

10 Loyalty to the Jewish State: “We are [...] a [...] Pitskalle”

As outlined in chapter 9, the interviewees present *servicing the state* as a fulfilment of one's *duties* as an Israeli citizen and showing *loyalty* to the *Jewish state* as a central issue with regard to citizenship. The repeated emphasis on their perception of the disintegration of Israeli society and its discursive linking to (a lack of) loyalty to the state of Israel is central in the narratives.

The narratives are structured around perceived cleavages and a perceived threat. Gal argues in favour of integrating “the ways in which ‘ordinary people associate with citizenship’” (Gal 2011: 215; see. also Joppke 2007: 44) and shows that in the data he used, the respondents clearly link different spheres of *rights* to different threat perceptions: the perception of economic threat can be linked to the allocation of welfare *rights*, symbolic threat is connected to the cultural *rights* dimension and a perceived security threat results in a lower willingness to allocate political *rights*. In this context, an evaluative hierarchy of threat (Rippl et al. 2007: 111-2) can be derived analytically: on the one hand, perceived cleavages causing an “internal” threat, i.e. within the Jewish segments of Israeli society, connected to symbolic collective values—e.g. as derived from the interviewees’ understanding of Zionism—and, caused by the challenge of those values, the existing social hierarchy and the interviewees’ objective position within that hierarchy. On the other hand, in the narratives perceived “external” cleavages are presented as posing an existential threat to both individual and collective as well as realistic and symbolic well-being. While nation-wide polls show similar results with regard to the perception of the disintegration

of whole social groups, the interviews differ from the general picture when it comes to the centrality of the issue of disintegration—in particular the emphasis on a gap between Jewish and Palestinian segments of Israeli society, which has implications on their willingness to allocate *rights*. This centrality in the narratives can be explained with reference to the political ideology of Lieberman’s Yisra’el Beitenu party. In the narratives, this ideological superstructure reinforces a particular processing of personal experiences—in particular on the local level—, which in return serve as an argumentative basis for the reproduction of that ideological superstructure.

Partly, those cleavages are perceived on the basis of concrete personal experiences; in these cases, narratives about cleavages are based on the (factual, emotional, evaluative) description of very concrete encounters the interviewees experienced. As will be shown, in this context, the interviewees find examples and situations from their everyday experience to reconfirm, and, thus, reproduce learned habitual dispositions. Accordingly, there are different contexts against which the interviewees’ narratives of threat take place. They cluster around three “argumentative contexts”: the context of a perceived disintegration of Israeli (Jewish) society, the larger historical-political context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the situative context of the Gaza flotilla in the summer of 2010.

10.1 ANALYSIS OF DISCURSIVE PRACTICE IV: “EVERY ISRAELI...”

The intermingling of current discursive events, (long-term) personal experiences and political dispositions affects the interviewees’ view of Palestinian citizens of Israel in particular with regard to their notion of loyalty to the State of Israel. The discursive events (cf. Jäger 2004) the interviewees relate to Iran’s former president Ahmadinejad’s threat of “wiping Israel off the map”,¹ the war against Hisbollah in Lebanon (2006),

1 Glenn Kessler. Did Ahmadinejad really say Israel should be ‘wiped off the map’? Washington Post (Online edition), October 5, 2011; Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/post/did-ahmadinejad-really-say-israel-should-be-wiped-off-the-map/2011/10/04/gIQABJKML_blog.html

Operation Cast Lead against Hamas in Gaza (2009) or the Gaza flotilla (2010). All four discursive events have been controversially discussed in Israeli public discourse. However, while the first three are against the background of an outer enemy vs. Israel constellation, the last one focuses on an inner enemy, namely Palestinian citizens.

Especially the Gaza flotilla and the subsequent discourse was still so fresh at the time of the interviews I conducted in 2010 that these interviewees made frequent references to it in their narratives. Yet the emphasis the interviewees placed on the reference differs. Igal presents it as a unifying event for the Jewish collective. He claims: “every Israeli wants to support IDF now, the whole world is against us, on the side of the Palestinians, that Turkish Arabs send a flotilla is proof” (Igal, p. 3-4), and uses it as an argument to find proof for his black-and-white dichotomic perception of the world against Israel (e.g. also Lerner, 2010), or what Bar-Tal and Antebi (1992b) refer to as “siege mentality”. Zeev and Vicky may share Igal’s view on the world around them, but for both of them the discursive event serves as motivation to become active. Vicky says: “sometimes I feel that I want to contribute more” (Vicky, p. 8), and justifies that so far by being a state employee and as such was limited in her political activities, but “actions to strengthen the state allowed” (Vicky, p. 8). Zeev even felt the need to organise such an “action[...] to strengthen the state” and gathers like-minded people at his local school in Haifa to have regular Friday demonstrations to show support to the IDF. He explains his need to show support, stating: “we did well [what we did in Gaza]” (Zeev, p. 14). Zeev does not explicitly speak about who he has in mind with the collective “we” he uses; yet from the context—Zeev speaks about being “at war with them [i.e. the people in Gaza]” (Zeev, p. 14)—the collective “we” can stand for Israelis, Jews or the IDF.

Katya refers to discursive events on another level. She speaks about an argument between herself and her father who stayed in Russia after her parents’ divorce, and whom she happened to visit at the time of Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in winter 2008/ 2009. Their argument started against the background of a news report in Russian television about the military operation and Palestinian civilians in Gaza suffering from it. Katya tells me how angry she was with her father for not standing on Israel’s side of the story but speaking up against Israeli military actions instead:

“With my father I did have a serious argument [about politics], actually, actually at the time of Operation Cast Lead, when I visited him for Sylvester [New Year’s Eve] (.), he obviously, too, was influenced by some, in some way by all those media reports, and (.) we really had a fight, a real fight, we argued so much that I almost started to cry because (.) he, he simply started to talk in a way that I could not, not, not accept, (..) um: he really started to blame Israel. I took this very hard, I started, I started to get very emotional, and (..)—this was one of the arguments that really, um, I got very angry with my father, and this just does not happen, so I took this very hard, but, um, well, it has been forgotten over time because (..)—again, it’s my father, um, arguments about anything connected to internal politics—my father is not involved in what is going on here in Israel, he is only interested in what happens outside, ok, that means, foreign politics.” (Katya, p. 8)

On the personal level, Katya expects her father to agree with her with regard to political events and is upset that this is obviously not the case. She is upset, however, not only because her father “obviously, too, was influenced by some, in some way by all those media reports”, but also because it was her father she was having an argument with over an issue that is very important to her and that she is emotionally connected to, and her father does not and cannot share her position. It reveals a feeling of estrangement with a person who is very important to Katya and from whom she seeks advice in important personal matters, and the very fact that she stresses “well, it has been forgotten over time” shows that it is not. However, on the collective level, Katya’s quote also implies her concern with Israel’s standing in the world and her trust that Israel’s government, and in particular the IDF, act morally right (cf. Arian et al. 2010: 91).

10.2 ANALYSIS OF DISCURSIVE PRACTICE V: “IT HURTS”

The issue of criticism of official institutions is a very sensitive one for the participants, especially the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have a somewhat sacrosanct status among them. In view of discursive events, the interviewees refer to critique of Israel, and in particular its politics towards Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank as well as military operations. Accordingly, those who criticise one or more of these institutions, are regarded as disloyal.

However, this perception not only concerns the participants of the present study, IB voters, or Israelis with an FSU family background, but represents a widespread notion in the Israeli (Jewish) public: as Ichilov showed, young (Jewish) Israelis in general perceive a growing threat and increasingly find the use of military power legitimate to reach political goals and they also support anti-democratic tendencies, for example by emphasizing the character of the State of Israel as a *Jewish state* (Ichilov 2004: 153). Avi states in this regard:

“Israel needs to be bad, I think we need to be bad, [I mean] not to kill, God forbid, blood, God forbid, be bad and say ‘you want to blow us up here, you send us a flotilla [the Gaza flotilla raid]?’, just as an example, the latest event, the most current, so, great, no problem, we won’t enter with toy pistols, I had shot down the whole ship, like the Russians did over there [i.e. in Chechnya?], let’s say, it was these days, that the whole world will hate us, no problem, we will enter, like Ahmadinejad [the then Iranian president, who, according to controversial translation, threatened to wipe Israel off the map, just an example, congratulations, how bad a person is, and this [...], and I hate him because he hates me, and hates us, but I defend [the idea] that we will be bad, because only then they will fear us and leave us alone, there is nothing to do about it.” (Avi, p. 14).

This tendency goes on; Zimmermann (2016) states that the notion of what is politically correct to say in Israel nowadays has changed in the way that even the political left agrees that the government or official Israeli politics is no longer to be criticised. In this context, the interviewees are particularly bothered by their incomprehension of what they present as “pro-Hamas demonstrations” in several Palestinian settlements in Upper Galilee taking place in the aftermath of the 2010 Gaza flotilla:

“I saw on TV many demonstrations against [IDF], Israeli Arabs with Palestinian flags, and this hurt me very, very much. Why on earth do Palestinian citizens show solidarity with terrorists who claim to destroy their homeland while in Israel every citizen is supposed to have equal *rights* and access to various governmental support, only demanding a very basic proclamation of loyalty to it.” (Vicky, p. 19)

Emmanuel adds:

“Our country is surrounded only by enemies and all say, like, ‘we hate Israel and you are goats’ and so on (...), Israel cannot do anything about it because they [political left-wing] said ‘Stupid, they will annihilate, bomb your busses, but you sit quietly!’, and above all, that it works no matter that Iran shouts, Lebanon shouts, they can shout till tomorrow, but there is resistance in this country from within, the Arabs who? I don’t talk about those who live in the cities but those who live in the Arab villages, small towns, there are serious and violent protests going on against Israel, there Israeli flags are burnt, and they shout, ‘Freedom for Palestine’.” (Emmanuel, p. 22)

When it comes to the perception of threat, Palestinian citizens are explicitly othered in the interviews; all of the interviewees refer to them as “Arabs”, “Israeli Arabs”, or “Arabs in Israel”; Igal claims in this context: “there is a problem with the Arabs in Israel, they perceive themselves as Palestinians, not as Israelis” (Igal, p. 50). All of these terms disregard the self-understanding of the national minority (Waxman 2012; Peled 2007; Rabinowitz 2003), and thus show open misrecognition of particular minority *rights*. But while the first versions (“Arabs”, “Israeli Arabs”) leave the interviewees with a lack of understanding; the second term openly excludes Palestinians from belonging to the Israeli reality, and, as a result, Palestinian citizens are presented as a merely tolerated but temporary minority. Igal is aware of the Palestinians’ self-understanding, yet on the one hand he ignores it completely and on the other hand, he perceives any identity different from Jewish in dichotomic contradiction to being *Israeli*. As a consequence, in Igal’s view, national minorities are not part of the *Israeli = Jewish collective* but excluded from it without exception. While not all of the participants argue this strictly, they all draw a symbolic boundary between Jewish and Palestinian citizens.

Having drawn that symbolic boundary between themselves as part of the *Jewish collective* in Israel and Palestinian citizens, “Arabs”, and as such part of the “Arab world”, the latter are presented as the ultimate threat to the very existence of Israel and its (Jewish) citizens. In the interviews, the Palestinian demonstrations in Upper Galilee are presented as proof that Palestinian-Israeli citizens do not identify with their Israeli co-citizens but with the Palestinians across the border; as Vicky puts it: “Israeli Arabs with Palestinian flags”.

In this context, the interviewees often link passages about a perceived threat with particular: similar to the demonstrations and riots in October

2000, which left the Israeli-Jewish segments shocked and with a feeling of betrayal (see also Waxman 2012), the interviewees are shocked and feel betrayed by “pro-Hamas demonstrations”. Her shock is displayed in Vicky’s statement: “[w]hy on earth do Palestinian citizens show solidarity with terrorists who claim to destroy their homeland while in Israel every citizen is supposed to have equal *rights*”; it reveals both the inability to understand minority demands for particular *rights* and recognition and the actual misrecognition of these minority *rights* in her own statement. Instead, she feels betrayed by those who demand those *rights*. Those demands which had been easy to ignore as long as they were uttered quietly or within the institutional framework, are now perceived as an unexpected and uncontrollable threat to national security; Vicky summarises: “this hurt me very, very much”. The inability to understand is also displayed in the interviewees’ reactions: they argue for the demand of a *loyalty* oath for Israeli citizens. Unisono, there are statements throughout the interviews, mirroring Vicky’s “[Israel] demand[s] a very basic proclamation of loyalty to it”, Igal’s “the State asks for a minimum” (p. 1), or, Ilan’s “the state demands a minimum [of] loyalty” (Ilan, p. 14).

Picture 2: “No Citizenship Without Allegiance”.



Source: Yisra’el Beitenu Website²

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- 2 Partija “Yisra’el Beitenu” (“Our House Israel”). “No Citizenship without Allegiance”. Retrieved from: <http://www.beytenu.org/no-citizenship-without-allegiance/>

As it is the case with the demand for an “equal contribution”, the demonstration/ display of loyalty to the *Jewish state* must be read as a reference to one of the Yisra’el Beitenu party’s electoral slogans: “Without allegiance, not citizenship”. Even more than the slogan about making an equal contribution, the demand for loyalty echoed in the Israeli public and dominated much of the 2009 electoral campaign for the national elections. Picture 2 shows the respective screenshot of the party’s online platform. The picture shows three schoolgirls with long brown hair and dressed in white shirts, waving Israeli flags. The girls smile, in the background nothing but a blue sky. The slogan says: “No citizenship without allegiance”; the subtitle says: “For Israel to remain a Jewish, democratic and Zionist State”. The girls—innocent children and not boys who might be bullies—look happy: being loyal is so easy, as if it was some game children play—except that these children do not understand what is at stake in that game: collective deprivation of citizenship for those who do not want to play in the eyes of those who make the rules. It is just as easy for the interviewees to demand “allegiance”—the Hebrew term says “loyalty” (*ne’emut*); but in contrast to the electoral slogan, they directly address the national minority targeted against the background of personal experiences.

The slogan shows quite frankly how, or, where the Yisra’el Beitenu party positions Palestinian in relation to the very society: outside. IB’s loyalty slogan has been harshly criticised as targeting Palestinian citizens and Palestinian citizens only (e.g. Bagno 2011a; Koren 2010); yet at the same time it seems to have found consent in the Jewish segments of Israeli society. This is mainly because of the, at first glaze, rational character of the demand: be loyal, do not harm the state, your homeland that you live in! For most Jewish citizens, this may be a peculiar civic *duty* since it is such a self-evident one. However, in this context the demand for Israel to remain a “Zionist State” is rather to stress that the Yisra’el Beitenu party is in line with the Zionist values of the State and aims at attracting voters who have had doubt in that. Avi directly links both issues, threat perception as the cause and the loyalty oath as the presented solution He directly addresses Palestinians (“you”) as the imagined listeners, throwing his incomprehension and anger at them. However, he is also confused:

“[W]hy do you go towards terror, like why do you go ‘Let’s do damage’ to your state, ‘No loyalty’, like Lieberman says, ‘No loyalty, no citizenship’, this is his slogan, but

the [...] he is right, actually in this he is right, as much as he is corrupt and everything, as much as I don't believe in this person, but this is true, because from my point of view the same people who throw stones and everything, afterwards I go to eat Shawarma at their place. It's a pity because a people needs a culture, because a people [...] I don't even know how to distinguish, right, it's difficult to distinguish between Jewish and Israeli, there is some [...], you know, sometimes it is asked, asked on, I see it on TV, let's say, someone is interviewed, like we are doing right now, only that's on TV, how do you feel? Do you feel more like Jewish or Israeli? What is this question? Is this something different? In my opinion, it is not something different, and it's not, not important whether you are Jewish or not, you live in Israel, you accept Israeli values? What does this mean? Are you for peace, first of all, with the help of God, if not peace, so at least for the Israelis, you already live in Israel, you *serve the country*, in the army, you served in the army? From my point of view, you are Israeli, you didn't serve in the army, but you as a person accept the values of [...], what was it? Like, patriotism, some love to the state of Israel, this is what I think." (Avi, p. 21)

Avi's quote displays his hesitation to decide clearly that IB's slogan is the legitimate way, and he appeals to "Israeli values" which he presents not necessarily as "Jewish" but negotiable. After all, Avi's hesitation is rather the exception in the interviews.

