In this book on progressive library movement, Shiraz Durrani challenges us to look at the concept and practice of library differently, while also providing invaluable information on the alternatives in both Kenya and Britain. He thus continues the critical tradition he has already established with his earlier works, particularly, Never Be Silent. It’s all right to be silent inside a library but never about a library.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o

“This book is required reading for all those working in public libraries whether qualified librarians or not. It sets out why public libraries are so important, how change is achievable and how all people can be supported to use information to improve their lives. Told through the remarkable career of an inspirational librarian, it gives hope to all those wishing to do more than issue a pile of mindless books.”

Catherine Lusted

“The detailed examples of the foundations of progressive librarianship provided by Durrani in this book offer valuable lessons for Western readers”

Alice Corbel.

PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIANSHIP

Public spending is under threat and public libraries are suffering. At a time when libraries can play a critical role in supporting people facing difficult economic and social situations, the dominant conservative model of librarianship has nothing meaningful to say about the role and relevance of libraries. It offers more of the same, but no qualitative change so necessary today. It continues to maintain the myth that there is no alternative to its own policies and practices. There is thus an urgent need for alternative ideas and practices to address people’s needs.

The progressive librarianship movement is taking up this challenge. It has also been active in Kenya and Britain but its work is not widely known. The Kenyan movement differed from the others in that it grew within the underground political movement in the 1980s - the December Twelve Movement/Mwakenya.

Using original documents, this book records this hidden history. In the process, it examines key concepts such as the role of libraries and the relevance of service. Linking library work with the wider social and political concerns, the book explores issues such as politics of information, the role of activism and “neutrality” in library work. It offers an alternative approach to librarianship, to the training of librarians and to organisational change to make libraries more relevant to people’s lives.