CONTESTING COLONIAL CAPITALISM IN THE AMERICAS, AFRICA, AND ASIA

NEIL ALLDRED

Dip Kapoor (ed.) (2025) *Contesting Colonial Capitalism in the Americas, Africa, and Asia*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Readers of *Policy and Practice* may be familiar with Dip Kapoor's earlier book, *Education, Decolonisation and Development: Perspectives from Asia, Africa and the Americas* (Kapoor, 2009). It importantly gave voice to Indigenous peoples and their impressions of and reactions to imperialist exploitation in the supposedly post-colonial world of the twenty-first century. For those of us in the development sector of the global North, that book was a wake-up call to recognise that development could no longer be just a top-down charitable initiative from the global North but had to wrestle with concepts, ideas, language and perceptions from different cultures and world views. Kapoor's (2025) latest book is, in principle, a celebration of the life and work of Aziz Choudry, another important figure in the struggle to get the global North to recognise and give value to those different perceptions emanating from the global South. Choudry was an activist in New Zealand and in Canada where he was an associate professor at Magill University, as well as a leading organiser, teacher and activist with the Immigrant Workers' Centre in Montreal. He campaigned for Indigenous peoples everywhere, but especially for Palestinians, immigrants, the landless and others, as well as being the author and inspiration of many publications championing contemporary victims of modern colonial exploitation (Choudry, 2009; 2012; 2013; 2015).

But the book is more than a salute to Choudry's impressive work. With over 24 chapters it offers case studies covering activist movements in more than 30 countries, and challenges those of us who may be finding that the exigencies

of academic life conflict with the moral imperative to activism. Clearly, for many development teachers, learners, researchers and others in the global South, activism is not simply an add-on, or a secondary priority to academic career advancement. This important collection shows that language and naming remain of huge importance to communities whose very identities have been challenged and denied. Aotearoa and the Māori are examples of Indigenous names that are deeply connected to culture, ancestry and the land, and show that colonial appellations were nothing more than misnomers. Turtle Island is the name given to much of North America by Indigenous communities there and it behoves us to recognise and accept that the way colonial powers imposed their names on Indigenous lands, cultures and identities was nothing less than thoughtless and shameful.   When European explorers wrongly sought India by travelling westwards, they called the Caribbean, the West Indies, and the inhabitants of North America 'Indians' – even 'Red Indians' – which was a perfect example of imperial ignorance and arrogance, and overdue for change.

Kapoor offers us myriad examples of everyday English language failing to reflect the perceptions and realities experienced by Indigenous communities across those three geographical areas of the Americas, Asia and Africa. There are concepts that exist in other tongues and other cultures but of which most of us in the global North remain completely ignorant, so our ability to step in with developmental initiatives is immediately challenged. Most of us are familiar with the concept of Ubuntu, which Desmond Tutu neatly translated for us as 'I am because we are' (Tutu, 2023). This book adds to our understanding of that with the important inclusion of a proverb in the Zulu language, 'Ubuntu ungumuntu ngabantu', which translates as 'a person is a person through other people' (Kapoor, 2025: 163). The enormity of that challenge to Western liberal thinking and its emphasis on the importance of the individual is huge. Many of us in the development education (DE) sector in the global North often want to help people and communities in poorer countries but we want to do it in our chosen way, based on our perceptions, our understandings and our values, which of course often presupposes that we want to see the continuation of a globally unequal distribution of power and resources since that is what we have grown up (comfortably) with.

Most of the contributors to this edited text are themselves academics and activists, mainly from the global South, who are conscious of the need to respect accepted academic practice on research, analysis and the compilation of their research and findings. But the frequency with which contributors point out that Indigenous knowledge, perceptions and understandings are important and need to be brought into the foreground hammers home the point that the struggle for social justice and equity worldwide is more important than mere academic practice. To be a 'value-free' discipline is neither a worthy nor valid aim in the ongoing struggles of poorer communities across the world, and academics in the global North need to remind themselves that their work will only have value if it contributes practically and materially to the improvement of lives of poorer peoples.

Anthropology was very much a Western-invented discipline, designed to help administrators of colonial peoples to understand their 'subjects' more intimately, and with the clear aim of using that knowledge for the more effective management and manipulation of those subject communities, a position that was morally bereft. Contributors to Kapoor's book argue convincingly that, if the rural, dispossessed communities are not at the heart of the research initiative, then the moral value of the development enterprise has been lost from the beginning. Wherever we may be from, and whatever may be the contexts of our work on development, many of us in the DE sector need to engage more fully in grasping and using Indigenous languages. We need to ensure our research, teaching and learning are central – and not at all marginal – to the struggles that those communities face day after day. Academics need to be a part of the solution to the agonising and even existential inequalities disfiguring the entire world, and we need to be allied with the rural communities, so that we do not become a part of the problem.

The book offers case studies of Indigenous communities and their struggles, and each case study is rarely more than ten pages long, so the book would make an excellent primer for pupils in secondary schools. It would enable students to see that the world is bigger than the English language, that identities are not just something arbitrarily imposed on people – like passports or driving

licences – but something that is essential for the clarity of purpose that is a necessary precondition for any development initiative.

The language in the book is challenging and one needs to spare a thought for the editor of the book and for the editors of the Routledge Critical Development Studies series: when activists submit manuscripts to editors using concepts not familiar to audiences in the global North, the work can be quite challenging. I noted 'Englishisms' such as 'rematriation', ('returning to the sacred teachings of Māori women and girls') (Kapoor, 2025: 43), de-citizenised (Ibid.: 64), commoning ('those responsibilities that are enacted through loving relationships between humans and more-than-human relatives across the sky world, this world and the interior/beneath world') (Ibid.: 66-7), 'othermothering' (Ibid.: 121), 'shack-dwellers' (or Abahlali – 'people who do not count') (Ibid.:161) and 'philanthrocapitalism' (Ibid.: 179) among many others.

For the editors, presenting such material from so many disparate communities and popular initiatives must have been daunting. That Aziz Choudry was a person and a theme around which all submissions could cohere was doubtless helpful, and indeed each chapter presents an important part of a coherent book whose central theme is that activist struggle is not so different to academic research on developmental issues, precisely because struggle is a learning process, conflict is an enlightening experience, and challenging perceived oppressions is an important way of learning how better to understand those oppressions and respond more effectively to them.

The book also highlights a major factor of dispossessed people's perceptions: whereas people in the global North assume that colonialism ended with the rush of independences being granted by (not won from) colonial powers, in the 1960s and 1970s, for migrant groups, for the landless, for women and girls, for the Dalits, the untouchables, the disabled and discriminated against, colonialism is very much a continuing reality. The book is titled *Challenging Colonial Capitalism* and readers are rightly reminded that for so many people across the globe the legal status of colonies may have disappeared, but colonial exploitation and capitalist extraction of value continue as before.

There is a chapter devoted to Bill Gates' 'Target Malaria project', which is intended to be a major technological intervention in the struggle against malaria, by using the very latest scientific discoveries in gene therapy. Its aim is, of course, wonderfully humane, but the case study clearly shows the application of technological 'cures' to problems involving human beings, their understandings and behaviours is fraught with difficulty. This example of 'philanthrocapitalism' is neatly laid out and challenged because Gates' idea that money in the global North can be the solution to poor people's needs is itself a part of the problem. In his world view, the money from outside comes with the Big Tech from outside and conducts itself in splendid isolation from the research subjects as well as from the eventual beneficiaries of the project. There is no attempt to understand how people feel about a high-tech approach to malarial control and the whole experience is a clear example of a project being thought up in an office, worked out in a laboratory and announced on social media – all without any meaningful input from the people who matter. Kapoor's collection really is a fascinating read and does what it says on the cover: it challenges us all, by making learners, teachers, researchers and activists dealing with issues of development take into account the needs and circumstances of dispossessed communities and thus change the emphasis and orientation of our work. In effect, the book's contributors remind us constantly and convincingly that peace and prosperity did not come to the global South with the ending of formal colonial rule.

But this is not a daunting or intimidating book. Readers of *Policy and Practice* will feel at home with the many references to Freire, Fanon, CLR James, the anti-globalisation movement, the coloniality of power, the corporate capitalism model, and so much more. I found practically every page was rewarding, either with new knowledge, new perceptions of familiar situations or ideas, or new ways of looking at problems with which we have wrestled for years. The development education sector has perhaps spoken too often and for too long with other members of the same community, and we have been attempting to help people in the global South even if we don't really know what 'they' want or need. This book emphasises the urgency of welcoming 'the other' into our intellectual community – and of ensuring that our community of learners, teachers, researchers and activists is not a closed shop of closed minds, but a vibrant

community of people committed to clearer values of social justice, of community struggle, of learning from the very fact of struggle and action for justice.

Aziz Choudry passed away in 2023 but this book is not only a very fitting tribute and memorial to him but – as he would have wanted – it is a call to action, in recognition that fancy PhDs do not solve society's most urgent problems, that 'ordinary' people have an awful lot to offer to our understanding of this wider world, and that a career in the development education sector is not worth two dimes if it does not add substantively to the ongoing struggle for social justice.

References
Choudry, A (2009) 'Challenging colonial amnesia in global justice activism' in D Kapoor (ed.) *Education, decolonisation and development: perspectives from Asia, Africa and the Americas*, Leiden: Brill.

Choudry, A (2012) *Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice*, Oakland, CA: PM Press.

Choudry, A (2013) 'Activist research practice: Exploring research and knowledge production for social action', *Socialist Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 128-151.

Choudry, A (2015) *Learning Activism: The intellectual life of Contemporary Social Movements*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Kapoor, D (2009) *Education, Decolonisation and Development: Perspectives from Asia, Africa and the Americas*, Leiden: Brill.

Kapoor, D (ed.) (2025) *Contesting Colonial Capitalism in the Americas, Africa, and Asia*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Tutu, D (2023) 'Ubuntu is international, and it's growing', 21 April, *Tutu Foundation*, available: https://tutufoundationuk.org/2023/04/21/ubuntu-is-international-and-its-growing (accessed 27 July 2025).

Neil Alldred has spent more than fifty years working on development issues in both the global South and in Ireland and the UK. These two complementary perceptions convinced him that

development has been a neatly managed concoction of global northern initiatives, defending and expanding the interests of elites and their supporters in the global North. Now in retirement, he seeks new avenues of pensioner activism.