

*Also published in:*  
Ideas and Action (FAO) 1984.  
*Information for Social Change* (London) No 7, Summer 1998.  
*Alternative Library Literature*, South Stoughton, WI (USA) (1999/00).  
Wird Nyanjiru zum schweigen gebracht? *Laurentius Sonderheft* (Hannover) 1998, pp. 37-38 (German)  
*Link-Up* 17(1) March 2005 pp.21-22

## Will Nyanjiru be silenced?

By

Shiraz Durrani

Extract from "Libraries and rural development", *University of Nairobi Library Magazine*, No.4, 1980.

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Nyanjiru wakes up at 4 am; a water debe on her head, she walks for an hour and a half to the nearest stream. Then she climbs back from the river to her home, picking up dry wood on the way for fire; she arrives home three hours later to start the day's other work: crying children to be calmed with bits of left over food, chicken to be fed and watered ; then to start digging her half acre shamba in the hot, burning sun. This is the daily routine for a peasant.

And this is the life of a modern librarian: Kamau pats his dogs fondly as they surround his new Volvo. This is his daily ritual. He realises that the gates are not open yet and hoots loudly. Where is Mutua? Does he not know that today is the library board meeting and he has to report early? They are to discuss library regulations and he has prepared a long list of don'ts that users should adhere to. As Mutua opens the gates, Kamau speeds out, the silent noise of the Volvo soothing his mind. He starts thinking about library rules. Yes, users must be controlled. Only last week he found a fellow eating mandazi in the library. How can that be allowed ? Kamau had him thrown out. The first rule is going to be about eating in the library. And then of course "Silence": "Silence in the library":

Kamau feels happy as he enters the library parking. "Silence Please": "Silence in the Library"; "No eating in the library"; "American Library Association Rules for Filing catalogue cards"; "Anglo-American Cataloguing System" ... In such an atmosphere of threats, admonitions, foreign terminology and practices lives and works the modern librarian. Inside the stone walls of the library, in total peace and calm among the well preserved volumes, he is oblivious to the ruin and chaos of hunger, starvation and mass exploitation outside.

The contrasting lives of Nyanjiru and Kamau can be found in any Majority World country. Their activities are taking place within miles of each other and on the same day. Yet the two are so removed from each other that they may easily be on different planets or in different historical ages.

The library is a concrete structure inaccessible to Nyanjiru, and Nyanjiru as a library user is unacceptable to the librarians. For Nyanjiru there is no time to waste, no compromises to be made. All her labour and thoughts are to satisfy her family's basic material needs :

food, clothing and shelter. Anything that helps her in this work, she accepts with open arms and mind. Anything that prevents her from acquiring what she needs, she will fight. Her information needs are clear - she wants information which will help her to produce and protect her material requirements.

On the other hand lies the library service - set up and maintained through 'assistance' from a colonial, neo-colonial 'mother' country. A mother whose very touch brings death. "Silence Please, Silence in the library":

Silence, in spite of Nyanjiru's dying children; silence, in spite of Nyanjiru's twenty-four hour working day ; silence, even though Nyanjiru's labours fill up the stomachs of "ladies and gentlemen" thousands of miles away, while her own stomach remains empty.

Thus it is not surprising that Nyanjiru knows no library, and no library knows Nyanjiru. The world of Nyanjiru and the world of library services as they exist today are far apart. Libraries based on traditions of foreign information practices cannot serve the needs of people like Nyanjiru.

Nyanjiru belongs to her own people's information system based on the oral tradition and experiences of history which she can understand, trust and apply in order to fight for her existence.

Shiraz Durrani

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15-7-98