

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The research team for this study were Woldekidan Kifle, Hilifity Aregawi, Kiros Berhanu, Yonatan Tesfaye, and Leul Woldu from the University of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Interviews with female participants were conducted by female researchers.