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Book Review

Open Divide: Critical Studies on Open Access

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BOOK REVIEW

Open Divide: Critical Studies on Open Access

Edited by Joachim Schöpfel and Ulrich Herb

2018 | Library Juice Press | 188 pages, softcover | ISBN-13: 9781634000291 | \$35.00

With 15 contributors to the 13 chapters, one preface, and one introduction, *Open Divide: Critical Studies on Open Access* provides a good variety of diverse and critical perspectives on open access (OA) issues. The organization of the book in two parts by geography made sense to this reviewer: Part One contains six chapters covering global issues, and Part Two contains seven chapters on North/South issues. Its focus is largely on the viewpoints of researchers, librarians, information professionals, publishers, and library users in the Global South, with many of the chapters, the preface, and the introduction available online. See <https://scidecode.com/en/open-divide-critical-studies-on-open-access/> provided by Mr. Herb. Individual chapters are licensed CC-BY-NC 4.0, but not the book as a whole.

This book goes deep into the debate on open access. Several chapters in the book considered the overall concept of OA from a critical perspective. Many authors mentioned the open access statements signed in Budapest, Bethesda, and Berlin. The debate between Gratis vs. Libre open access was addressed in a number of chapters. Several authors noted that some researchers have their own ideas concerning what open access means to them. For some people, free-to-read content is OA, while other people would like the rights to reuse research output (Kuchma, 135). Moore's idea of treating open access as a "boundary object" or concept was particularly thought provoking (Moore, 50-51). One author seemed to conflate the definition of gold OA journals with OA journals that have Article Processing Charges (APCs) (Raju, 160), but other authors reminded the reader that most gold OA journals are not funded through APCs (Herb, 70-71; Kuchma, 131).

Several chapter authors noted the high cost of APCs from many of the traditional for-profit publishers of the Global North. Chan said, "we should take the private business out of the scientific information system, or at least have some regulatory oversight" (174). Many authors intimated that scholarly communication should be done with public funding since scientific and scholarly knowledge is a public good. For example, Poynder said "Public



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goods are constantly vulnerable to subversion, marginalisation and/or privatisation by commercial interests” (6).

The majority of the book covers approaches to address the disparity of researchers using the global scholarly communication system within the Global South. The maps of the Global South on pages 100-101 are particularly useful. Many researchers in the Global North possess privileges when compared to others. The authors flesh out ways for researchers, librarians, publishers, and others interested in scholarly communication to improve the OA publication system for those in developing nations.

There are two main aspects to the problem of the inequality of information access between the North and South. The first problem is for information consumers to access subscription-based articles in the Global South (Mlambo, 138; Poynder, 4). Information users in the Global South may theoretically have more access to research as more OA content becomes available, but greater availability does not necessarily mean greater accessibility. Researchers in the Global North typically have fast computers, good internet connections, can often read English, and have academic connections to be able to access relevant library resources. In the Global South, researchers may have slow computers, slow internet access connections, and poor electrical infrastructure. The disenfranchised, less educated, and those who are not able to read English are in poor positions to take advantage of OA content (Herb, 72). Well-educated people are usually in the best position to take advantage of the existing scholarly communication system. Piron noted that many people in African universities may not “have the digital skills to find these open access articles on the web” (123). However, one might argue that researchers from the Global South are more information savvy than Piron gives them credit.

Within the book, I did not find any mentions of ResearchGate, Sci-Hub, Library Genesis, nor social media as methods to obtain research. While these methods of obtaining articles may not be legal, researchers from all over the world have been known to use alternative back channels to get the content they need (see <https://blogs.princeton.edu/librarian/2016/03/sci-hub-and-information-apartheid/>). If researchers are accessing articles through alternative means, then they may not care as much about OA issues.

The second problem as stated in the book is that researchers and information producers in the Global South have problems finding reputable publishing outlets. The Global South is limited in its ability to participate in scholarly communication because knowledge creation and dissemination are dependent upon money and technology. Developing nations do not have the same kind of financial and technological infrastructures to compete with the Global North (Mlambo, 138). Concerning OA platforms, resources such as African

Journals OnLine, SciELO, and many other projects were mentioned as successes, but more outlets like these are needed. The “lack of governmental policies and political support in the Global South make researchers reluctant to fully embrace open access” (Kuchma, 131). Authors in the book explored how researchers in the Global South are just as concerned about the perceived prestige and impact of their research output as researchers in the Global North. As Poynder noted, “researchers are a surprisingly conservative bunch, a characteristic reinforced by the promotion and tenure (P&T) systems that operate in academia” (1). Haider stated that the act of publication functions “as a way to indicate status, merit, advancement, and belonging” (21). Researchers all over the globe want to publish in journals that are perceived to have high prestige and impact, and journals and repositories in the Global South may not have the same perceived level of prestige. Thus, many researchers in the Global South desire to have their articles published in the traditional journals of the Global North.

There was room for improvement in the book. Some authors had confusing statements. For example, Schöpfel wrote that “scientists are anarchists, and states cannot be trusted” (65) in a section dealing with control. Um, what? The chapter by Zehle, *Cooperative Futures: Technologies of the Common in the Collaborative Economy* (83-96) was difficult to follow. The index was not very substantial. Overall, this book drives home the point that OA on its own will not solve all of the information access disparities that researchers in the Global South face.

BIOGRAPHY

Joseph R. Kraus is a Reference Librarian and Associate Professor at the Arthur Lakes Library of the Colorado School of Mines in Golden, Colorado. He has been interested in OA journals and publishing since he discovered OA content in 1994.