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LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1 25
Participant's age at recruitment, occupation, age at demobilisation, length of service

TABLE 2 31
Participants involvement in active combat and military rank

TABLE 3 48
1960 Civil Code, Tigray Family Code and Revised Family Code (2000)

TABLE 4 53
Example 1: Repertory grid of female ex-combatant-constructs and rating

TABLE 5 54
Example 1: Repertory grid of female ex-combatant-Constructs elicited

Table 6 56
Example 3: Non ex-combatant woman: Constructs and rating scale

Table 7 61
Example 4: Non ex-combatant woman: Constructs and rating scale

Table 8 61
Example 4: Non ex-combatant woman: Constructs and rating scale

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic organisation
EDORM	Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defence Force

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although there is increasing awareness about the role that girls and women play in fighting forces in conflicts around the world, there are still few gender-based analyses of the differential experiences of men and women who have been involved in military units. Demobilisation programmes are complex process in which ex-combatants, through gaining acceptance in communities, finding new livelihoods and becoming a part of decision-making processes, establish civilian lives for themselves.

The contribution of women as fighters in the liberation struggle against Mengistu's Derg regime is almost legendary. It is widely regarded that fighter women were strong, if not stronger, than the men, and played a critical role in the success of the movement. Women's associations emerged in tandem with the development of the Tigrean movement and the movement along with an explicit agenda for addressing women's equality, which was considered a cornerstone for the liberation of the society as a whole.

Within Tigray, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) set up a counter-government, and organised health and education and rehabilitation systems for the population. With respect to the position of women in society, the TPLF was responsible for initiating number of reforms within its counter-government addressing marriage, access to education and land tenure reforms, intended to address the mechanisms by which gender inequality were sustained. This in turn acted as a mechanism for the mobilization of women, who clearly identified their own emancipation in the agenda of the struggle.

This brief study captures the demobilization and reintegration experiences of a group of women fighters, all of whom were recruited as children and demobilized as adults. The methodology employed enabled the researchers to explore how being a fighter had impacted upon women's constructions of themselves as 'women'.

Within a small sample, it traces the movement of a group of women from a time when they were children, through their entry to fighting forces and the

impact that the militarisation and politicisation they experience in that setting has on their lives. Their identity and experiences as fighters have become central to their current identity and it is through this lens that they view and experience the civilian world.

At the point of demobilisation and reintegration, women found that the values, socialisation experiences and expectations they had inculcated during their fighter years, as women, were at odds with the traditional feminine values of Ethiopian society. They had to make some adjustment within themselves in order to reduce the level of conflict they experienced with that society.

The women, however, refused to compromise their internalised beliefs about their competence, ability and rights to participate in an equal society. Through the analysis, we can see the influence of fighter women on the political context in Ethiopia, and the dynamic impact of women's political and military participation on a gradually evolving political system in the post-conflict years. Although women feel frustrated personally, their ongoing resistance and challenges to the social and political system means that the host society has been 'pushed' by them, as they have been pushed by it. At an individual level, it is an unequal battle and women struggle economically and personally within this system.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Girls and women in armed conflict

Although there is increasing awareness about the role that girls and women play in fighting forces in conflicts around the world, there are still few gender-based analyses of the differential experiences of men and women who have been involved in military units. Females have been active participants in military units throughout the 20th and 21st century. In the period 1990–2002, female child soldiers were present in fighting forces in 54 countries across Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Middle East.[1] Adult female soldiers are represented in significantly more countries again. The lack of visibility of female fighters in both academic literature and in public awareness is striking. It is possibly due to the fact that cultural conceptions of 'female' as nurturing and life-giving are the antithesis of concepts synonymous with conflict, such as of aggression, violence and destruction. Yet women's biological differences through their reproductive functions means their needs and experiences within contexts of conflict are different to men's. In addition, socially constructed gender norms, expectations and socialisation patterns means that the violent behaviours demanded by war are frequently in conflict with gendered expectations of 'femaleness'. A question explored here is 'how do these biological and social factors impact on female participants in armed conflict, demobilisation and reintegration?'

Military forces are hierarchical, power-infused institutions. Women's position within the power structures of military forces varies enormously from one conflict to another. Females enter fighting forces in many different ways, including active recruitment, volunteering, abduction or gang pressing.[2] In some countries, women choose involvement in armed forces as a career. In forces such as the Israeli armed forces, women are regarded as highly competent and respected fighters. Within Africa, women have been active participants in many conflict zones. African women's participation in conflict has a long history. Cases have been recorded of female fighters in the 18th and 19th centuries in the African kingdom of Dahomey, now Benin. Mazurana et al note:

> Dahomean culture revered its female warriors as superior to male forces. Girls who trained as warriors followed a code of celibacy to keep them free of emotional ties and potential restrictions associated with pregnancy. To maintain the strength of the king's female forces, fathers were to report every 3 years with daughters between the ages of 9 and 15, with the most fit selected for military duty. Slave girls were enlisted and carried weapons and gear into battle.[3]

This is relevant to contemporary analysis in capturing the position of women in fighting forces both as warriors and forced conscripts. In the recent past, women have been involved in conflict zones such as Angola, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea and Ethiopia, amongst others. The status of women within the fighting forces of these conflict zones has differed enormously. In northern Ethiopia, within the rebel forces of the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF), women have been highly regarded and respected as fighters and Tigrean women have historically been involved in active combat. In other conflict zones, such as the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, females are abducted and forced into a position of sexual slavery and arguably serve as breeding machines for a new generation within the rebel community. Females within fighting forces typically perform non-combat tasks that are gender stereotypical for women in their society such as preparing food, cooking, cleaning, and being porters. In many contexts, women are used as 'comfort women' or 'wives' for sexual services. Women also participate as fighters. Females may occupy multiple positions simultaneously, such as 'fighter' and 'wife', rendering them powerful in one role and powerless in another.[4] There are no figures available to indicate how many women enter fighting forces as minors and 'grow up' as fighters.

Many accounts examining gender issues in armed groups, demobilisation and reintegration stress the physical and sexual vulnerability of females, particularly girls, in conflict zones. Issues important to women such as reproductive health issues generally receive little medical priority or attention in combat zones. In addition to the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV, some accounts report many adolescent girls' menses cease because of malnutrition and trauma,[5] forced sex can result in abdominal pain, cervical tearing, and infection, and complications during child-bearing can have long term repercussions on women's and their infant's health. Little is known about the incident of abortion in conflict zones but anecdotal evidence suggests it one strategy used as a means of birth control in contexts where women may not be able to assert significant control over their fertility. Recently, research has begun

to examine specifically the issues facing girls and women post-conflict, and this raises issues regarding the importance of considering gender in demobilisation, reintegration, development and peace-building.[6]

Gender issues in demobilisation and reintegration

In an analysis of demobilisation programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, Kees Kingma has defined demobilisation and reintegration as "a complex process in which basically each of the ex-combatants has to find a new civilian life, and re-establish *roots* in society" He makes a distinction between social, political and economic reintegration. *Social reintegration*, he argues, is the process through which the ex-combatant and his or her family, feel part of and accepted by the community, *political reintegration* refers to the process through which the ex-combatant and his or her family become part of decision-making processes, and *economic reintegration* is the process through which the ex-combatants household gains its livelihood. In short, "The long-term objectives of the reintegration process are to enhance economic and human development and to foster and sustain political stability, security and peace."[7]

In general, there is a significant lack of attention to gender issues in official demobilisation and reintegration programmes in post-conflict contexts.[8] For example, one disarmament and demobilisation programme in Mozambique gathered no data on how many women were linked to soldiers and what subsequently happened to women linked to the rebel movement.[9] In Angola, thousands of boys were formally demobilised compared to zero girls, even though there was systematic evidence that large numbers of girls had been abducted and forced to be part of the Angolan armed forces.[10] Furthermore, in Liberia, the plight of girls in the rebel National Patriotic Front of Liberia was ignored in demobilisation programmes as the rebels did not readily release girls. Male combatants left the rebels and demobilised, leaving girls to fend for themselves.[11] In circumstances where females have been demobilised as part of national disarmament and demobilisation programmes, De Watteville[12] has argued there has been little attention to or understanding of the specific issues facing female ex-combatants. This includes issues such as identifying women, targeting women as 'family units' with their children and partners rather than merely as individuals, addressing female health needs and sensitisation to the particular issues of discrimination and difficulties of community acceptance. She highlights that it is often not possible for women to return to their communities of origin, particularly if they have children or have been repeatedly sexually abused and stigmatised. Women also face different challenges to men in

economic reintegration because of lack of education, training, skills, and lack of access to credit and childcare facilities. Women frequently face institutionalised discrimination because of the lack of rights to inherit housing or property, thus leaving them socially and economically vulnerable. Many female ex-combatants prefer to resettle in cities rather than to return to rural communities of origin as the socialisation they have experienced as part of a military unit makes it difficult for them to accept to return to traditional gender roles in a rural community.

There is very little empirical information to draw on which gives any accurate reflection of how successfully female ex-combatants reintegrate. A survey conducted by GTZ interviewed 128 ex-combatant wives in Uganda. It found that community resistance to the women was resolved either by women leaving during the first few months, or if they stayed, of women being finally accepted.[13] Issues impacting upon acceptance include whether or not women were involved in committing atrocities. De Watteville also refers to the impact of demobilisation on women in the host community, an issue that is rarely examined. Demobilisation is frequently characterised by the return of a large number of men to the employment market, which can push women to more marginal jobs. This impacts on their socio-economic position by creating a negative demand for women's labour. Demobilisation can also have broader repercussions for women:

> Unemployed, demobilized young men, socialized to violence and brutality during war, are more likely than other to form gangs, particularly in urban areas and can pose a constant threat to the security of women and children. The threat of men in the army generally involves instilling an aggressive masculinity, generally linked to misogyny. This can include visiting prostitutes as a demonstration of male virility and forcing women to cook and clean for them.[14]

She notes that domestic violence of men against women and women against children increases in war-torn countries. Furthermore, for women who were combatants themselves, their emancipation can trigger domestic violence. Female ex-combatants may also find that they reject the values and patriarchal gender roles of their home community. In some conflicts, a desire to participate in the revolutionary process is a key part of women's motivation to become engaged with a rebel movement.[15] In such cases, they identify broader political liberation with the liberation of women but "unfortunately, in many cases when peace comes female ex-combatants see the cause for which they fought—their liberation—being forgotten."[16]

This monograph seeks to examine the process of engagement, demobilisation and reintegration of female ex-combatants who entered military units as youth (those younger than 24). Many demobilisation and reintegration programmes overlook issues of gender, and often render women and their particular experiences in returning to communities invisible. Women and their constructions of self and their social/economic/political world are presumably changed as a result of their experiences as combatants. Yet they often return to a society where women are still tied to traditional roles. This study sought to examine whether the changes wrought in female ex-combatants' self-view and world-view placed them in either a respected/empowered position, or in a position in conflict with broader society. It focuses on women who entered fighting forces as youths, that is, less than 24 years.

Terms such as 'youth', 'minor' and 'child' are often used interchangeably, and frequently overlap. The term 'youth' generally refers to individuals aged 16–24 years, although it is culturally relative. In Ethiopia for example, the term 'youth' can refer to males up to the age of 30 years if still living with family.[17] The term 'minor' and 'child' are often used synonymously to refer to individuals under 18 years of age, or in some legal contexts, 'minor' can refer to children aged 14 years or under. A number of international protocols exist which prohibit the recruitment of individuals under 18 years of age in fighting forces. The Optional Protocol To the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, advocates ending the recruitment of children and youth under 18 years for participation in armed forces. ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182 and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child also advocate against the use of children as soldiers. A commonly accepted definition of a 'child soldier' is:

> Any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other than as purely family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.[18]

To a large extent, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which fuelled much protective legislation for children, has been widely criticised in many non-Western contexts for its highly protective language; its notion of childhood as a period of vulnerability and dependency; and a lack of recognition of cultural variation in what constitute appropriate economic roles for children.[19] Thus while the debate about cultural differences in some areas, e.g. child

labour, has been very rich, discussion about other issues, such as the political lives of children and their participation as members of fighting forces, has been poor. Partly this is due to a number of taken-for-granted assumptions. These include assumptions that children are apolitical, that active political involvement is inappropriate for children, and that in cases where such involvement occurs, children are passive and exploited victims (as they do not have the cognitive capacity to chose) or have been forcibly conscripted. The question of 'choice' in recruitment of minors, particularly female minors, is highly contested.[20] Mazurana et al. argue that the options for girls are so limited in many conflict zones, that a decision to volunteer as a fighter represents no choice at all. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, it is claimed that the choices facing youth are "to join the military, become a street child, or die."[21] They argue frequently girls enter fighting forces because they provide food, shelter and a sense of security. This is a difficult issue to explore in research with minors in armed conflict as there are significant ethical problems. Any statement by them of their political position, their motivation or feelings about their recruitment, or their activities as fighters could be used against them if the information was used in another context. However it is a reasonable issue to explore with women who entered fighting forces as minors, that have been demobilised and reintegrated and are in a position to reflect on these issues as adults, as is the case in this paper.

To this extent, the information presented in this paper on female ex-fighters in Ethiopia presents some challenges to the accepted orthodoxy. It was not the intention of this research to reflect on issues relating to child soldiers; the focus of the research is on the reintegration experiences of female ex-combatants. However, it quickly emerged that all the women in this exploratory study had joined the fighters as children. This research contributes to existing literature as a presentation of the perspective of women who had voluntarily joined fighting forces as children. Though interviews, they reflect on the impact that that experience has had on their lives as women, as family members and as members of society. It should be noted from the start that the sample here is small and does not claim to be representative of any group beyond the individual voices it gathers. The voices therefore are those of eleven women who were fighters in a highly specific context, that of the rebel forces of the Tigrean People's Liberation Army who overthrew the Government forces of Ethiopia's dictatorship government in 1991. The sample was a sample of convenience and it was not possible to engage in random sampling. All lived and worked in Addis Ababa, in Government jobs, most as lowly paid as janitors or office assistants. An effort was made to trace women who had fought on the side of the Derg, i.e. the Government forces and it was not possible to do so in the time

available. As is common in history, the voices therefore are those of the victors. However this does not negate the experiences of these women, and the challenges they present to some of the accepted thinking on the issue of the reintegration of female ex-combatants in general, and on assumptions about the impact of being a 'child soldier' in particular.

Specifically, this study sought to:

- identify gender specific issues facing young women in demobilisation and reintegration;

- explore the impact of having been an ex-combatant on women's social relationships (children, husband/partner, extended family, community); and

- explore how being part of the military impacts of self-concept, challenges the traditional role for women in Ethiopian culture and the impact of this on reintegration experiences.

CHAPTER 2
BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT TO PRESENT STUDY

From rebel movement to national government: The Tigrean People's Liberation Front

The 1974 revolution, which led to the overthrow the imperial government of Emperor Haile Selassie, brought about the establishment of a military government in Ethiopia, which sought to create a socialist state. Under the autocratic leadership of its leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam, the government sought to implement major social and institutional changes, nationalise land and private industries, and quell political dissent. The years following the inauguration of the Derg government from 1977–1979 became known as the 'Red Terror' as the Government instigated a campaign of violence, torture and death against anyone suspected of political opposition in Addis Ababa, and urban and rural areas throughout Ethiopia. In spite of this, powerful opposition movements emerged in the north of the country, a region that had a long history of political struggle. Eritrea experienced a political struggle for independence following colonisation by the Italians. It subsequently was liberated by the British in 1941 and had a federal relationship with Ethiopia. However this was replaced by open annexation in 1962, marking the start of what became known as the thirty-year war. The Eritrean Liberation Front emerged in the early 1960's and later became known as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF).

In 1975, in Eritrea's neighbouring province of Tigray, the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was founded as an opposition movement to Mengistu's Derg military dictatorship. Based on a socialist, Marxist-Leninist ideology, it developed strong grassroots support throughout Tigray as a result of community development, an emphasis on collective action, liberation education and mobilisation of a strong Tigrean identity. In the mid 1970's, the TPLF formed a strategic alliance with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), forming a powerful regional block. The Derg regime responded by developing immense military capacity. Under the slogan of "everything to the war front" in the late 1980's and early 1990's, the army was enlarged to at least half a million soldiers and the redirection of resources to the defence sector threatened the

country's economic, social and political stability.[22] Yet in 1991, combined opposition forces of the EPRDF brought about the successful overthrow of the Government. The EPRDF at this time was under the command of four organisations, the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) and the Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement (EDORM). But in reality, the EPRDF was not really a broad based movement with roots throughout the country but represented a support based in the north of the country, and in Tigray in particular. This was reflected in the seniority of the TPLF in the military and political hierarchy.[23]

Following the overthrow of the Derg in 1991, an interesting situation emerged in Ethiopia that witnessed demobilisation from within two armed groups, the Derg and EPRDF. Approximately half a million Derg soldiers were totally demobilised. Meantime, a new national army of the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) was formed, under the new national government of the EPRDF. The new government released about 20,000 soldiers (mainly Tigrayans) between 1991–1995 as a means of restoring the ethnic balance of the defence forces and replaced them with members of other Ethiopian nationalities.[24] A detailed account of the impact of the demobilisation and reintegration of the Derg combatants can be found in Ayalew & Dercon . Approximately 3–4% of Derg soldiers were female, while both the TPLF and EPLF were composed of approximately a third of female fighters.

Bruchhaus & Mehreteab document the profile of the EPLF in 1993 at the time of demobilisation. There were 95,000 fighters, of whom 80% were from rural backgrounds, 64% Tigrinya from the highlands and 24% Tigre from the lowlands. Eighty percent had completed 1–5 years of schooling and in general, the educational level of the fighters was higher than that of civilians. A third, or 34% of the fighters were female. Their paper, entitled "Leaving the warm house: the impact of demobilisation in Eritrea" examined attitudes to demobilisation and found 64% wanted to stay in the army. Only 9% did not want to stay and 27% could see no other alternative to demobilisation, so accepted it as inevitable. They report that demobilisation was a difficult strategy and was a process of 'weaning' fighters off the military and encouraging them to be self-sufficient and to take life into their own hands. They quote a senior EPLF fighter who summed up the dilemma of demobilisation as "We have convinced them to be ready to die; why shouldn't we be able to convince them to work for themselves".[25] Demobilisation support consisted of credit and savings schemes, job placement, settlement and agricultural activities, income generation act ivies and psychosocial counselling. In addition, the

EPLF recognised that special support needed to be given to female ex-fighters and a special Gender Unit was established. This tried to find ways and means of enhancing the women's self help potential.[26] Similarly, the TPLF recognised the debt it owned to female fighters and similarly sought to prioritise the reintegration of females. It developed separate reintegration projects for women by establishing factories to employ female-ex-fighters, and offered education, training, credit and support. Interestingly, the Commission set up to demobilise and reintegrate ex-soldiers of the Derg army was accused of overlooking the needs of female ex-combatants

> Female ex-combatants were part of the main reintegration programmes. The commission believed that economic reintegration was easier for female ex-combatants than for their male counterparts as they were holding positions such as musicians, secretaries, radio operators and cooks. Not everybody shares this view. The CRS (Catholic Relief Services, 1994) notes that the involvement of female ex-combatants (in reintegration programmes) was very low due to the insensitivity of the responsible agencies towards women.[27]

Although women formed only a small percentage of the Derg army, between 13,350 and 17,800 thousand women would have been demobilised.[28] There is an interesting contradiction in this, in that within the same country, the needs of female ex-fighters were placed central within one demobilisation programme while being completely overlooked in the other. This study focuses on the recruitment, demobilisation and reintegration of TPLF female ex-combatants.

The role of female fighters in the TPLF

Within Ethiopia, the contribution of women as fighters to the liberation struggle against Mengistu's Derg regime is almost legendary. It is widely regarded that fighter women were strong, if not stronger, than the men. According to Tsegay Berhe "(Another) important factor for the success of the TPLF was the dynamic involvement of women. Women fighters' determination for combat had its apparent contribution to a more radical and military ardour of the liberation movement". Tsegay develops a very fine account of the role of female fighters in a report entitled "The Tigrean Women in the liberation struggle and its aftermath". According to Tsegay

> The role of women was indispensable to the success of the TPLF led Tigrean movement. Women saw themselves as fighting for political

> justice, development and social progress including gender equality. Gender emancipation was held as a vital political agenda of the TPLF-the front initiated certain important socio-economic reforms such as the ban on early marriage, equal land/property ownership rights, equal rights to divorce and fair share of common assets etc. Women's schools opened in Tigray with the aim of raising their political and social awareness….The Tigrean women witnessed greater experiences during the armed struggle that marked a departure form the past. Women's roles, social attitudes and political perceptions underwent considerable changes. They acquired new skills, diverse organisational capabilities and exemplary confidence hereto strangled by tradition. Women also enjoyed greater equality with men. Farm activities like ploughing, political roles such as community leadership, military skills ranging from combating to commanding regiments and social services like administrating justice were now open to women. The TPLF produced the first prominent female technicians, drivers, electricians, 'barefoot' doctors, actresses, singers, and players of traditional instruments.

He also notes Young's point that the recruitment of women was essential as part of the overall human capital required to successfully launch a fight against the might of the Derg. However Tsegay argues this has done little to transform women's socio-economic status in the post-conflict period, and concludes "The pervasiveness of underlying social structures and the poor economic base of the Tigrean society largely militated against sustainable gender equality". A similar pattern was noted in Eritrea:

> At the beginning of the armed struggle only a small number of women had joined the ELF, and they mainly performed auxiliary tasks. From 1974 onwards, when the EPLF came in and proclaimed equal representation of men and women, the situation changed slowly and the female population in the liberated and semi-liberated areas progressively got ready to both liberate their country and their own interests. We can see that the women joined in the hardest times of the liberation struggle, when the Ethiopian army was five to eight times stronger than the EPLF; whereas in the end, when victory was at hand, more young men decided to give a helping hand in the final blow.[29]

The implication, according to Tsegay and Bruchhaus & Mehreteab is that, while women participated actively in combat, women did not equally share in the political and economic development of their new countries compared

to men. Yet within the TPLF and Tigrean society as a whole during the period of the liberation struggle, the participation of women was responsible for pushing for considerable political and social change with respect to women's rights beyond a purely narrow military agenda.

Pushing political and social change: The contribution of female combatants in the TPLF

Within the province of Tigray, strong women's associations emerged in tandem with the development of the rebel movement and the Tigrean movement had an explicit agenda of addressing women's equality. As mentioned, Tsegay notes that the TPLF saw the liberation of women as the basis for the liberation of society. Within Tigray, the TPLF set up a counter-government, and organised health and education and rehabilitation systems for the population. With respect to the position of women in society, the TPLF was responsible for initiating a number of reforms. These included:

- raising the minimum age of marriage;
- introducing a voluntary system of dowry and equal land and property ownership rights;
- introducing the right to equal divorce and fair share of common assets;
- introducing equitable access to education;
- endeavours to reduce women's workloads by introducing appropriate technology;
- introducing land reform in which land was distributed to women over 17 years old, which had the impact of discouraging early marriage; and
- introducing technical training in ploughing, targeted at single, divorced, widowed and separated women.

According to Tsegay, the TPLF most prided itself on mobilising women's political participation at the grassroots level through the formation of women's associations and female representation on community level and regional political bodies. *Baitos,* local administration councils were responsible for further reforms to customary law, including:

- the equal allocation of land to men and women;
- introducing women's rights to inheritance, divorce and equal share in the household property, which couples produced jointly;
- raising the minimum age of marriage from 15 years for girls to 18 years;
- that marriage be purely on the goodwill and choice of partners; and
- that there be equal rights and recognition of parental responsibility for children born in or out of wedlock.

However, many of the reforms were also controversial and raised bad feelings toward women, in which drought or losses at war were attributed to the changed new order, resulting in some modifications or difficulties in implementation. However, according to one author women were actively engaged "in making their own revolution within a revolution" and they resisted considerable social pressure in order to implement the reforms. Levels of women's active engagement politically and militarily is demonstrated in figures which show that in 1986, more than a quarter of local council members were women and a third of the fighters were women

A political agenda of female emancipation was supported actively by the practices and ideology of the TPLF that established special boarding schools for women to train them as fighters and political and social activists, and in administration and technical skills. Graduates became politically and socially influential in their villages. According to Tsegay, neither Ethiopian nor Tigrean women had any significant influence in public affairs in pre-revolutionary times. "Although the *risti* (land tenure) system was formally open to women by virtue of their kinship/village descent, in practical terms, pre-revolutionary women could not litigate on their own to secure their rights. It was only in the agency of men that they could state whatever demands or grievance they had. He argued that gender equality in Tigray, as elsewhere in Ethiopia, and indeed much of Africa, was largely sustained by the subtle mechanism of denying women access to inheritance, wealth, power, prestige. The reform of the TPLF within the confines of its regional territory challenged this, contributing to the creation of a new society for girls and women. The question that remained for the women who helped to shape this new reality is what were their experiences after the revolution?

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a qualitative methodology to gather the demobilisation and reintegration experiences of female ex-combatants in Ethiopia. A two-part methodology was used; semi-structured interviews and repertory grid analysis. Semi structured interviews were used to explore the process of demobilisation and reintegration. Repertory grid analysis was used to explore how being a fighter had impacted upon women's constructions of themselves as 'women'.

The semi-structured interviews sought to examine the process of women's engagement and disengagement with the armed forces, and their reintegration into civilian life. The questionnaire was structured to examine recruitment and entry into the fighters, women's engagement in combat and non-combat duties, demobilisation and life post-reintegration. In particular, the interviews sought to explore women's perceptions of their experiences as women, both as fighters and back in the community, and generate an understanding of particular issues facing women. The research took place over a one week period in December 2002. Local key informants facilitated the researcher in making contact with ex-combatant women and in negotiating their permission for the study. The women were initially reluctant to be involved and the women presented a list of questions outlining their concerns about the research before agreeing to participate in the study. They wanted to know about the purpose and objectives of the study, and if it would contribute to bringing about any changes or identify solutions to problems faced. They wanted the researcher to understand their political commitment and they would not participate in anything that would be politically undermining of what they had fought or stood for. These concerns were discussed and debated. Six women agreed to participate in the research. Each woman was invited to ask a female friend who had also been a fighter, to attend with her. This served a duel purpose of doubling the sample size, but more importantly, to create a comfortable and conducive atmosphere for the interviews, and to create opportunity for rich discussion. Five women recruited another participant for the research, bringing the total to 11 participants. The interviews were held in a coffee area of a quiet but central hotel. Each meeting lasted

approximately two hours, and participants were given a small cash amount as reimbursement for their time.

The second part of the methodology was the repertory grid analysis. This is a method that examines the meaning people construct about their world. It is widely recognised that gender is an entity that is not merely biological, but is to a large part socially constructed. Repertory grid technique is derived from personal construct theory developed by Kelly .The basis tenet of Kelly's theory is that much of what we term as 'reality' is actually part of a cognitive attempt to construe, to interpret, makes sense and evaluate our personal experiences. Kelly termed this process 'construal': how we construe or make sense of our world, and our interpretation of reality can be examined through the identification of each individuals construct system. A construct, basically, is an idea we have about the world, a basic dimension of appraisal of the world.[30] A construct can be explored and identified by exploring what something is *not*, i.e. as a dichotomy. According to Kelly, "Each construct involves two poles, one at each end of its dichotomy…The relationship between the two poles of a construct is one of contrast."[31] For example, equality (equality versus inequality), is an example of a construct. Thus, if we are all seen as construing our own individual realities, Kelly suggests that we each develop a dynamic framework or system of constructs that we then use to anticipate events. Our construal system influences how we understand past events and how we anticipate and deal with events in the future.

In order to explore how gender constructions may be changed as a result of having been a fighter, repertory grid technique was used with 6 of the female ex-fighters that participated in the first part of the study. In addition, repertory grids were carried out with 4 women who had never been part of the armed forced in Ethiopia. Due to the small sample size, these repertory grids can be regarded as exploratory, but they yielded interesting information nonetheless. Repertory grid analysis proceeds by first identifying a set of 'element's. Elements are a set of categories belonging to a subject to be described and compared in the study that describe the scope and context of the investigation. In this case, the study sought to examine women's constructions of themselves as 'women' and the elements referred to gender and roles, such as 'me before the fighters'; 'me in the fighters'; 'me currently'; 'my mother'; 'an average man' etc. The elements are compared, to yield 'constructs'. Constructs are categories of meaning by which the elements are the same or different to each other. In this study, a set of eight elements was written out on A5 cards. These were 'me before fighters', 'me during fighters', me currently', my mother', 'a man I know', 'a woman never a fighter', my female fighter

friend' and 'my husband'. These were presented in threes to the research participant with the following instructions:

> Consider the three…In one or two words, say what, for you, makes any two of them similar, and, thereby, different from the third.

Their replies formed the individual constructs to be used in the study. The answer is referred to as the 'emergent pole' Then participants are instructed to say "What, for you, is the opposite of ….", the first response. The response is again noted. The researcher now has two poles of a construct, for example; Equality versus Inequality; self-confidence versus lack of self-confidence. The participant is then asked to elaborate on why the emergent pole of the construct e.g. 'equality' is important to her, and this is explored, yielding qualitative information.

Finally, a matrix is constructed by placing the individual elements (e.g. me before fighters) as columns across the top of the matrix, and constructs (e.g. equality-inequality) along the rows. The participant is asked to indicate which end of the construct is the positive or preferred construct, and this is placed on the left hand side, with the less preferred/less positive construct on the right hand side.

The final part of the exercise involves a rating exercise. It was explained to each participant that they were to rate each element in terms of each construct pair on a scale of one to five, where the constructs of the left hand side column were number one on the scale and the part of the construct on the right-hand side column was number five on the scale. However, any element could fall at any point (1,2,3,4,5) along the scale.

The final repertory grid shows how we construct each element in relation to other elements and the constructs that define them. The value of this methodology is that it generates information grounded in local meaning and understanding.

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CHAPTER 4

ETHIOPIAN FEMALE EX-COMBATANTS: RECRUITMENT, DEMOBILISATION AND REINTEGRATION

Entry and recruitment

Table 1: Participant's age at recruitment, occupation, age at demobilisation, length of service

Age when joined fighters	Occupation at time of recruitment	Age at demobilisation (1991 to 1994)	Length of time in fighters
S1 11 years	attending school, grade 3	23 years	12 years
S2 5–6 years	young child	N/R	N/R
S3 17 years	attending school, grade 6	21 years	4 years
S4 12 years	farming, never attended school	30 years	18 years
S5 13 years	married at 12 years,	29 years	16 years
S6 13 years	never attended school	29 years	16 years
S7 14 years	attending school, grade 7	20 years	5 years
S8 15 years	attending school, grade 2	21 years	6 years
S9 12 years	attending school, grade 1	25 years	13 years
S10 14 years	never attended school	29 years	15 years
S11 13 years	married	23 years	10 years

Source: author's own

The average age of recruitment of the 11 female participants in this study to the fighters was 12.68 years, while the youngest was five years old and the eldest was 17. Therefore, all entered as minors, and would officially be considered as 'child soldiers' at recruitment under official definitions used today. The average length of time spent as a fighter was 11.6 years. The shortest time was four years and the longest was 18 years. As a basis for comparison, within its sister movement the EPLF, a quarter of female ex-combatants surveyed spent more than 15 years as a fighter, one fifth spent five to ten years, and a third under six years as a fighter. Among ex-fighters that had spent more than five years in the field, proportionately more were female, attributed to the fact that many men joined the EPLF at the point of the 'final push', when it seemed militarily that extra resources could bring victory within reach.[32]

Women's accounts of how they came to join the fighters varied. Although political education was used as a recruitment tool in Tigray, only one women said she had been politicised by a friend before joining the TPLF, and cited this as her motivation to be a fighter.

> I knew nothing about the TPLF but then one of my classmates told me about TPLF liberators, and about people being oppressed by the Derg. I withdrew from my family and went to the army. My family were not happy about it because it was difficult for my family to tell others that I had joined the TPLF. (S10)

This is not surprising given the young age of individuals at recruitment. Joining with peers or because family members had joined the fighters before them emerged as the most frequently cited reason, and this would be consistent with developmental expectations.

> S11: I had three friends and I joined the army with them.

> S4: I became a fighter because my best friend went to the fighters and I went with her because I liked it more than staying.

> S7: Because my family members joined the army. There was drought, migration and other problems at that time. The reaction of my family was not good because they did not think I would be coming back.

> S8: There were my three brothers who joined the army before. I didn't know why they had joined the fighters but I expected that I would meet them and join them there. At that time, many people were joining, even

> girls. My parents were not happy because my brothers had disappeared and they thought the same might happen to me.

Another participant said she was attracted by the songs, dancing and ceremonies of the fighters, and the sense of belonging and community that this enforced.

> S1: When I was 11 years old, I became involved with the fighters because of the *Giola*. *Goila* is the fighters dance. It implies if anyone joins that *Goila* and dances with them, he or she is already entered the fighters and is ready to become a fighter. Therefore I joined the *Goila* when I was 11 years old, and I was taken to the training programme

One of the consequences of the TPLF policies to establish social services such as health, education and relief within Tigray province was that it secured the confidence of local communities that indirectly acted as a mechanism of recruitment. The provision of education was the entry point for one of our participants to the rebels, and politicisation and training as a fighter came later.

> S9: There was a school there, and I went to learn. After that, I joined the fighting. For the first while, I just lived there and I loved to be with them (the fighters) but when I got older, I got to know about the Derg. I expected that by joining, I could bring about a different Government. I knew nothing about the different ideologies-I knew about the Derg bombing people in Tigray. My parents' reaction was they were happy because my sisters had joined the fighters before me. I didn't really have any personal expectations about what my life would be like because my age did not permit me to know about these things.

One participant saw being part of the fighters as a way of escaping from an early marriage, a practice very widely practiced in Tigray at the time, although less so presently as a result of political advocacy by the TPLF and women's associations against this practice.

> S5: I joined the fighters to escape marriage. I was married when I was 12 years and the only option to escape was to go join the fighters.

Two participants joined as a result of being separated from or the death of their family due to the drought and famine of 1984 (Ethiopian calendar 1977). A third also lived with the fighters and was raised within the fighters' camp as

an alternative home, but claims she was attracted to be with the fighters rather than with her mother, who most likely also became involved as a fighter.

> S2: I was born in Addis Ababa. When I was a child of five or 6 years, I went with my mother to Tigray. I was only a small child. My mother was gone to look for her mother, my grandmother. At that place (in Tigray), there was a fighter's camp. There was a fighter there I liked more and I went with him. I did not want to separate from him so he took me to the kindergarten in the fighters' camp. In that kindergarten, there were children who had lost their fathers and mothers due to the (Ethiopian Calendar) 1977 drought (1983/4). The children were supported by the help of foreigners. And I integrated with these children. We received education from Grade 1–6. After I completed grade 6, I was taken to the training programme for about two years. Then I became a fighter and my major duty at that time was fighting.

When asked to indicate whether they experienced their recruitment as voluntary or forced, ten of the participants said it was voluntary. One said she had no choice as her parents were dead but that she was not forced.

The self-reports of our respondents fit with the findings of a much larger study by Tsegay of more than 200 female ex-combatants that examined the involvement of women in the TPLF. He reports:

> The TPLF was reluctant to recruit women combatants…women were considered non-violent compared to men. They tend to favour negotiated settlement. Tigrean women's involvement in violence was however, apparently induced by different factors. Among others, dramas songs and cultural shows were by far the most vital instruments of mobilisation throughout the period of TPLF insurgent.[33]

A popular Tigrean mobilisation song demonstrates the combination of nationalistic sentiment with military intent.[34]

> Tigray, my country,
> Do not shed tears,
> Do not weep'
> Hand me a gun through the backyard

Tsegay used a qualitative category analysis to analyse women's reports of their motivation to join the TPLF. He classified them as 36% political motivation,

17% socio-economic, and 47% as 'emotional'. Political motivation refers to those who were motivated by political concerns such as by opposing the Derg, and its 'Red Terror' campaign, by nationalism or the ideology of socialism and the class struggle. This group, he argues, was mainly composed of university students, civil servants and teachers. In its attempts to crush the opposition rebel group, the Derg regime used torture to instil fear and social control and men and women were tortured for their political beliefs. Gender politics were an integral part of a broader liberation politics for many politically motivated women, thus ensuring gender equality as an issue was placed central to TPLF ideology.

(Another) component for politically inspired women was a keen awareness and deep resentment of gender inequalities—this coincided with the TPLF's ideological appeals in addressing their critical imbalance. This social group constituted quite a significant ratio (over one third) from among politically stimulated women.[35]

Tsegay also reports on a number of women who joined the TPLF as a means of escaping the narrow, rigidly structured place of women in domestic life.

The second motivational category, socio-economic factors, refers to those women motivated to join the TPLF because of poverty, the famine of 1983/4 and the economic breakdown of the region, by fears of early marriage and as a result of disruption to family of the effects of conflict, migration, displacement and death. The third category, 'emotional' factors, is most interestingly, the largest category. In Tsegay's analysis, this refers to women who were attracted to by the sentimental mobilisation songs, cultural shows, and dancing. The appeals to Tigrean identity gave these women a psychological identification with the movement, and the discipline and humble approach of the fighters was attractive. Young girls could identify the excitement of seeing new roles for women as fighters and many joined under the influence of friends. Tsegay also included as 'emotional' those for whom joining the fighters was an act of desperation, as a response to loss of family members, gross violations of human rights, and air raids. In razing communities, the Derg made women specific targets for physical violence and rape.

While two thirds of recruits could be considered as non-political on joining the TPLF, once women were mobilised within the fighters, they were quickly politicised. Mazurana et al. talk of the importance of the militarisation of females in fuelling and supporting conflict and argue "the roles of girl soldiers must be considered as an integral part of the conflict, a window through

which we might gain a deeper understanding of the overall conflict itself".[36] Arguably, the recruitment and training of women within the TPLF was a means of capturing the hearts and minds of the community in its entirety, thus maximising the impregnability of local structures to Derg forces. This influence exerted itself both ways, and while political education formed part of the training curriculum to be a fighter, our participants reported that a part of this training included explicit training on women's emancipation.

> Equality, based on Marxist-Leninism was stressed as the over-riding political ideology… Ultimately the TPLF succeeded in undertaking successful indoctrination upon its women folk. They were convinced that women were more oppressed than men. Women were also convinced to fight a social and political system, the root of their oppression, not just men. This ideology laid a premise that men can, of course, be political allies in a joint struggle towards the establishment of a fair political, social, economic order.[37]

This sets up expectations for women's role and status within military life.

Life in the military

This study did not aim to examine in detail women's life within the military but to gain some insight into their roles and experiences within the military as a basis for understanding reintegration experiences. All reported that once they entered the fighters, they were taken for training. Some had the opportunity to complete school to Grade 6 before embanking on training as a fighter. From women's reports, it seems training was quite structured. This is consistent with Tsegay's accounts of the formal initiatives within the TPLF, through boarding schools, to raise the capacity of women to function in senior administrative, strategic and military positions. As mentioned above, part of the training included explicit training on issues of gender and equality. One participant said "They were telling us about the differences in the ideology of the Derg and TPLF. We learnt that females have double oppression in two ways: through the whole society with the Derg and for their being female". Military training included training in the use of weapons, ambushes, and 'being a fighter'. One of the women moved from combat to being a nurse, and she received six months training for this role. Participants were asked to indicate whether they had been engaged in active combat or not. Seven of the eleven participants, or 63% said they had been active participants in combat. Of the

Table 2: Participants involvement in active combat and military rank

	Were you involved in active combat	Given a military rank
S1	No	No
S2	yes then became a 'barefoot nurse' with 6 months training	no
S3	yes	no
S4	yes	yes
S5	yes	no
S6	Yes	no
S7	No	No
S8	No	no
S9	No	no
S10	Yes	yes
S11	Yes	No
Total	7=yes	2=yes

Source: author's own

11, only two had been awarded a military rank. Within its sister movement, the EPLF, Bruchhaus & Mehreteab report 70% of women served as ordinary fighters and never achieved higher military ranks.

Participants were asked about social and power relations between men and women within the military. Participants said that work was shared equally between men and women; men worked in the kitchen and cooked *enjira*, alongside women and women fought in combat, alongside men. One said "Men and women, they worked together, even they sleep together, their relationship was like brothers and sisters. Any job was distributed among them equally. Whatever the job, they share it equally". Another said "They respect females and live co-operatively." This was consistently voiced among the participants.

A section of the interview focused on family life, sexual relations and sexual abuse within the fighters. All respondents insisted that discipline was tight with

respect to sexual relations, and it was forbidden for a man to have sexual relations with a woman without her permission. Rape, they reported, was rare and severely punished. One said sexual relations happened "only out of interest, no forced relationships". Another said that "Sometimes (there was) sex between two people on their own agreement if they were not married. If a man had sex with a woman without her permission, he would be imprisoned". Another reported that there was a good relationship overall between men and women,

> It was a co-operative life. The male does not behave like the others do in the civil society. They respect us. Even they advise those males who do not respect females. There was no forced sexual relationship with males. The male fighters did not force us to do anything without our interest. The male had no feeling of superiority over the female.

Many of the women married during their years in the military. They reported that earlier in the conflict, there was a marriage ban and marriage was prohibited. They explained this as the over-riding goal of the rebel movement was to destroy and overthrow the Derg. Marriage and having children was prohibited because it would distract from this goal. As one woman reported, "everyone worked for the achievement of the TPLF goal". One of the women said she received lessons on how to control pregnancy, both using contraception pills and natural methods. Another said that if women got pregnant, they sometimes had abortions.

Once the marriage ban was lifted, men and women could get ask their commanding officer for permission to marry, and many of the women married. Such marriages were recognised as formal and official.

> I married during the fighting years after the marriage ban was lifted. Marriage and getting pregnant was forbidden during the fighting years as having child would be an obstacle to strong fighting. But later the TPLF allowed marriage, and I got married at that time.

Demobilisation

Demobilisation refers to the specific tasks of the identification and assembly of soldiers and their dependents, registration and documentation, data collection, pre-discharge information, medical screening and transport home. The specific issues with respect to women at this point include:

- whether they are formally targeted and included in demobilisation programmes;
- whether they are registered as 'family units' and their needs considered as a family rather than as individuals;
- physical security during encampment while awaiting discharge;
- appropriate pre-discharge information that addresses women's rights and entitlements (which may differ to men's); and
- appropriate health services including HIV screening and reproductive health.[38]

De Watteville differentiates this from reinsertion and reintegration, which is support given during the first transitional 6–12 month period and afterwards, where the issues facing female ex-combatants may also differ from those facing men.

All the women interviewed for this study were demobilised as part of a formal demobilisation process. They were sent to one of a number of camps where they received education or skills training as part of the preparation for returning to civilian life. Women who had children were treated as a unit, but for many women, demobilisation meant separation from their husbands who remained as fighters with the new army of the EPRDF and were located in other parts of the country. Women explained their understanding of their demobilisation as follows:

> We were told that our goal was to bring down the Derg Government and now it is collapsed. For this reason, you don't have to lead this kind of life (military) anymore. So the programme was to educate us and give us a job. That time, we did what we were told to do.

Similar to the reports of Bruchhaus & Mehreteab from Eritrea, many of the women reported that they were demobilised reluctantly. They said they were worried about returning to civilian life; indeed, as they had joined the rebel forces while still children, and were effectively 'child soldiers' at recruitment, they experienced the prospect of civilian life less as 'reintegration' and more as being catapulted into an unfamiliar and foreign way of life. One explained:

> Because before, the aim was to destroy or remove the Derg at any cost, that is why it cannot demobilise female soldiers before that time.

> In the demobilisation process, some of them were not (demobilised) voluntarily—I did not accept the demobilisation process because at the time, demobilisation for me was difficult because I liked the social and the military life.

A number of the women claimed that they understood that there was an international law that forbade women to be soldiers, and the EPRDF then applied this law once they were in a position to do so, after the removal of the Derg government. One respondent explained "Internationally women cannot be soldiers, and as our government accepts that, it decreased the numbers of women fighters". Another explained her understanding of why women were demobilised in large numbers at that time as follows:

> My demobilisation was part of a formal demobilisation process. According to international law, women shouldn't be fighters. The government told us that we are the ones who made history so that the Government was not to let us live a rural life as we did before the struggle, but (we were to) stop being soldiers. Also (they wanted to) increase the number of ethnicities in the army.

In spite of this as a consistent claim of a number of women in this study, no such international law banning women as fighters exists. However the Government did undertake a demobilisation of many ex-TPLF fighters in order to increase its capacity to recruit new soldiers as part of a broader, national army.[39] A comprehensive package was put in place for female-ex-fighters as part of a reinsertion and reintegration package. According to some key informants in Addis Ababa, the new Government recognised the debt it owed to female fighters, who had fought bravely and effectively, but women faced many cultural barriers on reintegration that proved more complex than simply the will of the Government could resolve.

Reinsertion and reintegration

The following captures the main themes that emerged from interviews with the 11 participants in this study with respect to reintegration. The semi-structured interviews explored women's worries and concerns on reintegration, strategies for resolving these worries, participant's perceptions of the particular issues facing women in reintegration as compared to men, socio-economic reintegration, social and community relationships, adjustment criteria and personal change as a result of having been a fighter.

Government support during reintegration

Through the support of the Government's demobilisation and reintegration package, all the women in this sample had the opportunity to complete their education to Grade 12. One woman said however "I received the support of education but I couldn't learn because of health problems". Women received varying amounts of cash on demobilisation that they used in different ways. One woman reported she used it to help support her family on her return. Others were not asked specifically what they did with the money so it is not possible to compare responses. The women in this sample obtained government jobs, and all were working for the Government at the time of interview.[40] In Eritrea, Bruchhaus & Mehreteab noted that the tendency to live in towns was strongest among women and that female ex-fighters either preferred to go to larger towns in order to find a job and/or escape the control of their family, or to return home to their villages and the protection of the family. Participants in our sample said they observed a similar pattern.

Women's worries, concerns and experiences on reintegration

Participants were asked about their concerns on demobilisation. It quickly emerged that rather than 'reintegration', the women experienced civilian life as a new socialisation experience. All had entered the fighters as minors, and for the most part, spent the formative years of their teens being trained as fighters, and educated in liberation politics including gender politics. On demobilisation, they were reinserted-reluctantly-into a society where traditional gender roles for Ethiopian women were the norm and where their behaviour and appearance was experienced as 'odd'. One key informant explained the contradictions that were that were experienced by women and by the host society through stories that demonstrated some of the issues.

> When peace was coming, women were told 'now you can go', you don't have to be associated with the men anymore. Women were well-treated in the EPRDF situation. They were very politicised people, very assertive, they have proved that they were real heroes, even stronger than the men. The EPRDF felt indebted to them and designed special projects for women. One of the things they did was to set up a textile factories that absorbed women ex-fighters as workers. It is still going. It started with 2,000 to 3,000 women. However there were problems from the start with the management. Those women were challenging, they didn't give a shit, they wouldn't take

> orders, and management couldn't manage the factory. Senior ERPDF people had to go and ask them 'Please take orders from this man, that manager. But the women said 'Look at you, you were fighting side by side with us, and now, look at the shoes you are wearing, they are more than our salaries". Mediation failed-they expected a lot and life was difficult and there were adjustment problems. They had experienced many traumas and marriage failures. Over time, the managers decided to employ other people to work in the factories, those that say 'yes'. They reasoned, 'If we put too many ex-fighters in one place, there could be trouble', and they tried to dissolve the fighters. The Government did what they could for those women, gave some money to start a business, for homeless and disabled women, there were sheltered workshops, but the issues were greater than the Government could solve.

What emerges from the interviews is that TPLF women, on emergence from the military, experienced what can be most accurately described as a form of culture shock. Their gender socialisation within the military was so at odds with that within civilian society that the gender role discontinuity they experienced challenged them at all levels of their daily life. The first significance of this is that, rather than women having certain 'add-on' special needs in demobilisation and reintegration, which assumes the challenges facing men and women are the same e.g. socio-economic reintegration, but with areas of special needs e.g. gynaecological health, the issues may be more fundamental and merit further analysis in demobilisation programming.

A second issue is with respect to the impact of female ex-combatants on the host society; these women are simultaneously forcing societal change by challenging traditional roles that they find they cannot accept, and strongly argue that they have personally gained and not lost from their experiences as fighters. This presents challenges to a further set of assumptions with respect to the impact of having been a 'child soldier', and 'female' child soldiers in particular and the relationship between minors and politics.

The following are some of the main themes that emerged in women's accounts of their reintegration experiences.

Missing the collective nature of military life

One of the things women most missed on demobilisation was the collective nature of military life; the camaraderie, the social life, and the sense of common purpose. One woman noted:

> At the beginning, everything seemed difficult, In the past, good social life, no responsibility, clarity, collective life; these things are not in the reintegration so it seems difficult and you adapt yourself in the process.

Another said:

> There was no thinking of yourself—rather thinking for all, or for all the fighters but now I am thinking of myself only.

The participant who went to live with the fighters when she was 5 or 6 years old said that, for her, it was particularly difficult and she experienced demobilisation almost as a loss of family, and the 'absence' of these things as a sense of loneliness.

> I did not have any experience of civilian life, because almost the whole of my life was with the TPLF. So life for me as a woman is difficult, and I preferred the military life. I liked the social life of the military. We eat, drink together, even we sleep together, we like each other as brothers and sisters. But these things are not present now and the absence of these things worried me….. Life was not as I expected but whether the life is good in civilian community or not, I do not like it, rather I prefer living in the military life.

Although demobilised for approximately ten years, arguably for this woman, civilian life is still experienced as 'other' and military life is the standard against which it is gauged.

Difficulties of domestic civilian life

The everyday chores of managing a household were difficult for women, and women reported that they found this very difficult.

> Life is difficult, being a women because you know nothing about how to work in the house. Since I went to fighting when I was 12 years old,

> as a means of escaping from an unwanted marriage, I did not know how to manage the household and this was difficult for me.
>
> Reintegration from the military life to civilian life is difficult; when we compare between women who were not fighters and those who were, most of the time, the keeping and leading of the household is difficult for those fighter women than for those who were never fighters.
>
> To live individually was something new for us, since we came here when we were children, we didn't know any other life. Even we found it difficult to adapt to work individually, to administer our home and our life. Neighbours, friends showed us how to adapt.

In the military, many tasks such as ordering and preparing food, managing and administering daily life were taken care of by the institutional machine of the military. Where soldiers carried out such tasks, the work was done collectively. Women found the individual responsibility of administering the household very strange. As the women in this sample had moved to Addis Ababa rather than return to their community of origin, they depended on neighbours and friends to help them adapt, rather than family, as they lived far away. As a result of joining the military as children, the normative learning within the home and community was largely missing for these women. Key informants reported that this also created conflict with the host community. One man reported that mother-in-laws would be scandalised their daughter-in-laws couldn't make *enjira*, and would sarcastically ask their sons whether their ex-fighter wife was a man or a woman!

Lack of equality with men

Within this division of household labour, one of the issues women found particularly difficult was their sudden experience of a lack of equality with men, with whom they felt they had participated as equals in the difficult task of being a fighter, but suddenly, saw they were relegated-unequally-to the work inside the home. They noted that their male counterparts did not experience the role incongruity they experienced.

> Life is more difficult for women than for men, because during the fighting, women and men were doing the same work, and were living in the same camp, and their job also was the same. But after reintegration to the community, women have to do women's work and men have to

> do men's work. That is women's work is in the household rearing children and others, but men cannot work at women's work.

This theme was echoed again and again in the interviews:

> Life is more difficult for women than men because during the fighting, women and men were living the same, but now householding, rearing children and such are women's duty

> As females, we cannot escape from housework but the males are not expected to do housework

In post-war Europe in the 1940's and 1950's, a number of feminist authors have identified ideological and social patterns which sought to return women from the public life of work to the home, and to wrest from them power, skills and emancipation they had gained while the men were off fighting. In Ethiopia, as one woman noted, their experience was not only a push to be responsible for the home, but frequently to do this in addition to the 'male' task of being a contributory or sole breadwinner.

> Male and female work equally in the military life. But after reintegration comes the difference! The females can't escape from housework. But the males are not expected to do the housework. They work outside the house whereas the female works in the two simultaneously.

De Watteville notes that demobilisation impacts in this way both on women who were fighters and also on women in the host community. Women are frequently encouraged to take up employment when human resources were scarce during conflict, but post-demobilisation, are pushed into marginal employment once a surplus of men becomes available to do the work. She notes "Unfortunately, in some countries, like Eritrea, women can only compete with the return of men because they accept lower salaries. Women are also sometimes pressured by the Government or patriarchal views to become housewives in order to help reduce male unemployment".[41]

Socio-economic reintegration

The women in the small sample here were all employed in Government jobs. The EPRDF placed many ex-fighters in Government positions as a means of socio-economic reintegration. However, eight to ten years after demobilisa-

tion, the majority of women in our interviews felt they were stuck in low paid and unskilled work as guards or janitors. They reported they were struggling to survive economically. Tsegay noted that the reintegration of women was linked to the degree of education and their status in the military hierarchy. For example, he noted that of women who joined for socio-economic reasons, the vast majority had little or no previous education and the government found it difficult to integrate them into post-war development activities. One woman reported:

> Most fighter women are poorer than other women. This is because fighter women lack experience in civilian life. The fighter women spend their life in the military but other women in urban areas have access to education and they learn from when they were children, and this leads them to have a good status and way of life.

In fact, in terms of education, ex-combatant women are higher educated than women generally in Ethiopian society and one participant noted this by saying "(Fighter women) are better in education but economically, they are as poor". What they reported they lacked was the 'know how' to make this work for them in civilian life while urban non-fighter women learnt from a young age how to generate employment for themselves in the urban informal market.

Burchhaus & Mehreteab's survey of 238 ex-fighters in Eritrea, of whom a third were women, examined indicators of socio-economic reintegration. Unemployment was higher amongst women (28%) than men (21%), but apart from that figure, the employment profile of men and women was similar; a third of each sex worked in Government employment, 11% of women and 12% of men were employed and 50% of women and 55% of men were self-employed. However, they reported that more than half of respondents were not satisfied with their economic situation. Of our participants, although all were working, none expressed themselves satisfied with their economic status. Some felt they were better off than female friends who did not have a regular salary, while others felt they were very lowly paid and their low earnings placed them under considerable stress. What emerged again and again was the fact that, having joined the fighters as children, women to some extent had been institutionalised within that context, and had never had to be responsible for the generating and managing money.

> From an economic point of view, everything is expensive. When I was in the army, what I know is about firing a gun and ammunition. I knew

> nothing about leading life economically. In the past, the government used to arrange everything now things are difficult and I have to be responsible for doing economical thing that had been done by Government

> Socio-economically, it was like this. In the past, I didn't start leading my own life economically even though I got married, I was just a child, so I was with my family. But when I see things, life is difficult. But I have salary. A little difficult but when I compare myself with my friends without salary, I am better, at least I allocate the salary I have. But it's not the life I want to lead.

Women moved from a position where the fighter movement, then, during demobilisation and encampment the government, provided everything they needed, then suddenly they had to manage for themselves. For many women who separated from their husbands during demobilisation, it was a double push to independence; the struggle to manage without the logistical and economic support of the army, and the push to survive as a single woman or head of household in an economy that offered marginal work for women.

Family relationships

Key informant reports indicated that the incidence of separation and divorce were high, following demobilisation and reintegration. This was confirmed by the observations of women in our sample. In a conversation with two women who had separated from their husbands during demobilisation, one explained

> My husband is still a fighter, because of the demobilisation process, we live in separate ways. And he did not help me, even I do not know where he is, but he is alive. Formally we are not divorced but it seems like divorce. Divorcing because of demobilisation is common for many women.

In the small sample here, of 11 women interviewed, 6 were still with their husbands, although not all were living together as their husband was still a fighter in the government army. One woman had remarried, and four women were either separated, divorced or widowed.

The small sample makes it impossible to draw any conclusions from these results. However the survey of Eritrean ex-combatants by Bruchhaus &

Mehreteab examined marital status by gender and clear trends emerged with respect to gender. They found that a far higher percentage of female than male ex-combatants were divorced, separated or widowed. They found 13.4% of females were single (35.9% of men), 56.1% of females were married (58.3% of men), 18.3% were divorced (3.2% of men), 8.5% females separated (0.6%) and 3.7% widowed (0.6% of men).

They attributed the relatively higher level of marriage breakdown among female ex-fighters to post-liberation stresses.

> (In) Eritrea many marriages (were) between fighters…In most cases, the married couples did not live together, as they were usually assigned to different units in different places, and only spent between a couple of days and one month together during common leave. It is also noteworthy that there were no material problems they had to bother about. Even if it was not much, the EPLF took care of this. After liberation, when the couples came home, they suddenly had to cater for their livelihood. Problems with in-laws also started. Whereas the fighters had learned to disregard ethnic and religious differences, their civilian relatives had not reached that stage. They often rejected sons- and daughters-in law, because they did not belong to their own ethnic or religious community. Another fact should not be neglected: in cases where the wife was demobilised and the husband remained in the new army, he usually had to join his unit far away from their residence, and she was expected to follow him. In many cases, she refused to do so. Considering all these circumstances, it is actually astonishing that there are still many happily married (ex-) fighter couples.[42]

One of the implications of the rather high percentage of women who are widowed, divorced, separated or single, is that they have to raise their children alone. They noted "Unlike during the war when children were totally taken care of by the Front, in post-war Eritrea, kindergartens are rare. Many female ex-fighters cannot go for training or take up employment because they do not have anybody to take care of their children" and so has a significant impact on socio-economic reintegration. In Eritrea, both within the military and civilian life, ethnic differences between Ethiopians and Eritreans were responsible for the expulsion of individuals and the break-up of many families where two partners were on different sides of the geographical divide. This did not emerge in our interviews, although it is possible that it did occur more broadly among combatant couples.

One key informant interviewed as part of this study also highlighted that a contributing factor to marriage breakdown amongst fighter couples was that, once returned from the front to civilian life, some men appreciated the more traditionally feminine appearance and behaviour of civilian women who had never been fighters. Fighter women had grown used to adopting the dress code of men, including short hair and masculine dress. Adaptation to the feminine style demanded by civilian life seemed foreign to many of them. In Eritrea, Burchhaus & Mehreteab also noted that male ex-fighters had more opportunity to marry civilians than female ex-fighters, which is probably linked to cultural notions of 'femininity' and what is desirable or expected in a woman as a wife.

Psychosocial well-being

In order to understand the adjustment difficulties faced by women, and the strategies they used to cope with these, participants were asked to indicate signs that an ex-fighter was adjusting well in civilian life, and signs that she was having difficulty adjusting. Criteria of positive adjustment were identified as

- being sociable;
- being able to manage economically;
- being able to participate in education and learn skills that were useful for civilian life;
- working hard and starting your own business; and
- being able to integrate in some of the women's associations such as the *Edir* associations, which are traditional savings and credit associations managed and administered by women for women.

Other criteria were to adapt your behaviour to the way of life of the civilian society, and to things in such a way that it doesn't bring you into conflict with others. Signs of being not well-adjusted were linked to not being able to achieve these tasks. One of the necessary adaptations was to change their communication style. All the women noted that they had trouble because the language they used was the language of the fighters. However the adjustment needed went deeper than that language or words used but the whole style of communication:

> Things that were difficult to adapt to were related to the work life, how to communicate with office workers and others. We speak like fighters i.e. (fighters) have clarity, they speak to a person if he/she has weak points in front of the person. In addition, they lack politeness, but such things are not wanted by the office workers. Yes, compared to other women who were not fighters, the fighter women speak what they want without any feeling, but others feel shy or frightened or something.

Inherent in this quote is part of the fundamental difficulty women felt in adjusting to civilian life. They recognised that the style of communication of the fighters was causing conflict, hostility and was 'not wanted' by those office workers, but they felt it was a more honest and open form of dialogue. It was part of not being 'shy, or frightened or something', like those female office workers they were supposed to be trying to emulate in order to fit in. This theme emerged a number of times in interviews with different women.

> There is a change. Being a fighter leads you to speak freely about what you feel, and they don't like back-biting any person, rather they prefer to speak freely in front of the person, or in face-to-face communication.

Deeply embedded communication patterns were a part of the 'culture shock' that women recognised they had to adjust to. Positive adjustment was linked to being able to be sociable and to get on with people and elicit their help and support; bad adjustment was when ex-fighters continued to be in conflict with other people. Yet within this, women still valued the communication style they had learnt in the fighters and quietly fought against the 'shy and frightened' style they felt characterised women who were never fighters.

Emotional adjustment also presented many difficulties for women. In other parts of the interviews women hinted at the sense of isolation, loneliness and being suddenly 'individuated' they felt on initial demobilisation. Another element of this was that, within civilian life, the emotional numbing that may have characterised their experience of traumatic events within the fighters, partly supported by the collective experience of being with other fighters experiencing similar things, was less. This only emerged in one interview but is worthy of further exploration. One woman explained:

> During the fighting, I was happy; I felt happy compared to civilian life. For example, at that time, if somebody died, you didn't feel any sad-

> ness, whether that person will be their brother, or sister or friend, you didn't feel about the death of the person because their aim, dream is how to destroy/fall the Derg at any cost. The Derg was their enemy.

The implication was that in civilian life, it was a battle to keep feelings of sadness away, without the focus of a goal and the collective support of other fighters. One of the key informants insisted that many women were experiencing psychological trauma because of the violence they had witnessed and participated in, often from when they were children, and that this has to been recognised because of the women and fighters status, even if only to themselves, as heroes.

Community expectations and acceptance

In general, the women reported that they had been accepted by the host community and felt they had been able to positively reintegrate, after an initially difficult period of adjustment. The language and communication issues outlined above caused conflict at first, but this was part of the adjustment process. They said acceptance was generally good. However, there was not unanimity on this. One woman said:

> I am living in the same area as when I returned. The community treats me in a good way. They say that it is because of the struggle that everybody got freedom of speech. When I come back from work, my neighbours help me in different way.

Another said her experiences contradicted this:

> People in Addis Ababa, in the community in which I live, dislike me because of being a fighter because most of the Addis Ababa people dislike Tigray fighters for the reason that they have an intention of Derg.

It is clear therefore that community acceptance is linked, not to individual adjustment and personality, but to women's political identity as ex-fighters. For some community members, they are seen as liberators who freed the country from the Derg; for others, suspicious of the political aspirations of the present Government, they are perceived with a related suspicion. The link between political identity and reintegration has been noted in the demobilisation literature with respect to whether individuals were on the side of the

winners or the losers.[43] Socio-economic and political reintegration has been found to be easier in many post-conflict contexts for the victors of conflict. In Eritrea, local organisations and international NGOs were favourable to hiring ex-combatants. A similar trend was noticed in Ethiopia. However it can also bring misconceptions. One woman argued:

> The community expect that we are rich, because we were fighters, but in reality we are poor.

In other contexts (such as Rwanda), there is visible evidence of the 'new wealth' of the Tutsi-dominated military and political hierarchy. However in Ethiopia, while the government has sought to ensure women were supported to be economically self-sufficient by favouring many demobilised soldiers for government jobs, Tsegay estimates that women have not fared as equally well as men and many are disillusioned that the societal change and emancipation they fought for has failed to materialise. In the post-liberation Ethiopia, political change has been brought about but female liberation is something they have been left to fight for themselves. The sense from the interviews with women is while they felt broadly accepted by the host civilian community, they themselves continued to reject the traditionally submissive position and role of women in the host society. This places them in an uneasy position with respect to normative Ethiopian society.

Political reintegration

Political reintegration refers to the extent to which ex-combatants, in this case, female ex-combatants, are involved in decision-making and power structures both locally and nationally. A key informant in this study told a story a recent question put to the Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi by a female member of the Ethiopian parliament, as 'There was a large number of women in the liberation movement—where are women in the army now, it appears they have been moved aside?' This indicates awareness locally that fighter women have been politically sidelined in the post-conflict context.

While women fought in the war, it is not clear to what extent they were consulted in the formation of the peace. De Watteville argues that

> the participation of women, and especially female ex-combatants, in peace negotiations at an early stage is a prerequisite to the promotion of their interests and to their future participation in decision-making.

> It is at the peace table that the tone is set for the reconstruction of the country, and that the political, economic, social and institutional changes are initiated. It is also an opportunity for women to express their views and influence decisions.[44]

The author is not aware but assumes that women were involved in the Addis Ababa transitional conference of July 1991 in which the EPRDF set out its agenda as a transitional government. In the report of this conference , there is not a single mention of issues that could be seen as priorities for women, and the discussion was dominated by issues of regional self-determination, in particular, the issue of Eritrean independence.[45]

While there has been limited representation of women at a political level nationally, the women in our sample were highly politicised, and they claimed they asserted this in their daily lives. One woman explained that fighter women made their voices heard at local government level in a manner that was atypical for Ethiopian females:

> In politics, those (women) who were fighters are better than those who were not. E.g. If there is a meeting at the Kebele, these fighter women ask and answer questions. They participate actively, but this activity is not common to those who were not fighters or other women because they feel frightened or afraid of anybody.

However in general, the participation of women at a political level has not matched the promises or expectations that existed within the period of the liberation struggle.

In spite of that, however, issues that impact on women have slowly begun to be addressed in political agendas. According to key informants, women are a significant political force at local and regional government levels within Tigray. While this does not generalise to the rest of Ethiopia, legal and social change within Tigray is making its impact on Ethiopian society as a whole, through changes in the legal code. Take, for instance family law, which profoundly affects women's rights in society around rights to property and inheritance. Ethiopian Family Law is for the most part based on the 1960 Civil Code that applied to the country as a whole until very recently. As part of its political programme of a pan-Ethiopian framework, the EPRDF has introduced a federal system that gives regions within Ethiopia rights to self-determination in key areas, thus aiming to change rather than dismantle the Ethiopian state. In 2000, two regions, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa adopted a Revised Family

Table 3: A comparative overview of the differences among the 1960 Civil Code, The Revised Family Code and the Tigray Family Law in terms of references to women and children

Legal issue	The 1960 Civil Code Presently applicable nationwide except in Dira Dawa and Addis Ababa	The Tigray Family Code Developed in Tigray pre-1991	The Revised Family Code (2000) Addis Ababa & Dira Dawa
Marriageable age	A woman who attains the full age of fifteen may contract marriage	A man who attains the full age of twenty two and a woman who has reached the full age of eighteen years can contract marriage	Neither a man nor a woman who has not attained the full age of eighteen years can conclude marriage
Head of the Family	The husband is the head of the family	Both the husband and the wife are equally heads of the family	No such provision is included in the revised family code
Management of the Family	Management of the family under the guidance of the husband	Joint management of the family-vested with equal right in management of the family	Joint management of the family-equal rights in the management of the family
Administration of common property	Administration of common property by the husband	Administration of common property with the full knowledge and ability of both the husband and wife	Administration of common property conjointly by the spouses
Divorce by mutual consent	Prohibits divorce by mutual consent	Permits divorce by mutual agreement of the spouses	Allows divorce by mutual consent of the spouses
Common property under irregular union	Excludes the development of communal property	Allows the development of communal property in an irregular union provided that the relation had lasted for at least 10 years. Yet even in the case where the relation has lasted for less than 10 years, evidenced	Allows the development of communal property in an irregular union provided that the relation had lasted for not less than three years.

Table 3: Continued

		could be adduced to the court to the effect that the property is a common property	
Termination of an irregular union	In the case of termination of an irregular union the man (if equity so requires) may be condemned by the court to pay an indemnity to the woman corresponding to the expense of the maintenance of the woman for not more than six months.	In the case of termination of an irregular union, the man may not be condemned by the court to pay indemnity to the woman or forfeit any of his rights	In the case of termination of an irregular union, liquidation of property shall be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of the code relating to liquidation of pecuniary relations of spouses.
Legal conflicts in regulating paternity	The Child shall be attributed to the husband of the man with whom the woman is living at the time of birth in preference to the husband or the man with whom she was living at the time of conception.	The child shall be attributed to the husband or the man with whom she was living at the time of conception in preference to the husband or the man with whom the mother is living at the time of the birth.	The child shall be attributed to the husband or the man with whom the mother is living at the time of the birth, in preference (to) to husband or the man with whom she was living at the time of conception.

Source: Compiled for this report by Yonatan Tesfaye, Addis Ababa University.

Code that contains significant changes that impact on women. As part of this study, a legal expert was commissioned to examine the similarities and differences between the original 1960 Civil Code (Tigray Family Law) which was developed and applied by the rebel TPLF for Tigray province before 1991 and the 2000 Revised Family Code that is now in place in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, and may be adopted elsewhere in Ethiopia.

The Revised Family contains some very significant changes with respect to the legal position of women. It increases the legal marriageable age of females to eighteen years, a significant move in a country where many women's associations are advocating for an end to early marriages for girls. It removes a

statement in the 1960 Civil Code referring to the husband as the head of the family and asserts the equal rights of the man and woman in the management of the family. Under the Revised Code, rights to divorce is the prerogative of both partners, however the division of property and common assets following divorce is linked to there being reasonable grounds for divorce. Domestic violence, for example, is not regarded as a sufficient ground for women to seek divorce. The right to the administration of property also is held conjointly by both partners, as opposed to by the husband, as under the 1960 civil code. Although women have arguably been sidelined as a political force in the new government, the gender political base of the TPLF, which developed within the *Baitos* (local councils) of Tigray where women were engaged in "making their own revolution", is slowly infiltrating legal and social codes within Ethiopia, resulting in progressive social change.

The impact of being a fighter on women's construction of self

Throughout the interviews, there emerged a sense that being an ex-fighter was not something that women had relegated to the past, but was an active part of women's identity, part of their experiences that differentiated them from other women in Ethiopian society. Women felt they were changed by this experience and overwhelmingly, they saw this as a positive change compared to women who were never fighters. Participants were asked "Do you think being a fighter has changed you in important ways, compared to other women who did not become fighters?" Some of the responses women gave to this question were as follows:

> Because I was a fighter, I got access to education; had it not been for being a fighter, I could not get access to education because the place where I was born is rural, and there is no school there.
>
> Being a fighter, I escaped from an unwanted marriage.
>
> Before, I was afraid of somebody, to do what I want to do but now I have confidence to do everything, I can decide by myself. I can marry who I want; I do not care for someone else (their opinion). All these things I get from being a fighter. I know I can solve whatever problems face me.
>
> Interviewer: How has being a fighter changed you?
>
> Woman: To think about the equality of female with male, to believe and internalise that there is nothing that women do less than men.

Participants felt that, as a result of being a fighter, they were stronger, more confident, more able to face and solve their problems, and considerably more assertive. The significance of this can only be truly appreciated by comparing it to Ethiopian societies norms of appropriate and desirable traits for women. According to Tsegay in Ethiopia, society characterises adult males by traits such as dominance, achievement and aggression, whereas 'decent' women are characterised by traits such as timidity, passivity, emotionalism, deference and self-abasement. He goes on to state that "deviation from this norm would be discouraged and rejected". The women in this study deviated considerably from this norm. They expected equality in their relationships with men and in their personal relationships with their spouses. This expectation characterised their approach to their life. One woman said of her relationship with her husband "There is equal right in decision making. The decision is based on whose idea is better and right, beyond this we have equal power in the family". Another said, "My husband and I—the decision making in our family is between us equally".

> We have equal power, we discuss everything. In the family, I advise if these is any problem

Another said it gave her confidence in her ability to cope with challenging situations. For example:

> It changed me in many ways. Even when you get few things to eat, you can prepare them in good way.

Another woman said it empowered her with respect to family planning, and the experiences and knowledge she gained as a fighter helped her in taking control over her reproductive health:

> It makes a difference because my friends and family are in the rural area. They have many children and they nothing about birth control but I do have only two children. I could add (more children) but I live my life economically (i.e. have the number of children I can afford).

Bruchhaus & Mehreteab note that in general, Eritrean ex-fighters are very concerned about the future of their children, especially about their education thus valued small families, and, for women, since their time in the field, most of them practise family planning. Our interviews suggest a similar pattern amongst female ex-TPLF fighters.

In order to examine female ex-combatants' constructions of self i.e. the cognitive constructs they hold about themselves as women, repertory grid analysis was used to explore and elicit information about how women understand and construct who they are. This is now examined in the following section.

Repertory grid analysis with female ex-combatants

Repertory grids were carried out with six female ex-combatants who participated in the interviews in the first part of the study. In addition, repertory grids were completed with four community women who had never been fighters. These women were from the Gurage region, but were matched on the basis of being a similar age to the women in our interviews, and as having moved from a rural area to the capital city.

An analysis of individual repertory grids provides an opportunity to see women's individual constructions of self.

Example 1

This is the repertory grid of one of the female ex-combatants. The first table is a visual matrix summarising her construct of self before the fighters, self during fighters, self currently and her constructions of other males and females. The second table gives an account of her elicited constructs.

In terms of the rating scale, it is a scale with numbers between 1–5, where 1 refers to the construct in the extreme left hand column and 5 refers to the construct on the extreme right-hand column. For example, for the first construct, 1=equality, 5=accept male superiority. Each element receives a rating with respect to each construct.

From this matrix, it can be seen that, on the first construct 'equality', this participant judged 'Me before the fighters' is the same as 'My mother' and 'A man I know', (4=close to 'accept male superiority) and similar to A woman who was never a fighter (3). These contrast with 'me during fighters' and 'Me currently' and 'My husband', who are rated as 'Accepts equality'. This sets up a contrast between an acceptance of cultural notions of the position of men as superior to women, and an acceptance of equality between the sexes. It captures the personal movement of the woman from a position of 'accepts male superiority' before joining the fighters to one of 'accepting equality' on joining the fighters.

Table 4: Example 1: Repertory grid of female ex-combatant-constructs and rating scale									
Construct (positive)	**Me before fighters**	**Me during fighters**	**Me currently**	**My mother**	**A man I know**	**My female fighter friend**	**A woman never a fighter**	**My husband**	**Opposite construct (less positive)**
Accept equality	4	1	1	4	4	1	3	1	Accept male superiority
Self-confidence	4	1	1	3	2	1	3	1	Lack of self-confidence
Economic independence	5	5	3	3	1	2	4	2	Economic dependence
Lead life according to one's own interest	5	1	2	3	1	1	3	1	Lead life on (other's?) interest
Not accepting all culture as it is	4	1	2	4	4	2	4	2	Accepting culture as it is
Don't worry for minor problems	1	1	1	3	2	1	3	2	One who worries for minor problems
The one who works hard to get needs	5	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	Gets satisfied with limited needs

Source: author's own

Table 5: Example 1: Repertory grid of female ex-combatant-Constructs elicited	
Reject male superiority/Accept equality I prefer this because accepting ideas from one side is not good. Taking example from my married life, I don't want my husband to be superior so that he will do every decision to me. For instance, if my husband wants to have a child, it is not only his choice but I have to agree at this point	**Accept male superiority**
Self-confidence It is important for all. I am not the one who is suspicious/not sure for everything I do. When I decide to sat something or do something, it is with confidence that is it possible for me to do it. I am not that much dependent on others to get better ideas or solutions.	**Lack of self-confidence**
Economic independence It is obvious that everyone prefers economic independence. I have economic independence so that I allocate the income I get in a way that it furthers my interest. If I were not economic-ally independence, I would be dependent on my husband not only financially but also for other things. My husband would have been the one to decide fro my own life. I wouldn't have freedom to go wherever I like and so on.	**Economic dependence**
Lead life according to one's own interest I choose to lead life according to my own interest because it is a good thing for me to lead a happy life. I have to live based on my own interest and my husband's interest with agreement and understanding. If I do accept things for others sake, I am not living my life.	**Lead life on (others?) interest**
Not accepting all culture as it is I don't accept out culture as it is because there are certain things that I think are not fair to females. And rejecting these things helps me in many ways. For example, in my culture, it is not good for females to go to a hotel alone and ear. I don't accept this but do go to hotel or where-ever when I get hungry at workplace or whenever there is no food at home	**Accepting culture as it is**
Don't worry for minor problems I don't want to get worried about everything. Because worrying by itself cannot be a solution by itself. Getting worried is a sign of hopelessness. In my married life or workplace, I may get problems.	**One who worries for minor problems**

Table 5: Continued

The one who works hard to get needs Working hard is very important because it helps me not to be dependent on others. It also helps me to live better income and by that I can live a better life. I worked very hard to get educated and I got a job and now I am economically independent. If I didn't have work, I would not be now economically independent and having job. Any way to be hopeful that things can be arranged if working hard.	**Gets satisfied with limited needs**

Source: author's own

Interestingly on 'Not accepting all culture as it is', she judges that she moved from a position of 'accepts culture' (a rating of 4), to 'does not accept culture' during the fighters (a rating of 1), then to '2' for 'me currently'. Reintegration has resulted in making some compromises on accepting traditional cultural norms.

On economic independence, she rates her position before and during the fighters as 'economic dependence'. Currently, she rates herself as 3, implying she is not as economically independent as she would wish, and this contrasts with the position of 'a man I know', who is rated a 1, or economically independent, or her husband (an ex-fighter) whom she rates 2 on this construct. The second table gives the detailed meanings of each of these constructs for this participant.

A second example also captures a participant's construction of the impact that being a fighter has had on her construction of self, in comparison with others. From this, we can see a similar pattern to the first grid. This woman constructs herself as accepting the equality of women and men, of having political knowledge as being reasonably educated and successful and standing up for her rights. This contrasts with her mother for example, who is constructed as accepting the inequality of men and women, of not standing up for her rights, as lacking in political knowledge. 'A man I know' is constructed as being somewhere in the middle of all these constructs (3). Interestingly, 'A woman who was never a fighter' is constructed as being more similar to 'My mother' while 'My female fighter friend' is constructed as similar to 'me currently'. 'My husband' is also placed in the position of accepting equality, standing for his rights, having political knowledge, but only a 3 in terms of being educated, having a good way of life, and being successful. Also interesting is she positioned herself as 'successful' within the fighters, and less so (2) currently.

Table 6: Example 2: Repertory grid of female ex-combatant-constructs and rating scale									
Construct	**Me before fighters**	**Me during fighters**	**Me currently**	**My mother**	**A man I know**	**A woman never a fighter**	**My female fighter friend**	**My husband**	**Opposite pole**
Equality	5	1	1	5	3	5	1	1	**Inequality**
They can stand for their rights (have rights)	5	1	1	5	3	5	1	1	**They do not care about their rights**
Successful person	5	1	2	3	3	3	3	2	**Not successful**
Political knowledge	5	2	1	4	3	5	2	1	**Does not have knowledge of politics**
Educated, having a good way of life	4 3	3 3	2 4	3	3 3	3 3	3 3	3 3	**Illiterate/bad way of life**
Respecting others	3	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	**Disrespects others/ believes in his superiority**
Source: author's own									

After the elicitation of each participant's individual constructs, four themes emerged as central in the self-constructions of female ex-combatants; these were equality, knowledge of politics and political struggle, self-confidence and independence, and being educated.

Equality

The construct of 'equality' emerged in the repertory grids of all six women. Each was asked 'Why is this (construct) important to you'? It became clear that the principle of 'equality' is something women have internalised and it infiltrates how they approach every aspect of life, from decision-making on a day to day level within the family to decision-making about larger family issues such as family planning, to the social and political development of the country. One woman explained:

> I prefer this (equality) because accepting ideas from one side is not good. Taking example from my married life, I don't want my husband to be superior so that he will make every decision to me. For instance, if my husband wants to have a child, it is not only his choice but I have to agree at this point.

For other women, 'equality' was important in terms of being able to access resources that were automatic for men and more difficult for women, such as education and work. One woman gave an example that demonstrates how the issue of 'access' is subtle and fundamental in everyday life. She worked in a Government office in the city centre. She said sometimes, if she did not have time to prepare food to bring with her, she would go to a restaurant close to her workplace and have something to eat there. However she explained, as a woman, to enter and eat in a restaurant on your own, is culturally not accepted. She gave this example as a testament to her principles of equality and her defiance of the cultural restrictions on females, and the norms and cultural values that restrict women's access to resources of all kinds.

For another woman, equality is important as it means a woman can 'decide for herself, by herself' and nobody will pressurise her. This shows a sense of resistance or defiance; a stand against pressurising forces that may want or expect something different—or more traditional—for her. From women's interviews, this sense of pressure, conflict and resistance was a central part of their relationship with civilian life on their emergence from the military.

One woman defined equality as important for her as a potential source of opportunity and support: "If there is equality for both men and women, if I can have equality with men, I can get as good access as them. I can lean on them in the rearing children and doing in the household". As in feminist literature everywhere, it is in the domestic sphere that women feel the burden of inequality most fundamentally. Women defined the polar opposite of 'equality' as 'inequality', as 'accepting the superiority of men' or as 'accepting the inferiority of women'. Two women linked their constructions of equality with the broader political agenda of social development. One participant said equality was important in development; "(The) equality of both men and women is important for the economic, social and political development of the country. I have equal rights with men, I can participate in many things. As women are part of the society, they should have equal rights for the development of the country". The link between the personal and the political is explicit in women's constructions of themselves and their view of their social world.

Self-confidence

Women constructed themselves as 'self-confident', and the polar opposite of self-confidence was 'lack of confidence'. This emerged in four of the six repertory grids. On being asked 'Why is this important to you'; self-confidence for participants meant women had confidence in their ability, in their right to speak up for their rights, and in their decision-making and problem solving. One woman explained:

> Self-confidence, it is important for all. I am not the one who is suspicious/ not sure of everything I do. When I decide to say something or do something, it is with confidence that is it possible for me to do it. I am not that much dependent on others to come up with better ideas or better solutions.

Another said:

> If I have confidence in my self, I will not depend on others in any decision. And this leads me to be successful in everything. If I have confidence, I can do what ever I want to do.

One construct of one of the participants was "Decide by yourself", of which the opposite was "depend on others for the decision". This is similar to the ideas

being expressed by other women as self-confidence. For this participant, she constructed it as deciding about birth control, family planning and other things.

> Deciding for yourself is advantageous. For example, if I have the ability to decide for myself, say, if my husband wants me to give birth, but I don't want; this will be done by agreement between me and him.

Political knowledge or knowledge of political struggle

Three participants included political knowledge, or knowledge of fighting or knowledge of political struggle as constructs in their meaning systems. The women said knowledge of political struggle was the opposite of 'does no know about politics' or 'having no knowledge or experience about fighting', or 'having no knowledge of political struggle'. One explained what it meant for her as follows:

> If I have experience of knowledge of fighting, I become successful in destroying my enemy. If I have the skill and know-how of fighting, I can destroy my enemy easily.

This may also be part of the basis of self-confidence. Political knowledge was constructed as the opposite of 'being ignorant'. For half the women, it was part of their core constructions of themselves.

Being educated/independent

Being educated was constructed as being linked with being independent, and economic independence in particular, and with having an awareness of what is going on politically. One woman explained, "If I am educated, I become independent in everything. If I am educated, I would have a good job, and good way of life. Economically, I become independent. Even I know about everything that is going on in my country." As with other constructs, women linked their education and independence with broader societal development, thus integrally linking the personal with the political.

> If I am economically independent it will be advantageous for myself as well as for my country. If an individual's country is economically independent by itself, this shows the development of the country, and this leads the independence of the country.

Economic independence is also linked with equality and self-confidence, as the person who is economically independent is also free.

> It is obvious that everyone prefers economic independence. I have economic independence so that I allocate the income I get in a way that it furthers my interest. If I were not economically independence, I would be dependent on my husband not only financially but also for other things. My husband would have been the one to decide for my own life. I wouldn't have freedom to go wherever I like and so on.

Repertory grid analysis with female non-combatants

As a point of comparison, the repertory grids of two women who were never fighters are shown here.

The first interviewee is referred as G. She is a 27 year old woman, who is engaged in selling tea and bread for the daily labourers on a street corner. Her husband is dead and she has a child. She went to school to grade 8. G believes that men are superior to women in every way. The woman she admires most is her childhood friend, who has been to Dubai and has been to improve the life condition of her family.

From her grid, we can see the constructs are those that are closer to the traditional characteristics of females identified by Tsegay , such as nurturance and caring values. She explained her construct of 'Sharing good and bad times' as "It is good to have someone around or to be there for someone in good or bad times; and being able to improve one's life and the life of one's family, and being diligent. Being urban emerged as a core construct in the grids of all four non-combatant women. For this woman it meant, it "allows cleanliness, being better dressed, better house keeping, better food". An analysis of her repertory grid indicates, 'me before' and 'My mother' are constructed as being similar. 'Me now' is urban (1), somewhat diligent (2), but not able to improve one's life or the life of one's family (4).

A second interviewee is referred as B, is a 23-year-old woman. She is engaged in peddling different items like socks, cigarettes, soft papers, and so on. She knows how to read and write.

The constructs that emerged in this woman's repertory grid were:

Table 7: Example 3: Non ex-combatant woman: Constructs and rating scale								
Construct	**Husband**	**Female friend**	**Man I know**	**Rural woman**	**My mother**	**Me currently**	**Me before**	**Opposite pole**
Sharing good/bad times	2	3	1	3	2	3	4	**Not being there in good/bad times**
Being able to improve one's life and the lives of others	3	1	3	2	4	4	4	**Not being able to improve life/life of family**
Being diligent	2	1	2	2	4	2	3	**Not being diligent**
Being urban	1	1	5	5	5	1	5	**Being rural**
Source: Author's own								

Table 8: Example 4: Non ex-combatant woman: Constructs and rating scale									
Construct	**Admired woman**	**Husband**	**Female friend**	**Man I know**	**Rural women**	**My mother**	**Me currently**	**Me before**	**Opposite**
Being more knowledgeable	1	2	4	3	4	5	3	5	**Being less knowledgeable**
Being allowed the chance to be educated	1	2	4	1	5	5	5	5	**Not allowed chance to be educated**
Being urban	1	1	1	3	5	5	1	5	**Being rural dweller**
Being popular	1	3	5	3	5	5	5	5	**Being unknown**
Being unmarried	1	5	1	5	5	5	1	5	**Being married**
Source: Author's own									

> 'Being more knowledgeable', which she defined as "You can do well to your nation and can lead many in the right direction";
>
> 'Being allowed the change to be educated' as "I can be self-reliant and know more";
>
> 'Being urban', as "There is no electricity, school, and hospital in rural area. I would have been given away to a husband by now wind up leading a miserable life if I were in rural area; now here I am self-reliant";
>
> 'Being popular' as "I can have a better life and bring pride to my nation and my people"; and
>
> 'Being unmarried' as "When you are married when you don't know much and when you are dependent, you will end up leading a miserable life ".

As can be seen from an analysis of her grid, she constructed herself as being urban (1), as being somewhat knowledgeable (3), as being unmarried, which she linked with not being dependent, and being unknown (5). All of these contrasted with an admired woman, for her, the most famous singer in the country, Aster Awoke, whom she constructed as rating 1 on all the constructs. This indicates someone who has many fantasies of how she would like her life to be, and her reality does not match how she would like her life to be.

In summary, the self-constructions of female ex-combatants and women who were never combatants differ significantly and in consistent ways. Each set of constructs emerges from women's experiences and expectations of their lives. In general, female ex-combatants are more aware of women's rights; expect equality in their relationships in society; construct themselves as politically-aware, self-confident and independent. Non-combatant women construct themselves as ascribing to more traditional values for women; as not confident in their competence to bring about the kind of life they would like; and as valuing being an urban dweller as opposed to living in the rural area, which emerged as the most consistent and strongly-felt construct for these women.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

This study highlights a number of important issues. Within a small sample, it traces the movement of a group of women from a time when they were children, through their entry to fighting forces, and the impact that the militarisation and politicisation they experience in that setting has on their lives. Their identity and experiences as fighters has become central to their identity, and it is through this lens that they view and experience the civilian world. At the point of demobilisation and reintegration, they found that the values, socialisation experiences and expectations they had inculcated during their fighter years, as women, were at odds with the traditional feminine values of Ethiopian society. They had to make some adjustment within themselves in order to reduce the level of conflict they experienced with that society. However, they also refused to compromise their internalised beliefs about their competence, ability and rights to participate in an equal society. Through the analysis, we can see the influence of fighter women on the political context in Ethiopia, and the dynamic impact of women's political and military participation on a gradually evolving political system in the post-conflict years. Although women feel frustrated personally, their ongoing resistance and challenges to the social and political system means that the host society has been 'pushed' by them, as they have been pushed by it. However at an individual level, it is an unequal battle, and women struggle economically and personally within this system.

The findings in this study also give critical insight into the social and relational challenges faced by women on demobilisation and reintegration. Research on gender in demobilisation has drawn recognition to the fact that women have specific needs in demobilisation that are different to those of men. This includes a recognition of the special medical needs around reproductive health, treating women with their children as a unit, and that there may be a need of special supports to promote host community acceptance of female ex-combatants, especially if women have been sexually assaulted or raped, or have had children while in fighting forces. This suggests an 'add-on' model of addressing gender in demobilisation and reintegration. That is, there is an assumption that the needs of men and women in demobilisation programmes

can be treated as similar, with some added support to address specific gender-linked needs of women. The findings here reach a different conclusion. Women who enter a militarised social-relational world as children, as is the experience of many females in armed conflict contexts, experience their entire socialisation within the norms and values of that military context, and their constructions of what it means to be 'female' are shaped by that socialisation experience. On demobilisation and reintegration, they confront a different world, where those constructions may no longer apply or be relevant. This socialisation experience may have been empowering, as reported by women here, or oppressive and enslaving, as is common on other conflict contexts. Depending on their position within armed groups, it may place them in a power struggle with traditional gendered expectations for women in civilian society. If women's socialisation within armed groups was one of gender-related violence and abuse, it is likely that it is through this lens that women will relate to the civilian world, enhancing their vulnerability as they attempt to renegotiate the learning they have experienced within that abusive context. The point is, women's experiences become central to their identity, and the discontinuity they experience within and outside of fighting forces in terms of their gender and self-identity is most likely not experienced to the same extent as men. There has not been sufficient recognition of this in the literature on demobilisation and reintegration.

Finally, this study raises some important challenges for taken-for-granted assumptions about the impact of entering military forces as a child, and the long-term impact of being a 'child soldier'. Firstly, it must again be noted that the reported experiences of women in this study are highly atypical of that of females within fighting forces in Africa in general, where available research indicates women are highly exposed to sexual exploitation and gender-based violence.[46] Yet all women in this study entered the fighting forces as children, and rather than emerge with constructions of themselves as victims, they constructed themselves as having been empowered by their experiences. This exposes a tension that exists within the child-centred literature with respect to the notion of 'child participation'. There is generally a recognition of children's agency and advocacy for their right to participate in arenas that affect their lives. Yet in contexts where children may choose to participate in fighting forces, they are constructed in child protection literature as not really making a choice, as powerless or forced by circumstances and as 'victims'. There is an important reason for this, is that it seeks to protect children's safety. But a denial of the tension of demanding recognition of child 'power' in one fora while rendering them powerless in the political contexts of conflict, is a contradiction. The lives of women in this study, as those of children in Palestine,

Northern Ireland and other conflict contexts attest to the reality that children can choose to be politically active. The question then is what avenues are created for children to assert their power in this respect. The women interviewed here challenge not only their own society but commonly-accepted assumptions about children's risk and resiliency in the context of war.

ENDNOTES

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27. A Ayalew & S Dercon, op cit, p 144.
28. This figure is based on Ayalew & Dercon's, 2000, figures showing that between 3–4% of 445,000 demobilised personnel from the Derg military forces were females.
29. E M Bruchhaus & A Mehreteab, op cit, p 121.
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38. A De Watteville, op cit.
39. A Ayalew & S Dercon, op cit.
40. See notes on sampling. Women were selected on an ad hoc basis. Five women were initially identified through a key informant and all five worked in

Government offices. These women were asked to invite a female ex-combatant friend to also participate in the study and all also worked in Government jobs.

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