

## PREFACE

*Haba na haba hujaza kibaba.*

We do not know whether Professor Arvi Hurskainen became a marathon runner due to his fieldwork among the Maasai in the arid conditions of the East African steppe or whether his endurance preceded his career as a multidisciplinary scholar devoted to Africa. We, as Arvi's students, can only try to guess the ultimate source of his persistence.

With this book, we want to pay tribute to Arvi Hurskainen's significant contribution to the field of African Studies. Indeed, African Studies as an academic discipline in Finland owes much to Arvi's efforts, as he is the first Professor named to the chair of African Languages and Cultures in 1991 at the Department for Asian and African Studies, University of Helsinki. As Arvi is now retiring, we invited his colleagues, students and friends, whose scholarly interests partially represent the fields in which Arvi has been involved, to participate in this tribute. We wish to express our warmest thanks to all of you.

In organising the articles, we decided to put them in an order that, in a way, follows Arvi's own career, from anthropology to linguistics and computer science, passing through history and the social sciences. We hope that the diversity of the topics gives the reader an idea about the multiformity of the African continent itself. A detailed picture of the themes of research that Arvi has been involved in can be found in his bibliography on pages xiii–xvi of this publication.

When it comes to linguistics and computer science, we could say that one of Arvi's major missions as a scholar has been to bring African languages into the modern era by applying methods of computer linguistics to the processing of African languages. The only way to treat African languages in an equal manner with European languages is to do it in practice. By creating SWATWOL, a morphological analyser of Swahili, SALAMA (Swahili Language Manager), a comprehensive working environment for manipulating Swahili texts, the spell-checker and hyphenator for Swahili as well as several other applications for Swahili and other African languages, he has inspired and guided many other

scholars around the world to take interest in the possibilities of information technology in the study of African languages.

As an anthropologist, Arvi Hurskainen has conducted distinguished and long-term fieldwork among the pastoral Maasais and the Parakuyos in Tanzania. His research interests have concerned various phenomena among the Maasai pastoral communities, such as spirit possession, rituals and the whole social structure which is based on age-class systems. Arvi's anthropological studies are all marked by the use of explicitly systematic methods for collecting and interpreting data. Some of his studies on the Maasai and Parakuyo are linguistically oriented, concerning formal taxonomies and plant categories. Nevertheless, Arvi Hurskainen's anthropological research is marked by a down-to-earth approach, which stresses the importance of environmental factors in the shaping of the variety of cultures.

In parallel with his major scholarly interests, Arvi Hurskainen has approached many other disciplines such as population studies, philosophy, theology, development studies and history in relation to Africa. This tells us something about Arvi's curiosity as well as about his sense of responsibility as Professor of African Studies.

Human life has endured on the African continent for six million years. However, in world politics as well as in research, Africa has been a playground of shifting ideologies and personal ambitions. Holding the chair of Professorship in African Studies for more than two tumultuous decades must have been an art. If there is any conclusion that we can draw from Arvi's work and message as a scholar, it is that there is no Africa of hasty conclusions. Instead, Africa can only be studied in the long run.

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