9 Serving the Country: "The State of Israel Demands"

The following chapters deal with the analytical question of how talking about civic engagement with the Yisra'el Beitenu party is discursively framed by patterns of interpretation of Israeli citizenship. In the narratives, the interviewees' construct of Israeli citizenship is based upon certain conditions: the fulfilment of a *citizen's duties*, namely *serving the country* and being *loyal* to the *Jewish state* grants a citizen *rights*; and the notion of who a good citizen would be is central. I will show how the interviewees, based on the argument of being a good citizen, position themselves in a dominant position within the Israeli society along the dimensions of *duties*, participation and identity or, in Bourdieu's words, a sense of belonging. Against the background of the assumption that the social group in power defines who gains legitimate access to the Israeli society in the form of providing or denying Israeli citizenship at a given time, I argue that the interviewees' reading of Israeli citizenship is their strategy to successfully construct such a dominant position. Having said this, the empirical analysis aims at showing how the participants in the study embed their narratives about civic engagement into the broader context of how they present Israeli citizenship and their roles as Israeli citizens, respectively.

The current chapter looks into how the interviewees present Israeli citizenship in general and the dimension of *service of the country* in particular, and how they embed narratives of their own *service of the country* into this reading.

9.1 ANALYSIS OF HABITUAL DISPOSITIONS I: "YOU GET [WHAT] YOU GIVE"

In the context of the study, citizenship is understood as the "membership of a political community" (Lister/ Pia 2003: 8), featured by four core dimensions in a particular relationship: (political, cultural, economic) *rights, duties*, participation, and identity (Delanty 1997: 9). In the narratives, all four of these dimensions can be found and they are presented in a particular relationship. The insight of how the interviewees theorise Israeli citizenship on the one hand and how they construct it as everyday practice on the other hand is essential for understanding how they construct their subjective position within the field of Israeli citizenship and, consequently, within Israeli society. Pinson shows that the Jewish and the Palestinian students in her empirical study construct their understanding of citizenship along various discourses. They employ individualistic approaches which stress the granting of *rights* to the individual citizen as well as those approaches which rather stress the relationship of a citizen within a particular citizenship space which comes with certain obligations, in particular military service (Pinson 2004: chapter 7). In contrast to Pinson's findings, the participants in the current study construct citizenship first and foremost in terms of perceived obligations: they construct Israeli citizenship around the fulfilment of *duties*, upon which the individual citizen earns certain *rights*. Ilan claims:

"So, to say, as much as you give to the state as much you get, like, (...) to me this sounds very logical, right? If you (..) are a citizen who fulfils his *duties*, you deserve full *rights*; if not, you deserve part of it, if you don't give anything to the state [...] why will I pay taxes, me, who, why do my military service, do everything, and (..) somebody else will receive social benefits, pension, insurance, and all these things on my money." (Ilan, p. 14)

In other words, a "just distribution of goods", including *citizen's rights*, in Israeli society should be organised according to an individual's contribution, not according to an individual's needs.

The first dimension of *citizen's duties*, as presented by the participants in the current study, is that of *service of the country*. Ilan, the lawyer, puts his argument on a legal basis:

Interviewer: "[...] Is military service mandatory as well?"
Ilan: "It's the law in the state of Israel!"
Interviewer: "But those who—"
Ilan: "You don't want to serve in the military, like, you have a problem with that [military service], and I understand that some people have a problem with that, like, do national service, *serve* the country in some other way." (Ilan, p. 15)

The "law" regulating military service in Israel is the National Defence Service Law (1986), but this "law" is not the common argument to join the army in the interviews. Instead, the obligation due to the law is presented as a moral motivation and at the same time as "natural" (Helman 1999: 395). Zemlinskaya describes the link between *service*, *loyalty* and *citizen's rights* in her empirical study on draft resistance: "[i]t [military service] is perceived as an expression of loyalty to the state and as such it defines the hierarchy of belonging to the state" (Zemlinskaya 2008: 12). The interviewees have internalised that public moral discourse about a citizen's obligation to *serve* and do not question the obligation to join the army. It is usually against their personal experience of military service that *service* of "all Israeli citizens" is demanded, disregarding the differences in opportunities and approaches of different societal and/ or ethnic groups in the country. Indirectly, Katya claims "every citizen in the state" (here: student) undergoes the same procedure, so everyone "want[s] so badly to serve in the army" (Katya, p. 27). The interviewees just accept it as given to get enlisted after school and not doing military service is usually not considered an option. Some interviewees, however, explain their motivation to *serve* with their migration background. In this context, Lukas explains why he got enlisted despite his rejection as unfit due to physical health issues:

"It is very important to me to protect this country because we live here, although I was not born here, in my eyes it is very important because this country helped me a lot, like, helped my family, like, helped, helped me to make a place for myself here (.), helped my mother to find work, like, my brother grows up here, I grow up here, grew up here, so, it is very important to me, like." (Lukas, p. 6)

A further issue in the context of their reading of citizenship is how the interviewees relate their civic engagement and active participation to the other dimensions of *duties*, *rights*, and *sense of belonging*. The interviewees

distinguish between an abstract understanding of citizenship in terms of *citizen's duties*, in particular contribution by doing military service and concrete political participation in the form of civic engagement (cf. Pinson 2004). However, participation is presented as not mandatory and thus as subordinate to a *citizen's duties*: accordingly, in the narratives civic engagement in contrast to the interviewees' military service is not presented as a major issue but serves them rather as a point of departure to present themselves as a good citizen (Ichilov 2004). As will be shown below, the interviewees talk about their civic engagement as something that "happened" rather by chance than something they did consciously and regard as *service*.

But, not for all of them it is as clearly a *citizen's duty* to contribute. Emmanuel reflects about the confusing contradiction between the abstract hegemonic discourse of home-coming and directly experienced "hatred" of "Russians", as in the story about his little sister's humiliation. His emotional reaction then displays a feeling of humiliation, and consequently the rejection of the idea of contribution: "look, it's not that I want it too badly because personally I, a country that looks at me strangely, why should I risk my life?" (Emmanuel, p. 29).

9.2 ANALYSIS OF HABITUAL DISPOSITIONS II: "I WENT THROUGH SOME KIND OF BRAINWASH"

The interviewees connect the notion of mandatory military service, which they perceive as the most important way of *serving their country* first and foremost with formal socialisation agents, above all civic education lessons in school. However, in practice those lessons are described as the frontal teaching of slogans rather than discussions about sense and nonsense of having *citizen's rights* and *duties*. Katya puts it that way:

"[W]hy did I want so badly to serve in the army? Because—again, this is not because of deep faith in that party or another, it's simply because I felt: 'wow, I have to!' (..) Now why? Because I went through some kind of brainwash (laughing), yes, maybe not in the understanding—not in the negative sense of the word, but yes, when everybody—every citizen in the state has to *serve*, [...] I simply remember myself in school, [...] the country needs to raise a new generation, the country needs to raise a

new generation, it needs to prepare them already from a young age, so if this is, if this is to speak about youth organisations, ehm, they talk in slogans, so yes [...], again, I can't tell you to what extent this [talk in slogans] is wanted because we live in that reality (...) and every country does this at the end of the day (laughing), it's not that only we do that [...], obviously, obviously it is wanted by the state, because it has to continue its—it has to continue its erection [...], because if it doesn't raise a new generation, it obviously will not go on to exist, so obviously it is right." (Katya, p. 27-8)

And Vicky, talking about when she started to consciously think about what it means to be a citizen, adds:

"I became more interested in what is really going on with regard to politics during adolescence because I was in a youth movement called the Zionist youth movement, ehm, there I more considered Zionism and actions that need to be undertaken and afterwards also in the army, ehm, I became more interested in why actually we fight so many (...) wars and what leads to what." (Vicky, p. 16)

Yet Katya presents the moral motivation to "want so badly to serve in the army" as something learnt, externally enforced ("I went through some kind of brainwash"). "Brainwash" carries an alternative interpretation: students are not able, not allowed, not wanted to question the idea of obligatory military service, they are not necessarily convinced of the idea but lack thinking about an alternative. However, Katya hurries to add that it was something she was not forced to learn but did willingly ("brainwash (laughing), yes, maybe not in the understanding—not in the negative sense of the word"), as something a good Israeli citizen internalises—or, as Vicky said, "consider[s] [...] to be undertaken". Generally, the messages sent in formal education contexts are received as rather abstract or far from personal experience—yet at the same time powerful. In this context, other authors refer to the perception of military service as a moral obligation towards their country also described like this by native-born Israelis (e.g. Goldberg 2006; Helman 1999); Kimmerling has coined the phenomenon "civil militarism" which means that "socio-political boundaries of the collectivity are determined and maintained by participation in military service, its manipulation, and sacrifice to support spheres that are classified as 'national security'" (Kimmerling 1993: 207). Accordingly, Ilan justifies the

outstanding role military service plays is due to the fact that it links the perceived obligation directly to the "situation that we are in" (Ilan, p. 15), a situation lacking security. Yet, as will be shown, the interviewees' perception of a lack of security has an impact on how they read citizenship and *citizen's rights* especially:

"We are not Switzerland, we are not Denmark, [for] people from Germany it might be difficult to get [i.e. to understand], like—Germany, of all countries, for foreigners—like, the situation that we are in, the security guys who stand outside [a building] and check your bag every time you enter and all these things, like, there is nothing [to do about it], it's hard, it's very different from abroad, it's very different from Europe [...] it [serving in the military] is the law in the state of—it's the law in the state of Israel." (Ilan, p. 16)

Zeev simply states: "we have to contribute, we are Jews, we have to fight, why, I have no clue, [...] we did well [what we did in Gaza], [...] we are at war with them" (Zeev, p. 14). For the establishment of the link between the security situation and military service, civic education lessons play a crucial role in the eyes of the interviewees—as Katya put it, the state needs young people or students to be in line with the official state ideology. In Katya's understanding, "official state ideology" means a nationalist approach to security issues which is justified in her view "because we live in that reality".

Finally, the interviewees can draw on the personal experiences they made during military service. On the one hand, the interviewees refer to personal experiences in the past when talking about their own motivation to serve in the IDF or to become actively engaged in a community or political context. On the other hand, they post-rationalise these personal experiences and refer to them in light of public discourse in order to show what they understand by a good citizen. Similar to civic education lessons, military service is described as a major factor for how young Israelis perceive their everyday life in Israel. Ilan says:

"In Israel [...] young people are generally more conservative, more Zionist, and the older ones vote rather for Avoda [the Labour party], Meretz [a rather liberal party], like, more liberal [...] Again, like, the young generation, which is the generation that serves in the military or has to go to the military or is just after the military or is in reserve duty, ok, they know exactly what is going on in the country, like, they live

this every day, they are at the university, they see what's going on in the media, they, they are more active, like, older people who work, no idea, at the work place or pensioners, or people from the older generation that usually vote Avoda and so on—no idea, maybe they see the things a little different, like, it's their right, I get it." (Ilan, p. 24)

Ilan here connects military service with being "more Zionist", and thus indirectly establishes a direct link between being Zionist, doing military service, and fulfilling one's *citizen's duty*. Besides, he links being "conservative" with the personal experience of military service—which is not surprising against the background of previous findings about the influence of war on political opinion (e.g. Canan-Sokullu 2012)—, but more importantly with being Zionist as a political opinion ("young people are generally more conservative, more Zionist, and the older ones vote rather for Avoda [the Labour party], Meretz, like, more liberal"). In this context, recent military service is not only presented as a particular filter but as a point of view which is more appropriate than that of older Israelis who do not share that insight knowledge. In Ilan's view, the cleavage between political right-wing and political left-wing is simultaneously a generational cleavage. In Ilan's opinion this is due to the fact that "young people face the political reality during their military service" (Livio 2012),[1] and (also as a causal effect of their recent service) are more interested in politics while their parents' generation either tend to forget their experiences, make their peace with them or may have other, everyday worries. In sum, political right-wingers, i.e. in Ilan's words those who are "conservative", or, "Zionist", "go to the military or [are] just after the military or [are] in reserve duty", are able to see the political reality because they have insider knowledge.

In contrast to the major role other socialisation agents play for the willingness to join the IDF, family is hardly mentioned in this context. Yet in contrast to findings of previous empirical studies on the issue of military service among FSU immigrants and their children (e.g. Eisikovits 2006), the interviewees do not mention any negative attitudes or talk hesitantly concerning their military service in the family (cf. Eisikovits 2006: 295).

1 More specifically: in border control units, as some of the interviewees point out, e.g. Lukas.

9.3 ANALYSIS OF DISCURSIVE PRACTICE III: A MATTER OF SOLIDARITY

Peled identified three layers of Israeli citizenship: a liberal dimension with regard to the distribution of *rights* in order to "separate" between Israeli citizens and non-citizens, a Republican one with regard to contribution to the community in order to "legitimise" the existing social hierarchy and an ethno-nationalist dimension in order to "discriminate against" non-Jewish, in particular Palestinian citizens (Peled 2011: 278). Having asked secular and religious as well as Palestinian pupils in the Israeli school system about their understanding of Israeli citizenship, Pinson (2004) can empirically confirm the actual existence of a threefold perception of Israeli citizenship across the three groups (secular Jewish, religious Jewish, and Palestinian citizens). Yet the participants in the current study do not make such a distinction with regard to the *citizen's duties* of different segments of Israeli society. Instead, they apply the same standard for every segment of Israeli society regardless of their actual legal status. In more detail, they apply a Republican reading of citizenship to all Israeli citizens: citizens are obliged to participate (e.g. Dalton 2008; Lister/ Pia 2003), or—in the words of the interviewees—to *serve the country* in an equal way.

Accordingly, the interviewees' emphasis on military service of all possibilities to contribute can be read against the background of recent developments in Israeli society with regard to diminishing the absolute value of military service in Israeli society and what Levy calls "the violation of the Republican equation" (Levy 2011: 40). In this context, in the Israeli public discourse, the notion of "mishtamtim" (Livio 2012) has appeared, i.e. individual (Jewish) citizens who dodge their military service for various reasons. However, I argue here that the interviewees do not intend to criticise those Jewish individuals in the first place. This is for two reasons: first, "mishtamtim" are not referred to directly in the narratives. Second, and more importantly, the interviewees constantly construct their line of argument about Israeli citizenship against another segment of Israeli society: Palestinian citizens. However, they do that indirectly. Again, one can take Ilan's narrative as an example. Ilan is preoccupied with his hope for a political career. Above all, he aims at presenting himself as ambitious and successful and making an impression: on me in the direct context of the interview situation on the one hand. On the other hand, Ilan also aims at

impressing his invisible listeners in the Yisra'el Beitenu party. For this purpose, he talks in much detail about his past and present activities within the framework of the party and outside of it. Besides, Ilan emphasises he has done all those things although, first, "this is not an obligation", and second, in particular not for him since he is physically disadvantaged ("I had a stroke, the physicians didn't believe I'll survive" Ilan, p. 2). Accordingly, he is the one delivering the most elaborate statements about how he understands citizenship. Again, quoting from Ilan's interview:

"[Y]ou have the right to get as much as as you give, that is to say as much as you give to the state, as much you get, like, (.) to me that sounds very logical, right? If you are a citizen who fulfils his obligations, you are entitled to full *rights*, and if you don't [fulfil your obligations], like, you are not [entitled to full *rights*] but part of them." (Ilan, p. 13)

And he provides a detailed definition of what *serving the country* means to him:

Interviewer: "In what way is it possible to *serve the country*?"
Ilan: "*Serve the country*? Like a million ways! What does it mean 'to *serve*'? First of all, start with what you are obliged to do, that's first of all, if you do that, it's already enough."
Interviewer: "What is that in detail?"
Ilan: "Ah, ok, what it means?"
Interviewer: "Aha."
Ilan: "First of all, don't evade taxes, pay taxes like everyone else, go to the army—you don't want [to go to the] army? Do national service! Ehm, (pause) no idea, if you want [to *serve*] like just a tiny bit more, donate to some place, to the community that you live in, volunteer somewhere, contribute to your community, where you are, like, this is not an obligation, but it is something that satisfies you—I, when I [studied] in second grade at Tel Aviv University, I volunteered at the [...], at the court, to people who need money, and they come [to the court], and they don't know what they want in life, and they have debts, like, 1,000 NIS, and they are poor, and you (.) help them to fill in the forms and explain to them what to do, hand in the forms, like, (..)—[it's] great satisfaction, like, I, all the time during my studies, all the time—I don't know, all my adult life, I think, I have been volunteering somewhere, ok?" (Ilan, p. 13).

Ilan puts it straight, *service of the country* is obligatory—in which form, however, is in his eyes to a certain degree an individual decision. At the same time, his quote implies that there are individuals or segments of Israeli society who do not serve in the military. Yet, unlike Ilan suggests, the National Defence Service Law instructs mandatory military service for Jewish Israelis—making exemptions on individual grounds and giving the possibility of doing National Service instead—but explicitly excludes Palestinian citizens on grounds of security concerns. It is safe to suggest that Ilan, as a lawyer and referring to "the law", is aware that he interprets the regulations on mandatory military service for the sake of his argument. From the quote it has become clear that Ilan knows that those who do not serve in the military cannot be forced to do National Service instead. But, against the background of his own history of civic engagement, Ilan demands some kind of contribution to the "community" from every Israeli citizen and makes the option of alternative service quasi-mandatory. And he utters this demand forcefully; he even directly addresses his imaginary non-serving listener: "you [my emphasis] don't want [to go to the] army? Do national service!".

In this context, Ilan does not explicitly distinguish between Jewish and non-Jewish or Palestinian citizens; yet his wording makes it clear that he has just the latter in mind: Ilan refers to "the law", and to "national service". Besides, by hiding the fact that Palestinian citizens are legally excluded from military service, Ilan implies that those citizens evade their *citizen's duty*. In other words, he discursively terminates the legal distinction between the Jewish majority and non-Jewish minorities with regard to their *duties*. Instead, Ilan applies a Republican reading of citizenship to all Israeli citizens, wittingly ignoring that some segments of Israeli society, here in particular Palestinian citizens, have not got any chance of fulfilling this demand. As will be shown below, Ilan is not the only one claiming that the Palestinian-Israeli minority does not fulfil their *duties*, and *service* is not the only *duty* mentioned in this context. It is rather the case that the non-Jewish minority serves the interviewees as the other against whom they can show they fulfil their own *duties* as Israeli citizens.

It can thus be read as a discursive marker for an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006 [1983]; see also Barth 1969). As outlined above, the concept of community, however random, concrete or abstract, in the narratives implies a moral value demanding the active engagement of those who belong to it. Ilan here connects this sense of belonging to a particular community

with a particular view of Israeli citizenship as contribution: as it was with civic engagement, contribution is discursively defined as a moral value. Zeev goes even further and adds a scenario of threat to the moral demand: "people who don't *serve* harm the state, [...] we are Jews, and we have to contribute to the state" (Zeev, p. 11).

The interviewees do not make a direct reference, yet I argue that the presentation of service as regarding all Israeli citizens equally must be read as a reference to one of IB's electoral slogans as well. Picture 1 shows the respective screenshot of the party's online platform. The picture shows someone, obviously a soldier because of the olive-coloured trouser legs and military boots, standing in front of military backpacks.

Picture 1.: "AJust Society Begins With an Equal Society."

Source: Yisra'el Beitenu Website[2]

Whether that person is male, or female is not clear because one can see only their feet and part of their legs; and this is intentional: in Israel, military service is mandatory for both sexes alike. A slogan reads: "A just society begins with an equal society.". The slogan reflects both the legal discourse of mandatory military service for Jewish Israeli citizens, and the ethno-nationalist discourse of military service as a moral obligation of (Jewish) Israeli citizens against the background of a constant threat to security. Yet at the same time the slogan implies that the obligation as well as the legal ruling

2 Partija "Yisra'el Beitenu" ("Our House Israel"). "A Just Society Begins with an Equal Society." Retrieved from: http://www.beytenu.org/a-just-society-begins-with-an-equal-society/

of military service is not limited to the Jewish segments of Israeli society but concerns every Jewish and non-Jewish citizen. It further implies that there are individuals or groups who do not *serve* and thus do not fulfil their obligation as Israeli citizens; otherwise it would not be necessary to mention the issue in an electoral campaign.

This is exactly how the interviewees argue. Yet it is left open to the potential voter to interpret who is the target group of this campaign. Against the background of the ethno- nationalist roots of that discourse it becomes clear that the target group are non-Jewish segments who do not *serve*, i.e. Palestinian citizens. Neither the Yisra'el Beitenu party nor the interviewees feel the need to make that explicit any further.