Introduction
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. At the same time the book is a discussion of different analytical approaches, mapping a

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1 Female initiation has been condemned by political powers, and matriliney – if acknowledged at all – is considered difficult.
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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 matriline 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 matriline just being a matter of uncles replacing fathers is untenable. Man/woman gender power relations differ from gender power relations under conditions of patriline, 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 Moçam-bique, 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 Comunais*. 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
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

2 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 built of reeds (caniço).
in Maputo factories and bairros. 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 Comunais 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 lobo, abaixo polygamy, 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.

For all of these reasons the Party wanted the OMM to undertake grassroots 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

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3 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.
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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. 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

4 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).
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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.


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 Moçam-bique, 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 Ribáuê, 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. Ribáué, 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 Ribáué 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 re-conceptualizations of other issues relating to sexuality and gender – re-conceptualizations 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 re-conceptualizations 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-
nists 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.5

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 2002.6

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5 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).

6 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 guerrilla 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 a 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.7 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 Suíca) – 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.

7 Junod’s work is discussed in several chapters, particularly in Chapter 3. See Chapter 2 for Catholic/Protestant positions regarding women’s sexuality.
Sections and chapters – overview

In most of the chapters in this book I discuss both meanings and interpretations, applying a reflective approach to my own conceptualizations, while also wanting to say something about the subject matters at hand.

Part I – Conceptions of Gender and Gender Politics in Mozambique
This first section consists of five chapters, which all in one way or another deal with gender policy in Mozambique, as linked to understandings of gender. Chapter 1 – ‘Women in Mozambique: Gender Struggle and Gender Politics’ – is also the first-written chapter in the book, published in 1988. In this chapter I try to come to grips with the contradictions between Frelimo/OMM gender policies on one hand, and women’s concerns as I saw them on the other, especially in the north of Mozambique. Elements in the analysis are the following: (a) As long as the OMM saw itself as ‘an arm of the Party’, it would not be able adequately to represent the women, who were organized in the OMM. (b) It was my feeling – corresponding to my findings – that unlike what I had expected before arriving in Mozambique, women had not only a lot to gain from the process of development/modernization – they had something to lose as well. (c) Against Frelimo’s preaching that gender struggle is a characteristic of ‘the petty bourgeoisie’, I argued that gender struggle is not only a predictable outcome of social change – when gender power relations have been destabilized compared to previous norms, as it had happened in the north of Mozambique during the liberation war, it is to be expected that men as well as women will fight to maintain new positions, or to reestablish old positions, whatever the case may be. Gender struggle is indispensable in the process of change of gender relations. How could Frelimo, who believed in the necessity of class struggle for changing power relations of class, presume that power relations of gender could change softly and smoothly without struggle? (d) I also found that processes of development/modernization without concomitant gender struggle most likely would result in enhanced power positions for men, again especially in the north. The political tradition of which Frelimo was a part (socialism/communism) was/is strongly androcentric, and also the state as an institution favours male power. Thus Frelimo’s political programme of modernization, while seemingly gender neutral, would often in reality support male gender power.

The second chapter (written in the late 1980s) ‘Notes on Gender and Modernization: Examples from Mozambique’ is somehow programmatic for my later work on issues of gender in Mozambique. Actually this chapter introduces all of the themes developed in this book: it has a long analysis of initiation rituals, north, centre, south; an analysis of different economic structures in different parts of Mozambique; passages on implications of different kinship systems (matriliny/patriliny) in north/south of Mozambique, and an analysis of implications for women of the different religions: Christianity (Catholic/
Introduction

Protestant) and Islam. The chapter was written on the basis of my participation in the OMM Extraordinary Conference preparation process, and also on the basis of the OMM archive, i.e. the data material gathered from all over the country during the Conference preparation process.

Chapter 3: ‘Family Forms and Gender Policy in Mozambique’ (written also in the late 1980s) is likewise based on a mixture of data from my own investigations and data material from the OMM archive. In this chapter I go through the OMM material related to family/marriage. Quite a lot of the topics discussed during the OMM Extraordinary Conference preparation period actually belonged in this category: lobolo, polygamy, divorce, early marriages. The chapter goes into these issues, primarily lobolo, polygamy and divorce, discussing them with a focus on differences between matriline (north) and patriline (south). Issues are seen from women’s points of view, and in relation to the proposed New Family Law – a legal project which had been in the pipeline since very early post-Independence days, but which by this time (late 1980s when the chapter was written) had not yet got off the ground. In 2000, when the chapter was first published, the Family Law – now slightly revised – was again discussed in Parliament, backed by active lobbying from various Mozambican women’s NGOs. The New Family Law was finally passed by the Mozambican parliament April 2003\(^{10}\). The guiding question in the chapter on ‘Family Forms’ is the following: How does a unified Family Law, based on a notion of gender equality, work under conditions of diverse realities? The chapter discusses some of the unexpected consequences of this political project, noting that in the process of modernization under the political ideology of gender equality, ideology becomes nicer to women, but reality becomes harsher. This is particularly true in the northern, matrilineal parts of the country, where the law’s push for nuclear families – as opposed to the previous extended families based on sister-brother bonds and uncle-nephew relations – is likely to make women’s situation more precarious and to undermine female positions of power in extended family settings.

Three different insights worked as inspiration for Chapter 4, ‘Simone de Beauvoir in Africa: Woman – the Second Sex?’ namely the following: (a) the similarities, from women’s points of view, between liberal/capitalist and socialist/communist types of development/modernization. Economic ideologies may differ, but the outcome, from women’s points of view, is much the same. (b) Simone de Beauvoir universalizes women’s subordination, in ways which are duly critcised by post-colonial feminists like Chandra Mohanty, Ifi Amadiume and Oyèrônkè Oyewùmí. I wanted to discuss and elaborate this kind of critique. (c) From African feminist points of view motherhood has a social position very different from the one it is given in mainstream feminist thinking – and by Simone de Beauvoir. The chapter was provoked by the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of de Beauvoir’s important 1949 book: *The Second Sex*. It is one thing to see de Beauvoir as an important historical figure, another thing (in my view) to hail her as a contemporary theorist of feminism. It was the latter position, quite prevalent in the celebrations, which provoked me.

Finally Chapter 5, ‘Conceptions of Gender in Colonial and Post-colonial

\(^{10}\) See more on the Family Law in Chapter 5.
Discourse’ brings together lines of thought in other chapters in Part I, connecting conceptions of gender with gender policy. A major reason for my focus on concepts and re-conceptualizations is my conviction that concepts are important, and that different lines of thinking do make a difference, also in politics. The point in this chapter is, however, that in spite of radical and dramatic changes in overall Mozambican politics, from Portuguese colonialism, over Frelimo socialism, to donor-driven neo-liberal economic policy – the concepts of gender and connotations attached to gender have remained fairly stable. Each different regime has launched its politics as a radical break with the immediate past – but seen from women’s points of view (and particularly as seen from women’s positions in the matrilineal North) there is a clear line of continuation from colonialism over socialism to World Bank market economy. This chapter is not based on the OMM material, but on work in the Portuguese archives in Lisbon, reading Boletim Geral das Colônias and other similar publications. It is also based on political documents and speeches from the socialist Frelimo period as well as from the liberal, donor driven, market-economy period, when Frelimo is still in government, but when socialism has gone.

Part II – Night of the Women, Day of the Men: Meanings and Interpretations of Female Initiation

In this section all chapters deal with different aspects of female initiation rituals, some of them written some time ago, others more recently. I struggled for a long time to find a proper analytical approach to the material. I was confused, I think, because of the widespread contamination of concepts regarding sexuality, the ‘thick fog of miscomprehension, stereotypes and other misleading constructions’ as Marc Epprecht has called it (personal communication). My attempts to conceptualize sexuality in African settings pushed me backwards into European theories of knowledge, and into rather nasty racist, sexist and misogynist assumptions and ideas, underpinning seemingly straightforward notions of man, woman, sexuality. I came to understand why at that point in time (early 2000s) African feminists seemed to refuse to deal with sexuality at all. The field was simply too heavily charged with an overload of colonial preconceptions, still alive and kicking long after they were presumed dead.

I have named the section ‘Night of the Women, Day of the Men’ after important events during my fieldwork in Ribáuè 1998–1999. On several occasions I was present during ceremonies of initiation and at other ritual occasions, during which the most intense and holy moments took place in the dark of night, lit only by a few candles, with drumming and dancing and falling into trance all headed and monitored by women. These aspects of everyday life, which generally took place at night, were never included in development programmes. It was as if, in the light of day, other rules applied and other forces governed, even in the same locations and with the same people involved. Government programmes of development take place in broad daylight. This is when the men of Frelimo, of the local government – and also of the Catholic/Protestant churches – take over. Oyéronké Oyèwùmí says something about vision being the privileged sense in Western culture – Europeans speak of knowledge as illumination, knowing as seeing and truth as light. ‘A concentration on vision as the primary mode of comprehending reality promotes what
can be seen over that which is not apparent to the eye; it misses the other levels and nuances of existence’ (Oyéwùmí 1997, 14). In contrast she points to hearing as the more important sense in many African settings. Her observation fits my own experience in Ribáuè. When night falls and when Europeans go to bed – this is when a different life takes over. As an example, long sections of Chapter 7: ‘Moonlight and mato’ take place at night (mato is Portuguese for bush). This chapter is a descriptive account of one of the sessions of female initiation in Ribáuè anno 1999, during which I was present. This chapter was written in 1999, shortly after returning from fieldwork in Ribáuè. Description was no problem. The problem was the analysis. What did all this mean – and most importantly: how could an analysis of female initiation contribute to the re-thinking of gender and sexuality, which I found pertinent and necessary?

The chapters on female initiation in this section are written (and rewritten) at different points of my struggle with analytical approaches. Three different analytical approaches have been applied. The first one is my initial analytical approach, also applied in most of the chapters in the first section of this book, with a focus on male/female gender power relations. The analysis takes a point of departure in a critical deconstruction of pre-conceived notions of male dominance/female subordination, and a conviction that gender power relations should be investigated, not assumed. Similarly – in line with the analysis of Chapters 1 and 2 – modernization and economic development are seen as part of an implicit and partly invisible gender struggle in favor of male positions of power, to the detriment of previous female positions. Further, from this point of view, the persistence of female rituals of initiation are seen as expressions of resilience vis-à-vis increasing male privilege. Chapter 8 ‘Wineliwa – the Creation of Women: Initiation Rituals during Frelimo abaixo Politics’ is mainly based on OMM material and written with a focus on male/female gender power relations.

This analytical approach worked well, to a certain extent – but it didn’t capture the aspects of embodiment and sexuality, also very prevalent in female initiation. For this reason, inspired by Judith Butler’s concept of performativity and Foucauldian thinking on bodies, I decided to try out another approach: an analysis of the ritual proceedings, following a set of distinctions suggested by Sandra Bartky. This happens in Chapter 6 ‘Feminism and Gendered Bodies: On Female Initiation Rituals in Northern Mozambique’. To me it was an interesting experiment to look at my data from this somewhat different angle, but the approach did not really produce the breakthrough in understanding I was looking for. Thus I returned to my previous sources of inspiration, the field of African feminist research, where in the meanwhile studies of sexuality had started to emerge (Tamale 2003, 2005 a & b, McFadden 2003, Pereira 2003, Nnaemeka 2005 and others). The third approach, applied in Chapter 9 ‘Female Initiation Rituals and the Coloniality of Gender’, is based on post-colonial feminist lines of thinking. The expression ‘the coloniality of gender’ is borrowed from Latin-American feminist philosopher Maria Lugones, who builds on the work of Oyérònké Oyewùmí among others. Somehow, however, she takes Oyewùmí’s thinking further, in terms of saying that gender as such – the very concept, the very idea as applied in global South – is a product of colonization. In the context of this logic, such things as rituals of initiation cannot be understood with current concepts of women and gender; in the context of this logic,
female initiation is not (just) about the precise and goal-oriented creation of adult Makhuluwa women (as different from notions of natural biological growth) but also about the manifestation and recreation of a powerful female universe; in the context of this logic, thinking gender might be something about thinking social forces, powers and patterns, including – in the Makhuluwa case – the invisible world. Chapter 10, the final chapter in Part II, ‘Situational Gender and Subversive Sex?’ doesn’t deal directly with initiation rituals, but being concerned with reinterpretations of so-called African culture from feminist points of view, introducing and discussing the work of a number of African feminists regarding reconceptualizations of gender and sexuality, it elaborates on and puts into context the post-colonial feminist approach which (with Maria Lugones) I have called ‘the coloniality of gender’.

Implications of Matriliny in Northern Mozambique

My initial experience from 1982 of gender power relations working differently in northern Mozambique was confirmed by later investigations. Because of the to me so obvious difference – from women’s points of view – between patriliny in southern Mozambique and matriliny in the north, I was very surprised to find, when by the mid-1980s I returned to Denmark and to my normal life as a university teacher, that so little had been written on matriliny in Africa; very little anthropological literature, and even less from a feminist perspective. I tried to find out why this was so – and to some extent my experience in this endeavour was parallel to my experience (reported above) of asking questions regarding interpretations of sexuality. I found that pre-conceived assumptions play a very big role, even in social science, and that in studies of matriliny the assumption of male dominance/female subordination as the ‘normal’ state of affairs had been the background onto which any kind of research findings had been mapped. Chapter 11 ‘Male Mythologies: An Inquiry into Assumptions of Feminism and Anthropology’ reports these findings.

Further along the lines of investigation into meanings and interpretations, as reported in ‘Reflections on analytical approaches’ above, I tried to find out, particularly through my studies in Ribáuè, what life was like in this matrilineal society, from the point of view of the women. One of the findings was that patriliny and matriliny are different things (for instance depending on patterns of residence) and that gender power relations may be changing, while inheritance to land still follows maternal lines. My concern in Chapters 12 and 13 has been to identify female positions of power, in a kind of implicit polemic against the assumptions of male dominance/female subordination, which I had found dominant in other studies of matriliny. One of the early findings was that the world in Makhuluwa context goes beyond the day-to-day visible world. It also includes the ancestors who have died, and the children yet to be born: men may have an upper hand in the visible world, but women hold the key to the world beyond. This double world is reflected in the double power system of the mwe ne and the pwiyam wene, the male and female chiefs, the hidden female power structure also making these societies resilient to change. The colonial power and later Frelimo only intervened in relation to the male power; they never saw the female counterparts. Initially my 1998–99 fieldwork had been planned to be shared between inland (Ribáuè) and coastal locations (Ilha de Moçambique and
Looking for female power positions I soon found food and land. Land is a source of food, and as such it is necessary for all men and women. Land is conceived as plentiful: ‘we people are few in numbers compared to the vastness of the land’ as they said in Ribáuè (cf. Chapter 12); land is the basis of life. For this reason land must be provided for those who come to the community from the outside: ‘They need to produce and eat like we do’. Land is like the air you breathe; to think of land as a commodity is an alien idea in rural areas of Ribáuè district – even if this idea is coming closer in the vicinities of Ribáuè town. In Chapter 12, ‘Ancestral Spirits, Land and Food’, I operate with a ‘logic of subsistence’ (with ‘life’ as the ruling principle) as distinct from a ‘logic of the market’ (where the ruling principle is ‘money’). This chapter gives examples of the ways in which the ‘logic of the market’ is encroaching in the Ribáuè area (including examples from the neighbouring district of Mecuburi), spokespersons in favour of the market logic are not surprisingly young men. Not surprisingly, because subsistence logic and female power seem to go well along, or put differently: Female power positions fit well in a context of subsistence logic. This is quintessentially the case regarding control of food as a source of female power. It thus is not by accident that both Chapters 12 and 13 focus on food. Control of food is crucial in a subsistence setting, and this control is in the hands of women. Women control food, women control sex, and women control offspring; children belong to the mother’s line, and men are positioned through their relations to women. In Chapter 13, ‘Sex, Food and Female Power’, I elaborate on sex – parallel to cooking – as an area of female capacity and expertise.

In Chapter 14 the location shifts to coastal town Ilha de Moçambique – and to a very different matrilineal setting. My interest in this chapter has been to investigate the co-existence of matriline with Islam: the coastal populations have for centuries been Muslim. I found the co-existence to be very peaceful, and Islam – in the form of Sufi orders or brotherhoods (tariqas) – very open to Makhluwa gender relations. Sufi tariqas is the traditional and still prevalent form of Islam at the coast, even if it is challenged by other, more orthodox editions (Wahabism), boosted in recent years by funding from Saudi Arabia. The chapter focuses on the coastal dance group culture, using Tufo dance groups as a prism through which to see matriline and Sufi Islam from women’s points of view. I found matrilineal male/female leadership structures to be reflected in the setup of local Sufi orders, and this plus other aspects of Sufi order life to be reflected in (or even taken over by) the dance groups. In the dance groups the dancers are women, and men in leadership positions are put there by women and/or through their relationships with women. This far the dance group structure follows matrilineal patterns, even in the context of Islam.

Conclusion

Overriding concerns in all chapters are issues of conceptualizations, and of seeing things from women’s points of view. The two support each other, in as far
as ‘seeing things from women’s point of view’ in all phases of the fieldwork process has pointed to the insufficiencies of existing conceptualizations, and pushed me off, as described, along two different lines of inquiry. One of these has been the searching for meanings in customs and culture, the other has focused on investigations of implicit assumptions in existing interpretations. Nevertheless, beyond and across these conceptual, and also by implication political concerns, I am also deeply fascinated with the cultural wealth, abundance and diversity of rural Mozambique. It is my hope that beyond conceptual discussions and polemics also some of this fascination will transpire, at least from some of the chapters.