

Book Review

European Origins of Library and Information Science by Fidelia Ibekwe (Emerald Publishing, 2019), Ronald E. Day, Indiana University at Bloomington

Fidelia Ibekwe's (Professor of Information and Communication Sciences, Aix-Marseille University, France) book, *European Origins of Library and Information Science*, takes on a grand task in a relatively condensed text: describing the modern appearance of the field of Library and Information Science in six European countries (France, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway) and one former European country (the former Yugoslavia). It is understandable that any such large undertaking by one author would require the specification of its limits. In this case, the author's stated limits are that of the author's language abilities, country choices, and resources. In terms of the first, Ibekwe relied on documentary resources in English and French. Complementing this, Ibekwe used oral, as well as textual, resources.

Within these limitations, Ibekwe's book gives readers some fundamental names, dates, organizations, etc., for understanding the unique Library and Information Science traditions in each of these countries and regions. This is very useful. But also, beyond this, one of the most intriguing issues that runs throughout this book is: what does such knowledge tell us about the topic and domain of the field of Library and Information Science (LIS)?

As summarized in the fifth chapter and the conclusion, the LIS field in these countries in Europe show at least two comparative international influences: Anglo-American influences (most prevalent in the Scandinavian countries studied and the former Yugoslavia) and French influences (in France, of course, and in Spain and Portugal – and as far as the book notes, Latin American countries). Though these two streams ebb, flow, and converge with one another more or less in all the countries studied to different degrees (most of all in the Scandinavian universities, perhaps), they break out along lines of the French tradition's merging of communication and information sciences and technologies (along with documentation and semiotics) in a more cultural approach and the Anglo-American emphasis on libraries and on technology-led information science (hence, 'library [science] and information science' is a largely Anglo-American formulation). Whereas the former situates information as expressions within socio-cultural communicative systems and the processing of linguistic and computational 'codes,' the latter takes the material forms of 'information' as beginning and end points for information use, storage, and retrieval, via documents, information, and data (understood as content bearing quasi-entities). In Ibekwe's book, somewhat at the origins of these two streams are the works of Paul Otlet, who, writing in French, was the father of modern documentation theory, but who has been proclaimed as a pioneer of information science.

The other conclusion one comes to from this book is that much of the problem of what this field studies and what it is called (e.g., 'Library and Information Science'? 'Information Science'? 'Documentation Studies'? 'Bibliology'? 'Informatics'?) comes down to cultural and social traditions and national and institutional politics. What we have is less fixed objects of study for the field and more that of methodological and epistemological tendencies and somewhat variable objects and subjects of study (partly as a result of such variance in the former tendencies) within the umbrella terms of 'documentation,' or more recently, 'information.' These variances are not only the product of different forms of research and different epistemological assumptions, but perhaps more importantly, different national and institutional situations for scholars and for students: different national individual and organizational actors and agencies, national directives, professional associations, dominant languages, funding sources, accrediting bodies, educational institutions, etc. One of the things that I took out of this book is that, like public libraries and other social and cultural institutions, educational institutions force scholars to adapt to the 'state form' and to particular state forms at work nationally and internationally. 'Research,' as well as pedagogy, obeys political economy, both nationally, and then secondarily, through the most powerful nations and the most wide-spread languages, publishers, etc., internationally (hence, again, 'library [science] and information science' as the international 'taste' that flavors all the national institutions discussed in this book).

If one were to be critical, it might be said that such variances in precisely naming the field also somewhat enter into the method of this book. Ibekwe's account seems to be influenced by a handful (or less, in some countries) of dominant authors or oral informants of a passing generation. Of course, in the case of oral informants for an historical work, this is inevitable and perhaps even desirable. But, as much as we accept the term 'library and information science' and its institutions, and as much as we see both library science and information science as rooted in Otlet's works and traditions, so we end up with a book that is flavored in these terms. Though, for example, more bibliometric, information retrieval, and 'use' traditions are presented in different countries in this book, they don't seem, at least to me, to be the perspective that guides this book. This isn't meant as a criticism, but rather to point out that such a large international scope and comparative methods suggest multiple research and reading strategies.

Thus, as Ibekwe argues at the end of her book, there remains still more research to be done in an historical comparative and international framework; research which is made more complex by the high degrees of local and national definitions of the field and also by the influences of international political economy upon scholarship and teaching. Ibekwe's book makes a good and useful contribution to examining the fields, furrows, and even the unexploded ordinances that make up the European (and international) origins of "library and information science."