

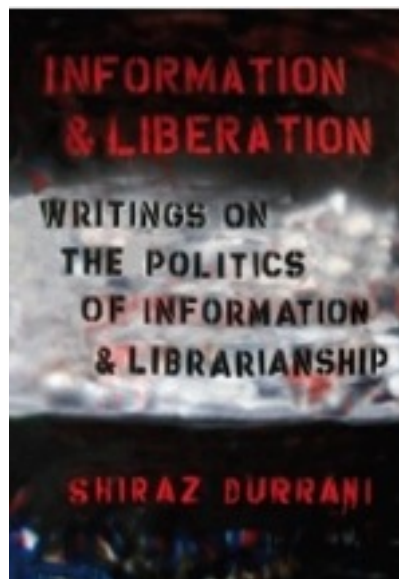
SRRT Newsletter  
Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American  
Library Association

Issue 166, March 2009

<http://libr.org/srirt/news/srirt166.php#14> [Accessed: 30-09-14]

**Durrani, Shiraz. *Information & Liberation: Writings on the Politics of Information & Librarianship*. Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, 2008.**

**Reviewed by Jenny Bossaller, Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science, University of Southern Mississippi**



This volume is a collection of Durrani's writings, correspondence, and interviews spanning thirty years and two continents as an activist and librarian. In it, Durrani redefines the role of librarian, from a passive (or neutral) collector and provider of available information to an active contributor and collaborator in the world of culture and information: "Thus the myth of the 'neutral' librarian needs to be exploded. There is no way that librarians are or can be neutral in the social struggles of their societies. Every decision they make-how much to spend on books, which books to buy, what staff to

appoint, how to manage the service-is a reflection of their class position and their world outlook.” (p. 160)

His writings reveal a deep commitment to social justice through his involvement with many different socially or governmentally oppressed groups. His descriptions of his own involvement with these groups provide a well-reasoned rationale for his inspirational visions for librarianship. The book is laden with theory which provides fuel for thought, but perhaps the most useful sections for the library practitioner are his concrete suggestions for improving services for many different disenfranchised groups-from teenagers to ethnic minorities.

Shiraz Durrani began his activist career in his native Kenya as a librarian and writer, and political response to his writings caused him to seek political asylum in the U.K. in the 1980's. His findings regarding politically motivated suppression of information as both a journalist and a librarian shaped his writings over the course of his career. This background and his descriptions of personal experiences reminds the reader throughout the book of the social and political context in which librarianship resides, and the effect that librarians' complacency or activism can have on local groups in need of information which is impossible to find in a homogenized, outsourced library collection. The idea of information as text, as a tool of communication; as a force for liberation, and a tool of suppression by the state permeates the texts.

You might ask: how does Durrani propose that libraries become a force for social inclusion within the trans-national, capitalist framework of our current information landscape? He tells stories of oppression from around the globe and then gives a lesson on how public libraries can take up the cause. A sampling of the actions that he presents are:

- By providing tools for media production to capture the voices of the oppressed, collecting multimedia formats that truly reflect their voices, and then helping to save and disseminate their words;
- By collecting underground publications (including online productions);
- By combating racism and social exclusion by actively opposing supposedly neutral stances in regards to social and political oppression; and

- By becoming involved with arts and cultural groups to redefine librarianship as part of the cultural process.

Each general idea above is supported with a real-life explanation of a project that he has been involved with. Durrani's book would be useful for any librarian suffering from a professional spiritual crisis—some of the suggestions could be easily implemented as a pilot project that might give a library a renewed sense of place and purpose in the community. Sections of the book would be equally valuable for library students and faculty, in courses such as information ethics and program planning.

## NOTE

The new issue of the *SRRT Newsletter* has a [review](#) of Shiraz Durrani's book, [\*Information and Liberation: Writings on the Politics of Information and Librarianship\*](#). Jenny Bossaller, an Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science at University of Southern Mississippi, wrote the review. It's a thoughtful piece, which I always like to see. Thanks to Dr. Bossaller for writing it. I do want to add a bit of info that was not present in the review, which is Dr. Durrani's present position as a senior lecturer at the library school at London Metropolitan University. While it is not incorrect to refer to him as a librarian (once a librarian, always a librarian), his job now is just as a scholar and teacher. For some that might make a difference in how his book is viewed.

Filed under: [About Litwin Books & Library Juice Press](#), [American Library Association](#), [Books](#), [Intellectual Freedom](#), [People In Focus](#) by — Rory Litwin @ 7:31 am