

Book Review

Review of Kapoor, D. (Ed.) (2025). *Contesting Colonial Capitalism in the Americas, Africa and Asia*. Oxford & New York: Routledge.

Bob Boughton

University of New England, Australia

After Aziz Choudry died prematurely in 2021, social movement activists and scholars across the world joined in honouring and mourning him, paying tribute to the man and his work in multiple forums (e.g. Vally et al 2023). Four years on, his colleague, comrade and friend Dip Kapoor has dedicated this book to him, a collection of twenty-three social movement case studies from the Americas, Asia and Africa, each one inspired and informed by some aspect of Choudry's work. Tragically, this was also Kapoor's last book, as he died in August this year. It would be hard to overstate the loss this represents for those of us who value radical education scholarship.

Space does not allow me to review this collection adequately while also detailing the contributions which Choudry and Kapoor made over the last two and a half decades. But one simple point which this book illustrates is that sometimes separately, sometimes together, these two comrades were the absolute masters of networking. Between them, they produced multiple edited collections, bringing together many of the academy's most committed radical scholars with representatives of the world's most inspiring social movements, all to reinforce two fundamental propositions. The first is that progressive social movements, both with and without the help of academic allies, collectively produce the most important knowledge we can discover about how our world really works. The second is that this knowledge begins with the

world's First Peoples, whose struggles over the last 500+ years reveal the realities of colonial capitalism.

Kapoor's introductory essay sets the scene, explaining how he assembled the authors, almost all of them Choudry's close associates, and the themes he asked them to address. The book proper begins with the Americas and the Caribbean, with five chapters by Indigenous authors, centring indigenous peoples struggles in Turtle Island (Canada and the United States), Aotearoa (New Zealand) and in the lands of the Quechuas, Peru. The next chapter, in true Choudry style, breaks with the scholarly format, in a photo essay illustrating key moments in the history of radical social movements since the 1960s. The remaining five chapters cover Brazil's landless workers movement, Caribbean migrant labour organising, women's movement activism in Guyana and Jamaica, and oral history research on Argentine's military dictatorship.

Section II is on Africa. It begins with two essays from South Africa, one on the rise of anti-immigrant organisations, the second on Ubuhalism the philosophy/praxis of South Africa's largest contemporary social movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo ('people of the shacks'). The next chapter is set in Uganda, Tanzania, and Mali, where peasant movements are fighting land acquisition by 'agro-industrial' complexes linked to foreign capital. The next, set in Burkina Faso, recounts local opposition to Target Malaria, a research institute funded by Bill and Melinda Gates to experiment with genetic technology. The last two chapters in this section continue the theme of accumulation by dispossession, first in Ghana, with an account of the long history of opposition to the transfer of ownership of West Africa's largest alluvial salt yielder, the Songor Lagoon, to a private corporation, before ending with the activism of Ogoni women of southern Nigeria who are fighting for self-determination in the face of the petro-chemical industry.

Section III, on Asia, begins with an analysis inspired by Choudry's work on immigration and refugees, focusing on the Middle East (West Asia) and

Palestine. Immigration is also the focus of the next chapter, a study of Filipino migrant worker organisation in Canada, which the authors argue is a direct result of the impact of neoliberalism in the home country. The next chapter builds on its author's 'slow ethnography' over three decades with women garment workers organising in Bangladesh to discuss their use of a Facebook platform to organise and educate many thousands of their co-workers, highlighting one young garment worker's use of the minimum wage campaign to express a new politics of hope. Feminist analysis continues with a chapter on research undertaken with the Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek (PKMT) (Eng: Pakistan Peasant Worker Movement), on how women livestock keepers and smallholders who produce 80% of the national milk supply are responding to legislation prohibiting the distribution and sale of unpasteurised milk, a move backed by multinational milk companies and the WTO. Staying on the subcontinent, Chapter 23 examines the 2020-21 farmers occupation in Delhi, involving 50000 farmers on any one day, and 700,000 at its peak, protesting laws giving control of food production and distribution to multinationals. It explores some of the political learning and activist knowledge production which occurred in this struggle, which led to victory after 380 days, when the laws were withdrawn. The final chapter compares the learning that has occurred in two movements, one amongst Adivasi in India, and the other with Indigenous and peasant landholders in Sulawesi in Indonesia.

Readers of *Postcolonial Studies in Education* may already be familiar with some of the themes of Choudry's work (e.g. Choudry 2014). From this book, they will learn how far and wide his ideas have spread, and how useful they are for revealing the multiple ways in which movement activism is itself a vibrant form of education, in part because it also always involves serious, rigorous research. As Choudry and Vally (2019) wrote in their introduction to another collection, "activist research, education and action are dialectically related." That is to say, social movements are learning movements, and research is a vital part of helping activists to learn from their experiences. As the MST in Brazil teaches, the movement is the school – but not just for the

direct participants, but also, importantly, for the wider society, including the academy itself.

This edited collection depended on the goodwill and hard work of its thirty-five contributors, too many to name. I felt humbled but also inspired to learn about so many activists and scholars across the globe who have devoted decades of their lives to working with and in grass-roots social movements, creating what Choudry and Kapoor (2010) called “learning from the ground up.” What is amazing about Kapoor and Choudry is that they have been able to produce so many of these books, each one gathering together different activists and scholars from around the world. The academics who write in their books are facing increasing pressure within their institutions, especially but not only in the United States. But even before this, the work of building authentic relationships with the social movements of which they write has taken years, and much of this time will not have translated into ‘career-advancement’. It may just as likely have produced the opposite. But one effect of this book is to demonstrate that activist scholarship is not only possible, but absolutely necessary.

Living in Australia, I was disappointed there was little mention of Oceania, and no case study of First Nations struggles here. Nor was there more than a passing reference to Cuba, which has played such a pivotal role in supporting anti-capitalist movements across Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa. On another level, there was no attempt to systematise the learning and knowledge production described in the individual case-studies. building for example on the anti-capitalist education theorising of Paula Allman, Sharzad Mojab and John Holst. Such a systematisation might have made more of the differences between the informal learning that occurs alongside any activism and the more explicit pedagogy of non-formal popular education.

That said, I do not hesitate to recommend this book to anyone with an interest in popular radical adult education, in social movement learning and knowledge production, and in activist participatory research. Any one or

several of these case studies provide ample material for teaching courses in these areas, to undergraduate and postgraduate students in higher education, and also to activists involved in self-education and more structured movement education classes. Taken together, they amount to an international encyclopedia of social movement activism.

To Aziz & Dip, my heartfelt thanks. May they rest in power.

Bob Boughton
Adjunct Professor of Education
University of New England, Australia
October 2025.

References

- Choudry, A., & Kapoor, D. (Eds.). (2010). *Learning from the Ground Up. Global Perspectives on Social Movements and Knowledge Production*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Choudry, A. (2014). From struggle knowledge and movement learning to the university classroom. *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, 3(2), 252-291. Retrieved from <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar//handle/123456789/19732>
- Choudry, A., & Vally, S. (Eds.). (2018). *Reflections on Knowledge, Learning and Social Movements. History's Schools*. Oxford & New York: Routledge.
- Vally, S., Novelli, M., Tarlau, R., & Motala, E. (2023). Special issue introduction: social movement struggles, learning and knowledge-making: in memory of Aziz Choudry (1966–2021). *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 21(5), 589-594. doi:10.1080/14767724.2023.2259675