



## 5<sup>th</sup> Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies Conference, Moi University, 6 – 8 September 2021

### Theme: On Radical Joy

#### Call for Papers

As it has killed tens of thousands of people and traumatized many more in Africa, the Covid–19 pandemic has accented the frailties of the continent’s postcolonial nation–states. Feeble or non–existent health care systems, scientific backwardness, poverty, dependent economies, weak structures of political accountability, and generally, most indicators of underdevelopment, have once again been exposed. But that is not all that the Covid–19 crisis has hauled back to light. It has also returned to view Africa’s resilience in the face of multiple natural and man-made perils – and thus raised the question on how to understand the resilience of the continent’s peoples that is undeterred by earthquakes, floods, locust infestations, HIV and Ebola pandemics, the bubonic plague, rinderpest, terrorist attacks, wars, structural adjustment’s violence, and most devastatingly, corrupt, predatory governance.

The 5th Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies Conference invites papers reflecting on the practices of joy that concretize, symbolize and help to explain that resilience in East African contexts of adversity. We are interested in the circulation of individual and collective joy amidst public peril. We read these pursuits of joy as radical acts of refusal. Refusal of surrender, defeat, unhumaning. While seemingly quotidian, often ephemeral, and sometimes conservative, these acts of refusal are generative for understanding East African modes of insisting the self into being, against all odds. In contexts where, as Audre Lorde would say, we were never meant to survive, East Africans have not only survived, but flourished; squeezing joy out of unlikely sites, sometimes laughing in the face of death, literally.

We welcome critical considerations of what is known about the practices of joy as an everyday imperative in Africa, despite — or perhaps because of — brutal structures, agents and processes of harm across history. Which are these rituals and practices that generate joy as a counterforce to the temporalities of harm, peril and death in East Africa? What genres have been associated with the production and circulation of joy in the region at the different times of crisis? What economies of pleasure, leisure and self-making articulate East African modes of resilience in the face of intractable challenges? How have East Africans imagined new orientations in the face of devastation and despair? How have artists, thinkers and knowledge workers mapped alternative affective landscapes of renewal and hope in response to systems of decay? What does lingering on the collective euphoria of historic moments — such as the respective countries’ independence days, Eritrea and South Sudan’s secessions, or the end of Idi Amin, Daniel arap Moi and Haile Mariam Mengistu’s respective autocracies — reveal about the limits of this radical joy? What does the memory of that affective charge, enable, in fueling future mappings? How does the collective jubilation produced by artistic and sporting victories such as Lupita Nyong’o’s Oscar or athletics world records complicate nationalism’s popular appeal? How do we reconcile the predatory predilection of Pentecostal entrepreneurship with the equally powerful affective renewal produced by charismatic Christianity across the region? What methods lend themselves to archiving such an ephemeral affect as joy? What are the radical possibilities of joy — both individual and collective — in countering the forces of unhumaning most recently underscored by the Covid–19 pandemic? What is the socio-political reach of the erotics of pleasure explored in such genres as East African film, fiction and popular music? How do the temporalities of productivity in neoliberal time devalue the pursuit of joy as a legitimate political quest? What methodological issues does the interpretation of textual and everyday practices of joy in Africa pose?

We invite rigorous, theoretically nuanced reflections on these and related questions. Abstracts and panel proposals responding to one or more of the above questions, not exceeding **300** words, can be emailed to [ealcsc2021@gmail.com](mailto:ealcsc2021@gmail.com) by **30 November 2020**. All abstracts and panel proposals must include paper titles, presenters’ institutional affiliation and status i.e. student/non-student. Please indicate which of the above broad questions your paper is responding to.