

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research project leading to this book has combined many of my study, research and travel interests over the last fifteen years or so. It can be linked back to my MA thesis in Philosophy (University of Hamburg), where I dealt with Ernst Cassirer's philosophical anthropology and its relevance for an intercultural project of philosophy (Kresse 1996); to my MSc thesis in Anthropology (LSE, University of London), where I discussed the *izibongo* genre of Zulu oral poetry and its role for critical discourse in society (revised and published in 1998); and to my ongoing preoccupation with African philosophy which started in 1990, when I was a first-year student of Philosophy and African Studies. In the same year, I had already begun learning Kiswahili while travelling in East Africa, and then studied it for over four years in Hamburg under the good guidance of Sauda Sheikh Barwani. This book is based on my PhD thesis which was examined at the University of London in February 2002. For the period of my postgraduate research, I was registered in the Anthropology Department and also the Africa Department at SOAS.

Fieldwork for this project was authorised by the Kenyan Office of the President (OP/13/001/28C 115/4) and conducted between early August 1998 and late September 1999. It included a good ten-month stay in the Kibokoni quarter of Old Town Mombasa, where I lived in a flat in Nyeri Street. Several short trips to Lamu and Zanzibar were undertaken within the fieldwork period. I was already familiar with East Africa and the Swahili region due to previous visits: for three months in 1990, 1992 and 1993 (with a DAAD stipend for a two-month Kiswahili intensive course in Zanzibar) and for one month in 1995. An HSP3 doctoral scholarship from DAAD, the German Academic Exchange Service, financed the first two years of this project and is gratefully acknowledged. From SOAS, I received an additional fieldwork award, for which I am also grateful. During my stay in Kenya, I was affiliated to the Institute of African Studies at the University of Nairobi and I would like to express my gratitude for that.

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