

# Sexuality and Gender Politics in Mozambique

**RETHINKING GENDER IN AFRICA**

**Signe Arnfred**



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*For my daughters*

*Anne Julie & Katrine*



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# Acknowledgements

The work on which the chapters of this book are based started thirty years ago, when in March 1981 I was employed as an in-house sociologist at the Maputo headquarters of the *Organização da Mulher Moçambicana* – the OMM, the national women's organization in Mozambique. The idea was that I should assist the OMM in the preparation of an Extraordinary Conference for debating 'women's social problems'. My period of work with the OMM (March 1981 to June 1984, with a return visit for the Extraordinary Conference in November 1984) was decisive not only for development of my knowledge and my thinking regarding women in Mozambique, but also for my general political and feminist orientation. A co-worker, interpreter and personal friend during these early years was Adelina Penicela, then an employee of the OMM secretariat of Maputo province. I remained closely connected to Mama Adelina throughout my life in Mozambique, until her death in May 2008; to me she was somewhere between a friend and a mother (she was ten to fifteen years older than me) and an extra grandmother to our daughters. Mama Adelina was a remarkable woman. Born and raised in Manjakaze in the province of Gaza, she had come to Maputo where at the time of Independence she worked as a market woman. Through Frelimo she had attended alfabetization classes, thus she spoke Portuguese in addition to her native XiChangane. The OMM selected Mama Adelina as interpreter for my work in the XiChangane speaking parts of the country. My relationship with the city of Maputo is closely connected to my relationship with Mama Adelina. Thanks to her I moved with ease and confidence in the *bairro* of Chamanculo, where she lived, and where through the 1990s and 2000s – after Structural Adjustment Policies (in Mozambique the PRE, *Programa da Re-estruturação Económica*) with concomitant pauperization – not many whites would move around. Thus I want to acknowledge the memory of Mama Adelina in this book.

During my years with the OMM I was employed by the Danish Development Agency, Danida. In the second half of the 1980s I did some work in Mozambique for the Norwegian Development Agency, Norad, which made it possible for me to take leave from university and stay on in Maputo, in order to read through the material collected from all over the country during the preparation process for the OMM Extraordinary Conference 1984. These readings and subsequent analysis of the data, facilitated by a research grant from the Danish Council for Development Research (1988-1990), made me keen to return to the matrilineal north of the country, particularly to Nampula province, for proper fieldwork. Eventually the Frelimo/Renamo war came to an end, and it was again possible to travel outside the cities in Mozambique. By the end of the 1990s I again got research money, this time from the Danish Social Sciences Research Council

(1998–2000), allowing me to spend eight months – November 1998 to June 1999 – in Nampula province, mainly in Ribáuè district (inland) and in the coastal town Ilha de Moçambique.

In Ribáuè I worked with Ricardo Limua, who at that time was District Director for Culture in Ribáuè. Ricardo Limua was himself very interested in Makhuwa culture; he suggested himself as a collaborator shortly after my arrival in Ribáuè. He knew all important people in Ribáuè district: traditional healers, initiation ritual counselors, male and female chiefs. He was invaluable as a helper, friend and interpreter, and I want to acknowledge his importance for my work. Also in Ribáuè I stand in debt of gratitude to Salama, a Nampula-based NGO working with community health. The then head of Salama, Dona Michaela da Silva Sale, whom I met through friends in Nampula city, invited me to settle in Salama's small house in Ribáuè town, one of the few brick houses, which had remained standing through the war. Here I got my own room with electricity and access to water, being well looked after by Salama's cook, Esmínio. I also owe thanks to the Danish NGO MS (Danish Association for International Cooperation) from whom I borrowed a 4x4 car – very useful for getting around on the sandy trails of Ribáuè district, and also for helping informants with transport tasks. At one point my car was used as a wedding carriage for bringing the young couple to church.

In Ilha de Moçambique I worked with Maria da Conceição Amade, a friend of Flora Pinto de Magalhães, whom I met through a mutual friend, and in whose house, *Casa Branca*, I stayed through all research periods and later visits to Ilha, always in the same room with a wide view over the ocean and light curtains waving in the breeze. Maria da Conceição was/is a native of Ilha and I got the impression she knew every one of the 13.000 inhabitants of Ilha, or at least the 8.000 men and women, who were proper islanders, those born and bred in Ilha de Moçambique – as distinct from those who had settled on the island during and after the war. Maria da Conceição had a job as a pre-school teacher; she knew everything worth knowing about Ilha's history and culture, and she was a very sensitive, precise and poetic translator. The translation from Emakhuwa to Portuguese of Tufo songs (see Chapter 14 for some of these songs) is her work. I want to acknowledge Maria da Conceição for her importance for my work, and for her friendship.

In Maputo I have a circle of gender scholars and friends with whom I have met over the years, for discussion of my work and their work, and for coffee and gossip in Maputo cafés. Centrally placed in this group are those who are and have been connected to the Mozambique branch of the Women and Law in Southern Africa research project, such as Isabel Casimiro, Maria José Arthur, Ximena Andrade, Conceição Osório, Terezinha da Silva and Ana Loforte. It has been important to me over the years to have this circle of gender scholars as a reference group in Maputo.

From 2000 to 2007 most of my trips to Mozambique, including two shorter fieldwork visits to Nampula province 2003 and 2005, were funded by the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala. I was an employee of this institute from 2000 to 2007, the first six years as a research programme coordinator (the *Sexuality and Gender in Africa* research programme), the last year as Acting Research Director. The years in Uppsala gave me a lot in many different ways (see further in the

Introduction) and I want to acknowledge the generous funding from the Swedish Development Agency, Sida, which facilitated this work – including the travels to Mozambique, and to many other countries and Centres of Gender Studies on the African continent. Towards the end of my stay in Uppsala I received research funding from the Sida Department for Research Cooperation (SAREC) for final writing up on my Mozambique material. This funding was crucial for getting together the bits and pieces of this book, also because it encouraged me to concentrate on this work, rather than on all the other projects in which I tend to get involved.

Individual chapters have been written over quite a long time span. Some have been published before in different versions. Chapter 1 was first published 1988 in *Review of African Political Economy* vol. 15 no. 40; it is reprinted by permission from Palgrave Macmillan, who re-published the paper 2010 in a volume edited by Meredith Turschen: *African Women. A Political Economy*. Chapter 2 was published in 1990 in a volume of writings by colleagues from International Development Studies at Roskilde University, Agnete Weiss Bentzon (ed.): *The Language of Development Studies*, New Social Science Monographs, Copenhagen. Chapter 3 was published in 2000 by CEAN (Centre d'Etude d'Afrique Noir) Bordeaux, in *Travaux et Documents*, no 68-69. Chapter 4 was first published in 2001 in a Swedish conference report: *Svensk Genusforskning i Världen*, the Swedish National Secretariat for Gender Studies, and again in 2002 in *JENdA: A Journal of Culture and African Women's Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1. Chapter 5 was published in 2004 by CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) Dakar, in their Gender Series no 4: *Gender Activism and Studies in Africa*. Chapter 6 was written for *Qaderns d'Anthropologia* no 6, a special issue focusing on bodies, published in 2010 by CSIC (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas) Barcelona. Chapter 10 was published in 2010 in Alex Ezeh (ed): *Old Wineskins, New Wine: Readings in Sexuality in sub-Saharan Africa*, Nova Science Publishers. Chapter 11 was published in 2006 in *Studia Africana* no 17, CSIC Barcelona. Chapter 12 was published in 2001 in Rachel Waterhouse and Carin Vijfhuisen (eds): *Strategic Women, Gainful Men. Gender, Land and Natural Resources in Different Rural Contexts in Mozambique*, Nucleo de Estudos de Terra (Universidade Eduardo Mondlane) and Action Aid Mozambique. Chapter 13 was published in 2007 in *Sexualities*, vol. 10 no. 2. Chapter 14 was published in 2004 in *Lusotopie*, CEAN Bordeaux. Some chapters have been changed only slightly to fit the context of the book, others have undergone more substantial changes. Their character as individual articles – written at different points in time – has, however, been maintained. The years of writing are indicated in brackets alongside the chapter titles.

The woodcuts at the chapter openings were crafted in the early 1980s by artists in Nandimba, Cabo Delgado. They were sold as postcards in Maputo 1983, published by the Mozambique Angola Committee. They are reprinted here with the kind permission of the Mozambique Angola Committee.

Acknowledgements usually include family members. In my case I have three fellow travellers, who have been close to me from day one of this project, thus having followed its ups and downs through all of the thirty years. They are first my friend and *companheiro*, and after fifteen years together also my husband, Jan Birket-Smith, and second our two daughters, Anne Julie (born 1977) and

Katrine (born 1980). Anne Julie and Jan feel as close to Mozambique as I do; the years in Maputo in the early 1980s have been very important for all of us. Katrine was very young when we returned to Denmark, thus she is less connected to Mozambique – but she has become a gender scholar, thus providing a different kind of sounding board for my ideas and concerns regarding this project.

The book is dedicated to my daughters. This book has been a key project of my life over thirty years. So have they. Only they flew from the nest before the book got going. Now it follows.

Signe Arnfred

Roskilde University, January 2011

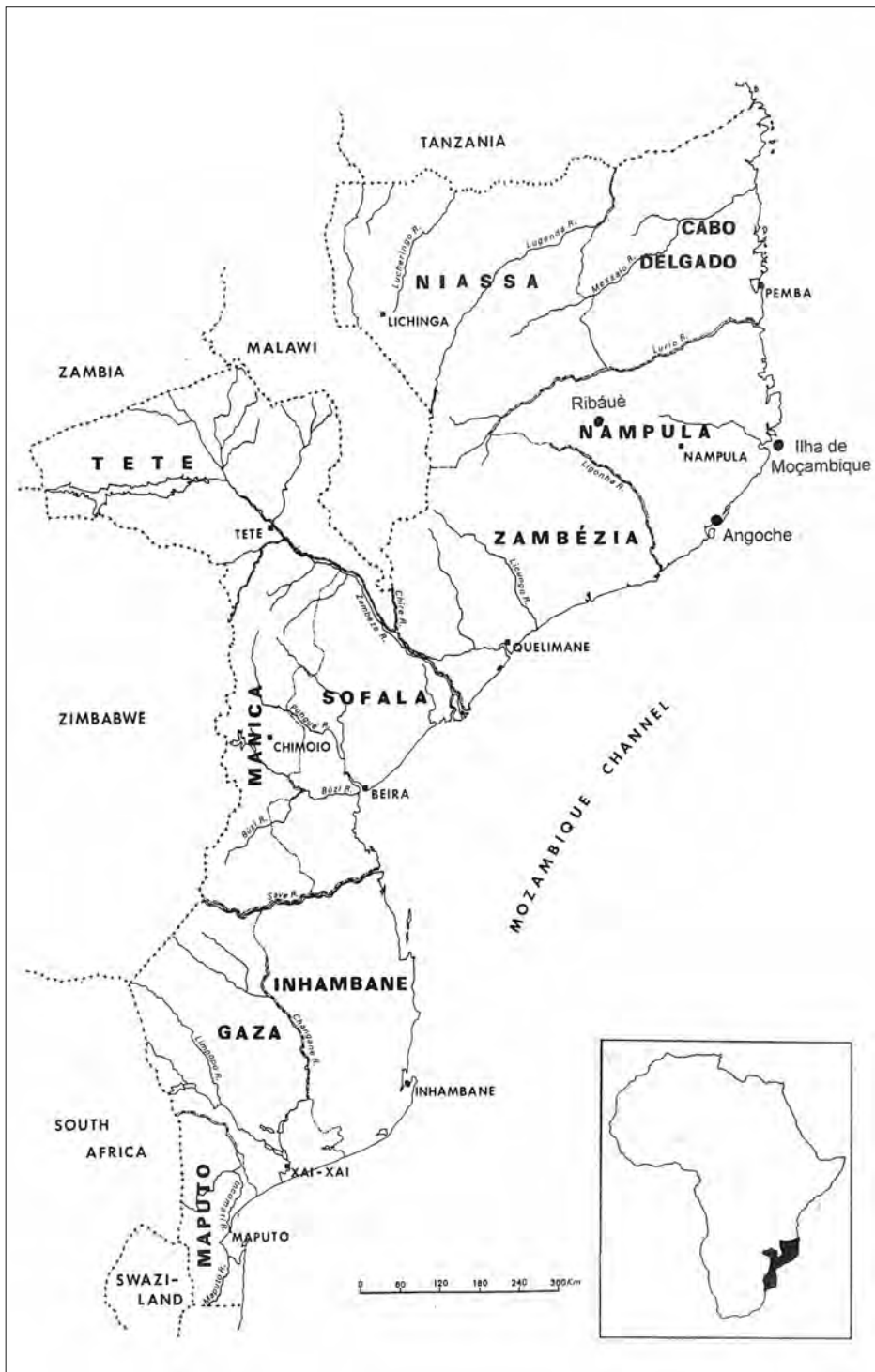
# Glossary

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>aldeia comunal/aldeias comunais</i> | Frelimo-organized re-grouping of people in villages  |
| <i>amante</i>                          | lover, male/female   |
| <i>amantismo</i>                       | informal polygamy (usually with one formal wife and additional informal wives, i.e. <i>amantes</i> )   |
| <i>autoridade tradicional</i>          | traditional authority  |
| <i>bairro</i>                          | part of town   |
| <i>batuqueiro/a</i>                    | man/woman who beats the drum   |
| <i>caniço</i>                          | reed; building material for houses in <i>bairros de caniço</i>   |
| <i>capataz</i>                         | overseer, expression used in colonial times  |
| <i>capulana</i>                        | women's clothing. An often brightly coloured piece of cotton cloth, 1.00 by 1.80 meters. In the coastal culture of northern Mozambique <i>capulanas</i> are sold in pairs, one to be used as a skirt and (part of) the other as a scarf. <i>Capulanas</i> are used by women all over Mozambique. |
| <i>carrama</i>                         | large festive gathering of Tufo groups   |
| <i>chefe da família</i>                | family head  |
| <i>chocalhos</i>                       | rattles, used by <i>curandeiros/as</i> and during rituals  |
| <i>colono/s</i>                        | Portuguese during colonialism  |
| <i>conselheira/s</i>                   | woman in charge of initiation rituals; assistants to woman in charge   |
| <i>curandeiro/a</i>                    | traditional healer m/f   |
| <i>erukulu</i>                         | family unit at household level, literally meaning 'womb'   |
| <i>escudo/s</i>                        | Portuguese coinage, used in Mozambique until 1980  |
| <i>esteira</i>                         | woven mat made of grass/weeds  |
| <i>feitiçaria, feitiçeiro/a</i>        | witchcraft, witch (male/female)  |
| <i>Frelimo</i>                         | <i>FREnte de LIbertação de MOçambique</i> : Mozambique liberation front, in 1977 turned into a Marxist-Leninist Party. Mozambique, since 1994, has been a multi-party country, however with Frelimo still in power.  |



|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <i>halifa</i>                 | in Ilha de Moçambique: the <i>xehe</i> 's deputy – generally a woman  |
| <i>ikano</i>                  | chanted advice, given during initiation rituals   |
| <i>indígena/s</i>             | native/s  |
| <i>ithuna</i>                 | elongated <i>labia minora</i>   |
| <i>kulukana</i>               | traditional healer m/f  |
| <i>lobolo</i>                 | usually translated as 'bride price', but better translated as 'traditional marriage' in the patrilineal south of Mozambique. Without <i>lobolo</i> the ancestral spirits are not informed about the marriage, and the children do not properly belong |
| <i>lobolar</i>                | <i>lobolo</i> turned into a Portuguese verb: to marry through <i>lobolo</i>   |
| <i>machamba</i>               | field   |
| <i>macuti</i>                 | palm leaf thatch for houses   |
| <i>madras, madrasa</i>        | Quranic school  |
| <i>madrinha</i>               | already initiated woman, supporter of initiates during initiation rituals   |
| <i>makeya</i>                 | finely ground flour of <i>mapira</i> . <i>Makeya</i> is used for communication with the ancestors; it is produced and administered by women.  |
| <i>mandioca</i>               | cassava   |
| <i>mapira</i>                 | cereal grass with glossy seeds, something like millet or sorghum  |
| <i>mato</i>                   | bush  |
| <i>mestra</i>                 | woman in charge of initiation rituals   |
| <i>metical/meticaïs</i>       | Mozambican currency after 1980  |
| <i>miropo</i>                 | yeast made of <i>mapira</i> for the production of <i>otheka</i> , ceremonial beer   |
| <i>missangas</i>              | glass beads   |
| <i>msiro</i>                  | ground weed of a certain tree; used for making skin light and smooth. Also used at specific ceremonial occasions.   |
| <i>munumuzana, mulumuzana</i> | man of importance, southern Mozambique  |
| <i>mwali, amwali</i>          | young girl(s) undergoing initiation rituals   |
| <i>mwene, mamwene</i>         | chief(s); in other parts of Nampula province the <i>mwene</i> is called <i>humu</i>   |
| <i>nakhapa</i>                | home-made briefs for use during menstruation  |
| <i>namalaka, anamalaka</i>    | woman/women in charge of initiation rituals   |
| <i>nihimo</i>                 | matrilineal descent, the matriclan  |
| <i>nkhonsikaze</i>            | first wife in a polygamous marriage, southern Mozambique  |
| <i>noivo</i>                  | fiancé  |

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <i>npichi</i>                   | bush plant with oily seeds   |
| <i>olimiha</i>                  | day of mutual work on somebody else's farm in return for <i>otheka</i> and/or food   |
| OMM                             | <i>Organização da Mulher Moçambicana</i> , the national women's organization   |
| <i>otheka</i>                   | ceremonial beer made from <i>mapira</i> and <i>mandioca</i> (cassava)  |
| <i>padre</i>                    | Catholic priest  |
| <i>peneira</i>                  | broad, flat winnowing basket   |
| <i>pilão</i>                    | mortar   |
| PLF                             | <i>Projecto da Lei da Família</i> : family law project   |
| PRE                             | <i>Programa de Re-estruturação Económica</i> = SAP, Structural Adjustment Programme  |
| <i>povoação</i>                 | village, settlement  |
| <i>puxamento</i>                | Portuguese for vaginal lip-elongation  |
| <i>pwiyamwene, mapwiyamwene</i> | female chief(s)  |
| <i>raínha do lar</i>            | queen of the home, housewife   |
| <i>régulo</i>                   | Portuguese for chief, with colonial connotations   |
| <i>Renamo</i>                   | REsistência NAçional de MOçambique, Mozambique National Resistance; opposition army during Frelimo/Renamo war, since 1994 elections opposition party |
| <i>tariqa</i>                   | way, path (Arab); Sufi order   |
| <i>tiquiri</i>                  | Arab = <i>dhikr</i> ; remembrance of God, prayer   |
| <i>unyango, unyago</i>          | Yao name for female initiation rituals   |
| <i>wineliwa</i>                 | 'to be danced to'. Name for female initiation in parts of Nampula province   |
| <i>wula</i>                     | menstrual blood  |
| <i>xehe</i>                     | Arab = <i>shaykh</i> : leader of Sufi order/respected man of learning  |
| <i>zauria</i>                   | 'woman's mosque' in Ilha de Moçambique   |
| <i>ziara</i>                    | large religious gathering  |



# Introduction



Woodcut by Faustino Robati

The title of this book reflects its double ambition: to make a contribution to feminist theorising by rethinking gender (and sexuality) based on material from Mozambique, and to say something about gender politics, sexuality and matriliney in Mozambique. The two ambitions are closely related. The chapters discuss sexuality and gender politics and policies in Mozambique over three decades, from Independence in 1975 to 2005. In doing so, they also investigate ways of understanding gender and sexuality. Gender policies from Portuguese colonialism through Frelimo socialism to later neo-liberal economic regimes share certain basic assumptions about women, men and gender relations. This however begs the question as to what extent such assumptions fit into the ways rural Mozambican men and women see themselves. The book is a discussion of Mozambican gender policies with a focus on the early post-Independence years, but it is also a conceptual discussion – facilitated by post-colonial feminist thinking – of how to understand gender and sexuality taking as a point of departure the lives and views of Mozambican men and women.

The discussions are based on 30 years of work off and on, in and with Mozambique, from full-time work in the National Women's Organization, the OMM (*Organização da Mulher Moçambicana*) 1981–1984, over a series of shorter and longer visits, consultancy work and teaching at the Eduardo Mondlane University during the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s, to periods of fieldwork in Nampula province 1998–1999, 2003 and 2005. The chapters were written over a span of more than 20 years, the first in 1987, the last in 2010. The organization of chapters in the book, however, is thematic, not chronological.

In Part I state gender policies are discussed as seen from below, by rural and urban men and women in different parts of the country. Post-independence state gender policy condemned polygamy and bride price (*lobolo*), but seen from local people's points of view these so-called 'traditional' customs are much more complex. Most of the chapters in Part I are rooted in fieldwork and knowledge from my work in the OMM. Part II zooms in on female initiation rituals, likewise condemned by early Frelimo policies, but very popular with rural women (and men) in northern Mozambique. Female initiation rituals are described and analysed from different viewpoints. The chapters in this section are mainly based on data material from the Makhuwa, the largest ethnic group in northern Mozambique. Part III deals with implications of matriliney. In the northern half of Mozambique the kinship systems of the dominant ethnic groups are matrilineal. This means that close to 40 per cent of Mozambique's population live under conditions of matriliney. What are the implications of matriliney for gender relations, for family structure and for ways of being women and men? In the coastal areas of northern Mozambique matriliney coexists with Islam. Parts of Part III investigate, how this mix works out in practice.

The book is concerned with empirical subject matters: gender policies and politics in Mozambique is the overriding theme, with focus points on particular – from a policy point of view – problematic areas, such as female initiation rituals and implications of matriliney in northern Mozambique.<sup>1</sup> At the same time the book is a discussion of different analytical approaches, mapping a

<sup>1</sup> Female initiation has been condemned by political powers, and matriliney – if acknowledged at all – is considered difficult.

struggle to find appropriate ways of understanding gender and sexuality in the country. In this struggle, aspects of post-colonial African feminist thinking have proved particularly helpful, thus some chapters may also be read as introductions to aspects of post-colonial African feminist thought (see Chapters 4 and 10).

Regarding gender policies/politics it is argued throughout the book that even if economic policies have shifted in Mozambique from Portuguese colonialism, over Frelimo socialism to donor-driven neo-liberal approaches, conceptions of gender and sexuality have remained much the same. Discrepancies between state policies and men's and women's lives have thus remained. Regarding female initiation rituals it is a main argument that these rituals have been systematically misunderstood as indications of women's subordination in a hierarchy of gender. The chapters show that the rituals have little to do with hierarchies of gender, but lots to do with hierarchies of age, and that female initiation is better understood as focal events for regeneration and maintenance of female community, identity and power of certain kinds. Through initiation rituals young girls are transformed into grown-up women. Sexual capacity building is an important element in the proceedings; the rituals confirm and celebrate Makhuwa femininity. Regarding matriliney it is a main argument that this kinship system – at least in the form it takes in northern Mozambique – does make a difference for women, and that the conventional anthropological position of matriliney just being a matter of uncles replacing fathers is untenable. Man/woman gender power relations differ from gender power relations under conditions of patriliney, partly because of matrilineal inheritance to land, partly because of a double-gendered system of chieftaincy: every *mwene* (male chief) has at his side a *pwiyamwene* (female chief) particularly responsible for matters regarding links to the invisible world. The matrilineage embraces the dead as well as the as yet unborn, and those in charge of such connections are mainly women.

It is an overriding argument throughout the book that development policies on gender, which do not take into account local understandings (and local realities) of gender, sexuality and gender power relations, have little chance of success. Mainstream development policy, frequently based on gender-and-development conceptualizations, sees African women as subordinated and oppressed. In matrilineal northern Mozambique such assumptions do not fit realities very well. Rather than starting off from fixed assumptions, development policies for women should take into account the actual positions of power, which women do command, and go on from there.

## Periods and types of fieldwork: historical overview

When I first arrived in Mozambique in 1979, as a member of a group visit arranged by the Danish Association for Solidarity with Mozambique, I had already read about President Samora Machel's explicit concern for women's emancipation. Samora Machel had been leader of Frelimo's successful struggle against the Portuguese colonial power (Frelimo = *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*, Mozambique's Liberation Front) which had led to Mozambique's Inde-

pendence in 1975. He was then President of the People's Republic of Mozambique. One Samora-quote in particular from the First Conference of the National Women's Organization, the OMM, in 1973 spoke to my feminist heart. The quote goes like this: 'The liberation of women is a necessity for the revolution, a guarantee of its continuity and a condition for its success' (Machel 1973) (See photo 1.2). I wanted to work in a country where the President could talk in this way about women.

In Denmark I had been a part of the New Women's Movement since its early days in 1970. The Women's Movement had emerged as a part of the Student's Movement and of the New Left, but also in opposition to implicit and explicit patriarchal ideologies and male domination in these movements, as well as in society at large. Reading Samora Machel I understood him as being a part of this feminist struggle, and in 1979, together with my partner, Jan, and our two-year-old daughter Anne Julie, I was heading for Mozambique. Jan had his own socialist agenda. As an architect and a physical planner he had been working in Chile in the government of Salvador Allende, and he was ready for more experience of work in a socialist country. Returning to Denmark from Chile in 1973 he worked as a journalist at a left wing journal, and as such (speaking Spanish, close to Portuguese) he was sent to Portugal from 1974 to 1975 in order to cover the Portuguese anti-fascist revolution. I had finished my degree in sociology and was employed as an assistant professor at Roskilde University, but I was given research leave in order to go to Portugal to study the involvement of women in the Portuguese revolution. In a Portuguese newspaper we read about the need for all kinds of professional competence in Mozambique – after Independence most Portuguese nationals had left the country, and the newly independent state was in desperate need of qualified labour power. We began to consider a move to Mozambique.

Before embarking on a work contract of several years, however, we wanted to get a feeling of what the place was like. This was the background for our participation in the 1979 journey to Mozambique arranged by the DK-Mozambique Solidarity Association. The result was clearly positive. Mozambique at that point, barely four years after Independence, was infused with a spirit of enthusiasm and hopes for the future. During this trip we visited ministries, factories, cooperatives and communal villages, *Aldeias Comunaís*. We strongly felt the energy and enthusiasm, released by the fact that colonial oppression by the Portuguese had come to an end at last. We also saw how sometimes the political fervour of Frelimo cadres and the Soviet-inspired line of Frelimo politics – kindled by ideas of huge state farms operated by effective labour power usefully assembled in communal villages – were somewhat out of tune with lives and dreams of the rural peasant population.

We moved to Maputo with very little furniture, lots of books and our two daughters (the youngest, Katrine, only six months old) the following year. I was determined to get myself a job in the OMM (Jan had employment in a Government institute of physical planning). This, however, turned out to be complicated. The OMM was a political organization, and foreigners (*cooperantes*) would typically be working in Government ministries, not in political organizations. When finally I succeeded in arranging a job in the OMM, it was in roundabout ways through an agreement between the Danish Agency for International



Family photo, Maputo 1982; Bairro Chamanculo, where Mama Adelina lived. From right to left: Jan, Jan's mother (who was visiting from DK), Mama Adelina, who worked with me in the OMM, Anne Julie, Terezinha (Mama Adelina's daughter), Katrine. I am behind the camera. The car is our beloved Niva.  
(Photo: Signe Arnfred)

Development Aid (Danida) and the Mozambican ministry for collaboration with foreign donors. A high-level official in this ministry was interested in sociology and in women; she knew that the OMM had recently been tasked by Frelimo to organize an Extraordinary Conference for discussion of 'women's social problems', i.e. issues of so-called tradition, such as lobolo, polygamy, initiation rituals etc., which Frelimo found difficult to reconcile with their modernist socialist programme. Seen from the point of view of this official I would be useful as a person who could support the OMM in this regard. She managed to convince Danida that they should pay my salary, while I was working with the OMM.

### *My work with the OMM, 1981–1984*

My actual work situation in the National Secretariat of the OMM was weird in many ways, particularly in the beginning, when nobody really knew what I was supposed to be doing. The OMM Secretariat was housed at three floors in a high-rise building in one of the previously affluent parts of Maputo, full of large villas built for upper-class Portuguese people. The OMM building and the Frelimo building next door were (and are) the only high-rise buildings in this area, the Frelimo building taller than the OMM building (which the OMM shared with the National Youth Organization, the OJM). I got an office and a typewriter, but instructions regarding my work were unclear. Thus I set off on some initial investigations in the immediate surroundings, interviewing working women

<sup>2</sup> A *bairro* is a part of town; in Maputo most Mozambicans lived (and live) in the *bairros de caniço*, ie parts of town where houses are build of reeds (*caniço*).



in Maputo factories and *bairros*.<sup>2</sup> In the Greater Maputo area at that time there were many factories, several with a majority of women workers, such as cashew nut processing factories and textile factories. Since then Mozambique has been deindustrialized due to World Bank Structural Adjustment Policies in the 1990s. Later I also went to agricultural cooperatives, state farms and *Aldeias Comunaís* in rural areas of Maputo Province, interviewing women.

In 1980, at the time of our move to Maputo, Frelimo was busy discussing an overall plan for industrialization of Mozambican agriculture. Kindled by images of Soviet-type state farms, the Party envisaged that this change could be completed within a span of ten years. The OMM 1976 Second Conference documents were full of talk of the Socialist Family and *o Homem Novo* (the new man), meaning the new human being. Frelimo meetings all over the country started and finished with the shouting of slogans such as *abaixo lobolo*, *abaixo poligamia*, *abaixo ritos de iniciação* (down with brideprice, down with polygamy, down with initiation rituals) – but clever Party officials of course were aware that ways of life of a peasant population did not change just by shouting slogans. In Party headquarters – or anywhere else – there was far too little empirical knowledge regarding ways of life in various parts of the country. After all Mozambique is quite a big place – 800,000 square kilometres, which is bigger than any single EU country, something like Germany and France together – embracing many different groups of people with different lifestyles, talking different languages. It is generally considered that 13 major African languages are spoken in the territory known as Mozambique.<sup>3</sup>

For all of these reasons the Party wanted the OMM to undertake grass root level investigations and discussions, leading up to an Extraordinary Conference not yet scheduled in terms of date and year. The OMM was waiting for more specific instructions on what to do. The OMM at that point saw itself as a women's organization, but also as 'an arm of the Party', whose function it was to transmit Party politics to Mozambican women, not the other way round. Thus they were waiting – and in the meanwhile I was carrying out my more or less individual investigations, however in the name of the OMM, and with travel conditions and local support (such as interpretation from local languages to Portuguese) supplied by the organization. By 1982 word came from the Party that investigations of women's lives in a core Frelimo area, the northern province of Cabo Delgado, were requested. Cabo Delgado was the province where the armed struggle against the Portuguese had started in 1964, and thus the province with the longest standing so-called 'liberated areas', areas which during the war had been captured from the Portuguese, and where – even before formal Independence – Frelimo had been the force in power.

Thus in September 1982 I set off for Cabo Delgado in order to carry out much the same form of investigations, which I had undertaken in the south of the country: In the chosen villages and cooperatives etc. ten women would be selected in each location for a life-story kind of interview; this would be supplemented with public meetings and group discussions. Selections of locations as well as selection of individuals were undertaken in cooperation with local OMM

<sup>3</sup> At Independence it was decided that Portuguese – albeit the colonial language, but also the only language potentially shared by all in Mozambique – should be the national language. Swahili, the *lingua franca* of East Africa, is only spoken by a tiny minority in northern Mozambique.

staff, with the aim of getting as much diversity (and approximate representation) as possible. This experience of interviewing peasant women in Cabo Delgado became decisive for my later thinking and analysis regarding women in Mozambique. In the reflections on analytical approaches below I shall explain in greater detail what actually happened, and why this experience became so important.

### *The OMM Extraordinary Conference preparation*

Then again some time passed. The Party was busy with preparations for the 1983 Fourth Frelimo Congress, and only after the successful completion of the Frelimo Congress, at long last, in August 1983, the official campaign for the Extraordinary OMM Conference (now scheduled for April 1984) was initiated.<sup>4</sup> Information Minister Luis Cabaço gave the opening speech, stressing the importance of going out, this time, not to teach, but to listen and learn.

The conference preparation campaign was modelled after the recently completed campaign preparing for the Fourth Frelimo Congress, in terms of an explicit bottom-up approach. Questionnaire material (i.e. loose lists of topics to be discussed) was prepared at central level – this was where I could contribute with my sociological background, by now supplemented with a fair amount of knowledge regarding living conditions and family life in south and north of Mozambique. Brigades were educated at central level, subsequently to be sent out to all ten provinces of Mozambique for instruction of local OMM staff regarding how to conduct meetings, which topics to discuss, how to take notes etc. At province level new brigades were educated for instructing OMM staff at lower levels. Administratively Mozambique at that time had ten provinces with seven to eighteen districts per province; meetings were held in every single district of the country, in cooperatives, state farms, factories, villages and *bairros*. Altogether several thousands of meetings all over the country, with an average of 200 public meetings and 200 group interviews per province. The meetings were fora for discussion of the issues at stake – *lobolo*, polygamy, initiation rituals, etc., supplemented with group interviews on selected issues conducted by local level OMM staff. The idea was to collect data not only regarding how customs worked in relation to initiation, polygamy etc. but also regarding women's and men's attitudes to these customs, and how they could possibly be changed or replaced.

The whole Conference preparation process lasted well over six months – from August 1983 to March/April 1984. During this time everybody everywhere discussed the conference issues. It was like being in the midst of a social movement. I remember one Party veteran, with whom I worked in Maputo province, saying that these were the best political meetings she had ever attended in her entire political career. For a while issues of polygamy and *lobolo* were topics of discussion among people queuing at bus stops in Maputo. I participated in all phases of the campaign, travelling to the provinces for participation in meetings at all levels. The public meetings at district and lower levels were particularly successful. Often you started with a smaller crowd, but as people passed and listened, they too wanted to join, and before long you ended up with big crowds

<sup>4</sup> More about this meeting and about the conference preparation process in Chapter 1.

and meetings to be continued the following day, because of the long list of issues to be debated. Different viewpoints were frequent, and heated debates between young and old, and between women and men. The meetings were organized by the OMM, but everybody was invited to take part, and Frelimo, as well as the OMM, was particularly keen that the debates should not be among women only.

After discussions and taking of reports at district level, the material/the findings were written up and analysed in preparatory conferences at district level, subsequently to be sent to the provincial level, where provincial conferences were held for discussion of the findings and deliberations on suggested policies in one field or another. Finally all data ended up at the National Secretariat of the OMM in Maputo, as background material for the OMM General Secretary's Report, to be read to the delegates of the Extraordinary Conference.

### *The OMM Extraordinary Conference, November 1984*

At the very last minute the conference, scheduled for April 1984, was postponed for half a year, to November. Evidently the Frelimo leadership, who was used to be in control, felt uneasy regarding what was taking place in this national social movement, into which the conference preparation had developed. The postponement worked as intended: when at last, in November 1984, the OMM Extraordinary Conference took place it was indeed closely controlled. A few days before the start of the five day conference – delegates had been travelling to Maputo from all over the country – Samora Machel announced, that as the President of Frelimo and of Mozambique he was going to not just deliver the opening and closing speeches, but to preside over proceedings during the entire conference. I recall how everybody in the OMM felt very honoured by this message. However, in reality it was nothing short of a sabotage of the conference. During the OMM General Secretary's presentation of the conference document, based on analysis of the masses of data gathered in the conference preparation process, the President incessantly intervened with his own stories and interpretations. In this way the presentation of the document took much longer than expected, and fifty-one conference delegates, wanting to speak from the floor supplementing or responding to the conference document, never got a chance. Instead of a forum for discussion of the conference preparation findings, and for future politics of the OMM, the conference became yet another platform for the President's often misogynistic and moralistic points of view.

My initial respect for Samora Machel's feminist positions had long since vanished. At the OMM conference he expressed views regarding women, which were so narrow minded and out of place that even the OMM leadership – otherwise generally Party soldiers par excellence – felt a need to voice a different opinion. The issue of struggle was the theme of *mães solteiras* – unmarried mothers. When the OMM General Secretary reached this point in her report, the President jumped to his feet: 'To be an unmarried mother is a disgrace,' he exclaimed, 'the concept, the very phenomenon must be abolished. In my department I want no single mothers.' He proceeded to announce an investigation in the entire state administration for identification and expulsion of single mothers. This was where the OMM put its foot down, suggesting in very polite tones in the concluding document from the conference that unmarried mothers should be helped, rather than castigated (Arnfred 1985).

The story of the preparation of the OMM Extraordinary Conference juxtaposed with the absurdities of the President's performance at the Conference itself shows – to me – in a nutshell some of the basic dilemmas of gender politics in Mozambique: on one hand you have tremendously rich resources in a population with very diverse cultural lives, and with an interest – so clearly demonstrated in the conference preparation process – to discuss, debate and develop their ways of life; on the other hand you have a powerful ruling Party, and a President, who in spite of his Minister's opening speech regarding bottom-up approaches, proved unable to, and uninterested in, listening and learning – except from himself.

This description of the process of my work in the OMM is important for several reasons. First because my thinking about issues discussed in subsequent chapters has been influenced by these events. Decisively of course by the very experience of meeting and listening to women north and south in Mozambique, pinpointed during my trip to Cabo Delgado, to which I shall return below, but also by the entire OMM Extraordinary Conference preparation period with its political contradictions. Second, because the empirical material, on which some of the chapters in this book are based, has been produced in the course of the conference preparation process. After the Extraordinary Conference all material was archived at OMM headquarters in Maputo. At that point I (with husband and daughters) had returned to Denmark and resumed my job as Roskilde University. I managed however to arrange money for going back to Mozambique in order to read through the OMM conference material and to write on that basis. This resulted in a number of articles, some of them included as chapters in this book.

### *Subsequent rounds of fieldwork 1998–1999, 2003 and 2005*

Other chapters draw on subsequent rounds of more normal sociological/anthropological fieldwork. From 1984 to 1992 the war in Mozambique between Frelimo and Renamo forces (Renamo = *Resistência Nacional de Moçambique*, oppositional army, later oppositional party) made fieldwork outside major towns impossible. After official peace agreements in 1992 and general elections in 1994 (the first in the history of Mozambique) it took another few years before people in Mozambique felt confident that peace had come to stay, and that immediate post-war fears of the war starting all over again were unfounded. Towards the end of the 1990s it again became possible to do fieldwork in Northern Mozambique. Ever since the early 1980s I had been keen to return to the north of Mozambique in order to have a closer look at women's positions under conditions of matriliney. My own Cabo Delgado experience and the OMM material had pointed to interesting differences between the patrilineal south of Mozambique as compared to the matrilineal north, and I was longing to get a possibility for making investigations in the province of Nampula, the heartland of the large, matrilineal (and matrilocal) Emakhuwa speaking population of northern Mozambique. This possibility emerged when in 1998 I received a research grant, enabling me to spend eight months (Oct 1998 to May 1999) in Mozambique. During this period I undertook fieldwork in two different locations in Nampula Province, the inland district of Ribáuè, and the coastal towns of Ilha de Moçambique and Angoche. My original idea had been to compare

women's lives under conditions of matriliney in social settings characterised by different religious influences: Christianity in the inland areas versus Islam at the coast. Northern Mozambique coastal areas represent in many ways an extension of Swahili culture, with specific characteristics due to colonial history and the special combination of Makhuwa matriliney with Sufi Islam. Ribáuè, on the other hand, is characterized by the Catholic church as implanted by the Portuguese, a few old-time Protestant missions, and an astonishing post-war influx of new African (Evangelical) Churches.

For various reasons I changed my mind regarding this idea, ending up putting less emphasis on religion. This fieldwork (and subsequent shorter field work periods in Ribáuè 2003 and 2005) resulted in some chapters, discussing female initiation and various aspects of matriliney in the inland setting, and in Chapter 14 investigating the unique coastal northern Mozambique combination of matriliney and Islam, seen from women's points of view.

### *The Nordic Africa Institute: Theoretical inspirations*

From 2000 to 2006 I worked at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, as a research programme coordinator for a programme on 'Sexuality, Gender and Society in Africa'. The stay in Uppsala gave me a unique opportunity for collaboration with gender researchers in Africa, the aims of the research programme being 'to promote and enhance conceptual and methodological discussions on issues related to studies of sexuality and gender in Africa, and to encourage research' (Sexuality, Gender and Society in Africa brochure, 2004). This new job (during which I was on leave from university) came in handy at a point when I was at a loss regarding analytical inroads for coming to grips with apparent contradictions in my data material – such as the contradiction between the ways in which initiation rituals were described by the OMM, and the ways in which they were perceived by participating women. I had a clear feeling of conceptual tools from my feminist and sociological/anthropological background being insufficient for proper in-depth analysis of my material and experience from northern Mozambique. I felt that what was at stake was not just concepts for analysis of this particular data material – but also that my data material pointed to shortcomings in mainstream understandings of gender, which it would be very important to identify, in order to enable reconceptualizations of other issues relating to sexuality and gender – reconceptualizations which would be important for feminist analysis as such, not just for knowledge about women in Mozambique.

My collaboration with, and reading of works by African feminist researchers provided me with some of the conceptual tools I had been looking for. Particularly in terms of reconceptualizations of concepts like 'women' and 'gender'. One of the characteristics of Second Wave feminist thinking, which I found it increasingly hard to deal with, was the foundational idea of 'the universal subordination of women'. In the New Women's Movement back in the 1970s we had been convinced that male domination/female subordination was a global phenomenon. It did not occur to us that gender relations might be different elsewhere in the world, and that we could possibly learn about different, more balanced gender relations by studying other cultures. I was familiar with the work of Chandra Mohanty and a few other post-colonial femi-

nist scholars, but it was only now I realized that also African gender scholars, such as Ifi Amadiume and Oyèrónké Oyewùmí had criticized Western feminist ways of looking at 'women' and 'gender', pointing to the impact of colonialism and Christianity in terms of introducing European gender concepts and gender power relations into African societies (Amadiume 1987, 1997, Oyewùmí 1997). In pre-colonial days, according to their analysis, conceptions of gender and gender relations in Nigeria had been very different, but with mission and colonization norms had changed.

Oyewùmí's critique of Western partriarchalizing interpretations of African cultures hit the nail on the head for me: every time Europeans saw a throne they expected a man to be sitting on it. Most Nigerian personal names, unlike most European ones, are not gender specific. Nevertheless, long lists of Yoruba rulers going back in time, were read as 'lists of kings', even if – as it later turned out – some of the rulers had actually been women (Oyewùmí 1997, 83–91). In her native Yorubaland, Oyewùmí says, the subordination of *wives* has nothing to do with the wives being women, but everything to do with their position as strangers and outsiders to the *lineage* (in this case a patri-lineage) into which they are married. Hierarchical relations are based on being inside/outside of a particular lineage, much more than on being a 'man' or a 'woman' (Oyewùmí 2002). Thus the Second Wave feminist notion of gender hierarchies (male domination/female subordination) being foundational just doesn't fit these African settings.

At this point in time, to me Ifi Amadiume, Oyèrónké Oyewùmí and other post-colonial African feminist writers were essential sources of inspiration. They not only criticized Western notions of gender, they also suggested alternative ways of thinking about issues of men and women. The Nordic Africa Institute programme was, however, not just about gender, but also about sexuality. In my data from Mozambique there was a lot about sexuality; in Cabo Delgado I had come across the unexpected importance of initiation rituals for the women, and also during the Extraordinary Conference preparations, discussions of initiation rituals were often very heated and intense. Very few of the African feminists, however, on whose work I could draw for general rethinking of concepts of gender, made any reference to sexuality.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding reconceptualizations of sexuality I thus had to look elsewhere. My thinking about sexuality in a post-colonial African setting sent me out on journeys into the long colonial history of European perceptions of sexualities in Africa. Supporters on this journey were other post-colonial scholars with a historical touch and focused on sexuality, such as Anne McClintock (1995) and Janice Boddy (1989, 2007) – as well as an expanding network of African gender scholars attached to the *Sexuality, Gender and Society in Africa* research programme. There were also a few important conferences, 'Sex and Secrecy', organized 2003 at Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg by IASSCS (International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society) and a much smaller workshop convened in Uppsala by myself 2002.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The only exception at this point in time was Swazi/Zimbabwean feminist scholar Patricia McFadden, who as early as 1992 had taken up issues of sexuality (McFadden 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Papers from this workshop were later published in Arnfred 2004a: *Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa*.

## Reflections on analytical approaches

When I started in Uppsala in autumn 2000 my search for different conceptual tools and new analytical inroads had been going on since 1982 when I had been interviewing women in Cabo Delgado.

The women of Cabo Delgado greatly impressed me by the way they recounted events during the war. These women had taken part in the war against the Portuguese colonial regime; they had transported war material over long distances, they had cooked food for the guerrilla soldiers. The war had changed their world and opened their horizons. The women had learnt new things and experienced different social relations, including relations of gender. Based on their war experience they now questioned a number of issues, which they wouldn't previously have been thinking about. Their critique of the ways in which Frelimo had changed – from guerilla warfare to running a one-party state – was devastating, as was their critique of OMM, having disappeared to the city in the south (Maputo), forgetting about the women in the north. I was very impressed by the insight and eloquence of these women. What puzzled me, was the fact that these same women defended the female initiation rituals. As far as I knew – my knowledge being based on OMM writings – these rituals were oppressive and humiliating, confirming women's subordinate position in society: 'The initiation rites implant in the woman submission and total dependency of the man. The woman is conditioned to submit herself and gradually to assume self-inferiority' (OMM 1977, 90). The OMM and Frelimo campaigned against the practice of these rituals. How come then, that these very conscious and critical women would defend them?

In general terms the official OMM understanding of women's positions corresponded fairly well to my own preconceived assumptions about women in Mozambique. From my engagement in the New Women's Movement, I was well acquainted with the socialist theory of women's emancipation, which had inspired Frelimo's approach to women's issues. According to this line of understanding, women in Mozambique were oppressed under age-old patriarchal traditions, but since Independence they had a unique possibility for liberation, emancipation and development, guided by Frelimo's socialist ideas.

The contradictions in Cabo Delgado led for me to a serious destabilization of all preconceived ideas regarding women's emancipation. If these strong and eloquent women were defending rituals, which according to the general theory of women's emancipation were seen as oppressive and degrading, something had to be wrong somewhere! I felt that the very gender thinking I had adhered to – from Simone de Beauvoir onwards in the New Women's Movement – had to be reconceptualized and rethought.

The Cabo Delgado experience sent me off on two different lines of inquiry: of meanings and of interpretations. First I had to find out more about what these rituals were actually about: What happened during the rituals, and why did the women consider them so important? What was for them the *meaning* of the female initiation rituals? This was the first line of inquiry. Along the second line of inquiry I was asking questions regarding the ways in which these rituals had been *interpreted* and understood by outsiders, such as Christian missionaries, colonial administrators, European anthropologists, and the socialist state. Thus

the first line of inquiry was about Mozambican women, while the second line was basically about myself, and the lines of thinking developed in the culture and history to which I myself belonged.

### *Inquiry line one: searching for meanings*

In my search for meanings, of course I asked the women. Their answers, however, were not very helpful. Asking why they found it so important to continue performing the rituals, they gave this type of reply: 'We cannot give up the initiation rituals. They are our tradition.' 'We will have to go on with the rituals. It is an education of our daughters.' When I asked if they did not find the female initiation rites humiliating and oppressive, their faces made it evident that they did not understand what I was talking about. Oppressive? 'In these rituals there is nothing very big or very special. It is only us dancing and singing throughout the night until the morning comes.'

Searching for meanings invariably involves interpretations. On the outlook for local meanings, however, your interpretations have to be very open, flexible, alert and sensitive to context, atmosphere and emotions. What you want to grasp may very well lie beyond the words. And sometimes the odd answers, the ones that make no immediate sense, may provide the clue to understanding. This was what happened to me in Cabo Delgado. Among all the answers along the lines of 'it is our tradition', there was one woman who said: 'The drum is our only opportunity for playing.' What was this about? I had expected to hear about oppression and humiliation, and these women talked about drumming and dancing.

Eventually it dawned on me that the initiation rituals were both: the younger women are subjected to trials, while the older women have fun. For the young initiates it is all about discipline and codes of behaviour, their capabilities are tested, sometimes they are castigated and anyhow they are bossed around by the older women. At the same time, however, for the grown up women, i.e. those who have already been through the initiation rituals, for these women each new celebration of initiation rituals is an new and cherished occasion for fun and games with other women, in a special ritual space where special rules apply.

In the early 1980s the initiation rituals were supposed *not* to take place, and travelling as an employee of the OMM, there was a limit to what the women would show me. When in 1998–1999, and later in 2003 and 2005 I returned as an individual researcher, the times as well as my position having changed, I had the chance to be present during several celebrations of initiation rituals. At these occasions I got a very strong impression of the division between on one hand the subdued and scared young women with downcast eyes and on the other hand the rowdy older women, behaving without restraint.

### *Inquiry line two: interrogating interpretations*

Interrogating interpretations is a very different activity, compared to searching for meanings. For finding meanings I had to listen to people on location, taking part in relevant activities while trying to grasp and understand their ways of life. For unpacking interpretations, however, I had to go back into history, digging into my own Western/Christian cultural baggage with adjoined stereotypes and implicit assumptions. What I found there was not very nice.



The story about European views of African female sexuality is rather grim: Patriarchal, racist, ethnocentric and misogynist. When researching into this field I was taken aback by the derogatory and misogynist attitudes vis à vis African women (Arnfred 2004c), sometimes even shared by feminists (cf. Mohanty 1991). I came to see Christian/missionary gender morals and hypocrisy as a major factor in the whole setup. In Christian contexts, sexuality in general and female sexuality in particular, is equivalent to sin, immorality and so on: Eve being the carrier of primordial sin. In Mozambique the general attitude of the Portuguese colonial power, closely connected to the Catholic church, was a strong condemnation of the female initiation rituals, because of their focus on the development and education of female sexuality; female initiation rites were considered 'immoral and offensive to the human nature' (Medeiros 1995, 5). The attitude of the Protestant missions was equally dismissive. An early and foundational work on southern Mozambique, first published 1912 by Henri Junod of the Presbyterian Swiss Mission, bears evidence to this. According to Junod it is bad enough to face explicit education of male sexuality; but to confront education of female sexuality is beyond the pale.<sup>7</sup> There is in some of the missionary accounts regarding female initiation an unpleasant mixture of fascination and disgust – a mix which even today characterises some Western attitudes to African female sexuality.

Even worse was the realization that Frelimo's attitudes to women and female sexuality were not only rooted in socialist classics on women's emancipation, but also very much in Christianity. Samora Machel had been educated in the Swiss Presbyterian Church – the so-called Swiss Mission (*Missão Suíça*) – a fact which often transpired in his marathon speeches. On several occasions, in the long speeches in which he excelled, Machel spoke in strongly condemnatory terms about women who have children with different men, and about prostitutes who smell like rotten meat (Machel 1982). The Christian fear of female sexuality is barely hidden. And even if the guiding documents of the OMM do not directly speak negatively of female sexuality, they do not talk about it in any positive terms. In the documents from the second OMM conference in 1976 everything related to the female initiation rites is bad and problematic. On the whole women in so-called 'traditional-feudal' society are oppressed and exploited, and this position is seen as confirmed and maintained through customs and rituals, among which the initiation rites loom as most hideous. 'These ceremonies and institutions, which during centuries have been practised in traditional-feudal society, placed the woman in a position of inferiority and passivity' (OMM 1977, 90). Because of the initiation rituals 'the woman is violated and traumatized, transformed into a passive being without capacity for initiative' (ibid., 91). The document goes on to list the horrors and humiliations to which the girls are subjected in the course of the initiation rituals. It was evident that the OMM/Frelimo perception of the female initiation rituals, widely practised especially in northern Mozambique at the time of Independence, had much more to do with the Christian view of African women and African sexuality than it had with the meaning and implications of the initiation rites as experienced by the women themselves.

<sup>7</sup> Junod's work is discussed in several chapters, particularly in Chapter 3. See Chapter 2 for Catholic/Protestant positions regarding women's sexuality.