

In Memoriam

Abdul Aziz Choudry (1966 – 2021)

Activist, scholar, professor, *chacha*, son, popular educator, friend.



It is with heavy hearts that we mourn the passing of Aziz Choudry. Aziz was an editor of the Canada/US section of *Interface* from 2011 - 2016. In his role with the journal, he edited a special issue on anticolonial and postcolonial social movements and brought in new editors from South Asia.

Aziz was the quintessential activist scholar. He was deeply rooted in anti-colonial and anti-capitalist movements, and sought to help movements to understand the changing context, and how to build capacity. The questions he asked are the ones movements asked - how historical patterns trap movements, how to win, how to organize in changing contexts.

Aziz's first moment of politicization came out of growing up in 1970's and early 1980's England where he was influenced by the anti-nuclear movement, migrant justice, anti-racist struggles by Asian and Black communities, as well as

being inspired by national liberation struggles in the Third World and Indigenous people's struggles in settler colonies. He settled in Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1988 where he was involved in a number of small organizations where he worked on campaigns against free trade agreements while linking with Maori anti-colonial struggles. Those experiences generated important reflections that fed into his future writings that critically examined NGOs (e.g. with Dip Kapoor, *NGOization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects*), state surveillance of social movements (e.g. the edited collection in *Activists and the Surveillance State*), and how social movements are sites of knowledge production (e.g. *Learning Activism: The Intellectual Life of Contemporary Social Movements*). Aziz moved to Montreal, Canada, in 2002 for graduate studies. There, he was actively involved in the Immigrant Workers Centre, and would eventually become a professor at the Faculty of Education at McGill University. His local and transnational organizing for migrant justice was mirrored by scholarly collaborations like the co-edited volume with Adrian A. Smith *Unfree Labour? Struggles of Migrant and Immigrant Workers in Canada*. In Montreal, Aziz was also involved in Palestine solidarity, Indigenous solidarity, anti-globalization efforts, anti-war activism, and struggles against Islamophobia. In the past few years he was a visiting professor at the University of Johannesburg. He recently moved from Montreal to Johannesburg in February 2021 to take a position there in the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation.

In *Learning Activism: The Intellectual Life of Contemporary Social Movements*, Aziz wrote:

"Some individuals achieve extraordinary things, but I believe that social change is driven mainly by ordinary people organizing, learning, and creating knowledge together—by people consciously and collectively taking steps to bring about change. Not to rule out spontaneity, but most struggles emerge from the hard work of organizing, incremental learning, lineages of earlier movements, and efforts to organize together. Although it is often overlooked, this work is both informed by and contributes to the intellectual work that takes place within social movements, as in social, political, and ecological activism. Everyday acts of resistance are not always visible, nor is much of the long-haul work of organizing that takes place in communities, workplaces, fields, homes, and other spaces down the street and around the world, 365 days a year. This work is often slow, painful, and painstaking. It involves a lot of patient work in small groups and organizations." (Choudry 2015: 9)

For him, this was not just a theoretical insight, but it described the way he lived his life. He considered himself an ordinary bloke who worked collectively for social change. This included everyday acts of resistance in the institutions where he worked, doing the grunt work of writing out and photocopying pamphlets for a campaign, and an important part of his praxis in movement-building was by being a friend and in several cases a mentor.

We will miss his insight, his humour and his incredible energy for doing the work. He brought dozens of people together over the years, helping them to think in his humble, sly way.

He left us better. Thank you for everything.

Choudry's publications in *Interface*

Choudry, Aziz, Mandisi Majavu, and Lesley Wood. (2013) "Struggles, strategies and analysis of anticolonial and postcolonial social movements." Editorial for Special Issue. *Interface* 5 (1): 1-10.

Austin, David, Aziz Choudry, Radha D'Souza, and Sunera Thobani. (2013). "Reflections on Fanon's Legacy." Article for *Interface* 5 (1): 128-150.