THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT IN TIGRAY (1976- PRESENT)

Emergence, Development and Relationships with TPLF

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Spring 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper would not have been completed in the way it has had it not been for the support of many. First and foremost, my special thanks goes to my informants: Hiriti Mihreteab, Saba Teka, Kidusan Nega, Zenebech Fiseha, Sister Genet Desta, Mulugeta Gebresilase, Tadese Birhane and Kibreab Asayehey for investing their precious time to answer my questions and to provide me with insightful information on the women’s movement in Tigray over time.

I am also indebted to my supervisor Associate Professor Thera Mjaaland for her unreserved support from beginning to end of this thesis. I thank you for your useful professional comments, guidance and patiently crafted supervision.

I owe a special word of thanks to Professor Haldis Haukanes for her kind professional support and encouragement in my two years of stay in the programme of Gender and Development and for her constructive comments on a chapter of this thesis. Last but not least, I extend my cordial gratitude to my dear classmates for their constructive comments and all those who contributed in one way or another to make my two years study period in Bergen pleasant.
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<tr>
<td>AWFT</td>
<td>Association for Women Fighters of Tigray</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>Central Statistical Agency</td>
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<td>CSC</td>
<td>Central Statistical Commission</td>
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<td>DATW</td>
<td>Democratic Association of Tigray Women</td>
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<td>EDU</td>
<td>Ethiopian Democratic Union</td>
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<td>ELF</td>
<td>Eritrean Liberation Front</td>
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<td>EPLF</td>
<td>Eritrean People’s Liberation Front</td>
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<td>EPRDF</td>
<td>Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front</td>
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<td>EPRP</td>
<td>Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party</td>
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<td>EWA</td>
<td>Ethiopian Welfare Association</td>
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<td>EWLA</td>
<td>Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association</td>
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<td>FDRE</td>
<td>Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia</td>
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<td>NPEW</td>
<td>National Policy on Women in Tigray</td>
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<td>REWA</td>
<td>Revolutionary Ethiopian Women’s Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>TGE</td>
<td>Transitional Government of Ethiopia</td>
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<tr>
<td>TPLF</td>
<td>Tigray People’s Liberation Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>WAT</td>
<td>Women’s Association of Tigray</td>
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<td>WAO</td>
<td>Women’s Affairs Office</td>
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<td>WPE</td>
<td>Workers Party of Ethiopia</td>
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ABSTRACT

This study, which follows the historical trajectory of emergence and development of the women’s movement in Tigray, North-Ethiopia, was conducted to investigate its interaction with Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) to explore how this interaction has played out impacting strategies and/or forms of mobilization as well as its achievements and challenges faced. Key issues are the mobilisation for practical and strategic gender interests of this women’s movement in Tigray and different levels of organisational autonomy.

Data was collected using interview, observation, informal discussion and document analysis. The analysis and interpretation of the data was done based on the concepts of women’s gender interest, the notion of independent, associative or directive aspects of women’s mobilisation, double militancy as well as the concept of the political opportunity structure. The findings of the study show that the causes of mobilization of the women’s movement that emerged within TPLF in 1976 have been based on both practical and strategic gender interests. In this regard, on one hand, women have mobilized calling for provision of basic necessities, educational facilities and health services which are practical gender interests; on the other hand, they have mobilized demanding emancipation of women, equal political representation, equal right to property ownership, divorce right and reproductive rights, which are strategic gender interests. In connection to this, it was found that whereas, during the struggle in the time period from 1976 to 1991, emancipation of women was pursued to the level TPLF’s Marxist Leninist ideology allowed; after the struggle, from 1991 onwards, the mobilization for equality has been framed in terms of rights and development issues.

In its interaction with TPLF, the data showed that the women’s movement was shifting positions and changing status enjoying differing degrees of autonomy but without attaining full independence during the time frame under study. Regardless of the shifting of positions and differing degrees of autonomy, however, this study concludes that there has been meaningful cooperation between TPLF and the women’s movement based on mutual respect and understanding, which has helped the women’s movement to push for, and achieve more gender-friendly changes.

Key Terms: Women’s movements, gender interests, emancipation of women, autonomy
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the women’s movement in Tigray, northern Ethiopia. Apart from dwelling on the historical trajectory of emergence and development of the women’s movement in Tigray, the study tries to explore its interaction with TPLF taking autonomy as a point of reference, to uncover how this interaction played out impacting strategies and/or forms of mobilization as well as its achievements, and challenges faced. In this chapter, I begin providing general introductory information.

1.1. Background to the Study

Social movements refer to socio-political movements whereby oppressed groups of people stand in opposition to status quo. As Barrig noted: “Social movements are the expression of the oppressed or dominated groups in society” (Barrig, 1994, p. 152). Women are among these oppressed sections of societies that have been taking part in social movements for long. In this regard, for instance, authors like Molyneux, (1985), Mahdi (2004) and Trip and colleagues (2009) have shown in their studies how women have been taking part in revolutions, liberation movements, civil-unrest and other broader movements demanding change to status qua of oppression and inequality. Involving themselves in social movements, women have succeeded in advancing their concerns as women though, at some point they have also been denied what they fought for. Besides, they have also participated and led their own social movements as women and feminists.

Given that several women’s movements, if not all, have emerged out of other popular movements, the notion of autonomy holds a central place in understanding and explaining women’s movements and their relationships with states or other social movements (Ray & Korteweg, 1999). Whether autonomy is an “unqualified good” or not for women’s movements is a matter of debate in the literature. As Molyneux (1998) explained, on one side of the spectrum are feminists who claim that autonomy plays an indispensable role in terms of fulfilling women’s gender interests for which women’s organizations mobilize. On the other, are those authors like Wieringa (quoted in Ray & Korteweg, 1999) who are against the very proposition of depicting autonomy as an “unqualified good” for women’s movements. Wieringa believes that the importance for women’s organizations of allying themselves with strong political organizations, or the state for that matter, weighs more
than sustaining independence where influence on gender-friendly policies might be far-fetched. Similarly, Geisler (2006) have revealed that in the context of the third world, and depending on historically and contextually specific developments, alliances can serve women’s interests better. More importantly, other researchers have shown in their studies from Latin America, that autonomy can have negative repercussions if pursued as the sole goal and strategy (e.g. Barrig, 1994). However, still other researchers in Africa, for instance Trip and colleagues (2009), have shown that autonomous women’s movements have been one of the forces effectuating gender-friendly changes in the post-1990 Africa. Besides, Katzenstein (1989) have suggested that autonomy and march against gender violence unlike those who were aligning themselves with political parties enabled women’s movement in India in the 1970s to be effective. As a result, the issue of autonomy and its role for women’s movements is not as straightforward as it might seem. It is debated in the literature and demands further research especially when studying women’s movements emerging out of other popular movements to learn from their practical experiences.

In the case of Ethiopia, as Burgess (2013) has argued, women’s mobilization has been there since the imperial rule in Ethiopia in the 20th century. Here women’s organization took place within a state-controlled structure, and women started to organize in their own way only in the 1970s, in the shadow of the political developments that followed the popular revolution of 1974 and the coming into power of the military regime, Derg (Biseswar, 2008). As it is held in the literature (Gebru, 1984; Aregawi, 2008), in the post-revolutionary Ethiopia, a number of progressive movements came into existence. Among these, one was the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF). TPLF as an ethnic-based insurgent group waged armed resistance to the military regime in Ethiopia from 1975 till 1991. Within TPLF, women were grossly represented. According to sources, TPLF claimed that women accounted for 1/3 of its total number of fighters after 1982 (e.g. Hammond, 1990; Veale, 2003; Young, 1997; Tsegay, 1999; Aregawi, 2008). As the historian Gebru (1984) has indicated, these women in TPLF were initiating “a revolution within a revolution” that pushed for equality with men. Thus, based on a historical overview of the emergence of women’s movement in Tigray within TPLF and the relationship developed between the two through time, this study will investigate how
this interaction evolved over time, and how the women’s movement has exercised and/or negotiated authority, independence and support for women’s issues since its inception as an ad hoc committee in 1976.

1.2. Background to the Study Area and Context

Below I will present a brief discussion on the post-revolutionary political history of Ethiopia to locate the Tigray region’s place in the political landscape of the country. I will also include here some more general information about the geography and population of the region today where the women’s movement under consideration has remained active for an uninterrupted period of 38 years.

1.2.1. Tigray in the Post-Revolutionary Ethiopia up till Today in Brief

As indicated earlier, in 1974 there was a popular revolution in Ethiopia that ousted Emperor Hailesellasie I, closing centuries-long history of imperial rule in Ethiopia. Taking advantage of the vacuum created in the aftermath of the revolution, a military regime came to power. The military junta, which called itself the Derg (meaning the Committee), was led by Colonel Mengistu Hailemaryam. Because of this immediate seizure of power by a military junta, and declaration of a military rule, a number of armed groups were born in different parts of the country.

In Tigray, northern Ethiopia alone, three dominant armed groups (two nationalist and one ethno-nationalist) became active. These were Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). As a result, as Gebru (1984) noted, Tigray became a battleground, on one hand, between the insurgent groups and the Derg, who was advancing against all in its aim to crush any form of armed resistance by force; on the other hand, among the insurgents themselves in a struggle for dominance and being the only rebel group to tackle the military junta in the area. In the years that follow, TPLF emerged victorious out of the confrontations and realized its dominance. As to Gebru, it became one of the most organized and largest liberation movements in the Horn of Africa in the 1980s, being successful in mobilizing all Tigrayans cross-cutting gender, religion and age barriers (see also Aregawi, 2008).
As of 1989, when TPLF has ousted the Derg army from the Tigray region, it joined other insurgent groups fighting the Derg to form a coalition called Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) (Hammond, 1990; Aregawi, 2008). In 1991 the TPLF-based EPRDF toppled the military regime and seized power in Ethiopia (e.g. Bahru, 1991; Aregawi, 2008; Tsegay, 1999; Young, 1997). In the course of four years of transitional government, a new constitution was drafted and a Federal system of governance was proclaimed (Burgess, 2013). Tigray, in present day Ethiopia is one of the nine regions that constitute the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (see FDRE Constitution, Art. 47 (1)). The Regional State of Tigray is located at 14° 10' 00" N latitude and 38° 50' 00" E longitude. It is bounded in the north by Eritrea, South by Amhara region, in the west by the Sudan, and in the east and south-east by Afar region. The 2007 population and housing census of Ethiopia puts the region’s population at 4.3 million (currently estimated to be around 6), and constituting 6.1% of Ethiopia’s total population. Out of the total population of Tigray, males form 49.2%, and females 50.8% (CSC, 2008). The dominant ethnic group is the Tigrigna-speaking ethnic group accounting for 96.55%, followed by Amhara (1.63%), Irob (0.7%), Afar (0.29%), Agaw (0.19%), Oromo (0.17%) and Kunama (0.07%). In terms of religion, the majority Tigrayans are Orthodox Christians (95.6%), followed by Muslims (4%), Catholics (0.4%) and Protestants (0.1%) (CSA, 2007).

1.3. Statement of the Problem
As Burgess has argued “Ethiopia is not a country that has figured very much in international research. Outside of the country, little is known about its political history. In particular, little is written about the place of women in Ethiopian political spheres and the emergence of women’s activism in Ethiopia has not been greatly studied” (Burgess 2013, p. 97). The scarce literature about women in Ethiopian politics that have been written from a gender perspective (Biseswar, 2008, 2011; Burgess, 2011, 2013), have limited focus and scope. Biseswar has focused on the role educated women in Ethiopia could have played in feminising politics in the country. In her critical analysis of the experiences of women’s mobilization in the country, she has critiqued educated Ethiopian women for lagging behind other Africans in radicalising women’s movement in the
country. Although, her work is crucial in that it has shed light on field of research where, as indicated above, there has not been enough work before, however, it is limited geographically and historically focusing mainly on the educated women in the country in the central part (including the capital city) of Ethiopia. In the same vein, Burgess (2011, 2013) has produced interesting pieces on women activism in Ethiopia. Her articles written from a gender perspective emphasized the history, experience and role of the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) to advance women’s issues in the country. Although the articles provide us useful information about women’s activism in Ethiopia, they are limited in scope and focus, as her articles do not show the experiences and histories of other women’s mobilizations witnessed at different times and in other regions of the country.

More specifically, a reading of the historical literature (Gebru, 1984; Hammond, 1990, 1999; Young, 1997; Tsegay, 1999; Aregawi, 2008) which does mention women in TPLF from where the Tigrayan women’s movement under consideration emerged, show that both in the context of women’s movements in Ethiopia and within Tigray, studies which address these issues are scarce. After all it is only, Hammond (1990), Tsegay (1999) and Veale (2003) that have produced detailed historical studies about women in the Front (TPLF). Secondly, even these authors did not address to any significant degree the women’s movement and its interaction with TPLF. Thirdly, their studies do not cover the developments of the women’s movement in Tigray in the post victory period. Therefore, my research was conducted to fill this gap in the literature about Ethiopian women’s mobilization by shedding light on the experience and role of the women’s movement in Tigray.

1.4. Research Objective
This study which follows the historical trajectory of emergence and development of a women’s movement in Tigray, North Ethiopia was conducted to investigate its interaction with Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and explore how this interaction played out impacting strategies and/or forms of mobilization as well as achievements, and challenges faced over time.
1.4.1. Research Questions

More specifically, this research intends to answer the following major research questions:

- What were the causes for mobilization of women throughout the period under consideration, and which locally and historically specific external environments and the political opportunity structures entailed, impacted these?

- What has been the nature of interaction between TPLF and the women’s movement? How has this women’s movement exercised and/or negotiated authority, and support for women’s issues? What have been the constraints and strong-sides of the forms of mobilization pursued and the interaction experienced?

1.5. Organization of the Paper

This paper has seven chapters. Chapter one is about the background of the study elaborating reasons why the study was conducted. Chapter two assess related literatures to this study. Chapter three is devoted for discussion of the theoretical bases of this research. In chapter four, I have presented the methodology used to collect and analyze data. Chapter five to seven are devoted for presentation of the empirical chapters accordingly. In chapter six, historical background and development of the women’s movement in Tigray in the time from 1976 to 1985 is covered. In chapter six, the discussion is limited to the dominant role TPLF had on determining what to do for women and the double militancy of participants of the women’s movement from 1985 to 1991. Chapter seven touches on the socio-political developments in Ethiopia, independent organizing and relationships with TPLF in the time period from 1991 to present. The final chapter, that is, chapter eight is conclusion which focuses on the major findings of the study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

O’Leary has noted: “Research requires engagement with literature at each and every stage of the process” (O’Leary 2010, p.72). Cognizant of this, to get a clear picture on the focus of my study, the women’s movement in Tigray that evolved out of another broader political movement, and so as to locate it in light of other similar movements in different parts of the globe, I have reviewed relevant literatures covering broad range of areas on the following major themes: social movements and women, women’s movements and their relationships with political organization, the impact of the external environment on women’s movements, strategies that women’s movements design, achievements they score, as well as challenges that they face. Besides, I have tried to look into the available literatures on women activism in Ethiopia. Here under is a thematically arranged critical discussion on the literature reviewed.

2.1. Social Movements and Women

Social movements refer to socio-political movements whereby oppressed groups of people stand in opposition to status quo. As Barrig noted “Social movements are the expression of the oppressed or dominated groups in society” (Barrig, 1994, p. 152). Among these oppressed sections of societies who have been taking part in social movements, women are one. Authors like Molyneux, (1985), Mahdi (2004) and Trip and colleagues (2009), show that women have taken part in revolutions, liberation movements, civil-unrest and other broader movements demanding changes to the status quo of oppression. Involving themselves in social movements, women have succeeded in advancing their concerns as women though, at some point they have also been denied what they fought for. For instance, in Algeria though women actively contributed during the liberation struggle where they were estimated roughly to constitute 3% of the fighters waging the struggle, their rights as women were ignored after the war ( Trip and colleagues, 2009). In a different vein, Mahdi (2004) indicated that, though it has not been always the case and had its own drawbacks in that the reforms were state directed, women in in the pre-Islamic Revolution Iran were able to witness certain gender-friendly reforms as a result of their involvement in broader movements. Thus, even if women’s
participation in social movements is not a guarantee for gender sensitive reforms to prevail, given that more often than not, changes are sought after general social changes; women have been actively involving themselves in social movements.

2.2. Women’s Movements

Women apart from being involved in larger and broader movements for social change, they have also been mobilizing in movements of their own just to advance their own concerns as women. What constitutes a women’s movement does not yield a straight answer in the literature. As Hassim stated “Attempt to define women’s movement raise a particular set of considerations, as this is not a movement in which subjects, interests, and ideological forms are self-evident” (Hassim (2006, p. 4). In this regard, she raised three issues why defining women’s movement is not that easy and without controversy: (1) the identity “women” embraces other identities within it like worker, black, white and so on, (2) no one understanding of what constitutes a women’s interest is available, and (3) women’s movements do not have one and the same form of mobilization and so do their tactics, goals and the like. Similarly, Molyneux (1998) noted that defining women’s movement is not an easy task because the meaning of its core definitional components, that is, autonomy and women’s interests remain contested.

Although these limitations are inevitable, still some attempts have been made, however, to conceptualize what the naming of women’s movement signify, albeit in different ways. As to Alvarez, a women’s movement refers to “those sociopolitical movements, composed primarily but not necessarily exclusively of female participants, that make claims on cultural and political systems on the basis of women’s historically ascribed gender roles” (Alvarez, 1990, p. 23). For her, because women’s movements pursue gender interests\(^1\), women’s organizations that do not necessarily mobilize women for specific gender interests are not constituents of women’s movements. In this regard, she identified two forms of women’s groups: feminine and feminist. Considering women’s gender-specific claims as strategic, Alvarez called those women’s organizations working to further strategic gender interests or gender-specific interests feminist. On the

\(^1\) According to Molyneux (1985) gender interests can be understood as “those that women (or men for that matter) may develop by virtue of their social positioning through gender attributes (p. 233).
other hand, those groups that she termed feminine work to advance women’s practical gender interests, understood as gender-related interests like cost of living. To expound, according to Alvarez, as far as the traditional division of labour is concerned, women have the responsibility to manage budget and distribution of household resources. Thus, while cost of living concern both men and women, women could be more concerned about rise in cost of living. Hence, advancing to improve cost of living is advancing for practical gender interests, gender-related concern, which is according to Alvarez, the characteristics of feminine groups. Generally therefore, as to her account, women’s movements can be either feminist when groups are involved in strategic claims calling for gender-specific changes, or feminine when the advance is for gender-related concerns on a more practical level.

Besides, as Charles and colleagues have suggested (quoted in Alvarez, 1990), women’s movements can differ depending on whether they mobilize to support or challenge women’s socially assigned gender roles. In this regard, whereas proactive women’s movements try to challenge these roles and gender relations; the reactive women’s movements support the prevailing gender roles and relations, and try to seek improvement in lives of women without changing the hidden structure that give rise to them. Moreover, women’s movements can be differentiated depending on the forms of mobilization and tactics employed or in short based on their organizational forms. In this regard, they could come in two different forms: disruptive and conventional. In disruptive forms of women’s movements, organization, structure, objective and so have no rooms due to the fact that such movements occur spontaneously in demand of pressing change with the possibility to discontinue the push for change afterwards.

Conventional forms of women’s movements refer to those who have organizational structure, leadership, strategy and stated objectives plus goals. In this regard, it is possible to talk about a women’s movement involving one organization as it is possible to talk about a movement where multiple organizations take part. For instance, for Trip and colleagues:

*Women’s movements included organizations that represented a wide range of activities directed at advancing women’s status, including both international*
and domestic nongovermental organizations (NGOs) engaged in advocacy, social service provisioning, leadership training, business promotion, media reform, financial empowerment arrangements, as well as professional and labor associations and organizations that address the concerns of special groups such as disabled women. They also included a wide variety of local-level informal and formal associations (Trip et al., 2009, p. 2).

On her turn, emphasizing the importance of numeric strength and capacity for change as basics of women’s movement, Molyneux has argued that “a large number of small associations even with very diverse agendas, can in cumulative terms come to constitute a women’s movement” (Molyneux, 1998, p. 223). In the same manner, after recognizing that defining women’s movement is problematic given the differences in interests, tactics, forms, constituents involved, Hassim indicated that “it is possible to name and loosely bind together as a women’s movement organizations that mobilize women collectively on the basis of their gender identity” (Hassim, 2006, p. 8). Hence, cognizant of all the possibilities, the direction taken in this literature review is to look into the women’s movement in Tigray, which constitutes organizations of different form that can be explained in terms of a continuum of organisational stages of development through time, being one of the forces behind the gender friendly changes in Tigray/Ethiopia.

2.3. Women’s Movements, Political Organizations and Autonomy

Given that several women’s movements, if not all, have emerged out of other popular movements, the notion of autonomy has remained to hold central place in understanding and explaining women’s movements and their relationships with states or other movements (Ray & Korteweg, 1999). Whether autonomy is an “unqualified good” or not for women’s movements is a matter of debate in the literature. As Molyneux (1998) explained, on one side of the spectrum are feminists who claim that autonomy plays an indispensable role in terms of fulfilling women’s strategic gender interests for which women’s organizations mobilize. On the other, are those authors like Wieringa (quoted in Ray & Korteweg, 1999) who are against the very proposition of depicting autonomy as an “unqualified good“ for women’s movements. Wieringa believes that the importance
for women’s organizations of allying oneself with strong political organizations or state for that matter, weighs more than sustaining independence where influence on gender friendly policies might be far-fetched. In a similar vein, literature search on the third world reveal that autonomy does not always put women in an advantaged position and, hence, is not a guarantee for advancing strategic and/or practical gender interests. In her work in Peru, Barrig (1994) has eloquently shown that organizational autonomy put the feminist movement of the country in a disadvantaged position and failed to benefit women due to its marginalization and isolation not only from political organization but also from the more popular women’s movements in the country. Similarly, but from a different angle based on the experiences of Zambia, Botswana and Namibia, Geisler (2006), showed that alliances rather than autonomy helped the women’s movements in these countries in achieving more gender-friendly legislations. Furthermore, Alvarez has shown with her study in Brazil that women’s movements alliances with political organizations were crucial in influencing politics to the advantage of women taking the case of two political organizations in Brazil, Partido dos Trabalhadores and Partido Movimento Democrático Brasileiro. In the case of South Africa, Hassim (2006) has shown that women’s organizations in the country aligned themselves with the broader political movements and thus managed to impact politics in a gender sensitive direction; that is, raising the case of three different organizations the United Women’s Organization, the Natal Organization of Women and the Federation of Transvaal Women.

So even if autonomy is still looked for and endorsed by many, and even though there are histories of success like in the context of India (see Katzenstein, 1989) and Africa (e.g. Tripp et al., 2009), much literature speaks otherwise. In this regard, Hassim has noted: “Because women’s political activism in postcolonial contexts has been enabled by larger struggles against colonial and class oppression, the result is a more highly developed politics of alliance rather than autonomy” (Hassim, 2006, p. 9). Hence, even if Ethiopia stands unique in the African context since the country managed to avoid colonization, this history of alliances with broader social and political movements, rather than solely pursuing an independent status for women’s movements, is important in relation to my own study of the women’s movement in Tigray.
2.4. Women’s Movements, External Environments and the Political Opportunity Structures Entailed

Women’s movements never escape the influence of the external environments; be it political, social or cultural. Ray and Korteweg (1999) asserted that external environments have always played a crucial role in terms of shaping both women’s movements and their contenders and/or collaborators like states, political parties and so on. Several studies have shown that women’s movements are influenced by inescapable external environments, for good or bad. In the case of Brazil, Alvarez (1990) showed that transitions to democracy helped women’s movements to influence politics like never before due to the fact that the opportunity enabled the doing of politics in an “unusual way”. As a result of ruptures to old power structures, opportunities could avail themselves whereby previously oppressed people get the chance to incorporate their concerns in the making of new politics. Waylen (2008), similarly have shown the impact that the external environment can have through her comparative study of transition to democracy in African, Latin American and East European countries. Based on her findings, she indicated that besides women’s movements, political opportunity structures like democratization played a significant role in impacting politics during transitions and the resulting or not of gender-friendly reforms in the countries she compared. Waylen also attributed the length of the transition as cause for the differences observed when it comes to the gender friendly reforms.

In Iran, Mahdi (2004) showed that the impact of the external environments can be significant. He argued that, apart from the devotion of feminists, several other factors contributed to the development of early women’s organizations around 1890-1930 and the intensification of their activities in Iran. Mahdi noted that these factors include: (a) the emergence and spread of the Bahai religion, which emphasized women’s freedom, (b) the influence of western liberal thought on Iranian intellectuals, (c) the existence of Europeans in and their increased contact with Iran both before and after the First World War, (d) the Russian Revolution of 1917 and its influence on some Iranian intellectuals, (e) the emergence of the women’s movement in neighbouring Turkey and Egypt, and finally (f) the American and British women’s victories in achieving the right to vote in the late 1910s (ibid., p. 49).
In a way that can show the influence of the external environment, Al-Ali (2002) discussed that differences in focus of attention in between the women’s movement in Egypt and Turkey were produced due to the broader political and historical environment. She argued that the fact the women’s movement in Egypt were aligned with broader movements like anti-colonial, anti-imperialism, anti-Zionist limited them from focusing on women specific concerns. “But on the other hand, Turkish nationalism that were promoted in the Turkish Republic and that equated with Turkish civilization with equality between men and women” (ibid., p. 29) benefited Turkish women’s movement to raise gender-specific concerns like divorce right, reproductive right and the like. In the Ethiopian context, Burgess (2013) has indicated that the opening of political space in the transition to democracy in the post 1991 period had an impact on women’s activism in Ethiopia. As to her, the first years of the transition to official democracy were crucial in that independent women’s organizing was made possible raising the case of Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA). Thus, it is evident from the literature that women’s movements have been susceptible to influence from the external environments that at times hinder and at other times create opportunities for them. The direction taken here in this paper is to look into the political opportunity structures from the broader environment.

2.5. Challenges of Women’s Movements

Regardless of their status as autonomous or not, women’s movements have been faced with challenges of differing degrees and type. As much as women’s mobilize for change, they have been met with problems. It is well documented in the literature that these challenges can stem from different origins and for different reasons. In her article titled, Analysing Women’s Movement, Molyneux (1998) stated that autonomous women’s movements face the risk of marginalization and isolation as well as internal organizational problems. On a similar account, Barrig (1994) with her study in Peru; Bauer (2011) with her study in Botswana; Al-Ali (2002) with her study in Egypt and Turkey, and Mahdi (2004) with his study in Iran, have indicated similar challenges to the autonomous women’s movements in the respective areas of their research. Besides, the literature shows that autonomous organizations can also be subject to strict laws,
chauvinist leadership, shortage of budget and religious intervention from the external environment limiting their scope.

Al-Ali (2002) noted that there were restrictive laws directed at women’s organizations and activists during different rulers of Egypt. In this regard, she mentioned the situation where during the time Egypt was under Gamal Abdel Nasser, autonomous women’s organizing was banned and all organizations in the country were required to be registered under the Ministry of Social Affairs. “The Ministry of Social Affairs [had] the authority to license and dissolve private organizations. Licenses [might] be revoked if such organizations [were engaged] in political or religious activities” (ibid., p. 13). On her part, Bauer (2011) with her study on Botswana listed presence of chauvinist executives as one of the serious challenges of the country’s once vibrant autonomous women’s movement next to gender-neutral constitution, isolation and marginalization, project orientation rather than policy, lack of fund and a broad-based coalition, as well as lack of continuity in leadership of women’s organizations by talented activists. As Mahdi (2004) noted, in Iran too male chauvinist leaders created problems for the independent women’s movement resulting in the closure of the last independent women’s organization The Patriotic Women’s League of Iran (Jamiate Nesvaan-e vatankhaah-e Iran) in 1932. A similar finding by Burgess (2013) in Ethiopia revealed that EWLA’s independent status was challenged by a restrictive law that set limits on foreign NGOs’ involvement in gender and rights issues, and local NGOs’ ability to receive more than 10% of their budget from foreign donors.

In the case of non-autonomous women’s movements, though they share most of the problems for autonomous organizations, co-optation is, according to Molyneux (1998), regarded as a serious problem they might face. For instance, Escandon (1994) wrote that one challenge of the women’s movement in Mexico was the downside of cooperation with other political organizations in this case Party of the Institutionalized Revolution of the 1960s. As to her, the cooperation with political organizations in Mexico resulted in women forgetting their organized struggle for women’s rights due to the positions they secured in government offices; linking up with personal interests rather than women’s gender interests. Trip and her colleagues (2009) on their part also mentioned that
co-optation put limits on the achievements of some women’s movements in Africa who aligned themselves with other political organizations and/or state.

### 2.6. Strategies of Women’s Movements

Women’s movements set their own strategies to advance their goals. These strategies are various and many. As hinted in the above sections, creating alliances have been one of the strategies and mechanisms that women’s movements have been using through history though not as the only. In India, for example, women’s movements have been using a number of other strategies as well. Gull and Shafi (2014) asserted that the mechanisms range from demonstrations calling for change, to trying to motivate and find a space for women through bringing to light legendary women. In this regard, they mentioned that two of the Hindu goddesses in India, Kali and Shaki, were used as role models to mobilize women at some point in the 1980s focusing on the strong sides women can have. In her study from Nigeria, Madunagu (2008) on her part shed light on the fact that the Women in Nigeria (WIN) pursued research, analysis and documentation as strategies to advance its goals. In a similar vein, as mentioned by Mahdi (2004) publication and awareness creation on harmful traditional practices and beliefs against women were among the strategies utilized by women’s movements in Iran. As Trip and colleagues (2009) showed contemporary women’s movements in Africa have used new communication technologies (internet) and media (print as well as radio and TV), networking (regional and international coalition) as strategies to forward their agendas.

Strategies adopted by women’s movements can differ depending on time and space. For instance, speaking of strategies adopted by women’s movement in Iran, Mahdi indicated that, “while the strategy of women’s groups in pre-revolutionary periods was based on participation in a general social movements against the state, . . . the strategy adopted by women activists in the post-Kohmeni period involves accommodation, negotiation, and resistance” (Mahdi, 2004, p. 442). When faced with challenges, women’s movements have used different mechanisms to either mitigate or overcome these. In response to the restrictive laws in Egypt which forced women’s organizations to be registered under the Ministry of Social Affairs for control and follow up, Al-Ali (2002) showed that women in Egypt did not only resist the law but also devised their own
mechanisms like looking for any loopholes in the countries law to escape the mandatory registration, as the quote below shows:

_Several women’s groups have preferred to avoid registering as private voluntary organizations or NGOs under Law 32 with the attendant danger of being dissolved by the Ministry of Social Affairs, by registering instead with the office of Property and Accreditation as research centres or civic non-profit companies, thereby avoiding the control and restrictions imposed by the Ministry of Social Affairs (Al-Ali, 2002, p. 13)._ 

Thus, women’s movements in different parts of the world have been pushing for their goals devising different working strategies.

2.7. Achievements of Women’s Movements

As indicated above, despite the fact that other factors also contribute to bring about gender friendly changes, studies show that women’s movements have played a pivotal role in terms of working to the advantage of women, and have succeeded. Women’s movements have struggled, among other things, for gender sensitive reforms, and mobilized against repressive laws.

As Escandon (1994) have noted in Mexico affirmative action, and the incorporation of a feminist agenda into politics and political programmes were possible due to the role of the country’s vibrant women’s movement. As to Trip and colleagues (2009), women’s movement in Mozambique, among other things, was responsible for reforming the country’s land act in gender sensitive manner. As Bauer (2011) noted the Botswana women’s movement claims responsibility for a number of what she called institutional accomplishments: creation of gender machinery, reform of old discriminatory laws, promulgation of gender sensitive new legislations, increased number of women in different organs of government including in parliament. According to Madunagu, women’s movements in Nigeria, besides influencing politics in gender friendly manner, they have also functioned as a corrective force when laws were not gender-friendly. For instance, Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF) has mobilized against and repelled
discriminatory laws in the country. First, they repelled an attempt by a private university to issue mandatory virginity and HIV test for girls. Second, they mobilised against a move by a state in Nigeria to ban the use of condoms. Third, protested against a bill that calls for institutionalizing dress codes in Nigeria (Madunagu, 2008). In the case of Ethiopia, EWLA played a significant role in abolition of old discriminatory laws like the Family Law and the amendment of old codes that had gender discriminatory clauses like the Penal Code (Burgess, 2013). So, as this sub section has shown women’s movements in different countries have been behind gender friendly reforms either through promulgation of progressive reforms or repel of old discriminatory laws. How about the women’s movement in Tigray? The empirical part will shed light on this matter in detail?

2.8. Women’s Organizing in Ethiopia

As Burgess (2013) and Biseswar (2008) noted women’s organizing in Ethiopia dates back to the 20th century. The first organization became to be the Ethiopian Welfare Association [EWA], which was established in 1935. These authors mention that this was a state-linked organization whose members had relationships with government officials, and/ or were influential elites. Apart from EWA, two other women’s organization of the same nature also came into existence during the same period of the imperial rule in Ethiopia: Armed Forces Wives Association and The Ethiopian Young Women’s Christian Association. These two organizations all the same came to end when the Derg stopped their operation confiscating their property.

According to these authors, following the declaration of socialism after the Emperor was ousted from power and the Derg took over power in 1974, the then ruling party, the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE), took the initiative to mobilize women under the Marxist-Leninist issue of the “woman’s question”. As part of this in 1980, a national association called the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women’s Association (REWA) was formed. Like never before, REWA was able to mobilize millions of women at some time its members even reaching 5 million, at least on paper. Although REWA had some history of success in relation to trying to improve the condition of women through grassroots initiatives including introduction of development projects and literacy programmes, both Biseswar (2008) and Burgess (2013) have asserted that it was not a
political organization in its own right rather it was wing of the WPE. In the same period of time, in the liberated areas in Tigray where TPLF was operating, and within TPLF itself, other women’s organizing evolved. According to available literature (Hammond, 1990; Aregawi, 2008), the mass women’s associations which flourished in the 1970s Tigray, after the commencement of the Tigrayan struggle in 1975, were “independent”. However, Aregawi (2008) noted that these independent organizing came to its end when an association for women fighters of Tigray (AWFT) was established and the women’s organizing in the area was centralized under TPLF. Despite women’s organizing in Ethiopia having been in existence for a long time by now, these organizations were more or less attached to the state or a particular political party, even if some independent organizing has been witnessed.

2.9. My contribution to the study of the Tigrayan Women’s Movement in Ethiopia
As the literature review above has shown, a lot of studies have been conducted on women’s movements throughout the world. But, when it comes to Ethiopia there is shortage of studies that cover women’s mobilization in the country. As indicated before, some have covered the topic (Biseswar, 2008, 2011; Burgess, 2011, 2013), but their studies are limited geographically within Ethiopia. Given that their studies focus on women in the central part of the country only, they have not included women’s mobilization that have been taking place in different places of the country like in Tigray in any substantial sense. Hence, my study will contribute in filling the gap created by the dearth of information on the women’s mobilization and organizing in Ethiopia by bringing to light a particular women’s movement in the northern part of the country, Tigray. As far as previous studies on women in Tigray that fought with TPLF are concerned, except for more comprehensive studies by Hammond (1990), Tsegay (1999) and Veale (2003) other scholars have devoted only a chapter or small section in their materials to discuss the women in TPLF (e.g. Young, 1997; Aregawi, 2008), or as the historical context for understanding the present situations for women in Tigray (Mjaaland 2013).

One of the most extensive work on women in TPLF is by Hammond (1990). Hammond in her book entitled *Sweeter than Honey. Ethiopian Women and Revolution:*
Testimonies of Tigrayan Women, based on testimonies from female fighters and civil women and leaders, both women and men, has grossly covered the experiences of women in TPLF and their place in the struggle. Using the voices of her informants and based on her observation, she has discussed what role women had in TPLF and what TPLF did for them. In a similar vein, Tsegay (1999) with his often cited study entitled, The Tigrean Women in the Liberation Struggle and Its Aftermath, 1975-1996, has covered the history of the struggle and the place women had in it. Tsegay like Hammond have reflected on the roles Tigrayan women (fighters and civilians) had in the struggle. Based on interviews, document analysis and personal observation, he has covered the significant contribution of women for the struggle against the military rule in Ethiopia, and the development afterwards. He has also reflected on what their contributions brought to them as women. Reflecting on the reforms undertaken by TPLF during the struggle, Tsegay has shown how much their involvement in the struggle helped improve the conditions of women in the post-revolutionary Tigray. Quite interestingly, both Hammond and Tsegay have shown what role women had in the struggle and what the TPLF that led the struggle could do for them in return from a historical perspective. But none of them have taken a critical view on the interaction between women, their movement and TPLF. Similarly, Veale’s (2003) study, though important, differs both in scope and focus when focusing on the issue of under age recruitment and demobilization of female fighters in TPLF. Therefore in general, looking into the relationships and status of the women’s movement in relation to TPLF (from which it emerged, and supported the TPLF-based EPRDF coalition establishing government in Ethiopia), this study will contribute on the issue of autonomy versus engagement of a particular women’s movement and its relationship with a party and/or the state. In doing so, besides contributing to the continuing debate on the issue of autonomy and/or engagement of women’s movements in relation to broader political organizations, it is hoped that my study will contribute to enrich the literature on African/Third World Women’s Movements; or simply women in politics.
CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I present a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings for the analysis and interpretation of my empirical data. In this regard, I will discuss in detail the notion of autonomy and different forms of women’s mobilization; the concept of political opportunity structures, the concept of double militancy and concept of women’s gender interest (practical and strategic). Whereas the concept of autonomy and different forms of women’s organization will serve to look into the general feature of relationship between the women’s movement and TPLF, the concept of opportunity structure is used to explore what locally and historically specific developments have impacted the movement having implications on its relationships with TPLF. In the same vein, conception on double militancy is considered useful to discuss roles of activist women as members of TPLF and the different organizations that the women’s movement under consideration came to encompass in its history of existence. Finally, the notion of women’s gender interest will serve to address the causes mobilization for the women in Tigray during the time under consideration and to see what political opportunity structures entailed in the broader external environment impacted it and how.

3.1. The Concept of Autonomy and Women’s Organizations

As indicated in the literature, given that several women’s movements, if not all, have emerged out of other popular movements, the notion of autonomy has remained to hold central place in understanding and explaining women’s movements and their relationships with states or other movements (Ray & Korteweg, 1999). In a way that can help better understand in explaining women’s movements and their relationships with state or political organizations, Molyneux (1998) has developed a promising framework using the concept of autonomy. According to her, women’s mobilization for social change can be of independent, associative or directive form depending on the direction for the transmission of authority as a dimension of autonomy. Independent women’s organizations, according to Molyneux, are those:
which are characterized by independent actions, where women organize on the basis of self-activity, set their own goals and decide their own forms of organization and forms of struggle. Here the women’s movement is defined as a self-governing community which recognizes no superior authority, and nor is it subject to the governance of other political agencies (ibid., p. 226).

In this kind of women’s movements everything, be it specifying goals, setting priority areas, securing fund and the like, stems from within the movement and/or as a result of its independent action. The authority fully lies in the entity itself. Molyneux recognized that autonomy is the most preferred status by feminists who assume that it plays a pivotal role when it comes to securing women’s “real” gender interests. However, she is cautious about this proposition, and even refutes it:

Independent organizational forms are (...) compatible with a variety of different political positions and goals; and even when women do organize autonomously, they do not always act collectively in pursuit of their gender interests. Women’s interests cannot be “read off” from the organizational form in which they are expressed; the mere fact of an organization’s autonomy or internal organizational structure does not indicate that it is a privileged vehicle for the expression of women’s interests or, indeed, that it is entirely free from authority, either internally with respect to the organization concerned or with regard to external influence (ibid., p. 227).

To support her argument against feminist proposition that autonomous organizations are the only forms of mobilizations where strategic women’s gender interests are secured, Molyneux mentioned that these forms of collective mobilization has the danger of marginalization, on one hand, and risk of organizational corruption of power on the other hand. To this end, she raised the possibility that organizational goals and contents can be abused when some goals and contents are advanced at the expense of others due to the privileged position of certain actors in a self-identifying independent organization.
In the second type that Molyneux recognizes, that is, associational autonomy, the women’s organizations have semi-autonomous status pertaining to alliances they form with other organizations, for instance, political parties. “Power and authority in this model are negotiated and cooperation is conditional on some or all of the women’s demands being incorporated into the political organization with which the alliance is made” (ibid., p. 228). Nevertheless, Molyneux noted, given that it is formerly independent women’s organizations that, in this case, enter into alliances with other organizations, “their actions are not directed by a superior power, as women remain in control over their own organization and set its agenda” (ibid.). Molyneux asserts that this type of women’s movement have certain advantages over the other two types. One, it helps to avoid risk of marginalization and isolation which may result out of solely independent status, and second, it can prove pivotal in effectively influencing the political organization with which the alliance is made to undertake reforms in favour of women. However, she emphasized that associational autonomy is not free from drawbacks and that organizations can “run the risk of co-optation resulting in (…) losing (…) capacity for agenda setting” (ibid.).

Finally reflecting on the third form of mobilization, Molyneux argued that certain women’s organizations can be established by some superior authority. The purpose behind, is, more often than not, to serve broader political goals than specific women’s goals. Here women have no authority to decide on their actions. Their mobilization is directive mobilization where, unlike associational autonomy, the door is less likely open for discussion and negotiations on strategic women’s issues:

*There is little, if any, room for genuine negotiation over goals. This means that either one or both of the following tends to occur: (i) the goals of women’s associations do not specifically concern women other than as instruments for the realization of the higher authority's goals; and/or (ii) even if they do concern women, control and direction of the agenda does not lie with them as an identifiable social force (ibid., p. 229).*

The mere purpose of such women’s organizations existence is to serve the broader goals
of the superior organisations or officials associated with these higher organizations from whom the direction stems from. As Molyneux noted, though intervention from above might be more common, historical contexts matter a lot in terms of determining the fate of the directed mobilization. At certain point in time, even directed mobilization can get the momentum to influence the broader and stronger political organizations or parties by which they are created. At other times they may remain fully submissive where their presence remain a token gesture. Accordingly, for her: “A critical factor in the assessment of concrete cases of this directed form of collective action, is the nature of the party or state concerned” (ibid., p. 229). She stressed furthermore: “While directed mobilization . . . represents the antithesis of independent women's organizations, it has in many parts of the world and for a substantial period of history constituted the principal form in which female mobilization has taken place” (ibid).

As Molyneux has argued directed mobilization in itself can be witnessed in three different forms. “In the first type, women are mobilized to help achieve a general goal, such as overthrowing the government, or bringing a party to power. In this case there is no explicit commitment to enhancing women’s specific interests” (ibid.). It is created by an external power just for the sake of external purposes. Its existence in relation to the community it claims to represent is symbolic. “A second type of directed action is that which, while primarily concerned with securing broader political goals, does express a commitment to advancing women's interests, but within the context of a general commitment to social change” (ibid., p.230). In this kind of directed mobilization, the core point, among other things, is that the discourse of general emancipation is given priority over women’s specific emancipation. That means, women’s emancipation is preached to be possible as a result of general emancipation. According to Molyneux, most socialist view of emancipation of women falls into this category. Finally, the third form of directed mobilization is “where women are mobilized for causes which may abrogate rights they already have, in the name of collective, national or religious interests” (ibid.). For example Muslim women rejecting certain principles of human rights claiming that they contradict to Islam. A case in point is what happened during the Islamic Revolution in Iran where thousands of women were mobilized by Imams. However, in the aftermath of the revolution they were denied even the rights they used to have like attending law
schools and being and becoming lawyers, judges for that matter (see e.g. Mahdi, 2004).
To wind up, I will use the above framework when approaching and analysing the
women’s movement in Tigray in light of its relationships with TPLF as a broader political
organization. This framework helps me to analyse the relationships that have developed
historically in between the two and is useful when discussing the shifts of position taken
by the women’s movement and the rationale behind. In line with Molyneux’s (1998)
framework, I will discuss questions that address whether the relationship between TPLF
and the women’s movement has been a relationship of master and agent, or if it has been
a relationship of autonomy and alliance based on mutual understanding.

3.2. External Environments and the Political Opportunity Structures entailed
It is widely held belief in the literature reviewed by Ray and Korteweg (1999) that
women’s movements are influenced by both internal and external environments.
According to these authors, the external environment constitutes of structural- global
forces as well as local- historical forces. Whereas the structural-global approach includes,
among other things, education, human rights, capitalism and so; the local-historical
approach are more specific like resistance to dictatorial rule, regime change and so on.
Ray and Korteweg argued that even if both approaches are helpful to understand the
context under which women’s mobilize, in the context of the third world the
structural-global is criticized for being more obfuscating than revealing. Hence,
according to them, the local-historical approach, which helps to identify and analyse
political opportunity structures, is more relevant in the context of third world politics. For
them: “The concept of political opportunity structure usually refers to changes in access
to power or shifts in the ruling alignments that enable those outside the polity to gain
access to it” (ibid., p. 53). As Hassim has indicated political opportunity structure can
also mean “the extent to which development in the wider field of politics . . . shape the
political opportunities for collective action” (Hassim, 2006, p.14).

Different processes are behind different opportunity structures. As Ray and
Korteweg’s (1999) review of literature involving four local-historical processes:
democratization, anti-colonial and national struggle, socialist, and
religious/fundamentalist has proved, two important conclusions can be drawn about
opportunity structures and women’s movements. First, that “women’s movements are fundamentally shaped by political processes, particularly crises of the state, and second that “there is considerable variation in the outcomes even within each of these processes” (p. 53). As to McAdam (1996), the proponent and one of the fathers of the concept, political opportunity structures can either obstruct or facilitate mobilization. Political opportunity structures are meant to influence either the timing of collective action/mobilization or their outcome and/or both.

Therefore, given that the women’s movement in Tigray is part of the now 40 years of socio-political history of struggle and victory in Tigray under the leaderships of TPLF from where the women’s movement emerged 38 years ago, the approach will help me to analyse and discuss the external environment in terms of the socio-political and historical developments that were taking place at the time it emerged and in its total historical existence to this day. This makes it possible to look into specific political opportunities that either inhibit or initiate and even strengthen the women’s movement under consideration, especially in relation to the shifts in positions of the status of the women’s movement in relation to TPLF and/ TPLF-based EPRDF.

3.3. The Concept of Double Militancy

As to the mother of the concept Beckwith, “double militancy” signifies: “the location of activist women in two political venues, with participatory, collective identity and ideological commitment to both” (Beckwith, 2000, p. 442). It represents a situation whereby women activists can find themselves both in a women’s movement for a particular purpose and in a political party with another aim. Activists in women’s movement follow it as a strategy to fulfil their interests despite the fact that it has both tactical and organizational implications which may be positive and/or negative in nature. As to Beckwith: “One implication is that feminist activists have to negotiate their feminism within non-feminist organizations that nonetheless provide resources, contacts, and scope for feminist activist goals” (ibid., p. 443). The point at stake here is that, double-militancy can be a source of tension that put the goals of activists and their women’s organizations at risk. That is, first because the situation can force activists willy-nilly to concentrate on less confrontational issues even at the cost of feminist claims
(which would not be recommendable). Second, in the face of double militancy, parties may take the first step to boldly ban anything which they consider alien to their priorities and goals, and hence can put up barriers for both feminist and women’s activism. At this point these activists may have no other option but to comply with party discipline even if it meant sacrificing their gender specific concerns as women.

The second implication is that double militancy can have a transformative role. It can help to transform non-feminist organizations, through feminist activism of members, and as a result of positive influence from empowered members. How? As Beckwith said: “Double militancy may position feminists within state structures, government and political party systems more powerfully, more influentially, and with more protection and support than they would otherwise be able to provide for themselves independently” (ibid., p.445). Hence, in this situation, there is huge probability for them to influence members, internal party procedures as well as party decisions in favour of women. On the other hand, double militancy can help parties emerge beneficiaries and lead to effective coalitions. As Beckwith noted, as a result of the role activists play, a bridge could be created linking both organizations where the actors of double militancy are present. Information may flow at ease. Hence, coalition and standing together for a similar cause is possible. Thus, in this regard, not only women’s movements but parties may emerge as beneficiaries.

More importantly, as a result of women activists’ location in two different places, strategic collective action can prevail. Activists, due to the mere fact that they belong to two different organizations, may not feel comfortable and at ease to take sides and become hard-liners for any cause of the two organizations they belong to. Rather being soft they would prefer to pacify things. Ultimately, as Beckwith asserted, they end up taking strategic collective actions that never puts their double militancy or their location in two different organizations at risk. Thus, as a result of the above closely linked possibilities, double militancy can have a key role in transforming relationships between two different organizations. So provided that the women’s movement in Tigray came as an out-growth of TPLF, and hence activists, especially senior members, have been members of both; using the concept of double militancy helps me discuss the roles of these activists.
3.4. The Notion of Women’s Gender Interests

Started as an attempt to open up debate on the complex concept of women’s interest, Molyneux’s (1985) move to conceptualize women’s interests has ended up developing another controversial, but helpful, concept of gender interest with its two dimensions: practical and strategic. Although, Molyneux reckoned that: “The concept of women’s interests is central to feminist evaluations of socialist societies and indeed social policies in general,” (ibid., p. 230), she is of the opinion that the concept can hardly represent women’s common interests:

Because women are positioned within their societies through a variety of different means - among them class, ethnicity and gender- the interest they have as a group are similarly shaped in complex and sometimes conflicting ways. It is, therefore, difficult, if not impossible, to generalize about the interests of women (ibid., p. 232).

While Molyneux still holds that it is possible to talk about general common interests among women, the concept she recommends and that can encompass all is gender interest. As I have indicated before, by gender interests, Molyneux means interests that all human beings can have due to their social place in their society (ibid., p. 233). In this direction, she identified practical and strategic gender interests as two distinct categories. According to Molyneux, “strategic gender interests are derived in the first instance deductively, that is, from the analyses of women’s subordination and from the formulation of an alternative, more satisfactory set of arrangements to those which exist” (ibid., p. 232). She said that these are believed to represent women’s “real” interests and are what feminists strive for.

The other form of gender interests are the practical gender interests:

Practical gender interests are given inductively and arise from the concrete conditions of women’s positioning within the gender division of labour. In contrast to strategic gender interests, these are formulated by the women who are themselves within these positions rather than through external interventions. Practical interests are usually a response to an immediate
perceived need, and they do not generally entail a strategic goal such as women’s emancipation or gender equality (p. 233).

Therefore, employing the above framework on women’s gender interests, I can assess which of the interests caused the mobilization; for which of the interests the women’s movement in Tigray has been advancing. Has it been for practical or for strategic interests or for both that the women’s movement in Tigray mobilized? How could the women’s movement in Tigray be explained in light of the concept of the women’s gender interest? Has this been influenced by the wider political opportunity structures? Thus, it is in an attempt to answer these types of questions above that the concept of practical and strategic gender interests will be employed.

Generally, therefore, I believe that though different interests can serve women’s mobilization, they are in turn susceptible to influences from the external environment and the political opportunity structures entailed that can either restrict or facilitate mobilization for different gender interests. Accordingly, women’s movements can utilise different strategies pertaining to their goals by giving due care to the surrounding socio-political, cultural and economic realities at a certain point in time. Among these strategies are either remaining independent or deciding to working together with other organizations, political parties and even the state for that matter in certain circumstances. So, the theories and concepts discussed in this chapter will help me discuss these interrelated issues in relation to the mobilisation of women that has taken place in Tigray from 1976 to the present.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Pertaining to underlying theoretical underpinnings surrounding qualitative research, Flick (2014) noted that qualitative research allows the researcher explore the experiences and perspectives of those whom s/he studies, and helps her/him to be reflexive of his/her own role, experiences and feelings while contacting research subjects. Hence, cognizant of this fact, so as to investigate the women’s movement in Tigray, which consists of different women’s organizations, through the lived experiences of its participants and other knowledgeable people, I have opted for a qualitative research methodology which is informed by feminist theories. As O’Leary, noted, methodology is understood as the:

> Overarching, macro-level frameworks that offer principles of reasoning associated with particular paradigmatic assumptions that legitimate various schools of research. Methodologies provide both the strategies and grounding for the conduct of a study (O’Leary, 2010, pp. 88-89).

In this regard, as the discussion below would show, to collect the qualitative data and for the purpose of triangulation or data cross-checking, I have utilized multiple methods such as interviewing, informal discussions, observation as well as document analysis.

4.1. Recruitment of Informants and Rapport

To begin with, Flick noted that as a researcher, “you cannot adopt a neutral role in the field and in your contacts with the people to be interviewed or observed” (Flick, 2014, p. 158). He further remarked: “Entering the field entails more than just being there: it involves a complex process of locating yourself and being located in the field” (ibid, p.165). With this in mind, I embarked on my fieldwork in the beginning of June 2014. At that very day of my arrival in the field, I visited the headquarters of the Women’s Association of Tigray in Mekelle. After I had informed the secretary of the office about whom I was and what I wanted to do, I was allowed to meet the chairperson of the association. I was warmly welcomed by the head and got support from the office to carry out my research. Even if, I had a tentative list of potential informants, I was not sure of
their whereabouts, so together with the chairperson it was possible to locate them. The chairperson, having seen the list of my potential informants, also recommended me to include some other informants. To get access to the documentation centre of TPLF where a lot of relevant documents can be found (but which is not open for everyone) I requested and received another support letter from the Women’s Association of Tigray.

Because I was a local in Mekelle, it was very easy to meet my informants once I identified their exact locations. Accordingly, within a week I had made the first contacts with my informants and had got appointments. My informants were eight in total, that is, five females and three males. Whereas seven of these were ex- TPLF fighters, two were civil government employees. Within this first week, I also got acquainted with both the head and librarian of the documentation centre of TPLF to start with the document analysis and even begun doing informal discussion with everyone whom I met by chance regardless of gender, religion, age and so on. I had such informal discussions at different times and in different venues. Provided the fact that I can speak the local language Tigrigna fluently, it was not challenging to get accepted, and to create trust and communicate with them at ease.

4.2. Key Informant Interview

As O’Leary (2010) asserted, during interview the researcher is involved in questioning, prompting and probing. In this regard, interview helps researchers to get rich and detailed information about the subject they study. On my part, since my intention was to analyse the women’s movement in Tigray and its interaction with TPLF in the eyes of the life experiences of activists and other people who have knowledge, the contributions it has made and of course challenges it has been faced with, including the mechanisms used both for resolving the challenges and for implementing its goals, I have depended mainly on interview data. I conducted interview with groups of people whom I selected beforehand for their knowledge, experience and age, as well as with other informants whom I was linked with by my informants who were in my previous list. When setting appointment times for interview prior to our meeting, I provided my informants with interview guide that consisted of open-ended questions. This was to help them have a brief overview of what the interview was supposed to be. After that, I started doing the
interview. The interviews were conducted for a period of 1½ to 2½ hours in the offices of my informants during lunch breaks or after office hours.

All the interviews were conducted in Tigrigna by myself and were recorded, transcribed and translated into English. While recording was not a problem for majority of them, one informant was hesitant. This informant was willing to be interviewed but not willing to be recorded. She was not quite convinced that I was recording her only for academic purpose, so she initially refused to be recorded complaining that she was not that prepared for the interview and could make mistakes which she would not like others to hear. But, by the time I agreed not to record her and kept on the interviewing taking notes, fifteen minutes later I was asked by the same woman to record the interview. When I reflect on this situation I feel she agreed to be recorded because she did not want me to miss some of her points. This perhaps could be due to that she was making points she wanted to be considered. Or maybe she felt moral guilty for not agreeing to be recorded while being interviewed.

4.3. Informal Discussion

For cross-checking the data generated through interviews and the other methods that is, observation and document analysis, I also used informal discussion in informal settings. Given that most of my informants were ex-fighters and above all affiliated either to TPLF or to the Women’s Association of Tigray, it was advisable and necessary to depend on other sources of information to glean more critical views especially on the relationships between TPLF and the women’s movement, and so as to discuss with people at ease having no recorder (which would have created discomfort and worry). In this regard, I immersed myself in informal discussions. These informal discussions were with groups of people and individuals coming from all walks of life and representing various groups of societies (women, men, elderly, young, students, employees, peasants, Muslims and Christians). The informal discussions were undertaken whenever and wherever it was possible to initiate or take part in discussion of political nature. Most of the discussions were done in taxis or when using public transport, in and around offices of my informants, gatherings in residential areas and in cafeterias. Using this method I collected information on the history of women’s movement in Tigray, its ups and downs,
critical view on its relationships with TPLF and critical view on its contributions when it comes to the benefit of women both in the past, that is, during the time of the struggle, and after victory.

4.4. Observations

Although it has its own drawbacks, observation is a credited method of data collection. As O’Leary noted: “Observation invites you to take it all in; to see, hear, smell, feel, and even taste your environment. It allows you to get a sense of a reality and work through the complexities of social interactions” (O’Leary 2010, p. 209). Conducting this study, I have employed the method to look into realities which could not be told by my informants and discussed by participants but could only be observed. For instance, I have observed women in neighbourhoods discussing women’s issues based on the direction they got from their association. Doing so, it has been possible to observe the conditions which members at grassroots level rise as concern. Besides, employing the method I was able to look into the way residential-cells of the women’s association of Tigray function at the grassroots level. The participation of members in discussions and their compositions in terms of age, religion and so was possible to observe. More importantly, the method proved helpful to follow challenges that women face for being women. Furthermore, hearing to the Voice of the Revolution a local radio broadcast which has a programme for women, and visiting into some governmental offices where women gather, it was possible to observe the way the women’s movement in Tigray work to enhance public awareness as regards harmful traditional practices, and women’s consciousness about their concerns. So, used with the other methods, observation has enriched my data both as source of information and in terms of cross-checking data collected from the other sources.

4.5. Document Analysis

Given that the women’s movement of Tigray is an off shoot of the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), it was important to visit the documentation centre of TPLF looking for relevant information. Besides, I had to visit the centre because different published and un-published materials from different offices like the Women’s
Association and the regional parliament could also be found there. I also had to review policy documents, legislative materials, reports, magazines, brochures, statistical data, and so. All in all, these documents proved pivotal in terms of identifying the context where the movement emerged and developed, the tangible contributions it has made so far, the structure of the association, its past and present goals, its mission and visions, its priority areas and of course, the challenges it faced and through which mechanisms these challenges were solved.

4.6. Thematic Data Analysis

Meaning making and interpretation is not an easy task; especially when analysis is to be done from data which is qualitatively generated. In my research, to finally come up with meaningful themes and draw conclusions, the heap of data was reduced searching for words and concepts after the interviews were transcribed, and translated together with the data from other sources produced in languages other than English. Through reading the translations and hearing to the recorded tape interview repeatedly, any interconnectedness in between these words was noticed in order to identify underlying or emerging patterns. With these patterns, categorization followed, where I sorted out meaningful themes (history and emergence of the women’s movement and interaction with TPLF, causes of mobilization, strategies of mobilization, achievements and challenges during mobilization). After that I embarked on the interpretation process and meaning making by consulting the research objectives/questions and my theoretical frameworks.

4.7. Ethics, Challenges and Reflexivity

Research on human subjects needs to be ethically sound. For example, Flick has asserted:

*Codes of ethics are formulated to regulate the relationships of researchers to the people and fields they intend to study. Principles of research ethics require that researchers avoid harming participants involved in the process by respecting and taking into account their needs and interests* (Flick, 2014, p.50).
In light of this, from its inception utmost care was taken for this research to be ethical. I have observed the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) ethical guidelines of the University of Bergen, and have made sure that informed consent and anonymisation was done in line with it. As to Kvale: “informed consent entails informing the research subjects about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design, as well as of possible risks and benefits from participation in the research project” (Kvale, 2007, p. 27). Once in the field, I started making contacts with my informants after I could explain my identity and the purpose of my research in lucid language and/or in a language they could understand or using less academic language. I also made it clear for them that participation fully depended on their willingness and agreement, and that they had full right to withdraw from the research whenever they wanted, and to refuse to be recorded even if they agree to take part in the interviewing. Doing all these beforehand, I started interviewing them having obtained their informed consent. In the same vein, concerning participants in the informal discussions, enough care was taken to secure anonymisation of all the implicated parties.

Finally, as it is said, no matter what, a researcher in a field is faced with certain challenges; and I was not different. Appointments with my informants were not easily secured for most of my informants were claiming that they were too busy to be interviewed at the time I had in mind. In this regard, I was forced to accept appointments of extended times like for a month and even a month and half. More to that, some were not even able to avail themselves or make themselves ready for interview during the agreed on appointment times. Hence, I had to have patience, and tolerate them in order to make new appointments. Besides, when interview schedules were not working as to the original plans, I had to shift to an alternative plan which I prepared for fear of possible cancellations of appointments. This was the case with government officials, who were extremely busy given that the period of the interviews in June, July and August, was the time when either they would be in hurry to prepare annual reports and/ or they may be busy due to the routine meetings (both party and government) which the current government in Ethiopia is well known for. As a result, when these kinds of things started to happen I involved myself in informal discussions with people whom I meet wherever in offices and public places; and I was visiting the TPLF documentation centre to do
document analysis. Hence, the fact that I had an extended schedule subsidized by an alternative calendar of duties proved helpful.

Given that the interviews were conducted in offices, and even if necessary care was taken to avoid any interruption from unexpected visitors into the office, interruptions was inevitable. When interruptions were evident due to unexpected visit of friends of the officials I was interviewing, and due to phone calls, I had to stop the recording and wait with patience until the informants were ready to let the interview continue. Although I was not feeling comfortable with the interruptions, I was happy to see my informants wishing to continue the interview after a short break telling the visitors to come some other day or the callers to call some other time.

Compared to my informants who where officials I was young, and above all, I was only a student. So, I also felt that the interruptions had something to do with this gap in age and power. So, while I had to show respect for my informants through the whole session of the interviews, I was also trying my level best to keep my authority as a researcher. So, at certain times, for example, when the visitors spoke for an extended period of time, forgetting that I was there, and that they had in fact interrupted our interview, I had to make them understand through body language and facial expressions that I was there for a purpose and that I was serious about it.

Before going to the field, I was more interested to focus on political representation of women based on the women’s movement in Tigray. But after I immersed myself in the field I found that my academic background in history influenced my perspective. I wanted to incorporate the historical development of the women’s movement and present a detailed discussion on its history from beginning to present. I also felt that I had narrowed down my study too much when focusing only on women’s political representation in Tigray. So, once in the field, I widened the scope of my study.

Provided that most of my informants, if not all, were affiliated to TPLF as they were ex-TPLF fighters that served in different positions, and this time they are high ranking government officials, I had a certain degree of hesitation that my informants may not be open enough, especially in talking about the interaction between the women’s movement and TPLF. Therefore, even if during the interviews my informants seemed frank to talk about TPLF and the different women’s organizations involved, I still had the difficulty to
accept all what they said, and thus I was urged to cross-check it using other methods. In this regard, I found it advisable to employ informal discussion to a higher degree possible than to continue interviewing more people with similar background who for sure had knowledge but whom I felt were providing more or less similar responses and/or whom I, to some expect, doubted might not be “critical” enough. Accordingly, incorporating various groups of people having different backgrounds in the informal discussions, and pushing my informants as far as I could while trying to make them remain at ease to talk, finally, I was able to access some critical reflections on the relationship between TPLF and the women’s movement in Tigray.

Lastly and in a matter of summing up the section, the other thing which I would like to reflect is that, from the very beginning, having noticed that I had some background information about the women’s movement in Tigray, both during data collection, transcription and analysis, I have used my life experience as a Tigrayan for meaning-making and interpretation and to some extent as supplementary source of data. In this regard, during the fieldwork, I was asking for clarification when concepts, words and so were used to explain the matter I was studying, based on the fact that I was aware that these words could be interpreted in a number of ways. At times, when during transcription I was faced with less understandable clarifications from my informants, I had to depend on my insider knowledge as a Tigrayan to decipher the meaning of the issue that was being noted. In general, my life experience and insider knowledge was part and parcel of, not only data generation, but also in the interpretation and analysis process.
CHAPTER 5

BIRTH OF THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT AND ITS EARLY FORM
OF INTERACTION WITH TPLF (1976-1985)

As this chapter will show, the women’s movement in Tigray started out of sheer interest to solve practical problems that Tigrayan women were facing. Even though, the movement was an outgrowth from another popular movement TPLF, as it is shown below, the representative organizations it encompassed, were more or less organizationally autonomous or in the term of Molyneux (1998) had associational autonomy in the time period from 1976 to 1985. The chapter covers chronologically historical developments to show how the women’s movement emerged, and to investigate how it has been shaped by the historically specific external environment in Tigray.

5.1. The Women’s Committee (1976-1985)

They were all fighters of TPLF, a broader and popular liberation movement that was waging an ethnicity-based liberation struggle. Women joined TPLF not having different aim than their male comrades. At the centre of the struggle was class oppression and ethnic marginalization. But, once they joined the Front, a group of female fighters in TPLF decided to establish a separate organization for women within in TPLF that later grew to include mass women’s associations at the grassroots level. In this regard, an ad hoc Women’s Committee in TPLF was formed in a place called Sebeo Belesa in the Eastern part of Tigray in December, 1976. It stayed having informal status until 1980 when it was recognized by TPLF as ad hoc Women’s Committee. When asked why it was necessary to establish a separate Women’s Committee while they were all there in the field as fighters of TPLF, informant 1 said:

You are right, the same thing was raised by some of the participants when we met by chance in Sebeo Belesa which was one of the base areas of TPLF in December 1976. I remember all in all we were 12 to 14 female fighters in
number within the whole TPLF at that time. I can name: Martha, Taemu, Nigisti, Lielti, Hiriti, Saba, Almaz, Zewdu (she did not stay long), Aregash, another Hiriti, Yomar, Mebrat, Roman, Hiwot, Lemelem, Genet and Alganesh (by the way Alganesh is the first female martyr). But, when we met in Sebeo in 1976, it was only some of us. The first thing we did was that we shared our experiences. Kahsu (Marta) being the first female to join the Front shared with us her experiences, and was curious to know what was going on with us. We all shared our experiences, and talked about mechanisms through which we can meet and discuss issues of concern for women regularly. To this end, even if as I told you some were first hesitant, finally, we all agreed to establish our own committee which we called Deqi Anistiyo Komitti [meaning the Women’s Committee]. Firstly, to cope with practical problems which we were facing as female fighters. For instance once in the field, initially, though later even excess special treatment was the case, no one seemed to understand our nature. Although supporters of TPLF in towns were sending us soup, sanitary pads, cloth and other things which we may need as female fighters, we still had shortage of such products and no one seemed to consider that we may need extra. So, we wanted TPLF to consider this and other. Secondly we established the committee, to work to deter from the very beginning any expression of superiority on the side of male comrades and inferiority and dependence on the side of females given that, though not to a higher degree both these problems were noticed. Thirdly, to prepare an accommodating environment for new female recruits within TPLF (Interview on July, 2014).

Informant 2 on her part remarked:

As a matter of fact, the political atmosphere at that time had its own impact for the formation of the Women’s Committee. You see. It was not only TPLF but other political organizations, including the Derg, were all the same calling for freedom of speech, freedom of association and so on. But, none put these into practise except TPLF. While in the field we were aware that TPLF was pro
freedom of association, and we were even being informally motivated to establish any kind of association during chats and discussions. Hence, we took the initiative to establish the Women’s Committee in 1976 (Interview, August, 2014).

So, as the above quotes can show, it seems that the start of the women’s movement in Tigray was in relation to practical problems that female fighters faced and their attempt to deter the challenges, and a plea to use the available opportunity in relation to the political philosophy of TPLF that support freedom of association. TPLF which was in its earlier years reluctant to welcome women began to recruit females for the struggle later on in its history. For Young (1997) the reason behind the shift was twofold. One to use the available human resource for the struggle it was waging against the Derg. Second, because of its philosophy of emancipation of women as part of its total liberation struggle which was based on Marxist-Leninist ideology. According to informants, in its founding meeting the Women’s Committee elected Aregash, Yomar, Hiwot, Roman and Almaz as its executives. As to informant 3:

The main responsibilities of the leaders then came to be (1) facilitating the organization of women within the fighters (both in base areas and army), among the mass inside Tigray especially those who were under TPLF like in eastern, western and central parts, and outside Tigray in Sudan, Middle East, Europe and America, and (2) studying the experiences of other women’s organizations operating within the then existing revolutionary movements like the Eritrean Liberation Front and others in Algeria, Palestine and Vietnam (Interview July, 2014).

Informants noted, outside Tigray the program was to establish women’s associations in the Sudan (Africa), Middle East (Saudi Arabia), Europe (Italy, Germany and Sweden) and

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2 One of the senior TPLF female fighters and founders of the Women’s Committee who served as the only long lasting female member of the central committee of TPLF and also president of the Regional State of Tigray. In 2001 she was removed from party membership due to internal power struggle and currently leading the only opposition party in Tigray.
in USA where there were large numbers of immigrant Tigrayans, so as to mobilize them for their concerns as women and to support the overall struggle.

5.2. The Derg, TPLF and Its Programmes and the Women’s Committee
According to informants, as ethnicity-based liberation front, to prove its existence in the face of other competitors for power in Tigray, TPLF had to fight a number of decisive battles with EDU (Ethiopian Democratic Union), EPRP (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party) and ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front) in the first two to three years of its existence after it was formed in 1975. TPLF was not immediately targeted by the Derg, unlike the other rebel groups like EPLF (Eritrean People’s Liberation Front), EDU, EPRP immediately after it came into existence. It was considered to be a minor force whose existence depended on other stronger groups, for example, EPLF. Besides, in the first three years of existence of the Front (TPLF), the Derg was fully involved in eliminating its contender for power in towns and the capital city Addis Ababa, EPRP and preventing the threat of aggression by Somalia. Accordingly, TPLF was not pressured from the government as such yet.

Even if TPLF did not face punitive military campaigns, the Derg launched its Red Terror campaign in Tigray as of 1978. As Hammond (1990) noted the Red-terror begun on the 4th of February 1977 in Addis Ababa and reached Tigray in 1978. As to informants even if the Red Terror was meant to hunt down activists and weaken the Front, in practice it was used to terrorize the public employing all forms of atrocities. Suspects were killed in broad daylight; families were forced away from mourning their lost ones, and were made to pay the price of the bullets used for killing their family members and relatives; even to dance over the bodies of their loved ones. A similar finding by Hammond (1990) ascertained that the Red Terror unleashed devastation. Shortly later, however after the Red Terror, the inevitable engagement of TPLF with the powerful army of the Derg began. Here is what informant 1 had to say about that:

*The Derg having scored a decisive victory in its war against the Somalia aggression diverted its attention to that of the rebel groups in the North. Even if the main focus of attention of the Derg was on EPLF, it also began to*
consider TPLF as a threat to the territorial integrity of the country. Accordingly, the Derg vowed to destroy all rebels and launched a campaign against all including TPLF. One of these campaigns was the Raza Zemecha [literally meaning the Eagle’s Campaign] where the Derg deliberately armed the peasants of southern parts of Tigray and sent them fight against TPLF whom it blacklisted as groups of bandits (Interview July, 2014).

As to informants and discussants in informal discussions, the Red Terror coupled with the punitive campaign of the Derg which targeted equally the rebel group TPLF and the public at large, in the years following 1978, thousands of Tigrayans were left with no option than fleeing the government either to join the armed groups like TPLF, or else to leave the country and migrate to other areas where they could spare their lives. Among those joining TPLF at this time, a significant number of them were females. In connection to this, similarly Hammond wrote that “the Red Terror drove thousands of new recruits from the towns to fight with TPLF in the countryside. This was when waves of women went to the field” (Hammond, 1990, p.43). So, this according to informants was attended by new developments where TPLF’s position and interest towards new recruitment of females which was indicated earlier began to change.

TPLF became hesitant to accept all of those who joined it in the field. More importantly, it showed no interest in new females’ recruitment. TPLF had different reasons for that: First of all, at that time it was not only the youth who were fleeing. Newly-weds, young mothers and the middle-aged were all the same among those joining the Front. On one hand, it was very evident that rural areas and towns were devastating inhabited only by the elderly and the sick who cannot go away. So, it became necessary for TPLF to revive normal civilian life mitigating new recruitment, especially of women. Secondly, TPLF had the feeling of having enough number of females compared to its male fighters. In principle it had the belief that its male fighters should be a bit higher than its female fighters for physical capacity reasons. So, it was one reason for it to refuse recruiting new females. Thirdly, TPLF had no economic
capacity to entertain all. Especially, it was concerned about those children who were being abandoned by the young mothers joining the Front. It was one of the burdensome responsibilities of the Front to take care of abandoned children. It even had a boarding school for abandoned children in the Sudan (Informant 3, Interview July, 2014).

So, as the accounts can testify, as a result of the influx of thousands of Tigrayans where female constitute the majority, women became over time a dilemma for TPLF which I will come back to below.

5.2.1. A Leap Forward

As indicated above, following the Red Terror and the other offensive campaigns by Derg, given that thousands of Tigrayans, including women, went to the field, TPLF was hesitant to accept all for the reasons specified earlier. However, later on, the Women’s Committee intervened and successfully found a way out for both TPLF and its new female recruits who were in the field but never gained approval for mandatory military training to be considered fighters of TPLF. What did the Women’s Committee do? How was this situation in the field solved for women? The narration by informant 1 could show how this situation was mitigated:

At that time there were 4000 new female recruits. They were not officially accepted and hence were denied from taking training and integrating with the fighters of TPLF. We, members of the Women’s Committee were convinced that TPLF was right to try to mitigate the number of its female members. It was necessary for TPLF to have significant number of male combatants who can manipulate and even carry heavy armaments. But, at the same time, we were also convinced that we should not let down all the new female recruits in vein. So, we had to devise mechanism. We negotiated and convinced TPLF that it was necessary for those already in the field to get the military training so that the fit ones could join the army and the other do other jobs in different sectors of the then growing organs of TPLF. Accordingly, 4000 of the new female
recruits were trained alone. As we anticipated some were found to be very fit to be combatants when even they had chance to show their ability to manipulate heavy armaments, and others were assigned as public administrators, technicians and so (Interview July, 2014).

Thus, it means the activists who had already been working for both TPLF and the Women’s Committee were using their positions in both the organizations to pursue their concern as fighters and as women representing the women of Tigray. The limitations posed on the recruitment of women resulted in the intervention of the Women’s Committee where it had to oppose the stance of TPLF and forward a resolution in the form of recommendation which was accepted by TPLF. Here it helps to recall that creating accommodating environment for women within TPLF was one of the emboldened aims raised during the formation of the Women’s Committee. And, hence it was working towards this end.

5.2.2. The Green Light

Female informants recalled that another major move by the Committee in advance of its goals was what it registered in 1979. At this time the newly established Women’s Committee was able to positively pressure TPLF in favour of women. By the time TPLF was making preparation for holding its first congress, the Committee came up with the idea of having quota for female representatives. It lobbied successfully and for the first time TPLF agreed to set aside reserve seats for female representatives. In connection to this informant 1, recalled:

As far as representation in congresses of TPLF is concerned, it was only possible as a trend based on merit. It was based on performance that one would be elected; say for example, as representative of a squad or battalion. In this regard, the competition was intense. So, because we were aware that the probability for women to be elected as representatives was less probable if based on merit in an army where there was male dominance, we made the recommendation that at least three seats be reserved for women. The
recommendation was accepted and endorsed. So, it was a major achievement for us to be able to influence TPLF in favour women. Even if representation was supposed to be based on merit, we managed to jump this and ask for representation based on gender (Interview July, 2014)

Informants all agreed that this achievement was considered substantial because of different reasons. First, the women’s movement became aware that pressuring TPLF positively in favour of women was possible even beyond its own working culture. Secondly, given that it was in congresses that major decisions that could determine the fate of the Front and its fighters and the public at large were made, it was quite necessary for female representatives to be there. Therefore, this achievement was significant.

5.3. The First Congress of TPLF, New Programmes and the Women’s Committee
Following the first congress of TPLF where quota representation of female fighters was effectuated, certain programmes were designed by TPLF. Below I will discuss these issues in detail to reflect on the nature of these programmes vis-a-vis the situation of women in Tigray and the role of the participants of the women’s movement.

5.3.1. The New Programmes
As to informant 1 and informant 3 after the 1978 military confrontation with the Derg, one reality which became crystal clear was that all the groups fighting against TPLF had the plan and were also in practice using divide and rule policies, to raise Tigrayans against TPLF (whereas TPLF’s political slogan was “fight to liberate Tigrayans”). Accordingly, faced with this challenge, TPLF came up with a new programme under the motto Hafash Yingah, Yiwedeb Yiteateq (meaning “let the people be conscious, organized and armed”) in 1979. In line with this, as argued by Aregawi (2008), the few educated female fighters on their part were given the responsibility to mobilize women in Tigray. According to informants, the Committee, whose strategy was to use every available opportunity to its advantage and the advantage of its constituents, gave its activists the role to mobilize and organize women not only for the general struggle but for a struggle against gender inequality in line with the socialist philosophy of TPLF
on the “woman question” and the matter of gender equality. In connection to this, both informant 3 and 1 made the following remarks respectively:

At first we were trying to create awareness about gender equality, to mobilize and organize them, inviting both men and women to public meetings. But, we found out that women turn- out was minimal. The reason behind was that they were not allowed by their husbands to come to meetings among whom some even had the gut to tell us that they had to be in their homes to take care of household chores and children. As a result, we had to use different mechanisms to reach women for they were our main targets. For instance, on my side I had to be member of a lot of mahber [traditional religious institution where women gather monthly] to meet them in person and share them our ideas. It was really a successful endeavour (Informant 3, Interview July, 2014).

By the time we were given the order from TPLF and our Committee to work to mobilize women in Tigray in the then liberated areas and in any other countryside where we had access, we had to call public meetings, attend church gatherings and so on. But, after we realize that we could not meet women we had to employ other mechanisms. For instance, on my part, in order to meet women in their homes, there was occasions where I had to plait their hair so that we could have time to share our ideas about the question of women and gender-equality and convey message from our movement (Informant 1, Interview, July 2014).

In general, as the presentation above reveal, by the time opportunities were there, the Women’s Committee was working, one, to organize women civilians in a way they could meaningfully contribute to the struggle against the military regime and the other rebel groups, and secondly, to strengthen their gender-based women organizing as female fighters and civilians so as to further the push for gender-equality. As result, as informant 2 noted: “Following this year, it was possible for the Committee to establish civilian Women’s Associations in Sheraro, Edaga-Arbi and Zana within the then liberated areas in Tigray.” (Interview August, 2014). In total, 2667 mass associations out of which 29%
were women’s mass associations, had been established in Tigray within a short period of
time then after (Voice of Revolution Special Edition Magazine, 2012). As Hammond has
argued, mass associations were links between TPLF and the public at large. It was from
these associations that elected representatives from the public were sent to TPLF
congresses to influence decisions. But, more importantly, as Hammond asserted, “the
women’s associations [were] the whole basis of the strategy for gaining women’s equality.
Through the regular meetings women have largely managed to overcome the lack of
confidence instilled in them by centuries of suppression” (Hammond, 1990, p. 72).

Therefore, coupled with the concerted efforts of the activists of the Women’s Committee,
the new programme constituted an opportunity structure where women were not only
mobilized for the general struggle but also on the basis of becoming conscious of the
gender-based struggle as women under the banner of the struggle for gender equality.

In 1981, another programme which was aimed at boosting the economy of the
Tigrayan peasants was launched by TPLF. Locally, the programme was called *Mahtot
Midinfae*, meaning boosting the economy, and was aimed at building the capacity of
peasants’ skill’ to produce enough for subsistence, and even to make profit from
marketing surplus. It was part of the programme to train peasants modern ways of
production, irrigation, poultry, bee-hiving, health and disease prevention, hygiene, basic
education and so on. So, according to discussants in informal group discussion, in the
presence of this programme, the Women’s Committee’s main role became making sure
enough number of those training were females. In connection to this, informant 3 said:

*Our Committee worked hard to ensure women could benefit from the new
programme that TPLF introduced. We used our organization to mobilize
women, this time, civilians to take part in the training. The end result of this
was that we were able to have enough number of females who could boost their
economy and even be assigned in different positions to train and even lead
locals as local leaders (Interview July, 2014).*

Hence, it seems that participants of the women’s movement were in a position to use
every available opportunity to benefit women, not only because they were fighters of
TPLF that believed in equality between men and women, but also, perhaps because, as Gebru (1984) argued they were busy pursuing their own “revolution within a revolution” aimed at ensuring women being equal to men in line with TPLF’s plea for equality more generally.

5.4. The Second Congress of TPLF and the Women’s Committee

In 1983 TPLF held its second congress where 10% of participants were women (Voice of Revolution Magazine Special Edition, 2012). In this congress it was decided that women were equal in law but that they still lagged behind men in practice. Hence, positive measures were necessary (Hammond, 1990; Young, 1997). Besides, the congress, among other things, introduced two new policies that significantly impacted women and the relationships between TPLF and its female fighters and women civilians at large. First it introduced a controversial policy regarding the recruitment of new female recruits. Here, the policy decided to enlist only females who had finished fifth grade of their education; or at least could read and write. Second, legalization of what was termed the “democratic marriage” was proposed (Hammond, 1990; Young, 1997; Tsegay, 1999; Aregawi, 2008). This new marriage policy, legalized marriage for the first time in the history of the Front. Before this time the fighters were required to be abstinent. One male discussant said: “Let alone marriage, it was the law of the party to sentence to death anyone caught having sexual intercourse” (Informal Discussion June, 2014). Later in 1984, when these controversial policies, which were bitter pills that proved difficult to swallow for the women in TPLF and in the mass women’s associations, were put into practise, women arranged demonstrations. In elaboration, informant 1 remarked:

The main reason that women opposed the new recruitment policy of females was because they considered it as an attempt by TPLF to change its policy towards women and also they thought it was an attempt to minimize the number of female fighters in favour of males. Besides, they opposed as they considered it as an attempt by TPLF and its male leadership to set limits for females; telling them that they were weak compared to males to be involved in physical combat against the Derg unlike new male recruits who were still
allowed to join the Front even if they were not fifth graders (Interview July, 2014).

When it comes to the marriage policy, they opposed it thinking that it was too early to be involved in marriage and establish family before the struggle was over. They were worried about the delay this would pose to the struggle itself. But more importantly as informant 3 noted “they opposed it because they believed that it would add burden to female fighters and was a return back to old tradition of caring babies.” Or as it was said by one female in one of my informal group discussion “a return back to the kitchen, a return back to old household chores.” On a similar account, other sources indicated that: firstly, women opposed the proposal on marriage considering it as an attempt by men comrades to express dominance and to re-assign old traditional household chores. Besides, they rejected the recruitment policy interpreting it as an attempt to downplay equality between men and women (Hammond, 1990; Tsegay 1999; Aregawi, 2008). As Young noted “Involvement of women as fighters, and particularly in combat, was held to demonstrate that women were equally as capable as men” (Young, 1997, p. 179). So, probably, this added impetus to the opposition against reduction in recruitment. What is interesting to note here is that the reasoning by TPLF for introducing the controversial policy of marriage and the new recruitment policy was different. In this regard, informant 2 explained:

TPLF wanted to legalize marriage for different reasons. First and foremost, having seen what fighters were doing and tempting to do in their relationships even under the threat of death penalty for anyone caught having intercourse, was really challenging the very principle itself. Second, TPLF was growing in capacity and it was changing its style of confrontation with the Derg from guerilla to conventional war. Thus, it was thought possible to legalize marriage and take responsibility of the impact of legalization of marriage in terms of fulfilling basic necessities and legal requirements as well as security (Interview July, 2014).
Furthermore, according to Young, TPLF reduced its recruitment of new female recruits claiming that:

(1) domestic life was being disrupted because so many women became fighters, (2) women could make a valuable contribution to the war through activities in their homes and villages, (3) the educational level or becoming a fighter were raised to five years and many women did not meet these criteria, (4) the war was moving to a conventional form that placed more emphasis on physical strength (Young 1997, p. 179).

Thus, women, especially those who had no education were not welcomed to TPLF from then onwards even if women opposed.

5.5. The 1984 Demonstrations and Implications

Even if looking into the above discussions it can be concluded that the Women’s Committee was less influential in deterring the propositions by TPLF concerning women through the role of its double militants at this point; besides even if the Committee failed to stop the policies, since they were in fact applied, another strategy was designed. This time it was demonstrations. As to informants, the then somewhat uneasy relationships between TPLF and women’s movement in Tigray as represented by the Women’s Committee and its civilian wings, and which had fermented following the proposal for introduction of the two controversial policies, reached its peak when women arranged demonstration in the western part of Tigray.

Although the immediate cause could be the policies, the root cause of the disagreement between TPLF and the participants of the women’s movement on the formulation and later implementation of the two controversial policies, I suggest, was the heightened consciousness of women, both civilians and female fighters. Once, they were aware about the “woman’s question”, equality and women’s right through the effort exerted by the women’s movement, it must have been unbearable for the newly awakened women to endure anything that could endanger their plight for more gender equality. The fact that it had been part of the public education to learn about the experiences of other
similar women’s movements, can be assumed that it had influenced how they dealt with whether or not it would be “safer” to guard the plea for equality themselves. Moreover, given as Hassim noted that, “social movements do not merely activate pre-existing identities and consciousness; they also create consciousness” (Hassim, 2006, p. 8), it can also be claimed that new consciousness was already created within women in Tigray, and the mass demonstration was a reflexive response to that. More importantly, the mass demonstration could also serve as indicator for change in the strategy of the women’s movement. However, as to accounts from informants, the independently decided demonstrations had unintended consequences in the relation of the women’s movement with TPLF. “Following the demonstration, TPLF summoned executives of the Committee and ordered them to settle the situation. The Committee in general and its leaders in particular were criticized for going beyond the limits of gender equality as understood by the Front” (Informant 1, Interview July, 2014). Receiving this immediate direction, the Women’s Committee, especially the leaders, became at odds with both TPLF and the demonstrating women, as informant 2 said:

“On one hand, it had to convince its members both civilians and ordinary fighters that the Women’s Committee and TPLF were still on their side and cared about them. On the other hand, it had to show TPLF that it could manage the situation and made things continue at ease” (Interview on August, 2014). In this regard, majority informants indicated that it was one of the hardest times for the Women’s Committee. It was only after repeated failures which took a long time that the committee finally settled the case and members reluctantly accepted the two policies. Members were convinced through emergency meetings and individual contact that the policies were meant to facilitate the struggle which would finally result in emancipation of women. They were told that emancipation of women was possible only with the success of TPLF to seize power in Ethiopia and that it was necessary to abide by the rules and regulations of TPLF to see the Front succeed and strengthened. With that the situation, which was intense for some time, was over. Generally however, they remarked that after the demonstration TPLF put a more heavy-hand on the women’s movement and it was able to totally control it through the channel of the double militants; a case which I will come back later in the next chapter.
5.6. Concluding Discussion

In the time under coverage in this chapter, from 1976 to 1985, the Women’s Committee and the civilian mass women’s associations it led were able to set their own agenda, elect leaders and determine priority areas independent of TPLF. However, they were also grossly involved in negotiations with TPLF. Hence, in line with Molyneux’s (1998) typology, this chapter has shown that the position of the women’s movement in Tigray in this period can best be characterized as associational autonomy. As the discussion above has indicated, it is argued that associational autonomy was sustained given that TPLF was willing to entertain freedom of association (1) as per its plea for democracy, and (2) because it was one of its strategies to win public support, provided the fact that, in the period under consideration, it was under intense pressure from the Derg and other competitors for power and dominance in Tigray, like EDU and EPRP.

Interestingly, as indicated above, given that associational autonomy was the defining feature of the period, negotiations were taking place between the Women’s Committee and TPLF. Double militants who were situated in both TPLF and the women’s movement with its separate organizations were in a position to run these negotiations, which were subject to a two-way traffic of influence. On one hand, double militants were able to influence party politics; on the other hand, the party through these double militants was able to impact the women’s movement. For instance, whereas the women’s movement in 1979 succeeded in influencing TPLF, where TPLF had to agree for quota representation of female fighters in its Congress, that is, based on gender (which in principle was meant for elected representatives at a merit base); in 1983 the women’s movement was influenced by party politics. In this regard, double militants had to agree to the recommendation from TPLF for reduction in recruitment of females and new marriage legalization, and hence had to convince the other members of the Women’s Committee and the Mass Women’s Associations. According to Beckwith (2000) this two-way traffic of influence is considered as the inherent nature of double militancy that has both tactical and organizational implications with negative and positive results for women’s movements as is clearly showed in the data from Tigray. The fact that the double militants had to agree to the recommendations by TPLF concerning the two policies is the negative aspect of double militancy in that they had to be soft enough avoiding confrontation even
at the expense of the goals of their organization. But, their ability to influence the party politics shows the transformative or positive implication of double militancy, where double militants can influence party politics to the advantage of the women’s organization.

On the other side, as the discussions in the literature and theories chapters have shown, mobilization of women can be caused by different reasons. As to Molyneux (1985), women can mobilize together as women to satisfy their gender interests which can be either practical or strategic or both. Hence, seen from this angle, this chapter concludes that, as far as the cause of mobilization of women in Tigray in the specified period is concerned, even if at start women were mobilizing for more pressing problems they were facing like shortage of basic provisions on the side of female fighters, shortly later they started mobilizing for more radical or strategic interests like emancipation of women or gender-equality. However, as their mobilization was influenced by the external political environment and the political opportunity structure it entailed, the chapter also shows that their plea for equality was limited to how gender equality was understood in TPLF’s Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the “woman question” and a socialist understanding of women’s emancipation where bigger issues comes first. In other words, even if there was advance for gender-equality, gender oppression was not singled out as a self-defined problem by itself. It was rather considered to be part and parcel of the class problem pertaining to TPLF’s ideology. Although gender-equality was sought, and women were mobilizing for it, it was perceived as a by-product of general equality or general emancipation destined to be achieved after waging a successful class struggle; in this case defined as seizing power in Ethiopia and establishing a government for all, that is, based on revolutionary democracy.
Despite the controversy over the new policies addressed above, the recommendation of the Second Congress of TPLF in 1983 included the formation of Association for Women Fighters of Tigray (AWFT). Hammond (1990) noted that training centres were opened for women like Marta School and March 8 School following this congress, and they were put under the command of the new association (Tsegay 1999) which was also given the responsibility to centralize the mass women’s associations activities (see also Aregawi, 2008). Hence, drawing on this historical context, this chapter will cover the experience of the women’s movement in Tigray and its relationships with TPLF in the time period from 1985 to 1991. As will be shown, TPLF was able to effectively put the women’s movement under control through the formation of a fighter women’s association which it financed and directed. Although AWFT was in a sense able to have separate existence as an association with its own structure; its agendas and priority areas were in line with TPLF and more importantly its goals were secondary to the goals of TPLF. Thus, in light of this, this chapter will reflect on how it was possible for the women’s movement to push for gender friendly changes even when TPLF dominated and effectively controlled and directed it. In other words, the chapter would highlight on how it was possible to advance both practical and strategic gender interests even under domination of TPLF.

6.1. The Formation of AWFT and the Beginning of Directed Mobilization

Association for Women Fighters of Tigray (AWFT) was officially formed in a place called Sheka Fikur in the central part of Tigray in February 1985. As to account of informant 3:

*In its founding Congress in 1985, it was decided to elevate and change position from continuing as ad hoc Women’s Committee to a permanent association. This time the Women’s Committee which was leading the women’s movement*
stopped its preparatory course and the Association for Women Fighter’s of Tigray was formed officially (Interview July, 2014).

As to Aregawi (2008), following the demonstrations in 1984 by women in opposition to the implementation of the two controversial policies that the Congress of TPLF had passed previously in 1983, AWFT was given the responsibility to follow the women’s mass association under its centralized association. According to informants, the mass women’s associations which were active at that time were inside Tigray: Women’s Association in Edaga-Arbi, Women’s Association in Zana, and Women’s Association in Sheraro. And outside Tigray: Women’s Association of Tigray in Sudan, Women’s Association of Tigray in Middle East, Women’s Association of Tigray in Europe and Women’s Association of Tigray in North America. A new association’s constitution was ratified, goals and priorities were identified, a structure was designed, and for the first time staff members that work as full-time and other more staffs that work on ad hoc basis were assigned along all the structure of AWFT. As to account of informant 1:

*Among the senior leaders of the women’s movement, Roman and Yomar*[^3] *were assigned as full-time staff whose only responsibility was to follow and execute activities of this association of the fighters and the mass associations both inside and abroad. The other leaders that were to work at ad hoc to facilitate the activities of AWFT include Hiriti, Aregash and Mebrat* (Interview July, 2014)

This time the association got its own constitution. The stated objectives of the association as extracted from the Constitution of AWFT (1988a), among other things, include:

1. Facilitating the struggle against the Derg and securing support from women
2. Prioritizing the goal of facilitating the overall struggle against the Derg to also fight against gender in-equality within TPLF as secondary goal

[^3]: Although Yewmar was elected in the 1980s conference to work as full-time employee with Roman Gebresillasie practically she did not take up this position because in the same year she was given another mandatory post by TPLF. She was assigned as director of a newly opened Academy School for leaders at a place called Qalema. Hence, she had to go there leaving Roman solely to continue as full-time employee up until 1991.
3. Mobilizing women in Tigray for the struggle against the Derg and that of the culture of men dominance over women in Tigray

That means, as it is evident from these objectives, with the formation of the association, the broader goals of the Front were prioritized. Similarly, a reading of another extract from a document entitled *The Women's Question and Challenges of Feminism* (1988b) confirms this:

*Any special treatment of women is allowed so long as it is proved it can contribute to the class-based struggle. This situation can of course change with the course of the struggle. This means that at certain point in time, if it is considered it no longer is serving the struggle it can even be interrupted.*

Hence, party issues prevailed, and it was within this scope that the participants of the women’s movement had to undertake their role as female fighters of TPLF and activists of AWFT. If anything was to be done to realize gender equality, it could not be at the cost of the struggle. It was possible to advance gender equality only by advancing the success of the struggle against the Derg.

### 6.2. Working within the Limits of TPLF for Progressive Gender-Friendly Reforms

As discussed above, though TPLF seems to have controlled the thus far organizationally independent women’s movement or the women’s movement that had associational autonomy, it also seems that the Front was still willing to cooperate with the women’s movement though only having dominance. In this regard, In a way that can show its willingness to cooperate, firstly, TPLF on its own transferred the administration of two board schools for women to AWFT. Secondly, based on public demand, and its continued plea for gender equality in relation to its Marxist-Leninist philosophy of equality (see Young, 1997; Tsegay, 1999), it undertook some progressive gender friendly reforms. As the discussion below would show, the main strategy of the women’s movement under the circumstance became double militancy, where activists were positioning themselves in both the women’s movement organizations and also in key positions in TPLF. Drawing on the ideology of Beckwith (2000) double militancy signifies involvement of members
in two different organizations, in this regard for instance, women’s organizations and political organizations. Central to the strategy was also the role the two new board schools for women happened to have in advancing the goals of the women’s movement. Here under I would present the reforms that TPLF introduced and meanwhile reflect on how the double militants were playing the game of double militancy and how it worked out. But, after all, caution must be exercised that most of the reforms discussed below were started a bit earlier during the struggle, and were only strengthened and expanded with the increase in power and sphere of influence of TPLF in Tigray in the period under consideration.

6.2.1. Progressive Gender Friendly Reforms by TPLF and Double Militants of AWFT

As noted above, side by side with its restrictive measures against any unobserved moves by the participants of the women’s movement, and which it effectively controlled with the formation of AWFT and centralization of all mass organizations working on women accordingly, TPLF issued a number of gender friendly reforms. These reforms, which were diverse in form, are believed to have put women in a better position than they had before. In this regard, as Tsegay (1999) argued, TPLF became the first to theorize the women’s issue in Tigray and to take practical measures to relieve them from their oppression. The available literature shows that these reforms covered political, economic, educational and socio-cultural aspects of life (e.g. Hammond, 1990; Aregawi, 2008).

6.2.1.1. Political Reform

As to the political reform, both women and men were given equal rights to elect and be elected, and stood on equal footing before the law. In an attempt to secure public trust and to respond to the peoples call for improvement in administration, TPLF let locals establish their own administration which were called baito (public councils) (Young, 1997; Tsegay, 1999). The first baitos, as to Tsegay (1999), were set up in the then liberated areas of Tigray Sheraro, Zana and Edaga-Arbi. Later the experience of these liberated areas was shared and implemented in other areas of Tigray once they were freed from the Derg. According to Young (1997) officials of these local administrations were responsible for different areas, inter alia, education, health, land distribution and political
leadership. Officials were elected from the local community by majority vote. As a result on the ground, significant number of women took office in local administrations. As to Aregash (quoted in Aregawi, 2008) 30% of public administrators in Tigray became women. As to account from senior ex-TPLF fighters, in the presence of this reality securing enough number of members of the baitos to be females became one of the priority areas for AWFT. In this regard informant 3 noted:

Because we had been working on capacity development of women through trainings and education, it was possible for us to have large number of women who have the capacity to take responsibility as local leaders when the baitos were set up. Thus, the time these became functional significant number of women became administrators like never before (Interview, July, 2014).

According to informants and informal discussion participants, a school established in 1984 (see for e.g. Hammond, 1990) had great role to play in terms of politically empowering women. The school called March 8, which AWFT was given the responsibility to administer was meant to train female leaders both from the army and the civilians. Here is what informant 3 had to say about it:

The main focus of March 8 was political empowerment. The question of woman was a major part of the curriculum and trainees were trained for three months to improve their leaderships skills. The trainees were coming from different bases of TPLF, the army and women’s mass associations in Tigray and out of Tigray from Sudan, Middle East, Europe and America from the migrant Tigrayan community (Interview on, July 2014).

Shortly later, in a place called Kaza, the school was able to graduate as much as 5000 female trainees who were then assigned different posts as local leaders. Therefore even if TPLF being dominant implemented the reform, AWFT was in a position to effectively use its strategy of working within the limits set by TPLF over where its double militants play a double role, to ensure its struggle for gender equality was kept afloat.
6.2.1.2. Economic Reform

As to the economic aspect of reform, women and men were given equal rights to property ownership including to land. Like never before, land was distributed to women including widows and unmarried as well as children regardless of their class, ethnic or religious backgrounds (e.g. Hammond, 1990; Young 1997; Aregawi, 2008). In pre-revolutionary Tigray, even if theoretically speaking women had equal right to hold land as men by birth, they were denied of this right in practice (Crummey quoted in Tsegay, 1999, p.64). As a matter of fact the local proverb *ni wedi risti ni gual gezmi*, meaning “land for a man and dowry for a woman” attest to this fact. Although TPLF was not the first to undertake land reform since Derg had also conducted its own way of reform which was based on the household as a unit, it was, as Tsegay has noted, TPLF’s land distribution that enabled women to hold land for the first time. TPLF’s land reform was unique in that it targeted individuals and enabled them to have right to hold land as individuals regardless of gender, marital status and other identity markers. Female ex-TPLF fighters noted that the movement’s contribution was significant in this regard. Informant 2 explained:

*It was not only TPLF, others including Derg were also promising a lot of progressive reforms. Land to the tiller, freedom of association, freedom of speech were common slogans to hear from all. But, it was only TPLF that was in a position to put its promises into practice. So, when TPLF started their initiative in land reform we had, in one way or other, to work in favour of women without harming men. We had to follow that there was equitable distribution of land to those who have right to hold land (Interview August, 2014).*

Informant 3 elaborated further on this issue:

*Due to cultural and institutional barriers women were victimized in pre-revolutionary Tigray. Let alone right to own land and property, they had no right to decide even in minor family matters. This was not only cultural*
matter, it was also institutional. Thus, it was mandatory for TPLF to undertake reforms where we lobbied. TPLF decided that all able-bodied, plus infants, own land. Here, we were working to benefit women. On one hand, they were able to get land. On the other hand, considering that it might be difficult for them to take care of their land in distant areas, we were also ensuring ways that females get fertile lands in near by areas (Interview, July, 2014).

According to this reform, all individuals in Tigray (where a significant number of them were females) above 17 years of age were, as Tsegay (1999) has noted, able to own land and were given the right to use it in the way they would like to. Children were also part of the distribution of land though the size of land given for them was half of that of adults.

6.2.1.3. Educational Reform and Education for Women

As peasants called for the opening of schools, educational reform in general had in fact been a priority area for TPLF since 1979 (Hammond, 1990). Initially, TPLF had not the necessary human power and financial capital to undertake the reform up until 1980 when it was possible (Young, 1997). And when it was implemented, the educational reform was inclusive for both females and males. Informants noted that like in the other areas of reform, AWFT had to struggle against all odds to ensure that significant number of those attending school were females and that they were successful. More importantly, Marta School, one of the two board school’s for women established by TPLF and which AWFT administered had a lot to contribute. As Hammond (1990) noted this school’s main focus was both on vocational and academic training, the ultimate goal being to transfer knowledge and skill to the community once the trainees were graduated and assigned in different localities among the masses. To this end, an academic and vocational curriculum for adults was prepared, and students had to reach grade four within two years of intensive teaching. After the graduation of 1000 female trainees in 1985 which was criticized to be slow progress, however, Marta School was forced to revise its curriculum. Accordingly, it stopped providing academic training and focused only on vocational. Another school which concentrates on academic training that came to be called School of
Academy or School of 71 was then formed and continued to provide academic training. Generally therefore, as a result of the concerted efforts in propagating education where AWFT was active having special focus on women; women began to actively take part in education. And as Hammond indicated their number could reach 30% and 40% of all students in schools in Tigray in this period under consideration.

6.2.1.4. Social Reforms

As to the social aspect of reform, early marriage was banned (age set to 15 years for girls), marriage was decided to be the association of the two marrying each other by consent, rather than the families, and divorce was decided to be a no-fault right with shared entitlements to custody and property rights (see Hammond, 1990; Young, 1997; Aregawi, 2008). As Hammond (1990) has indicated, citing testimonies of her informants during the struggle, following the legalization of marriage in 1984, TPLF also took some progressive measures on the part of its female constituents. It introduced reproductive rights which included: right to abortion, maternity-leave (three months before and after delivery), child-care scheme (where children were expected to be breastfed by mothers for two years and after that were to be handed over to the Front) as well as maternal health-care. Before the implementation of these social reforms, things were not easy. In the past, according to the Tigrayan tradition, a girl female grew up to be a mother and nothing but that. Her fate was to marry someone and bear children for him. As informant 4 recalled:

*In the past, the wish of families for their female girls was for them to get “better” husbands. Better in terms of wealth, education or family background [than their own family]. They were not considered for education or something else which would make them independent. They would grow up just to marry and live like their mothers bearing children for their husbands. Dowry and early age marriage were also common (Interview, August, 2014).*

In this regard I think of the proverbs I grew up hearing. One common proverb which readies girls for marriage is, *belai iba tetirekib* (meaning, “let her get someone to marry.” Another is, *gualkas wala ni zibi mihaba* (meaning, “it is okay to give your daughter even
to a hyena”). Simply, girls were born to be like their mothers. That is, the ones who marry will have husbands and bear children, even without their consent. As far as the traditional Tigrayan culture is concerned, it was parents who would decide for their children whom they should marry. So, even if this in principle concerned both girls and boys, girls growing up according to cultural sentiments had less power to resist traditional norms than boys. Moreover, after marriage husbands became head of the family with decision-making power in all family matters. This was not only a socio-cultural norm but institutionally endorsed. For instance, the old Penal Code of Ethiopia gives husbands power over wives and full right to administer the family (Fikremarkos, n.d).

On a similar account, divorce was mentioned to be a common feature and part and parcel of the oppressive nature of marriages in Tigray before the progressive reforms. Like in forming families, informants mentioned and group discussants endorsed that women in traditional Tigray did not have a say in ending marriages. For example, informant 3 said:

*In times of divorce it was only the husband who could have a say. Even if a woman wanted to end marriage, it was more often than not left for family arbitrators to intervene and make sure the marriage continue even at the expense of her wish. But, if the husband wanted he could divorce her without consulting any. Especially Muslim women had no right to ask why. Rather they were required to leave their house wearing what they were wearing when their husbands declared the marriage was over under any circumstances (Interview on July, 2014).*

To avoid this, TPLF had to introduce the reforms (equal right to political representation, equal right to property ownerships, divorce right, reproductive rights, equal right to education) where its female members, who were by then also members of the women’s movement, contributed a lot when putting them into practise. But, still the reforms introduced were limited due to a number of challenges.
6.3. Challenges of the Women’s Movement

Challenges are inherent to women’s movements. The women’s movement in Tigray has been facing the following major challenges in the period under consideration as presented below.

6.3.1. Prevailing Gender Norms: Women’s Inferiority and Dependence

Informants noted that women’s feeling of inferiority and dependence was one of the serious challenges limiting the achievements of the women’s movement in the period under focus. In connection to this, they noted that even if the problem was commonly shared by almost all women in Tigray (both civilians and female fighters), it was considered more serious among the former. Here is what informant 3 had to say based on her experience of working among peasant women for change of the status quo concerning the relationship between men and women and the challenge they were facing.

“We were trying our level best to change the mentality of women in rural Tigray. We were using different mechanisms and every possible opportunity to help them free themselves from the mental trap they were in. We used to tell them that male dominance over women was socio-culturally constructed and had nothing to do with nature. But, though it did not mean that they never changed, the chilling fact was that on one hand, it used to take us long time to convince them. And second when we did they were not ready to accept it full-heartedly. In general changing the civilians was by far more difficult and demanding than those in army (Interview on July, 2014).”

So even if the problem was equally shared by both civil and army members, there was clear difference and changing the civilian women mentality trapped with feeling of dependence and inferiority was demanding and serious challenge.

6.3.2. Negative Implications of TPLF Policies for the Plight of the Women’s Movement

Among the other challenges that stood out clearly from the informal discussions and from the interviews with former fighters was the negative repercussions of the marriage policy that I addressed in the previous chapter. Informant 1 noted:
Following the legalization of marriage, there was a return back to the responsibility of care giving on the part of female fighters. Once they became mothers, with that followed the responsibility to take care of children. Though it started at the time when the struggle was nearing to its end, the shying away of fighters from responsibilities of the Front to take care of other responsibilities like care of children reached its climax when some even preferred to follow their husbands abandoning their bases as fighters and be dependent on their husbands. So, it was really a problem. On one hand, it was reason of criticism, as female fighters were said to have been lagging behind. Second it was against our mission of empowering women so that they became independent and competent equal to men (Interview July, 2014)

Informant 3 on her part said:

With time, the marriage policy began to have its own limiting impact on the mission and activity of the women’s movement. When they became pregnant and mothers, members were not any longer in a position to have the motivation and vigour to perform in the best possible way as they used to be. They were reluctant to be separated from their husbands and hence were criticized for lagging behind men in performance evaluation which was mandatory in TPLF. That was a very serious challenge for us. One, it was against our mission and expectation. Our mission was to see equal representation and our expectation was for women to continue reflecting their decades built performance and take positions. But, with the nearing of the coming to an end of the struggle several were lagging and going out from the struggle (Interview on July, 2014).

Thus, the legalization of marriage was found to be having its own negative impact both to the gender friendly reforms by TPLF, and the women’s movement push for gender-equality.
6.3.3. Peasant Scepticism against Women’s Recruitment and Reform

Young (1997) noting the contributions of TPLF in terms of improving the lives of women or taking measures to do so, reckoned peasant scepticism as a limiting force. As informants noted, even if this peasant scepticism was directed at almost every effort that aimed to change the status quo in men-women relationships, it became more specifically visible with the attempt of TPLF, with recommendation from its female fighters, to train female peasants how to plough.

As I mentioned above, as part of the economic reform, land reform was introduced in the TPLF administered areas of Tigray during the struggle. The land reform, though helpful, proved to be limited in that female-headed households were not emerging beneficiaries. The reason was because due to lack of capital and agricultural implements on one hand, and skill of farming on the other hand they were handing over their lands to male tillers who would then take either half or more than half of the harvest; again putting women at a disadvantage (Young, 1997; Tsegay, 1999). To solve this problem an initiative came from members of AWFT to train peasant women on how to plough. As Tsegay noted “The first intake of trainers was about 366 women who received a three months training” (Tsegay 1999, p., 76), and who were later expected to train others. But after two years, as Tsegay noted that the programme was abandoned due to a number of reasons including worry of overload on women, opposition from traditional forces like the peasants as well as Orthodox Church. On a similar account, one of my key informants, informant 3 who had experienced the situation, said:

*Peasants were not happy with our training of women on how to plough. They opposed the training due to the fact that one, it was widely held belief of the society that if women plough would not have love and respect to their husbands. Second, that ploughing was believed not good for the health of mothers especially for their wombs (Interview on July, 2014).*

Thus, as the discussion above can show, the reforms by TPLF where the women’s movement played a great role were limited due to challenges that stem from the external societal traditions and cultural practices.
6.3.4. Party Pressure and Restrictive Measures

At first it was mutually beneficial for the women’s movement and TPLF to work cooperatively. However, over time when the women’s movement started to push more resolutely for gender equality and strive for more radical claims even when working within the limits set by TPLF, there came a time when these claims came to stand in stark contrast with the positions and interests of TPLF; and hence women’s activities were limited.

In 1988 AWFT was criticized. Especially the then leaders of the association were blamed for favouring women over men. You know! Following the legalization of marriage there were new developments in TPLF. A new organ called Social Affairs Office was set to follow marriage and family issues. New policies in relation to rights of husbands and wives plus children were introduced. Thus, we had to work to make sure the new programmes concerning the treatment of pregnant mothers, mothers and children were put into practice. A new way of rationing was introduced for expectants and their babies. As a result, the association worked hard to put what has been on paper into practice. Besides, we had to work hard so that the voices and concerns of some female fighters in relation to placement and assignment of responsibilities were considered. But, in an unprecedented way, that became cause for criticism. A party conference was held at a place called Dejena. At this conference AWFT was officially condemned for going too far in its claims about gender equality, and some of its members were criticized for being radicals or feminists. They were identified as feminists, who support feminism (Informant 3, Interview July, 2014).

More importantly as to extract from a document entitled The Question of Women and Challenges from Feminism, (AWFT 1988b, p. 74) in this conference, feminism was decided to be banned in TPLF. As stated in this document, the motto of the day became “death to feminism.”
Thus, it means TPLF was willing to entertain claims and deeds by its female constituents only within the limits it had set. Interestingly, however, it still continued to support its plea for gender equality. As to the accounts from informants and informal discussants, TPLF stressed its position that it would like to see women emancipated together with men. The Front underlined the fact that it was only the struggle against the Derg that could help to achieve gender equality, and not by way of feminism. Therefore in general the politics of the party had also its own role to play when it comes to the limited achievements of the women’s movement in this period.

6.4. Concluding Discussion

As the chapter has shown, following the formation of AWFT, TPLF begun to dominate and control the women’s movement in Tigray. Its goals became primary goals at the expense of the goals of the women’s movement that were deemed secondary. AWFT fully became under TPLF, financed and directed by it. More importantly, TPLF became the dominant power determining what to do for and/or with women. In this regard, first it succeeded in implementing the legalization of marriage and reduction of new recruitment of female fighters. Besides, it was responsible for undertaking several progressive reforms where the women’s movement role was confined to working within the limits set by TPLF. As a result, and in line with Molyneux (1998), the chapter shows that the form of mobilization in Tigray under AWFT was directed. This form mainly fits into what Molyneux, specified in her discussion as the second form of directed mobilization, a mobilization for a broader goal but with a commitment to consider women’s issues as part and parcel of the general goal in the process. The other two forms of directed mobilization being directed mobilization for the sake of broader goal with no mention of women, and directed mobilization even in a way that can cost women some of their previous rights.

But, as Molyneux noted during directed forms of mobilization, even if, women’s issues are put secondary to other broader goals of those who have authority, in this regard, political organizations or parties like TPLF; depending on the specific external environment and the opportunity structures entailed, women, in their role as double militants, can still make significant strides in advancing gender-friendly goals. In the case
of Tigray this seems to be the case. Even if the mobilization was directed, it was in this period that Tigrean women could secure more gender friendly reforms. Economically, as a result of the reforms of TPLF, women begun to enjoy equal right to property ownership including land. Socially, traditional harmful practices were reduced, divorce became a no fault law, reproductive rights were secured including the right to abortion and of course marriage became a matter of mutual concern. Politically, women started to equally take part with men. They were given equal right to elect and be elected in local assemblies. As a result at some time in this period large number of women became local administrators in Tigray. Similarly, as a result of the educational reform, the participation of women in education was heightened. Their number even became nearly equal to all male students in schools in Tigray at that time. All these have been possible because double militants were also effectively active in using every available opportunities, in this regard reforms of TPLF. In this period, the activists were actively serving both TPLF and the women’s movement positioning themselves in both, and negotiating their position without necessarily losing ground in both. Or in other words, given that these double militants had key positions in both TPLF and the women’s movement, it was possible for them not only to influence decisions in a way that never put either the party or their movement at risk of disagreement that arises from a clash of interest, but used every opportunity to pursue reforms that were to their advantage. As a result, it was not only that there was formulation of more gender sensitive reforms in this period from 1985-1991, some reforms were surprisingly radical, for example, abortion right which was fully endorsed among the female members of TPLF after marriage was legalized. What does this signify then? The point at stake is, therefore, the Tigrean case show that, so long as there is a party devoted enough to undertake progressive reforms and provided that women are allowed to have at least a separate organization where they discuss their agenda, set priority areas and goals no matter what, and regardless of the fact that they are primary or not, even during directed mobilization, it is still possible to influence party politics to a higher level and come up with gender sensitive reforms. But this does not mean, as indicated in the discussion that there has not been limitations to the women’s movement in Tigray during this period. As McAdam (1996) noted political opportunity structures do not only facilitate but also can obstruct mobilizations. In this regard, in Tigray, as the
chapter has shown although significant gender-sensitive changes were undertaken during this period, it was also evident that the reforms were limited due to the prevailing political opportunity structure pertaining to the external environment constituted by the party politics of TPLF, which was based on a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of gender-equality, and which was also susceptible to being influenced by social and cultural traditions and practices of the Tigrayan society, especially the traditional forces, the peasantry and the Ethiopian Orthodox church clergy. The next chapter will discuss how the relationships between TPLF and the women’s movement played out in the time from 1991 to present and how gender-sensitive changes have been put in motion since then.
CHAPTER 7

THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIPS WITH TPLF IN POST VICTORY PERIOD

In the preceding chapter I have reflected on the dominant position TPLF had on what to do for and/or with women in Tigray and the role of the women’s movement, to put any gendered moves by TPLF to the full advantage of women while working within the limit set by TPLF. Given that in the considered period TPLF was active only in Tigray, I limited the discussion to cover what happened in Tigray. But in this chapter, provided that TPLF in coalition with other political parties has manage to expand its influence beyond Tigray since 1989 (when the Derg was ousted from Tigray) and after seizing power at national level as of 1991, the discussion will also cover developments in gender politics at country level without losing the focus on Tigray where the women’s movement under study is operating and where TPLF is dominant constituting regional government.

In this context, I will highlight the fate of the women’s movement and women after victory addressing questions such as: how have the relationships between TPLF-based EPRDF coalition and the women’s movement evolved after victory in 1991? Have there been any shifts in positions, or has party politics continued to dominate and determine what to do with and/or for women? Have the revolutionary gains for women been sustained after victory or not? Have women been side-lined after the struggle ended, or have they continued to be part and parcel of the post-struggle’s political scene in the country’s overall pursuit of development and democracy?

Thus, in the proceeding sections, first I will reflect on what happened during the transitional period after the downfall of the Derg and the TPLF-based EPRDF coalition had seized power in Ethiopia to show if that has had impact on women’s issues and the women’s movement in Tigray. Then I will continue to discuss the strategies used by the women’s movements to show their effectiveness in achieving the goals it has been
advancing since then, and also to reflect on the feature and dynamics of relationships with TPLF\(^4\) and/or TPLF-based EPRDF. Finally I reflect on the challenges they have faced.

7.1. Transitional Period Developments in Ethiopia with Focus on Gender Politics

As Jaquette (1989) has noted, in transition periods there is the doing of politics in an “unusual” way. It is well covered in the literature that transitions to democracy opens up spaces for all forms of opinions (political or otherwise) to come to the fore and, among other things, independent civil societies organizing, including women’s organizations, to thrive (see also Alvarez, 1990; Hassim, 2006; Waylen, 2008). After the TPLF-based EPRDF coalition took over power in Ethiopia in 1991, as Burgess (2013) noted a shift to an official democracy was heralded. With swift to revolutionary democracy, officially socialism was banned as it was the case in other countries too following the disintegration of USSR, and more importantly, inter alia, independent organizing of different groups, where women’s organizations are one, became reality. Besides, Women’s Affairs Office (WAO) was opened under the office of the Prime Minister, and a women’s policy, National Policy for Ethiopian Women (NPEW), that incorporated internationally recognized human and democratic rights, was formulated in 1993 having the following major objectives:

\[1. \text{Facilitating conditions conducive to speeding of equality between men and women so that women can participate in the political, social and economic life of their country on equal terms with men and ensuring that their rights to own property as well as their other human rights are respected and that they are not excluded from the enjoyment of their [sic] fruits of their labour or from performing public functions and being decision makers.}\]

\(^4\) In this chapter and the conclusion part I will use both TPLF and TPLF-based EPRDF interchangeably. When referring to Tigray I will preferably use TPLF because it has constituted the regional government in Tigray as one member of the coalition EPRDF. But, when raising issues with implications beyond Tigray, I will preferably use TPLF-based EPRDF. Which ever case I use, however, I would like to make it clear that I am basically referring to one political party and party politics.
2. Facilitating the necessary condition whereby rural women can have access to basic social services and to ways and means of lightening their work-load; and,

3. Eliminating, step by step, prejudices as well as customary and other practices that are based on the idea of male supremacy and enabling women to hold public office and to participate in the decision making process at all levels (TGE- NPEW, 1993, pp. 25-26).

According to Fikremarkos (n.d.), the formulation of a national Policy for women, was a great leap forward for gender issues in Ethiopia, and reflecting that the government was serious. Besides, it also showed that TPLF-based EPRDF coalition kept its promise from the struggle based on that gender equality would only be possible when the struggle was won (which it had). In 1995 a new constitution, which incorporated human and democratic rights was ratified having a separate article, Article 35, on women (where women’s movement in Tigray played a part during its formulation as I will show later), and a federal system of governance set along ethnic-linguistic lines was proclaimed. However, significant gender sensitive and positive developments were registered during the transition period in Ethiopia 1991-1995, the question remains: Did these developments have any influence on the women’s movement in Tigray, or not? And conversely, did these developments have the imprints of the women’s movement in Tigray? In the next section, I will reflect on these issues. I will explore the relationship between the women’s organisation in Tigray and the TPLF-based EPRDF coalition as a state power or TPLF, and which continued to constitute, as indicated above, the regional government in Tigray.

7.2. The Formation of Democratic Association of Women in Tigray

After the taking over of power by the TPLF-based EPRDF coalition, AWFT joined all other women’s mass associations of Tigrayan women both inside and outside the region including those abroad, and formed the Democratic Association of Tigray Women (DATW) in a founding congress held in Mekelle in 1991. As to Tsegay (1999) DATW was formed incorporating women of various social, economic and political backgrounds.
As to account from informants, in the congress it was decided for DATW to be independent and the reason for independence at this time was explained by informant 4 in the following way:

> Organization based on gender cannot be political organization for men or women only. Political organizations should be open for all groups of people in a society. There is no such a thing called politics for women or politics for men. Politics is an ideology with which a country is led. This ideology serves both men and women. But why women need to organize independently is, because they were lagging behind men and had to fill this gap and nothing else. It is when women can have organization of their own as women they can fill such gaps. In order to either support or oppose they need to be independent. If they are with political organization, they are members of that particular organization and they can do what the party tells them to do. They cannot go out of it. Besides, TPLF cannot be an organization for men or women based on their gender. It is political in a sense it is open for all. As individuals, we can join TPLF and no one is forced to join. But, as women, regardless of whether we are with TPLF or not, we face the same problem/oppression. Thus because of this we need to be in this organization of our own as women (Interview, August, 2014).

Informant 3 accounted similarly:

> As a matter of fact when the idea of establishing a separate organization from TPLF was raised, there were some who did not find the idea attractive. They did not like the idea of separating ourselves from TPLF after victory. But, later a general consensus was reached on the necessity to form a separate and independent organization that includes all women in Tigray. First its importance to strengthen the organization even at international level was discussed and agreed. Second, it was briefed that the constitution that the country would have would allow and guarantee such organizing (Interview, July, 2014).
Thus as the accounts from the above informants can reveal, women decided to have an independent separate organization pertaining to the promised political developments following the downfall of the Derg, and wanting more space for their claims as women. As indicated above, even if there were some who did not find the idea of having an independent women’s organization helpful, after consensus was reached in the founding congress in Mekelle which was headed by Aregash, a number of ground-breaking decisions that significantly would determine the fate of the new women’s association and its relationship with TPLF were put in motion. In this regard, informant 3 noted:

*First and foremost, the association declared itself independent. In this regard, it set its own written objectives quite independently like never before and decided to fund itself. The sources of funds were decided to be a monthly/annual fee from members which was decided to be 0.25 Ethiopian cents/month, and external donors. Besides, an elaborated structure was designed, and three full-time employees were assigned: Roman (chairperson), Hiwot (vice) and Atsede (secretary) (Interview, July, 2014).*

As observed, the then independently stated objectives of WAT came to include:
1. Convincing and mobilizing women members both in rural areas and towns to enable them actively to take part in the activities of the association and emerge as beneficiaries
2. To ensure independence of the association through observance of an already set internal procedural rules and regulations (constitution)
3. Fight against backwardness and traditional practices that harm women, as well as working to strengthen the association both in terms of human and financial capital (Art. 4), enhancing women’s participation in education both in quality and number (Art. 5), and participate in awareness creation so as to mitigate HIV/AIDS through ensuring behavioural change (Art. 6), plus increasing income of the association and women (Art. 7), and working to the ideas and culture of democracy (Art. 8) (WAT Constitution, 2012, p. 7).

Therefore, it is visible from the stated objectives and the discussion above that DATW had started a process of freeing itself from TPLF based on objectives that focused,
not at satisfying a bigger goal of a bigger organization as was the case before, but the goal of its own constituents, women right after the victory. Besides, the objectives also reflect the diversification of areas of focus of the women’s movement in Tigray, and consequently, a shift in the cause for mobilization. The objectives show that women started mobilizing for economic, social and political causes based on the ideals and culture of democracy: equality, liberty, rule of law, freedom of association, freedom of speech or in nutshell human and democratic rights.

7.3. Strategies of Mobilization

Besides forming a separate women’s organization, once it declared its independence, DATW, which from 1996 on was re-named Women Association of Tigray (WAT) and in 1997 registered as an NGO that works on rights issues, started to advance its goals developing a number of other strategies.

7.3.1. Networking

Networking is a common working strategy utilized by women’s movements. Networking can be done at local, national, regional or international levels. As Trip and colleagues (2009) have indicated networking which have regional and international dimensions have proved helpful in creating coalition used as strategy by contemporary women’s movements in Africa. Burgess (2013) has indicated that Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) networked itself nationally and internationally to share experiences and to secure fund. On a similar account, WAT has networked with a number of organizations and groups that work on women both at regional and national levels. This is what informant 4 said about the case:

We have networked ourselves with other national associations like EWLA and also some other regional associations which constitute the Ethiopian Women’s Federation and in which we are member. (…) We work cooperatively with those whom we are networked with either at organization to organization level or at individual members level. For instance, there has been case where our individual members received professional legal support from EWLA in times when we requested EWLA with formal letter for cooperation during appeal to
Federal Courts. This is just one example. The same is true with the rest (Interview, August, 2014).

Similarly informant 5 in Adeday Micro-finance\(^5\) for women noted:

There is Women’s Federation both at regional and national level. Women’s Federation is an entity where those working together on women meet to cooperate and evaluate their work. In the case of Tigray the regional federation constitutes professional women’s organizations namely Teachers, Artists, Merchants, Lawyers and one advocacy organization of the Disabled Women Association and WAT. They have their own congress meeting sessions and leaders (Interview on August, 2014).

According to informants networking has been effectively used not only to undertake activities and share experiences, but also to secure fund:

The first time we set out with our independent organizing we were faced with critical financial and facility problems. At that time we were able to solve the problem through the funds we could secure from international donors. The international donors with whom we were linked were ready to provide funds for rehabilitation of war torn economies. So, because we were organized at that time we were linked and hence we were able to get the funds which we have been using to provide loan to those needy women meanwhile circulating the return money with interest since then (informant 3, Interview July, 2014).

On her part informant 4 said: “We have links for instance with Oxfam America. For example, using the fund we got from them, it was possible for us to solve critical shortage of potable water in some dry areas of Raya [a place in Tigray]” (Interview, August, 2014). Therefore networking has helped WAT to secure funds and that has helped it to be involved in solving practical societal problems like lack of provision of pure drinking water, that is, besides advocating and lobbying for women’s rights.

\(^5\) Adeday is a registered independent micro-finance. It was formed by WAT in 2013 and is currently providing loan to the public (70% to women and 30% to men).
7.3.2. Media, Publication and Focused Capacity Building

As mentioned by Mahdi (2004) publication and awareness creation were among the strategies utilized by women’s movements in Iran. As Trip and colleagues (2009) showed contemporary women’s movements in Africa have used new communication technologies (internet) and media (print as well as radio and TV) as strategies to forward their agendas. So much so, in the case of Tigray, informants noted that media and publication are used as strategies to create awareness and sensitize societies about harmful traditional practices. As observed, besides publishing magazines like *Harina*, legal documents have been distributed to different areas in Tigray to be used during face to face public education regarding laws of the country and specially the family law. Besides, a programme for women in the *Dimtsi Woyane* (voice of the revolution) is used to disseminate information about rights of women and harmful traditional practices. WAT has also been involved in building the capacity of its members through formal training. Given that one of its goals is to improve the economy of its constituents, the association has included this in its strategy since 1995.

*WAT has been providing loans to women to improve their life and solving economic problems. We believe that economic empowerment is key to meeting other goals. They [women] cannot be equal to men if they are not economically empowered. Hence, as part of this, WAT has been providing loans to 15,000 women since 1995. And these women were able to get training in one of our training centres Marta training centre in Adigrat, Dehab Tesfay training centre in Shire and Zewdu Ayele training centre in Maychew. We give them the loan but meanwhile we provide them with training in order to 1. help them know how to use the money, and to ultimately ensure economic empowerment as per our objectives, and 2. To make sure they can return the loan (Informant 4, Interview August, 2014).*

As to informant 5, the training in the centres mainly focuses on building particular skills of those who take loan from WAT (before Adeday took up on it) on such areas as
production, household resource management and budget, accounting and so on. One, to economically empower women by building their capacity. Second, to ensure the circulation of WAT’s money through ensuring return capacity of those who take loan. So, in general even if the capacity building has specific purpose and is limited to those taking loans, capacity building of women members is hence one of the strategies that the women’s movement in Tigray has been employing to advance its goals since formation of the DATW.

7.3.3. Joint Committee

At regional level, WAT works in cooperation with Tigray Women Affairs Bureau (TWAB) and the Women’s League of TPLF (from where TPLF enlist future female leaders). These three have formed a joint committee. This joint committee set agenda together, discuss and evaluate issues jointly in light of each ones individual plans, achievements and challenges along all their respective structures. When asked to what level they work together and whether one dominating the other is possible, informant 4 noted:

We work together in matters we can work together. For instance, if there is a package by government and would like to meet women at grass-roots level, we would discuss the matter with representatives from TWAB and the Women’s League of TPLF to find ways by which we could mobilize our already grouped and organized members. The same is true during vaccination campaign and so. So, generally, there is no hand twisting among us. We work based on common understanding and mutual respect for mutual benefit (Interview on August, 2014).

So, even if WAT has independent status and it pursues it as strategy, it has, however, continued to share experiences with other groups working on women including TPLF’s Women’s League and the governmental organ TWAB in a way which is proving helpful not only to discuss and plan matters of concern so as to mobilize women during special occasions like health and other developmental campaigns, but also to arrange together special sessions and trainings for women. For example, Women’s Forum is a special
arrangement for female representatives in the regional parliament of Tigray. It mainly focuses on building the capacity of female parliamentarians. According to informants, the forum is directly accountable for the vice speaker of the house of peoples representatives of the regional government and it undertakes its activities under the auspices of the Women’s Affairs standing committee of the regional parliament where WAT exert influence through its senior and influential activists that are currently holding higher governmental positions. According to informant 6:

*In the forum, female representatives receive training which concentrate on leadership and management; discuss intensively policies and strategies as well as evaluate and summarise main points on interest before the convening of the regional parliament for session meeting (Interview, August, 2014).*

According to many of the informants, this is done to make sure female representatives have the necessary knowledge and skill so that their representation will be meaningful, and far beyond simple physical presence in the regional parliament where women currently constitute 48.8% of the seats.

### 7.3.4 Grassroots Grouping

Finally, grassroots grouping is another strategy which has been consistently followed by the women’s movement in Tigray since 1976 but which has been revised and reformed with time in response to socio-political developments in the external environment. According to informants, currently most of the activities of WAT are deemed to be performed at the level of *Limiat Gujile* (meaning Development Group). *Limiat Gujile* is the lowest level of the rather elaborated structure (see appendix III) of WAT. It is a residential group which consists of 25-30 women (WAT, 2009). Informant 4 elaborated on WAT’s grassroots structure and how things are done at that level in the following manner:

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6 Before 2009, the lowest level in the structure of WAT was called Ade 30 (literally meaning mother of 30) signifying a group that consists of 30 women. But after 2009 a new structure was designed and the lowest level came to be called *Limiat Gujile* reflecting that focus was being exerted on development issues.
It is at this level that a lot of practical things are done to change the lives of women. The fact that it is the grouping of those at the grassroots level makes it effective to reach large numbers of people. Among those members grouped under one residential cell consisting of 25-30 members, five are leaders and the rest are ordinary members. But, what is interesting is that all are connected with one another by network. The five leaders of a single residential cell are given specific responsibilities. They are responsible for follow up and control of certain specific activities within the categories of Health and Social Affairs, Education, Mobilization, Economy, Politics and Prevention of Harmful Traditional Practices. Currently, members guided by their group leaders in their network are expected to look after any woman/family in their residence area. Whereas those in the education group follow whether families in their residence area are sending their children (especially girls) to school or not, those working on health and social affairs are responsible to know whether there are practice of harmful traditional practices, whether there are pregnant women or not, whether pregnant mothers are visiting health centre for medication and vaccination or not, whether they deliver on hospitals or not, and whether newly born babies and their mothers are vaccinated or not (Interview, August, 2014).

According to informants, to ensure conformity and success of the strategy, ostracizing non-confirming mothers from traditional gatherings, evaluation and assessment followed by grading of each and every members of a group are used. In connection to this, informants and discussants in informal discussions endorsed that the strategy has proved effective in preventing traditional harmful practices, heightening society’s consciousness on the ideals of gender equality which paved way for increasing girls attendance of school, improving attendance of health services and consequent rescuing of the lives of pregnant women, mothers and babies. Informant 4 witnessed that the strategy is effective in such a way:
Just to give one practical example, Tigray has excelled other regions in Ethiopia when it comes to percentage of women who are giving birth at clinics. The experience of Tigray is currently taken as role model let alone at country level even at continental level [in Africa]. Nowadays, thanks to the concerted effort of our members and the governmental willingness, 61% of pregnant women in Tigray are delivering in health centres. This is because of the work at the residential group level. We are still not fully satisfied with it we would continue to work on it together with our government and our devoted members (Interview, August, 2014).

Thus, as to the responses, it seems that the real job is being carried out at the lowest level of grouping as per the structure of the association and it is proving effective as a strategy. Her account also endorses my previous discussion as regards the fact that WAT is continuing to work together with TPLF now constituting the regional government in Tigray or in other words the state, on such matters of common concern. As a matter of fact, data that I compiled shows that WAT in this regard is mobilizing 685,000 women in Tigray.

7.4. Achievements of the Women’s Movement in the Post 1991
So far I have presented the strategies that have been designed by the women’s movement in Tigray since 1991, in this part of this chapter I will set on presentation of achievements of the women’s movement in Tigray. First I will present accomplishments in terms of political representation. Then I would shed some light on the gender friendly legislative changes/reforms for these two issues remained the focus of the women’s movement and are areas where remarkable victories have been registered.

7.4.1. Representation in Parliament
As Trip and colleagues (2009) noted equal political representation has been one of the central goals of women’s movements across the globe. In the case of post 1990 Africa, to ensure increased legislative representation of women, several women’s movements in different countries (Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Senegal, Tanzania, Sierraleone, South
African, Uganda and Zambia) have been lobbying for 50-50 representation of men and women in parliaments. In Tigray, the women’s movement has been advocating for equal representation of women in all organs of government during the time of struggle and after that in the past 24 years or in other words in the past four electoral periods. In this regard, looking into the realities on the ground and based on the data that I compiled, the women’s movement has made advances. To expound, in the first electoral period (1995-2000) the number of female parliamentarians in Tigray were 18%. The number increased to 28% in the second electoral period (2000-2005). In the third (2005-2010) it reached to 50% and this time in the fourth electoral period (2010-2015) the number of female representatives in the regional parliament is 48.8%. Thus in Tigray the general trend is that women have continued to make big strides in terms of their political representation even after the victory. They are well represented in the decision making organ of the regional government. But, though there is promising increase in number of women in the legislative organ, both informants and informal discussion participants all agreed that number of women in the executive and judiciary organs of government is limited. For instance, the data that I collected show that out of the executive positions in Tigray, at region level, it is only 20% positions that are occupied by women. In the judiciary too, although the number of representation of women increase when we go down the administrative structure reaching, for instance, 50% in social courts, those at the top is minimal.

7.4.2. Legislative Reform
7.4.2.1. Constitutional Reform

Ethiopia has, in the course of the 20th Century, formulated four constitutions when including the latest FDRE 1995 Constitution (Abebe, n.d.). The FDRE constitution has incorporated both general and specific provisions in relation to the rights of women. Besides ensuring that both men and women enjoy the rights stipulated in the constitution, its Article 35 is specifically devoted for the rights of women. It provides women, equal right to men, among other things, in such areas as property ownership; marriage and family matters; maternity leave; and also bans customary laws that affect women negatively; calls for affirmative action to redress past historical legacies that put women
at a disadvantage; gives full right for women to gain access for family planning and to be consulted in development projects that can significantly impact their lives.

According to a senior TPLF cadre and female fighter, the current gender-friendly constitution has the imprint of the women’s movement in Tigray. She said that during its formulation in the transition period, 1991-1995, DATW had an important role to play in making sure the constitution became gender sensitive. For instance in a way that can show what role the women’s movement had during the formulation of the new FDRE constitution, informant 4 noted:

*We were better organized than any other organisations that worked on women in Ethiopia at the time of constitution formulation. Hence, when the constitution was presented for public discussion we forwarded a lot of comments for the constitution to consider the rights of women. We demanded that the constitution gives equal right for both men and women. We believe we succeeded in ensuring a constitution that was gender-friendly like never before (Interview, August, 2014).*

Informant 1 on her part said:

*It was us women especially those of us who were better organized that happened to have a strong sense and say when it comes to the issue of women. Let alone for demanding gender equality, cognizant of the fact that poor women are tempted to sell their lands, it was us women who strongly supported the idea of public ownership of land of the country and the banning of the use of land as commodity for sale. We also had a say in relation to the right of self-determination till secession. So, we had significantly contributed so that our concerns be incorporated in the final draft of the constitution. That is why, I think, we have a gender-friendly constitution now (Interview, July, 2014).*

As a matter of fact, here it helps to note that Article 40 of the FDRE constitution covers the right to property ownership. In this regard, Article 40 (3) states “Land is a common
property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange.”

7.4.2.2. Government Structure
Another contribution of the women’s movement in Tigray with implication at national level was its success in meeting demand for governmental structure for gender issues at all levels of administration. Informant 4 noted as a result of the concerted effort of women in all parts of the country where DATW was one, plus the willingness of the ruling party, a government structure for women had been set in the 1993 *National Policy on Ethiopian Women*.

*During the early periods of our organization as an independent women association, we had shortage of human power and capital. It was hence necessary for us to demand a governmental organization that could support our efforts to improve the lives of women and to bring gender equality. So we pressed for that. And we believe we succeeded in this when the Women Affairs Office was finally opened (Interview, August, 2014).*

Burgess (2013) indicated that one of the developments noticed in Ethiopia, in the aftermath of victory in 1991, that concerned women was the establishment of the Women’s Affairs Office (WAO) which, at higher level was at first under the office of the prime minister. In this regard, whereas departments at federal level of the government were made constitute offices, through decentralization regional governments were also allowed to establish women’s bureaus which were also constitutionally recognized and protected.

Later, pertaining to pressure and concern from different groups that work on women, especially the Women’s Association of Tigray (WAT) according to informants, the office was elevated to ministry level in 2002, as Ministry of Women’s Affairs, but changed to Ministry of Women, Youth and Children in 2010\(^7\). A woman minister was assigned to the

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\(^7\) As to informants, even if the nomenclature for the ministry was changed to Ministry of Women, Youth and Children at national level and bureaus at regional level were made to follow the same way of naming since then, in Tigray due to the stiff resistance from WAT, the old nomenclature, Tigray Women’s Affairs Bureau (TWAB) has been sustained. WAT
post and its own budget was allotted. According to informant 8, the main responsibilities of this ministry became two-fold from them onwards: first, to organize different groups working directly with women; and secondly to effectuate gender main-streaming at national level.

Even if, Biseswar (2008) and Burgess (2013) appreciated the establishment of the office, they have rebuffed it as merely symbolic rather than practical when it comes to its work on the ground which might be hampered by lack of qualified staff and financial resources. In the same manner, informants and discussants in my study hesitated to agree that the women’s affairs bureau is doing what it is expected to do. For instance, despite the fact that the women’s affairs bureau has continued to work with groups working on women like WAT and is working on gender main-streaming, they said that it has not done enough and its presence seems more of symbolic. In a way that can show that the women’s affairs bureau presence in the region is for token gesture, one female discussant said:

*It surprises me when the women’s affairs bureau is not working with what it is supposed to work. It is not women’s groups, and organizations so and so that should take the initiative to work for women. It is this particular office that should look after them and try to help them to widen their involvement with women. But, what you see on the ground is that it is the women’s organizations, say for example, WAT that takes the lead to initiate discussions, actions and so on. Thus, it is really surprising why this office is not doing the job it has to do (Informal Discussion, July, 2014).*

The office does not seem to be active in fulfilling its promises of supporting these groups working on women, and even its role in implementing gender main streaming which is also one of its two main responsibilities. Based on my observation of the presence of gender departments and/or gender experts in the different governmental offices, and also as to account from participants in informal discussions, it can be claimed gender opposed the new nomenclature because it conflated women’s issues with that of youth and children.
main-streaming is at its infant stage implemented by only few bureaus at higher level. It is very slow progress compared to the mission and vision of the women’s affairs bureau. It seems that little progress has been achieved since the time it was elevated to the level of ministry at national level and bureaus were established at the regional level.

7.4.2.3. Reforming Old Laws

Besides calling for new laws, women’s movements have been behind repel of old discriminatory laws or their revision in different countries. For instance as indicated in the literature review part, in the case of Botswana, Bauer (2011) has noted that the women’s movement led by the women’s organization called Emang Basadi (stand up women!) was responsible for the abolition of a host of discriminatory laws in the country. Similarly, Madunagu (2008) has shown that the Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF) successfully mobilized against and repelled discriminatory laws in the country. In the case of Ethiopia, EWLA played a significant role in abolition of old discriminatory laws like the Family Law and the amendment of old codes that had gender discriminatory clauses like the Penal Code as to account from Burgess (2013). Under the same token, informants indicated that the women’s movement in Tigray exerted a lot of efforts calling for repel and/or revision of old laws with discriminatory clauses. Fikremarkos noted: “In addition to the FDRE Constitution in 1995 with several provisions relevant to women’s rights, many other laws have been enacted and the existing ones have been revised in a particularly gender-sensitive manner. Chief among these laws are the Revised Family Law and the Revised Criminal Code” (Fikremarkos, n.d., p. 51).

According to informants, even if for short period of time, immediately following the victory, the old laws of the country were put on motion but were challenged as these were full of discriminatory clauses.

_The old Civil Code was coated with phrases that do not only undermine women but also preach the supremacy of men over women. The old civil code was reminder of the institutionalized oppression of women by men in Ethiopia both during the Imperial and the Derg regimes. For example article 635 of the Civil Code did not only give a husband right to be head, of family but also to be responsible for discipline of members of family including wife. That means, it was right and
acceptable for husbands to beat their wives and this was endorsed by the law of the country (Informant 3, Interview on July, 2014).

On a similar account, (Gizaw, 2009) asserted that whereas article 635 of the old Civil Code expressed in black and white that husbands are responsible to be heads of their respective families, article 641 of the same code asserted the possibility for wife to serve as servant in the absence of maids. Thus, as to informants, WAT’s main focus became amending and repelling the old Family Law. Accordingly, provided the fact that regions were given full right to have their own Family Laws as per the constitution which allows so; WAT became the first organization that work on women to prepare its own version of the Family Law which it presented and approved in the regional parliament of Tigray in 1998 as per Proclamation No. 33/98. Later because gaps in provisions of the law were found in the originally revised Family Law of the region, WAT once more did revision and succeeded with its approval in 2007 as per proclamation No. 116/2007. The current regional Family Law of Tigray is full of provisions that guarantee more rights for women. Inter alia the law covers custody (Article 105) where both husbands and wives have equal right; divorce (Article 96) which is made a no fault law giving both equal right for divorce; polygamy (Article 20) in which infidelity is prohibited; equal property ownerships (Article 78) and equal family administration (Article 68). Informants appreciated the achievements as golden comparing the experience of women when the old laws were applicable. “In the past let alone to be on equal footing with their husbands, wives had no right even to give names to their babies. But thanks to our struggle we have come to change this. Now women have their rights on each and every affair of their family” (Interview, July, 2014).

Similarly informant 4 appreciated this achievement in the following way:

Women had been victims on a number of areas of the old laws of the country. But, none compares to the Family Law. Every right was given to husbands and women had no rights. Let alone to own property, to head family, to make decisions, they were not even allowed to name their babies. It was all these discriminatory clauses that
were removed as a result of the revision. Hence, it is a very real and tangible achievement (Interview on August, 2014).

The other area of law which has been reformulated based on the principles of gender equality as has been stipulated in the Ethiopian Constitution was the criminal code (Fikremarkos, n.d.). In the current Criminal Code (2004) unlike in the old Penal Code, all forms of violence are criminalized: physical abuse, be it in marriage unions or else in irregular unions (article, 564), female genital mutilation (articles 565-66), early marriage (article 649), prostitution of others for gain (article 634), abduction, (articles 587-590), rape (article 620-628) as well as trafficking women (article 597).

Megersa (2014) noted that the revised Criminal Code (2004) “addresses violence against women in different forms: by expanding the existing vague provision, by introducing new offences, by redefining the elements of these offences, by adding aggravating circumstances and by revising the penalties applicable in cases of violation.” In the context of this, speaking of these changes to the Criminal Code which is applicable in regions too, female informants who are participants of the women’s movement in Tigray pride themselves that the changes were possible due to the concerted efforts of different groups working on women in which WAT was one.

7.4.2.4. Supplementary Laws

Finally, besides, the above legislative achievements at national level which have also regional implications, other promising legislative changes have also been endorsed with the promulgation of a number of complementary proclamations at regional level. As to accounts from informants, once the necessary reforms were endorsed, the big worry was their implementation. Accordingly, it was found necessary to take further measures as per the recommendation of groups working on women like WAT. Informant 6 explained:

Equitable laws were prepared. They were available on paper. But, still they could not be guarantee for women. It was reported that abuse of the laws was common. So, it was necessary to devise mechanisms. Thus, the joint committee (WAT, TWAB and the Women’s League of TPLF) worked together with the regional government to devise mechanisms. Thus, declarations were advised so as to reform the way laws are approached and interpreted (Interview, August, 2014).

Considering the possibility for abuse of the law, the regional government of Tigray had to make certain reforms impacting women, and Proclamation No. (224/2012) on Authority and Duties of Social Courts of the Regional State of Tigray was promulgated. As to informant 7:

To meet the demands of mothers who may find it difficult to attend courts at distant areas, family matters were made be the responsibility of local social courts. Besides, according to the new declaration out of six judges where by three are reserve and the rest three will be active to be assigned in courts, 50% of them are expected to be females. Plus, out of the three active judges at least one of them should be a woman (Interview, August 2014).

When elaborating, a majority of informants underlined that the arrangement is done to make sure that the laws on paper are observed to the possible required level believing that the presence of female judges would prevent any breach of the laws due to male gender bias if all the judges are males. The response also show that how much cooperation among the Women’s League, WAT and TWAB is proving helpful in identifying gray areas in the law and taking corrective measures.

7.5. Challenges of the Women’s Movement in the Post Victory Period
The experiences of various women’s movement in different part of our globe show that lack of budget, isolation and marginalization, restrictive laws, incumbent male leadership,
discriminatory constitution are among the challenges they faced (see for e.g. Barrig, 1994; Molyneux, 1998; Al-Ali, 2002; Bauer, 2011; Trip et al., 2009 and Burgess, 2013). Similarly, the women’s movement in Tigray has faced serious challenges since the time it separated itself from TPLF as an organization. As the previous chapter has shown, during the struggle time, especially when the women’s movement was directed by TPLF through AWFT, it was TPLF who has been covering expenses, like, for publications, trainings, conferences and so. But, right after it separated itself and formed its own organization such help from TPLF was no more possible at official level. Thus, lack of budget and facility became problems of DATW. Informant 3 explained:

By the time we set ourselves free, the first challenge we faced was shortage of finance and facilities. We had to ask TPLF for help to provide us with an office which we secured first until we were obliged to return it later. The time was transition time and the government by itself had shortage of finances. So, we were faced with critical financial and facility problems (Interview, July, 2014).

Thus, like other women’s organizations the women’s movement in Tigray was also faced with critical shortage of finance limiting to cover its budget. As a matter of fact even if this immediate challenge was solved through securing funds from external donors and also fees from members, a majority of the informants and discussants in informal groups agreed that the problem still limits the performance of the women’s movement in Tigray. Moreover, they mentioned that the controversial NGO law, which was promulgated in Ethiopia in 2009, significantly aggravated the problem.

The 2009 Civil Society Law of Ethiopia is considered one of the most controversial laws to have been proclaimed in the country since the current government took power 24 years back. It is criticized among other things for contradicting with and eroding some of the provisions of democratic and human rights as enshrined in the FDRE Constitution of 1995. Especially, it is criticized for its banning of non-local NGOs from participating in any rights based activity as well as gender issues, and for local NGOs not to receive more than 10% of their fund from external donors. According to this law NGOs that
secure more than 10% of their fund from outside donors are considered to be foreign NGOs, and hence cannot work on rights and gender issues. In connection to this, participants in informal discussions underlined the fact that several local NGOs including WAT have been influenced negatively by the law. According to informants, WAT as local NGO working on women’s rights, cannot secure more than 10% of fund from outside any more since 2009, and hence is facing aggravated shortage of fund. Besides, in the face of the NGO law and as per the recommendation of its self-financed research in 2009, a document from WAT (2009) indicated that a splitting of focus between development, and advocacy activities was pursued since then. This splitting suggest a circumvention of the restrictive NGO Law concerning foreign funding for gender issues since its restrictive provisions do not include development issues.9

Finally, interestingly, informants also raised that demobilization was another serious challenge for the women’s movement after victory. How?

Veale (2003) in her study that deals with the demobilization of TPLF Women Fighters has indicated that women were among the first to be demobilized right after victory. She mentioned national and international factors to have been behind the demobilization. On the national level the need to balance the proportion of Tigrean and other ethnic groups in the national army; internationally due to that international laws discourage recruitment of females for army. Writing about the post demobilization developments, she further noted that several females faced problems of integration on one hand, and economic challenges on the other (ibid.).

A similar study about the experiences of the demobilized and returnees women in Eritrea revealed that ostracization due to failure to confirm with cultural gender ideals and expectation was a challenge faced by ex-EPLF female fighters in Eritrea after demobilization (see Victoria, 2001).

On the case of Tigray, informants mentioning that demobilization has had its own evil effects on the lives of women, recognized that there was non-conformity and social-exclusion of ex-TPLF female fighters. For informant 3 , however, the most serious

9 The fact that the lowest level of structure come to constitute Limiat Gujile (development group) since 2009 shows that emphasis was given to development issues perhaps to secure external fund in the face of NGO law that limit external fund if working on rights issues.
related problem noticed immediately after victory was the gap and imbalance created in the percentage of men and women holding leadership positions in different offices and the different governmental sectors that were established later. She narrated the case in this way.

If asked whether we had similar experiences with other African countries where women returned back to kitchens after involvement in struggle following victory, I would say no. But, still I have this feeling that during the long years of struggle, our representation was increasing from time to time. We were holding different positions as civil servants and public administrators. For instance in one administrative area where I was a leader three others were also leaders. In that time, due to the proportion of women in leadership, the woreda was called anstawit woreda (literally meaning feminine woreda). But, with the end of the struggle, several were demobilized and even those who were active were not in a position to hold power. For example, those who managed to improve their education and acquire skill (computer skill for instance) with the stipend given to them ironically ended up being secretaries. In the time of the transition and quite for some time after that it became improbable to see enough number of women in leadership and holding offices as leaders. That was contrary to our struggle as participants of the women’s movement. It is my biggest regret even if there is undeniable progress and we are building up once again. Now it is oki. (Interview, July, 2014).

So, as the narration above and the witness by Veale (2003) can reveal demobilization of ex-TPLF female fighters has had negative repercussions both on the lives of the returnees and their movement immediately after victory though now it seems the situation is over.

7.6. Concluding Discussion
In this chapter I set to explore relationship between TPLF and the women’s movement in Tigray in the post struggle period. I have also tried to assess and reflect on whether women and their issues have been side-lined at the end of struggle, and/or whether the gender friendly revolutionary gains were sustained or not pertaining to the interaction in this period. Besides, I have explored the cause of mobilization of women in Tigray in the
aftermath of victory to see if there have been changes in light of the nature of interaction experienced and the political opportunity structure entailed in the broad external environment.

As the foregoing discussion has shown, right after victory in 1991, it has been found that the women’s movement in Tigray changed course in its relationships with TPLF. Following the formation of Democratic Association of Tigray Women (DATW), it is evident that the women’s movement effectively separated itself from TPLF. In this regard, it has been observed that it begun to set its own specific priority areas, design specific goals and agenda, and above all to finance itself basically from membership fees, its own fund-raising initiatives and of course foreign donor’s fund. However, WAT has continued to work closely both with the Women’s League of TPLF and TWAB. In this regard, as indicated, they have formed joint committee where they discuss and evaluate matters of mutual concern in the case of women. As a result of this strategic cooperation with the government and the women’s league of the ruling party, where its senior and influential members are actively involved, WAT has succeeded to win trust of both without risking its existence as separate organization. Besides, WAT has got the potential to exploit the gains of the transition period (which it significantly contributed) in a way that enabled revolutionary gains to be sustained and more new progressive/gender-friendly changes to be achieved as can be reflected in the increased female representation in parliament now, creation of national gender machinery, repel of old laws with discriminatory clauses, enactment of supplementary gender sensitive proclamations and above all formulation of a national women’s policy and gender sensitive constitution. Thus it is argued here that even if WAT has stopped formally to be under TPLF and is registered as independent NGO, because it has continued to closely work with the women’s league of TPLF and the government agency TWAB, its status of relationships is not autonomous/independent in the way understood by Molyneux (1998) rather it is best characterized by associational autonomy. Negotiation is still evident with the party through its women’s league and the current government via the governmental organ and cannot be claimed there is independent mobilization.

Finally, as indicated in the literature part and theory, women’s movements are susceptible to influence from the external environment (Ray & Korteweg, 1999). As
McAdam (1996) noted among the forces in external environment, political opportunity structures can either obstruct or facilitate mobilization. Susceptible to this influence are either the timing of mobilizations with causes or outcomes of these mobilization or both. In Brazil, Alvarez (1990) has showed that transitions to democracy influenced the women’s movements in the country positively where opportunities were created enabling those previously oppressed people to get the chance to incorporate their concerns in the making of new politics. Similarly, Waylen (2008), have shown that democratization played a significant role in impacting politics during transitions and the resulting or not of gender-friendly reforms in the countries she compared in Africa, Latin America and East Europe. In the case of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, a previous study by Burgess (2013) has shown that the transition to democracy was helpful for the emergence of independent women’s organizing, EWLA though she also claimed this was later threatened raising the NGO Law of 2009. In the same vein, with the opening up of political space based on democratic ideals, and with the formation of DATW/WAT in Tigray since 1991, the chapter shows that women’s mobilizations have been strengthened and their causes expanded. As discussed earlier, since 1991 women in Tigray have been observed mobilizing to mitigate HIV/AIDS calling for behavioural change, for quality education, for better health services and so, which can be classified as practical gender interests following to Molyneux (1985); as they have also been mobilizing for strategic gender interests like equal political representation in all organs of government (legislative, executive and judiciary). But, this time it was found that their mobilization have been grossly influenced not by the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of TPLF as during the struggle, but by the more general ideals and culture of democracy (human and democratic rights constituting women’s rights as it is enshrined in the country’s constitution) and the related broader development issues.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

As I have indicated in the theory and literature parts of this thesis, autonomy is considered core in discussing women’s movements (Molyneux, 1998). It is so, especially given the fact that several women’s movements emerged out of other broader social movements, political parties and/or organizations (Ray & Korteweg, 1999). As Molyneux (1998) has indicated feminists praise autonomy of women’s organizations considering it a vehicle for realizing women’s strategic gender interests which as to them is “real” gender interests. But, for Molyneux, autonomy does not guarantee positive outcomes for women’s organizations by itself as it could cause marginalization and isolation or it may be source of internal organizational power imbalance. Empirical findings on this issue are different. Some researchers (Wieringa in Ray & Korteweg, 1999; Geisler, 2006) have shown with their respective studies in Indonesia in Asia, and Zambia, Namibia and Botswana in Africa that engagement and alliance with strong political organizations can better serve women’s gender interests. On a different vein, others for example, Katzenstein (1989) has found that autonomy and march against gender violence enabled a women’s movement in India in the 1970s to emerge effective. In the same account, Trip and colleagues (2009) emboldening feminists claim that autonomy is privileged vehicle for gender friendly change to prevail, have stressed that autonomous women’s organizing was among the forces behind the post 1990 progressive changes in Africa. Thus, cognizant of this ongoing debate on whether autonomy or engagement/alliance is best for women’s organizations, I have followed the genesis of the women’s movement in Tigray and its relationships with TPLF. My contribution to knowledge is based on this particular women’s movement experience of autonomy versus engagement/alliance, and how this has impacted women’s pursuit for practical and strategic gender interests as well as outcomes.

To reiterate, social movements are the expressions of the oppressed people. These oppressed people take part in social movements demanding change to status quo. Women have actively taken part in social movements that have different purposes, but as to Molyneux (1985), women’s gender interests can also cause mobilization of women in
separate movements. In this regard, women can lead their own social movements, women’s movements, to meet either their practical or strategic gender interests, or both. In Tigray data shows that women have been mobilizing to meet both strategic and practical gender interests at the same time. In the early years of mobilization in the 1970s, it was female fighters who were actively mobilizing and their mobilization was to meet perceived needs in the face of practical problems they were facing. These include shortage of provision and distribution of necessary products like clothing, soup, and demand for education. But with time, though shortly, given that gross numbers of civil women also started taking part, and pertaining to the experiences of the revolution and exposure to revolutionary ideals of equality (the woman question and emancipation of women), women begun to mobilize for more strategic issues such as equal political representation, equal right to property ownership and criminalization of harmful traditional practices (early marriage), reproductive rights, and of course emancipation of women. In connection to this, interestingly, the study reveals that during the struggle mobilization for strategic issues was possible only to the level TPLF allowed, that is, based on its Marxist-Leninist Philosophy. But, after the struggle and transition to democracy, the guiding principle became more general ideals of democracy, that is, human and democratic rights, and of course broader development issues.

As regards the interaction of the women’s movement and TPLF and/TPLF-based EPRDF coalition, this research has shown that the women’s movement has been shifting positions and exercising different levels of autonomy. Drawing on Molyneux’s typology, in the period from 1976-1985 it was found that it pursued associational autonomy. In this regard, it has been shown that negotiations took place between the Women’s Committee leading the women’s movement, the mass women’s associations and TPLF to a large extent. Accordingly, it has been indicated that both were able to influence each other. Inter alia, whereas the women’s movement was able to exert pressure on TPLF impacting party politics in which TPLF agreed for the first time for quota representation of female fighters in the congresses it held since 1979, the women’s movement had to agree to accept the recommendation of TPLF for legalization of marriage among fighters and reduction in recruitment of new female members. Here the role that double militants which according to Beckwith (2000) refers to those members who work in two different
organizations in a way that can influence both, in this regard, TPLF and the Women’s Committee plus the mass women’s associations deserves attention. Because double militancy has positive and negative implications the fact that the women’s movement exert influence on TPLF is considered as the positive aspect of double militancy in the women’s movement in Tigray, and the influence of TPLF on the women’s movement even contrary to its goals is regarded as the negative implications of double militancy.

In the period from 1985-1991, this study found that the feature of interaction was a bit different from what it was before. This time, it was found that TPLF had dominance not only in determining what to do with and/or for women but in centralizing the activities of the women’s movement through formation of its women’s wing: the Association for Women Fighters of Tigray (AWFT). This organization that succeeded the associationally autonomous Women’s Committee and the mass women’s associations, was meant to control these mass women’s associations and the activities of the female fighters as members of the Committee. As to Molyneux framework on autonomy, this was then a directed form of women’s mobilization. Here, power and authority was in the hands of TPLF. Interestingly, however, the paper finds that it was in this period that large number of gender-sensitive reforms were instituted in Tigray through TPLF which took dominance and undertook a number of progressive reforms, as the double militants used the political opportunity structures available to influence TPLF to the full advantage of women. However, as to McAdam (1996), political opportunity structures do not only expand but also limit mobilization. In this regard, although these reforms were progressive, they were undoubtedly limited by the political opportunity structures pertaining to the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of TPLF as well as the norms of the predominantly Christian and peasant society. Nonetheless, it was evident that some of the reforms were surprisingly radical, for instance, the reproductive rights where the right for abortion was also sustained and endorsed among the female fighters of TPLF.

Finally, this study finds that once again the course of interaction between TPLF and the women’s movement was changed in the post-struggle period. In the period from 1991 to the present, it was found that the women’s movement has been able to significantly free itself from TPLF with the formation of Democratic Association of Tigray Women (DATW) which later was re-named Women Association of Tigray (WAT) where it sets its
own objectives, priority areas and above all finance itself. However, on the other hand, it has been found that it continued to work with TPLF and the TPLF-based EPRDF coalition in government in Ethiopia through the Women’s League of TPLF and the governmental organ Tigray Women’s Affairs Bureau (TWAB), respectively. These three have formed a joint committee where they discuss agendas and evaluate issues at all levels of their respective structures. Therefore it is argued that the current form of mobilization is again associative, and despite WAT being registered as an independent NGO. As it is the feature of this form of mobilization drawing on Molyneux, power and authority are negotiated between the women’s movement, the ruling party TPLF in Tigray region and the TPLF-based EPRDF coalition now in government in Ethiopia. As a result of its current status, it is argued that the women’s movement (having won trust and support from the ruling party and the government it is leading), has managed to contribute for and also to exploit the gains of the transition to democracy pressing for more gender sensitive changes as well as sustaining the revolutionary gains. In this regard, a mention can be made of the increased parliamentary representation of women, repel and revision of old laws with discriminatory clauses, formulation of gender friendly new constitution, creation of gender government structure/office, formulation of women’s national policy and several other progressive legislative reforms at region level.

To sum up, the Tigray case shows us that women can mobilize for and succeed in achieving both practical and strategic interests even when they are not independent/autonomous, as when their mobilization is directed by an external authority or when there is only associational autonomy. However, this is dependent on the political opportunity structures that the external environments make available and the extent to which women, as double militants, are able to use the possibilities available. In this regard, this study differentiates the feminist notion that autonomy is the only way with which women mobilizing for change can meet their “real” gender interests or in other words strategic interests. In the Tigrayan case it is shown that women can make big strides even under a directed form of mobilization where power and authority rests in external entity, let alone having certain degrees of autonomy, like associational autonomy, where there is negotiation with an external power, in this regard with the political party TPLF. As to the findings of this study, in Tigray, though the women’s movement has not
attained full autonomy throughout its history, through engagement with the dominant TPLF during the struggle and the TPLF-based EPRDF coalition after the struggle, by shifting positions and exercising different degrees of authority, it has managed to push for, and achieve significant gender-sensitive changes in the country in general and the region of Tigray in particular. Generally, what the Tigrayan case tells us is that, so long as women remained focused, goal-oriented and strategic in their approaches with male dominated political organizations by avoiding confrontations to the level possible, and so long as they could manage to have a separate organization where they set their own agendas, share experiences to create and use opportunities to their advantage, they could make history when pushing for, and achieving more gender-sensitive changes regardless of the form of autonomy that informed their pursuit or regardless of the fact that their mobilization is independent or not. If politics is a game, and if getting involved in women’s movement is deemed the doing of politics, what matters the most is not, whether the women’s movement doing the politics remains autonomous or not in terms of being entirely independent, but knowing how to play the game.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX I

List of Informants and Background Information

Hiriti
One of the pioneer ex-TPLF female fighters and also founders of the Women’s Committee. Served in different positions assigned by TPLF like staff of the sector of health of the Front, and also as public servant in different areas of Tigray. Currently serving as President of the Tigray Region’s Higher Court.

Saba
One of the pioneer ex-TPLF female fighters and also founders of the Women’s Committee. Served in different military positions of both TPLF and the national defence force of Ethiopia after victory, reaching the rank of Colonel. Currently, serving as head of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Mekelle Branch.

Kidusan
A senior ex-TPLF fighter who served in different positions assigned by the front as public servant actively involved in distribution of land. Currently serving as Speaker of the Regional Parliament.

Zenebech
Senior TPLF ex-TPLF female fighter. Who served in different positions including the vice of the Tigray Regions Women’s Affairs Bureau after the struggle. Now serving as chairperson of the Women’s Association of Tigray.

Genet
Civil servant currently working as head of the standing committee for women’s affairs of Tigray within the regional parliament of Tigray

Tadesse
A male civil servant serving as leader of the standing Committee of Law and Administrative affairs of the regional parliament of Tigray.

Kibreab
A male civil servant who has worked as expert in the Tigray Women’s Affairs Bureau and who now serving as head of Adeday Micro-finance for women in Tigray.
Mulugeta

An ex-TPLF male fighter who served in different positions within the Front and in different governmental offices after the struggle, and is currently working as head of the Public Relations office of the Tigray Women’s Affairs Bureau.
APPENDIX II

University Bergen

Informed Consent Form

My name is Zelalem Meressa, and I am a Master’s Degree student at the University of Bergen. I am inviting you to participate in a research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. A description of the study is written below.

Information Sheet

I am interested in learning more about a research project entitled Women’s Movement in Tigray 1976 to present. You will be asked to give information on what you know about the women’s movement in Tigray emerging out of TPLF. This will take approximately 1-2 hours. The risks to you of participating in this interview are that you may come across some issues which you may not need to talk about or you may feel discomfort. Besides, you may feel pressured to speak. But for these kind of risks are not encouraged in this research, you are free to skip them. Moreover, if you no longer wish to continue the interview, you have full right to withdraw from the study, at any time without any consequences.

As regards the data you will provide us with, be informed that, enough care will be taken to keep confidentiality by not sharing information to someone except me as a researcher and other relevant persons. As far as anonymity is concerned, your name will remain hidden for I will use codes, and I will also hide all markers of identity in the most possible way. I will delete the tape-recorded material once I use them for the intended purpose.

Even though all aspects of the study may not be explained to you beforehand, during the briefing and debriefing session you will be given information about the study and have the opportunity to ask questions. If you think all of your questions have been answered, and you wish to participate in this research study, we can proceed with the interview.
Interview Guide with Ex-TPLF Fighters

Background Information

- Can you tell me some about yourself? When did you join the TPLF and in what positions have you served in the Front? How about now?

Part I (1976-1985)

- What can you tell me about women in TPLF?
- What can you tell me about the women’s movement in TPLF? How was the organizing for women started?
- Why was that necessary?
- You said you first formed women’s committee within TPLF. Can you elaborate on it? Why did you want to have separate Committee? (probe)
- What was the reaction from TPLF?
- What were the main responsibilities of the Committee?
- You said there were mass women’s associations, can you tell more about them? How was your relationships and TPLF’s relation with these mass women’s associations? (probe)
- Have you faced any challenges? If so, what were these challenges?

Part II (1985-1991)

- You said an association for women fighters of Tigray was established in 1985. Can you tell more on that? Where, when and why AWFT was formed? (Probe)
- What was TPLF’s role on it?
- What was the cause of your mobilization? Any change from beginning?
- What is special about AWFT?
- Any new strategy for advancing goals?
- Had your strategies been successful? What achievements can you mention?
- How do you explain the relationships with TPLF?
- Any challenges encountered?

Part III (Post 1991)

- Any organizing for women after 1991 period of victory?
- Why WAT and what were the causes of organizing? (probe)
- How did your relationships with TPLF-based EPRDF continue?
Any further progresses? What mechanisms have you used?

Any challenges?

Finally do you have anything you want to add?

Thank you for participating

**Interview Guide with non ex-TPLF Fighters**

- What can you tell me about yourself?
- What do you know about Tigray women’s mobilization for equality both during and after the period of struggle?
- Do you think they have succeeded? If so why? If not why not?
- How can you explain the relationships between TPLF and women involved in the women’s movement? Do you think it was and is smooth relationships or not?
- What challenges do you think women were facing in the past and what are they facing today?
- Anything you want to add?

Thank you for participating
APPENDIX III
Structure of WAT

Congress

Board

Audit

Chairwoman of Board

Vice Chairwoman of Board

Board Secretary

Executive Secretary

Internal Auditor

PR

Mobilization and Organization Director

Mobilization and Organization Expert

Law

Executive Secretary

Vice of Executive

Micro_Finance

Plan and Development

Trade Enterprise

Research and Training Director

General Finance and Administration Service
Source: Adopted from WAT Constitution