3. Methodology

This chapter contains a detailed account of my methodological approach, constructivist grounded theory[1], its background and the related choices of this research. Rather than merely displaying a technical toolkit, I see the methodology as the basis of my research, shaping its whole process. For this reason, this is a central chapter, which addresses philosophical, practical and ethical questions. Constructivist grounded theory is an approach that enables me to use and include elements of different relevant philosophies and methodologies in my research design. Salazar Pérez and Canella underline that GTM is especially useful in critical qualitative research projects concerned with marginalized positions:

> "To construct a critical social science that would reconceptualize what we can know and how we take actions in solidarity with/ for those who have been traditionally marginalized, research methodologies are needed that do not require restricted boundaries. Rather methods are called for that are emergent, reflexive, and malleable in order to mirror the complexity of the issue, structure and/ or system being studied." (Salazar Pérez & Canella, 2015, p. 216)

Firstly, I give some background information about the philosophical groundings of my research and discuss methodological approaches that it draws on. Subsequently, I introduce constructivist grounded theory as my main methodological approach. This contains some history of the approach and the practical procedures of data generation and analysis. Later, I also discuss how I implemented this methodological approach during the different stages

1 Hence referred to as GTM (Grounded Theory Methodology), which underlines it as equally a method ("a distinctive and clearly articulated research approach") and a methodology ("includes explicit justification for the approach or method being used") (Bryant, 2017, p. 16f.).

of my research process, including more details about my field and case selection. Finally, I add some ethical reflections.

3.1 Philosophical background and relevant methodologies

This study aims to develop theoretical concepts on activism by, with and for refugees and migrants in Hamburg, grounded in activists' own perceptions. It attempts to explore the understandings they have of their acts, claims and visions and, based on this, conceptualize what takes place. The explorative nature of this research interest and the aim of working *with* the research participants make constructivist grounded theory a particularly apt research methodology. It enabled me to gather insights and develop exchange among the data that would remain invisible to other approaches. At the same time, it allows for combinations with other research traditions.

Interpretive research is quite a natural complement to, if not constitutive of, constructivist grounded theory. It shares the ontological beliefs and offers the tools for a more in-depth exploration of the philosophical grounds of this research project. In ontological terms, interpretive approaches are generally open to more relativist perspectives. They also tend to constructivist or subjectivist epistemologies that question the possibility of objective knowledge and the existence of *one* truth. Lisa Wedeen points out how such epistemological perspectives impact methodological choices and also varying areas of study and research interests. She discusses that an epistemological commitment "to uncertainty, ambiguity, and messiness" lets interpretive researchers "to focus on social movements, political resistance, and modern power in ways that are irrelevant to rational choice theorists." (Wedeen, 2002, p. 726) This underlines the importance of transparently reflecting one's philosophical background. Yanow and Schwartz-Shea even differentiate interpretive from qualitative research approaches, saying that the latter are increasingly unable to entail all forms of non-quantitative methodologies. They see the main difference in the "philosophical umbrella" (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014, p. xvii). They underline:

> "In interpretive research, we seek to understand what a thing 'is' by learning what it does, how particular people use it, in particular contexts. That is, interpretive research focuses on context-specific meanings, rather than seek-

> ing generalized meaning abstracted from particular contexts." (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 23)

All of this speaks very clearly to a research project aiming to explore the perspectives of activists and partly marginalized groups of people through participant observation and interviews while critically reflecting the researcher's positionality. Generally, interpretive research is much more focused on (self-)reflection than other approaches (Bartels & Wagenaar, 2017, p. 4). Indeed, constructivist epistemologies are particularly apt for research projects that are interactive with their research participants. The way that Yanow and Schwartz-Shea discuss data generation raises another example of the impact of adopting interpretive methodologies when they underline that this research step is "understood less as [data] being gathered or collected by the researcher as if they had some ontologically prior, independent existence." (2014, p. 147) Instead, they refer to data as being *generated*, "at the very least by the researcher, interacting conceptually, mentally, with her documentary materials and observed events." (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014, p. 147) It might be seen as problematic to take a clear normative stance as a researcher, but it can be equally wrong to pretend to be neutral and objective (de Laine, 2000, pp. 25–28; Hale, 2008, p. 2ff.; Milan, 2014). All positionalities, relations and emotions can create problems, yet, they can also be opportunities:

> "[E]motional engagement can supply a powerful motivation to get one's explanations 'right' and an essential means for accomplishing this goal. Emotions are storehouses of knowledge, compasses for navigating the world, and basic expressions of the meanings we attach to political objects and events." (Soss, 2014, p. 180)

Identification can mean overlooking problems, but involvement can also be the only way of noticing them. These are tensions that have to be dealt with and brought together. Furthermore, they show that we should not get stuck with simplified insider/ outsider distinctions (Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017; Nowicka & Ryan, 2015).

3.1.1 Activist and participatory methods

Nowadays, there are various research approaches that explore the interaction between researchers and research participants in new ways and build their methodological perspectives on that. I want to mention two that helped

delineate the methodological development of my research project: While activist research emphasizes the political positioning and responsibility of the scholar, participatory research takes a step further in *involving* participants in the whole research process. They both emerge from qualitative and interpretive research perspectives that as global justice research, aim at having a practical impact beyond academia. Hale describes this characteristic as "activist scholars work[ing] in dialogue, collaboration, alliance with people who are struggling to better their lives." (2008, p. 4). He claims that taking responsibility for results relevant to these people "redefines, and arguably raises the stakes for, what counts as high-quality research outcomes." (Hale, 2008, p. 4) According to Hale, rather than being a clearly delineated approach, activist scholarship entails various approaches and procedures that, however, have common grounds. For him, these consist in the explicit political positioning of the researcher, a qualitative methodology and the approaching of research subjects as "knowledgeable, empowered participants in the entire research process" (Hale, 2008, p. 4):

> "Perhaps the only easily and usefully agreed-upon connotation of the term activist research, in relation to the others, is an acute awareness of all these fault lines and a commitment to work on them, without any expectation that they will go away. This broad and pluralist approach should then free us up to formulate and explore a general proposition: research that is predicated on alignment with a group of people organized in struggle, and on collaborative relations of knowledge production with members of that group, has the potential to yield privileged insight, analysis, and theoretical innovation that otherwise would be impossible to achieve." (Hale, 2008, p. 20)

This broad understanding emphasizes that activist scholarship plays a role throughout the whole research process and allows researchers to see it as an ever-ongoing learning process. Wadada Nabudere mentions another interesting characteristic of activist scholarship: He points out that such perspectives challenge the continuously produced polarization between theory and practice in academia (Wadada Nabudere, 2008, p. 62). A reflexive and open interaction with social movements and activists can be an interesting starting point in bridging this gap, particularly, when taking critiques of the field of social movement studies seriously. In fact, according to some authors, the field should be more inclined to develop "movement-relevant theory" (Bevington & Dixon, 2005, p. 186). Activist research also wants to embrace that there are multiple forms of knowledge that are often not depicted or even

considered in traditional research designs, as the following quote by Lipsitz displays:

> "In the process of struggle, activists develop new ways of knowing as well as new ways of being. They discover nontraditional archives and generate nontraditional imaginaries as constitutive parts of mobilizations for resources, rights, and recognition." (Lipsitz, 2008, p. 91)

Routledge and Derickson discuss such acknowledging various forms of knowledge. They also argue that scholar-activist knowledge should be "tied to a material politics of social change" and refer to their more detailed discussion of scholar-activist practices as "situated solidarities" (Routledge & Derickson, 2015, p. 393). Participatory research goes beyond this, in the sense that it aims to balance the power relation between researchers and participants by making the latter "co-researchers" (von Unger, 2014, p. 35). In the most advanced forms, this includes all stages of the research process—from design and topic choice to writing (Payne, 2018; Wadada Nabudere, 2008, p. 70).

This goes way beyond what I have tried to achieve in my dissertation research, for instance because such projects are even more time-intensive than other qualitative or interpretive approaches (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, p. 85).[2] Nevertheless, it has been very helpful to explore the steps that these researchers take to obtain a more equal footing with their participants and find ways of involving them in the research process. As Block and his colleagues point out, participatory methods "are explicitly oriented to reducing power differentials" (2013, p. 72). Sörensson and Kalman also mention participatory methods as a way of dealing with asymmetrical research relations (2017, p. 1f.). Following Patricia Hill Collins, they pick up this aspect especially regarding the importance of dialogue as a way of assessing knowledge claims (Sörensson & Kalman, 2017, p. 4). From my perspective, this means that even when only taken into account as an additional source of methodological inspiration, participatory methods can be valuable for a research project with such goals.[3]

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2 In fact, one could say that, in a way, participatory methods contradict the very nature of a dissertation, which is a means of academic qualification in the career of an individual.

3 This research project does not fully embrace either of these approaches. Therefore, I do not discuss here to what extent they can actually lead to a political empowerment of the participants or what challenges and limits are (see e.g. Krause, 2017, p. 18; Marmo,

3.1.2 Ethnomethodologies or ethnographic research

Concerning the positioning as a researcher in the field, ethnomethodological and ethnographic research are approaches that also should be mentioned. According to de Laine, ethnomethodological approaches, such as fieldwork, have finally increased in importance and acceptance (2000, p. 1f.). Traditionally, these methods were not necessarily complying with current, more common constructivist ideas, which underline more attention to researchers' roles, positionalities and relationships as well as the methods used (de Laine, 2000, p. 208f.). When used within other research designs, it is sometimes described as a way of looking at things or a sensitivity rather than a methodology of its own (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 4; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014, p. 153f.). Abbott defines ethnography as follows:

> "Ethnography means living inside the social situation one is studying and becoming to some extent a participant in it. One's participation can range from mere observation to *going native*, from occasional afternoons to round-the-clock immersion. One can augment this participation with interviews, guidance from key informants, and review of official records." (Abbott, 2004, p. 15f. [Emphasis added])

Consequently, it is again very much linked to the researcher's relation to participants but also more centrally with her own perceptions. Emerson et al. claim that "[t]he ethnographer seeks a deeper immersion in others' worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important." (1995, p. 2) Palmer and her colleagues sum up that ethnographic research "aim[s] to learn from the voices and experiences of community members." (Palmer et al., 2018, p. 417) Nevertheless, the language used in the previous couple of quotes also reveals the problematic roots of this research tradition in European colonialism (e.g. see the added emphasis in the quote above). For instance, even though she immerses herself in the field, the researcher is not expected to be part of the community she is researching (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 37). Therefore, it is essential to engage with critical developments within these methodological approaches. These clearly share many philosophical groundings with the previously discussed approaches and can therefore be coherently combined

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2013, p. 98; von Unger, 2014, p. 94f.). However, many reflections, particularly in this chapter, are based on insights from them.

through constructivist grounded theory. Because the methodological proximity also shows that my research is related to these methodologies. I have learned a lot from ethnographic research perspectives concerning topics such as entering or defining the research setting, interacting with research participants, participant observation as a tool of generating data, ethical reflections and dealing with my feelings throughout the research process.[4]

3.2 Constructivist grounded theory

This research project has been implemented following the constructivist grounded theory methodology proposed by authors such as Kathy Charmaz, Antony Bryant and Adele Clarke (Bryant, 2017; Bryant & Charmaz, 2011; Charmaz, 2014; A. Clarke et al., 2015). GTM can be defined as follows:

> "The method is designed to encourage researchers' persistent interaction with their data, while remaining constantly involved with their emerging analyses. Data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously and each informs and streamlines the other. The GTM builds empirical checks into the analytic process and leads researchers to examine all possible theoretical explanations for their empirical findings. The iterative process of moving back and forth between empirical data and emerging analysis makes the collected data progressively more focused and the analysis successively more theoretical." (Bryant & Charmaz, 2011, p. 1)

Grounded theory is therefore treated both as a methodology and as a process of theory development and today entails various approaches, methods and assumptions (Charmaz, 2014; Equit & Hohage, 2016). Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser originally developed it as an inductive approach to qualitative research, applying rigorous interpretation and analysis to develop theory grounded in the data (Glaser et al., 2010). However, both authors had different understandings of the basic assumptions and priorities of the approach, so that each developed an own school of GTM. While Glaser emphasized its inductive nature and developed the method for it to be "an objective and neutral instrument" following positivist assumptions (Equit & Hohage, 2016, p. 24),

4 Hence, as with activist and participatory research, I do not fully count my research into ethnomethodologies, but I gained relevant methodological and practical insights from them.

Strauss was more influenced by American pragmatism and symbolic interactionism. With Juliet Corbin, he developed an approach acknowledging that a researcher *cannot* be neutral or objective. Therefore, they introduced an interplay between inductive and deductive elements to embrace the researcher's subjectivity (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As in the research philosophies displayed before, neutrality and objectivity in the classical sense are rejected for assuming the possibility of an unpositioned speaker (Hale, 2008, p. 11). Kathy Charmaz and Adele Clarke are two students of Strauss who shaped an explicitly constructivist strand of GTM. They see GTM more in the tradition of interpretative social research, asserting that data and analysis are socially constructed and context-specific, and thereby do not aim at objective, generalizable theory (Hildenbrand, 2011, p. 556). Charmaz underlines three central characteristics of her understanding of GTM—it being a systematic, abductive and comparative methodology:

1) GTM is a systematic approach in that it consists of a precise series of activities. This is not to be understood as mechanical procedures but, instead, as "rules-of-thumb" that are made explicit in the research project (Bryant, 2017, p. 90). These activities include for example the generation of rich data and data analysis through various coding techniques throughout the research process. The decisions and steps of data generation and analysis are always transparently reflected.
2) GTM is abductive: Constructivist grounded theory involves both inductive and deductive elements. Thus, it is not assumed that the researcher can start her research without preconceptions but, in contrast, she is assumed to have a certain knowledge of the issue in question. Concerning this "abductive reasoning," Charmaz refers to Charles S. Peirce who first introduced the notion that for her is "a mode of imaginative reasoning researchers invoke when they cannot account for a surprising or puzzling finding." (Charmaz, 2014, p. 200) This abductive logic is the basis of the constant shifting between data and theory (Bryant, 2017, p. 278).[5] Hence, abduction stands for the moving between these emerging concepts, empirical data and other literature:

5 This is closely intertwined with the use of sensitizing concepts, which are derived from existing literature and the researchers' prior experiences (Charmaz, 2014, p. 200). They are further introduced in Chapter 4.

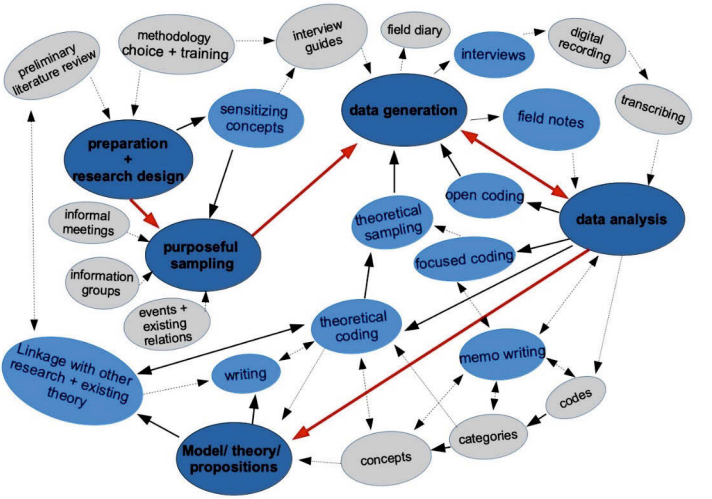
"In this puzzling-out process, the researcher tacks continually, constantly, back and forth in an iterative-recursive fashion between what is puzzling and possible explanations for it, whether in other field situations […] or in research-relevant literature." (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 27)

3) Finally, GTM is comparative: It is often referred to as a method of "constant comparison" (Bryant, 2017, p. 200), which takes place at various levels. First of all, the back and forth between empirical data, developed analysis and existing literature enters this notion. Simultaneously, the generated data are continuously compared with each other through the various stages of coding. Finally, the abstracted categories and concepts are confronted with new data and validated through that. Theoretical sampling is a relevant tool in this context. It implies that data generation and data analysis are not two subsequent and separate steps of the research process. Data analysis starts together with and later even informs data generation: "Analysis leads to concepts. Concepts generate questions. Questions lead to more data collection so that the researcher might learn more about those concepts." (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 144f.)

Illustration 1 shows my adaption of an exemplary illustration of a GTM research process displayed by Bryant (2017, p. 89). I made my own version at the beginning of my research. It should mainly emphasize the three characteristics just discussed here.[6]

6 The dark blue bubbles are the main research phases. The light blue ones are the main activities. The grey ones are additional steps. This illustration is not meant to be complete or exhaustive.

Figure 1: Research process illustration, based on Bryant (2017, p. 89), adapted by the author.



3.2.1 Data generation

> "A method provides *a* tool to enhance seeing but does not provide automatic insight. We must *see through* the armament of methodological techniques and the reliance on mechanical procedures. [...] *How* you collect data affects *which* phenomena you will see, *how*, *where*, and *when* you will view them, and *what* sense you will make of them." (Charmaz, 2014, p. 26 [Emphasis in original])

This quote by Charmaz exhibits how complex data generation is.[7] Already the sample selection in GTM is tricky because, as has been discussed, it uses theoretical sampling, which is based on the analysis of the previously generated data. Of course, this is not possible for the initial sample. It is agreed upon

7 I follow Yanow and Schwartz-Shea in referring to this process as data generation, emphasizing the interactive process, as opposed to the researcher plucking data as "some exotic fruit" (2014, p. 147).

that the initial sample can follow a purposive sampling approach together with the snowball principle, as is common in other qualitative research designs (Bryant, 2017, p. 251).

GTMs aim for gathering rich data that enable the researcher to develop new and grounded analysis: "Rich data are detailed, focused, and full. They reveal participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives." (Charmaz, 2014, p. 23) In-depth interviews and fieldnotes are classical data sources for GTM. Especially the first interviews should be conducted quite openly, meaning that researchers give interview partners as much space and as little guidance as possible to be receptive to their perspectives. Charmaz refers to this as "intensive interviewing" (2014, p. 56). She points to the combination of flexibility and control that it offers, leaving interactional space for ideas to emerge between participants and researchers. The data are, in line with this, understood to be a co-construction. An interview guide can be a flexible tool lending assurance to less experienced researchers without being an entirely rigid structuring device (Charmaz, 2014, p. 62).

There is no exact endpoint to the process of data generation. Instead, the researcher estimates when "theoretical saturation" is reached, "meaning that all categories are sufficiently developed in terms of their properties and dimensions." (Peters, 2014, p. 11) This addition is significant as otherwise this already contested term is easily taken to refer to "the new data fail[ing] to add anything to the data already gathered." (Bryant, 2017, p. 253) Just as Peters, Bryant underlines that saturation concerns the theoretical development of the analysis, not the data. Given the continuous dialogue between data and analysis, the whole process is understood as flexible and open-ended: "We can add new pieces to the research puzzle or conjure entire new puzzles while we gather data, and that can even occur late in the analysis." (Charmaz, 2014, p. 25)

3.2.2 Data analysis

> "Codes emerge as you scrutinize your data and define meanings within it. Through this active coding, you interact with your data again and again and ask many different questions of them. As a result, coding may take you into unforeseen areas and new research questions." (Charmaz, 2014, p. 114)

As has already been pointed out regarding the characteristics of GTM, the data analysis does not take place when data generation is finished but starts simultaneously. Therefore, the analysis directly impacts further data generation and has to be very structured and well-documented. If possible, the transcription of interviews is directly followed by inductive coding. Charmaz differentiates between open or initial, focused and theoretical coding in GTM data analysis (2014). Coding is also the process through which the analysis of the generated data is step-by-step raised in its level of abstraction.

Initial coding, also referred to as open coding, is the most explorative coding technique applied to the first generated data (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 116–120). At this stage, the researcher should not have fully clear ideas in mind and instead be "receptive to all the clues and hints that the data might provide." (Mattoni, 2014, p. 30) An additional technique that helps remaining open and that I applied is line-by-line coding. According to Charmaz, it "goes deeper into the studied phenomenon and attempts to explicate it." (2014, p. 121) It means that "[i]deas can occur to you that had escaped your attention when reading data for a general thematic analysis." (Charmaz, 2014, p. 125) Open codes are short, active, provisional and stay close to the data.

Focused coding is applied later in the process and involves the identification of central or focused codes. There is also the first abstraction through building categories of focused codes and paying attention to the interaction between different codes and categories (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 138–147). Focused coding does not involve line-by-line coding anymore and thus enables the researcher to move more quickly through larger amounts of data. Through this step, the researcher explores the adequacy and conceptual strength of initial open codes and engages in a first round of comparing and revealing patterns:

> "Focused coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through and analyze large amounts of data. Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely." (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138)

The third stage, building on focused coding, is theoretical coding, which is the most sophisticated type of coding that moves from categories to concepts. It substantiates certain categories to concepts by showing relationships and enhancing theorizing. Furthermore, it is the stage when the emerging theory is confronted with existing literature (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 150–155). According to Charmaz, not all research projects realize theoretical coding. Even though it "can add precision and clarity," it also risks to impose a framework on the

data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 151). Ideally, even this most abstract level of analysis remains grounded in the data because it is continuously confronted with further generated data.

Generally, Bryant and Charmaz both recommend coding "in gerunds". They argue that from the very start this moves the analysis away from merely focusing on themes and topics and enables the researcher to highlight processes (Bryant, 2017, p. 113f.). Charmaz emphasizes that "[s]tudying a process fosters your efforts to construct theory because you define and conceptualize relationships between experiences and events." (2014, p. 245) "Invivo" codes are named after formulations of a participant and hence "symbolic markers of participants' speech and meanings" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 134).[8] They can be valuable in grasping notions best described by the participants themselves. For Charmaz, the different types of coding are the central activities of GTM in working but also playing with ideas gained from the data: "Through coding we make discoveries and gain a deeper understanding of the empirical world." (Charmaz, 2014, p. 137)

3.3 Practical implementation

While GTM offers rules-of-thumb for realizing a research project, it does not provide clear-cut rules and linear procedures for any stage and situation. Given this and the fact that I integrated elements of other methodological perspectives, I additionally discuss my own experiences with and implementation of GTM in this chapter.

3.3.1 Field and case selection

My research focuses on activist groups engaged for migrant rights in Hamburg, Northern Germany. Hamburg has the second-biggest European port, making it an important center of economic power and historically also one of migration.[9] Despite its partly very rich society, Hamburg has traditionally

8 These can then also move to the more abstract analytical levels. When focused codes or categories are in quotation marks, they are grounded in invivo codes. This is most visible in Chapter 5.

9 The colonial roots of this economic wealth and the cosmopolitan image are essential to point to but will not be discussed further in this dissertation.

been a social-democratic city and is known for radical Left neighborhoods. The city's about 1.8 million inhabitants and its being a city-state make it a relevant urban metropolis, which "spatially concentrates" the resources and relations that movements draw on (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2017, p. 8). In fact, Nicholls and Uitermark especially underline the relevance of such a context of resources of relations for migrant rights struggles, which in such a setting can turn into bigger mobilizations (2017, p. 227). Furthermore, even though refugees in Germany are distributed according to the "Königsteiner Schlüssel" for instance, big cities are clearly a magnet for migrants as they are for people generally (Alscher, 2015).

In a rather recent publication, Donatella Della Porta uses a differentiation of various localities in the context of migration. From a Northern perspective and with a research focus on Europe, she organizes them along the route of many refugees and migrants and distinguishes between places of first arrival, places of passage and places of destination (Della Porta, 2018b, p. 1f.). In that sense, Hamburg can be seen as a place of passage and a final destination, as opposed to places of arrival. Above 30 percent of Hamburg's inhabitants are statistically captured as "with migration background," compared to roughly 25 percent in the whole country (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019). Therefore, Hamburg is a research context that makes sense to look at: It is a relevant urban setting with a potentially high density of migration and political activism. Additionally, my personal background of living and being active here provided me with a certain knowledge of the field, which was a valuable starting point (Bryant, 2017, p. 105; Charmaz, 2014, pp. 155–160; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 26). While it might seem more representative to compare activist groups in different contexts, the groups involved in these movements are mostly organized or connected in various cities or regions, often also transnationally and thus transcend delimited local contexts anyways (Kewes, 2016a; Klotz, 2016).

For my research, I accompanied several activist groups in their meetings and activities: four on a more regular and a few more on an occasional or singular basis. The period that involved the most active academic involvement spans roughly two years (2017-2019). My data consist of fieldnotes from this participant observation and twelve in-depth interviews with activists.[10]

10 When referencing my data, the systematization works as follows: "IDI" stands for an in-depth interview, followed by the participant (e.g., "IDI_P02"). The number does not necessarily indicate when an interview was conducted but is based on the moment

Groups and interview partners were selected purposively, based on the sensitizing concepts and my own political involvement. Groups and interview partners will not be described more in-depth as singular cases. Firstly, this is a step to enhance anonymity and confidentiality. Secondly, I did not regard them as cases in the classical sense and did not aim to systematically compare them to each other. Instead, the general setting and interactions enabled me to focus on movement dynamics as such.

I started my empirical research in autumn 2017 by approaching groups and individuals. I began accompanying activist groups and writing fieldnotes after presenting myself as a researcher. Activist groups are understood as collectives that meet regularly with a more or less fixed constituency (although fluctuant presence is common and explicit exclusivity varies) and that are part of social movements. The frequency with which groups meet differs. Some meet weekly, others every two weeks or just once a month. Additionally, there have always been occasions beyond the regular meetings, such as demonstrations, events, etc. The size of the groups cannot be determined with precision. There were usually between five and fifteen people for regular meetings—the size varied by group. The groups also differ in their concrete topical focus, forms of organizing[11] and core activities. However, they all engage for migrant rights, are or aim at being mixed in (part of) their meetings, especially with regards to the legal status of the people involved, and consider themselves political. They mostly focus their activities on current refugees or illegalized people. The actual composition varies too: a group might focus on women*, another one might be predominantly white German, most groups involve activists of multiple legal statuses and with all kinds of lived experiences.[12]

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of contact. "PO" means participant observation, followed by group and fieldnote (e.g., "PO_G03_12").

11 Most groups are no legal entity and run through political engagement. One is a registered association, meaning it could potentially involve paid positions.

12 Following Bakewell or Brubaker, I try to move "beyond categories" because when sorting and approaching people by categories, e.g. nationality, they are easily reduced to one ascribed identity (Bakewell, 2008, p. 445; Brubaker, 2013, p. 6). According to Holston, citizenship was established as a most dominant categorization (1999a, p. 1f.). I mostly refer to people as "activists," not to reduce them to their legal status. This does not mean that I ignore such categories' existence or significance in lived realities. I try to take a critical view when using them.

I captured the accompanying of the groups, which generally falls under participant observation, through writing fieldnotes.[13] These fieldnotes of activist meetings and events have become a central part of my data, so that I treat them with the same attention as my interviews. I was not aware of this equal weight from the very start, but with advancing in the research process and a method workshop I attended I realized their centrality and value for the analysis. Even though my fieldnotes are not classically following ethnographic provisions because of being more focused on a discursive rather than a situational description, they capture perspectives that can add a dimension to individual activists' accounts. They can offer a more detailed picture of what takes place in the groups, including elements that participants might not perceive as important or they might not feel so comfortable talking about. Nevertheless, fieldnotes are clearly always biased by my own gaze.

The selection of the interview partners was mainly based on the involvement in the activist groups and quite naturally spread throughout the whole research process. Especially in the beginning, I approached activists as participants whom I already knew from my previous involvement. Later on, in line with theoretical sampling, analytical and theoretical concerns also played a role. It was important to me to take time to get to know the people, give them the possibility to learn more about me and my research as well as building a more equitable and trustful relationship. For example, all interviews were conducted only after at least one preparatory informal meeting, which I did not record, and the interview partners' explicit written consent.[14] Those meetings were often very intense, and my experience is that most people only

13 Fieldnotes differ both from memos and a research diary. A research diary is a tool for the researcher to deal with her own experience throughout the research process but especially in the field. Therefore, it is not part of the research itself, although, of course, there can be topical overlaps with memos. Memos are written at any stage of the research process and capture the current state of whatever is going on in terms of research praxis. Bryant writes: "Memo-making is a form of reflecting and learning; memos themselves are evidence of that process. Thus, publishing one's memos indicates not only the ways in which the research developed at a variety of levels-empirical, procedural, and conceptual-but also how the researcher employed and, we hope became more adept in terms of theoretically sensitivity." (Bryant, 2017, p. 210)

14 It is relevant to mention here that Mackenzie et al. problematize standardized informed consent (2007, p. 301f.). Such an approach ignores vulnerabilities, compromised autonomy and other issues. Therefore, they propose "iterative consent" as a way to deal with it (Mackenzie et al., 2007, p. 306f.).

openly ask questions about the research after such more extended personal conversations. For most of the interview partners, I can say that we had arrived at some level of familiarity once the interviews were conducted. I generally transcribed the interviews as soon as possible after they took place.[15]

The interviews were conducted in different places depending on the preferences of the participants. They were also conducted in different languages. Certainly, my selection of participants was influenced by my own and people's language skills, among other factors—though many of the activists regularly involved in mixed groups tend to speak either German or English. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that many of my participants did not speak to me in their first language, which is partly true for myself too. The approach I am taking to this is thus certainly pragmatic. This is not to downplay the role and importance of language. In a research project with more resources, more ways of using interpretation or translation should be considered.[16] I ended my formal fieldwork in late 2019. Regarding the activists involved in the groups and those interviewed, there is a rather balanced range of legal status, age, race, home countries, activist experience, gender, religious and educational background, but I do not claim representativity. Some of these categorizations only emerged during the research process. They were not equally rep-

15 Some remarks on how to read quoted transcriptions: I did a verbatim word by word transcription of all the interviews (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 211; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 207). In my transcription, I followed Boje (2001). I roughly included pauses and filler words but did not transcribe intonation. Sometimes I add comments about non-verbal expressions in [square brackets]. "[…]" signals an omission, while "…" within a quote means a pause in the phrasing of the participant. "-" is used when there was an interruption within a sentence. That happens frequently and can compromise the comprehensibility of what is being said so that direct quotes are partly smoothened for a better reading flow without changing participants' language and tone. *Italics* indicate when a word was expressed with particular emphasis. I used "[Name N°]" to anonymize the mentioning of activists and groups in interviews or fieldnotes.

16 Of course, language can result in a potential further power imbalance between the researcher and participants (Sörensson & Kalman, 2017, p. 13). It might also mean that the analysis of these data contains an additional interpretive level, which I am not exploring more closely. It gains more importance in such contexts to pay attention to simple and comprehensive language and to ask for clarifications in interview settings (Charmaz, 2014, p. 96f.). While it can be argued that any interpreting of people's perspectives involves an act of translation, it would still be promising for academia to more explicitly engage with the role of multi-lingual interactions for research (Kruse et al., 2012; Kruse & Schmieder, 2014).

resented or used in any systematic way, which, as Curtis and her colleagues discuss, is quite normal in an open process (2000, p. 1011).

3.3.2 Constructivist GTM

Until May 2018, I conducted five interviews as my first round of data generation. Those interviews were conducted very openly. While I used an interview guide (Weiss, 2014)[17], I would not go as far as calling them semi-structured since it was up to the participants to set a focus, expand or leave certain issues aside. But I started all interviews with a narrative question on participants' daily life, for instance, and later on asked for their involvement in groups, in case it did not come up. Following Weiss, I generally tried to ask as little as possible completely pre-formulated questions (2014). Instead, I used what had already been said by participants—for example, in previous meetings—as prompts for further questions.[18] I used open coding, more specifically line-by-line coding, for these initial interviews and about six months of fieldnotes. This resulted in an extensive amount of codes, which was not sorted or developed in any way since the process was supposed to be spontaneous.[19]

Moving from open to focused coding was challenging, especially given the amount of open codes I had. It already took a lot of time to go through all open codes to erase doublings and get some overview. Following Charmaz and Bryant, I decided to focus on approximately 35 codes that, in substance and quantity, seemed promising to look into more in-depth (Bryant, 2017, p. 100; Charmaz, 2014, pp. 138–147). I went through all the sequences where I coded these, thereby delineating them more clearly and, finally, differentiating them from each other. Based on these focused codes, I also developed preliminary categories that I subsequently used for analytical structuring and for focusing the following data generation. The newly generated data were then coded based on the emerging scheme. I went back to include my sensitizing

17 I developed an interview guide based on the sensitizing concepts (that are explained in Chapter 4).

18 Given the iterative nature of constructivist GTM, this could be seen as a pilot phase in which I addressed initial methodological, practical and ethical challenges (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 135).

19 I used the software program MAXQDA. This program was developed from a GTM perspective, which made it particularly suitable. I transcribed and coded my interviews directly in the program.

concepts at that point to have a first confrontation of my analytical developments with existing literature. To give a sense of this stage, I quote from a memo I wrote at the time:

> "This is where I was absolutely overwhelmed and panicked a bit because I felt it was impossible to go through all these codes, clean them up, re-fine them and then end up with those that seemed most promising. Letting it all sink in a bit, I then understood or decided to interpret what Charmaz and Bryant write in a certain way: Namely, I figured that to arrive at focused codes, I don't need to reduce all my codes and arrive at having only the focused ones left. Even though it might be ideal to have worked through all my initial codes to have them straight, not overlapping or contradicting each other, etc., I feel like I cannot achieve this at the moment. When puzzling the codes, I wrote memos and noted which ones needed considerable revision. This made exactly 100 initial open codes. This still seemed way too much to realistically get through […]. I then re-read parts of Charmaz' chapter again where she underlines to be courageous enough to follow one's gut feeling when a code seems interesting regardless of the quantities of its being coded. […] This helped me clarify the role of focused codes in relation to theoretical sampling to some extent. Because in a way, in my mind, the focused codes were mainly used for focusing the research in general and guiding further interviews. I think for Charmaz it is also about having a certain number of focused codes to go through larger amounts of data quicker. So it's a confrontation of the initial codes with more data…" (Memo *Moving from open to focused codes* 08/06/18)

Later, I came across perspectives that confirmed me in these decisions and interpretations (Saldaña, 2009, p. 194ff.). Based on the analysis of the first round of data, I conducted another five interviews until December 2018 as a second round. I also had another seven months of fieldnotes by then. These interviews were already more focused because they were based on the analytical insights from the first round. Given the more focused nature of the second round of interviews, they helped me contrast my analytical, focused codes and categories with new data and substantiate them in terms of depth. Initially, the categories were rather groupings of focused codes. Subsequently, I developed these groupings more explicitly into categories by writing narratives about what they contained. After the second round of interviews, I went through all sequences of all the focused codes again to align but also confront them with these narratives. This made the categories more settled in the data

and, additionally, more coherent and substantive internally.[20] Coding new data in these later stages also made me add or revise certain focused codes.

In 2019, I continued to accompany and be involved in groups and was in close exchange with activists. But I also got more involved personally, shifting the weight of my double role within the groups toward the activist, as opposed to the researcher. In this stage, I conducted two more interviews in which I more explicitly engaged with the conceptual development of my analysis so far. The fieldnotes became a more occasional tool, as well, in the sense that I did not write fieldnotes for all meetings or events I attended but only selected those occasions that seemed to add substance to my analysis. For me, theoretical coding as a coding technique was not entirely distinguishable from focused coding because the further development of the categories, the exploration of their relations and the resulting development of concepts are not merely a linear process. This stage also contained coding bigger units of data (multiple sentences or paragraphs) and confronting the previous analysis with new data. It mainly involved further developing the narratives of the analytical categories, also by going back to involving existing literature and theories. It centrally meant that I worked on finding and focusing an overarching storyline that engaged with the relations among the analytical categories but also aligned with existing theory:

> "This process is about needing an overarching frame for my analysis. The categories for themselves are fine, but they need to be bound together somehow. […] The recommendation was to sit down with a blank page, and just start writing. Since that also quite well fits some grounded theory approaches and I found it reflected in strategies for theory integration and development of a storyline (Birks & Mills, 2011), this is what I tried to do this week. […] The process was really valuable. […] I'm time and again surprised how helpful writing is for analysis. I really just wrote and wrote, and then with one line of thought figured this potentially could be developed further." (Memo *Finding the Storyline* 23/01/20)

Writing plays a crucial role in developing analysis and, thereby, theory. The fieldnote above references Birks and Mills, who propose *storyline* as an analytical technique with double function and call it "a means and an end in itself"

20 These categories are the ones that I discuss in-depth in Chapter 5. In some cases, a category's name comes from a focused code and is called the same (e.g., feeling the need to be political).

(Birks et al., 2009, p. 407). They emphasize that it "assists in production of the final theory and provides a means by which the theory can be conveyed to the reader." (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 118) In fact, it helped me move through the difficult stage between focused and theoretical coding and has been the frame for the presentation of my empirical findings in Chapter 5. At this stage, I was also much more explicitly engaging with existing literature and theories again. How I relate my empirical data and analysis with these is presented in Chapter 6. The final overarching concept that I am presenting there only emerged after this thorough linking with existing literature and writing as a general technique.

3.4 Ethics

Ethical reflections are a central part of interpretive research because, with a specific set of philosophical assumptions, the self-reflection of the researcher's position, interactions and responsibilities are crucial (Milan, 2014). They become even more essential when a project is as clearly concerned with power relations—as this one is by centrally engaging with potentially vulnerable and marginalized communities of people without (clear) legal status (Brounéus, 2011; Krause, 2017; Refugee Studies Centre, 2007). So, while ethical reflections also appeared in the philosophical groundings, this explicit subchapter is essential to further underline this project's particular research setting.

Hale names three assertions of *good* research when discussing activist collaborative scholarship: methodological rigor, scholarly privilege and theoretical innovation (2008, p. 4). Methodological rigor implies "includ[ing] systematic reflection on the positioned and intersubjective character of the research process." (Hale, 2008, p. 13) This is also ethically relevant because it makes a non-linear and intuitive research process at least somewhat comprehensible to others. In my project, this links to the different principles and tools delineated in the previous subchapters. Scholarly privilege means to critically reflect that generally, "privilege [is] associated with ultimate authority and control over the process of knowledge production." (2008, p. 15) Privilege plays a particular role in this research project as I am not only privileged as a researcher but in many more senses, as discussed in Subchapter 2.2 concerning positionality.

Finally, in Hale's understanding theoretical innovation stands for using "the potential to yield privileged insight, analysis, and theoretical innovation that otherwise would be impossible to achieve." (Hale, 2008, p. 20) For me, this also entails that I have a responsibility to my research participants. For instance, in using the data I am generating with them respectfully. Or in producing an output that does not only have academic relevance.[21] When researching social movements and acts of resistance, this also links to being aware that one's research might make "flaws in the states' system visible to the latter," which can be not in the interest of the movements and research participants, as Piacentini emphasizes (2014, p. 178). From a further angle, Howse refers to "vigilant epistemologies" when it comes to consciously reflecting colonial power structures in knowledge production (2019, p. 201f.).

Such ethical reflections directly concern the relationships with participants. In their official ethical guidelines, the Refugee Studies Center in Oxford underlines that it is about protecting research participants, honoring trust, anticipating harm and avoiding intrusion (Refugee Studies Centre, 2007, p. 162f.). They discuss topics such as informed consent, anonymity, fair returns and intellectual property that partly have been addressed in previous (sub-)chapters. This shows that ethical reflections have to be very broad, involving power, forms of knowledge (production), outcomes, risks, remuneration and so on. Informed consent and other seemingly standard steps in the research process should be reflected even more carefully and practically and might need different approaches (Block, Riggs, et al., 2013).

Protection of identity, in particular, is difficult to fully obtain in qualitative research in general. It relates to anonymity and confidentiality but cannot be limited to that because, especially in small research contexts, complete anonymity is almost impossible to obtain (Mackenzie et al., 2007). People involved in or familiar with the research setting could likely be able to identify groups or participants. This should not result in abandoning the aim to provide anonymity and confidentiality, but it is important to communicate its limits transparently: it is "an ongoing working compromise" (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 627). Anonymity is aimed at, carefully "removing any names of people,

21 The latter can include addressing questions that they voice as relevant, making results accessible and understandable for a non-academic audience or producing non-academic output.

locations, places or specific information that may reveal the identity." (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 216) It is controlled before publication.[22]

It is very clear that the main benefit of the dissertation is my own in that I build my career on it. This cannot be equated with any reward I can give to participants. I am not paying my research participants but tried to find other ways of giving something back. A respectful, not time-bound relationship is one way of working on that. Palmer et al. have interestingly explored time as a factor that can work to re-balance power imbalances, at least to some extent:

> "The waiting is not simply a space between actions, nor at the margins of work in the field or community; waiting is at the centre of the work and throughout all of it. It is a necessary duration, a patterning of time, power and grace in which researcher and another construct and share their space." (Palmer et al., 2018, p. 430)

Taking time, of course, also means trying to support people with issues and problems they have whenever possible and attending to their doubts or curiosities regarding the research. On the collective level, I participated in the group activities in a way trying to contribute my skills and knowledge where possible. Producing knowledge that is not just academically relevant but also accessible and potentially valuable for groups was reflected on with other activists. As Chapter 2.2 on positionality has shown, I cannot, nor aim to, get rid of my own perspective. Nor am I able to fully compensate my own benefit and privilege as a researcher compared to my participants—in fact, even if there was for example the financial possibility, this would not abolish power differentials either, which highlights that in this whole context it is not about a one-to-one exchange deal. However, I hope to have shown through this chapter that I take the responsibility I have very seriously, see it linked to the philosophical, methodological and practical elements of my research and continuously reflect on these issues and learn from the situations I encounter.

22 Data security is another standard affirmation that is only partly in the researcher's hand. I attempt to ensure it through pass-word protected server saving of all the data to which only I have access.