

Statements In Memoriam: Aziz Choudry (1966-2021)

Professor Aziz Choudry (23/06/1966 - 26/05/2021)

Issued by the staff and students of the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) and the SARChI Chair in Community, Adult and Worker Education (CAWE).

It is with a deep sense of grief that we convey the devastating news of Prof. Aziz Choudry's passing. We are still in a state of shock and trying to comprehend the enormity of this loss. Aziz had many dear friends, comrades, colleagues and family around the world. We know that all are stunned and are trying to process his passing. We are thinking of you all and hold everyone close to our hearts. We ask you to reach out to all who knew him and support each other emotionally in this difficult time.

Aziz arrived from McGill University to join us as a full-time staff member of our Centre in February this year after a number of years as a visiting professor with our Faculty. He enjoyed a longstanding scholarly relation with all of the staff and expressed a profound affinity with our work.

Aziz was the quintessential scholar-activist and was deeply sensitive to injustices wherever they occurred. He made significant global contributions to social movement learning, knowledge production in community organisations, activist archives, immigrant workers' education, anti-racist/anti-colonial education and related fields. He will also be remembered for his unstinting and selfless devotion to the students he supervised and taught as well as the many academics and movement activists he mentored throughout the world. He was also an untiring international solidarity activist supporting indigenous, Palestinian and anticolonial struggles. Aziz helped activist work around opposing surveillance and repression, unfair trade, and supported activism around food sovereignty and climate justice. He was a strong advocate of education as a public good and championed the struggle for a decommodified and decolonial academy.

Prof. Choudry wrote prolifically and is the author and co-editor of the following ten books between 2009 and 2020: *Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice* (2012); *Activists and the Surveillance State: Learning from Repression* (2019); *Learning from the Ground Up: Global Perspectives on Social Movements and Knowledge Production* (2010); *Learning Activism: The Intellectual Life of Contemporary Social Movements* (2015); *Unfree Labour? Struggles of Migrant and Immigrant Workers in Canada* (2016); *Fight Back: Workplace Justice for Immigrants* (2009); *NGOization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects* (2013); *The University and Social Justice: Struggle Across the Globe* (2020); *Just Work? Migrant Workers' Struggle Today* (2016) and *Reflections on Knowledge, Learning and Social Movements: History's Schools* (2018).

Aziz's praxis and vision for a kinder and humane world will always inspire and remain with us.

From Peace Action Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand

Kua hinga nga totara e rua. We are heartbroken and devastated by the loss of two of our great friends and comrades today: Dr Carl Bradley and Dr Aziz Choudry. These two men spent their time and energy working for a better world, speaking truth to power and making space for the powerless.

Carl worked to destigmatise gangs and bring wider understanding of how colonialism and imperialism are implicated in the creation of gangs in Aotearoa. He worked liberation of Palestine, for feminism, against domestic violence and for a huge range of social justice kaupapa.

Aziz is a legend in Aotearoa having taken the Security Intelligence Service to court after the illegal break-in to his house during the 1996 protests against APEC (foiled by fellow academic Dr David Small). He has been an outspoken critic of the growing surveillance state ever since. Aziz has worked to expose the self-serving and self-perpetuating NGO-industrial complex that stands in the way of real justice, peace and self-determination. His was a great mind interested in pushing social justice thinking to new approaches and analysis.

We will miss you our friends. Your contributions will continue to resonate in days to come.

In Memoriam: Abdul Aziz Choudry (1966-2021)

From: Interface - a journal for and about social movements

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.

Aziz’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, Choudry, Aziz, D’Souza, Radha, & Thobani, Sunera. (2013). Reflections on Fanon’s Legacy. *Interface: a journal for and about social movements* article, 5(1), 128-150.

Aziz Choudry (06/23/1966 – 05/26/2021)

by Rebecca Tarlau

We should all strive to be Aziz Choudry. He did not get caught up in the bullshit. He was a brilliant academic, a prolific writer, a renowned scholar, a leading social movement theorist, but he would have laughed at all of those titles. He cared only about justice. He was my inspiration in an individualistic academic world that seems so far removed from the social movements I care about. He showed me the value of theory, of ideas like social movement learning and social movements as knowledge producers, of intentionally creating a space in the academy for students of color, poor students, Palestinian students, students like myself who were conflicted about the role of academic institutions. He was never conflicted because he was always clear about his purpose in the academy: to use its power and resources to support anti-racist struggles and migrant justice, to support trade unions and workers centers, to fight for climate justice, to condemn U.S. imperialism and the war on Palestine. His engagement with academia was driven by his commitment to social movement organizing, which in turn, was driven by his deep love for people. I benefited from that love as Aziz became my mentor and friend. Before the pandemic, Aziz hosted me for a week in Montreal organizing five book talks for me around the city, taking me out for meals with friends, and arranging a visit to the Immigrant Workers Centre that he supported for many years. His dedication to uplifting the next generation of activist-scholars was evident. During the pandemic if we went a few months without talking he would send me an email, “Thinking of you!,” most recently reminding me that there were lots of uncles and aunties in South Africa for my newborn son to visit. Just two weeks ago, he went out of his way to help one of my students, not simply because I asked him for the favor, but because that is what he does. He was a giver. He gave his life to the fight for justice. We will honor you, dear Aziz, not by citing your work, although we will do that too. We will honor you by recommitting to our work with social movements and remembering the power of education for radical social transformation. Rest in Power, my friend.