

### 3. Conceptualization

---

This chapter defines three important concepts at the heart of my study: human rights, women's rights, and violence against women.

As chapter 2 has highlighted, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the development of two separate notions of rights: human rights, which formally includes women and men, but can often be interpreted as “men's rights”<sup>1</sup> in its concrete applications, and women's rights, which was framed separately in its interpretation and application. In fact, the mainstream notion of human rights reflected women's subordinate position with respect to men in most societies, which Bunch explains “as a politically constructed reality maintained by patriarchal interests, ideology, and institutions.”<sup>2</sup> The parallel development of separate standards for women's rights and mechanisms like the CSW, the CEDAW, and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women<sup>3</sup> are the result of women's subordination to men.

As demonstrated by previous research, the international women's rights movement reshaped the popular understanding of human rights at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by illustrating that the traditional human rights paradigm did not protect women's lives because of its inability to address violence in the private sphere.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as Krook and True (2010) explain, “the meaning of human rights has been [...] challenged to include women's rights, economic rights, and access to drinking water and essential medicines,”<sup>5</sup> suggesting a continuing redefinition of the notion of human rights over the course of the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is thus worth defining human rights “not

---

1 O'Hare 1999, p.364.

2 Bunch 1990, p.491.

3 Schmid-Häuer 1998.

4 Baer 1994; Bunch 1995; Bunch et al. 2000.

5 Krook and True 2012, p.110.

[as] something that somebody gives from on high, [...] It is something that people claim and fight for and struggle for and keep redefining in every era [...].”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, human rights and women's rights cannot be seen as naturally given or static. Instead, they must be considered gendered social and historical constructions. AI's understanding of human rights and women's rights changed over the period of the study's focus (1989 – 2010). Hence, I use the concepts of human rights and women's rights as Amnesty International understood them at the time, which is in turn reflected in the organization's policy and activities.

Violence against women remains primarily an issue of women's rights despite being recognized as a violation of human rights at the beginning of the 1990s, because it “is rooted in gendered social structures rather than individual and random acts.”<sup>7</sup> As the discussion above indicates, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women provides the first comprehensive internationally agreed-upon definition of VAW.<sup>8</sup> It delineates VAW as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”<sup>9</sup> The definition further includes the “[p]hysical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family [...] within the general community [...] perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.”<sup>10</sup> AI's policy delimits the organization's approach and activities concerning VAW. AI's policy and activities, in turn, reflect how AI deals with issues of VAW.

The present research is interested in AI's policy and activities and focuses on the role of activists and officials in the integration process. Consequently, the study does not address acts of violence against women. In the present research, the term ‘violence against women’ therefore refers to AI's policy that directly or indirectly concerns the way the organization deals with issues of VAW and to the activities concerning acts of gender-based violence, as defined in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, that the organization engages in. Because AI's work on VAW overlapped with internal efforts and measures seeking to enhance gender equality among staff and

---

6 Bunch 1997, p.8.

7 UN Women.

8 Reilly 2009, p.80; Sullivan 1995.

9 UN Women 1995.

10 UN Women 1995; UN General Assembly 1993.

activists (sometimes these efforts were even closely interlinked), the present study applies a broad reading of “AI’s work on VAW” that encompasses all policies and activities that directly or indirectly relate to VAW.

