

In the panel discussion, it was agreed that humility is needed when exchanging with people from different disciplines. This was certainly the case during the conference, in which all participants were rather open to the knowledge of scientists from other disciplines. Equally important is enough time both for understanding complex relationships in the field and trying to understand each other's disciplines. It was remarked that if as a natural scientists one mixes social and natural sciences, it can be "quite hard to find a job" and that how one frames information is key in order to achieve credibility. To prick a needle into the bubble of academic discourse, I would like to quote one conference attendee, a former Georgian NGO-worker, who said that while she had worked in the field in Georgia, they "were never invited to think too much" and were kept out of the planning processes of the international NGO.

The areas of overlap between natural, namely environmental, and the social sciences continuously gains importance, not limited to, but in particular in the context of unstable national states, financial insecurity and more or less direct dependence on ecosystems and the two essential resources soil and water for livelihoods. Environmental issues can no longer be tackled without considering the social circumstances in which they occur in the Age of Anthropocene, when humanity has become an environmental force. Questions of scale, whether temporal or spatial, should never be neglected in order to achieve accuracy. A core idea that emanated from the discussions was a change in perspective in data collection by furthering the dialogue across disciplinary borders and systematically integrating the emic view of the societies and people in the field in the process.

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## Report: Africa Days 2015 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Ethio-Czech Conference on Africa (Pilsen, 15.-16.10.2015)

■ MONIKA BAUMANOVA AND JAN ZÁHOŘÍK

The conference represents an important stepping-stone in the cooperation of the Czech Centre for African Studies based at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, where the conference was organized, and the Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia. It was also a continuation of a series of previous meetings and an exhibition (20th century Revisited: Relations between former Czechoslovakia and Ethiopia) that had been on show from October 1st to November 30th at the Ethnographic Museum of Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. Africa Days 2015 (2nd Ethio-Czech Conference on Africa) was the fourth event of its kind organized or co-organized by the Centre of African Studies in Pilsen since 2013. Last year, the 1st Central European African Studies Conference was hosted in Pilsen, and later that year, the 1st Ethio-Czech Conference on Africa was co-organized by Jimma University (Ethiopia) and the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen (Czech Republic).

The Africa Days have developed into an important networking opportunity for researchers from Africa and/or working on Africanist issues, predominantly connected to East Africa. This year it was attended by historians, sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists and archaeologists from several institutions including Kisii University, Kenya, Addis Ababa University and Jimma University, Ethiopia, and a number of European universities.

The meeting was opened with a keynote lecture given by Ahmed Hassen Omer, head of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at the Addis Ababa University on Research at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies: Experiences of six decades, 1963-2015. The presenter gave an overview of how the Institute has evolved into its present day form of an outward

oriented centre that attracts international attention and conducts research relevant for the future development of the Ethiopian society.

The first panel incorporated three papers that considered socio-economic factors, gender issues and geopolitics as the driving forces of social change in Africa, drawing on examples from across the continent. While Judit Bagi (University of Pecs) adopted a practical approach to gender mainstreaming strategies in Rwanda, Alemayehu Kumsa (Charles University, Prague) explained how we could understand socio-economic factors as a driving force for the Boko Haram war against the Nigerian State. The presentation of Maurice Amutabi (Kisii University) offered a broad perspective that encompassed globalization trends in West and East Africa and discussed Geopolitics and resource exploitation in Africa.

The following panel targeted developments in Ethiopia. Jean-Nicolas Bach (Sciences Po Bordeaux) reflected on the 2015 Ethiopian election and the Ethiopian right wing, presenting a fresh perspective on the underlying political issues now predetermining the future of the country. Alexander Meckelburg (University of Hamburg) opened a theme that has enjoyed a renewed attention in the recent decade, speaking on slavery and the slave trade in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. He highlighted the fragmented nature of research to date and the need for telling more integrative histories of slavery in this part of Africa.

The last panel of the first day of the conference brought together the underlying causalities between political and social developments as they are reflected in the practical aspects of state-building and power struggle in East Africa. Hohetemisrak Samuel (Addis Ababa University) chose case studies from Kenya and Zimbabwe in his paper on power sharing as a resolution to post-election violence. Aleksí Ylönen (University Institute of Lisbon) reflected on the domino effect that went hand in hand with separatism following international recognition in the Horn of Africa. Finally, Dejene Gemechu (Jimma Univer-



Audience of the introductory panel to the Africa Days 2015 (image: Monika Baumanova, 2015).

sity) opened up the popular topic of gift-giving in social sciences, examining how it is played out in the field of indigenous diplomacy in Borana-Arbore in Ethiopia.

The second day of the conference was launched by a panel that discussed some of the most pressing issues in political and social management of education, health and foreign affairs in East and South Africa in the context of a rapidly globalizing world. Anakalo Shitandi (Kisii University) linked research to teaching in his scrutiny of the dilemma of young universities in Kenya. Jiří Preis (University of West Bohemia), who brought forward examples of Uganda and Botswana, presented an overview of HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan

Africa in the second decade of the 21st century. Alfred Kramer then looked at South Africa in his paper on South-South cooperation in the post-apartheid foreign policy.

The last panel of the conference incorporated multi-disciplinary perspectives on a range of issues relevant to present-day developments in Africa, including archaeological interpretations of pre-colonial architectural heritage, historical examinations of Victorian perspectives on Africa, as well as the long tradition and relevance of Ethiopian studies. Monika Baumanova (Centre for African Studies Basel) and Ladislav Šmejda (University of West Bohemia) contributed a paper on Stone mortuary architecture in Swahili towns, highlighting the relevance of material artefacts, among which stone architecture can be counted, for construction of identities and making claims of social power. Hanna Rubinkowska (University of Warsaw) presented her study on Stefan Strelcyn and the Haile Sellasie I Prize as an example of the Emperor's policy towards Ethiopian Studies. The conference closed with the historical study of Professor Ivo Budil (University of West Bohemia) on William Winwood Reade and the Victorian vision of Africa.

One of the main goals of this kind of conference is strengthening research networks and creating new ones. Addis Ababa University and Jimma University in Ethiopia are crucial partners for the Centre of African Studies in Pilsen. In Jimma, a joint Centre of African Studies was opened this year (by Jimma University and the University of West Bohemia). However, new partner institutions, such as Kisii University in Kenya or the University of Ibadan in Nigeria represent prospective future partner institutions for research, student and staff exchange as well as joint meetings, conferences, and programs.

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