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Peace as Disappointment

The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa

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THE REINTEGRATION OF FEMALE SOLDIERS IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES – A COMPARATIVE STUDY FROM AFRICA

A Report for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO)
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PREFACE

THIS REPORT WAS WRITTEN TO produce documentation on post-conflict demobilization and reintegration of female soldiers, with a special focus on Africa. Most of the work on the report was conducted during 2001, although some of the work spilled over into 2002. I am very grateful to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for financing this project, and to individual representatives of the ministry – Knut Tøraasen, Fredrik Arthur and Unni Rambøll in particular – for encouraging me.

The report was written at the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO). I am grateful to my many colleagues there, especially Inger Skjelsbæk and Henrik Syse, for invaluable help and support.

I am also grateful to my numerous informants and interviewees, not least the many brave African women who spent many, many hours speaking to me and relating their often painful stories. I would also like to express my gratitude to Worku and Tzegga for helping me to arrange interviews in Eritrea and for otherwise assisting me in numerous ways.

The recommendations in this report are the result of a long process of study and deliberation, and they have been discussed with several colleagues at PRIO. I hope they will be of use to aid workers and diplomats alike, but I stress that they represent my views and not those of PRIO or the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Elise F. Barth
Oslo, August 2002

Chapter 1

PROLOGUE

Introduction

This report has three objectives:

- to increase knowledge about the situation of women who have been soldiers in various countries in Africa, and thereby understand the mechanisms that sustain the separation between ex-soldiers and civilians;
- to map and analyze the demobilization and reintegration process of female soldiers in a post-conflict situation; and
- to suggest how demobilization and reintegration can be facilitated.

The project will compare the situation of female soldiers in various African settings, focusing in particular on continuity/change and socialization. The project aims to analyze the situation from the perspectives of both the female fighters themselves and the surrounding civil society.[1]

Method

The report is based on extensive fieldwork in Eritrea, where both fighters and civilians were interviewed. In addition, information has been gathered from fact-collecting trips to the Sudan and Northwestern University, Chicago, as well as from reports, articles, and books documenting the phenomenon of female soldiers.

Background

Female soldiers have existed in most parts of the world and at most times. In Africa, for example, we read of cases where women have served in guerrilla armies and liberation movements in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, South Africa, and Algeria (Kriger, 1992; Turschen, 1998; Arthur, 1998). In such cases, the role of women has been both to increase the number of soldiers in general and to serve in roles unique to women (see chapter 2).

Women become soldiers for many reasons, one being that the military can provide them, and not just men, with an alternative career. Indeed, sometimes the military is the only career available at a particular time and place.

Africa is becoming more and more militarized (Volman, 1998; Schröder, 1999). Daniel Volman has documented the growing impact of war and armed conflict on African societies. The enormous volume of the flow of small arms, such as guns and mines, throughout the African continent adds to the causation of violence and devastation. Women's vital roles in maintaining their families and participating in farming and activities that keep their societies functioning are particularly affected by escalating levels of violence and social chaos.

With increased militarization, there is naturally an increase in the total number of soldiers. This leads to a decline in other sectors of society as many of the most able young men and women spend their time fighting and perfecting their skills as soldiers instead of receiving a civilian edu-

[1] 'Civil society' is defined here, and throughout the report, as unorganized civilian people, not as non governmental organizations (as is often the case in international politics or sociology).

cation and working towards the construction of their respective countries. As legitimate economic activity declines, warfare increasingly becomes the dominant mode of production and a significant sector of the economy. Increased militarism leads to more and more young people leaving their home communities to take part in military service, never to return again (Kingma, 1999).

In a modern 'total war' situation, there is often no clearly defined frontline, and civilians can come directly under attack. Consequently, the stereotyped image of men going off to war and women staying at home, away from the conflict, has to be radically revised. However, women are not merely victims in such conflicts. They also actively work together with men in support of the war effort.

Often, women's work has consisted in helping the men to be the soldiers they want to be, or are expected to be. Women have filled all kinds of auxiliary functions so that war can go on. Urdang describes how women in Guinea-Bissau were the ones who made sure that supplies reached the guerrilla soldiers. She argues that in all guerrilla wars, it has been women who have provided the supply line (Urdang, 1979). This is a very important and often undervalued point. Indeed, Jan Jindy Pettmann, feminist and professor in international politics, goes as far as to ask: 'Without women's activities, would wars be possible?' (1996: 127).

Women are often as central to the roots and perpetuation of an armed conflict as men. The role of women as supporters of armed conflict, however, has often been trivialized. Given women's instrumental role in supporting or opposing violence (see, for example, Byrne, 1995 or Sørensen, 1998), important sides of a conflict may be hidden when women's perspectives are lacking in an analysis. Thus, conflict analyses cannot be considered complete if they are based solely on information that fails to take account of women's points of view.

Female soldiers challenge deeply anchored preconceptions of gender identity (Enloe, 1990; Campbell, 1990; Segal, 1993; Cooke, 1996). Cross-culturally and historically, combat has been reserved for men as an arena in which they can test, prove, and be rewarded for their virility. Judith Hicks Stiehm (1988), who has done extensive research on women in the US armed forces, argues that the presence of women alters the military when service can no longer be seen as a way of demonstrating manhood. To allow women into a male bastion threatens it as an arena for demonstrating masculinity and, among other things, achieving the prestige of belonging to such an organization.

Female soldiers who have broken ties with their families and participated in a war on terms similar to those of men have very often been socialized out of their local settings. For many, the influence of military life has lasted over several years. They may have been very young at the time, and usually they have had experiences in the field that will influence them in the future. The gap between socialization in the home community and socialization within the narrow restrictions of a military movement is great.

When male and female ex-soldiers return to civil society, they are not received in the same way. While men are perceived to have strengthened their gender role through military life and are considered even more masculine than before, female fighters are increasingly marginalized. When a war ends, the female soldiers from the winning party of the conflict may at first receive gratitude from civil society. Gradually, however, women are pushed in the direction of a gender role considered more acceptable for women in that particular society. This is characteristic of the situation of female soldiers all over the world: conduct encouraged during the war is not encouraged in peacetime (see, for example, Enloe, 2000). As a result, women experience a much greater break with civil society's expectations with regard to appropriate gender behavior than men when they join a military group. Afterwards, they are challenged in a totally different way, expected to return to roles very different from their war activities. This certainly has implications for their reintegration into society.

Funding

Programs assisting with the demobilization and reintegration of soldiers are funded by numerous sources. When a war ends, the governments of affected countries negotiate with the aid commu-

nity for economic support. Assistance is usually provided by major donor agencies, like the World Bank, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations. Demobilization and reintegration assistance are then discussed and negotiated by the parties involved. The World Bank in particular is involved in demobilization efforts in Africa.

In the case of Eritrea, for example, Italy and the United States are Eritrea's first and second largest bilateral partners, while the multilateral partners, the World Bank (demobilization, economic recovery, health, human capacity development) and the European Union (energy, roads, education, food) are first and second overall. UN agencies manage a diverse portfolio of projects largely funded by other donors. Other major bilateral partners in Eritrea are the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, and Germany. All partners are involved in demobilization and reintegration efforts (World Bank, 2002).

Chapter 2

TARGETING

Introduction

Targeting ex-soldiers eligible for demobilization support is a complex process. In order to be successful, reintegration programs have to take into account a number of different considerations. First and foremost, a general and serious warning should be sounded against singling out some groups and giving them benefits that are very different from what is received by the rest of the community. The social fabric of a community is vulnerable to outside influence, and programs designed to benefit ex-combatants may work against the overall goal of integrating that particular group into civil society. The important question necessary to ask is whether demobilization assistance will promote integration into the local community or not.

In spite of this, it is essential to reserve some assistance for ex-combatants. Ex-combatants need incentives for returning to civil society. Numerous obstacles pave the way for the demobilized combatant, and support must be offered. It is necessary, as well, to recognize the different needs of the various groups of people who have participated as soldiers. For example, an ex-soldier youth will not have the same needs as an adult former combatant, male or female (Maslen, 1997). And the situation experienced by women ex-soldiers differs from that of men. These considerations must always be evaluated, and the question asked: Will the group in question benefit from the reintegration program? Are there possible long-term effects? Will the assistance lead to increased division between the ex-soldiers and other people in the community?

Soldiers not qualifying for assistance

A number of factors make the targeting of former soldiers eligible for reintegration programs difficult. Political sensitivity and factors often not obvious to an outsider influence the process and the conduct of such programs. Many of the problems of targeting people eligible for assistance after an armed conflict are the same for both men and for women. For example, soldiers belonging to a defeated group in the conflict will not have the same problems as soldiers belonging to the winning group. Often, some groups are not recognized by, for example, the government of the country as equally entitled to demobilization and reintegration benefits. The government may apply different targeting mechanisms to combatants from different groups. Both male and female soldiers belonging to the losing side may have difficulties in being recognized as ex-soldiers entitled to certain benefits.

Mozambique's two opposing liberation movements, *Frelimo* and *Renamo*, illustrate this point. Mozambique achieved independence from Portugal in 1975, only to see the start of a violent conflict between the Frelimo government and the opposition Renamo, which lasted for 16 years. No one knows exactly how many men and women participated as soldiers, nor the numbers of those who demobilized immediately after the war without being registered (Colletta et al., 1996; Maslen, 1997). The government's decision to only make pensions available for ex-soldiers who had joined at an age of 18 or over had a direct effect on many Renamo soldiers, of whom many, both male and female, were younger when they entered the armed forces. In addition, children under the age of 15 were excluded from the official demobilization process. The demobilization of children in Mozambique was a politically sensitive topic, as it has been in many other places. No government wants to draw attention to a practice of including children in the ranks of its armed forces. As a target group, ex-soldiers under the age of 18 consequently often fail to receive

proper attention. Owing to factors such as those mentioned above, estimates of the total numbers of soldiers at the end of the conflict in Mozambique were approximate, to say the least, ranging from 90,000 to 150,000 (Colletta et al., 1996; Maslen, 1997).

There are other examples of ex-soldiers that have not been accepted as being entitled to reintegration programs: insurgents and guerrillas are frequently not recognized as proper combatants, and are thus excluded from programs that target ex-combatants. One case, also from Mozambique, is that of the *Naparama*, a movement of 20,000 warriors led by a traditional healer, which was excluded from the demobilization program in that country (Barron, 1996: 24).

Problems with registration

Frequently, there is no systematic registration of combatants, or registration lists are not correct. For example, in Mozambique, reports from the war veterans association AMODEG show that some soldiers received support from multiple sources while others received no support at all (Baden, 1997).

Another example comes from Namibia, where an unknown number of both male and female combatants served during the war. At the time of demobilization in 1989, there was no systematic collection of socio-economic data on the combatants. This means that figures can be extremely inaccurate. However, one estimate is that 40% of ex-combatants have not benefited from any of the various demobilization programs as a result of 'targeting leakages'. These leakages occur at all stages of the demobilization process (Colletta et al., 1996).

Examples of targeting leakages are many. On example is that of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), which was founded in 1962 as a result of Ethiopia's violations against the Eritrean population. In 1970, a small faction of the ELF broke, later establishing itself as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in 1975. From that point, the two liberation armies were in serious opposition to each other, and the ELF was later forced to leave Eritrea. The EPLF liberated Eritrea on 24 May 1991, and the country was declared an independent sovereign state two years later (Iyob, 1995). These developments in Eritrea illustrate how some ex-soldiers are not recognized as soldiers eligible to reintegration programs because their existence either is not recognized or because they simply are not around any longer.

Another example of leakage is the case of the Ethiopian Derg[1] soldiers, of whom some 15% chose not to show up for demobilization assistance after the war. When they were called to show up for encampment, none of them did so (Colletta et al., 1996: 38) . This illustrates that even when soldiers are recognized as eligible for assistance, they may choose not to receive it, in order to avoid the situation of confronting other soldiers. In this case, the soldiers may have refused to come out of fear of reprisals by soldiers from other sides of the conflict. Here, we see again how different the circumstances are for soldiers on different sides of a conflict once the war is over. Soldiers who have fought for the 'wrong' side represent a very unstable group in a postwar society. They are not accepted within the establishment and risk becoming a more and more marginalized group.

There are also cases where less severely disabled combatants who are qualified for assistance have failed to show up at discharge centers. The reason for this may be immobility, or it may be because their homes were too far from the discharge centers. Examples from Ethiopia show that many less disabled ex-soldiers did not register and consequently received no support (Colletta et al., 1996: 35).

A last point demonstrating the complexities of targeting ex-soldiers is data collection on soldiers. Obtaining and storing correct data on ex-soldiers contains lots of potential for misunderstanding. Many countries have numerous languages because of different ethnic groups. The official writing down various data may come from a different group than the soldiers that he or she is collecting information from. Confusion because of language problems is not unusual, with the result that data on a particular soldier are not correct. One example from Uganda is where a number of veterans had their names misspelled on their registration cards. The background to this was that the clerks who filled in the information on the cards spelt names and addresses differently

[1] The Derg was the name given to the regime of Mengistu Hailemariam, leader of Ethiopia in 1974–91.

depending on their own places of origin. Later, this caused lots of errors and considerable confusion (Colletta et al., 1996: 235).

In addition, information supplied on discharge is not always correct. For example, the dates of birth and army numbers of former combatants are commonly confused (ibid.). From my own fieldwork in Eritrea, among very poor ex-fighter women, I was struck by the number of women who could not give me the precise date of their own birth. Different calendars, chronologies, and ways of reckoning of time all may increase the likelihood that incorrect information is being collected.

Veteran's families

It has been claimed that reintegration of veterans will not be successful as long as their families are not also targeted (Watteville 2000). Demobilization and assistance programs should include families when these are dependent on the veteran's income, but this does not often happen. Identification of dependents is difficult. Data are easily falsified, not kept up-to-date, or simply nonexistent (ibid.). Analyses should be conducted of the household to find out who has actual control over given benefits. This is obviously a demanding and time-consuming task, but is nonetheless important. The families of veterans are in a vulnerable position upon demobilization, and a program that aims to be successful cannot overlook this fact.

Special Problems with Targeting Female Veterans

The difficulties faced by female soldiers in being recognized as veterans are manifold and widespread (see, for example, Baden, 1997 or Watteville, 2000). This also leads to a general lack of access to demobilization benefits after an armed conflict. The roles of female veterans vary greatly from place to place. In many places, women have been fighting alongside men on the frontlines. In other places and at other times, women have only been allowed to do support work, such as carrying ammunition, cooking, communication, nursing – all auxiliary functions. Often, men have been unwilling to share veteran status with women, especially where women have been denied participation in direct combat. Sometimes female veterans are recognized for their contribution, for example by the government, and they receive an appropriate appraisal and formal acknowledgment. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that the women receive the same benefits as their male comrades.

Contribution not recognized

Ex-combatants are considered a serious threat to the political stability of a state. Accordingly, this group is a prioritized target for reintegration support. While this is true, women combatants are not perceived as a threat to the same degree as men. As a result, it is not considered as important to target them (Baden, 1997; Watteville, 200). Here, I would like to point out that it is possible that female combatants can be a destabilizing factor in ways that do not threaten in a direct manner, but are threatening all the same, such as through their rejection of traditions and established patterns of conduct. More than men, female ex-combatants are a challenge to traditional society. They are a challenge because, more than men, they resist returning to old gender relations. In a postwar society, the experiences of female combatants suggest that 'even more than men, these women have become unsuited to their former civilian environment because the change in their pattern of life was more radical' (Campbell, 1990: 117).

Whether women are perceived as a threat or not, there are several explanations for why the contribution of female soldiers often goes unacknowledged. In general, there is an overall reluctance among higher officers to recognize the importance of the participation of women for the war effort.

Even though few would argue that male and female combatants do not qualify for equal treatment after an armed conflict, female combatants have had a difficult time proving their contribution in a war. Especially in guerrilla movements, women have had a difficult time actually verifying their actions. Often, female veterans are not included in reintegration programs because their

role is not recognized as having been *active enough*. This is particularly common when women are not allowed to fight directly against the enemy. Most roles other than that of direct fighting on the frontline will be considered secondary to the war effort (Watteville, 2000; Zimbabwe Women Writers, 2000).

Women are frequently dependent on men to speak on their behalf in order to confirm their veteran status (Watteville, 2000). Men are the ones responsible for affirming the women's rank as soldiers and how they have contributed. This places women in a weak position. Many women have not had their ranks confirmed formally. Their access to veteran status is dependent upon the goodwill of a superior and the impulses or inclinations of those involved.

Psychosocial problems

Targeting female soldiers is a problem when women do not want to be recognized as combatants after a war is over because of the stigma attached to this. An example comes from Liberia, where many women wanted to hide the fact that they had been soldiers. Such women are hard to find – 'You can't find them, it's like they never existed' (Bennett, 1995: 43) – and consequently they never received any benefits after the war. This reaction is understandable in the light of the way in which women who returned after the war were received: 'as far as most of the men are concerned, when you [a female combatant] come back, you are out.... They hardly want you to come near the children' (ibid.: 39). This attitude towards women who have been combatants is not unique to Liberia. Ex-combatant women are well known to face difficulties in getting accepted by traditional society, and the consequence may be that they do not come forward to receive the assistance they are entitled to, but on the contrary try to hide their past.

Other examples document how women *try* to be proud of their contribution as soldiers, but nevertheless are rejected by civil society. In Zimbabwe, female fighters describe how, upon their return to civil society, they were pulled between living up to the image of a superwoman while being looked down upon (Zimbabwe Women Writers, 2000). The values of civil society and the values of the liberation army are often in opposition to each other, and women who have been influenced by their time as soldiers have to repress the soldier part of their identity in order to be accepted.

Women who do not come forward represent a large problem, and one that is probably more common than hitherto recognized. Even though several women are targeted and come forward for assistance, many women may choose to lie about their past as soldiers in order to hide this fact. The stigma women receive when they reject traditional roles and expose themselves to a male environment may be greater than hiding their past and making the best out of their situation without any help from assistance programs.

Lack of information

Experience has shown that women have less access to information on demobilization and reintegration assistance than men (Watteville, 2000). Information about one's rights reaches men more easily than women. In order to reach women, women's networks, church groups, health centers, and more informal information channels are more effective than, say, newspapers and radio.

Demobilization

Upon demobilization, if possible, all soldiers should go to encampment, as this is the best way of reaching and registering as many former combatants as possible. Otherwise, groups that risk being marginalized, like female soldiers, will often not present themselves at a later stage. The main purpose of encampment is registration and making sure that all soldiers receive information about the assistance they are entitled to.

There are many examples of women not showing up for registration in a postwar situation. Watteville (2000) lists countries like Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Nicaragua as examples where women did not show up for registration. She is unsure whether they were deliberately excluded,

whether they were not informed, or whether they themselves refused to show up. (This problem was discussed above.)

Watteville also notes that, in Uganda, families were present during encampment, and this made registration and collection of data on dependents easier. In Uganda, abducted women stayed together with female veterans and families in the camps. Information adapted to the literacy levels of the women concerned was provided.

When it is not possible to gather the soldiers in camps immediately after a war, many soldiers disappear and take their weapons with them. This was the case in Ethiopia, where the soldiers of the defeated side fled to remote areas and neighboring countries before they were formally demobilized (Colletta et al., 1996).

It is also important to carry out a study of soldiers' needs upon demobilization, and this can most easily be done while the soldiers are in the camp. Such a survey helps the planning of appropriate reintegration procedures. The orientations given to soldiers during encampment have at times been criticized for not giving realistic information. An example is provided by Ethiopia, where political topics were focused on, at the expense of socio-economic issues. This did not prepare the soldiers for the challenges of civilian life. In fact, the sessions (political orientation) may have contributed to unrealistic expectations about reintegration (ibid: 46).

The steady income a soldier and his or her dependents receive before demobilization is of great importance, and losing this is often very hard for those who have been used to it. Even if the sum that was received was small, many ex-soldiers describe their situation as desperate when they no longer receive this income (Pedersen, 1999; personal interviews with female ex-fighters, Eritrea).

Chapter Summary

- Although necessary in most cases, demobilization assistance represents a danger to cohesion and integration in the soldiers' home community.
- It is very easy for agencies from outside the country in which assistance is given to overlook groups of soldiers who need assistance. Soldiers who belong to the losing side in a conflict may be 'invisible'.
- Female ex-soldiers tend to be difficult to notice when a conflict is over. There is pressure on women to return to more traditional ways of living as soon as possible. This is a difficult situation for many women.

Chapter 3

REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS: WOMEN'S ROLES

Introduction

Within this project, I have decided to devote an entire chapter to women who participate in revolutionary movements or guerrilla forces. In recent years, guerrilla warfare has gained increasing importance in Africa as the institutional infrastructure of African states has decayed. In contrast to the European understanding of guerrilla forces in which they are perceived as being totally different from regular state armies, in Africa this kind of warfare can be regarded as the normal form of armed conflict (Clapham, 1998). Sometimes guerrilla forces, like the EPLF, have been transformed into large, more conventional armies. Other guerrilla forces have not developed beyond a stage of insurgency.

Insurgencies can be closely related to revolutionary movements. In Africa, as in the rest of the world, such movements have often been led by student radicals who have adopted the work of Mao Tse Tung and his ideal of a people's war as their organizational goal and strategy. During the Cold War, insurgencies claiming to implement this ideal had a status , in addition to international support, that disappeared in the ideological vacuum of the 1990s (Clapham, 1998: 8). In Africa, there have been many examples of such revolutionary movements. In the early 1950s, among the first insurgencies and liberation movements were those of the Mau Mau in Kenya and the Algerian war of independence. Later followed movements in Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, South Africa, Eritrea, and Tigray in Ethiopia, among others.

A viable liberation movement must develop common goals and a strategy for achieving them. An important factor for many revolutionary liberation armies is the politicization of all members. Clapham points out how the African insurgencies, like their equivalents elsewhere, have taught the members a new outlook on their own history and place in the world. Members have learned the 'correct' history of their country. The unity of all members has been fundamental to the movement's feasibility. In this way have the best and most efficient liberation armies been able to achieve what they aimed for: to seize power and establish a regular government.

Background to and Extension of Female Involvement

Women have often played important roles in revolutionary socialist struggles. In many parts of the world, such as Nicaragua and Eritrea, women have made up more than 30% of the revolutionary armed forces (Molyneux, 1985; Wilson, 1991). In Sri Lanka at least 30% of the Tamil Tigres (LTTE) are women (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2001). In other revolutions and liberation movements, women have not been represented in such large numbers, but have nevertheless been considered important for the outcome of the war.

In Africa, besides Eritrea, we hear women serving as soldiers in guerrilla armies and liberation movements in Ethiopia (Hammond & Druce, 1990), Namibia, Zimbabwe (Kriger, 1992; Zimbabwe Women Writers, 2000), Mozambique (Arthur, 1998), Algeria (Coughlin, 2000), Liberia (Bennett, 1995), Sierra Leone (Ayissi, 2000: 144–148), Guinea-Bissau (Urdang, 1979), and Uganda (Turschen, 1998). Even tiny Djibouti had female soldiers in its civil war (Milas, 2000).

Ideology

There are many reasons why women enlist as guerrilla soldiers. One reason is the characteristics of guerrilla warfare itself. A guerrilla force relies on clandestine activities; its aim may be to topple a government. For these reasons, it is more separate from civil society than a state military, though it might also (if the state is occupied, for example) be based on a secret network rooted in civil society. Clandestine work demands the involvement of individuals assumed to be innocent. Within such an organization, women are crucial in filling various positions and carrying out various roles, for example associating with the enemy.

When a country is occupied, there is often a high degree of consciousness in the population and many people want to resist the occupation. The political aims of liberation movements that wage war against the occupying enemy appeal equally to both men and women. Women want to resist and mobilize in ways similar to men. They want to contribute to the common good and, when possible, they join resistance movements, as do men. Of course, the specific ideology of a particular movement may also attract certain groups. If the ideology implies changes within existing gender roles, this can attract women to the movement. Women are often found in Marxist–Leninist revolutionary movements, and it therefore seems likely that this ideology plays an important role in the recruitment of women.

Many liberation movements have included women's rights and equality for men and women in their programs for political change. The movement has thus developed an explicit position in support of revolutionary women. The participation of women has been calculated to be important for the outcome of the war in question. The cooperation of all social groups – men and women, different social classes, religions and ethnicities – leads to the establishment of a strong group of people able to achieve more. Unity is crucial for a movement that intends to achieve its goals.

Such unity can often come at the expense of individuality and the soldier's earlier identity. In Eritrea, total dedication of all members to the liberation movement erased all the other identities of family, region, clan, and class (Wilson, 1991: 132).

Marxist ideology analyzes women's oppression as a consequence of a class-based society. Movements adopting this ideology have presented women's rights as a self-evident part of a future society ruled by them. In this way, women have been mobilized to join the revolution. Stephanie Urdang documents how women in Guinea-Bissau were recruited on many occasions before their husbands. Women were totally absorbed by the ideas of the revolution and by the idea that they themselves could change their lives. The wives then went on to recruit their husbands (Urdang, 1979: 121).

The whole foundation of a revolutionary group is to gather all available sources for the struggle.[1] In order to achieve this, ideology is a necessary tool.

> Any revolutionary vanguard, which struggles to liberate the broad masses from imperialist oppression, should take the emancipation of women as one of its prime objectives. The mobilization and politicization of the broad masses of women is essential for its success. As Lenin said: The success of a revolution depends on the extent to which women take part in it. (NUEW, 1980: 6)

According to Marxist theory, autonomous development, which meets the economic security needs of all people, can be achieved only by a socialist revolution. For feminists, the Marxist understanding of knowledge is helpful because it supports their claim that knowledge has been constructed in such a way that it denies a voice to women. Nevertheless, feminists criticize Marxist theories for ignoring women in their reproductive and domestic roles. Marxist theory looks at class as the basic unit of analysis. Rather than being discussed as a group with particular needs, women have been subsumed under this class analysis, and feminists argue that class-based capitalist oppression is not synonymous with the oppression of women (Tickner, 1992).

An example from Tigray in Ethiopia demonstrates how women's liberation has been discussed as a class question:

[1] The 'struggle' is the expression for the war of independence in Eritrea, and the term is commonly used to refer to wars of liberation.

> Our aim is class struggle. The reason that class struggle is important is that it unites everybody, not just women, not just men – they are not separated. Without class struggle, we can't liberate ourselves.
>
> We women fighters came together in 1977 and discussed whether there was a need for a woman's organization inside the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front]. At the beginning some of the women thought that it was not necessary. They thought that equality was doing all the same physical activities that the men were doing. But some of us knew that we did not solve women's problems by being fighters. We had to face the problems of civil women. (Hammond & Druce, 1990: 74)

As this example shows, some women have been aware that eliminating the power of the dominant class would not solve the problems of the oppression of women. Feminists argue that class-based analysis ignores two important facts: women are oppressed in specific ways attributable to patriarchy rather than to capitalism, and class analysis ignores women's role in the family. Classical Marxism has omitted women's roles in the family from its analyses. All the unpaid labor that women perform in the family is left out of economic analyses. Thus, certain issues that are peculiar to women regardless of class position are neglected (Tickner, 1992: 87). The close connection between revolutionary movements and women's participation demands an analysis of this phenomenon.

Some have argued that women are more easily recruited to revolutionary movements because of their subordinate position in society (see, for example, Urdang, 1979). Women may see an opportunity to fight two struggles at the time: one against an occupying force, another against traditional structures keeping women down. Urdang claims that this attitude was widespread among women in Guinea-Bissau. Through the revolution, for the first time in history, they would be able to count on political institutions to safeguard their interests (ibid: 124).

In Guinea-Bissau, the famous revolutionary leader Amilcar Cabral stated in a mass peasant meeting:

> Comrades, we are going to place women in high-ranking posts.... We want the women of our country to have guns in their hands.... Comrades, young girls are going to be coming into the villages from our bases. But don't anybody think that these girls are up for sale as brides. They will get married if they wish, but there will be no forced marriages.... These young girls are going to work in the villages, go to school, be in the militia and the party will exercise complete control. (ibid: 125)

This link between revolution and women's liberation is very easy to see. In Eritrea, women pointed to the needs of the liberation movement when their own wishes clashed with those of their husbands and with women's more traditional roles. In fact, women who could not conform in their personal life saw the revolution as an opportunity to get out of a difficult situation: 'The movement drew many rebel women into the revolution ... and so transforming rebellion into revolution' (Wilson, 1991: 80). The liberation movement had a position of authority that was not challenged.

In Mozambique, women who participated in the liberation movement were supported and protected by the movement during the war. Women had a collective strength as a result of this. They could challenge their earlier gender-based limitations, and the authority of the movement protected and strengthened women. The liberation movement treated women as individuals, independent of whether they were married, single, widowed, or divorced. (Arnfred, 1988: 12).

Lack of male soldiers

Guerrilla warfare and liberation movements trying to outnumber an enemy force usually appeal for and accept as many soldiers as they can.[2] The demand for male soldiers may increase over time, and losses in the number of combatants due to extensive fighting (or bad morale) must be

[2] This is different from a state military providing jobs for men. When there is competition for getting accepted into the movement, women often fail to qualify as soldiers. A surplus of men frequently prevents women from competing for fighter positions.

replaced (Smith, 1994). Here, if the number of men is limited, women are often welcomed out of necessity. This was the background for the large number of female recruits in early modern Europe: a permanent need for new recruits (De Pauw, 1998). A future lack of men may also sometimes be predicted at the beginning or at an early stage of the war, and such manpower shortages constitute one factor that has at times spurred male leaderships to take an interest in the emancipation of women (Pettman, 1996).

The rules for admitting women into a movement may change according to relevant circumstances. Even if the rule is that liberation movements welcome mass mobilization, there may be exceptions to this when regulation of female recruitment is considered necessary. If the number of women attracted to a military movement exceeds the needs of that movement, new rules for admittance may be made. An example of this took place in Tigray, Ethiopia, where the conscription of peasant women into the TPLF escalated to such a point that the TPLF had to limit the number of women allowed to join the movement. When some Muslim women tried to join the TPLF without their fathers' or husbands' approval, their villages reacted very strongly, and the TPLF was forced to take action to prevent large numbers of women joining (Hammond & Druce, 1990). Consequently, the rules of admittance changed, and only fighters with a minimum of five years of education were admitted. Previously, no such restrictions existed. The rule barred many women from joining and at first caused great resentment among women in the villages. Later, they seemed to accept that educated women could serve the struggle better (ibid.). This is an example of how the recruitment of soldiers is regulated according to needs. In Tigray, the number of women eligible to join decreased, and thus female recruitment was adjusted according to the needs of the guerrilla forces.

Female soldiers as symbolic power

As mentioned in chapter 1, women may be important not only because they increase the number of soldiers but also because they add legitimacy or symbolic power to the war effort. First of all, female soldiers symbolize a unity in the movement in question. Such symbolic power is expressed when movements use pictures of female soldiers for propaganda reasons to convey the message they want to get through. This message might be that the movement's cause must be just, since even women fight for it. The principles of the ideology are also further justified by women's participation. In this way, women are used symbolically, as an argument to the outside world: this struggle deserves support; obviously, even women sympathize with it (Stiehm, 1988). As already mentioned in this chapter, Clapham argues that ideological support from the outside has been important for the survival of many liberation armies.

The message of the unity of the group is conveyed both to the enemy – as a deterrent – and to the outside world – in order to gather sympathy and support. The female fighter as a symbol has been very important both in Eritrea and in several other guerrilla wars. In former Yugoslavia, which was one of the most important models for the EPLF, the woman fighter came to stand as a symbol of socialist Yugoslavia. As one historian puts it: 'Indeed, so noteworthy was women's courage ... that women Partisans performed more bravely than men' (Jancar, 1980: 14).

Stefanie Krug, a German anthropologist, has done fieldwork among long-term women fighters in Tigray, Ethiopia (Krug, 1999). She describes how women there were used as a symbol to strengthen the guerrillas. Female fighters were turned into a shining example for the liberation of the people from feudal structures and oppression. These women fighters were also highlighted because they justified the struggle as representatives of the most downtrodden. In Marxist guerrilla movements, both men and women have been regarded as oppressed by a dominant or feudal regime, and the emphasis has been on unity through class struggle. Still, Stiehm points to what she believes is the *most* important reason why pictures of armed women frequently appear in revolutionary guerrilla movements:

> Their purpose is to demonstrate unified commitment. It is to tell an enemy that it will have to occupy the country and pacify every citizen before it can claim victory. *But, perhaps most importantly, it is a way of mobilizing young men....* Few men are able to resist the call to service when women are [already] serving. (Stiehm, 1988: 123)

Even if there is great sympathy towards a guerrilla movement within a certain population group, many men who are expected to take part in the war may not be willing to do so. Even though the political discourse presents the will of the people to go to war as enormously high, this is not always the whole truth. Different, often contradictory, views are often also present.

There appears to be a contradiction between the idea of using women as symbols and making them invisible. While it is correct that women's participation in a war is often invisible, it is also true that pictures of female combatants are important elements in a guerrilla war. What can be presumed is that the importance of the struggle, the very goal of the war, justifies using whatever means that are assumed to be efficient in reaching this goal.

In Tigray, we hear that even though female fighters were important in the strategy of the TPLF, they were prohibited from serving within sight of their own villages. To fight for the freedom of their country, just as their male comrades did, was possible for women only within a context that kept them apart from their traditional society: 'The local militia was recruited among men since the continuous presence of these women with their male appearance would have caused unrest' (Krug, 1999: 9). It appears that accepting female soldiers was not unproblematic for peasant societies in Tigray, especially when they were known in the neighborhood. The conclusion may be that female soldiers were accepted, as long as they were kept out of sight, because the struggle demanded it. A concrete participation by 'real' women was more difficult to accept.

Socialization

Women's involvement as combatants in revolutionary movements represents a break with their earlier socialization represented by the values and way of life that their family has taught them. This can be contrasted with the role of males, which continue along the same lines as before. Men's gender roles are reinforced by activities associated with being soldiers. Revolutionary groups offer a different and often an opposite perspective on the world from that of growing up in a family. The perspective of the revolution is that women ought to live and act similarly to men. In contrast to civil society, *sameness* instead of *difference* between men and women is encouraged. When young soldiers learn and live with the values of the revolution, their primary socialization will be counteracted.

The gender socialization of children in Africa, naturally, contains a great deal of variation. However, all young people who join a guerrilla are faced with a new perspective on important matters such as their own role in society and gender roles. Inside the movement, they meet a military structure, as well as an ideology, whose whole purpose is to achieve a goal. In order to achieve this, the movement has to be well coordinated, and all members have to obey and work together towards this overall goal.

Socialization into the army

Joining a revolutionary movement implies for young people the loss of a normal socialization process as they leave their homes and their earlier lives behind. In Eritrea, many of the fighters were very young, and their primary socialization was thus interrupted. Eva Beth Egensteiner, in her thesis about female fighters in Eritrea, reports that:

> Many female children joined quite young, at 8 or 12 years old, for example. Although they were well aware of the expected behavior and positions of women in civilian life, and had experienced this to some degree as girls, they left too early to be *completely* socialized into these roles. (Egensteiner, 1995: 28)

Socialization into the EPLF implied the loss of significant others as 'reality-confirmators'. The fighters were especially susceptible to a resocialization due to their own vulnerability. In the EPLF, they met other fighters in the same situation as themselves. Many of them had left their homes during the night to escape their parents. In several cases, they were not allowed to see their family again for years. They were not allowed to identify themselves to fellow soldiers and thus had to give up their names (interview with Amanuel, ex-fighter, Asmara, Eritrea). This served two functions: creating anonymity in terms of Derg intelligence and eroding individual

identity. Personal possessions were not accepted in the liberation army, and gifts were shared collectively or given to superiors. Any material identification with civil society was taken away from the fighters (Young, 1997; Tronvoll, 1998).

There is a special kind of socialization that takes place in a situation like this, when members' total dedication to a system is required in parallel with a rejection of earlier life. The socialization into the EPLF's liberation army resembles socialization into other armies, but the dedication demanded and the break with earlier life were taken to an extreme degree. Such a process is not gradual, keeping important elements from earlier life, but involves an abrupt breaking of family ties and the embrace of a new, all-encompassing system. This, naturally, is important to remember when the former soldier is to be reintegrated into society.

Total institutions

Ervin Goffman in his book *Asylums* (1961) touches upon this situation. In this work, he defines what characterizes so-called *total institutions*. Much of what Goffman claims is typical for such institutions applies to the fighters in the EPLF, as well as to similar revolutionary groups. Goffman mentions, inter alia, relief from social and economic responsibilities as one important characteristic of a total institution. The ex-fighters in Eritrea frequently mentioned during interviews that as fighters they did not have to worry about money: everything they needed was provided for. They did not worry about the economic situation of a future spouse, or whether such a potential spouse was affluent enough or too affluent to match themselves. For this reason, they were able to choose a spouse freely and independently. There is thus an obvious contrast with civil society, where a future spouse is thoroughly measured in terms of, among other factors, the wealth of his or her family.

Another characteristic is the fraternalization process, through which socially distant persons find themselves developing mutual support and forced intimacy. This is also illustrative of the existence of guerrilla fighters. The fighters reported feelings towards fellow soldiers that resemble those normally reserved for close family members. Often deep friendships develop across common lines among persons distant to each other in social terms. An Eritrean female ex-fighter I interviewed went as far as marrying her cousin while they were fighters. She claimed that they were both unaware that they were cousins. While marriage between cousins is common for some, others with a Christian background, such as this woman, could not stay in such a marriage, and the marriage was annulled after the war. This case may not be an example of the 'forced intimacy' that Goffman discusses; however, on the other hand, it was a result of living outside one's society and not knowing into which categories to fit oneself and others. This particular woman seemed today not to question that a divorce was necessary in such a situation.

Goffman argues that, among inmates in various total institutions, there is a strong feeling that time spent in the establishment is time wasted, destroyed, or taken from one's life. The ex-fighters in Eritrea express great pride in the fact that the country was freed because of them. They are also proud of being different from civilians and proud of their knowledge compared to that of civilians. However, many ex-fighters claim that they have a sense of lost time. This is a main explanation for why husbands who have been fighters leave their wives: they say that they have lost so much time during the war as fighters – now they want to reclaim this time. The female ex-fighters, however, have less authority to do anything about their own 'lost time'.

In total institutions, harshness alone cannot account for this sense of life wasted. One must also remember the social *disconnection* caused by entering into a totally new existence. This is characteristic of the situation of the ex-fighters in Eritrea. They describe experiencing meaning and feeling that their effort was necessary: what they did was worthwhile, in spite of the extreme hardship. Still, they often mention their lost time. This leads to bitterness when expectations about the time of post-liberation fail to materialize.

A final point to which I will direct attention is what Goffman calls punishment and privileges. Outside total institutions, failure to maintain required standards typically leads to indirect advantages and not to specific immediate punishment. However, Goffman compares what happens inside total institutions to how children and animals are treated and punished outside such institu-

tions. The correspondence to experiences while a fighter is again relevant. Guerrilla armies are based on unquestioned obedience by the members.

Goffman's characterization of total institutions is useful when trying to understand the socialization of fighters into guerrilla movements. Goffman's analysis points out how soldiers are influenced *because* of the total institutional characteristics. In particular, the freedom they experience through relief from economic and social responsibility, and hence the lack of regulations in relation to marriage, is very important.

Gender equality?

All guerrilla soldiers experience being inside what Goffman calls a total institution. However, only the female fighters experienced putting on a new gender role. Rather than describing women as acting out a new gender role, female fighters in Eritrea say that they were acting as men. They found it necessary to prove that they were equal to men. This is constantly brought up, both by the female fighters themselves and by others. Even today, the *Eritrea Profile*[3] points out that everyone should remember that the female fighters proved that they were equal to men by the way they fought in the liberation war:

> Eritrean women have proved that they are not inferior to men. They have participated in difficult battles, ran alongside their brothers and helped dig trenches. (*The Eritrean Profile*, 7 March 1998)

And:

> People, who have not seen it with their own eyes, are not willing to believe that women are not inferior to men. Such people are unable to accept the fact that the real worth of the woman had been proved once and for all in the hills and valleys of Eritrea during the long war of liberation. (*The Eritrean Profile*, 14 March 1998)

Within the EPLF, apparently, the idea of equality between men and women contains the idea that women have to resemble men in order to gain respect. The two previous examples can be supplemented with numerous others. If socialization into a fighter existence means taking on the characteristics of men, this has implications for how a woman's understanding of herself must be affected. All rules for what a proper girl must be and do have to be unlearned. The aim becomes to behave in a masculine way.

Sara, an Eritrean ex-fighter of about fifty, explained to me that, as fighters, both men and women had the same tasks. They also proved to be equal when needed in combat: 'The women were just as aggressive as the men; in fact, the female fighters were *more* aggressive than the men were.' Sara obviously enjoyed stating this as a fact: she smiled broadly when saying it. She and her ex-fighter husband, who was also present, both agreed upon this. I gathered from the way she presented it that this was contrary to what was expected of women. Do women really react more violently than men given the right situation? And if so, why?

Empirical evidence suggests that women are not necessarily less warlike than men. Still women's attitudes towards force may differ from men's attitudes because of their subordinate, less-powerful position in society (Howes & Stevenson, 1993). This structural approach implies that a difference in behavior can be expected. When we analyze Sara's observations, it seems likely that evidence of women acting more aggressively than men comes as a surprise to her and to others in Eritrea. When such behavior occurs, it will stand out as contrary to traditional gender roles. Thus, women acting aggressively are more visible, because unusual behavior is more noticeable than expected behavior. Sara's content expression may indicate that, in her opinion, women proved in this way that they are equal to men.

Female fighters have traditionally been afraid of not living up to the standards of men. Often, female fighters mention that they have to prove themselves (Hammond & Druce, 1990; Bennett, 1995; Turner, 1998). Demonstrating the capability to be 'aggressive enough' may be vital in achieving a good reputation as soldiers.

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[3] An Eritrean newspaper, owned by the government and published in English.

Birgit Brock-Utne claims in her book *Educating for Peace* (1987) that women's values are influenced by the systems they relate to or operate in. If that system reflects male values, the women will be inclined to take on male values. They will thus resemble men in their thinking and in their action.

Creating a revolutionary group

A *united* group of soldiers is of paramount importance for any revolutionary group. A distinct 'we-group', a cohesive group with a common identity, must be created. Equality must be emphasized at the expense of individuality. It is not important whether one is a woman or a man, whether one belongs to this or that ethnic or religious group. What is vital is one's cooperation and one's loyalty. Each individual must be made into a useful member of the group. As a step in this direction, uniform dress and appearance is encouraged and group achievement is rewarded. The dependency of the members on each other – as a soldier, one knows that one's own life can depend on the others – nurtures a collective identity.

This dependency on other members is a crucial factor for all military groups and guerrillas. In *Stolen Valor: How the Vietnam Generation Was Robbed of its Heroes and its History* (1998), military researchers B. G. Burkett and Glenna Whitley describe how American soldiers from the Vietnam War were judged by criteria different from those by which people in civil society are judged. The sports hero who is more concerned with his own large ego than the safety of his fellow soldiers can be a catastrophe for the group. The soldier who does not put other people's life at risk, who is loyal, and who can be trusted one hundred percent is very valuable. Group solidarity and loyalty are of crucial importance.

Also from the Vietnam War, but from the other side, a Vietnamese male veteran leader has commented on the collective spirit of women and consequently their valuable contribution to the military. He argues that, in Vietnam, women soldiers were very useful to the military groups because of their willingness to give to the common good. He further states that women know how to sacrifice and to endure, and that they are more fit for army discipline than men 'because war needs not blazing heroes, but sacrifice, fortitude, mute and enduring' (Turner, 1998: 130).

When a person first joins a guerrilla movement, the affective side – the break of natural ties to parents and others – opens up for new emotional attachments within the soldier group. Also, because of young age, a natural inclination to bond with other soldiers appears. Sociology professor Ivar Frønes (1995: 43) explains in his book *Among Peers* that, during a formative and developmental period, the search for models is natural. Thus, the age of guerrilla fighters is an important factor for their socialization into the guerrilla forces. In Eritrea, several fighters later in life describe fellow-fighters as their family: 'The comrades are like my family, even today' (interview with female ex-fighter, Asmara, Eritrea).

In order to serve the guerrilla movement and to achieve everyone's common goal, the individual has to commit him- or herself in a comprehensive way. When a fighter gives him- or herself to the revolution, the final consequence is that the individual becomes ready to sacrifice him- or herself. In her thesis on Eritrea, Egensteiner describes the strength of the female fighters' dedication to the cause and how they labored to be equal to men:

> Women really showed that they were equal. They really pushed themselves. They used to tell me that when somebody was martyred [died], a woman, it was the happiest day for the women who were there. Because now they had reached the stage to say that we can even die for the country.... That was very nice. When somebody died, when a woman died, we were really very happy for them for serving their hearts. As women started to get martyred, started dying, it became normal. So we believed that we fought for our equality. It wasn't handed to us. (female ex-fighter cited in Egensteiner, 1995: 26)

Some people would analyze the gender equality that this women describes not as an example of equality but as an example of being brainwashed by nationalistic discourse.

Women's dedication to a cause, and their wish to prove that they are as beneficial to the guerrillas as men, led in general to female soldiers working very hard (see, for example, Turner, 1998).

In Eritrea, women's efforts are recognized. Today, all the men and women gathered around the EPLF agree that the presence of women in the Eritrean struggle was known to inspire men to give their best: 'It is embarrassing for a man if a woman sees that he is a coward. When there are both male and female fighters, the men do what they can to look strong and brave' (interview with Abeba, ex-fighter). Another woman who had also been a fighter said:

> In general, women are more dedicated and more responsible than men, that's why they were very useful in the struggle. In the field they were not afraid. It's good for morale to fight with a woman by your side. A man had to be brave when she was. (interview with Sara, ex-fighter)

It appears that the presence of female fighters strengthened the struggle of the EPLF. The all-important goal of the leaders of the liberation army was to create a united group of soldiers. The great aim – a liberated Eritrea – demanded the very best of all of the fighters.

Joining a revolutionary movement means joining a society that creates its own rules independently of the demands of civil society. All the members must have the same, all-important goal as their guiding star. This is a society separate and distinct from civil society. The leaders are able to make decisions without having to negotiate with people expressing opposing views. There may be opposition, but the leaders are expected to exercise power and lead the group or the people in the direction of the common goal.

The socialization into a liberation army contains characteristics similar to a primary socialization: it is far from pure cognitive learning, and the fighters do not have any significant others close by to relate to; as a result, they seek new ones. Like primary socialization, the setting is emotionally charged. Socialization into a closed revolutionary system represents a break with one's earlier identity. As mentioned earlier, in Eritrea the fighters were not allowed to reveal their names to their fellow comrades. Their earlier identity was thus not confirmed in these new circumstances. Some had joined together with a friend or relative; it was easier for these to keep their old identity. For others, the socialization into the armed struggle must have represented the most fundamental break with their earlier reality.

Enforcement

How do new fighters in revolutionary movements learn the ideology they are supposed to fight for? One method that has been frequently used by revolutionary groups is 'criticism' and 'self-criticism' sessions. This way of learning is an efficient way of teaching young soldiers ideology, as well as skills and values central to the movement.

According to Worku Zerai (1994: 22), 'criticism' and 'self-criticism' were the most important instruments used by the EPLF in Eritrea to make its policy effective. Every unit in the guerrilla had a criticism and self-criticism session once a week. Some female fighters have mentioned to me that this practice was very good for women: it made their life easier. A man could be criticized for trying to underestimate what a woman could do in combat, etc. A woman could be criticized for going to the kitchen too frequently. And a leader could be criticized for not treating his male and female soldiers equally. After combat, anyone could be criticized for cowardice. Worku Zerai was one of three female fighters who were among the first to join the EPLF. She writes in her master's thesis that, to her knowledge, 'no woman was ever criticized for cowardice, mismanagement or for not trying to defend herself and fight back at the same time' (1994: 23). One female ex-fighter claimed to me that 'in the field, women were not afraid. Issayas [the president] says: In our struggle I have never heard a woman complain or run away' (interview Sara, ex-fighter).

It is impossible to find out whether any woman actually has been criticized for these things. We know from similar movements that women did their very best to be good soldiers. The claim that women were not afraid, however, is not interesting as such (of course they were afraid), but it is interesting as part of an accepted discourse about women's role in revolutionary movements. That women are brave and important as fighters is part of this discourse.

Self-criticism and criticism were something that the fighters in the EPLF dreaded. If an issue was important to the leaders, the offender would be isolated and ostracized. To escape being

criticized, the fighters preferred to conform, even if they did not agree. Because of this way of sanctioning unwanted behavior, the ideology of the EPLF had absolute respect (Zerai, 1994: 23).

As mentioned earlier, because the goal of equality is crucial for the unity of a revolutionary movement, women are able to appeal to higher levels of authority if their rights are violated. In Eritrea, many women reported during interviews that their lives as soldiers were made easier thanks to the criticism sessions. Whenever men tried to oppress them because of their sex, the women could complain to the leaders and the men were later criticized in these sessions: women gained rights through this system that they have not had later. Today, they complain that no one is concerned about their rights. The ex-fighter women I interviewed in Asmara have little or no education and come from the poorer segments of society. Their connection with the earlier liberation movement, now governing the country, has been broken, and the women no longer have a position within that movement.

Profile of Combatants

Women and girls who join guerrilla groups are socialized away from their home community to varying degrees, depending on, among other factors, the length of their stay, their age, and the degree of seclusion maintained by the guerrillas. In addition, the ethnic group the soldiers belong to and the living conditions and class of their families influence the overall situation.

Peasants

Guerrilla wars have to a large extent been based on rural support: 'Most anti-colonial and anti-imperial wars and national development in the 20th century have involved rural-based guerrilla armies' (Kriger, 1992: 1). Revolutionary organizations seek popular peasant support as a prerequisite for success. They often do this by manipulating peasant grievances. Kriger writes about the Zimbabwean war of liberation and points to structures that explain why peasants in general are willing to join in revolutions:

> Peasants' responses suggest that gender, generational, and other structural inequities within villages may be more powerful motivating factors than peasant grievances arising from their externally oriented relationships. (1992: 20)

The majority of the fighters in the TPLF in Ethiopia were recruited from the peasantry (Krug, 1999). In Eritrea also, the fighters in the EPLF liberation army were also mainly recruited from rural areas. Teclemichael (1999) claims that as many as 80–85% of the fighters had a peasant background.

An ideology of equality appeals to young people and offers them access to a different status. Pressure on land leads to a situation in which young people in particular seek alternatives to farming when no other income-generating activities exist. Studies of peasant revolutions show that younger people are easier to mobilize for a nationalist cause than older people. The younger ones do not have the same obligations towards dependents or their loyalties to the village are not as strong. This is partly the explanation for why a large proportion of recruits to guerrilla movements have been young girls and boys with few, if any, rights in their peasant societies. Youngsters thus constitute an important group for recruitment. War empowers youth as never before and thus challenges the authority of the older generations (Kriger, 1998; Tronvoll 1998).

Kriger suggests that one reason why guerrillas have been able to recruit from the peasant population is that oppressed peasants see the breakdown of law and order during a war as presenting an unprecedented opportunity to transform oppressive village structures. Peasants' wartime actions have been more influenced by this than by economic structures and political conflict at the national level. Kriger further argues that the hierarchical nature of peasant structures produces oppressed groups within the peasant population, which are easy to recruit for revolutionary purposes. It is interesting that peasants widely held to be conservative have been prominent in several revolutionary guerrilla movements.

Great numbers of peasants participate in revolutions for various reasons, but many of these are rooted in the particular situation of the peasant population. The reintegration of combatants com-

ing from the peasant population has its own characteristics and problems. Women, even more than men, often reject returning to a rural community (see next chapter).

Women's special reasons for joining

In addition to the reasons men have for joining guerilla movements, women also have specific reasons of their own. In *Sweeter than Honey* (Hammond & Druce, 1990), several women discuss their reasons for leaving their homes and joining up as soldiers in the Ethiopian province of Tigray. Hammond explains how peasant women in Tigray saw men cook for women in the revolutionary army. They saw men and women do the same tasks, something they had never seen before. This fascinated them and made them curious. These girls and women from Tigray, coming from rural areas, had even less education than their male fellow fighters. Several young women joined the TPLF without the permission of their fathers or husbands.

In Eritrea, the increased need for recruits meant that women did not join in numbers that were too great for the EPLF to absorb, and women were not kept out, as in Tigray. On the contrary, women were first allowed to join in 1973, and were encouraged to do so from that time onwards and throughout the war.

One specific reason for joining up as a fighter was escaping an arranged marriage (Silkin, 1989; Zerai, 1994; Legesse, 1994). Asmarom Legesse, an Eritrean anthropologist, documents in the Zula Plain (southeast Eritrea) Baseline Study how many women who had difficulties getting out of bad marriages chose to join the revolution. The fact that rejected husbands could use force to keep their wives in check led to an intolerable situation for some wives. Legesse says that a few uneducated men would go as far as to write a *nashuda* against the wife. This meant that she could never marry again; that she, in fact, was tied to the man for life. An ex-wife in this position was not allowed ever to have her own house. Facing such a situation, the only way to become free was through joining the revolution.

Some very young girls left their homes and joined as fighters out of fear for what their wedding night would bring. They had heard terrible stories of what they had in store. For this reason, several young girls, only 10–14 years old, ran away from their homes and signed up as volunteers (Zerai, 1994). Zerai mentions that the majority of peasant girls marry before they are fifteen years old; many girls are infibulated,[4] and the wedding night can be a traumatic experience for them.

Wanting to fight for the liberation of one's country is a respectable choice. It is important to be aware that war poses a way out both for suppressed groups of people and for individuals. Often, there is more than one reason for joining. Private and personal motives may be more concealed than official ones. The women I have interviewed have clearly been proud to say that they joined for nationalistic reasons. The politically correct answer to a question of why someone chose to join as fighter is that they did it to free their country.

Many women have joined liberation movements in order to try to improve conditions for their families. Often, the bulk of soldiers come from poor sections of society. This is an argument for why so many poor women have joined as soldiers: they try to build a future for themselves and their children; they respond to a call to build a better society and give themselves to this common cause (Ibanez, 2001: 118; Bennett, 1995).

From South Africa, we hear that women have joined as soldiers in the hope that conditions for their families may improve: 'I'm a guerrilla and I'm a mother. Some people have accused me of being an unnatural mother but I did it for her [her daughter].... I'm very pleased my children will not turn to me and ask: Why did you do nothing?' (Cock, 1992). The woman expressing this view was called 'the knitting needles guerrilla' because in her effort to look as ordinary as possible she carried a handbag from which a pair of knitting needles protruded. She was interviewed after serving an eight-year sentence because of her underground operations as a cadre in the formerly illegal African National Congress (ANC).

[4] The most radical kind of female circumcision.

Age

Some women who have joined guerrilla movements have been extremely young when they left their homes and families. Some we would call children. Our criteria for when adulthood arrives are not necessarily universal. Still, many girls (and boys) must have the emotional needs of children. The loss of family ties and normal civilian life greatly interrupts their socialization.

Few reliable statistics exist on this matter. There is a tendency to conceal the age of young combatants in guerrilla groups, as the international community criticizes the use of child soldiers. Often, children wanting to be recruited will lie about their age in order to get admitted. Lack of soldiers, and the need for more, can influence the age of recruits.

Among peasant populations, girls traditionally marry and have children at a very young age. Girls without children can more easily leave their home. As a result, peasant fighters, to a larger extent than students, are young, and are consequently more easily influenced and thoroughly socialized out of their home settings.

Marie Jose Arthur has conducted research on women in Mozambique's armed national liberation struggle. Here, the preferred age of the girl recruits was between 10 and 15 years old. 'Men were recruited from older people, as you can see for yourself today from the ex-combatants. The men are always older than the women ex-combatants' (Arthur, 1998: 70, 71). These girls did not at that time have any family responsibilities and could more easily adapt. 'They would also be more receptive to army discipline and 'new values' (ibid.). Birgit Brock-Utne (1987: 48) claims that girls and women are considered more obedient and easier to train than men. Menkhaus (1999), a researcher on child soldiers, explains how very young soldiers are easier to mold than older ones: they do not question what they are told to do to the same degree as older soldiers.

Chapter Summary

- A guerrilla struggle usually requires combatants to live in harsh conditions, with little back-up in terms of food or military and medical supplies, as opposed to a state military, which has access to the state's economic resources to pay and support its soldiers.
- Demanding conditions and an often marginalized existence have an effect upon the guerrilla fighters; suspicion and fear of infiltration influence their psyches.
- Many soldiers are socialized into the guerrillas in a way that makes their return to civil society difficult.

Chapter 4

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE REINTEGRATION PROCESS OF FEMALE SOLDIERS

Introduction

The history of many revolutionary struggles suggests a widespread regression after the war when it comes to women's political representation. Why is it so difficult for women to translate their activism in wars and nationalist struggles into citizenship rights and effective participation after the fighting is over? This raises a number of questions, including the startling possibility that armies may be more friendly to women than civilian regimes themselves are (Pettman, 1996: 137). The participation of female soldiers during a conflict and their participation in the public arena afterwards do not necessarily have any connection. Even where large numbers of women have been carrying arms in revolutionary movements, peace seems to put enormous pressure on those women to return 'home', and to give up both jobs and political representation in favor of men.

In a war-torn society, opportunities are limited (See, for example, Colletta et al., 1996). The ex-combatants' expectations with regard to peace are often very high. During a war, these expectations of a future society are the motivation that keeps the soldiers going. Immediately after the war, optimism and happiness prevails, but gradually pessimism and disillusionment take over.

This chapter aims to analyze the situation and the reintegration of the female ex-fighters from their own perspective, as well as from the perspective of society.

Socialized out of Society

Ex-combatants who have spent years in the military do not come out of such a situation unchanged. War offers the soldiers experiences unlike those of civilian life and provides the most intense and brutal of human experiences (Funck, 1999). For me, it has been striking to interview ex-fighter women in Eritrea and hear them express the view that the years of war were preferable to the time that came afterwards. Uneducated women and women from minority groups in particular react in this way. In spite of losses and hardship, they long back to the time when they were fighters in the Eritrean People's Liberation Army, the EPLF.

This is difficult to understand. Knowing how terrible the war was, how is it possible to miss it? The answer is not clear, but somehow the difficult existence of being a female ex-fighter in a war-torn country is even worse. These women have been socialized out of civil society. Most have spent many years as fighters. Living as fighters for years in a closed system like the EPLF did not provide the female fighters with adequate tools to cope with the demands of everyday life in a civil society. They have not learned how to cope with basic problems of being civilian women. The knowledge they now need, such as how to function as a mother and wife *and* as an ex-fighter in a civil society, was not taught to them during the war. When they look to their mothers, they do not find women combining two different roles as they have to. In short, role models do not exist:

> During the struggle, the fighters did not learn how to function as a family. The ones married did not live together as man and wife during the struggle. Many have not learned how to deal with money. During the struggle they were provided for. All their

> needs were met. They did not need to plan for the next day, how to make ends meet, how to feed yourself and your family, how to stretch little money (interview with representative from the National Union of Eritrean Women [NUEW]).

In spite of the fact that many fighters received an education within the army, the knowledge of former soldiers is apparently not valued highly in civil society. Many women have learned various skills apart from those of actually shooting and fighting. In Eritrea, the female fighters were involved in the following activities: public administration, industry, transportation, health, construction, teaching, electronics, and communications at the frontline. These qualifications remained uncertified due to the egalitarian principles fostering cohesiveness in the army: 'Everybody shared the conditions of war and work and rank' (Tewolde, 1998: 22). Afterwards, the qualifications of ex-fighters who do not have an education outside of the army have not been accepted by civil society because they cannot be formally confirmed. Skills acquired during the war, even if very useful in peacetime, are not recognized. This is rather striking. Some people are very upset because the increased competition in a postwar society leads to many mechanisms of exclusion. One example is that of a resourceful Eritrean ex-fighter man who was turned down again and again trying to help a very clever ex-fighter woman who had no papers. No one holding a formal position was willing to support her, even though she clearly was a very skilful woman. In addition, even though an ex-fighter helped this woman, the ex-fighters themselves, both men and women, in many cases hold back other ex-fighters when they find themselves competing for scarce resources.

Being away from your home for several years naturally has consequences. Even civil society changed during the fighters' absence. When the ex-fighters in Eritrea started living together again with people from civil society, they did not understand each other. When they received demobilization money, some did not invest it wisely. The demobilization money for long-term fighters was 10,000 Birr (about 10,000 Norwegian kroner, or slightly more than US $1,200). The intention of the government was that this money should help the ex-fighters to become established in civil society. However, many became vulnerable to different kinds of exploitation and manipulation. Some were pressured by members of their family to spend money in ways not necessarily profitable to themselves. Others were deceived by men. For some, this large amount of money simply gave them additional problems: 'Some women become involved in relationships that do not make sense, young men approaching them because of their demobilization money' (Sorensen, 1996: 23).

In Mozambique, several negative effects were traced to the soldiers receiving demobilizing money. Many spent all their money on beer. Still, this situation was contrasted with men going to work in the mines in South Africa and coming back laden with gifts for the household. The demobilized soldiers deserved a lump sum of money as compensation – this was the general consensus (Maslen, 1997).

There is often a clash between how ex-fighters look at various issues and how civil society, which has gone through other changes, sees the same issues. When an ex-fighter woman returns to her family, she meets the traditions she grew up with. Eritrean Meriem reports: 'When I returned, my mother, she would say to me: Dear daughter, take some oil in your hair. How could I resist her?' Meriem wanted to change her life. She wanted to keep the hairstyle of the struggle: female fighters wore their hair short and did not oil it. This hairstyle became a symbol of a woman liberated from traditional customs. Meriem wanted her life as a fighter to have an impact, and she did not want everything to be as it had been previously when she had been a civilian. Even for her, who had an education, unlike most of the female fighters, it was difficult to keep acting according to the new ideas that she felt she had acquired. She explains how society forced the fighters back into traditional positions and how their points of view were rejected:

> The girls who had been fighters suffered very much after the war. The boys had experienced much of the same, and they respected each other. But when they came home, the boys wanted back what they had lost. At first, they did not want to admit it, but after a short while, they preferred girls who had not been fighters. I'm sorry to say, this tendency is international. Men like to be in charge. After the war, the fighters (male) had a very high status. The last thing the men wanted was a demanding wife. In their homes, their parents told them that they must find a kind and suitable wife, a wife to fit in with

> the rest of their family. They were pressured to live according to traditional society, even though they should have known better. It is very sad. (interview with ex-fighter woman living in Norway, November 1999)

When they return to civil society, the female ex-fighters of Eritrea experience a conflict between themselves and others. They often feel that they know more than civilians: 'The ex-fighters feel advanced. They think they have knowledge that other people don't.' This statement is regularly heard in Eritrea, articulated both by ex-fighters and civilians. The statement can be analyzed both from the ex-fighters' perspective and from that of others. From the perspective of the ex-fighters themselves, their fighter identity gives them a cause to feel superior to civilians. They feel they know much more than them. Their self-perception and sense of identity is tied to their fighter status.

From the perspective of civil society, the attitude of the ex-fighters, that of feeling superior to others, is not conducive to integration. The fighters have all been away from their homes for quite some time, most of them for many years. Their families have had to get along without them. Initially, when they returned, the families were very proud of their daughters or sisters. This was the case in Eritrea because almost the whole population voted for independence and most people supported the liberation movement. Gradually, however, the difficult postwar times and the ex-fighters' attitude of being advanced, which may be interpreted as arrogance, becomes difficult for civilians to accept.

The ex-fighters' sense of being fundamentally different from civilians is expressed in numerous ways. Elin Sparre Pedersen (1999: 91) tells in her thesis about a visit to a restaurant in Asmara, Eritrea, sitting together with a woman ex-fighter, a friend of hers. The child at the table next to them stares at Pedersen (a white woman) and starts crying. The woman the author is with declares that children of non-fighters do not behave like the children of fighters. *Their* children are more sophisticated. They know more and are more intelligent because they have intelligent parents. She adds that a couple sitting close by are fighters. She says she can tell from their language: they speak perfect Tigrinya, like all fighters. She explains that the background to this is that the fighters learned grammar in the field and spoke Tigrinya, whereas the civilian population had to speak Amhara (the Ethiopian language) in public. Now, the result is that non-fighters speak Tigrinya (their mother tongue) like small children. Because of this, it is easy to discern between fighters and others, she says. The woman is obviously very proud of her own identity as an ex-fighter.

This, I think, is a good example of how the ex-fighters call attention to the question of the superiority of ex-fighters in relation to civilians. Is it probable that civilians speak Tigrinya like children? Even if the language was suppressed and little formal tutoring took place, the Tigrinya of civilians in Eritrea probably did not regress to that of children. The Tigrinya of the fighters was shaped by extraordinary circumstances: the war itself and the isolation of the fighters (i.e. the *total institution* effect discussed earlier) were determining factors, shaping a distinct fighter language. Socialization means to become a member of an intersubjective world that shares a common linguistic structure. Socialization then implies acquiring linguistic competence in order to share a common culture (Høgmo, 1992: 25,26). These aspects, to a larger degree than grammar lectures, influenced the language spoken by fighters.

The story above is an example of how someone, through selective perception, defines a situation. It is also an example of the stereotyped characterization of fighters versus civilians. The ex-fighters contrast themselves with non-fighters. They find endless differences between themselves and others. Their identity is based as much on what and who they are not, as on what they are: 'Identity is not just what I have become, it is also what I want to be and what I do not want to be' (Frønes, 1995: 63). This, Frønes argues, is a crucial aspect of the formation of a subculture and the creation of an identity in a subcultural context.

'The most terrible and most rewarding time in my life'

The sentence above is characteristic of how many ex-fighters in Eritrea describe their time as fighters. The tendency for the female ex-fighters to look radiant when talking about the war of independence, and then look very sad when talking about the present, is so striking that it must be analyzed. 'To have lost what one has gained and tasted. That is the worst.' This statement

comes from an ex-fighter woman and describes how she feels about her time as a fighter. It expresses what many ex-fighter women are trying to communicate. It is a very powerful statement and seems to sum up their experiences. What exactly is it that they have lost? While they were fighters, they say that they felt respected and equal with men. Many say that they experienced empowerment. They describe what happened afterwards as losing something that they had gained in the struggle. What they believed was empowerment was not recognized by civil society.

The women felt themselves to be stronger than they were prior to becoming fighters. It seems that facing extreme situations and being active in a war greatly influenced the psyche of many fighters. Balancing on the edge of life, the great hardship, the loss of fellow fighters, all of these factors had a major impact. For many, the experiences strengthened them. For others, the numerous battles of many years shaped a fighter identity better equipped for war than for peace.

The comment about losing something one has gained illustrates this well. What they have tasted can be analyzed as a temporary feeling of empowerment. They describe their time as fighters as being among equals and of belonging to a community. Their contribution mattered. 'Being in the field – it was as if we all came from the same womb' (interview with Lemlem, female ex-fighter, Eritrea, 1998).

It is well known that demobilized fighters represent a factor of instability in postwar societies (Doornbos, 1999). One of the reasons for this is that demobilized combatants often lose the power gained during the struggle. War's irony is that, besides being the most brutal of experiences, it also provides the most intense human experiences in a positive sense. It allows the individual to increase his or her social status: honor and heroism, comradeship, and feelings of community are some examples of the attractions of fighting (Funck, 1999). This is especially true for underprivileged groups and individuals. Roughly speaking, the very young, and many women and marginalized minorities fall into this category.

Ex-fighter Nighisty's face is radiant when she talks of her wartime experiences. When she starts telling me about the struggle, her whole body changes. She signals with facial expressions and body posture how meaningful this time in her life has been. When I ask what she misses, she says: 'I miss meaning and purpose. Even though it was difficult, we all felt that the struggle was important and necessary. Now this is lacking.'

Several ex-fighters emphasize how much the struggle meant to them on a deeper level. They explain about the self-confidence they gained. When they talk about the liberation war, their expression changes. They tell their stories with lots of intensity. This has been rather remarkable to notice. In spite of terrible experiences, they have experienced war's irony – paralyzing fear along with friendships and a sense of solidarity across all the usual borders (Bethke Elshtain, 1995). This is what stays with them, the feeling of solidarity and meaning and of themselves being equal to men.

An Eritrean woman living in Norway who was a fighter at an early stage in the war describes the importance of music for the liberation army in Eritrea. Through music, the Eritreans were mobilized to the liberation army:

> At all events, we would use our own songs. For instance, at weddings, when the food was prepared, the women would sing. Often they hinted at the liberation of Eritrea. Everybody longed for the day when they should be able to make their own decisions in a free country. In the songs they express their longing. Eritreans were not free to say what they were thinking. They had to hide their opinions, and in their songs they made up stories that were not for everyone to understand (interview with female ex-fighter, Norway, November 1999).

This woman describes very well the unity felt during the war and its absence afterwards. She explains that even civilians felt this unity, and they also had expectations about a future when their voices would be heard. This unity has been especially important for the fighters and is repeatedly mentioned as something they miss in peacetime. The same woman continues:

> A couple of years ago, I was back in Eritrea to attend my cousin's wedding. It was so boring! We danced, but nothing was the same as before. I missed all the songs that I remembered from before liberation. There were songs now, as well, but they were not important. Earlier the songs had important messages. I missed the atmosphere, the in-

> tensity, and the longing the songs used to express. Now, the songs didn't unite us the way they did before. Something important was missing. Now there was nothing that all of us cared to sing about. The unity was gone, and I missed it very much. Even though the war was terrible, we had something meaningful that we lost when liberation came. For us, living in a foreign country, the changes were more noticeable.

Several ex-fighters have reported feeling during the war that 'after this, I can handle everything', and 'after this, I will never be afraid again'. It is difficult for an outsider to fully understand how the struggle can be less demanding than the time after independence for the female ex-fighters. Egensteiner writes:

> The difficulties they [female fighters] may have experienced with the transition from 'traditional' women to revolutionaries may have been a great deal easier than the transition women fighters experienced in their return to civilian life. (Egensteiner, 1995: 28)

Why is it that so many women who have lived through terrible experiences as fighters say that they miss this period in their life?

> We have seen a lot of things, shared hardship and experiences. I was illiterate, but completed fourth grade. I stayed in the fighting section, which was the most important. The first year you learn how to fight. Then there was the theoretical training. In the training camp we were expected to discuss. It was very good to come into the armed struggle. Very satisfying, I don't have the words for it. I know that I can lead my own life, I had that experience. (interview with Lemlem, female ex-fighter)

This woman is today divorced with two children. She insists that the most important thing for her is to be able to make her own decisions. 'The problem is to go back. I don't want a man or his family to decide everything for me,' she says. The gap between gender roles in the guerrilla movement and in civil society is very wide. This is characteristic: while men and women are encouraged to act out *similar* roles in the army, the *differences* between men and women are encouraged in traditional society.

Civil Society: A Stratified Society

It is important to focus here on how different the post-liberation period turns out for the *various groups* of women. A civil society is not homogenous, but stratified: people are situated differently within it. The unity of belonging to a military group is gone. What I want to discuss here is the possibility for maintaining the new gender roles acquired as fighters. In Eritrea, there is a huge gap between the female ex-fighters who found a niche within the EPLF's circles after the liberation war and all the others. The first group of women is educated; they are in a different position than the uneducated women. Their socialization into the EPLF has not been followed by another socialization back into civil society to the degree that the others had to go through. The EPLF has created a society of its own. As it is, a foreigner coming to Eritrea usually meets women belonging to this category of ex-fighters. Often, these women work or have worked within the NUEW.

John Young (1997), conducting research on peasant revolutions, reflects on this, trying to interview women in Tigray, Ethiopia. He admits that a weakness of his study is that he did not succeed in interviewing women who did not hold an official position. When women without official positions and men were in the same group, the women would usually defer to the men. Peasants of neither gender found it strange that men answered questions that were specifically addressed to women and related to their problems. This was contrasted sharply with the case of women holding official positions. These women were generally assertive and articulate. But Young argues that the more dynamic women like this were pushed to the fore, the more difficult it was to understand the conditions and gauge the attitudes of peasant women.

These findings suggest a great gap today between an ex-fighter women working in official jobs and other ex-fighter women. This is important to keep in mind: female ex-fighters are not one group of people, all having the same problems. Because society at large has not changed in the

direction earlier visualized by the revolutionary leaders, the female fighters do not generally find that civilians have attitudes towards gender roles that are similar to those they themselves were taught as fighters during the war. In general, behavior that can be perceived as being influenced by 'modern ways' is likely to be considered negative, a common counteraction in postwar states. This counteraction leads to a situation where ex-fighter women without education have to negotiate hard for a position in society.

Thus, the group of women strategically situated in power positions talks on behalf of the group that is *not* situated in such a position. There is a gap, and what Young points out – how the more assertive and articulate a woman in an official position was, the more difficult it was to grasp the condition of a peasant woman – is rather striking. My own experiences from interviewing women working in the NUEW, as well as women formerly working there, is that these women seem distanced from the peasant woman. However, in their own opinion, they understand the peasant woman very well: all she needs is to be educated. 'Women need to be educated more, to become like us – or more like us' (Hale, 2000: 22).

What is interesting is that all the more resourceful ex-fighter women who gave me information claim that 'the ex-fighters feel advanced'. They do not say that they themselves feel advanced. They say that *the other fighters* feel advanced. I interpret this to be correct in the sense that all fighters do *feel* advanced, but only some are able to live this out. No one ever claimed to me that *they themselves* felt advanced, or that they had knowledge that others did not have. The poor ex-fighters and to a large degree women are the ones referred to when ex-fighters mention that ex-fighters feel advanced. In many cases, these are the ones who do not have much else besides this feeling of being advanced. Ex-fighters who are well off frequently claim that other fighters think they are advanced, and say that this is a serious problem for them. These more affluent fighters suggest that less privileged ex-fighters *ought to* feel less advanced. Several representatives in the NUEW explicitly expressed this. They 'understand' that some ex-fighters feel this way, but they indicate that civil society does not understand it at all, and therefore the ex-fighter ought to compromise, which is something they themselves have not been required to do.

These questions have not been viewed from the perspective of traditional society. The clash between traditional values and more modern ones is very deep in many poor countries. In countries where women have been soldiers in a revolutionary movement, they have been exposed to new ideas and knowledge that are foreign to traditional society. When they return, these two perspectives compete.

The resocialization required of a former peasant woman, in order for her to return to her family, can hardly be compared with that of the women working within the circles of the EPLF, namely the group of female ex-fighters the foreign researcher meets. Thus, a woman working for the NUEW, for instance, like Nebiat wearing trousers in a rural area where this is unheard of, is able to say, 'I can do that; everyone can tell that I'm a fighter'. This ex-fighter is a strong successful woman. What she learned during the struggle is still valuable and respected by others, whereas a poor peasant woman cannot determine the premises to the same extent. To survive, she is forced to compromise.

> The ones, who have gone back to their village and try hard to reintegrate with their families have to compromise. They sometimes leave behind what they have learned during the struggle. Some of them circumcise their daughters.[1] (interview with representative from the NUEW)

The poor peasant ex-fighter women cannot live according to their new knowledge. Peasant women and uneducated women find themselves to a larger degree than educated women in a difficult situation. They are not in a position of power to influence their surroundings.

In some families, ex-fighter women are able to negotiate a position whereby they gain credit from their fighter experiences. However, other women in the family do not necessarily gain the same privileges:

[1] In Eritrea, approximately 95% of girls are circumcised. The EPLF was against female circumcision, and this was taught to the fighters and in the areas where the EPLF had control. Consequently, female fighters in Eritrea did not circumcise their daughters during the war (nor afterwards), though there are signs that some have started doing this again.

> My mother is not a fighter; all [the other members of my] family are fighters, so my mother lets us do as we want. But when my brother got married, she restricted his wife [e.g. from going out to the city with her]. She said, 'Now she is my daughter and your brother also said she should not go out, so I won't let her go out now that she is married.' We argued, but she did not agree. She knows that we are outside her authority and says we can do as we want, but not our brother's wife. (Hale, 2000: 8)

One may ask what has happened to the consciousness of the brother? By conforming to traditional norms, the men gain power over women. Often, the men are more accepted by their own families, as well as by friends, when they exercise power of this kind. But we also see that *women* exercise power over other women.

This is noticeable in the Eritrean Women's Union, the NUEW. The women working here are all ex-fighters. Gradually, it emerges that the women working for the NUEW are not just generalized female ex-fighters, but fighters who have been able to find a position in relation to the EPLF, now the government of Eritrea. These female ex-fighters are not just any ex-fighters, but are first and foremost women who come from an upper stratum of society. The gap between the female ex-fighters who managed to find positions close to the EPLF after independence and those who did not is quite striking. The gap can be analyzed according to a class perspective, rooted in degree of closeness to the EPLF. Thus, the ones situated on the margins of society do not profit from their fighter position.

Stefanie Krug, discussing Ethiopia, writes that ex-fighters refuse to admit that they have serious problems today when they are in the public sphere. When they are in the Women's Association, in an assembly, or talking to government representatives, they insist on maintaining the image of the 'woman fighter'. They will not admit to being a 'weak woman' (Krug, 1999: 17). It appears that taking on a male identity created the empowerment experienced during the struggle. Krug has done fieldwork among female ex-fighters in Tigray in Ethiopia. She insists that the Women's Association in Tigray cannot focus on the problems of the ex-fighters because they are not aware of them. For this reason, many of the same women do not want to join the local Women's Association. They feel that the association does not meet their needs. Krug's opinion is that the association focuses too much on the women as fighters who have emancipated themselves, and that this is only part of their situation.

Krug found that there is a strong tension between the self-image of being a fighter and the growing awareness of limited capabilities owing to disablement or war trauma, such as loss of comrades and grief. In her opinion, the women fighters need to take a critical and distanced stance towards the TPLF, the movement that recruited them and that governs in Ethiopia, in order to develop their own female discourse. This can help them find their own strategy, separate from the male-dominated one (Krug, 1999).

In Eritrea, the Women's Union stays in close touch with the EPLF, the country's ruling party. The situation resembles the Ethiopian one described by Krug. The female ex-fighters' actual state of affairs is not dealt with satisfactorily by either the NUEW or the government. The situation is not improved by the fact that the women hide their real problems, nor by their thinking that being themselves is the same as being a 'weak woman'. It appears that the empowerment of the war period was based on grounds that could not survive in peacetime. Afterwards, the previously homogenous group of fighters found themselves situated within different classes in society. A few have found employment, but most have a hard time taking care of themselves:

> Many of the girls who had been fighters, they had such a hard time after the war. Often it was the ones with no education who had children during the war. After the war they found themselves alone. They had experienced independence, the struggle for continued independence was harder than the armed struggle. (interview with Nighisti, ex-fighter)

An extensive armed conflict always comes with a very high price tag. First, there is the loss of human lives and serious disability it causes. In addition, displacement of large groups of the population is common. In both Eritrea and Mozambique, about one million fled the country during the respective wars (Mehreteab, 1999; Lundin et al., 2000: 181). Countries suffer from heavily damaged infrastructure and dramatic reduction of production. All of this leads to enormous problems, and governments are unable to counter these to the satisfaction of the inhabitants.

In Africa, where soldiers return to poor communities, scarce resources make their reintegration difficult. Traditional support measures are partly exhausted as a result of the deprivation caused by war. After perhaps many years of absence, the soldiers have lost their position in the family and in the community. They are no longer part of a network that depends on their labor for daily coping and survival.

Sometimes, the family has received money as dependents of the soldier. This money stops when the soldier is demobilized. For both male and female soldiers, new paid employment is difficult to come by, and the ex-soldier becomes a burden on the family. Unemployment is very high in a typical postwar society. This is reported in several countries (Colletta et al., 1996) and leads to increased competition for the few jobs available. Thus, a frequent complaint made by ex-soldiers after they are demobilized is that they increasingly become a burden to their family as they are no longer able to contribute their share financially (see, for example, Pedersen, 1999 or Zimbabwe Women Writers, 2000). Thus, from the perspective of the family, they have lost an employed member and gained a family member who cannot even take care of her- or himself.

Opposition in civil society also leads to what Pettman (1996: 140) argues is a need for governments in postwar societies to 'disarm' soldier men as potential threats to state power by 'rewarding' them with 'returned' power over women. This is preferred to risking further discontent. The temporary expansion of women's public roles may lead to men feeling helpless and vulnerable. Sometimes a counteraction appears as a way of reestablishing control and power (Skjelsbæk, 1997: 9). Women's rights and claims may be given away in return for stronger male support of the state, or out of fear of antagonizing conservative interests. In a postwar society, the rise of gender significance draws boundaries that former fighter women have little experience of.

Revitalization of traditional thinking

A middle-aged ex-fighter woman in Eritrea explained to me about female ex-fighters and the response of her fellow male fighters after liberation: 'Even the comrades wanted us to go back'. The statement sums up a reaction that the female fighters were not prepared for. The comrades are the only men the fighter women might hope to have on their side. And they are the only people who have been thoroughly taught the same ideals about new gender roles and equality. The fighters have deeply felt experiences that they have shared and that bind them together. The female fighters describe civilian women as different from themselves, and insist that they have a lot in common with their male comrades. The equal exposure to danger, the extreme situations, the living together outside normal society, and not least the political conviction – these are all factors that strongly bind the ex-fighters together. The female ex-fighters express a feeling of being betrayed by civil society at large *and* by their male comrades. For them, it may be easier to accept the reaction of civil society than the reaction of their comrades.

Male ex-fighters were extremely popular immediately after the war. Several women mentioned this to me. Unlike the women, the men have not stepped out of their accepted gender roles. As fighters, they have merely reinforced the image of a strong and masculine man, whereas the women have disregarded all accepted rules of feminine behavior. In order for Eritrea to reach its goal, this was necessary. *At the time*, it was seen as a necessary sacrifice. Afterwards, the women do not fulfill expectations of a proper gender role and have to bear the consequences.

Female ex-fighters experience a lot of tension in their lives, finding themselves considered somewhere between, on the one hand, heroines, and on the other, unclean women (Egensteiner, 1995; Pedersen, 1999). They have led lives that do not comply with rules for how respectable women ought to live, and they have to negotiate their identity against this background.

One result of the existence of different norms during war and in peacetime are marriages that do not last. In Eritrea, marriage was not permitted between EPLF fighters until 1977. A strict rule of celibacy was imposed. After 1977, marriage became legal. Still, a woman was not supposed to spend much of her time caring for her child if she had one. Children were the responsibility of everyone and would be looked after by both male and female fighters in the EPLF kindergarten. Many mothers would have preferred to stay with their child, but had to conform to the culture of putting the struggle first and leave their children behind (Wilson, 1991). Usually, this separation of the mother and child is described as unproblematic. The EPLF took good care of the children,

and there are no reports of problems. On the contrary, this system is presented as functioning well, and the children are presented as having been given opportunities that other children were not. As there are no descriptions from the mothers, only EPLF reports and reports by thoroughly impressed foreign journalists, little is known of the actual experiences of the fighter mothers and their children.

For all fighters, the struggle came first and foremost. During interviews, some of my obviously resourceful informants revealed that they themselves would not have had children if liberation had not come. They acknowledge that women who gave birth during the war had a difficult time then and often have a difficult time afterwards. Hopefully, the children of the fighters *did* have good experiences during the struggle. After liberation, on the other hand, the many orphans, as well as other fighter children, had to face a stratified society, totally unlike the world in which they had grown up.[2]

The EPLF's marriage law of 1977 banned customs like child betrothal, polygyny, and dowry. Marriage was now based on the free choice of both partners. The law is identical in form and content to the 1950 Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, which was used as a base for drafting the new marriage law (Zerai, 1994: 49). Trish Silkin, a British anthropologist, describes how the EPLF encouraged the fighters to marry contrary to traditional custom. She claims that the EPLF thus tried to undermine the practice of marrying within one's own group: 'Breaking down traditional barriers between people of different ethnic, religious and social groups is intrinsic to the whole process of building an Eritrean national consciousness (Silkin, 1989: 54). The fighters chose their own spouses and were encouraged to get to know each other intimately before marrying. The intention was that, through this, they would be able to test their compatibility, whether they fitted together in all ways. The important idea was to unite the different ethnic groups and thus assist the national project of building a nation. The EPLF's marriage law represented a break with traditional marriage as an alliance between two families.

The fighters' break with the norms and customs of civil society, however, backfires when peace finally comes. Marriages that were established contrary to the rules of civil society must pass a very difficult test in order to survive. A similar national project to the one in Eritrea took place in Guinea-Bissau. Here too, the goal was to unite all groups of soldiers into one, and earlier discrimination against various groups of people was not tolerated. Marriage was to be an institution based on free choice (Urdang, 1979: 150). Urdang explains how the national project of Guinea-Bissau aimed to encourage the fighters to marry across ethnic and social groups. However, the unstable conditions of wartime led to situations where husbands and wives often lost each other through various causes. Afterwards, some of the female fighters had several children, often with different men.

In Eritrea, female ex-fighters are largely married to ex-fighters. But most male ex-fighters are married to civilian women, while female ex-fighters are hardly ever married to civilian men. Only 3.2% of the women fighters are married to a civilian, compared to 96.4% of the men (GDI, 1995; Mehreteab, 1997). This illustrates a considerable difference between female and male fighters.

In a postwar situation, from the perspective of the government, the rights of women are secondary to the many other priorities. After a war, scarce resources have to be spent in ways that counter forces which threaten the very existence of the government. In order to survive, the government has to concentrate on these forces. In order to stay in power, these forces must be dealt with and negotiated with. An example can be taken from Eritrea, where the EPLF created new laws in order to overcome the inequality of women, but where civil society forcefully pushed women in the direction of more traditional social and cultural values. More and more, the government has abandoned earlier promises concerning women's rights (interview with ex-fighter women, Asmara).

Women are crucial to the building of a nation (Pettman, 1996), and nationalism seeks the 'roots' of a nation. A war-torn society needs women to do unpaid work, such work being crucial for a nation that has been ravaged by war. In Eritrea, for example, the EPLF adjusted its ideology after the war to 'the need of the nation'. One young Eritrean woman, who was at the time in the

[2] Hale (2000) reports that the children of fighters have a hard time adjusting to civilian norms, especially girls.

USA, met the Eritrean president there. The latter declared, when questioned, that female ex-fighters could not expect to find a job when they totally lacked education. In addition, he added, they were needed to care for their children since Eritrea needed children (Pedersen 1999: 26). The shift in priorities and the changing rhetoric of the leaders were striking.

While it is never possible to return to pre-war times,[3] neither in Eritrea nor anywhere else, the tendency to try is nevertheless a widespread pattern. The post-revolution regression seems to occur especially at a time of economic crisis. A nation that is going through a process of healing after fighting a war needs to rebuild itself. Women are important for reconstruction as biological reproducers, as cultural carriers, and as individuals responsible for socializing children.

When a war is over, the reconstruction of the nation is the most vital issue. The country needs to heal from the war experiences. The female fighters have been socialized into a kind of life that is not compatible with raising a family according to traditional standards. Life in the field did not involve living in a family. Managing the household and child-raising were never part of the military training. Thus, the female ex-fighters are not able to reproduce the Eritrean society's expectations of a proper woman. They have broken numerous rules and have to negotiate their identity.

> Women are often constructed as the cultural symbols of the collectivity, of its boundaries, as carriers of the collectivity's 'honor' and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture. Specific codes and regulations are usually developed, defining who/what is a 'proper man' and a 'proper woman', which are central to the identities of collectivity members. (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 67)

A 'proper woman' in a postwar society is definitely not an ex-fighter woman heavily marked by warfare. Despite government efforts to praise female ex-fighters in postwar times, such praise appears rather hollow, since little action follows.

Peasant soldiers and land scarcity

As mentioned in chapter 3, most wars in Africa recruit from the peasant population. When peasants are to be reintegrated, a number of obstacles may make this difficult or impossible. A woman ex-fighter from Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, describes the situation of the peasant girls who were fighters:

> The peasant girls had an even harder time as peasants than as fighters. For some, that was the reason why they chose to join. As fighters they were respected in a new way. They sat together with educated and non-educated people and they were expected to say something. Of course, they had changed. (interview with ex-fighter woman)

We can easily find documentation that shows how peasant women in general face an even more demanding existence than male peasants. Another example is from the Ethiopian TPLF, where a member acknowledged that 'being a fighter is such a liberation for them [peasant women]' (Young 1997: 179). This is important because a future reintegration has to take into account combatants' backgrounds and reasons for joining the guerrilla army. Women who join to get away from a difficult situation face their own difficulties when returning to their home communities.

Peasant women refuse, to a greater degree than men, to return to their families after they have been combatants in a war (GDI, 1995; Teclemichael, 1999). Krug's (1999) studies of Ethiopia explain how, after the war, there was ambivalence between the peasantry and the fighters. In her study of the reintegration of women fighters from the TPLF, Krug documents how most of the peasant women recruited did not return to their home surroundings after demobilization. Krug argues that reintegration into the peasantry had the most adverse appeal to many women. Their time in the liberation army had distanced them from values associated with traditional rural life. These women, especially long-term fighters, sought to live with their former comrades with whom they shared family-like ties, bonds of solidarity, and a collective identity.

[3] 150,000 Eritreans were reported dead in the liberation war (included both fighters and civilians); 70,000 suffer from various disabilities; and 90,000 children were orphaned. In addition, one-third of the total population was displaced (Bruchhaus & Mehreteab, 2000).

Both men and women find it difficult to return, as there are few opportunities for an *alternative* existence among the rural population. The women coming from peasant backgrounds and not returning often face a difficult existence in urban areas. In Eritrea, the peasant ex-fighter women are, too a large degree, invisible to the foreign researcher and have not been focused on sufficiently. Many of these women face serious problems (interview with representative of the NUEW).

Not only attitudes, but also more tangible problems make the return of ex-combatants to rural areas difficult. Often, land scarcity makes reintegration impossible. Relatives or neighbors have started cultivating land that otherwise would have belonged to the ex-fighters had they stayed in the village. Upon their return, the latter become intruders and threaten the stability of the community.

In Eritrea, an ex-fighter man working for the integration of fighters into civil society explained to me that, when the fighter came back, there was no room for him or her. The family had filled the empty gap while he or she was gone. On return, the fighter needs a space which is no longer available:

> The ex-fighters had been away too long, and they had changed too much. They were like 'the last ones to arrive'.[4] They thought they had rights. They had sacrificed everything for the liberation of Eritrea, but because times were so difficult they could not get what they thought they had a right to. And they thought they had a lot to teach the civilians. But the civilians didn't want to learn.

Often, the government may support ex-soldiers with land upon demobilization as compensation for their service. If there is a scarcity of land and housing, this becomes a burden to the community they return to. The receiving community may view the homecoming combatants as a threat, since poverty is prevalent in many localities in postwar Africa (Tewolde, 1998:34, 35).

An example can be seen in the International Labour Organization's (1995) report from Ethiopia. There, former soldiers wanting to reintegrate in farming were entitled to one hectare of land. This turned out to create great unrest in the communities. In a country where 60% of the rural population is below the poverty line, reintegrating soldiers in the agricultural sector proved extremely difficult. The government eventually pushed through an arrangement under which ex-soldiers were entitled to somewhat smaller plots of land previously held by the community. The same program failed to target large groups of female combatants because very few of these came forward and claimed the benefits to which they were entitled.

Reports of land shortage causing difficulties upon demobilization have also come from Uganda and Namibia (Colletta et al., 1996; International Labour Organization (ILO), 1995). In Namibia, although many ex-combatants had access to land through their families, few had it in their own right. Some did not find their families upon demobilization. They felt that the government ought to have helped them more in this difficult situation.

A Traumatized Population

The kind of mending and care that is needed by many women who have been combatants during a violent war may take years. Most reintegration programs last for a short time, and the ones who benefit from them have often not recovered when the programs are over. In fact, in her article on women guerrillas in El Salvador, Ana Cristina Ibanez points to the fact that survivors of a violent conflict often need lifelong treatment. The consequences of postwar trauma will persist in generations to come (Ibanez, 2001: 129).

Disabled ex-combatants

After a war, the physical and mental costs for female soldiers are often very high (Bennett & Warnock, 1995; Enloe, 2000: 249). This is not least due to the importance of family and marriage

[4] The man showed me a book with this title. It was book in English about persons who move into an area and the reactions of the ones who already live there.

in most societies. In poor African countries, a disabled woman definitely has considerably reduced possibilities.

There are numerous disabilities in the wake of a war. War-related disability and mental health problems are direct consequences of a long-lasting armed conflict. In addition to accidents occurring during a battle, health problems increase as a consequence of a lack of satisfactory health services and poor diets. Diseases easily healed under other conditions may result in serious disabilities because of lack of adequate treatment or deficient nutrition. Landmines also add to the range of war-inflicted disabilities.

Those who become disabled in war have a higher status in a war-torn society than other disabled individuals. In poor countries, disabled people have traditionally been treated harshly because they are a burden to the community (Tewolde & Nielsen, 1998). However, disabled war veterans usually receive respect due to their status as fighters who sacrificed their health for national independence. Still, as postwar conditions offer few job opportunities even for able-bodied men, disabled men and disabled women find themselves in very difficult situations.

The number of disabled female veterans naturally increases as women become subject to the same hazards as men. When women participate alongside men, even at the frontline, large numbers of women are often disabled.

Disabled women are generally considered to experience more difficulties than disabled men (Abu-Habib, 1997; Bennett & Warnock, 1995; Turner, 1998). Since men in most places engage in housework and childrearing to a lesser degree than women, a strong and fit wife and mother is considered necessary for the well-being of the household. A disabled woman is hindered in her ability to perform vital functions. She will consequently be less attractive as a spouse.

In many countries, a disabled man is able to marry a woman to take care of him and thus able to lead a normal life with a family of his own. A disabled woman runs a much greater risk of being abandoned than a disabled husband. According to the 1995 report of the United Nations Development Program (cited in Abu-Habib, 1997), disabled women are twice as likely to be divorced by their husbands as other women.

In Namibia, 10% of ex-combatants are disabled. In spite of skill-training programs, the economic prospects of the disabled after the completion of training are limited (Colletta et al., 1996).

Childless women veterans

The phenomenon of childless women, who have been touched in this way because of their history as active guerrilla soldiers, is quite common (Enloe, 2000). The reasons are manifold: extreme life situations over long periods of time, disease, lack of health services, and lack of proper nutrition. From Vietnam, we hear that many of the Vietnamese women who survived as combatants in the war against the USA became unable to bear children: 'Contact with death and blood have robbed these young girls of the very future they sought to defend when they left home in the first place' (Turner, 1998: 4). Further, women in Vietnam were left 'unmarriageable', condemned to life on the margins of a society that values family above all else. Even though men and women have many similar experiences, some of the experiences of women are unique to women.

The experience from Vietnam has its parallel in Eritrea. The war has affected the female ex-fighters and influenced their ability to lead a family life in future. In general, this strikes women harder than men. Society's expectations of a woman are different from those placed on a man. In order to be a 'complete' woman, one is dependent on fulfilling certain criteria. One's appearance and age are crucial. One's reproductive ability is dependent on age, but is also more vulnerable to diseases and a harsh life. War makes an 'imprint' on a woman's body, both physically and in the mind of others. To a greater degree than a man, a woman is measured according to whether or not she lives up to these standards. In the future home, a woman will need to take care of her husband and children. It is not the other way around, neither in Eritrea nor in (most) other places.

In general, very young girls are affected to a greater extent than older women. Length of military service is also an important factor, as are individual experiences. Nighisty, an Eritrean ex-fighter, married with no children and extremely unhappy about this fact, says:

> I'm happy that I was in the frontline when liberation came, because I experienced the victory more intensely than many others. But at the same time I'm very unhappy. The

> government has tried to help the fighters, but Eritrea is so very poor. If I had not been a fighter I would live with a large family today. Now, I don't have children and that is because I was a fighter.

This woman has not been able to find a position within the circles of the EPLF. She has no job, lives in a difficult marriage, and sees no solution to her problems. When she talks about her current situation, she cries. When she talks of her wartime experiences, her face radiates.

Quite a few women refuse to give birth during a war. The times are too uncertain for having a child. In Eritrea, several women have told me that they would not have had children today if the war had not ended when it did. One ex-fighter said:

> I was prepared not to have a child in my life. I was getting close to menopause; if liberation had not come at the time it did, I would not have had children. Luckily I was able to have one child before it was too late.

Women who wait for peace may be too late to have a child. They may be too old; they may have lost their husband; or they may not be able to conceive for numerous reasons when the conflict is finally over.

In a society where a woman's worth too a large degree is measured by her ability to raise a family, a barren ex-fighter woman is not a woman like any other woman in the eyes of most people. The great importance of having children is not only a personal matter, but also a ticket to acceptance by society as a successful woman. Karen Turner (2000) describes how women in Vietnam became barren as a result of their war activities and how their great contribution to the war can in no way compensate for what they have been reduced to today. Vietnamese women veterans lost their looks and their fertility after years of hard living and exposure to disease and chemical poisons. In the end, the guilty male survivors who admire women veterans will still prefer younger, healthier women as wives. The women veterans of today rather serve as a symbol of the disenfranchised rather than as heroic women who helped win the war.

Training

Most women who have been soldiers in Africa's wars do not have an education. After the war is over, unemployment is often high, and women have a very hard time finding a paid job.

In Eritrea, several men said to me that they were all for women's liberation and a new and alternative role for women, which, according to the ideology of the EPLF, was the right way to go. Interestingly, their own wives and daughters belonged to a different category. *They* could not, for numerous reasons, be exposed to modern ideas. The ideology of the EPLF has influenced the male fighters, but only to a certain degree. They express a belief that women ought to learn skills that belong to masculinized spheres. And though they seem quite sincere in this, it seems only to apply to other women, not women close to them.

It is very difficult to see simple solutions to the question of employment for female ex-fighters. In a postwar climate, women cannot easily join education programs, even if they are offered them. Women who do want to receive training and then to find employment need childcare facilities. This is very difficult, and such facilities usually do not exist as we know them in the West. It is also difficult for a woman to leave her house, as the husband can rarely help her with the household chores.

When women do leave their home and go to work, obviously this will affect gender relations, and ultimately will also require changes in men. An alternative male gender role is not on the agenda of many of the poor postwar states in Africa today. Both men and women with whom I have discussed the emancipation of women are interested in expanding women's possibilities. That there is a connection between this and men's activities and roles is not an issue. Even prominent ex-fighter women working, for example, in the Women's Union in Eritrea say that men doing work in the home is out of the question. Another woman takes care of 'women's' work in their homes. The well-off urban women who can afford one or two maids do not need their husbands to do housework. A poor peasant woman naturally faces a different reality.

In Mozambique, only one out of six demobilized soldiers received any kind of vocational training after the war. Some soldiers received support from multiple sources, due to poor coordination between implementing agencies (Maslen, 1997: 12). In addition, the few women ex-combatants who were offered training skills were commonly offered gender-typed activities like sewing and secretarial work. Initially, women were excluded from vocational training courses altogether. However, many women were not able to make use of the courses because there were no possibilities for childcare (ibid: 13).

A criticism voiced against the reintegration programs in Mozambique was that no needs-assessment was undertaken. According to the ILO, a survey evaluating the local reintegration prospects should have been done. Programs were badly tailored to the areas where it was supposed that the soldiers would return. For example, soldiers who were trained to be electricians returned to areas without electricity; others were trained to become car mechanics and then were expected to return to areas without any cars (ibid: 16).

An interesting survey by UNESCO (1996) suggests that ex-soldiers should be trained to work with the reintegration of ex-soldiers themselves. No one knows the problems of soldiers as well as they do themselves. As the then Director-General of UNESCO Federico Mayor stated, 'countries in post-war situations frequently continue to be characterized by political instability, insecurity and everyday violence. Reconciliation between the demobilized and society is thus essential'. Few, if any, success stories are reported on this matter, even when the necessary resources were available (ibid.). Frustration and resentment are typical reactions when ex-combatants feel that they are treated as objects and that they themselves have little say in their own fate. That the soldiers can play a major role, monitoring integration programs, is a suggestion worth paying attention to.

Soldiers commonly face a decline in status when they demobilize: 'One-time heroes and models held up to society are now troublesome reminders of the past' (ibid: 1). Upon demobilization, the ex-soldiers are seen as recipients, rarely as resources. Experts are called in to define the situation, to find the solutions, and to devise the right programs. Findings from the UNESCO survey indicate that education is a key link between peace and development. Training schemes that keep the soldiers busy, but that may not offer jobs in the end, only add to the frustration and incapacity of the soldiers. It also increases dependency, segregation, and expectations. Where trainers are veterans themselves, the positive impact is greater.

Chapter Summary

- The age of the soldiers, the length of their stay in the organization, and their personal experiences are important for how thoroughly the soldier has been socialized out of society.
- War experiences offer many soldiers a meaning and purpose in their lives that peacetime may lack.
- Men and women are often encouraged to have similar roles as soldiers, while in peacetime they are encouraged to act out different roles. Thus, the men do not have a break in their gender socialization, whereas the women do.
- When a war is over, the unity of the soldier group disappears.
- Ex-soldiers are no longer united and equal. They belong to different segments within a stratified society.
- A war-torn society will, for many reasons, aim to return to a prewar order. Marriages established during the war that run contrary to accepted norms run a high risk of falling apart.
- Women from peasant populations have an even more difficult time returning to their home community.
- Disabilities and other serious war-inflicted mental and physical wounds will not disappear after a short period with demobilization assistance. Disabled women and women unable to bear children because of traumatic war experiences can be additionally marginalized.
- Ex-soldiers are experts on their own situation and can often be used to train other ex-soldiers.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

One goal that is very important for international funding and aid agencies is that they do not increase inequalities in a community. This is the background for resisting programs that are *exclusively* for demobilized soldiers. Although sometimes necessary, such programs create barriers between demobilized soldiers and the rest of society. New social categories are produced as a consequence of armed conflicts, and the identity and status of these new social groups are negotiated by society. Female ex-combatants, who have broken rules of traditional behavior and gender roles, will risk being marginalized during the rebuilding process. In war-torn societies, traditional support measures are often exhausted. Social structures can only recover as the development of the whole community progresses. Programs aimed towards an overall integration of society are thus preferable to those focused on a particular group. At the same time, the special problems of ex-combatants must be addressed to help guide peaceful development and growth.

Targeting

- Because the targeting of female veterans has proved difficult, women should be able to rely on mixed-gender selection committees to ensure a more impartial decision when such committees decide on who have or have not been soldiers.
- Since women lack information of their demobilization rights more often than men, utmost care has to be taken to inform women of these rights.
- An overall assessment of the situation at hand is very important. Without this, marginalized groups that qualify for support may be invisible to the donors.
- An overall coordination of existing programs is important in order to avoid situations in which the same people receive double assistance, while the demobilization programs fail to target others.
- Confusion and complexity around data collection regarding soldiers should be kept at a minimum. Also, women should be involved in and follow the process of targeting eligible ex-soldiers.
- The widespread reaction that soldiers belonging to a defeated group are not considered as deserving assistance is a challenge. Such groups of soldiers will remain marginalized if not targeted for assistance.
- Demobilization and reintegration planners have to pay special attention to disabled women (and girl) veterans.
- In order to reach women, women's networks, church groups, health centers, and other less formal information channels are more effective than, for example, newspapers and radio.

Demobilization

- When possible, all soldiers should proceed directly to encampment upon demobilization. Data on everyone should be collected, and ex-combatants provided with necessary information.

When dependents or abducted women are included in the encampment phase, questions have to be adjusted to reflect the specificity of each group.

- Women and men need separate facilities. Also, separate family units are important if families or couples are present. Health facilities have to be adapted to women's needs and should also be separated from men's services.
- Women need to be informed about employment and training possibilities. They also need information about some of the obstacles they will meet.
- Information must be given in ways the recipients can understand.
- Transportation to the home community or another place must be organized.

Reintegration

- In a war-torn society, reintegrating a certain group of people is not the same as it would be in the case of a well-functioning society. Naturally, reintegration is the aim, but we have to ask: reintegration into what? A mainstream society that is weighed down with social problems? The latter is, after all, usually the case.
- In many cases, reintegration is not in fact possible. Women who have been soldiers and who have been socialized out of their families often refuse to return to them. The changes they have gone through are too great for them, and they need assistance in order to build a civil existence so that they are able to care for themselves and their children.
- Women soldiers must be assisted in trying to find an *alternative* way of living. Education and training are frequently what they lack, and these should be offered through assistance programs. A range of skills should be encouraged, not only typical female skills.
- Some of the knowledge acquired by ex-soldiers through politicization programs within revolutionary groups should be acknowledged as being of value. One example is the case of female circumcision, which has been considered counter-revolutionary by a number of revolutionary groups. Assistance to demobilized female soldiers must support women in maintaining such an attitude.
- Childcare opportunities are very important for the employment prospects of female ex-soldiers. Kindergartens ought to be made available to female ex-soldiers.

Land Pressure

- Pressure on land is also a reason for constructing programs that support the whole community. Otherwise, ex-fighters will distance themselves further from civilians. Social structures that could be relied on at earlier times must be strengthened, not weakened.
- Because land scarcity is common in many poor countries, ex-combatants with a peasant background can, as an alternative, be offered further education. This will not mean reintegration into their original home surroundings, but for some this can be an option and can lead to their upward mobility within the country.

Disabled

- Insight into the very difficult situation of disabled women and girls makes it especially important that reintegration programs pay extra attention to this group of disabled war veterans. Such extra attention should include the possibility for these women to turn to female physicians. One reason why this is important is that medical doctors must confirm their disability.
- Special programs for disabled female ex-fighters are important and provide a challenge to funders and aid agencies. Some agencies, like institutions in the Nordic countries, have considerable expertise within this field that can be applied.

Chapter Summary

There are few easy solutions to the difficult situation of women who have been soldiers in wars in Africa. Assistance programs must first of all be aware that female ex-soldiers usually do exist, and then must actively seek them out. To help these women on their way towards reintegration – if not within their original community, then somewhere else of their choosing – is a great challenge. The aim of this report has been to point to the special situation in which such women find themselves after a war.

Appendix

IMPRESSIONS AND LIFE STORIES FROM ERITREA

Introduction

Examples from Eritrea have been frequently used throughout this report. The background for this is that Eritrea had a very high percentage of women involved in its liberation war and my own fieldwork was largely conducted there. Some background information on Eritrea may therefore be useful, as well as summaries of a handful of the interviews with female ex-fighters from that country.

Eritrea's liberation war lasted for thirty years (1961–91), finally resulting in the creation of an independent state in 1993. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) was at the time of liberation the only active liberation army in Eritrea fighting for independence from Ethiopia. The goal of the EPLF was an independent state within the borders drawn by the colonial power of Italy around the turn of the century. The EPLF's ideology was Marxist, and, in addition to independence, its plan was to implement its own political program in a future state.

By the end of the liberation war, there were some 95,000 fighters[1] in Eritrea, around 3% of the total population (Teclemichael, 1999). One-third of the fighters in the liberation army were women. Like the men, they were introduced to the ideology of the revolutionary movement when they joined. To be useful to the EPLF in the struggle for liberation, the fighters needed training. They received military training and were trained in political awareness, based on Marxist doctrines. In addition, they learned vocational skills useful to the liberation army, and the illiterate were taught how to read and write. Like other leftist revolutionary movements, the EPLF had *equality* between ethnic groups, religions, and men and women as a basic principle.

In Eritrea today, the lives of the women who joined the liberation war have been molded by their experiences as fighters. During the war, the female fighters were introduced to a completely new existence. Coming from a stratified society with traditional gender roles, their socialization into the equality within the EPLF influenced their very basic understanding of self and others. Afterwards, the attitude of civil society and their own self-perception turned them into a distinct group of people. For some, the ex-fighter status becomes a basic and permanent one, as significant in civilian life as it was in wartime.

Thanks to the fighters, Eritrea was freed. When liberation came, other Eritreans were grateful to them for what they had done. They deserved everyone's respect. As time goes by, however, other feelings and attitudes towards the ex-fighters gradually appear. The female ex-fighters in Eritrea, like women in similar guerrilla wars, are disappointed about how little gender roles have changed in the postwar society. They find that the fighters are not as large a group of people as they believed during the fighting (interview with the National Union of Eritrean Women). These former combatants have lost something in the transition to peace. Now, civil society defines the rules that they must live by. But what exactly is it that they have lost? And why can they not forget their fighter status and return to traditional life?

My own interest in the female ex-fighters started when I heard that they were the only people in Eritrea that did not circumcise their daughters. This made me curious, and I wanted to find answers to how they were able to resist the pressures from the rest of society. What is it that they have learned that enables them to contest long-held traditions? For people who are unfamiliar

[1] *Freedom fighter* was the English term used to describe members of the guerrilla forces in Eritrea.

with it, female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM) has a stigma attached that is greater than that associated with many other traditions. It is often claimed that the way to eradicate FGM lies through education. The EPLF in Eritrea managed to do something that has proved difficult in civil society, to bring about a change in deep-rooted customs. However, the ex-fighters' knowledge had little impact on their surroundings in post-liberation Eritrea.

It must be added that in 1998, a new war started between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which lasted for two-and-a-half years.

Selection from Interviews with Female Fighters in Asmara and Keren, Eritrea, July 2001

Altogether, I interviewed 28 female fighters in Eritrea during July 2001. A woman who had previously been a fighter herself arranged for me to meet these women. All of the women had been fighters during the liberation war. All currently live under difficult conditions. Many of them belong to ethnic minorities in Eritrea. These women do not speak any English. An interpreter translated from Tigrinya since everyone, including those from ethnic minorities, spoke that language.

All of the women interviewed appeared to be very young, and all of them are suffering great economic distress. They want to be trained, to learn a skill and get a job. As they all, except for one, have children, they are in a difficult situation when it comes to keeping a job. Kindergartens are (most likely) not a possibility, and their extended families mostly live far away from them. These women have not grown up in the cities where they currently live. Many of them did not know their exact age.

All the women agree that all their problems started after demobilization. Most of them were married to soldiers, and several have not heard from their husbands in a long time and fear that the latter are dead (as a result of the recent war). At the time of the interviews, details of the casualties from this war had not been released. Families of soldiers could not therefore know whether or not missing family members were still alive.

Mehret

Age 28. She was 16 when she joined the EPLF in 1988. Her husband was martyred in *the field.*[2] Her daughter was born when liberation was achieved (1991). In the new war against Ethiopia (1998–2001), her parents, who lived in Barentu in the western part of the country, were displaced and became refugees.

When Mehret joined the EPLF, her parents knew about it and approved: 'My mother blessed me'. Her mother was a member of the Women's Union and prepared food for the fighters. She says that her 'emotions' made her want to join. She saw the fighters and wanted to be one of them. Her brother was already a fighter. He suffered a head injury during the war and was disabled. He is a big problem to her and her family because 'he is not himself any longer'.

As a fighter, she went to the front line and stayed there for two years. She says that she was politicized by the criticism sessions.[3] Then, at 18, she married another fighter. Her husband was soon disabled, and they both went to a camp for the disabled. Her husband became blind. He died in 1993.

Mehret was demobilized in 1994. She has no job, no income. She says she cannot eat in the evenings. All she wants is training for any kind of profession: 'Because we cannot expect anything from the government, we must help ourselves.'

Mehret's experiences are unusual when it comes to her parents approving of her joining as a fighter. Most women told me that their parents did not know that they joined. If they had suspected that their children were going to join, they would have prevented them from doing so.

[2] *The field* describes the geographical areas where the EPLF were active.

[3] See the criticism sessions, chapter 3.

Akberet

Age 34. She has five children: four girls and a boy (including two sets of twins). She has a Tigrinya mother and a Billen father. She was 16 when she joined the struggle. She stayed for seven years as a fighter.

She says that she was convinced that she wanted to be a fighter. Her brother was already one, and her parents approved of her decision.

During the struggle, she met her husband. 'It was not easy to be a fighter for a woman during the struggle. We had to work harder than the men to prove that we were good enough. They tried to oppress us, especially some cadres. The criticism meetings helped us. There we could complain about how the men behaved. But even if we had our problems, everything was much better than it is now.' This woman has no education and has not been able to find a job.

Zeineb

Approximately 36 years old. She is Saho (Muslim), and comes from Ghinda. Halina joined the armed struggle when she was about 13 or 14 years old. Her mother died when she was eight. A short while later, her father married another woman. She left for the field when she was very young. She says that she grew up in the field. 'For me, the struggle was more family than the family I had.' After independence, she feels that she is nothing: 'I'm in the streets.' She has four children, two boys and two girls. She says that she has a husband who is also an ex-fighter. She was first married to a Tigrinya (Christian) man during the struggle, but they divorced after independence.

'My father never wanted me to attend school, only a little bit of Koran school. But in the field I learned until fifth grade. We had a very good time together during the struggle. Everybody ate together. Now they (the former comrades) don't care about me.'

Zewdi

Age 34. She is Tigrinya (Christian). She was 14 years old when she joined the guerilla forces. Several other girls joined with her. She was the only girl in her family, and they were very unhappy when she left. Four brothers joined: two came back disabled and two died. Her two youngest brothers, who had not been old enough to participate in the first war, were soldiers in the most recent war. The family has heard from one of these two, but not from the other (which probably means that he is dead).

Zewdi was at the front most of the time in Eritrea's liberation war. This was what she wanted: she says that she wanted to kill. She also trained as a nurse during the struggle. The treatment at the hospitals was very good at this time. Zewdi was badly hurt herself three times, but she was treated well. These days, she does not get the treatment that she needs. She has bad health now. Her husband is a soldier.

Her situation today is terrible. She says that she wonders why they all went to war. Her parents lost most of their children. For what?

Even though most of the women I interviewed agreed that their lives today were terrible, very few said like Zewdi that they wondered for what they had fought. Still, several did express this doubt in other ways. They described their present lives as unbearable. They also said that they had had to fight when they did. The war was much better for them than these terrible times of deprivation. The great difference between themselves and other, better-off fighters is what they react most negatively to.

Manna

Age 29. She has four children: two girls and two boys. She is Tigrinya (Christian). She was only 11 years old when she joined the struggle. She was alone and simply disappeared one day without telling her parents. She had seen the fighters in the village, and that tempted her to join. She joined with one other girl and two boys. Only one boy came back. Her father was already dead,

but her mother looked for her without finding her. Her mother became ill with worry for her when she left.

She was in the struggle for ten years. She was in the Zero school for only one year.[4] After that she received no more education. She says that all she wanted was to fight for the independence of her country. She says: 'I was not afraid, oh yes, I was afraid, but I wanted badly to fight.'

Halina

Age 29. She has two children: one is five and the other is two years old. Her husband is a soldier. She joined as a fighter in 1989. She is Tigre (Muslim). Her husband is also Tigre. His parents are now refugees in the Sudan.

During the struggle, she was employed in a construction company, working as an electrician in a garage. She wishes that she had invested her demobilization money better. Her parents, the household, took it all. It was hard for her parents. Her sister also joined the struggle. She and her sister were their parents' only children. Both returned after liberation.

Halina had no education before she became a fighter. Today she looks very young, appearing not much older than 16.

Terhas

Age 36. She joined as a fighter when she was 12 years old. She is Tigrinya. Her mother was dead; her father tried to stop her, but she ran away. She says that she was not so conscious; the reason why she joined as a fighter was because both male and female fighters came to the village. She liked them very much: 'their hair and their dress, I wanted to be like them'.

Terhas spent most of the time in the frontline. She says that there were lots of injuries when she was there. Today she is married with four children, and her husband is a soldier. They were married in the field.

Terhas said at first that she was 29 years old. She said this in her mother tongue. She knew when she was born, but not how old she was. The others helped her find the correct age.

Hiryti

Age 28. She is Tigrinya, born in 1974. Her parents were fighters, and in 1977 the whole family joined up and went to live in a camp. Hiryti went away to the Zero school when she was nine years old. Two older brothers died in the war. Hiryti was not trained to be a soldier until 1990. She has been a soldier in the new war, as she does not have children or a husband. She is now employed by the government as a teacher for adults, teaching them to read and write.

Hiryti complains that she has not been successful as others who went to the Zero school. She mentions the pilots[5] who were educated there.

Hiryti was probably lucky that she only had one year left for fighting after she was trained, since the war stopped in 1991. She is very different from the others interviewed. She received 'true revolutionary' training and appears influenced by the ideology of the independence movement in a different way than the others. She seems as a child of this ideology growing up with it, in contrast to the others, who suffered a break with their homes and earlier values and traditions when they joined as fighters.

Sara

Age 32. She is Tigrinya, born in 1969 in a small village close to Asmara. She is married, but is now separated. She has two children. Her husband was an ex-fighter, and they married during the struggle. She was 12 years old when she joined in 1982. She says that she does not know why

[4] The Zero school was the revolutionary school run by the EPLF.

[5] The pilots in the last war in Eritrea were educated at the Zero school. A position as pilot demands absolute loyalty to the government.

she joined. She was not very politically aware, she says. She thinks she mainly joined up out of fear of the Ethiopian soldiers, who had killed her cousin and another woman with a baby.

One of her brothers died in the struggle, another survived. She stayed in the Zero school until 1985, but then she insisted on becoming a fighter. The students at the school all wanted to start to fight and kill, she says. They even went on a hunger strike in order that the EPLF would allow them to fight.

'I don't know whether we were fools or convinced. We all loved the struggle.' She says she is proud of what she did as a fighter, but that she is unhappy now. Her brothers are soldiers at the front now. She says that times are harder now than during the struggle.

Nebiat

Age 31. She was a fighter for 15 years. She joined at the age of ten, together with two brothers. One of her brothers died; the other came back, but he died during the recent war. The EPLF made her attend the Zero school for 4 years, but she didn't want to stay in school: 'I wanted to fight. That was all that was important.' Now she wishes that she had stayed on in school.

Most of her comrades died. Some who survived have kept in touch. They talk about the past together – that's what they like to do. She says: 'Now is not an attractive life. Before, it was all meaningful. The aim to liberate the country, we had this together. The children, the next generation, they cannot understand it, how it was freedom to us to be in the field.'

Fanus

Born in 1975. Married with two children. She now works as a cleaner at the hospital in Keren. When she was 8 years old, her whole family joined the struggle. Her mother went to a camp with the children until 1989. Then Fanus joined the front line. She says: 'it was important to become a soldier with a gun as quickly as possible'.

During the struggle everything was good, she says. 'I liked war at that time. We were fighting to liberate the country. The fighters were together and shared everything. We thought it would stay like that forever.' But immediately after independence, when her father went back to his farm, it was ruined and he had nothing. They were 5 sisters and brothers who all went to fight. Two brothers died.

Roma

She is now running a small shop/café. She has a girl and a boy of her own and has also adopted a Tigre boy who is Muslim (she is Tigrinya and Christian, herself) The boy was an orphan, and she adopted him when he was 4–5 years old, she says. She doesn't know her age. Maybe she was born around 1972. She went to the field when she was about 12. Her parents wanted her to get married, but she didn't want to.

She says that the soldiers, with their afro hair and Kalashnikovs, attracted her. She went to the Zero school and stayed for about a year. She had no education before that. Then she went to the front, where she received second-degree wounds. She says that 'she was changed by being a fighter'. She was politicized: 'At first you miss your family. Especially you miss your mother. But then you get convinced that you ought to be a fighter, you are doing something very important. When you realize that, you stop missing them.' She married another fighter during the struggle, but he left her after independence, she says.

Roma is different from the other interviewees. She appears much happier and more energetic.

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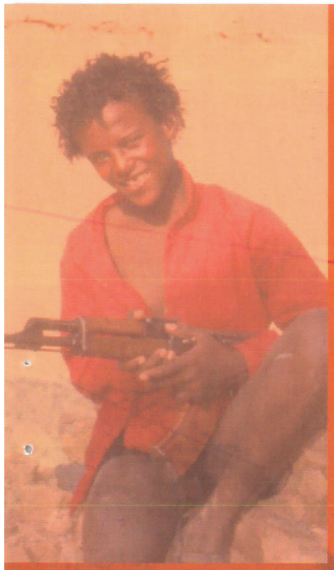

Peace as Disappointment
The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies:
A Comparative Study from Africa

The roles of women during war and peace are often very different. During a war, women may perform tasks usually performed by men, in addition to supporting the war effort more directly. In some cases, women are themselves soldiers. When a war is over, women's contributions during the conflict rarely receive recognition, one reason being that the needs and priorities of a post-conflict society are very different from those of a society at war: whereas men and women are encouraged to act out similar roles as fellow soldiers in an army or guerrilla movement, post-conflict society encourages difference between the genders. This has important consequences for former soldier women and for their sense of identity. In many cases, female ex-soldiers prefer to conceal their military past rather than risk social disapproval. Policymakers need to be aware of the characteristic obstacles faced by female ex-soldiers in a post-conflict situation. Drawing on a range of conflicts within Africa, with a special focus on Eritrea, this report describes a number of postwar challenges faced by female ex-combatants. The report will be of interest to aid workers, diplomats and researchers focusing on post-conflict reconstruction.

The report is available at: www.prio.no/publications/reports/femalesoldiers

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