to reading a literary text in inversion or referring to points of entry into histories; instead, working through these histories, it needs to be re-configured as an invitation to participate in resistance in policy structures of neoliberal capitalism.

Theorizing is also not traveling to a subaltern community for two days so one can write up his second order interpretation in dense language. Recognizing the very politics of second order theorizing that somehow maintains the privilege of the bourgeoisie academic, theorizing needs to continually work on deconstructing the very categories of knowledge that are derived from canonical texts. Theorizing instead is an act of returning to the ground, recognizing the agency of subaltern communities as participants in the co-creation of knowledge. Theorizing is first and foremost rejecting the notion of academe as a bourgeoisie public sphere where conversations among bourgeoisie academics operate at the level of second-order theories. Subaltern theories emerging from the margins form entry points to social change by fundamentally transforming the elite nature of theorizing, and by disrupting the elite club of bourgeoisie academics and theorists sitting in the ivory tower.

The act of theorizing itself, limited to the elite club of bourgeoisie academics, who retain their Brahminical caste status by keeping to themselves the language, articulative games, and rituals of production needs to be interrogated; the CCA suggests that this interrogation happens through acts of collaborations

at the margins. That it is not surprising then that elite academics in privilege retain their elite positions of and as theorists, drawing their power from their turn away from journeys of solidarity with the poor and the under-classes, forms the basis for active collaborative interventions in the ivory tower in the ambits of the CCA. The very notion of what makes up Subaltern Studies and the ways in which theories are produced is given close scrutiny through conversations with the subaltern classes that have been written out as erasures. That it is the Subaltern Studies scholars who must do the theorizing after the closed studying of the text as deconstruction emerges as an entry point to an imaginary of social science of social change that works through the muddled complexities and contingencies of the impossibilities of listening to subaltern voices (see Spivak's "Can the subaltern speak?") (Spivak, 1988). Thus the social scientific basis of the CCA takes off from the question "Can the subaltern speak?" to explore the conditions that are necessary for listening and dialogue so subaltern voices might emerge into the discursive spaces of elite academic spheres, and more importantly, interrupt the narratives of development and progress that mark the narratives of neoliberal consolidation of power.

In its theoretical turn thus, the CCA challenges the elitism of academe, noting that this elitism is intrinsically connected to the processes of commoditization and financialization of subaltern resources. To the extent that the subaltern voice can't be registered in the mainstream, structures of knowledge, neoliberal interventions that commoditize subaltern knowledge and usurp subaltern land can be fully justified on the basis of expert articulations of knowledge in the metropole. That the subaltern can and does speak in the face of the immense violence to

subaltern ways of life carried out by neoliberal development is a point of intervention in the CCA. The Brahmins of academe stand challenged because their very legitimacy as voices of representation and conceptualization lay challenged in the presence of subaltern voices. In Santali voices that foreground the everyday uses of representations of Santali identities in struggles with resources, the notion of strategic essentialism is a lived experience. It does not need second or third order reading of the archives or the academic language of a sociological analysis to be rendered meaningful. Recognizing the agency of subaltern communities as participants in the creation of knowledge resists the political economy of mainstream knowledge structures that turn subaltern knowledge into commodities to be transacted in the market, with the profits accumulating in the hands of the owners of capital and the funders of the knowledge producing structures.

### **Conclusion**

In summary then, in the elite structures of knowledge production, theory is a movement away from subaltern conversations and into the networks of academic privilege (Dutta, 2011). The high priests of theory argue that the turn back toward the ivory tower, to the office space in New York, to the archives in Kolkata, to the libraries in Paris is essential to the production of theory as a second order act. To produce theory, an academic must return to his elite club and participate in its language games, games of citation, and rules of knowledge production. To the high priests of theory, *Santali* articulations of strategies of resistance that draw upon frames of *Santali* identity are not legitimate until they use the high language of "strategic essentialism" that can now be attributed to the elite scholar in the

metropole. The CCA inverts this elite game in its being, arguing that this elitist turn away from solidarities at the grassroots and into the comforts of the ivory tower is closely intertwined with the principles of commoditization and financialization in neoliberal formations (Dutta, 2011). Instead, the CA suggests the value and role of academic work in lending solidarity to subaltern struggles and in working hand-in-hand to foster spaces of listening to the voices of the margins that have hitherto been erased (Dutta, 2011, 2013).

Ultimately, at the heart of the exploitation of the subaltern sectors is the erasure of the agency of the subaltern through active processes of erasure that devalue subaltern knowledge while at the same time usurping this knowledge for the purposes of exchange in the market. To foreclose subaltern agency by suggesting that the subaltern can't speak contributes to the perpetuation of the structures of subaltern exploitation. Instead, recognizing the agency of subaltern communities as articulators of ideas and principles of organizing fosters entry points for other imaginations. Therefore, to interrupt the processes of resource expropriation and exploitation in neoliberal political economy, the interventions in the CCA seek to talk back to the very structures of knowledge, interrogating the dominant categories of development and modernization that are used as expert-driven frameworks for justifying exploitation (Dutta, 2013). The CCA suggests the need for actively interrogating the elite position and its contingent claims to elitism that seek to keep intact the act of theorizing to its elite club through language games, rituals of publishing, and implicit rules of citation networks.

The CCA looks at the scholar in the metropole (including its own researchers and scholars) with

suspicion, questioning her/his motives and her/his legitimacy as a theorist, and at the same time, suggests the necessity of continually returning to subaltern conversations, subaltern struggles, and subaltern social movements at the grassroots as strategies for inverting neoliberal models of development. To recognize the failings, limits, and co-optive frames in the endeavor of subaltern collaborations is an entry point for returning to conversations in subaltern contexts, remaining ever vigilant about the structures of co-optation. Reflexivity as a method creates entry points for recognizing the limits to one's own political and economic privileges in the conversations with subaltern communities, and also recognizing the impossibilities of dialogue that brings forth ideas rooted in some subaltern essence. Yet, however dirty, impure, and incomplete, these conversations in subaltern contexts are the only entry points for a social science of social change.

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