Colonialism casts long shadows which are undoubtedly visible in a number of articles published in this issue. Community development has diverse historical roots, but as a named approach it is itself the product of the recognition of the need to reconstruct the world after the end of imperialism in locally grounded ways that meet the expressed needs of previously subject peoples. Subsequently too, these principles became seen as globally relevant. Both the vision then and now of how to achieve this and the means by which it can be made a reality are highly contested, and this inheritance forms the backdrop against which many of the articles in this journal debate a wide range of issues. The fact that the colonial inheritance is implicitly or explicitly present in a significant number of articles in this issue reminds us that it is a factor that is in fact never that far away.

It is addressed most directly in the opening article by Helene Perold and her colleagues on the colonial legacy that impinges on the growing trend towards international volunteers from ‘northern’ countries descending upon African countries. These are contextualized to research undertaken in Tanzania and Mozambique. Underlying their analysis is the claim that post-colonial relations were only partially transformed and decades of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) intervention have reinforced neo-colonial relationships that significantly shape volunteering in terms of notions of ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’. While volunteering undoubtedly has benefits, it needs to be informed by a stronger critical consciousness of the need to combat these tendencies. The next article, by Danielle Campbell and Janet Eileen Hunt, examines the ways in which land agreements are negotiated by mining companies with dispossessed indigenous people in Australia. At most, of course, ‘compensation’ can only be marginally beneficial given the fundamental losses that they have experienced. Even so, indigenous people have often experienced variable and mainly inadequate rewards. Nevertheless, the authors claim that community development strategies in such circumstances have started to
deliver improved benefits even when (or perhaps sometimes because) they do not always conform to government expectations.

One of the most difficult legacies of colonialism has been the long-running conflicts that frequently arose initially from a combination of artificial national boundaries, and colonialist divide-and-rule strategies which exacerbated communal tensions. In Ethiopia, such an inheritance helped to fuel an intense and bloody civil war between the communist national government of 1974 and regions such as Eritrea and Tigray, which led to imposed power on local people. After the fall of communism in 1991, Eritrea became independent but Tigray remained a northern region of the new, more formally democratic Ethiopia. In their article, Kiros Hiruy and Robin Eversole discuss the achievements of community development strategies for social and political reconstruction with local farmers. They show how a sensitive ‘auto-ethnographic’ approach which is respectful towards local expertise can yield significant dividends in helping to deliver beneficial changes. Further to the south, Rwanda in central Africa represents an extreme case of the catastrophic effects of the shadows cast first by Belgian colonialism and then by the IMF/WB-imposed structural adjustment policies of the early 1990s. These, rather than ancient tribal hatreds, were the main pressures that led to the appalling genocide committed in 1994 by Hutus against Tutsis (Story, 2001). Cecilia Benda’s article refers briefly to these issues, her main aim being to show how in a Rwandan context small-scale microcredit strategies through rotating savings and credit associations can start to rebuild not just economic well-being but also communal trust and solidarity in ways that are particularly beneficial to the most marginalized groups of people.

Thus, both the previously mentioned articles highlight the potential of community development to rebuild shattered societies from the ground up. The theme of community development as a potentially beneficial social repair mechanism also features in the article by Ruth Webber and Kate Jones examining the role played by three Catholic agencies after 2009 in the wake of severe bush fires that affected communities in Victoria, Australia. One of the interesting points made by this article is that organizations can learn how to work more effectively and in more empowering ways, by deploying community development principles and shifting their mindset from being providers to becoming allies, facilitators and advocates. Coping with displacement is the central theme of Naohiko Omata’s article on Liberian refugees’ coping strategies in a settlement in Ghana, in worsening economic circumstances. The research found considerable resilience achieved by mutual aid among refugees but it cautions against an over-romanticized approach in that these circumstances also generated considerable intra-communal tensions. The community was a long-standing
settlement originating in 1990 from the civil strife in the adjacent country of Liberia, also linked to a problematic post-colonial inheritance. As well as in poignant terms portraying the efforts of refugees to sustain themselves, the article criticizes the increasing policy emphasis on ‘resilience’ as in danger of shifting attention away from the structural causes of distress.

In the light of the clear links which the above articles establish between community development and Western imperialism, the question as to whether community development itself is a Western-imposed set of discursive practices needs to be addressed more directly. This is the central question underpinning the analysis of community development in Indonesia by Sue Kenny, Ismet Fanany and Sutria Rahayu. They bring this question into clear focus in ways that will facilitate informed debate, not posed in abstract terms but generated through context-specific understandings and pragmatics. Based on their close examination of Indonesian community development, they argue strongly that this is a complex issue rather than one that can be answered in a priori terms. In contrast to a presumed dichotomy between ‘Western’ and ‘Asian’ values, they argue that a more holistic and humanistic ‘cosmopolitan’ approach is more attuned to community development principles.

The last two standard articles in this issue cannot reasonably be claimed to connect to the core themes that run through this issue. They each, however, explore issues that may not always feature highly in community development discussions, but are nevertheless highly relevant to them. The article by Marian Stuiver and her colleagues on work they have been involved with in Haarzuiliens in The Netherlands offers both a theoretically informed and richly descriptive analysis of how community-based arts can contribute through narrative methods to redefining regional identities, and facilitating a participative approach to planning processes in partnerships involving artists, residents and planners. The article by Martin Knapp and colleagues looks at the economic case for building community care in social care. Like it or not, cost-effective considerations will play an increasingly significant role in making justifications for community interventions to deal with such pressing issues like elder care. So in this context, their claim, and the methods used to arrive at it, that modest investment in such interventions might lead to large potential public expenditure savings has important policy implications and is worthy of close attention.

Finally, the Reflections piece in this issue by Alexandra Koronaiou and Alexandros Sakkelariou continues the discussion on the politics of austerity and retreat of the state that informed the two Reflections pieces by Crowley (2013) and Emejulu in the previous issue 48(1) of CDJ. A number of articles in this issue have shown how neoliberal policies in the global South have exacerbated communal tensions and created the need for intensive
community repair work. Now these same processes are threatening the European Social Model, no more dramatically than in Greece, where draconian policies imposed from outside are threatening the well-being of the majority of Greek people. One consequence of this is the unprecedented rise of the fascist right, and their article shows how the ultra-nationalist and anti-immigrant party Golden Dawn are seeking in cynical and ethnically selective ways to use community-organizing tactics to undermine rather than reinforce or repair the social fabric. The perverse use of such community-based strategies by the right to divide rather than unite is an issue that deserves more attention, and which was also touched upon in Emejulu’s (2013) discussion of the community activities of US ‘tea-party’ activists. More submissions to the journal on this troubling but increasingly pressing issue would therefore be welcome.

References