

# REPORT ON THE 8<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AFRICAN STUDIES, VIVA AFRICA 2013, PILSEN, CZECH REPUBLIC

**Kateřina Mildnerov**

During the days of 24th and 25th of October, the 8th annual international conference on African studies - VIVA AFRICA 2013 - took place in Pilsen/Plzeň, Czech Republic. The success that the conference has enjoyed ever since it started in 2006 draws the attention of many reputable domestic and foreign specialists in African studies.

The main organizer, Pilsen based Cultura Africa Association, in partnership with the University of Hradec Krlov and the Metropolitan University Prague hosted lecturers from, among others, Nigeria, the Republic of South Africa, Germany, Poland, Denmark and Hungary.

The opening of the conference was attended by H.E. Franki Verwey, the Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa, and Mr Jaroslav Siro, head of Africa Division of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Apart from the foreign participants, representatives of Czech universities such as the University of Hradec Krlov, the Metropolitan University Prague and Charles University also presented their papers. The conference was organised into five thematic sections and in total 18 scholars presented their contributions. At the end of each section, there was a moderated discussion. The theme of this year's conference – tradition versus modernity – initiated a debate on the modernisation processes that is currently taking place in contemporary Africa and revealed a number of new findings about how the modern and traditional aspects intermingle and influence everyday political and social reality in different parts of the African continent. The Viva Africa conference primarily targeted scientists and university students, but also the general public and enjoyed a high attendance, approx. 60 visitors each day.

On 24th October, the constitutive meeting of a proposed Czech Association for African Studies took place simultaneously with the conference. The main objective of the association is to integrate scholars from different social disciplines and to co-ordinate research in Africa. Prominent Czech specialists in African studies joined the meeting in order to discuss the future of African science in the Czech Republic, a promising discipline with a long tradition and one which has recently enjoyed renewed interest. The establishment of the

association reflects several years of effort of Czech scholars to reunite and support the development of African studies, research and education. Founding members, mostly prominent Czech specialists in African studies, agreed on the objectives, mission and future common activities of the association such as organizing conferences, holding lectures and seminars, continuous publishing activities, as well as submitting suggestions for the improvement of education and research in the field of African studies and supporting the application of the results of scientific research into daily practice. The association currently awaits the election of a chairperson as well as the completion of a detailed strategic plan for the year 2014. Membership in the association is open for anyone with a university degree achieved in the area of African studies or similar, or a person with a direct interest in African studies, or a person that carries out activities in that area or supports the field in any way.

This year of the Viva Africa conference also offered a variety of accompanying cultural activities. The key event scheduled at the end of the first day was a performance of a Ghanaian trio (Marwan Kweku, Charles Mingle and Raymond Niikoi) that was invited to Pilsen in cooperation with the Embassy of Ghana in Prague. The concert accompanied a presentation of African dance carried out by graduates of the local dance group led by Barbora Pítrová (Pilsen). On the same day, a screening of movies from the field of visual anthropology took place in Smetana Hall in the Research library in the County of Pilsen. The Prague based association Antropofest was responsible for showing the movies. Its representative, Adam Spálenský personally introduced the screening and also joined in the discussion that followed. On the first day important guests were invited for a reception dinner which was preceded by a book launch of the proceedings from last year's conference.