

# THE KITTIWAKE TRUST MULTILINGUAL LIBRARY

NEWSLETTER NO 3. OCTOBER 2020

We are delighted to announce that we have received the Library of Sanctuary Award from City of Sanctuary, Newcastle.

We had almost forgotten our application while the library was closed and the award came perfectly timed with our re-opening on 12 October, during Black History Month and the belated (and very quiet) celebration of our fifth birthday.



This third issue of the Newsletter focuses mainly on Black History Month and on the Black Lives Matter movement. Looking back to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s it seems almost inconceivable that the same struggles are still going on, the same disparities in pay, incarceration and basic respect.

On the other hand, this stuff has been going on for 400 years, so perhaps it's not such a surprise.

Read on...



For a while I thought carefully, what shall I write about? Black lives in 2020? Black Lives Matter? Black culture and Language matter? Black bodies and souls?

October, a month which holds so much emotional value to me. My late mother was born in October. I was born in October. Nigeria gained its independence in October and now that I live here in the UK, Black history month is in October. October is also now even more important to me because of the 20th. The 20th of October in Nigeria will be marked by the massacre of peaceful protesters by the army.

Black voices and bodies have been screaming out loud for centuries but global attention has finally focused in attempts to either support or silence our screams. Cries turned to screams when over and over, pain and anguish was ignored. Just as it has in the past, we push back and demand change. This time, however, we do not need your permission. Either you join in, change, support, or you are against us. Silence or looking away, permits inhumane and violent acts to continue. Saying it has nothing to do with you, gives permission to death and persecution in your name. Your silence allows laws to treat us differently and as third class citizens or not as citizens at all.

The complaints to Ofcom from the British public about Diversity's expression, reflection and messaging is a simple example. Disgust at a message, refusing to understand, irritation and fear. Complaints should be about a system of oppression that allows the detention of adults and children, murder of innocent souls because they are Black, torturing vulnerable people going through a cruel immigration and social system, and a continuing abuse of power with intent to subjugate and destroy.

I am not just talking about institutional racism but racism in day to day life. Racism, I and countless other Black people face. Being followed in a shop when browsing, being told you do not belong not only verbally but from what you see and how people see you. Being told that stereotypes come before you and that you challenging these horrid injustices is violent, angry and even beastly. A society that devalues our bodies to such a point where others will argue in support of another.

In 2020, thanks to social media, we were able to connect our pain with each other. The world saw, broke and finally joined in our screams. Perhaps because of Covid-19, we were able to reflect and realise that ignorance was not an option. I am not here to educate, it is up to you to educate yourself. Do not put that on us, we already have too much to bear.

***Jola Olafimihan***



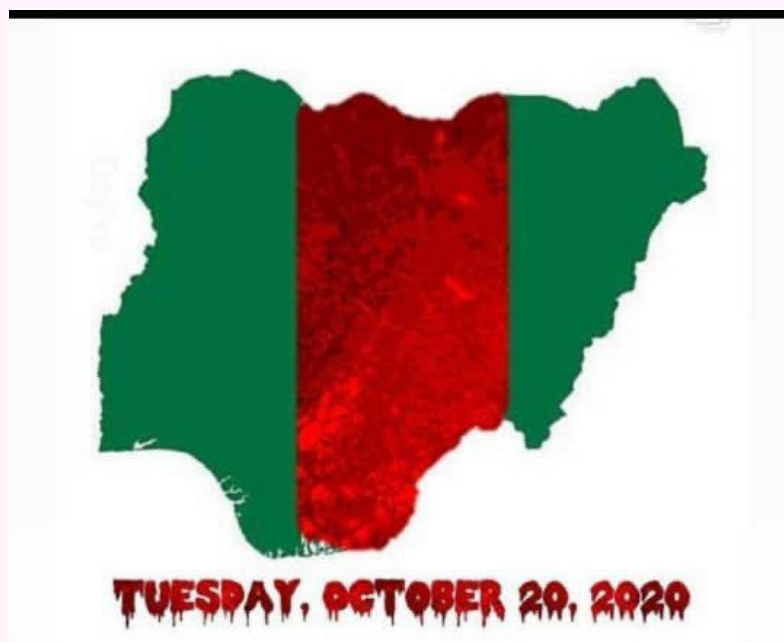
Again another died, again and again and again.  
Rivers of crimson of not just ours but yours.  
Once seen, cannot be unseen.

A price paid painfully again,  
Crushed under the weight, Black lives endures.  
Our rage burns just like gasoline.

Again more shall pass, again and again,  
Hand extending, not for white saviours.  
Do not pretend it was unforeseen.

Again? No! Better than Humane.  
Justice, equality, change, healing,  
a stronger loving bond, we must obtain.  
Once seen, cannot be unseen.

Justice for Black lives and bodies.  
Once again another died, again and again  
Rivers of crimson of not just ours but yours.  
Once seen, cannot be unseen.





My name is Alison Lambert and I was a volunteer at the Multilingual Library for several years. I am still a member and hope to be able to return as a volunteer in the future. As an avid reader and graduate linguist, speaking and reading several languages beside my native English, I could not believe my luck when I discovered the Library on walking through Eldon Garden one day. When I went in, I was struck by its impressive range of languages, the children's section, the attractive, imaginative décor, and the peaceful, welcoming atmosphere.

I knew that I wanted to be part of this unique project in Newcastle, especially in a climate where the numbers learning other languages have been decreasing for many years and Brexit has dominated the headlines. As President of the Newcastle Alliance Française, I am in regularly in contact with speakers of other languages and am aware that there are many in the North East whose background is multilingual and multicultural. It is wonderful to see how the Library offers them a chance to read in their own language, as well as meet up with others from both similar and other backgrounds.

As a volunteer, I soon realised I was meeting many interesting people from a variety of backgrounds. My fellow volunteers had been born in countries as diverse as Holland, Bulgaria, Iraq, China, Syria, Egypt and South Sudan. All were working hard to improve their English and the Library gave them an opportunity to do so. Modern Language students from our local universities also flocked there, remarking that the Library had a wider range of books than their university libraries and that it provided a calm, quiet atmosphere for working.



This atmosphere played a part in offering a haven of tranquillity to those who needed it. People would regularly drop in for a chat and a cup of tea, saying that it was somewhere they felt safe and welcome.

Most members and volunteers from the four corners of the world had very moving stories to tell. Many were refugees, who described terrifying experiences in the countries they had left and during their journey to the UK. You could only begin to imagine the long-lasting effects of such experiences. Sadly, they had all experienced xenophobia and racism since arriving in this country, especially the people of colour. Some was overt and aggressive: missile-throwing and threats of violence, particularly frightening for those who had fled from war-torn countries. Less serious to some, but demoralising for the victims, was name-calling.

Then there were the incidents that were not overt but unconscious and insidious, such as difficulties in finding a job or a place to live, with the suspicion that with a white skin, they would have had no problem. One revealing example was when a couple of ladies and a child of colour came into the Library, asking if we sold non-white dolls (many customers thought the Library was a shop because of its large, attractive window displays). They had previously found only one token non-white doll in a well-known toy department in Eldon Square, but the price was four times that of the white dolls and beyond their means!



I felt I learned a lot from working with colleagues and customers at the Library, who truly reflected the wide socio-ethnic mix of people in the North-East of England. The experiences of those from different cultures tied in very much with the stories that have come to light in the Black Lives Matter campaign. We are all human beings, whatever the colour of our skin or our background, and should all treat each other as such. The Multilingual Library encouragingly appears to do just that.

*Alison Lambert*

## EDITORIAL



There was a temptation to not write something about Black Lives Matter on the grounds that if we didn't believe in that, we wouldn't have created the library in the way we did. Thinking further and listening to more Black voices, that definitely felt like a cop-out, or a very white thing to do. So let's be very very clear, Black Lives Matter, and until that is understood, saying anything else is rubbish.

Saying Black Lives Matter does not imply that other lives don't matter or that they matter less, but how many hundreds more years should we continue allowing society and laws to act as though Black lives don't matter or not 'as much as...' - or that Black people should earn less or be given fewer opportunities or see themselves in films and books as more than side-kicks or drug-dealers or criminals.

Buying mannequins for a project at the library showed how ridiculously difficult it is to find a mannequin with black skin. Yes there are shiny black figures with Caucasian features (or no features at all) but a mannequin that looks like someone from an African country? Nah...One retailer even said that people wouldn't buy clothes if they were shown on black mannequins! After a lot of searching we were able to find two that were advertised as 'Asian/bi-racial' which is about as daft as lumping everyone who isn't white into the insulting 'BAME' hotchpotch. That term, in the end, is simply a modernisation of Apartheid's 'non-white' categorisation. (forget the capital A. apartheid doesn't deserve it). A friend from Nigeria said that as a child shopping with her mother, she had asked why the mannequins in the shops didn't look like her - so even in African countries the clothing in shops is modelled on white dummies, with all the subliminal messages that conveys.

It's amazing that still in 2020, it isn't that easy to find books for children where Black children are the main characters, although this is improving (interestingly, much easier to find in a London bookshop than one in the north...).

And for goodness sake, don't start telling us that there are fewer Black people in the north and that's why there's 'no need' for books for Black children up here. - How is it that Black children are supposed to grow up accepting never seeing themselves in books but white kids are not supposed to be able to accept the reality of seeing Black kids in their books. Would it not be more healthy for all children to know from the start that people come in all colours, shapes and sizes and with a variety of abilities and beliefs?

## EDITORIAL

Apart from Black Lives Matter, Black LIVINGS matter. Very recently there was a report about Black plus models. One of them had been in a TV ad together with some white plus models. After it was done, she discovered that although she appeared throughout the advertisement and was on screen more than any of the others, she was paid £2000 less than all the others!

Racism hides in plain view everywhere you look: in underwear labelled 'nude' which is vaguely the colour of a white body, or 'fleshtone' which is not the colour of all flesh. It was encouraging to see one seller of lingerie whose 'nude' section included four very distinct colours much more reflective of actual skin colours - but interesting to see that none of these brown shades were available in the 'sexy' sections of their website.

Back in 1975 George Carlin had a piece in one of his routines on 'Flesh-Coloured Band aids'

*Flesh colored Band-Aids. That's another thing we left the blacks out of, man. Didn't consult them at all. Flesh colored... we didn't even consult all the whites on that one. Ya ever notice them Band-Aids? I don't know anyone that color. It's kind of an off-coffee. I don't know nobody like that. And I've never seen anybody with their pores laid out in grids like that, man. .... But some businessman had to pick that color out. He had to approve it. Some man who was assigned a pad... a pencil... a place to write... had to OK the art department. Art department brought up all the .... "Let me see..55, 51, I dunno..51, 53. That'll be flesh! 53!" Wow! Didn't even bother me.*

It took until June 2020 for the BandAid company to announce that they would start manufacturing plasters in different skin tones. In the meantime Tru-Colour have been producing a variety of coloured plasters since 2014 because a white man realized his black sons were going to have to put up with plasters that didn't look like their own skin. Previous attempts failed because of marketing problems or perhaps opposition. Who knows?

The list goes on - it took until 2018 before a UK ballet shoe manufacturer started producing shoes for black ballerinas. In a recent conversation with a friend about a US company making ballet shoes, we noted that the three shades made for people with darker skins (all currently unavailable 'due to covid' (?) Were called after various kinds of coffee. We decided that they would be better named Nina Simone, Angela Davis and Clio Laine.

Happily, if you want to indulge in searching for skin tones, you need go no further than the website of Angelica Dass <https://www.angelicadass.com/humanae-project> where she is matching photos of people from all over the world with Pantone colours.

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Minds HAVE to change. Not only have history books to be rewritten to show reality from a different angle – not that of explorers but of exploiters – but what's going on here and now under our noses (masked or not) has to be recognised.

White people make up little more than 10% of the world population and it's time that white is no longer seen as the 'default position'.

White people have to go through the discomfort of seeing what privileges their white skins endow them with, recognize that we have been educated to be racist and that it's up to us to change.



We had hoped to include a column by Samantha Williams, the power behind the multicultural book carnival, This is Book Love, but unfortunately she was overwhelmed with Black History Month activities.  
<https://www.thisisbooklove.com/>

We were also unable to obtain permission in time to include a reprint of the article about her in Positive News - but do go and read it on their website and learn a bit more about someone determined to bring books to children in need of books who will recognize themselves in the books.

<https://www.positive.news/lifestyle/on-tour-with-the-multicultural-book-carnival/>

We hope to be able to bring you a column from Samantha herself in a forthcoming issue of our newsletter. - And when things have calmed down, let's hope we can invite her to our library as well.





We have more than 15,000 books in 103 languages and counting.

Members who registered with us four years ago or earlier may wish to consider visiting to renew their membership. You can sign up for gift aid if you are a UK tax payer. Please get in touch and we can send you the form so that we can claim a percentage of your membership fee from the tax office at no extra cost to you.

Memberships falling due for renewal this year are automatically extended for a further 12 months.

Unfortunately, due to covid restrictions, the classes and meetings usually held in Verb are cancelled. We'll let you know when this changes.

We are always on the look out for more volunteers to help run the library. Please ask for details or email us for an application form.

[www.multilinguallibrary.org.uk](http://www.multilinguallibrary.org.uk)



## ABOUT THE KITTIWAKE TRUST

The Kittiwake Trust became a registered charity in 2016. We run two main projects. Apart from the Multilingual Library, we have a project called Borderline Books, which collects books no longer needed by publishers, libraries and the public and redistributes them free of charge to those without the means to buy books.

This includes schools, refuges, organisations supporting people without homes, mental health projects, refugee organisations and more. We also send a large number of books to people in prison and their families.

We welcome donations of books (and money) for both the library and Borderline Books. Please contact us to arrange a time for you to drop off books or to work out the best way to get them to us.

We also hope that at some point people on other parts of the country will set up local branches of Borderline Books.

For more about the Trust and links to Borderline Books please go to [www.kittiwaketrust.org.uk](http://www.kittiwaketrust.org.uk)

OPENING HOURS:

MONDAY - FRIDAY 11:00 - 14:00

PLEASE KEEP AN EYE ON OUR FACEBOOK PAGE FOR UNEXPECTED CLOSURES

OR CHANGES IN SCHEDULE



*We add to this map as we get new volunteers. If you worked with us and don't see your home marked, please let us know so we can add you.  
Thanks to Marran for her impeccable stitching of the title!*

**Upper Level, Eldon Garden**

**Percy Street**

**Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RA**

**Tel: 077 768 4940**

**[kittiwake@multilinguallibrary.org.uk](mailto:kittiwake@multilinguallibrary.org.uk)**

**[www.multilinguallibrary.org.uk](http://www.multilinguallibrary.org.uk)**

