5. Data and method(s)

The present research borrows techniques of data collection, generation, and analysis from Grounded Theory. Therefore, this chapter starts by briefly explaining the origin and characteristics of Grounded Theory (5.1). Section 5.2 justifies my choice to use grounded theory techniques and provides details on the use of a limited set of grounded theory techniques as proposed by Birks and Mills (section 5.2.1). A detailed report on the used data and methods and a meticulous description of the research trail are pivotal for ensuring the trustworthiness and the quality of a qualitative research project. Consequently, sections 5.3 through 5.5 offer a detailed account of the research process and the applied grounded theory techniques. I start with the case selection (5.3), follow up with the data corpora (5.4), which details data collection and generation, before arriving at data analysis (5.5).

5.1 The origin and characteristics of Grounded Theory

The origin of grounded theory dates back to the work of Glaser and Strauss, who demonstrated the usefulness of "generating new theory from data, as opposed to testing existing theory"[1] in their groundbreaking 1967 book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*.[2] Throughout Glaser and Strauss' intellectual accomplishments, which the literature commonly refers to as the first generation of grounded theorists, scholars conceived of grounded theory as a single qualitative research method principally aimed at inductively generating a theory out of existing data. Scholars subsequently

1 Birks and Mills 2011, p.2.

2 Glaser and Strauss 1967.

developed an initial paradigm, and today one cannot speak about grounded theory in the singular.

Besides Glaser and Strauss, other authors such as Corbin, Charmaz, and Clarke contributed to the further refinement of developing an inductively anchored social research method.[3] While the initial inductive paradigm remained unchanged, grounded theory specialists differed in the proposed procedure of developing a new theory out of the data. Indeed, since the 1960s, grounded theory has become one of the most popular methods in qualitative research in social sciences, leading to numerous and sometimes contrasting techniques. Second-generation grounded theorists such as Corbin contributed to filling in the procedural gaps left behind by the texts written by first-generation grounded theorists such as Glaser. They did so by developing methodological frameworks. Glaser focused his writings on "what constitutes a grounded theory itself,"[4] while Corbin and Strauss offered a clear set of techniques describing how to actually proceed when developing a grounded theory. In their publications, they proposed a coding paradigm with several concrete steps to best analyze a large amount of data.[5]

In 2007, Bryant and Charmaz identified the relevant characteristics of a grounded theory research design.[6] In their practical guide, Birks and Mills consider "the following to constitute a set of essential grounded theory methods"[7] for the production of an integrated grounded theory from empirical data: initial coding and categorization of data, concurrent data generation or collection and analysis, writing memos, theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis, theoretical sensitivity, intermediate coding, selecting a core category, theoretical saturation, and theoretical integration. This process provides a systematic, inductive approach—from data collection and generation to data analysis by means of categorization, to the final generation of theory—that explains the phenomenon being studied. Thoroughly applying this entire set of techniques allows the researcher to study a new or little-known phenomenon by collecting and generating data and developing a theory from those data. Over the years, grounded theory methods have increasingly been used in other research designs. As explained by Birks and Mills, because of

3 Strauss and Corbin 1990; Charmaz 1995; Clarke 2005.

4 Birks and Mills 2011, p.5.

5 Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1998.

6 Bryant and Charmaz 2007.

7 Birks and Mills 2011, p.9.

the value of these techniques in the analytical process, a researcher employs grounded theory methods "but does not aim to generate theory."[8] Among these so-called mixed-method studies, concurrent data generation or collection and analysis, and theoretical sampling are the most widely adopted. [9]

5.2 Reasons for the use of grounded theory techniques

In contrast to other qualitative research methods, grounded theory techniques focus on theory development.[10] This unique characteristic makes grounded theory methods appropriate for the present research, as one of my goals is to enhance theoretical knowledge on the phenomenon of norm diffusion. Specifically, concurrent data generation (or collection) and analysis are fundamental to any research using grounded theory methods and is a distinctive feature of the latter. As little is known about the phenomenon under investigation (the reasons and the ways AI integrated issues of VAW into its work), answering the research questions requires the collection of a large amount of data and analyzing them to make sense of them. Grounded theory techniques provide the guidelines necessary to proceed with the handling of a large amount of qualitative data. Grounded theory research's focus on theory development facilitates a flexible, iterative approach to the study of phenomena, providing a framework whereby initially broad research questions are incrementally narrowed down. In contrast to most studies where "the research question directs how the study proceeds, in grounded theory, it is the research process that generates the question."[11]

I was initially interested in knowing why and how AI integrated women's rights into its activities in general. Concurrent data collection and analysis revealed the significance of VAW in AI's work on women's rights and allowed me to subsequently concretize the research questions. As I show later, while I initially planned to include three AI sections in order to understand the national level of the organization, I ended up only analyzing two cases.

As I strive to enhance knowledge about norm diffusion, rather than to generate a new theory about this particular issue, it is most appropriate to

8 Birks and Mills 2011, p.29.
9 Birks and Mills 2011, p.166.
10 Butler and O'Reilly 2010.
11 Birks and Mills 2011, p.20.

use a limited set of grounded theory techniques. The study results are based on the following set of grounded theory methods recommended by Birks and Mills (2011):[12] *initial coding and categorization of data*, *concurrent data generation and collection and analysis*, *constant comparative analysis*, *theoretical sampling*, *intermediate coding*, and *memo writing*. Together, these techniques constitute a detailed and comprehensive procedure of analyzing a huge amount of different types of qualitative data in a systematic manner, and provide new theoretical insights. I did not follow the final steps proposed by Birks and Mills - identifying a core category, advanced coding a theoretical integration, and generating theory - because I did not intend to develop a new theory. The following paragraphs briefly describe the six grounded theory techniques (based on Birks and Mills's selection) used in the present dissertation. While in reality the researcher applies (part of) these techniques simultaneously, I explain them one by one to facilitate comprehension.

Initial coding and categorization of data is the first step of data analysis and involves the identification, coding, and categorization of words or sentences in the data. During this initial analytical step, the corpora are fragmented and assigned codes and categories that allow a systematic comparison of the data.

The method of *concurrent data generation and collection and analysis* means generating and collecting data with an initial purposive sample, which is subsequently coded and categorized before additional data is collected or generated. Consequently, a category is called saturated when no new codes belonging to the category emerge from the data analysis. At this point, grounded theorists speak of theoretical saturation. Subsequently, *constant comparative analysis* compares new codes and categories to already existing ones, allowing for new insights to emerge from the data.

Theoretical sampling is defined as an iterative process for constant comparative analysis, allowing the researcher to assess the saturation of the previously developed categories and the need for additional information.[13]

Whereas grounded theory specialists refer to initial coding as the first step of data analysis and as a process by which the data are fractured, during *intermediate coding* the data are reconnected in a more abstract manner.[14] *Intermediate coding* is thus the second major step of data analysis after *initial coding*. The interplay of these grounded theory methods means that the researcher moves

12 Birks and Mills 2011.

13 Birks and Mills 2011, p.166.

14 Birks and Mills 2011, p.12.

between initial and intermediate coding throughout the process of *concurrent data generation or collection and analysis*, and the *constant comparative analysis*.[15]

Lastly, *memo writing* is an essential analytical process,[16] during which the reflexive researcher records his or her considerations analytical insights, choices and ideas in relation to a research project.[17] This activity trails the research journey from the very beginning to the end, and it allows the researcher to record initial thoughts and develop them in a reflexive manner as the analysis progresses.

5.3 Case selection

Because of AI's overall structure as a transnational network with an international headquarters and representations in numerous countries, scrutinizing the organization's interest in women's rights must occur at both the international and national levels. I chose the IS and the ICM as representative of the international level. My case sampling purposefully followed four criteria. First, the origin of AI as a Western human rights organization founded in the middle of the Cold War limited the range of potential sections to those in Western countries. Second, the countries' official language(s) served as another criterion. I had to select potential cases according to my language skills, which are limited to German, French, and English. Third, I strove to include sections that differed in their work on women's rights. The fourth criterion concerned the study's feasibility in terms of accessing archival materials and contacting potential interviewees.

Based on the first three criteria, I sought to include three European AI sections in my research: the Swiss, the German, and the Irish or the French sections. The impossibility of accessing the necessary data at the Irish and the French sections finally led me to only consider the Swiss and the German sections. Because it was a Western section, used the languages I am competent in, and faithfully followed the International Secretariat's guidelines about incorporating women's rights into its regular work, the Swiss section was a natural choice from the beginning. First, the Swiss section of AI (AICH) is one

15 Birks and Mills 2011, p.11-12.

16 Birks and Mills 2011, p.175.

17 Birks and Mills 2011, p.175.

of the oldest[18] and largest[19] AI sections in terms of its members and funding. Its relatively early foundation meant that the integration of women's rights into the organization's activities could be documented from its very beginning. Second, the necessary data could be collected and generated in German or French. Third, as a first explorative interview with the former SVAW campaign coordinator revealed, the Swiss section's attitude towards the integration of VAW into its activities was comparatively mild. AICH seemed to have been neither a precursor, nor very reluctant to consider this question. The last criterion concerns the feasibility of the research project. Due to previous professional exchanges with the Swiss section's SVAW campaign coordinator, I was certain I could collect and generate sufficient data.

The data generated at the Swiss section allowed me to simultaneously collect the necessary information on how other European sections integrated VAW into their activities and on the feasibility of data collection and generation in them. Finally, it helped me to purposefully select the German section as another case study. In fact, as the fifth largest AI section in terms of its financial contribution to the IS, only behind the US, the UK, the Netherlands, and France, the German section is representative of other Western AI sections.[20] It has remained one of the most powerful sections from the time of its founding. As I mentioned before, applying the technique of concurrent data collection, generation and analysis allowed me to identify differences in how the work on women's rights was organized in the German section compared to the Swiss section. This made the comparison between the German section and the Swiss section potentially interesting.

18 AICH was founded in Zurich in 1970, nine years after the foundation of Amnesty International as a global movement. The first so-called prisoner adoption groups already existed in the 1960s (Clark 2001).

19 As of 2004, the Swiss section was the sixth largest AI section behind those in the USA, the UK, the Netherlands, France, and Germany (Hopgood 2006, p.197).

20 Hopgood 2006, p.197.

5.4 Data corpora

5.4.1 Criteria for data collection and generation

I chose the data at the core of the analysis according to specific criteria relating to the research topic and the research questions. I strove to triangulate data and methods to enhance my study's validity and cross-check and corroborate my findings.[21] I used various types of data: written archival materials (both physical and stored and accessible electronically), interviews, and secondary literature.[22] I treated published literature on AI as data and not only as a theoretical framework, as other forms of research do.[23] As I describe in greater detail later, these types of data required different data gathering methods.

I applied two specific criteria to my data selection, which are both related to the research topic. First, my research's emphasis on women's rights limited the selection of the data to the period over which AI engaged in work on women's rights issues. In the case of written data, documents had to be published between the mid-1980s and 2010. Potential interviewees were chosen according to their engagement with AI during the same time period.

Second, data were selected according to their main content. Since the study requires accounting for the institutional context in which AI's work on issues of VAW evolved, I chose data containing information on the structure and functioning of AI, as well as data primarily concerning the organization's work on women's rights. The same criteria led me to conduct interviews with two sorts of people: so-called experts, who had worked on the issue of women's rights at the international or the national level within AI – either officials or activists or external people with specific knowledge related to the research subject – and ordinary AI officials and activists, who witnessed the integration of women's rights into the organization's activities because of their long-term engagement within AI.

21 Lamnek and Krell 2016.

22 Maggs-Rapport 2000.

23 Birks and Mills 2011, p.80.

In addition to purposive sampling, I used snowball sampling[24] to identify appropriate interviewees.[25] With the information collected from interviews and written archival documents, I identified suitable interviewees and could determine the number of interviews required to gain adequate information for my research. Thus, it was the grounded theory methods of *concurrent data collection, generation and analysis,* and *theoretical sampling* that enabled me to select suitable interviewees. Cross-checking the lists of potential interviewees provided by interviewed persons and taking into account information found in the archival material helped me make sure that I had an adequate number of interviews.

Data collection and generation took place over a period of nearly four years. While typical for grounded theory research, data analysis started with an initial sample and was subsequently completed with additional data using the technique of *theoretical sampling*. The following section provides details on the data corpora containing all the data collected and generated over the duration of the study. As mentioned above, the data corpora consisted of three types of data, which were assembled concurrently: written first-hand archival materials,[26] interviews, and secondary literature. Including data from both the international and national levels, the corpora consisted of nearly 800 archive documents, 49 interviews, and 20 secondary publications.[27]

24 Noy 2008.

25 In this situation, I relied on the contact information provided by previously interviewed persons or the assistance of persons external to my research. Most of the potential interviewees I approached agreed to give me an interview. Some did not respond to my request and others refused to be interviewed explaining that they did not have time to participate. However, contacting them was not useless, as they repeatedly served as informants.

26 They include personal notes and letters from staff and activists as well as (confidential) documents, such as meetings minutes and letters from AI bodies at the Swiss, the German, the US, the Canadian, and the Austrian sections.

27 I included the following secondary literature in the data corpora: Scoble and Wiseberg 1974; Ennals 1982; Steiner 1991; Clark and McCann 1991; Besset 1991; Thakur 1994; Fried 1994; Baehr 1994; Sidhu and Chatterjee 1995; Bahar 1996; Watson 1997; Pack 1999; Welch 2001; Mutua 2001; Clark 2001; Buchanan 2002; Hopgood 2006; Michel 2009; Lake and Wong 2009; Kelleher and Bhattacharjya 2013.

5.4.2 Written archival documents

The written first-hand documents (primary sources) were found in the following three archives. First, since important portions of the IS archives housed at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam have been closed to the public, I used the intranet-based AI document library called AIDAN Search. The latter is an online tool for accessing documents related to the international level of the organization. It is comprised of AI-indexed documents, which have been published by the IS since 1961. Second, I used catalogued electronic and physical documents from the Swiss section archives. Lastly, I used uncatalogued electronic and physical documents from the German section archives.

I analyzed about 400 documents focusing on the international level. These first-hand documents consisted of *IEC Information bulletins* and IEC policy papers regarding mandate development; resolutions; reports and decisions of different ICMs; *Integrated Strategic Plans* (ISP) (detailed long-term plans of AI activities for a period of six years); campaign agendas; reports and strategy papers; meetings agendas and minutes; and consultation papers on mandate development.

The same types of first-hand archive documents were included for the two case studies on AI's national level: meeting minutes, communication papers, and campaign materials. However, there was a sizable difference in the amount of data collected on each section. The corpora for the Swiss section were larger than that for the German section. For the Swiss section, I analyzed approximately 300 documents. These documents consisted of: 1) minutes of different meetings;[28] 2) communication papers, such as letters, emails and faxes; 3) campaign documents related to planning and evaluation. For the German section, I analyzed about 110 first-hand documents.[29] These documents

28 Minutes of the *Internationale Kommission*, the *Groupe de travail Gender Action Plan* (the working group *Gender Action Plan*), the *Groupe Action Urgente Femmes Chêne-bourg*, the *Groupe Nord-Vaudois*, *Frauengruppe Bern*, the *Frauenrechtskommission*, the *Groupe de Coordination Femmes*, the *Frauennetzwerk*, the *Delegiertenversammlung/Jahresversammlung*.

29 The analyzed archival material included the documents consulted at the German secretariat in Berlin, which contained documents about the section's specific work on women's rights from 1993-1995, minutes of the Annual general assemblies 1979-1993, *ai-info* 1981-1995. I could not access the minutes of meetings of the *AK-Menschenrechtsverletzungen an Frauen* because these documents are not archived at the secretariat but are distributed among the respective spokespersons.

consisted of: 1) minutes from annual meetings[30]; 2) communication papers, such as letters, emails, faxes and articles from the section's magazine, *ai-intern*; 3) campaign documents related to planning and evaluation. For ethical reasons, archive material such as letters, emails or personal statements from individual AI members or staff are anonymized by using a cross-referencing system for pseudonyms.

5.4.3 Interview data

I conducted 49 interviews in three languages (German, French, and English) between September 2011 and November 2015. The interviews were conducted face to face (32), by phone (9) or via Skype (7).[31] The majority of the interviewees agreed to being identified by name.[32] Nevertheless, I decided to anonymize the interview data for ethical reasons. I removed direct identifiers, such as the interviewees' names, and replaced them with pseudonyms. That is why I dispensed with attaching a list that contains the names of my interviewees.

For the international level component of my analysis, I conducted expert interviews with four (former) IS officials and two external individuals. The former IS staff members I interviewed were specifically chosen among a small group of officials who had worked on women's rights issues between 1989 and 2010. Additionally, I retained four interviews originally conducted for a third case study, as they also provided relevant information for the international level.

For the Swiss section, I conducted 7 expert interviews and 24 interviews with ordinary activists or officials. For the German section, I conducted 7 expert interviews. I was not able to conduct interviews with ordinary officials and activists from the German section. While all potential interviewees were identified according to the two criteria mentioned above, I applied two additional criteria when looking for potential interviewees among ordinary activists at the Swiss section. These criteria were the size and location of the AI

30 *Jahresversammlung*.

31 Even though I didn't include the Irish or French sections as case studies, I kept the interviews with officials and activists from these sections in the data corpora because they contained relevant information. In fact, many of their statements related to AI's women's rights work in general and were not only about their section's activities.

32 Generally speaking, people from the Swiss section agreed to be identified, whereas officials at IS or Germany and activists from the German section preferred anonymity.

group[33] to which the activists belonged. I interviewed members of AI groups in both the German and French parts of Switzerland.[34] Furthermore, I selected groups located in cities as well as groups working in the countryside.

Given the size of AI, the number of interviews may appear meager at first glance. Nevertheless, the number of interviews is sufficient for two reasons. First, because only few people within AI worked as officials or activists on issues of women's rights both internationally and within national sections over the two decades covered in the study, the number of potential expert interviewees able to provide relevant information on why and how AI integrated VAW into its activities is relatively small, compared to the overall number of officials and activists. Theoretical sampling allowed me to purposefully select interviewees, and it ensured that I included those officials and activists who were involved in AI's work on women's rights between 1989 and 2010. I therefore reached the people having institutional knowledge on the issue. Second, interview data was only one of three types of data included in the analysis. As previously explained, I applied data and methods triangulation to collect a significant amount of first-hand archival material and about a dozen secondary literature sources that allow to corroborate and cross-check the findings.[35]

As I mentioned before, I conducted two forms of interviews: expert interviews and interviews with ordinary AI officials and activists. For both interview types, I created questionnaires that combined *main questions*, *follow-up questions*, and *probes* to structure the conversations.[36] Because of the study's focus, people had to be asked about things that happened in the past. Since people tend to forget or only partially remember events that they experienced years ago, there was an implicit potential for information loss. By resorting to *oral history*, a common method in the historical sciences, I tried to account for this bias.

In oral history, researchers explore people's experiences of historical events.[37] Accordingly, follow-up questions were formulated so as to

33 A group must consist of at least seven active members. A group of this size implies that the group is implementing the campaigns proposed by the national secretariat.

34 Because of the language barrier, groups located in the canton of Tessin were not considered.

35 Lamnek and Krell 2016.

36 Rubin and Rubin 2005.

37 Ritchie 2003; Ritchie, Donald A. (Ed.) 2011; Kurkowska-Budzan and Zamorski 2009.

chronologically trace past events and how interviewees experienced them.[38] Whereas the order of the questions was similar for both types of interviews, the questions diverged and were adapted to the interviewees. One was used in expert interviews at the international level, another one in expert interviews at the Swiss section, one for the ordinary activists and officials at the Swiss section, and one in the expert interviews at the German section.

A good interview is determined not only by the questionnaire and the wording of its questions, but also by the interviewer's skills. In fact, achieving openness, confidence, and a small power imbalance between me as an interviewer and the informants is paramount to ensure the validity of the interview situation and the associated data quality.[39] For privacy reasons, I suggested not mentioning the interviewees' real names when quoting their statements, opting instead to use pseudonyms. This procedure enhances openness and trust during the interview.

As I already briefly mentioned before, it was relatively easy to collect and generate data for the Swiss case study. Being a member of AICH and having previously collaborated with the section's SVAW campaign coordinator proved to be helpful in accessing the archive and identifying potential interviewees. In fact, throughout the research project the former SVAW campaign coordinator was a very important informant. She introduced me to the section's information and documentation officer who later became fundamental to my research project. In fact, he facilitated the consultation of catalogued documents at the archive, helped me find documents that were not yet catalogued, and provided me with internal address lists containing details on staff members and groups. Because I was a member of one of the Bernese AI groups, I was also given access to normally confidential information, such as minutes from the meetings of the section's executive committee.

Accessing the German section archives and finding potential interviewees in Germany turned out to be a rather difficult endeavour, at least at the onset of my field work. AI Germany's former Secretary-General eventually helped me gather the necessary data for the German case study. He provided me with names of (former) activists and officials involved in women's rights activities in the German section. Furthermore, showing personal interest in my research, he invited me to Berlin and arranged a visit to the archive where he himself was conducting research at the time.

38 Rubin and Rubin 2005, S.162.

39 Steinke 2000.

5.5 Data analysis

The data corpora consisted of many written first-hand archival materials, 49 interviews, and a small amount of secondary literature. I used the qualitative data analysis software AtlasTi to organize/code/cross-reference the interview transcripts.

As the first coding step, *initial coding*, needs a line-by-line analysis of the text of interest. Applying this procedure to my first interviews and to a couple of archival documents on AI's first activities related to women's rights resulted in approximately 100 codes. *Concurrent data collection and generation and analysis* required me to constantly compare new codes and categories to pre-existing ones. *Constant comparative analysis* was thus part of the process of concurrent data collection, generation and analysis.

At the same time, *theoretical sampling* allowed me to assess the saturation of the previously developed categories and evaluate the need for additional information.[40] I identified the data to be integrated into the data corpora employing the *theoretical sampling* technique according to the data's ability to contribute to the research topic.[41] Additional data were collected and generated over a period of approximately four years. While my initial codes were very close to the data, codes became more and more abstract as my research progressed. Later, through *intermediate coding*, I reduced the number of codes by merging similar codes or redefining them as more abstract concepts. When a code was applied frequently, I developed sub-categories based on the content coded within them.[42] I also developed higher-level categories as needed. At the end of *intermediate coding*, when no new codes emerged and the collection and generation of data came to an end, I established a coherent and concise coding system with roughly 200 codes subdivided into 10 overarching categories, 75 categories and 115 subcategories.

The final analysis and the interpretation of the data are thus based on the use of initial and intermediate coding by means of concurrent data analysis, constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling. The structure of the following three empirical chapters (6, 7, and 8), which provide the findings of my research, reflects the coding system developed throughout the application of the aforementioned grounded theory methods.

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40 Birks and Mills 2011, p.166.

41 Birks and Mills 2011, p.25.

42 Friese 2011, p.6.