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## North East Africa meets North East England

Two internationally acclaimed creative writers will collaborate on a homelessness project spanning the North East of England and Africa, at Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Laura Fish, an Orange Prize-listed author and Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Northumbria, will work with Billy Kahora, a highly-respected film maker, prose fiction and script writer, on a range of public engagement, research and student activities this October.

The six week programme – launched during Black History Month – will see the Kenyan-based writer deliver lectures and seminars to BA and MA Creative Writing students. Billy will give readings at Durham Book Festival and there will be a public screening of ‘Soul Boy’, an award winning film that was scripted by him. The film will be shown at Tyneside Cinema – the North East’s leading independent cinema – which Northumbria University is working in partnership with to improve education, support enterprise and entrepreneurship, increase research impact and secure investment. ‘Soul Boy’ will be followed by a Q&A session, led by Laura and Billy.

The research collaboration will include readings and workshops with young homeless people in Newcastle and Gateshead. The findings developed from these activities will generate material for short stories, which will be shared with communities in Newcastle, Gateshead and Kenya.

Themes of home, homelessness, place, and identity run throughout both writers’ creative output and this latest collaboration aims to broaden their research interests and share them with wider audiences.

Laura Fish said: “Billy and I met in 2010 on the Iowa International Writing Programme, USA. Billy is an eloquent and affective writer, deeply political. He deals with reality and his work is felt in the gut. While in the US, I was invited to lead a writing workshop for homeless people in Portland, Oregon. The workshops not only improved the participants’ social skills, increased confidence and motivation, they also increased literary skills.

“I am hoping this new project will reach out to homeless people and provide a forum that will encourage them to create or tell their own stories. The material written by those involved in the workshops can be edited together to produce short stories or longer passages, so that not just one voice will be heard, but many – to assist the homeless to speak for themselves, and to be heard. However hard it may be, it is important for us to listen to those who often go unheard.”

Ahead of October’s events, the two writers will come together in another literary platform. Billy Kahora is editor of Kwani? – a prominent Kenya-based literary journal that reaches a large African, American and European readership. This month the publication will feature Laura’s latest short story, Angry Black Birds, a fictional piece that explores the complexities of interracial relationships and loss.

Laura has more than ten years' experience in broadcast television and radio. She is a prolific writer, her published work including two critically acclaimed novels, *Flight of Black Swans* and *Strange Music*.

Billy Kahora's planned collaboration with Laura and Northumbria University's creative writing programmes follows his recent nomination for the Caine Prize for African Writing – the most prestigious literary award in Africa. This is the second time that Billy, who entered his short story, *The Gorilla's Apprentice*, has been listed for the prestigious prize. The winner of the £10,000 prize was announced in Oxford earlier this month.

Laura said: "I am delighted that Billy Kahora will come to Northumbria University as Visiting Writer. During his stay I am certain he will make a positive contribution to the University and a number of partner organisations in Newcastle.

"I thoroughly appreciate this opportunity to be able to further develop the collaborative research projects Billy and I have been engaged in."

Northumbria University's full-time Creative Writing MA programme is the first of its kind in the North East of England. It is a practical degree, designed for people who wish to become creative writers, as well as for those involved in teaching creative writing, or working in other areas of the writing industry.

For more information about studying English Literature and Creative Writing undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at Northumbria University, visit [www.northumbria.ac.uk](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk).

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