

Abstract of Review

Title: Never be Silent: Publishing and Imperialism in Kenya, 1884-1963, by Shiraz Durrani

Reviewer: [Daniel Branch](#)

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Sorry, no abstract at present

Book Reviews

Never be Silent: Publishing & Imperialism in Kenya, 1884-1963, by Shiraz Durrani. London: Vita Books, 2006: pp.271. 21.99 (pb). ISBN 9781869886059. Reviewed by Daniel Branch, University of Exeter; © Daniel Branch 2008.

Lenin but not Lonsdale; thus can *Never Be Silent* be summarised in both content and tone. In presenting his history of publishing in colonial Kenya, Durrani has jettisoned the subtlety and ambiguity that characterise so much of the scholarship produced in the field over the past few decades. Instead, Durrani prefers the more fixed analytical categories of race and class that give little room for contradiction or flexibility. The end result stands in stark contrast to the regrettably under-appreciated work of Pugliese and others, who have sought to demonstrate the broad and complex range of views represented in the newspapers and other printed matter produced by Kenya's colonial subjects and citizens.

Following a rigidly nationalist chronology, Durrani outlines chapter by chapter the major newspapers and publishers operating amongst the African, South Asian and European communities. Within those racial categories, little attempt is made to consider the spectrum of political and social positions represented by the different newspapers. Instead, Durrani prefers to present each in homogenous terms informed by his Marxist approach. In so doing, *Never Be Silent* contains a great mass of primary source material assembled by Durrani from collections in Britain and Kenya. Durrani has thereby highlighted a number of important sources which will prove invaluable for future research in the areas of African and South Asian publishing in colonial Kenya. It is somewhat a pity then that Durrani has largely chosen not to analyse this material himself, preferring instead to simply identify which newspapers were being produced, where, when and with what overarching editorial message. This contributes to a very strange feel to the prose as a whole, which at times reads more like an annotated bibliography rather than a substantive study. Too much space is given over to lengthy quotes from other existing and well-known studies that could have been easily paraphrased. Similarly, the use of bullet points and a disjointed

chapter structure do not aid the progressive construction of a coherent argument.

The coherence of argument in relation to the colonial period is further complicated by the fact that Durrani's dissatisfaction with post-colonial political developments is never too far from the surface. This perspective informs much of the work, lending it the feel of an extended, historically informed polemic. Indeed, given the tone of the book it is perhaps a little unfair to review it as a scholarly piece when its audience is so obviously not primarily meant to be found amongst academics. Durrani's commitment to his political beliefs and his insistence that knowledge should be as widely disseminated as possible is supported by his praiseworthy decision to distribute this book as an Open Access publication. It is available at no cost via the internet. However, Durrani would be better served presenting their work in terms that their subjects and their audience would themselves recognise. While trade unionists and the labour movement as whole played important historical roles, it seems a stretch, for example, to characterise the period of 1922-1948 as the 'Consolidation of the Working Class.' To do so is to simply retrospectively impose an abstraction.

By virtue of his courageous, vocal and ultimately costly criticism of authoritarianism in Kenya, Durrani the activist is fully deserving of the praise bestowed upon him in the preface by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In insisting the dissent to which he claims ancestry be adequately historicised, Durrani cannot be faulted. He has the scars to prove its significance as a subject of historical enquiry. And Durrani's particular focus upon the role of South Asians, a still much overlooked component within Kenyan society, is laudable. As a guide for future research and indeed as a primary source itself for those interested in late 20th century political history, *Never Be Silent* is not without merit. With more time, greater critical engagement with existing secondary material, a more nuanced, analytical approach to its sources and a rigorous editorial process, *Never Be Silent* may have ended up as an important book. Ultimately, however, as a scholarly historical study, Durrani's work suffers from too many significant flaws to be considered a major contribution to the field.