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From a Bengali protest song from Indian People's Theater Association (IPTA):

আমার প্রতিবাদের ভাষা
আমার প্রতিজ্ঞার আগুন
দিক্ত জ্বলে যেনো
দিক্ত দারুন প্রতিজ্ঞা
করে চুপ, হিন্ হিন্ ...

. . . The language of my protest
The fire of my resistance
May burn in conviction
In resistance
Breaking down barriers . . .

For Jethumoni, Shyamal Dutta, headmaster and schoolteacher

For Baba, Chanchal Dutta, foreman and union organizer

For Godaikaka, Monojit Dutta, teacher, union organizer, and activist

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Preface

Your voices
Long unheard
By the beats of development
And progress
Share with me
The stories of hope
And sing to me
The songs of awakening.

—Paschim Midnapur, West Bengal, India, 2007

In this book, based on the culture-centered approach to social change (Dutta, 2011), we listen to the voices of resistance across the globe that foreground alternative rationalities of social, political, and economic organizing, challenging the hegemony of neoliberal ideology in organizing global economies. Primarily based on the economic substratum of resistance work, the book highlights the discourses, messages, and narratives of change that are articulated by the very people who are rendered invisible by the structures of neoliberalism. Drawing upon earlier work in Communication Studies that outlines the relationships between the discursive and material processes of resistance (Cheney & Cloud, 2006; Ganesh, Zoller, & Cheney, 2005; Dutta, 2008, 2011; Pal & Dutta, 2008a, 2008b; Zoller & Ganesh, 2012), the voices in this book engage with the possibilities of transformative politics as embodied in the agentic expression of those across the globe who are participating in varied forms of collective actions in order to be recognized and to resist the unequal policies promoted by neoliberalism. Drawing upon the Subaltern Studies framework (Guha, 1988; Spivak, 1988), on one hand, the book begins with the key

concepts of deconstruction that are embodied in the critical communication literature; on the other hand, the deconstructive turn is seen as an opening for engaging with the positive sites of transformative politics that depict subaltern struggles for recognition and representation.

Interrogating the academic expertise that is built into the production and circulation of knowledge and making the argument that disenfranchisement from academic structures of knowledge production is intrinsically intertwined with the material disenfranchisement of the margins, I seek to participate in the communicative processes of material transformations by attempting to co-construct the narratives of resistance with the voices of social change articulated across various global sites of resistive struggles. My goal, therefore, is to foster spaces for the reader to listen to the voices of resistance across the various sites of social change; however, these voices are constituted amidst dialogic engagements that also foreground my own subjectivities as an academic and as a participant (Dutta, 2008, 2011; Dutta & Pal, 2010; Dutta-Bergman, 2004a, 2004b; Pal & Dutta, 2008a, 2008b). Whereas my involvement in directly engaging these voices of change has in some instance been through active participation as an activist, engaging in performance as well as popular writing through various platforms, in other instances, my involvement in these struggles of resistance has been mediated through the new media, through channels such as YouTube, Facebook, and my blog on the culture-centered approach. My involvement as an academic in these sites of change is directed at transforming the very notions of academic work by centering the voices of those who have been disenfranchised from such platforms through the expertise-driven language of neoliberal governance; simultaneously, I seek to make visible the subjectivity of the academic and her/his participation in the production of knowledge by referring to my own journal entries, performative writings, and reflections. Furthermore, I seek to engage with the voices of resistance that we hear through the pages of the book by interrogating my own privilege and by reflecting on the communicative processes written into academic structures within which this privilege is ensconced. For example, here is an entry that I wrote during a 2008 trip to the Maliparbat Hills in the Kalahandi district of Orissa, lis-

tening to the voices of the indigenous activists in the region who were protesting the development of a mining project that would displace them and their livelihoods:

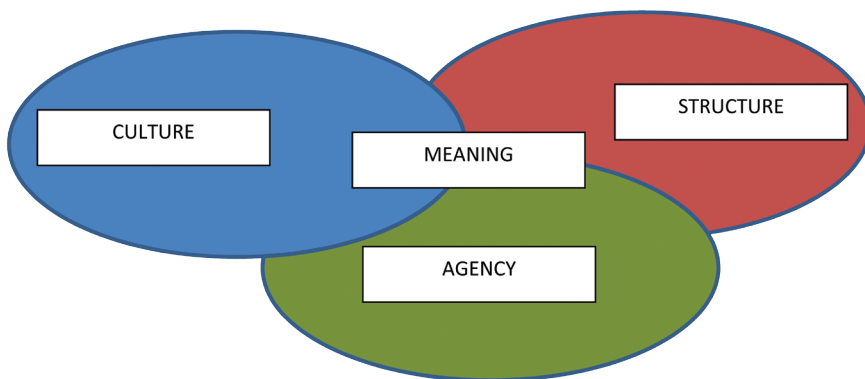
Because I speak
From this position of authority
Your voice must be silenced
And turned into a relic for codification.

The contribution of the culture-centered approach to the study of resistance in the communication literature lies in the foregrounding of listening as a tool for recognizing subaltern voices and for fostering spaces for representation of these voices in mainstream public spheres. Listening fosters spaces for meaning-making, which in turn offers alternative rationalities for organizing political, economic, social, and cultural spaces (Basu & Dutta, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Dutta, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2011; Dutta-Bergman, 2004a, 2004b; Kim, 2008; Pal, 2008). Meanings in the culture-centered approach are situated amidst the continuing relationships among culture, structure, and agency (for additional details, see Dutta, 2011) (see Figure 1). Structures refer to the systems of organizing that constrain and enable access to resources; agency is enacted in a dialectical relationship with structures, continually being shaped by structures and in turn working on structures to reproduce them, to challenge them, and to foster alternative configurations. Cultures are conceptualized as dynamic and refer to the local contexts within which localized meanings are articulated and understood. Structures are rendered meaningful through cultural rituals, codes, and beliefs; simultaneously, agency is enacted through the presentation of cultural symbols and narratives. Meanings emerge at the intersections of culture, structure, and agency, and through the enactments of agency that are intrinsically intertwined with the cultural logic, the structures of oppression and inequality are challenged.

In order to foster spaces of listening, the rules and logics of traditional academic processes have to be examined closely, especially as these rules and logics relate to the silencing of resistive voices. Therefore, throughout the pages of this book, I have sought to place emphasis on the active

meaning-making amidst communities of resistance, and simultaneously engaged these meanings in conversations with my own subjectivities and reflections. The meanings that emerge from the spheres of disenfranchisement offer entry points for turning the lens inward, for interrogating the logics of the very processes that constitute the hegemony of academic expertise, and for questioning the nature of oppression that silences avenues for participation. Drawing upon the body of work in Subaltern Studies that documents the impossibilities of listening to subaltern voices (Spivak, 1988), the culture-centered project engages with the possibilities fostered by co-constructive participation through the presence of subaltern voices in discourse, situating itself amidst this dialectical relationship between the possibilities and impossibilities of recognition and representation (Dutta & Pal, 2010). I am deeply aware that even as I bracket out the voices of resistance and comment upon them through my academic insights and writing for an academic audience, my writing turns the voices of resistance into objects of analysis, and therefore turns subaltern agency into a subject of analysis. And yet it is this precise juncture of strategic essentialism that offers a collective base for enactments of resistance that connects various local sites of struggles into global counter-narratives.

Figure 1. *The culture-centered approach to social change.*



Acknowledgments

I dedicate this book to the activists, from the past to the present, and into the future, who carry on the light of hope with their tireless conviction that the world is going to be a better place through their active participation in the global politics of change. In imagining a world that is just and equitable, they work every day through ordinary forms of resistance, seeking to transform institutional structures of oppression that silence the voices of dissidence. This book repays a debt to all the lessons they have offered and to the collective wisdom they have created over generations through their networks of engagement and political action. The voices of resistance that we hear in the pages of this book are also the voices of courage and wisdom, offering us guidance for envisioning an alternative world outside the narrow confines of neoliberal greed.

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To Baba, you taught me the earliest lessons in voice and the importance of lending your voice to issues that are meaningful. You also taught me how important it is to listen to voices that have otherwise been hidden or marginalized, and at the same time, to resist the voices of convenience that lay hidden in each one of us. Your work with the union, your everyday forms of activism, your letter-writing campaigns against things you considered unjust, your courage in trusting your voice especially at those times when others wanted you to simply join in their chorus, these are all sources of inspiration that have shown me the meaning of activism. I am lucky to have the opportunity to share this journey of activism with you, listening to these incredible voices of resistance that continue to emerge from across the globe. I remember how many years back you had expressed your conviction that change was going to come in the US—that

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Mohan J. Dutta

West Lafayette, IN

February 1, 2012

Note Concerning URLs and Images: Due to the nature of the topic, this book references a large number of online sources, some of which are contested and may appear and disappear for political as well as technical reasons. URLs provided were working at the time of writing but readers will likely find that some links become broken over time. By providing full URLs and additional contextual information, it is hoped that most resources will still be discoverable with some creative online exploration. Image captions indicate the source of images. Photographs without credits were taken by the author.