



Anticolonialism and qualitative methods for culture-centered interventions

Mohan Jyoti Dutta^{1,*}, Ambar Basu², Satveer Kaur-Gill³, Debalina Dutta⁴, Mahuya Pal²,
Iccha Basnyat⁵, Selina Metuamate⁶, Venessa Pokaia⁶, Phoebe Elers⁴, Indranil Mandal⁶,
Rabindranath Mandi⁶, Pankaj Baskey⁶, Devalina Mookerjee⁶, Shaunak Sastry⁷,
Jaime Robb⁸, and Andrew Carter^{6,9}

¹Center for Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE), School of Humanities, Media and Creative Communication, Massey University, Palmerston North 4410, New Zealand

²Department of Communication, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, United States

³Communication Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, United States

⁴School of Humanities, Media, and Creative Communication, Massey University, Te Papaioea, Aotearoa, New Zealand

⁵Global Health Communication, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, United States

⁶CARE, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

⁷Department of Communication, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio, United States

⁸Department of Communication, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, Florida, United States

⁹Department of Communication, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, United States

*Corresponding author: Center for Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE), School of Humanities, Media and Creative Communication, Massey University, Palmerston North 4410, New Zealand. E-mail: M.J.Dutta@massey.ac.nz

Abstract

In this essay, we a collective of Indigenous, Black, and migrant Global South scholars engaged in experiments with the culture-centered approach (CCA) draw on our lived experiences amidst struggles against land grab, neoliberal extractivism, and capitalist exploitation to outline a framework for qualitative methods as anticolonial politics. We begin by exploring the interplays of colonialism, imperialism, and racial capitalism that have shaped the origins and uses of qualitative methods toward serving extractive agendas of global capital. This critique serves as the basis for outlining the key principles of the CCA, turning to voice, storytelling, and embodied action as the basis for situating qualitative methods amidst anticolonial struggles that resist settler colonialism and extractive neoliberal neocolonialism. Through our review of diverse culture-centered interventions, we explore the roles of voice infrastructures in anticolonial resistance, outlining the contribution made by the CCA to decolonizing research methods by offering a theoretical-methodological framework for communication interventions for social justice.

Keywords: anticolonialism, decolonizing methods, Global South, culture-centered approach, voice infrastructures, communication interventions, social justice

Historically, data, defined as information gathered systematically, formed the backbone of the colonial¹ project, serving justificatory, managerial, bureaucratic, and expansionary functions (Appadurai, 2016; Bayly, 2016). Said (1978) noted that colonial knowledge production involved processes where “reconstructive precision, science, even imagination could prepare the way for what armies, administrations, and bureaucracies would later do on the ground, in the Orient” (p. 123). Documenting languages, mapping terrains, collecting descriptions, enumerating information, describing cultural characteristics, and classifying groups shaped “Oriental empiricism” serving “instrumental functions for capitalist, military, and administrative expansion by the English East India Company” (Ludden, 1993, p. 252). The occupation of land, displacement of Indigenous communities, extraction of natural resources, oppression of enslaved peoples, and their exploitation have been driven by the systematic gathering and analysis of data (Bayly, 2016; Caxaj, 2015). Smith (1999), one of the key architects of decolonizing methodologies, notes that the word research “is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary ... implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism” (p. 1).

Most forms of qualitative research methods (participation, observation, interviewing, and ethnography) emerged from the expansionary projects of colonial nations, needing to develop knowledge of the primitive other to shape “informational, justificatory, and pedagogical techniques” (Appadurai, 2016, p. 316). Bayly (2016) describes the class of “linguists and cultural experts—progenitors of the later official anthropologists—with a wide range of indigenous contacts who were often drawn from outside the main lines of civil and military officialdom” (p. 128) that formed the information system of the East India Company, one of the earliest and most powerful forces of global colonialism. The systematization of observation, participation, interviews, and note-taking crystallized as ethnographic methods shaped the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, later being employed in “other social and behavioral science disciplines, including education, political science, business, medicine, nursing, social work, and communications” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). The underlying ideology, masked as neutrality and objectivity of the observer, produces the figure of the primitive native, reduced to inhuman characteristics, wild and quaint, devoid of agency, without organization, and in need of the civilizing mission (Minh Ha, 1989).

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This colonial ideology shaping qualitative methods has been interrogated by decolonizing approaches, beginning with the foundational work of Smith (1999), examining the interplays of methods, power, and colonialism (Held, 2019). For Gopal (2021), “between colonialism and decolonisation, comes the anticolonial. If colonialism might be broadly understood—in all its variety—as a project of expansionist racialised capitalism (there is no context to which this definition would not be applicable in some way) – then anticolonialism² emerges as the different kinds of resistance to this project” (p. 88). Resistance to racial capitalism, as an anchor for qualitative methods for transformation is anticolonial, with its objective to dismantle the features of colonialism that produce marginalization. Urging scholars working with decolonization approaches to move beyond the metaphorical, Tuck and Yang (2012) situate the conversation on decolonization amidst questions of redistribution of land, resources, and sovereignty. Extending the scholarship of decolonizing research (Held, 2019), this essay puts forth the argument that qualitative methods (Coombes et al., 2014; Dutta & Hau, 2020; Elers & Dutta, 2023; Lechuga & Aswad, 2024; Na’puti, 2019) that work alongside struggles in communities to build transformative interventions resisting land theft, resource extraction, exploitation and oppression respond to the radical call issued by Tuck and Yang (2012). Drawing on the theoretical framework of the culture-centered approach (CCA) to communication, we argue that marginalization is at its root tied to communication, constituted by communicative inequalities, inequalities in the distribution and ownership of resources for information, participation, voice, and decision-making that are shaped by settler colonialism, racial capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy (Dutta, 2004, 2024; Elers & Dutta, 2023). The CCA offers an organizing framework for qualitative methods of/for communication that creates voice infrastructures—systems, mechanisms, and platforms designed to amplify voices—in partnerships with the margins, anchoring resistance to the forces of oppression through a register for praxis in communication interventions mobilizing for justice.

We, a collective of Indigenous, Black, people of color, migrants, refugees, gender diverse and people with disabilities, community organizers, and academics, write this essay, reflecting on the reorganizing of methods as the basis for advocacy and activism for qualitative researchers in communication studies and cognate disciplines (geography, sociology, anthropology, etc.) invested in building transformative registers for justice. We draw upon examples of communication interventions based on the CCA across diverse global registers and spaces, as well as from the community-led work of the Center for Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE) (see here for a documentary witnessing the organizing work carried out under the umbrella of CARE: <https://youtu.be/XKQiccSAqJc?si=FS3PGFGbHjWppy6m>). The CCA as a methodology—a theory of methods—works through the dialectic between deconstruction and co-construction, attending to the interplays among power, knowledge, critique, and organizing communicatively for transformative praxis (Dutta et al., 2024).

Deconstruction and co-construction in the CCA

The CCA offers critical methods for interrogating discourses of knowledge claims around communication interventions

and the methods of knowledge generation around them (Dutta, 2004; Dutta & de Souza, 2008). It draws on critical pedagogy to interrogate the workings of “structural racialization” (Akom, 2016, p. 114; Bonilla-Silva, 2001), imperialism, colonialism, racial capitalism, patriarchy, and cisgenderism, attending to the ways in which the global organizing of the core and periphery play out neocolonial extractive practices (Grosfoguel, 2002). Culture-centered analyses of intervention discourses and the methods that constitute them address the workings of communication, colonialism, and imperialism that have shaped the interventionist roots of communication studies conceptualized as propaganda during World War 2 and the subsequent proliferation of communication as persuasion during the Cold War (Dutta, 2005, 2015). Initially applied to the contexts of health and development communication that anchored the social scientific strands of communication studies, culture-centered analyses critically examine the hegemonic intervention messages, and the formative and evaluative methods around their creation and dissemination (Dutta, 2004; Dutta & de Souza, 2008). Culture is conceptualized as a site of struggle over values, norms, stories, and imaginations; structure reflects the organizing rules and roles that shape the distribution of resources, including communicative resources; and agency reflects the capacities of communities at the global margins to make sense of structures, negotiate them, and organize to transform them (Dutta, 2008). Placing communication at the intersections of culture, structure, and agency guides the interrogation of the relationship between communicative and material inequalities in the CCA.

The methods of deconstruction are deeply intertwined with the methods of resistance to colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and cisgenderism. Methods informed by the CCA build, nurture, and secure communicative spaces for social change anchored in the voices of the subaltern and suggest co-construction of infrastructures for voices (such as photo-voice, digital stories, placards, performances, and artwork) in solidarity with marginalized communities (Dutta et al., 2019; Dutta, 2018, 2024). These methods play important roles in inverting the erasures and reclaiming traditional knowledge, reimagining them toward anticolonial practices (Elers et al., 2023). The organizing work to resist erasures also emphasizes the concept of solidarity with the subaltern (Beverley, 2004), recognizing the impossibility of academic dialogues with the subaltern (Dutta & Pal, 2010), recognizing our own complicity with the colonial-capitalist structures while at the same time recognizing the radical anticolonial pedagogies that are held in the communities we call home (see Table 1).

Interrogating colonialism, imperialism, and communication

Colonialism, as an organizing system of securing control and ownership over land, resources, and people, is profoundly intertwined with imperialism, the expansion of a nation’s power beyond its geographical boundaries at a global scale through the influence on global political economy, diplomacy, and uses of military violence (Césaire, 2000). For Césaire, a wide array of interventions designed as pedagogy (philanthropy, education, health, democracy promotion, etc.) serve the justificatory infrastructure of colonialism. Aligned with critical analyses that document the organizing role of whiteness (de la Garza, 2018), the “mythical norm” that forms “the core of white dominance brought on by

Table 1. Key points to consider.

Key concepts	Definitions	Points to consider
Colonialism	The practice of acquiring and maintaining control, ownership and power over a territory, its resources, its people, and its culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the relationship between the definition of data and colonialism? • How does colonialism construct data gathering and analysis practices?
Anticolonialism	Practices of resistance to colonialism as occupation of land and ownership of people and resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can research practices resist the ongoing theft of land, extraction of resources, exploitation of workers, perpetuation of genocide, circulation of hate, and oppression of colonized people? • How do histories of anticolonial resistance in settler colonies and in postcolonial spaces of the Global South inform research practices? • How can qualitative research practices shape resistance to settler colonialism and imperialism?
Culture-centered approach (CCA)	A meta-theory of communication, encompassing a wide range of research practices, that explores the relationship between communicative inequality and material inequality, and offers practice-based guidelines for communication interventions seeking structural transformation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the organizing forces of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy and cisnormativity constitute communicative inequality? • How does communicative inequality shape and mirror material inequality? • How can qualitative research create voice infrastructures—systems, mechanisms and platforms designed to amplify voices—in anchoring resistance and mobilizing for justice?
Deconstruction in the CCA	Critical analysis of hegemonic communication processes, communication interventions, methods of data gathering and evaluation, and knowledge about communication interventions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do communication interventions (health, development, environment) reflect the interests of colonialism, racial capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, and cisnormativity? • How do communication methods (qualitative and quantitative) serve the interests of colonialism, racial capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, and cisnormativity? • Which voices and interests are present in communication interventions and which voices are absent or erased? • How do dominant constructions of community and participation reproduce extractive relationships?
Culture-centered co-construction	Practices of researchers collaborating with communities, examining the inequalities between academics and communities, and reflecting on these inequalities to build voice infrastructures, co-construct meanings, and build justice-based communication interventions rooted in locally voiced meanings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do inequalities in the distribution of power and control shape the relationships between communities and academics? • How can academics and communities collaborate, closely examining together the power inequalities that shape relationships, and transform them? • How can academics, activists and communities share ownership of research and creative products? • How can academic community relationships create spaces for dialogues through which meanings can be voiced? • How can community academic partnerships shift the locus of power to communities, making academics accountable to communities? • How can meanings co-constructed through dialogues anchor social change communication processes?
Decolonial philosophy	Critical examination of the ongoing effects of colonialism in the production and perpetuation of marginalization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do colonial, racial capitalist and imperial processes shape the marginalization of diverse philosophical traditions? • How do diverse philosophical traditions from Indigenous and Global South contexts resist colonialism? • How do diverse decolonial theories offer anchors for transformative praxis? • How do diverse decolonial theories offer critical registers for interrogating and disrupting the co-option of the decolonial to serve neoliberal extremism and/or fascism?
Indigenous theories and methods	Frameworks, concepts, and practices that are rooted in the knowledge systems, practices, and contexts of Indigenous peoples, owned and led by Indigenous peoples. They foreground land-based, place-based, embodied, oral, interconnected, reciprocal and ceremonial forms of knowledge generation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do Indigenous concepts of land, ecosystem, interconnectedness, and relationships shape research practices? • How do the research practices reflect Indigenous sovereignty? Who owns the knowledge being generated through research practices? Who owns the data generated through research practices? Who owns the solutions (such as communication interventions) that emerge from the knowledge claims being made? • Which Indigenous meta-theories are being drawn upon in the research practice? • What is the form of Indigenous leadership in the research process, from initiation to design and implementation, to analysis and authorship?

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Table 1. (continued)

Key concepts	Definitions	Points to consider
Co-creating voice infrastructures	Processes of building voice infrastructures through friendships, relationships and partnerships with communities. Voice infrastructures are both internal to communities, where communities participate in dialogue and deliberation, as well as external to communities, as spaces and resources through which communities at the margins raise claims into the hegemonic structures of the state, civil society, and capital.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can communication processes around connecting, dialoguing, listening and forming relationships support the co-creation of voice infrastructures within communities, taking the form of CAGs? • How can CAGs serve as spaces for listening within communities? • How can community members and researchers draw on values, norms, and practices, drawn from local knowledge systems, to create principles around participation in CAGs that are relational, invitational, and deliberative? • How can voice infrastructures enable community deliberation and decision-making, enabling community participation in transformative change processes? • What forms do externally directed voice infrastructures take when communicating with people, communities, organizations, institutions, media, government, regional, and global structures?
Margins of the margins	The concept underscores the communicative inequalities that exist in communities. It explores ongoing processes of marginalization within communities, shaped by power inequalities that exist within community life, leading to silences and erasures in community spaces. “Margins of the margins” foster invitational spaces within communities that reflexively attend to communication process through which voices at the margins can be listened to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to trace communicative inequalities within communities? • How to build communicative practices that explore which voices are not present within community spaces? • How to build communicative processes within CAGs that seek to listen for erasures? • How to build communicative processes within CAGs that invite in hitherto erased voices? • How to build communicative processes within CAGs that promote deliberation, attending to sustaining spaces for participation of those at the margins of the community?
Rearranging accountability	The process of radically transforming research practice by turning toward communities as spaces that hold researchers accountable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the research process be reorganized so that communities define what is research, the goals of the research process, and the uses of the research? • How can communication processes be created around learning, so communities participate in learning about research methods, developing research methods through knowledge held in community spaces, and making evaluative decisions about research methods and practices? • What are the communicative processes of accountability through which the ownership of the research is shifted into the hands of the community? • What are the communicative processes in academic-community partnership that foster community authorship in diverse multimedia forms of knowledge generation?
Disrupting power differentials	The concept invites researchers to consider critically the multiple layers and textures of power that exist within community spaces, between researchers and communities, between communities and activists, between communities and the organizations that serve them, and between researchers and organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do power and control shape practices, forms, and methods of knowledge generation? • How to build transformative knowledge generating practices and forms of knowledge that challenge entrenched knowledge production? • How to create communicative practices that guide academic community relationships toward disrupting power differentials?
Critical reflexivity	Practices of naming one’s positionality, critically scrutinizing the ways in which this positionality shapes relationships with communities and collectives one works with and intentionally developing spaces and resources for communities and partner organizations to interrogate academic privilege.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the position of the academic shape academic privilege, and how does academic privilege shape the research process? • How do raced, caste-based, classed, gendered, cisnormative, ability-based, colonial, and imperial privileges shape the power that academics occupy? For instance, in the South Asian context, how do familial histories of caste and social class shape the power that academics inherit and uphold? • How does academic privilege shape the practices and forms of knowledge generation? How do dominant forms of knowledge generation reproduce power and control? • How does academic privilege create and reproduce communicative inequalities, leading to the silencing of communities? • What are the practices of learning that strengthen the power of communities to critically examine the workings of power and control in research? • How can communities and partner organizations collectively participate in interrogating academic power, in developing strategies for de-centering academic power, and in holding academics to account?

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Key concepts	Definitions	Points to consider
Body on the line	The concretization of Indigenous and Global South knowledge systems that foreground the experiences of the body in the generation of knowledge. “Body on the line” invites researchers to consider the role of the body as an intervention, intertwined with the interventions that emerge from communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the commitments of researchers to communities and struggles at the margins? • How do communicative practices organized around humility, commitment and authenticity decenter the organizing framework of research methods as data extraction? • What are the communicative practices that enable researchers to speak alongside the struggles of communities at the margins, building registers that witness settler colonial, racial capitalist, patriarchal, and cisgendered violence? • How do communicative practices enable researchers to bear witness to the violence perpetuated by settler colonialism, racial capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy and cisnormativity? • How do communicative practices sustain the strength of researchers, activists and communities amidst repression?
Communicative justice	The processes for securing the rights to information, participation, decision-making, and voice among communities that have been historically erased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the organizing processes through which researchers and communities collaborate to secure collective rights to information, participation, decision-making, and voice? • How do communicative practices and processes enable the re/turning of the power of storytelling into the hands of communities? • How do organizing processes build justice-based infrastructures for safeguarding academic freedom and for securing the collective academic right to participate in community-led struggles? • How do organizing processes secure the voices and bodies of activists and communities at the margins agitating for justice?

colonization and enslavement incited by capitalist greed and justified by racism” (Calvente et al., 2020, p. 203), culture-centered interrogations of hegemonic communication practices (health, development, and planned social change communication interventions that form the earliest threads of the discipline) and associated knowledge claims depict the ways in which they serve the intertwined interests of colonialism, imperialism, and racial capitalism (Dutta & Acharya, 2015). The justificatory infrastructure of the colonial project constructs a civilizational narrative, framing colonization as “lifting the white man’s burden,” (Kipling, 1899) incorporated into the neocolonial architecture as teaching the Third World pathways of modernization while simultaneously opening up spaces to U.S. capital (Bah, 2008).

This trope of the primitive Third World culture, mired in tradition, reproduces itself in the foundational literature in communication constructed within the United States’ geostrategic, military, and expansionary free market capitalist interests (Dutta, 2015). The historic whiteness of communication studies, embedded within a North Atlantic imperial expansionist project, continues to be perpetuated in the ongoing erasure of Indigenous, Black, and people of color voices, practices, and systems of knowledge production (Calvente et al., 2020; Caxaj, 2015; Chakravarty et al., 2018; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Decolonizing readings critically interrogate the workings of colonial power in shaping knowledge claims about communication, the nature of communication, and the appropriate methods for the study of communication (Dutta & Pal, 2020; Halualani et al., 2009; Langmia, 2024; R’boul, 2022).

Culture-centered qualitative analyses interrogate the workings of power in the production of communicative inequalities through texts and communicative materials of interventions that turn communities of the Global South into passive target audiences of individualistic behavior change

interventions while strategically obfuscating analyses of the structures of capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and cisnormativity (Dutta, 2004). The analyses of these communicative inequalities map their roles in shaping cognitive epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 2007), the erasure of knowledges held by Indigenous, Black, migrant and local communities of the Global South. In these analyses, naming the organizing structures of racial capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism as “the root harm” forms the starting point for decolonization as transformation (p. 528). Critical analyses of campaign reports based on the CCA note the ways in which the promotion of family planning across the Global South worked alongside the promotion of U.S.-based free market policies and broader imperial geostrategic interests, broadly shaping the disciplinary contours of communication studies (Dutta & Basnyat, 2008; Dutta & Acharya, 2015). Critical analyses of the discourses of campaign texts, scripts, multimedia messages, and media plans depict the communicative processes through which communities at the margins are erased from decision-making spaces while simultaneously the language of participation, voice, and empowerment communicatively invert—turn on its head—this systemic erasure (Dutta & Basnyat, 2008). The CCA partners with communities in building the pedagogy of critically examining the entrenched relationship between colonialism and capitalism underlying interventions.

Interrogating methods

Colonialism formed the infrastructure of ethnographic methods, dressing itself as a humane form of rule (Bayly, 2016). Ethnographic methods of data gathering formed the basis of colonial race science, which shaped the racist discursive infrastructure mobilized to justify imperial power and control, inform the techniques of colonial rule, and streamline racist methods of controlling colonies. The organizing of

anthropology as a “war-fighting discipline” (Forte, 2011, p. 150), designed to gather cultural knowledge to inform contemporary counterinsurgency strategies, military operations, and imperial policies, is a direct product of the colonial roots (Forte, 2011; Price, 2002). Ethnographic constructions of the primitive native erased agency at the global margins while simultaneously imposing the whiteness of the imperial-colonial ideology on the societies being studied (Minh Ha, 1989). Colonial methods of generating knowledge worked through the systemic erasure of subaltern knowledge claims, carrying out epistemic violence as a necessary instrument that legitimizes (neo)colonial expansion. Writes Minh Ha (1989, p. 56), “Have you ever attended a white man’s presentation (often also ours) on a “native” society, be he a photographer, a filmmaker, a choreographer, a musician, a speaker, or a writer? It is as if, unvaryingly, every single look, gesture, or utterance has been stained with anthropological discourse, the only discourse in power when it is a question of the (native) Other. Knowledge belongs to the one who succeeds in mastering a language, and standing closer to the civilized language is, as a matter of fact, coming nearer to equality.”

Culture-centered analyses of methods of/as interventions place the work of U.S.-military-intelligence-funded anthropologists amidst the global project of imperial violence, such as in the 1969 Communist purge in Indonesia, that witnessed large scale rapes, incarceration and murders of Left activists, intellectuals, and party workers in Indonesia, directed and informed by U.S. intelligence (Pitaloka & Dutta, 2021). Amidst contemporary imperial violence, as witnessed in the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, anthropologists formed the critical infrastructure of cultural data gathering to support the war efforts post 9/11, including in projects such as the U.S. Army’s Human Terrain System created during the Iraq War, recruiting anthropologists to offer “cultural knowledge” (Wainwright, 2013, p. 150).

Moreover, methods, including many qualitative methods, have historically served as extractive tools, extracting knowledge of people, land, natural resources, cultures, and communities as data to be commoditized, deployed toward the occupation and theft of Indigenous land, extraction of natural resources, privatization of the commons, and continual development and re/design of products and platforms. Interviews and focus groups play critical roles in collecting stories, descriptions, and intelligence to shape market expansion. Briggs (2001) points to the power and control that shape the asking of questions, analysis of responses, and writing up of reports serving the expansionary goals of global capital, feeding neoliberal growth. For example, *México Indígena: Bowman Expeditions* project, funded by the U.S. military, incorporated the participation and voice of Indigenous communities in Oaxaca to map, surveil, and digitize land, critical to the neocolonial occupation of customary land and the redistribution of that land to serve extractive neoliberalism (Foote, 2011).

Interrogating communicative erasures

The idea of erasure is a critical theme across the subaltern studies project, building on the crucial work of Guha (1988), who noted that the elitist historiography of the Indian freedom struggle erased the history of people’s participation in the country’s freedom struggle. Spivak’s (1988) essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” argued that the voices of subalterns (communities on the peripheries of civil society) are

systematically erased from elite spaces of knowledge production, unheard, as if their knowledge claims do not matter in hegemonic registers. Critical here are the intersecting workings of patriarchy, cisnormativity, colonialism, feudalism, class, and Empire in the production of subalternity. Culture-centered analyses plot the interplays between communicative and material inequalities, depicting the ways in such systematic erasures are intrinsically tied to the economic marginalization of subaltern communities (Dutta, 2008; Pal, 2016). Epistemic violence through the erasure of subaltern voices serves neoliberal interests most extensively through biopiracy (the theft of biological materials and knowledge of how to breed, grow, and use these materials), land grab, and other forms of politics of extraction (Dutta & Pal, 2010, 2020; de Sousa Santos, 2007). Biopiracy relies on appropriating indigenous knowledge from subaltern spaces and patenting such knowledge by transnational corporations (Dutta & Pal, 2010). The expansion of intellectual property rights to claim patents on natural resources and appropriate traditional knowledge works through the erasure of subaltern knowledge. Land grab is another predominant mode of extraction through violent erasures (Pal, 2016). Aggressive forms of global capitalism identify extractive zones for land acquisition and use them for neoliberal projects. Such politics of extraction involve displacement, dispossession, and expulsion of Indigenous and local communities from their land, belonging, and livelihood, resulting in the erasure of local cultural meanings and collective traditional knowledge (Dutta & Pal, 2020).

The colonial ideology underlying qualitative methods freezes the native subject in culturalist essence, devoid of agency and replete with pathological characteristics. Writing about the colonial processes of erasure in ethnographic methods, and specifically referring to Meade and Bateson’s ethnographic account of Indonesia, writes Rony (2006): “It’s significant that only in the late 1980s were the Balinese asked what they thought of Mead and Bateson (by historian Tessel Pollman). Part of the consequences of Mead and Bateson’s view of Balinese culture—of seeing what was photographed as pathologized: fey and schizoid—meant that the Balinese were not seen as being subjects of history or even colonialism, for questions of class, location, poverty, disease, child labor, compulsory labor were elided” (p. 46). The disciplinary formations around methods uphold the political economy of whiteness (see Dutta, 2021a, 2021b). Denis (1997, cited in Grande, 2008) describes this as “Whitestream,” the dominance in U.S. society of Anglo-European “White” experience. Grande (2008) writes that the struggles with methods stem from “centuries of use and abuse at the hands of Whitestream prospectors (read: academics), mining dark bodies of Indigenous peoples” (p. 233). The taken-for-granted assumptions of whiteness, based on the values of individualism, reductionism, and linear movement are imposed on methods (Asante, 2007; Dutta, 2004; Miike, 2007). Similarly, postcolonial elites mimic the habits of whiteness, appointing ourselves as gatekeepers of subaltern knowledge while perpetuating erasure (Guru, 2016). Note here the argument by Dirlik (1999), “the projection of the postcolonial argument to the past has rendered the colonial past into just one more phase on the way to globalisation, while erasing the revolutionary pasts that, for all their failures, envisioned alternatives to capitalist globality” (p. 154). Writes Cook-Lynn (1997, p. 47), “for the indigenes everywhere in the

world, postcolonial studies has little to do with independence, nor does it have much to do with the actual deconstruction of oppressive colonial systems... Postcolonial thought in indigenous history, as a result of the prevailing definitions, has emerged as a subversion rather than a revolution." The next sections turn to the CCA as a method for resisting the communicative inequalities through interventions.

Culture-centered co-construction

We begin by noting a key lesson emergent from the Subaltern Studies project and from Spivak's engagement with the project in the form of the essay *Can the Subaltern speak?* Spivak's deconstructionist reading of the question of subalternity points to the impossibility of listening to the voices of the subaltern because of the organizing logics of the hegemonic colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal structures. Culture-centered theorizing of dialogue notes this impossibility, suggesting that the ongoing struggle for communication methods lies in working through the entrenched inequalities in power between academics and communities to create emancipatory openings for claiming justice (Dutta & Pal, 2010). We draw here on Gopal's (2021) critical reading of subalternity, guiding us toward the necessary work of struggling through the impossibilities that are scripted into the hegemonic structures of knowledge production to understand subaltern articulations. She notes, "The fact that the subaltern does not speak in any unmediated or immediately accessible ways, far from foreclosing the possibility of knowledge, invests the search for better understanding with greater urgency" (p. 151). Qualitative methods anchored in the CCA co-create meanings voiced from the global margins, outlining the structures that shape marginalization, mapping them out, and building communicative processes through friendships with subaltern communities that mobilize subaltern agency (Dutta, 2018).

Decolonial anchors

Decolonizing research methods as liberatory practices are located within decolonial philosophy, examining the ongoing effects of colonialism in the production of marginalization and the necessary strategies for liberation from colonial processes (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Critically unpacking the shared experience of colonization but with an understanding of the distinct cultural contexts across communities globally, the CCA centers community participation for (un)doing hegemonic development narratives, theorizing alternative registers of development, and building collective praxis for structural transformation (Dutta, 2015). The diverse lived contexts, reflections of traditions, and articulations of cultural values shape the processes of cultural centering, rendering visible the white culture's taken-for-granted assumptions that shape communication theorizing and turning to diverse cultural anchors as the basis for crafting diverse imaginations. This turning toward diverse cultures in the CCA shares the epistemological commitments of Afro-centrism (Asante, 2007) and Asia-centrism (Miike, 2007), two critical threads of scholarship in communication that decolonize the Western Euro-centric foundations of communication. The intellectual and cultural movement of Afrocentrism centers African people's knowledge, experiences, values, and practices, placing African knowledge systems in contrast to Eurocentric values (Asante, 2007). Miike (2007) describes Asian values by drawing on diverse Asian contexts, articulating their

convergences around interdependence, interconnectedness, harmony, discipline, emotionality, communicative sensitivity, responsibility, mutuality, reciprocity, and morality, and placing them as entry points to critique the Eurocentric framework of communication studies. Thambinathan & Kinsella (2021) offer four practices for decolonizing research methodology: (a) exercising critical reflexivity, (b) reciprocity and respect for self-determination, (c) embracing "Other(ed)" ways of knowing, and (d) embodying a transformative praxis. These aspects are extended in culture-centered methods that emphasize engaging with one's positionality beyond the surface confessions; centering respect, relationship, and commitment with bodies on the line; building on indigenous ways of knowing; and emphasizing co-creation of voice infrastructures through collaboration. The turn to voice anchors decolonizing interventions, generating knowledge "on the other side of the abyssal line," in spaces of "non-existence, invisibility, and non-dialectic absence" (de Sousa Santos, 2007, p. 71, cited in Silva et al., 2022).

Indigenous theories and methods

Indigenous theories and methods, through their embeddedness in struggles over land, nature, climate, ecosystems, cultural spaces, and knowledge systems, anchor the ongoing work of methods as decolonizing tools. We note here the transformative role played by Indigenous scholars and activists in generating decolonizing methods as practices, attending to the necessary work of dismantling the persistent neo/settler/colonial structures. In *Red Pedagogy*, Grande (2008) offers a framework for decolonizing research that is rooted in land, connected to nature and the ecosystem, and revolutionary in its desire to dismantle the interplays of colonialism and capitalism. As an education for decolonization, red pedagogy "interrogates both democracy and sovereignty," "actively cultivates praxis of collective agency," and "is grounded in hope" (Grande, 2008, p. 250). In reflecting on Hawaiian epistemology, Meyer (2008), situates method in the body, writing that knowledge is "embedded at the core of our bodies—the stomach or *na'au*" (p. 223). Smith (2012) directs us to critique of the extractive purposes served by hegemonic methods because colonizers "set the standards" for what "counts," cautioning against methods that involve "taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people to improve their current conditions" (p. 3). The CCA takes seriously this invitation to build social change interventions based on decolonizing analyses and through the participation of communities at the margins in struggles for communicative, social, economic, and political justice (Dutta, 2018, 2024).

Meanings as transformative registers

Meanings voiced by communities at the global margins directly challenge the conceptual categories around interventions in the hegemonic mainstream. For instance, meanings of health voiced by sex workers in the Global South resist the conceptual categories around health, risk, contraception, and safe sex constructed in the imperial-capitalist structures of HIV/AIDS intervention design in the Global North (Basu, 2017; Dutta & Basu, 2013). Culture-centered methods, designed as community dialogues, in-depth interviews, and group-based conversations, offer emergent meanings of living, organizing, health, and well-being at the global margins,

narrating the roles of colonial, capitalist, and imperial structures as sources of disenfranchisement. For instance, in Pal's (2016) culture-centered dialogues with farmers threatened by neoliberal land grab in rural India, the meanings of health and survival were located in the sacredness of the land and nature and mobilizing farmers for land rights. The construction of land as sacred (depicted as a mother) propelled the movement, resisting the neoliberal neocolonial construction of land as private property. Anticolonialism as resistance to colonial constructions of poverty is expressed in meanings of health and well-being intertwined with land, food, spirits, nature, and the environment. Culture-centered conversations around the question, "What does health mean to you?" invite communities to share concepts of health held in community knowledge systems.

Culture-centered constructions of meanings thus agitate against the disciplinary contours of communication, against the whiteness of disciplinary formations based on divisions that serve the political economy of the settler colonial academe (Dutta, 2004). For instance, voices emergent from the Global South situating health in relationship to food and the ecosystem disrupt the whiteness of the question, "Why is this health communication?" that is often presented to reports of culture-centered studies. The facile nature of questions such as "How is this communication?" or "How is this health?" is disrupted through meanings as reflections of knowledge claims that see connections, relationships, and intertwined frames, all the whole implicating the researcher in the methods we use to collaborate with the margins. For instance, in the ongoing work of CARE in partnership with Māori communities in Aotearoa, New Zealand, the theorizing of health situates it in relationship to rivers, land, trees, and food, offering critical anchors for organizing resistance to ongoing settler colonial land grab, and mobilization toward securing spaces for upholding Te Tiriti, the foundational contract between Māori and the Crown (Elers & Dutta, 2023).

Co-creating voice infrastructures

Convergent with the attention to voice as the basis for disrupting colonial structures of knowledge claims in feminist and decolonizing approaches, the CCA turns to voice as the basis for resisting the Empire's conceptualization of knowledge in the service of conquest. Critical analysis of voice co-opted as a tool serving colonial and imperial structures shapes the emphasis of culture-centered methods in building voice infrastructures in friendship and through collaborations with communities (Dutta, 2008). These voice infrastructures are structures, spaces, platforms, resources, and communicative processes through which communities at the margins participate in societal decision-making, express their needs, and organize to address these needs (Dutta, 2008, 2024). They resist the extractive frameworks of methods that undermine the power of communities to tell their stories, "recognizing that the erasure from spaces of knowledge production forms the fundamental basis of extractive processes that expel indigenous communities from their livelihoods thus turns toward reclaiming the right to voice" (Dutta & Hau, 2020, p. 265). Two critical questions guide culture-centered interventions: *How do we build voice infrastructures in partnership with communities? How do we work toward community ownership of these voice infrastructures?*

Through their participation in voice infrastructures, communities at the margins put forth locally-grounded problem

configurations, priorities, and community-grounded, community-led frameworks for social change in the form of communication interventions (Dutta, 2008, 2024). The CCA expands voice as not merely the failure to be "heard" and recovered through academic exercises of knowledge production cons/trained by elite pronouncements about the "subaltern cannot speak," but in the anchoring of subaltern agency as the basis for co-creating collective strategies for structural intervention against dominant forces that keep voices in intentional erasure, mindfully attending to the power differentials and working through them in relationships of solidarity with communities, community organizers, and activists. For instance, the voicing of health as intertwined with spirits living in the forests in the context of *Santali* struggles shapes the organizing against neoliberal land grab, state takeover of forests under privatizing logics of development and ecological protection, and the deployment of police violence (Dutta, 2004).

Voice infrastructures within communities

One of the effects of historic and systemic devaluing of subaltern agency has been the destruction of spaces of organizing within communities at the global margins. Indigenous and local communities across the Global South have, in many instances, securely nurtured communicative spaces for participation in spite of the repression. In other instances, where these voice infrastructures have been destroyed through forced land occupation, displacements, and expulsion, the role of the CCA as an organizing method turns to building community spaces for participation, dialogue, deliberation, and decision-making (Dutta, 2024). Culture-centered processes turn toward working within communities, in our roles of community organizers and activists, connecting with other community organizers and activists, and working with community members through dialogues. Building relationships in the community serves as the basis of co-creating multiple meanings of community, emergent through everyday interactions. The everyday friendships formed in communities emerge from the researchers' participation in community life, serving as the basis for co-creating voice infrastructures, taking the form of community advisory groups (CAGs) built through the participation of those members within communities experiencing disenfranchisement. The CAGs serve as fluid, dynamic, and porous spaces, with community members moving in and out. Drawing on their lived experiences, CAG members identify the key issues in their lives, conversing about them, co-creating the research design, co-participating in gathering stories and making sense of them, and organizing around the stories in grassroots advocacy and activism (Dutta, 2018).

Margins of the margins

The process of cultural centering turns to communicative inequalities, inequalities that exist in distributing resources of information, voice, and participation within and between communities (Dutta, 2023a, 2023b). Recognizing that communities are heterogeneous spaces imbued with power inequities shapes the process of purposive relationship building driven by theory, attending to the spaces of erasure within communities. The concept "margins of the margins" offers a methodological register for attending to the layers of erasure within community life, reflecting the ongoing and iterative processes of marginalization within communities that silence voices. Tracing the classed, raced, gendered inequalities in the distribution of participatory resources shapes the reflexive

practice of seeking out relationships within communities. The questions, “Which voices are not present here?” and “How do we invite these voices in?” shape the ongoing interactions within the CAGs, inviting in participants from the margins of the margins. Friendships that are based on the ongoing search for co-creating invitational spaces cultivate habits of humility and resist the elite capture of community spaces. The ongoing interrogation of privilege through critical reflexivity as a collective exercise in dialogue challenges the politics of representation that holds up neoliberal structures, instead placing voice in struggles against the structures that are sources of oppression and exploitation (Dutta, 2018).

Rearranging accountability and co-learning

Culture-centered processes of organizing alongside communities restructure the frameworks of accountability with qualitative methods (Dutta et al., 2024). The hegemonic construction of qualitative methods mirrors the whiteness of post-positivism by creating registers of quality such as reliability and validity (Dutta et al., 2019) through which qualitative studies can be evaluated, with these standards being imposed to often undermine knowledge-generating practices emergent from within struggles in Indigenous and Global South contexts. The goal here is to create pathways for legitimizing qualitative methods by reproducing the hegemonic constructions of what counts as good research. The academic community, replete with its privilege and embedded within its power networks, sets the standards. As a result of this hegemonic framework of accountability, community voices continue to be marginalized and erased, incorporated as extracted data embedded within the power games of whiteness. The CCA radically transforms this framework of accountability, turning the research process toward communities and holding the researcher accountable to the community one works with. This shift means that what counts as research and how research is put to use is shaped by the participation of communities in decision-making processes.

Members of the CAGs in culture-centered research processes first participate in learning together the nuts and bolts of diverse qualitative methods and then co-create together a community-led research design that is responsive to the problems identified by the community (Dutta, 2018, 2024; Dutta et al., 2024). The process of co-learning methods translates into the work of building a critical pedagogy of research methods in communities while simultaneously doing so to de-center research methods. For instance, community dialogues as the basis of interviews transform what counts as interviews, opening up the concept of one-on-one interviews to multi-participant interviews that build on each other. Rather than terming these interviews as focus groups as structures of whiteness insist, CAGs across the Global South insist on calling these methods of dialogue interviews to reflect the depth and mutuality of conversations (see Dutta, 2004). This iterative process of co-learning methods and co-designing them shifts the accountability of the researcher toward the community (Dutta et al., 2019). For instance, amidst COVID-19, the work of generating evidence shaped white papers that reflected the critical concerns of communities, circulating the papers through media and policy frameworks to build political advocacy (Dutta et al., 2019). The CAGs evaluated the research process and design anchored in their roles in supporting the community and measured the actual uses of the methods for the community.

This radical turn in accountability works toward shifting the hegemonic arrangements of power and control, co-creating entry points for transforming the infrastructures through which knowledge claims are generated. Community ownership over the research design and methods shapes the uses of the methods toward serving the transformative actions co-created by CAG members (Dutta, 2018). Culture-centered collaborations in community, for instance, generate knowledge in multimedia forms beyond the written text such as in the form of PhotoVoice, digital stories, video-based narratives, art installations, street theater, plays, songs, processions, and dances (Dutta & Thaker, 2019; Elers et al., 2024). These diverse forms of communication as method decenter the textuality of qualitative methods, instead turning to multiple modes of storytelling, situating stories in bodies, in collective movements, in struggles, and in relationships with land. Moreover, the rearranging of accountability (de)centers the extractive practices of qualitative methods as data gathering, with communities at the “margins of the margins” guiding whether to publish the research, the appropriate time for the publishing process, and what stories to share. In diverse culture-centered interventions developed at CARE, communities guide toward a three-year norm, suggesting that academics spend three years walking the ground before starting to write about the struggle (Dutta, 2024).

Community decision making

The CCA draws on theories of radical democracy and participation while simultaneously engaging in dialogue with community members to co-create the guiding principles for decision-making in the CAGs. Indigenous and Global South theorizing of decision-making processes shapes the norms for participation, outlining guidelines for deliberation, consensus, and/or voting within community groups. In Aotearoa, New Zealand, for instance, a CAG in Highbury, a low-income community with a large representation of Māori, Pacifica, and refugee communities, participated in dialogue to create an organizing framework of *Aroha Ki Te Tangata* (respect for people) as the basis for group participation. The facilitation of the group meetings is carried out by one of us, Venessa, who is a Māori Wāhine (woman) living in Highbury, working as a health advocate and as a community organizer with CARE. Consider here the participatory budgeting processes that are often used by CAGs in determining the most meaningful strategies for planning, implementation, management, and execution of budgets. In Highbury, the CAG decided to create a social cohesion intervention anchored in the values of *kotahitanga* (meaning togetherness and solidarity), *manaakitanga* (hospitality, caring for each other), and *whakawhanaungatanga* (process of establishing relationships with each other). They created a dialogic cultural infrastructure for storytelling, games, and intergenerational learning (including learning how to prepare a hangi, an underground oven prepared by Māori to cook food, learning to identify valuable knowledge of medicinal plants in the bush, and learning to fish together), wrapped together into the *Pā Tamariki* (referring to a safe, nurturing space that cared for the young, the future generations) campaign. In the face of ongoing violence in Highbury, the CAG invited members of the various conflicting gangs to participate in the collaborative process, designing solutions and taking charge of implementing them.

Externally directed voice infrastructures

Voice (de)centers the hegemonic notions of subaltern participation within the rules of the Empire, and “voice infrastructures challenge the communicative inequalities that systematically erase Indigenous communities, instead placing Indigenous voices at the center” (Dutta & Hau, 2020, p. 255). Voice infrastructures as interventions rooted in land disrupt the hegemonic state, supporting Indigenous struggles resisting colonial/neoliberal power and extractivism (Dutta & Hau, 2020; Elers & Dutta, 2023), and “the process of co-creating communication interventions from the Indigenous margins fosters openings for Indigenous storytelling that disrupt the racist media narratives imposed by settler colonial media to perpetuate neoliberal land grab” (Elers & Dutta, 2023, p. 48). In the culture-centered organizing work amidst a Māori land occupation, narrative sovereignty is reflected in the emergent campaign, “*Our voices matter*,” asserting Indigenous ownership of storytelling (Elers & Dutta, 2023). The occupation is intertwined with storytelling and shapes the collective relational work in community to grow and share food on the land, drawing on historic Māori practices of growing food (Elers & Dutta, 2023). The voice infrastructure built through the culture-centered method engaging Indigenous-owned Kaupapa Māori theory and research, highlights the relationship between land and voice, drawing on the transformative power of embodied solidarities (Elers & Dutta, 2023; Jackson, 2015).

Similarly, in the resistance of *Dalit* (oppressed caste) women farmers against biopiracy and the neoliberal capture of the agrarian infrastructure in India, organized into Sanghams (cooperatives) under the umbrella of the *Deccan Development Society (DDS)*, the subaltern ownership of communicative resources enable claims to seed sovereignty (Dutta & Thaker, 2019). Voice infrastructures catalyze communication sovereignty, shifting power in agrarian decision-making where the subaltern farmer women articulate resistance to the neoliberal hegemonic agenda shaping agriculture. Specifically, voice infrastructures (community radio, communication campaigns, and community-grounded participatory events such as street theater and processions) enable the dissemination of alternative claims of development (Dutta & Thaker, 2020). The ownership of community radio and video-based storytelling structures serves as the basis for articulating local and Indigenous knowledge, putting forth local seed growing and sharing practices based on the values of sustenance and mutuality (Dutta & Thaker, 2019). Embodied practices of singing, dancing, community theater, and street processions with the seedbanks on bullock carts emerge as anticolonial anti-capitalist modes of making knowledge claims (Dutta & Thaker, 2019). Method as storytelling is intertwined with method as observing cropping patterns, keeping detailed records, and generating video and text reports that anchor global movements against the neocolonialism of biotechnology-based crops. Similarly, Carter and Alexander (2020) center the voices of African American farmers, bringing to fore through voice the losses of land ownership and the violent erasures of African American farming traditions in the United States as health injustices.

Stories in the culture-centered research process (de)center knowledge production that keeps participants as “sources” without agency and voice, squarely outside the processes of data production. Marrying voices with stories and extending stories as collective experiences of marginalization and

erasures to build voice infrastructures shape social change. For instance, in the stories voiced by sex workers in Songahachi, organized under the umbrella of the *Durbar Mahila Swamanyay Committee*, the articulation of labor rights serves as the basis of collectivization to safeguard health (Basu & Dutta, 2008). Stories narrated by households negotiating food insecurity across India, the U.S., Singapore, and Aotearoa, New Zealand guide the “*Voices of Hunger*” social change communication interventions, fostering spaces through photographic images taken, edited, and curated by CAG members negotiating poverty, foregrounding the neoliberal logics that produce hunger, and co-creating strategies of community mutual aid and care that decenter the neoliberal organizing of food systems (Dutta et al., 2013). Similarly, Robb (2023) engages participant voices through a storied approach, presenting a storied lens on the complex negotiation of healthcare access for populations without papers in the United States. In Basu’s (2008) ethnographic dialog with sex workers, Reba’s story of motherhood theorizes HIV/AIDS risk amidst structural violence (the institutionalized and systematic harm caused by dominant modes of political and economic organizing), exploring the intersections of patriarchy, feudalism, and caste, and inviting resistance.

Collective stories of communities at the margins facing health violence are stitched together, at the intersections of culture, structure, and agency for shaping communication interventions seeking structural transformation. Take, for example, the culture-centered collaboration with hyper-precarious migrant workers in Singapore who are intentionally rendered hyper(in)visible, erased across systems to keep intact the structures of extreme neoliberal regimes of migrant work in the city-state (Dutta, 2021a). Reflected in their narratives are their everyday experiences with health violence trickling down from the practices of indenture and hyper-capitalism, exploiting their bodies for labor (Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2021). Their collective stories form the basis of migrant voice infrastructures to champion policy change centering on labour rights, voiced through art, poetry, and documentary film making, co-created in the *Respect Our Rights* campaign (See the documentary here: https://youtu.be/c1z-okT1_GY?si=owRTJe1gZTDete6l). Similarly, the insurgent infrastructures of storytelling in partnership with migrant construction workers in Singapore narrated through art, poetry, and community-led white papers disrupt the state’s hegemonic construction of efficient COVID-19 management, rendering visible the structural violence that shapes the hyper-exploitative conditions of migrant work (Dutta, 2021a). Narrative accounts of poor and overcrowded housing that result in the pandemic outbreaks in the dormitories housing migrant workers shape the white papers crafted by the research team, rupturing the hegemonic global discursive spaces celebrating Singapore’s smart COVID management, picked up by local, regional and international media, and building advocacy-based pressure points for structural changes to the housing architectures (Dutta, 2021a).

Working through power differentials

The spaces of knowledge generation within communities, between communities and researchers, between researchers and activists, between communities and activists, are mired in power differentials. Working through these power differentials is critical to building authentic friendships that sustain culture-centered interventions. The CCA draws on the

existing literature on reflexivity to rework the concept in the context of community partnerships, rendering it legible to communities, and moving it amidst dialogues and conversations in the various partnerships that sustain culture-centered interventions. Indigenous theorizing of knowledge in relationship with body, land, and nature situates the conversation on power differentials in relational spaces, anchored in land, and in community. These conversations turn to multimedia and new imaginative forms of knowledge-based interventions, challenging the “scriptocentrism” (Conquergood, 2013, p. 34) of hegemonic research methods, collaboratively and collectively creating art, songs, dances, theatrical performances, photographic images, videos, events, and communication campaigns (Dutta, 2024). Our authorial team writing this piece, including the revised version, inhabits different registers of power, some of us indigenous writers engaged in struggles for land, some others as migrants engaged in migrant rights struggles, etc. Teams working with the CCA negotiate these differential forms of power in the writing process by moving to conversational modes beyond the written text, turning to face-to-face and zoom conversations, in multiple languages, and moving beyond textual representations into photos and drawings as representations (Dutta et al., 2024).

Moreover, the process of working through these power differentials, directed toward ultimately changing the spaces of knowledge production in disciplinary contours, co-create new modes of co-authorship, inviting in community organizers, community researchers, activists, and civil society organizations as co-authors and lead authors. These processes of co-authorship re-imagine the process of writing up culture-centered interventions, turning to CAGs, broader community meetings, and community researcher inputs in deciding the timing, form, mode and scope of the knowledge to be shared. In the work of CARE with hyper-precarious migrant workers in Singapore for instance, the first seven years of ethnographic research was conducted without publications to retain the insurgent capacity of the work (anticipating backlash from Singaporean’s authoritarian regime).

Critical reflexivity

Decolonizing research methods discussing critical reflexivity turn the privilege occupied by the academic/intellectual as the object of critical scrutiny, questioning the assumptions that shape theorizing from elite locations in the metropole (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Engaging with one’s positionality reflexively in the CCA places researchers in relationship with communities and broader collectives that constitute struggles for structural transformation, in modes of communication beyond the text (Dutta et al., 2024). Culture-centered critiques question the caste-based, raced, majoritarian, classed, gendered, and cisnormative forms of power in relational contours of research, inviting researchers to reflect on practices to dismantle them (Dutta, 2004, 2024; Sastry et al., 2021). Structural transformation is sustained by learning methods of de-centering the power of expertise. Reflexivity moves beyond the individualistic performance of disclosures to careful and close consideration in community relationships about the workings of privilege, the reproduction of erasure, and the contours of power in research practice, outlining methods to undo them. Dialogic conversations within research teams, between research teams and community organizers, between research teams and partner

organizations, between partner organizations and community organizers create multiple registers for interrogating privilege, examining the ways in which particular privileges shape the highly unequal terrains of power in the co-constructive process, and identifying the uses of specific forms of privilege (such as academic access to policy spaces) in guiding the nature and form of communication interventions. Reflexivity takes the form of collective work, working in community spaces to examine the workings of power and control through research methods, cultivating humility, working iteratively to challenge the structures underlying academic privilege by building voice infrastructures that uphold struggles of the margins (Dutta, 2018; Sastry et al., 2021).

Embodiment, accountability, and land

Voice infrastructures are rooted in the body, in its relationships in community and with the ecosystem, and its groundedness in land (Conquergood, 2013; Grande, 2008; Smith, 1999, 2012). Notes Conquergood (2013, “scholarship is so skewed toward texts that even when researchers do attend to extralinguistic human action and embodied events they construe them as texts to be read” (p. 34). Challenging the whiteness and casteism of “scriptocentrism,” (Conquergood, 2013, p. 34), calling out the disdain of casteist and white ideological constructions of knowledge for embodied and practical activities, the methods of the CCA call upon the physical placing of the body of the academic amidst/in/with subaltern struggles for voices, in the co-creation of diverse forms of embodied communication interventions beyond the text (photos, posters, placards, songs, dancers, theater, videos, films, etc., participation in protests, walking in marches, etc.) (Dutta et al., 2019). The turning to community accountability translates into recognizing the academic body/voice as a source of power and placing that power in solidarity with communities at the margins in their struggles. In the words of Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981, p. 23), “A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience.” Similarly, Madison (2005) calls upon bodily investment, writing “coperformance as dialogical performance, means you do not only do what subjects do, but you are intellectually, and relationally invested in their symbol-making practices as you experience with them a range of yearnings and desires” (p. 168). Mignolo and Walsh (2018) note that the violence of colonization is inherently material and is intricately linked to the concrete material struggles against the theft of land and resources. The concept “body on the line” (Dutta et al., 2019) concretizes Indigenous and Global South concepts of knowledge in context, in the experiences of the body, and in the role of the body as an intervention, imbricated in and intertwined with the interventions emergent from collaborations with communities.

This translates into research practices that speak alongside the struggles of communities at the margins, building registers that witness settler colonial, racial capitalist, patriarchal, and cisgendered violence (Dutta et al., 2019). For instance, a CAG of participants negotiating poverty in Singapore co-created the “*Singaporeans left behind*” campaign discussed earlier. Through the campaign, the CAG sought to co-create an opening for conversations on poverty in Singapore, a concept that is marked by the authoritarian state as an “out of bounds” marker (Dutta et al., 2019). When the state and the

university sought to control the campaign, the research team had to turn to the CAG, working with the CAG to produce and disseminate the campaign that included a documentary film, participant stories on video, video-based 30-s stories, and digital infrastructure. In the face of repression, the academic “body on the line” serves as the basis for the communicative infrastructure that resisted the silencing of the conversations on poverty (Dutta, 2024). The state and academic structures responded with an organized purge, conducting an audit, questioning the activist work and connections of CARE (suggesting these were examples of financial mismanagement), planting disinformation, which was then picked up by prominent postcolonial academics, posturing as gatekeepers of postcolonial theory in communication studies, circulating and reproducing the disinformation to delegitimize our collective work. Sustaining voice amidst these covert and overt repressive strategies perpetuated by the state-academic nexus depicts the transformative role of community accountability.

Amidst the violence carried out by Israel in Gaza, an anti-colonial politics calls for placing the body on the line to speak up/out, witnessing the scholasticide, the destruction of knowledge structures that accompanies the violence (Dutta, 2024). In the face of the threats to academic freedom driven by powerful forces seeking to silence the critique of Zionism, “body on the line” as anticolonial politics calls on the academic to voice through one’s body the terrors of settler colonialism, bear witness to the techniques of erasure/violence, and co-create registers for listening to Palestinian voices (Dutta, 2024). Blogs, social media platforms, media opinions, video-based sites, local protest marches, etc., emerge as critical voice infrastructures for witnessing and standing in solidarity with Palestinian voices (see for instance, Zionist hate mongering, the race/terror trope, and the Free Speech Union: Part 1). Moreover, embodied forms of culture-centered research practice draw upon physical labor performed by the academic body in solidarity with communities at the margins, doing the everyday work of supporting community members in seeking health, growing food in community gardens, gathering and carrying food, preparing and distributing food, supporting community kitchens and community cupboards, writing posters, joining processions and protest marches, etc. Collectivizing and mobilizing for disciplinary transformations has created new openings for transformative spaces for multimodal interventions such as in the *Journal of Applied Communication Research* and the *Journal of Intercultural and International Communication* (Dutta, 2021b). At the ICA, panels and pre-conferences have been organized around multimodal scholarship, and a taskforce is being formed to advocate for building infrastructures for multimodal scholarship. Organizing at Departmental, College, and University levels, and partnering with unions to advocate for transforming what counts as knowledge are some critical aspects in the broader struggle to shift accountability.

Articulating communicative justice

The turning of accountability to the community foregrounds communicative justice, working alongside communities at the global margins in struggles for voice (Dutta, 2024; Dutta et al., 2019). Communicative justice refers to securing the rights to information, participation, decision-making, and voice among communities that have been historically erased,

and anchors cognitive justice (Briggs, 2001). Through communicative and cognitive justice, Indigenous and Global South communities secure structural justice, resisting settler colonialism, racial capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism that underlie the experiences of marginalization (Dutta, 2018). Justice refers to the re/turning the power of storytelling into the hands of communities at the “margins of the margins,” pushing forth plural modes of knowledge generation that include songs, dances, poetry, stories, images, photos, videos etc., laying claims to their lives by agitating against structural violence (Dutta, 2018, 2024). The recognition that knowledge claims are made in diverse forms disrupts the colonial hold over knowledge generation, working through multimodality to resist the neoliberal neocolonial capture of life forms. Dalit women in DDS secure communicative justice through ownership of community radio, singing the story of the seed, singing while walking alongside bullock carts carrying Indigenous seeds, and freely distributing the seeds through the community seed bank they operate (Dutta & Thaker, 2019). Communicative justice as ownership of the communicative infrastructures works alongside health, agrarian and climate justice, intertwined with the women’s capacity to grow food based on Indigenous knowledge and share seeds based on relational concepts of seeds. The intervention as community-led theater, with the women farmers writing the script, directing, and acting in plays telling the story of the seed, co-creates invitational spaces for diverse voices in struggles against extractivism.

Conclusion

The aggressive proliferation of extractive neoliberalism calls for the urgent work of building pedagogies of methods within the classroom and outside it that critically interrogate the contemporary structures of knowledge production, and the ways in which these knowledge claims are mobilized as resource extraction in the colonial/imperial/neoliberal university. The crises that have been brought about by global neocolonial neoliberal extremism call for decolonizing interventions as social change interventions that rupture and resist the colonial-capitalist structures, and build spaces for survival, health and wellbeing, built on decolonizing values. The anti-colonial politics of the CCA turns qualitative methods as the basis for organizing struggles against the interpenetrating forces of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism. We offer the CCA as a theoretical framework and a methodology for creating community-led communication interventions for social change resisting the organizing forces of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. The CCA theorizes qualitative method as the work of connecting with community and turning the research process as an infrastructure for building and implementing social change interventions. The organizing work of the CCA turns to community as the site of accountability, resisting the academic capture of methods. Methods as storytelling emerge from within community spaces of ownership. Community ownership over how to gather stories, which stories to gather, which stories to share, when and how to share the stories forms the basis of an anticolonial politics that is forged in resistance to settler colonialism, racial capitalism, patriarchy and imperialism. The anticolonial possibilities of qualitative methods are imagined through the conceptualization of methods as work of social change, embedded and rooted in

community life and amidst community struggles. This transformative shift to community calls upon researchers to learn the fundamentals of method work from community, placed in dialectic with teaching of hegemonic methods. Intertwined relationship between building public pedagogies of qualitative methods foreground the uses of qualitative methods as anticolonial tools, critical to the work of dismantling academic power and control. The nature of qualitative methods as storytelling moves beyond the written text, opening up registers for multimodality and multiplicity. In contexts where the written text is the site of engagement, experiments with the CCA invite diverse experimentations with modes of writing, including writing in reverse, writing in circular plots, writing as poetry, etc.

Notes

1. Colonialism is the practice of acquiring and maintaining control, ownership, and power over a territory, its people, and culture, often through the uses of militarized violence, legal techniques, economic policies, and education. Settler colonialism, as a particular form of colonialism, with the permanent settlement of a colonizing population on Indigenous land, taking over Indigenous land, resources and systems, and displacing or dominating Indigenous peoples.
2. We conceptualize anticolonialism as the historical resistance to colonialism, reflected in the anticolonial struggles that emerged across the globe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seeking to dismantle colonialism (Grosfoguel, 2002). Postcolonial theory explores the workings of power and control in the negotiations of identity and representation in the aftermath of colonialism, and decolonial theory conceptualizes the ongoing effects of colonialism, perpetuated through systems of power, knowledge and domination, exploring the openings for liberation and emancipation through the dismantling of colonial systems of power and control. Moreover, whereas decolonial theory refers to the epistemic reorganizing through delinking from the colonial matrix of power, decolonization is a process that seeks to undo the organizing processes of colonization that can be applied to theory, method, or to practices of resistance against the organizing of the nation state as a colonizing force (Quijano, 2007).

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Data availability

In line with the culture-centered approach and grounded in an anticolonial ethic of care, we challenge the normative expectations of data availability embedded in dominant epistemic structures. The demand for open data access, as standardized in neoliberal academic spaces, often reproduces colonial relations of extraction — where knowledge gathered from the margins is commodified and circulated within hegemonic knowledge economies without accountability to the communities from which it emerges. The performance of openness is often precisely the very tool that perpetuates capitalist-colonial-imperial extraction.

This is a conceptual piece on anticolonial methods and therefore, we feel, it is critical for us to voice our challenge to the imposition of data availability statements from Indigenous, Black, Global South and diverse forms of scholarship from the margins. Such imposition further imposes exclusion and marginalization on the South, while upholding the extractive logics of racial capitalism. Rather than situating data as decontextualized artifacts to be shared, replicated, or consumed by distant audiences, we argue for the necessity

of situating data within its lived, localized, and dialogic contexts — contexts that are shaped by histories of colonization, structural violence, and ongoing struggles for self-determination. In honoring these commitments, we reject extractive data practices and instead call for dialogic accountability that begins with listening to, and standing in solidarity with, those whose lives form the heart of culture-centered organizing of research methods.

Conflict of Interest

As a collective of Indigenous, Black, people of color scholars committed to dismantling colonial, capitalist, and white supremacist structures of knowledge as extraction, we reject the presumption of neutrality embedded in conventional conflict of interest statements. Such statements, often uncritically produced and imposed by academic capital located in the Global North, reproduce whiteness by presenting the labour of knowledge production as detached, individual, and apolitical acts.

Our positionalities—as scholars, community organizers, and community members shaped by histories of colonization, racial capitalism, marginalization, negotiation and resistance—are central to how we engage in research, advocacy, and solidarity work. Rather than disavowing “interests,” we foreground our relationships with communities at the margins, our accountability to movements for justice, and our refusal to comply with extractive academic norms.

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