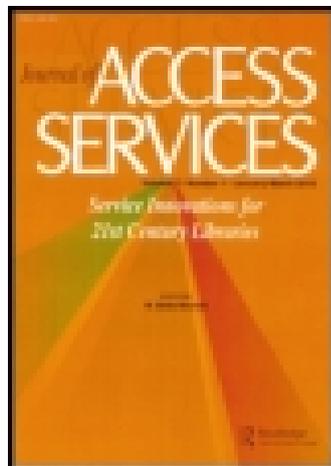


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A Review of “Information and Liberation: Writings on the Politics of Information and Librarianship”

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Reviews and Remarks

Carol Goodson, Column Editor

Durrani, S. (2008). *Information and Liberation: Writings on the Politics of Information and Librarianship*. Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press.

This book is an organized collection of nearly 30 years of essays, articles, papers presented, book reviews, and other documents authored or coauthored by Kenyan-born librarian and political/social activist Shiraz Durrani. Although Durrani focuses primarily on the politics of information in Kenya and the United Kingdom, he writes about this topic in relation to political and economic situations all over the world, including the United States. His writings speak to the universal themes of human rights, class struggle, and the concept of equitable access to information. The author asserts that what happens at the political level parallels what happens in the information field; that “inequality in the possession of wealth translates into inequality in the possession of information.”

Durrani worked at the University of Nairobi Library from 1968 to 1984. In late 1984, due to his outspoken activism, which included membership in the then-underground December Twelve Movement, now called Mwakenya, as well as numerous writings on Kenyan anti-imperialism and liberation, he was forced to move to Britain, where he worked as a public librarian at the Hackney and Merton public libraries and taught at the London Metropolitan University.

This collection is divided into four main sections. The first, “Society and Information: A South Perspective,” covers human rights and information services in Kenya. The essays cover the 500-year history of colonialism in Kenya, starting with the Portuguese, and then the British in the late 1800s. The influence of the British library model created an inequitable information system in the country, wherein only 10% of the population, the ruling class and elites, is served by traditional libraries. Durrani writes of the information needs of the other 90%, which includes peasants, farmers, and the rural and urban working classes, for basic information on agricultural practices and methods. This population has traditionally been served by oral traditions, passed down through the generations. The author articulates the need for these traditions to be recorded and the role librarians can play in preserving that information. Durrani also writes about the role of the underground press in the Kenyan liberation struggle and in the recording of history

from the point of view of the Kenyan people. He emphasizes the need for libraries to collect underground and alternative literature, rather than concentrating solely on above-ground legal publications and ones published by the mainstream press. Librarians need to know the populations they serve, and information communication should be a two-way process.

The next section, "The Battle Continues in a Colder Climate," consists of pieces written after Durrani's move to the United Kingdom. The author writes about Britain's similarities to Kenya, of a traditional library serving primarily the ruling class, leaving the working class and racial and ethnic minorities underserved. That Britain has had a stable government and more resources to dedicate to library services has been a strength; however, the shadow side of this strength is complacency and a culture of superiority. Durrani covers the topics of "Black librarianship" as well as institutional racism, as he points out the concentration of Black LIS workers in "lower, non-decision making positions." The author asserts that racism needs to be recognized in order to be addressed, and that the "first step in resolving the problems of lack of service to Black communities and the poor working environment for Black librarians is to accept the concept of Black librarianship." The author acknowledges that African American librarians in the United States have made more positive progress than in Britain, citing the American Library Association's Black Caucus as well as affirmative action legislation. The author's later writings include other excluded groups, such as the disabled and LGBT populations. Durrani has led projects to address these issues at Hackney Libraries, with its *Vision Statement on Services to Black and Minority Ethnic Communities* and its Black and Ethnic Minority Workers Group, and at the Merton Library and Heritage Services, with its service-development approach to equality. He summarizes: "The challenge is to develop a service that is open to all irrespective of class, race, gender, ability, age, sexual orientation, political beliefs, etc. The service needs to be an inclusive one, which reaches out to all who are currently excluded." A third project, the Quality Leaders Project—Youth (QLP-Y), has a goal of development of effective leaders and relevancy by consulting young people in order to develop library services that meet their needs.

A third section, "Taking a Stand," emphasizes the need for librarians to turn ideas into action. The author advises librarians to become activists and not hide behind professional "neutrality"; by doing so, they risk not serving large portions of their communities. The QLP-Y and other projects are discussed further, as well as the need for incorporation of reflective learning into the information profession. A smaller fourth section includes the author's book reviews.

Access services librarians in the United States can be grateful for a stable political environment. Nevertheless, we should heed Durrani's challenge to get to know the populations we serve and to reach out to those who are underserved. Since many entry-level support staff positions in

libraries are under access services, we possess a unique opportunity to foster development of personnel and help to encourage members of diverse backgrounds and underserved populations to pursue careers in librarianship. This, in turn, will help encourage the development of library services for all members of the community. Durrani's writings are unapologetically anticapitalist and unequivocally socialist in philosophy. Although these ideas are unpopular with many in the United States, his words should be read with an open mind. Our society needs to question whether some classes of people are being exploited for profit, and if this truly constitutes "freedom and justice for all." Durrani's experience has taught him that democracy does not bring true independence for all members of a society. At the very least, access services librarians should read this eye-opening work for its unique perspective and its lessons in history and society, with an eye toward what they can do by acting at a local level.

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Griffey, J. (2010). *Mobile Technology and Libraries*. New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

There is an increasing amount of pressure on Web content providers of all types to make their information accessible via mobile devices, and libraries are no exception to this. As Griffey mentions in his Preface, in 50 countries, cell phone penetration (the number of cell phones per person) exceeds 100%, and it is estimated that by the end of this year, 90% of the world's population will have access to a cell phone signal.

This concise and practical book is designed to aid librarians in developing a mobile Web site and start using SMS communications in their interactions with patrons. If the reader has very little knowledge of cell phone models, manufacturers, and the companies that provide service, Griffey supplies quite a bit of information on that in his Introduction; although not really needed in a book of this type, it was interesting to read.

Although the author seems to be making the assumption that the need to move toward mobile access to library services is a given, he does caution that demand can easily outstrip supply, in that you run the risk of being overwhelmed once you put yourself out there. He also acknowledges that getting staff buy-in is crucial, and that this may be difficult. He then proceeds to outline the Kubler-Ross stages of grief as a change model that might be useful in working through this process.