

# Streams of the Soul

*An anthology of poetry and prose from the  
Changing Perspectives creative writing workshop*



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**Changing Perspectives**

# CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP

Durham University  
9 - 23 February 2008



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# Foreword

For several years now Peter Adegbe has been engaged in and leading creative writing community projects, which have brought together diasporic peoples of the African-Caribbean descent living in the North East of England. His creative writing workshops have been acclaimed for their vision, imagination and popularity. In February this year, Kachi Ozumba a PhD student at Newcastle University and I accepted an invitation to help Peter run several such workshops at the Durham University Archives. Peter's 'Changing Perspectives in creative writing workshops' brought together African-Caribbean peoples with diverse professional, educational and cultural backgrounds. Whole families, often running into four generations, their ages ranging from 8 to over 80, interacted freely producing the marvellous stories and poems you will read in this volume. This anthology gathers rich if rare material, and maps out the best from the African-Caribbean creative writing workshops that Peter Adegbe and his colleagues ran in the North East. And everyone is here: the primary school pupil, the secondary school student, the medical doctor, the retired businessman, great grand papas who never thought they'd write down their memories of the world gone by, the PhD student, the university lecturer and others – all these depict tales in verse or prose of their complex multiple identities, crafting their achievements, aspirations, hopes and despairs. This anthology is precious; I hope there is more of its kind to come; it is definitely worth dipping into.

**Jack Mapanje**  
(Teaches Creative Writing, School of English, Newcastle University)

# VOICES FROM THE SLAVE SHIP



# Captured!

Ayanda Yabantu

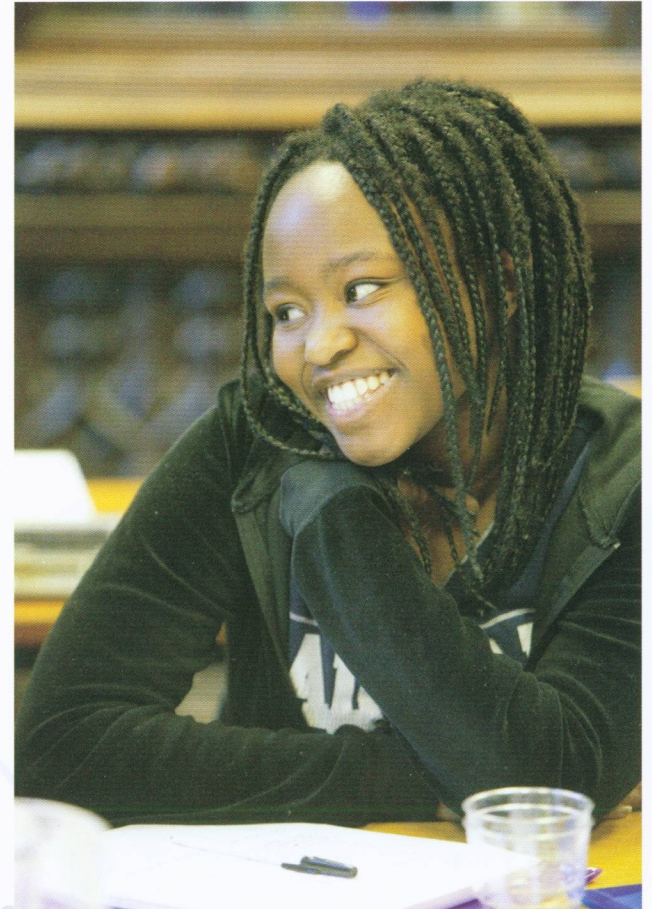
I don't know where they are taking me. Right now they are running past the mighty trees in the forest. But I don't know where they are taking me. I begin to hear screams ahead. I begin to smell water, lots of water. They must be taking me to the ship my parents told me about. I am scared; I don't know what they are going to do to me. I have heard stories that have given me nightmares so bad that I wake up sweating at night.

I can hear orders being called out now. They are telling someone to put people on certain decks. I don't really know what is going on and I can't say anything because they have gagged me. My stomach hurts because I am slung over someone's shoulder. My head is aching, as I have not been able to take a proper breath. My eyes are squeezed shut in pain.

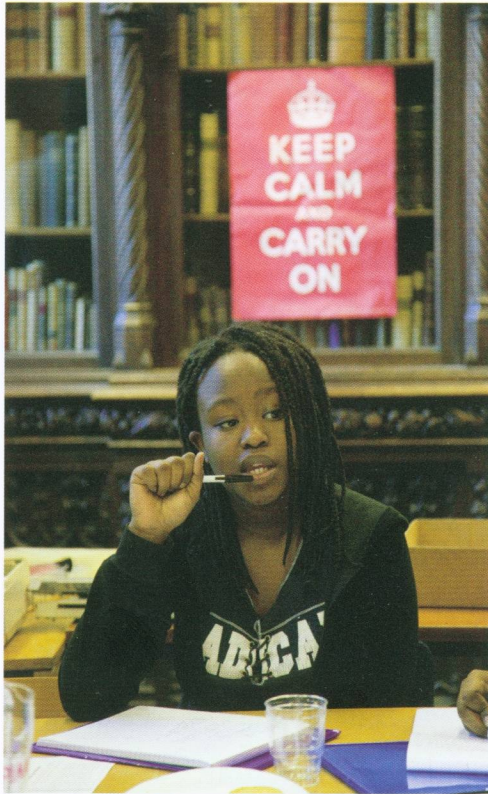
The voices get louder. Then BANG. I am dropped onto a hard wooden floor. Something scratches and stings me, and then suddenly my clothes have been pulled off. I can see the men around me. They look so mean, like they could kill someone and it wouldn't upset them.

I don't know where they are taking me. They have chained my wrists together and it hurts because the chains are heavy. There are also chains around my ankles which rub painfully against my skin when I walk.

I lie between two people. There is barely enough room to breathe. The person next to me, she is crying. And there is a boy on the other side trying to say someone's name, but he is crying so hard he keeps choking. They have put me inside some kind of deck. The ceiling is so close and I don't like it. It makes me feel as though it is getting closer to squash me.



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I am scared. I need my family now, to be the way we always are whenever one of us is sad, to sit and chat until the sadness disappears. The smell of sweat and other things I am trying not to think of are beginning to overpower me. I feel light-headed. Something wet has begun to rush past my head and by the smell I don't even want to get into it.

The boy next to me, he is making himself sick so I say, 'Hey, hey, don't cry baby, don't cry. Come on, we have to be strong. Stay strong so we live.'

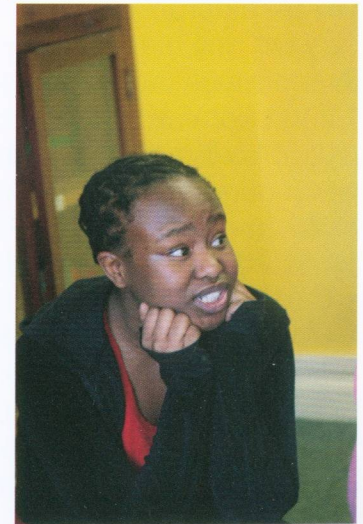
As he starts to calm down the other children also do. I can see why they started crying again. We are hearing screaming above us, and sounds of people being whipped.

I don't know how long it has been since I was captured. But everyday I wish I could see the sun again for just a minute. Sometimes we sing together to try to remember what life was like before we were thrown into this ship. Sometimes some of us get sick. The girl next to me was taken away and they have not brought her back. I don't know for sure, but I don't think she'll be back. The boy next to me, I tell him stories of my little brother and he says they have made him feel better. I think some of the other children have also been listening, as there is always quiet.

I think we are close to getting off this boat. Someone had shouted it last night. I am glad this ship ordeal is coming to an end. But I fear because I don't know what will become of me; I don't know if I will live till I'm grown or not. I fear that my parents, sisters, and brother may never see me again. I pray for them but I am getting sick and it has made me weaker, and the

only thing I have had to look at has been the dark ceiling. The only thing I have felt has been the sores on my body, the hunger, the thirst, and the rats that run around my head. But those don't affect me now. I am numb, with little or no feeling.

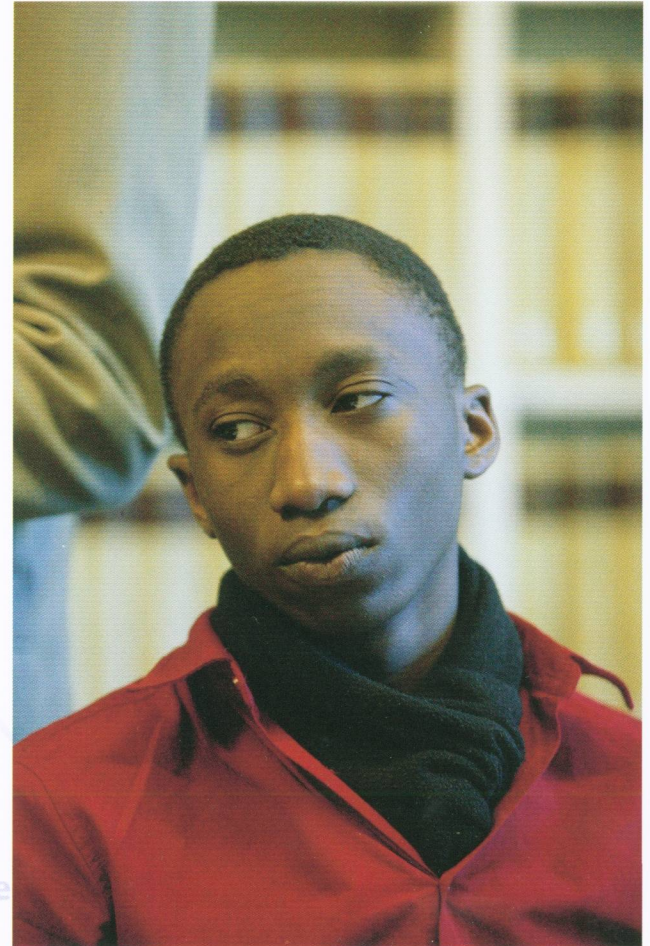
We have arrived. The boat, it has stopped. The sun, it beats down on me as we are led out. The wind blows against me, noise fills my ears, but I am unable to stay awake now. I must sleep. I think my time is up, I think I may not wake up again. I just hope that everyone else who has made it through this long journey will live. I hope my family will have a good enough life. I will always be there watching over them no matter what may happen. Goodbye my friends and family, and good luck.



# Boundless

Daniel Adegbie

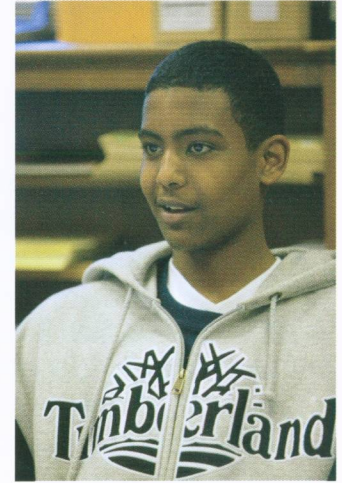
I gently release some gas  
Wondering if Zuby next to me will realise  
Naaa . . . his smelling senses have been numbed  
My bum is incredibly itchy  
I whisper to the rat on the second row  
It comes over and nibbles calmly on my behind  
Relieved, I relax some more  
Reminiscing of the days when I farted with freedom  
Those were the days . . . without a care in the world  
Now it's only my imagination that is boundless  
No Limits  
I will be a hero  
They will call me the Black Hulk  
An enormous ten pack beastie  
You will not dare stand in my way  
I'll beat up the slave-owners  
With a punch I'll bring down this awful ship  
No, in fact I will tie up the those evil men  
Then turn the ship around and sail home  
I will be legendary  
The African Hulk, no I prefer Black Hulk  
I will get all the black chicks  
But no, I will give glory to God  
For the awesome strength he gave to me  
But this is still my imagination  
Now I need a wee . . .





# Do As You're Told, Negro!

**Mohamed Seidi**



The line grew shorter as people got stuffed in. Eventually, it was my turn. I was asked nicely by a kind-looking man to squeeze into the crowded space. I was surprised at his tone; he must be new to this slave business, I thought. I got carried away by my thoughts and forgot what he asked me to do. So I replied, 'What?' Just as I said that, a middle-aged man appeared and said, 'There is plenty of room left.' But the space was packed. 'How am I going to fit in?' I asked. Before I could finish my sentence, I got stunned by a slap from the man. 'Do as you are told, Negro!' he said. And so I did.

The deck was so small and packed that I had to roll into my position, wincing as sharp splinters of wood tore into my skin.

# Lost Childhood

**Patience Abladey**



I hear crying around me, the crying of grown men, the crying of children, myself being one of them.

I don't know when my next meal will be. I feel so empty but full of tears at the same time. The smell is horrid and unbearable. Through all the sadness and clanging chains, I hear beautiful songs of joy and happiness. I don't know how long I will be on this ship for, but I know that God will be watching over me through my sleepless nights and days.

Day by day as I see people getting whipped, being beaten and dying, I lose hope, hope that my Mother and Father will come and rescue me from this pain that I feel, this longing to see my friends and play with them like any child should.

# The Sound of Silence

Odera Okoye

Cramped into a space no larger than 3m by 6m, at least twenty-seven boys and girls surround him, all chained together with metal bindings. There is no space to move. Where is Mummy? Where is Daddy? The boy next to him is screaming and crying for his parents. Fear passes over everybody like a plague, destroying any hope of being rescued. Sadness overwhelms him and he closes his eyes, pondering if he could try to escape. But his hands and feet are chained together with everybody else's. He cannot move. Then confusion replaces the fear. Why are these people trying to pull him away from the happiness he'd had in Gago? Why had these evil people wrecked his life and his home? Why had they separated him from his Mummy? Where was his Daddy now?

Children crying. Children screaming. His ears filled with the hurt and longing of all the other children. They were all overcome with loneliness and helplessness. He did not understand all the language they spoke. But they shared certain things: fear, confusion, sadness, helplessness, longing, pain, loneliness.

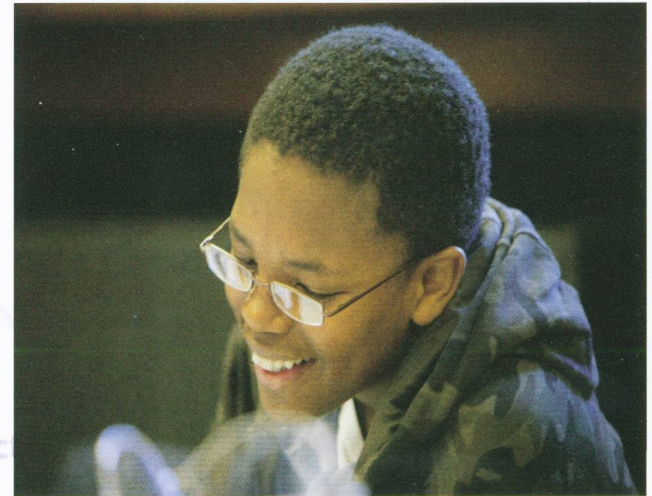
Then the rats came. Dirty, black, ugly, squeaking rats. They crawled over his chained hands and legs, his face. They bit his ears and nibbled at his fingers. He screamed out, more because he was scared than hurt.

Everybody was screaming now. Some were choking as the rats clambered up their neck and scratched at them. Some children were covered in fresh blood, produced by the sharp nails of the ugly rodents.

Tall, dark men came in and started shouting, 'Be quiet! Shut up! Now!'

They repeated these commands over and over but nobody listened. Then they started hitting the boys. Still nobody fell silent. They punched a boy who let out a piercing scream and . . . was no more.

Silence followed, save for the odd sob of a frightened boy or the muffled crying of a girl. The men left for the deck. Nobody cried anymore. There were not even any murmurs or whispers. Plain silence. Nothing is more fearful than the sound of silence.



# Out of the Horizon

Joshua Abladey

My friends and I were playing at the arena when a surprising new thing captured my attention. On the horizon, on the sea, was a gigantic object heading towards us. With anxiety and excitement, I ran to tell my family. We all gathered at the beach watching as the big thing grew closer and closer till it got to us. A man stepped out from the thing and before we knew it, we were surrounded by people dressed in white trousers, with coats the shade of the sparkling blue sea. They started taking people into the big thing and did not bring them back. Suddenly, two men grabbed me. They chained me up. I was taken into the thing where I saw other villagers tied up in a small place.



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# If It Was Me

**Dorcas Kiese**

If it was me I would have been scared and sad being on this ship. I would have missed my family and friends a lot. It is so scary that someone can take you away to use you as a slave. It is just not fair. No one should be used as a slave.



# Death Ship

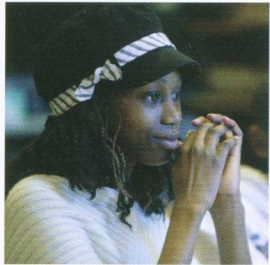
**Michael Kiese**

The emotions would be very sad. If you were in such a slave ship you would be crying everyday. You would feel so upset being without your friends or parents, in a tiny space where you could not even stand, where there were no toilets, no bathrooms, not enough to eat, and so uncomfortable. Most slaves were whipped as a punishment for trying to escape, and died.

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# The Bitter Taste of Helplessness

Divine Adegbie



I screamed as I was pushed into a dark space. I had heard of these things happening to people living along the coasts; I had not known that my captors now ventured farther into the city. I did not realize just how horribly small the room was until the door was shut with a loud bang, leaving nothing but an uncomfortable silence and the bitter taste of helplessness.

The walls were damp, and I could not stand because the ceiling was so low.

'You'll just have to lie flat,' the boy next to me said as I tried to sit up but failed. 'My name is Adebayo. Call me Bayo,' he continued, smiling despite the present circumstance.

His voice was barely audible because of the roar of the sea. 'My name is Oyinkansola, but call me

Oyin,' I said, trying to make friends.

That night we lay and talked for hours, telling stories to each other to try to ward off the dark thoughts that crowded upon us whenever we were silent.

After what seemed like hours I asked Bayo where the toilet was.

'It's right here,' he said.

'So we're supposed to sit in each other's waste till we die?'

'No, till we get to the white people's land.'

I tried holding the pressure in my bowels. But it was no use. I did it right there and then. The waste glided down my bruised body to my feet. I hated my helplessness; I felt disgusted with myself.

Then Bayo became sick. He shook without fail day and night, silently slipping into the realm of death.

On the tenth day of our second month on the ship, he began to froth in the mouth. His eyes rolled.

'No!' I screamed. 'Don't go!'

His body became still. Peace surged through him. Death filled the air.

'No!' I threw my body over his. 'No!'

It has been days now and my friend's body is still rotting beside me, adding a new odour to the already sickening stench of the dark windowless room. One night I decided I could take it no longer.

The sound of weeping coming from some other hold of the ship was also driving me crazy. Our destinies were being chosen for us. I just could not waste my life like this. A board slipped underneath me and I winced with pain. I had lost everything and everyone; there was nothing more to live for.

I broke a piece from the already sharp wood so that it had an even sharper edge, then I drove it into my hopeless heart, embracing freedom from a dreadful fate.



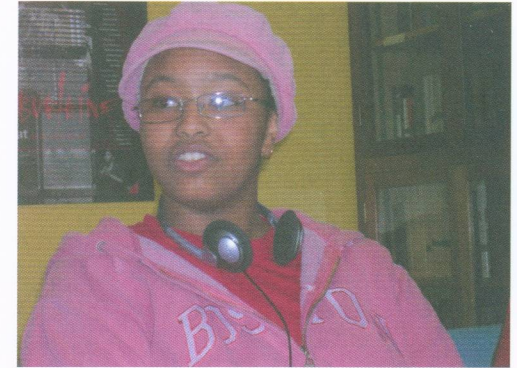
# No, Thank You Sir

Eman Seidi



I remember telling Mother I was going to the market to get some grapefruits. I remember this big man asking to help take me home after my shopping. 'No, thank you Sir. I'll be fine,' I said. Then he pulled up, seized me, flung me upon his horse and covered my eyes.

When he uncovered my eyes, I found myself on the deck of a ship. He chained my hand to this other kid. I tried to force my hand out of chain but it was no use. I was stuck. I started crying and calling Mother.



# Envyng the Dead

Yoliswa Yabantu



'This is good! More slaves to work, more money for me. I will even have a nigga to myself.' The slave master cackles as we are stuffed into the belly of the ship.

I feel alone and scared. There are so many black sweaty bodies, so crowded. I begin to cry.

'Shut up,' the slave master barks, and a whip stings my back.

Some of the people shackled on the racks around me seem dead. I call out to them but they do not reply. Instead, urine trickles upon my stomach from the rack above.

My sister is dead. My brother is somewhere on this ship. But where? I feel rats nibbling on my foot. I try to scare them away but it doesn't work. I begin to envy my best friend who had thrown herself overboard.

# Earthbound

Samuel Ndaa



He suddenly heard a scream in the house. He ran in and saw his sister being captured by two dark men. One of them saw him and came after him. 'Run! Run for your life! As fast as you can,' his sister shouted.

He sprinted across the muddy sand, going as fast as his legs could take him. But it was no use. One of the men gained on him and bound him in chains as strong as a bull's horn.

They threw him onto a ship's deck that had other children crying and struggling to get off. Each time they struggled, someone lashed out with a whip, leaving awful marks on their bodies, till they got the message that they could not escape.

They freed him of his chains and dumped him between two boys. There was another floor above him and he could not even sit. It was dark and the only light was a tiny ray from the outside.

Later on he saw his sister being led down from the deck. Her head was bowed as if they had sucked all the energy from her. He wanted to shout and call out her name. But he dared not, unless he wanted the whip of death on his body.

Two months have now passed and life had not got any easier. In fact, it had become

harder. He had cuts and bruises because of the moving ship, the place stank, the boy on his right was sick, and the boy on his left had died.

On and on, the suffering went, until he smelt fresh air and felt a cool breeze. They handed him to an old man who bought him for a very cheap price. The old man took him home and he thought life was now going to be easier. Still they made him perform impossible tasks and do all the work around the house, with very little food.

He died weeks later. But his spirit continued to roam around the house, helping the other slaves in ways they could not describe, and punishing those responsible for giving him such a hard time.



# Into the Unknown

Daniel Adegbie

I can't believe it's been six months since we left that reeking death ship. I can't believe I've been working on this sugarcane plantation for six months, with only thoughts of Christina keeping me going.

Christina. Her perfectly shaped face, glowing eyes, and smile so luminous you can see it from miles away; a smile that brightens the rags she wears. The way she talks, her gentleness, makes me feel good inside.

We planned to escape from this energy-draining plantation to new pastures. And though our plan was shaky, we went ahead with it anyway.

So, one day, after sunset, camouflaged in the darkness, we sneaked past the guards and dug our way through the fence. Holding each other's hands, we made a dash for freedom, making sure the only sounds we made were those of our beating hearts.

Then I felt a bullet tear into my back.

I fell to the ground. My blood drained onto the field. But Christina pulled me up by the arm. She radiated a certain hope, a hope that gave me strength: the strength of a panther.

With renewed speed, we sprinted into the unknown.

