4 The Data Material

In the present chapter I will describe the process of data collection and data analysis in the present study.

When I approached the potential interviewees, I explained to them that I would be interested in their story about how they had become engaged. I did not explicitly say, however, that I approached them because of their connection to the Yisra'el Beitenu party; but made the engagement with IB as well as public discourse about the party and its political leader, Lieberman, an issue in the interview itself. In the interviews, I used this framework as guiding questions or rather topics that I would adjust to the course of the interview and in the process of data collection, if necessary. However, I asked every interviewee an opening question (cf. Schuetze 1983): "Please tell me how you have become engaged [further, depending on the current engagement of the participant] in your community, with the students' council, with IB, etc.".

The empirical data is mainly based on in-depth interviews about civic engagement in general, and engagement with the Yisra'el Beitenu party in particular.[1] Besides, I collected context data that I also have included into the analysis: material from the Yisra'el Beitenu party's 2009 electoral campaign, material from the party's official website in English, Russian and Hebrew (newsfeed, the party programme, screenshots of their website), newspaper articles on FSU immigrants and on the Yisra'el Beitenu party, information obtained from informal interviews and talks, fragments of discussions in

1 All the names in this work were made anonymous, unless marked otherwise. However, I tried to keep the original "sound" and chose names accordingly.

social media on the Yisra'el Beitenu party and Israeli politics, workshop and conference proceedings on the Israeli society.

4.1 THEORETICAL SAMPLING OF THE DATA

Before I started the actual fieldwork in June 2009, I had made contacts with two young political activists in Israel through a colleague who herself had immigrated to Germany from the former Soviet Union as a child. One of these activists referred me directly to a member of the IB Knesset faction (Max), the other contact referred me to a former activist of the party who had been engaged on the local level (Nitsan). After initial contact with potential interviewees, I proceeded via the snowball system-approach and asked the interviewees whether they could forward me to further people affiliated with the party. Through Max I reached out to Katya, Ilan and Ljuba, who were all parliamentary assistants to Knesset members of the IB faction.

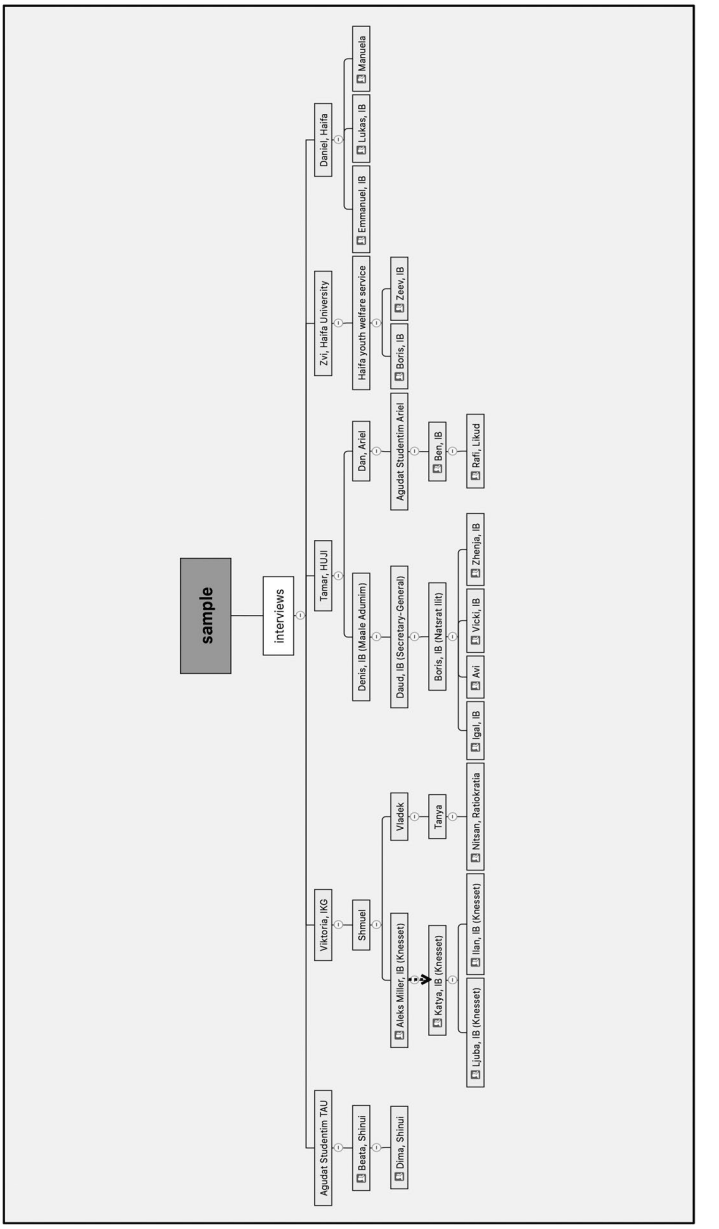
Furthermore, I directly contacted party representatives on different levels: national (member(s) and the party's secretary general)[2] as well as local representatives.[3] Figure 2 shows the sample of interviewees.

When I contacted people in the party's local or central administration over the phone, I asked them to connect me to young Russian-speaking Israelis who are actively involved in political or civic activities in the framework of the party. In most cases, I was rejected; in other cases, people agreed to meet me in person or referred me to potential interviewees. In Haifa, the local representative declined my request because she could not think of anyone who would meet the profile. Yet the most successful way to find interviewees was through mutual friends or acquaintances. I obtained the contacts through a personal network of colleagues in Israel or such colleagues with contacts in Israel.

2 Members of the Knesset were listed according to their party affiliation on the parliamentary website.

3 For this purpose, I used the section "Our people in the city" on the official IB party website (Partija "Yisra'el Beitenu" ("Our House Israel") 2013); besides, I contacted student cells of the party within the students' councils at the Universities of Haifa and Tel Aviv.

Figure 2: The Sample



Source: Author's Own Presentation

This went surprisingly very well. However, after giving it some thought, I reached two conclusions. On the one hand, I am certain that being referred to a friend was a sign of trust toward me that is not to be underestimated. This also explains, at least partly, why my request was more commonly rejected on the phone. On the other hand, I realised that the party officials had become increasingly confident about their political position after the 2009 electoral success of the party and its inclusion in Netanyahu's governing coalition.

Micha, a local IB representative from Ma'ale Adumim–one of the largest Jewish settle-ments in the West Bank, near Jerusalem–, for instance, agreed to meet me after I had contacted him through a local police officer, the husband of an acquainted Ph.D. student at the Hebrew University. At short notice, Micha set up a meeting with the secretary general of the party in Jerusalem. That meeting in particular opened many, many doors since the secretary general functioned as one of the *gate-keepers* in the present study; among other things, it paved the way to the local party branches in Natserat Illit and Ari'el (another large settlement in the northern part of the West Bank).

The participants I had interviewed in 2009 lived all across the country: in Bat Yam near Tel Aviv (Katya, parliamentary assistant), in Ashdod, i.e. in the south, close to the Gaza Strip (Ilan, parliamentary assistant), in Haifa (Nitsan, who founded his own political party after leaving IB), in Jerusalem (Ljuba, parliamentary assistant) and in Ari'el (Max, member of the Knesset, Ben, member of the student's council at Ari'el University). Additionally, I had the chance to interview Viktoria, Dima, and Rafi — three party activists who were not engaged with IB but with the Shinui party (Viktoria, whom I had "found" through the student's council of Tel Aviv University), or the Likud (Dima, a friend of Viktoria's, and Rafi, Ben's roommate at Ari'el college).

In 2010, I concentrated on Haifa, where I spoke with young people who would regularly visit a youth club in the Hadar neighbourhood of Haifa. I got in touch with these young people through local colleagues during my time as a visiting scholar at Haifa University (e.g. Boris and Emmanuel, IB voters, and Zeev, a local activist). The Natserat Illit contacts were established thanks to the help of Denis (e.g. Avi, Vicky, Igal, Zhenja—local activists).

In particular during my second field trip, data collection and analysis were geared to the principles of theoretical sampling and of minimal and

maximal contrasting (e.g. Glaser/ Strauss 2010; Kelle 2005), which Glaser and Strauss suggest for data organisation. When I had entered the field, I had just a vague research interest in 2009 and started to analyse the first interviews with open coding. Moreover, I began to read about previous research on civic engagement. The focus of my analysis was still on the individual stories about ways into civic engagement, which differed depending on the proximity of the interviewees to the *organisational centre* of the party: based on the first circle of coding I assumed that those closer to the centre had come from previous political engagement, while those further away from the centre had been more concerned with community or social issues. Thus, when I returned to the field about ten months later, I conducted interviews according to the following criteria of minimal and maximal contrasting with regard to the interviewees' engagement with the Yisra'el Beitenu party:

- active v. passive political engagement,
- formal v. informal political engagement,
- party work on national v. local level,
- party office-holder vs. voluntary engagement,
- engaged with IB v. other political party.

However, I was not able to satisfy the theoretical sampling completely; and the reasons for this are twofold. For one thing, it was due to difficulties in respect of limited time and money for the data collection, especially in view of the geographical distance, secondly, there was the problem of the availability of potential interviewees during field phases. As mentioned above, in some areas or cities there were just not (enough) young people engaged within the framework of the party. Aleks, a local IB office holder in Natserat Illit, was the only (young) person I was able to establish contact with on the regional level, and he did not agree to an interview. As a result, I was not able to fill the matrix with interviewees who hold a party office on a local level.

4.2 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWEES

I conducted 29 interviews with young Israelis (aged 18-29) with an FSU family background. Most of them had immigrated as children (the then oldest interviewee immigrated to Israel at the age of 11) from the former Soviet Union. Igal's parents — he was one of the two interviewees who were born in the country to immigrants from FSU countries — had come to Israel as early as in the 1980s, thus in a previous immigration wave from the Soviet Union.[4] The interviewees form two groups: one, which is actively involved in party work and one, which in its mainly local engagement is only loosely connected to an IB representative.

Previous civic engagement Civic engagement often serves as the starting point for engagement in general and political engagement in particular. In accordance with previous empirical studies, engagement with the Yisra'el Beitenu party is rarely the starting point for active engagement. Only a small minority among the participants had not been actively engaged prior to their IB engagement. If the interviewees were engaged before, it was in one of the following scenarios:

1. formal engagement
- ideological membership: Zionist institutions or youth movements (Vicky),
- students' council (Max),

2. informal engagement
- community work (Ilan, Katya).

Recruitment Various empirical studies (e.g. de Rooij 2012; Verba et al. 1995) have pointed to the fact that most engaged people have become recruited at a certain point. This is also true for the interviewees in the present study. Based on the analysis of the interview material, I interpret this moment of recruitment a little broader and included not only those interviewees who were approached by a particular person, but also those cases of rather indirect

4 For more details on this wave, see e.g. Beizer 2005

ways of recruitment, e.g. a job offer in the course of which the interviewees actively entered the IB framework.

Generally, the interviewees described two main ways of becoming engaged with the party. Either they had been active before in one way or another and had been recruited by an IB representative on the basis of these activities. On the local level, those who recruited them were people already active in the party, very close to the interviewees in their everyday lives–e.g. friends (Nitsan) or kin (Igal, Lukas, Vicky, Igal, Avi)–, and had asked for help with a certain issue. This kind of recruitment is of very informal character, it is often not ideological but rather a gesture of friendship and mutual support.

In contrast, on the national party level it was rather a Yisra'el Beitenu party official who could win the individual over. The usual pattern of recruitment here is to get to know to an IB representative through working on a specific project (Ilan, Max, Katya). Recruitment on the national level occurred in a much more formal way. While the first contact with a party official might have happened on the interviewee's initiative, it served the interests of the party at the same time, namely their readiness to actively look for new members. Bagno[5] pointed out that the party was actively looking for young activists in various societal fields and on various societal levels in order to recruit them as members and by these means used the trust these activists gained in their communities for its own political purposes.

Operation Cast Lead (2009) and the Gaza flotilla raid (2010) My field trips took place shortly after or coincided with these events, so, occasionally the interviewees referred to them in their line of argument; and they were also widely discussed in (the) (social) media. That is why I shortly outline them here. The military operation Cast Lead against Hamas in Gaza started at the end of December 2008 and ended in January 2009, only three weeks before the general elections for the 18th Knesset. Its declared goal was to stop rockets being fired from the Gaza strip to the south of Israel. In the aftermath of these events, the United Nations launched the Goldstone report, which in Israel was regarded as one-sided because it accused the country of disproportionately condoning civil casualties.

5 Olena Bagno. Informal Meeting at City University New York City (CUNY), New York City. (December 30, 2011), author's own notes

The Gaza flotilla was a political campaign which started from Turkey: Six ships were heading for the Gaza strip in May 2010. While the participants claimed to be taking relief supplies to the civilians in Gaza, Israel suspected them of delivering weapons for Hamas. When they entered Israeli territorial waters, the ships were demanded to leave by Israeli military. When they did not, IDF entered the ships: on one of them at least four people were killed through gunshot. The incident caused a long-term deterioration of Turkish-Israeli diplomatic relations (cf. Schiftan 2010; Pedatzur 2010).

Narrative style As mentioned above, the interviews are conceptualised as discursive practice. Against this background, I will be able to show how the interviewees use their narratives to turn to an *invisible audience*. This means, at times, not the interviewer is the partner in the current communication, but an imagined, absent partner is addressed. This must be understood as an argumentative strategy and thus serves a purpose.

At the same time, I had to consider that for the interviewees it would not be the first time that they told their life stories or parts of them. Thus, talking about one's life in a particular way, emphasising parts and leaving out others, has to be regarded as actively taking part in the reproduction or modification of discourse (Schäfer/ Völter 2005).

Cross-cultural communication and power relations Last but not least, I would like to reflect on power relations in the context of the interviews (e.g. Ebert/ Okamoto 2015; Lomsky-Feder/ Rapoport 2003). I approached the interviewees in Hebrew, but left it open to switch to Russian if requested. Occasionally, I felt that this caused irritation due to the foreign accent I had, and I was urged quite often to tell my personal story of interest in the issue in order to win the (potential) interviewee's trust. I do not think, however, that the fact that I was a foreigner was the reason for some of them to decline to tell their story. On the contrary, it may have particularly invoked their interest. During the interviews themselves, I often had the impression that the interviewees felt urged to explain something they had said in more detail to me, assuming I would not know—and often I really did not. The form of explanation they delivered ranged from adding details in a neutral way, so I would understand the matter, through flirting with me, through considering me as a collaborator, i.e. using my European or German descent

as a strategy to make an argument, to patronising me about how things work in Israeli society.

Language often did help; however, it did not always do so (e.g. Kruse et al. 2012). On the one hand, both the interviewees and I had various languages at our disposal to choose from if something was incomprehensible or if a term was missing. The interviewees made massive use of it, especially when speaking about everyday life: though they usually had a very high level of Hebrew, they referred to very familiar things, things of daily routine, in Russian. Yet sometimes, the interviewees felt the need to explain things in English instead, perhaps because they had not an adequate, more understandable way to describe these things.

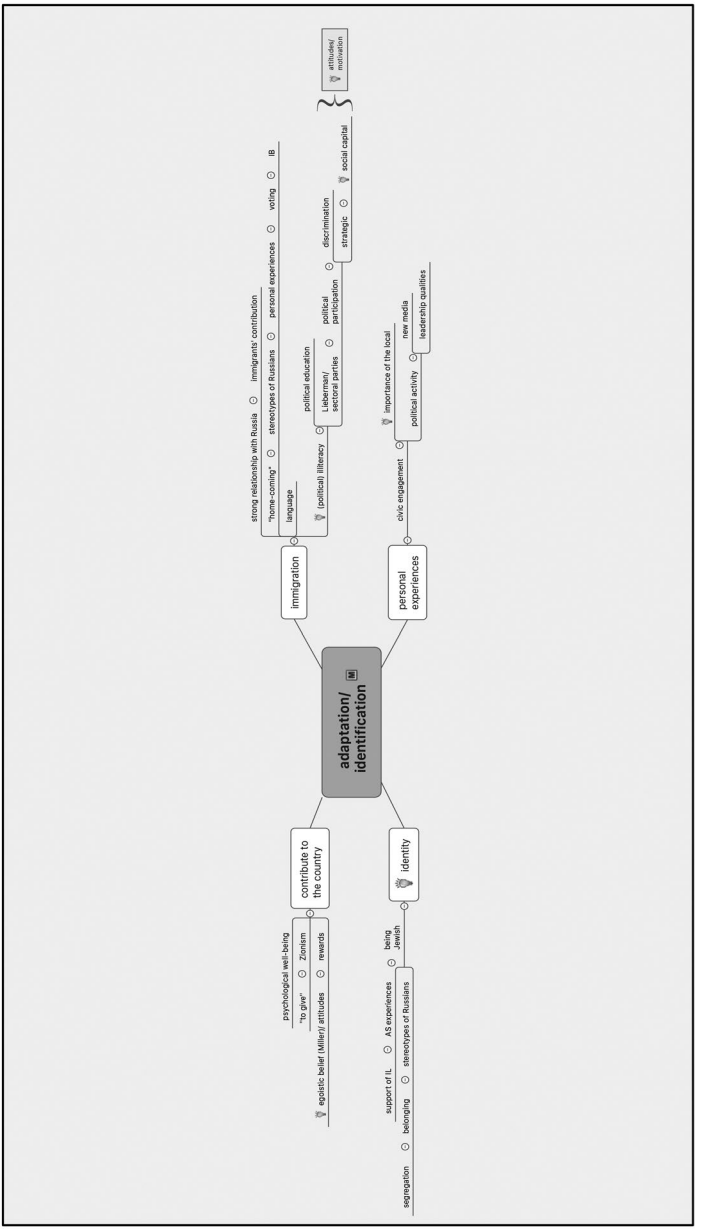
4.3 CODES AND CATEGORIES

As suggested, I started the analysis as soon as I had collected the first data and developed more detailed questions based on *open coding* in order to apply and adjust them in the process. As a very first step, I organised the material according to topics that either the interviewees would bring up or that I had brought up by asking about an issue. I used those topics as *in vivo codes*. The interviewees spoke about their personal experiences, growing up in families with an immigrant background, individual and collectively shared difficulties in the process and their individual ways of coping with those difficulties and about their military service as a central experience. In the process of *open coding*, I had developed first hypotheses about how young people become involved.

Yet I also found that the interviewees did not speak as much about their engagement as about their views on Israeli society and their own place in it – in other words, that they constantly referred to the macro-level, e.g. to cultural codes and to public discourse. Besides, I needed to extend the paradigm in such a way that it would be possible to include the role of discourse.

A second step in the process of coding was to approach the material with *axial coding*, as a way to organise the codes into categories and to fill those categories with empirical content by ascribing features to them, which in turn are based on the data or the codes. *Axial coding* is rather abstract thinking, aiming at systematisation of the preliminary findings and putting them into

Figure 3.: Category: Identification



Source: Author's Own Presentation

a relation (Breuer 2010: 284). Figure 3 shows an example of categories, as developed during the coding process.

When I approached the material that way, I hypothesised that the interviewees use talking about their civic engagement as a strategy to justify their particular view of Israeli citizenship. This version of citizenship, in turn, exactly as I assumed at that point, seemed to serve to give them a sense of *belonging*. During further analysis, I found more and more hints that my assumption might be right; I had found my key category: *belonging*.

At this point at the latest, Strauss's coding paradigm alone was no longer helpful. In order to grasp those references to the macro-level, I decided to extend Strauss's coding paradigm because I felt that the concentration on the conditions, strategies of action, individual actions, and the outcome of those actions of the individual would limit the analysis (Kelle 2005).