Saying the Unspeakable in East Africa

The aim of this panel would be to discuss how narratives (fiction or non-fiction) raise topics that are central, yet shunned, within east African societies. In their complexity of forms and diversity of languages, east African literatures appear as vectors of transgressions and assertions. A wall of Silence is created around specific taboos and unspeakable realities that are yet part of the writers and readers everyday lives. Whether Silence may be caused by social or religious norms, political expectations or traumas resulting from different kind of violence, throughout eastern African literature, voices appear standing up to this taciturnity. The presence of those silences seems to have enabled, on the one hand, the strength of one central narrative, that can be monitored by a group, a vision or a memory, and which thus generate a feeling of prohibition or rejection, yet, on the other hand it has facilitated the growth of a void which whispering rising voices are claiming as their own. In this newly claimed space, on the fringe of a single (official?) narrative, new points of views are emerging as they are reclaiming the control of their own narrative. Also, the diasporic voices and their role in the process of globalising a “whisper” and making an intimate issue visible on a broader scale could be studied –particularly with their relation with the continent. The discussion and the different contributions could study how narratives progressively try to fill a void by bringing layers to one official narrative and how these stories may become advocate for the disempowered.

- The Phenomenon of Power
- Issues of Taboo and Silence
- Silence and the Embodiment of Truth
- Narratives And Narrativity in the Study of Violence
- Writing in Transgression
- East African and Diaspora Literature
- East Africa and Languages