3   Theoretical Sensitivity I:
Pre-Concepts and Pre-Knowledge

Breuer suggests that researchers reflect on their position toward the study throughout the process in order to be aware of any pre-concepts of knowledge, personal experiences, or feelings that may influence their way of thinking (cf. Breuer 2010: 131). I agree with him, and thus I am going to describe here how I have come to study the issue at hand. In the present chapter, I will reflect on those pre-concepts of knowledge, personal experiences, or feelings that may influence my way of thinking, as Breuer suggests. Besides, I will outline major directions of previous research on civic engagement. With regard to the issue of theoretical sensitivity, I have assumed the position suggested by Kelle (2005), and applied Strauss' *coding paradigm*. However, in parallel to entering the field, I used "broad reading" (cf. Breuer 2010: 135) of previous research to get an idea of how to start data collection and organise the theoretical sampling (cf. Steinhardt 2015: 37).[1]

The present study has come a long way. My first personal encounter with how immigrants see their place in a new cultural environment was when I conducted biographic interviews with non-Jewish immigrant women in

---

[1]   In their latest, revised edition, Breuer, Muckel and Dieris (2018) suggest a two-step procedure for the review of literature relevant to the present research. At the very beginning of the process, one should get a broad and general overview, while later on—as part of the verification of grounding the present theory in the empirical data—the researcher should get a deeper knowledge of relevant previous concepts on the issue at hand (Breuer 2018: 145).

Israel, (1st generation) immigrants from the former Soviet Union[2] for my master thesis (Schmidt, 2006). Before these encounters, *migration* had been something very abstract for me: I grew up in a small town in the former GDR and remember just two single "Ausländer [foreigners]" because they were black. After school I studied close to home, and the picture I had of my social environment stayed very much the same. Occasionally, I heard a mixture of German and a foreign language, suggesting that the speaker had immigrated, but my network of personal acquaintances and friends was exclusively German. Thus, I was astonished and fascinated at the same time to hear personal stories of migration, the difficulties, those women had encountered in the process of leaving and adapting, particularly those in maintaining a consistent and stable identity and the individual strategies these women had developed to cope with them.

Yet at the same time I was shocked, for instance, by the—in my eyes—extreme right opinions those women uttered with respect to the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, or the cultural superiority they displayed towards Palestinian-Israeli citizens. Continuing to study migration, or rather immigrant adaptation, against this background, I became interested in the political dimension of this process as well as in the 2nd generation, i.e. those who have already grown up in their parents' country of destination.

However, when I wanted to return to the immigrant group I had already encountered, I was told there was no need to study their political attitudes and blame them for being right-wing extremists as they had enough problems "here in Israel". However, I did not agree; on the contrary, I do think there is a need to study the political adaptation of immigrants; and, again, Israelis with an FSU family background can serve as a case study. Hence, my initial interest was to understand who engages with the Yisra'el Beitenu party. Based on what I knew from previous research about the adaptation of FSU immigrants, I decided at the very beginning that I wanted to know more about the children of those immigrants, who very often immigrated with their adult parents but were usually not the focus of previous research. Thus, I decided to focus on how young Israelis with an FSU immigrant background become engaged with the Yisra'el Beitenu party. I started to collect data at a very early stage of the research process.

---

2   A short introduction to that immigrant group is Gitelman 2004; in more detail cf. Glöckner 2011.

At that point, I had only a general knowledge of Israeli society in general and FSU immigration to Israel in particular. This context knowledge came from two sources: from my previous research on non-Jewish Russian spouses who had immigrated with their Jewish husbands (Schmidt 2006) on the one hand, and from overview reading about research on civic engagement in order to identify research gaps for the preparation of a Ph.D. proposal.

Since I was interested in the individual's perspective on civic engagement and thought of it as rooted in the individuals' biographies, in-depth interviews with politically engaged people about their civic engagement were my first choice. Such kind of data would allow the interviewees to set their own focus and at the same time I would be able to work with a framework of open questions concerning civic engagement based on assumptions retrieved from the literature on civic engagement.

3.1 A TYPOLOGY OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

One can identify three main dimensions of research investigating civic engagement: publications in the first research dimension deal with theoretical and conceptual questions of a typology of civic engagement. Researchers of the second dimension are more concerned with aspects of citizenship education; in this context, they particularly study the motivation of engaged individuals to participate in democratic activities. A third line of research concentrates on the empirical variety of political participation focussing on different aspects (e.g. resources for civic engagement, or civic engagement of immigrants). Figure 1 shows the approaches of previous empirical studies on civic engagement.

Recent empirical studies appeal for a conceptual turn when looking at civic engagement, especially with regard to the younger generations. In this context, these studies affirm that those voices in the discussion are wrong who warn that participation is declining. On the contrary, the argument goes that the variety of activities has grown and especially young people (in the U.S.) today are not less active, but active in different ways than the generations before them. Dalton (2008) shows in his study that it is not so much engagement in general that is declining; instead, he can show a change in citizenship norms. He identifies two dimensions of citizenship, namely *citizen's duties* and *citizen's rights* (Dalton 2008: 80-1), and with the shift in

emphasis from the former towards the latter over the last two decades or so, informal forms of political participation have become more relevant (Dalton 2008: 83); social research has only started to take these phenomena into consideration. though.[3] As a first step, recent studies have tended to expand their concept of civic engagement. In this respect, various authors call for a broader definition of participation, i.e. to not solely understand it in strictly political terms (such as voting or formal membership in a political party) but to include also a whole (new) range of informal or extra-parliamentary political activities.

Several authors (e.g. Marsh et al. 2007; Miller 1992) demand a turn in the approach to civic engagement, which would take into account that nowadays especially young people become engaged in informal contexts of politics rather than joining for instance a political party. Haste and Hogan (2006) argue in a similar way based on empirical findings showing that lay

---

3   Research in this area builds on the empirical finding that the concept of citizenship has been contested (e.g. Haste/ Hogan 2006) and shows that notions of who a "good citizen" is have changed. Nowadays, young people still consider obeying the law the most important civic *duty*, but at the same time seem to rate e.g. community engagement as equally important as voting and even more important than partisanship (e.g. Haste/ Hogan 2006; Lister et al. 2003; Torney-Purta et al. 2001). The underlying conclusion of this contested concept is that what citizenship stands for should be left to the citizen under examination (Haste/ Hogan 2006). In this context, Torney- Purta and Klandl Richardson explored anticipated future civic engagement. They looked at how adolescents' conceptualisations of a "good citizen" can be predicted by various contextual factors of political socialisation; those predictor variables include school-related (political information, political efficacy), family-related (political discussions with parents (and peers), trust in the government), and organisation-related (pre-adult activities) (Torney-Purta/ Klandl Richardson 2004: 51). The authors can show that depending on different strengths of these factors a different outcome in anticipated civic engagement can be predicted: they find that informed voting is highly influenced by school-related factors as well as political discussions at home, whereas a high interest in current politics predicts future partisanship, volunteering in the local community is highly influenced by everyday experiences and a high level of perceived efficacy, and protesting is highly encouraged by political discussions with parents.

people do not follow the strict distinction between the political and moral or social spheres that is common in the political sciences. Ekman and Amnå (2009) developed or revised a typology in order to "map [...] the totality of different *types* [emphasis in the original] of political and civic participation" (Ekman/ Amnå 2009: 15). Furthermore, the authors introduced the distinction between non-participation and participation, distinguishing within the latter between pre-political and manifest forms of action, and added the category of attention as a necessary pre-condition for action.

Figure 1.: Previous Empirical Studies on Civic Engagement
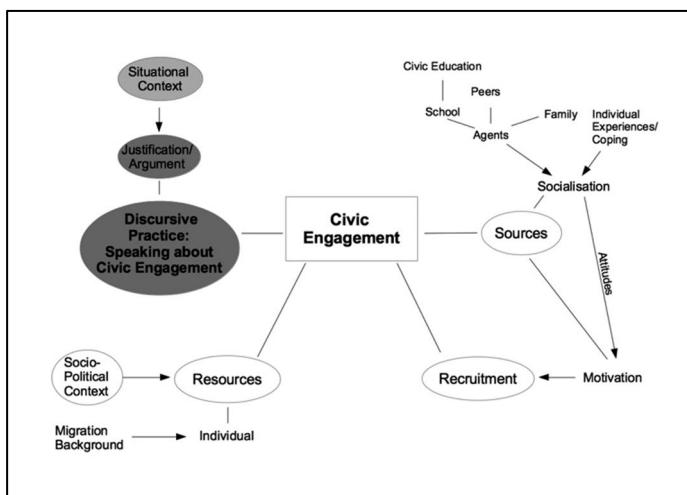
Source: Author's Own Presentation

3.2 MOTIVATION AND MORAL VALUES

Although the typology presented above suggests something different, empirical studies on civic engagement tend to answer the question why young people do not engage rather than the question why they become engaged. Motivation research has identified three areas of political participation: some are more value-orientated (ideology: "conventional (political)", i.e. voting behaviour, partisanship, political discussions etc.), some are more action-orientated (issue/ concern: "civic", i.e. helping the

community, engagement in a social movement[4] etc. or "make one's voice heard", i.e. protest etc.) (Haste/ Hogan 2006: 480).

Berger suggests an alternative approach and conceptualizes motivation in the context of individual moral development. In his theoretical paper he maintains that research must consider the motivation for engagement and argues in favour of submerging "civic engagement" into political, social or moral forms of engagement; he calls the very merging of social and moral engagement into social-moral engagement "civil" (Berger 2009). This is to elaborate a clear distinction between the various forms in which individuals can become engaged in, with or by something (Berger 2009: 340). Yet, as Bruter and Harrison empirical study[5] (2009) shows, it is not so easy to link the different theoretical concepts of motivation with a particular form of civic engagement. Motivation for civic engagement affects an individual's belief system as well as the particular situation in which the activity takes place. Berger, however, does not give hints on how to determine these aspects. Yet research on motivation based on survey data cannot answer the question whether political interest, "civic awareness" (Haste/ Hogan 2006) or "sensitivity" (Ekman/ Amnå 2009) lead to civic action or vice versa or, in other words, "[whether] sensitisation [is] a consequence of pre-existing socio-political or moral values and action patterns, or sensitisation [does] arise from some personal experience that engages the individual and then extends the domain of concerns" (Haste/ Hogan 2006: 490). The major critique of Berger's approach is that he left the relationship of the latter (political participation) with the two former (non-participation and civil participation) dimensions unclear (Ekman/ Amnå 2009: 18).

And I would like to add a further point of criticism here: Berger mentions that some people might act according to "indefensible [for democratic citizens] moral codes [e.g. extremist of all kinds]" (Berger 2009: 343). He only implicitly claims that moral values, as he understands them, are not universal, but distinctively democratic, "relating to moral principles such as toleration, reciprocity and law-abidingness" (ibid.). What does this mean for

---

4   "Engagement in a social movement" is considered as informal political activity elsewhere (Ekman/ Amnå 2009).

5   In their empirical study on party activists they identified three different types of activists: moral-, social-, and professional-minded.

empirical research on engagement in a non-democratic context, as the present study is going to do?[6]

3.3 RESOURCES FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A third line of research is concerned with the concrete resources an individual has at his or her disposal. But why are those so important to investigate? The empirical answer those studies give is that not only do different kinds of participation put different demands on the participant but, as Verba et al. (1995) pointed out, this will lead to different people engaging in different kinds of acts, and, according to Klandermans, with different "motivational dynamics" (Klandermans 2004: 361). Within this line of research, researchers put emphasis on the relationship between civic engagement and different variables, mainly previous engagement and social capital:

Previous engagement Quintelier explored the relationship between previous memberships in various voluntary associations–cultural, deliberate, help organisations vs. expressive, religious-ethic or youth organisations–,particular skills acquired in such associations and different forms of political participation (Quintelier 2008: 362). Summarising, Quintelier defined civic engagement as the "socialisation of attitudes [i.e. decision-making, political efficacy, social trust] and skills [deliberation, compromise, cooperation]" (Quintelier 2008: 356-7). She distinguished between "traditional" and "civic" forms of engagement as well as "political consumerism" (Quintelier 2008: 359).[7] Either way, Quintelier found that the type of organisation in which one participates matters as much as the number of the individual's

---

6   Möller (2016) suggested–similar to the present study–to change to perspective and to ask about how the social actors make sense of their engagement.

7   Yet the distinction (if there is one) between those forms seems arbitrary here; according to the typology developed by Ekman/ Amnå, all three forms suggested by Quintelier contain activities of manifest (formal and informal) political participation. Besides, it is important to note that the direction of relationship is unclear, i.e. whether membership in a voluntary association facilitates political participation or vice versa.

actual memberships in organisations as well as the skills that members are able to develop during their activities; all of these factors influence the various forms of political participation.

Social capital Putnam's influential study (2000) about social capital and political participation, his conclusions about declining social capital in the U.S. and the ensuing discussion about democracy at stake, introduced a new concept under an old name. In contrast to Bourdieu's concept (e.g. Bourdieu 1986), Putnam's social capital consists of three main components: the moral obligation to participate, social trust as an underlying condition that, again, is provided by individuals' social networks as more or less institutionalised opportunity structures. However, Putnam's work and particularly his concept of social capital, or rather its theoretical shortcomings, have provoked highly controversial critique; among the most severely criticised points was Putnam's conception of social capital as producing an entirely positive outcome (Braun 2001). Thus, a research line concentrating on the relationship between political participation (in its manifest and latent dimensions) and social capital (e.g. Teney and Hanquinet 2012; Berger 2009; Braun 2001) rather applies Bourdieu's concept.[8]

Bjørnskov (2006) proposed that different forms of social capital should lead to different forms of political participation, mediated by factors like socio-economic status (SES). Building on this, Teney and Hanquinet (2012) identified six types of social capital, which they connected to very different types of political participation. As expected, those with various social contacts also highly participated in all kinds of activities of manifest as well as latent forms (Teney and Hanquinet 2012: 9). However, the result that astonished the authors most was that another group with mainly one-dimensional contacts, above all within a religious community, also showed

---

8   Interestingly, in contrast to empirical studies on civic engagement of "citizens", research on the engagement of immigrants rather employs a social capital approach based on Putnam's work about the "civic community" (e.g. Putnam 2000; Putnam et al., 1994). Many empirical studies on the subject build on the work of Fennema/ Tillie (e.g. Fennema/ Tillie, 1999; 2001; Tillie 2004) about immigrant political participation in Amsterdam and test the "amount of 'ethnic' social capital (participation in ethnic associational life)" (Jacobs/ Tillie, 2004: 419) of a certain ethnic minority.

high numbers in political participation, yet again mainly within a religious community (Teney/ Hanquinet 2012: 10). Besides, the latter showed little hints to activities of latent forms of participation (ibid.). La Due Lake and Huckfeldt also started from a critique of Putnam's "excessive focus on organisational involvement and its consequences for the production of social capital" (La Due Lake and Huckfeldt 1998: 582). They concluded that "social capital [is] a by-product of social interactions [with other people who are similarly engaged] that enhances individual civic capacity and political expertise, thereby allowing individuals to become more fully engaged in politics" (La Due Lake and Huckfeldt 1998: 581-2). Besides they find that these interactions produce certain types of "politically relevant" social capital "because of the expertise of discussants, the frequency of political discussion, and network size" (La Due Lake and Huckfeldt 1998: 583).

3.4 IMMIGRANTS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

As shown in the previous sections, certain predispositions (i.e. motivation) and resources are considered major conditions for becoming engaged. Verba et al. (1995) employ a third necessary condition: the moment of recruitment. With regard to the political participation of immigrants, de Rooij added the dimension of "integration" and immigration-specific features, in particular patterns of mobilisation and time of residence (de Rooij 2012: 455). Accordingly, she stated that immigrants become engaged in conventional rather than unconventional and low rather than high-cost activities (de Rooij 2012: 457).

Structural factors But with regard to immigrants, one must consider not only individual but also structural factors, the most important one being citizenship. Bäck and Soininen (1998) considered an individual's citizenship status as the main reason for "significant exclusion" of immigrants from political participation (e.g. also Schönwälder et al. 2011). With regard to conventional political engagement, i.e. party activism, one approach is what Bird (2003) coined "descriptive representation" and refers to the role of political parties in selecting immigrant candidates. She studied ethnic minorities on the macro- + micro-levels as well as additional factors and found that a candidate's selection depends on several factors: supply-side +

demand-side + ethnic voting behaviour + the individual level of integration + practices of consociational accommodation + the electoral system. Sobolewska (2013) added that legal structure, ideological climate and intra-party organisation or party strategies also have to be considered.

Resources or capital? Verba et al. (1995) referred to (social) capital as a resource for civic engagement.[9] Empirical studies on civic and political engagement employ not only social, but also other forms of capital as distinguished by Bourdieu (e.g. 1983). On the basis of a former study, which showed that "that Irish political parties made minimal efforts to attract the support of immigrant voters and did little or nothing to encourage these to become party members" (Fanning/ O'Boyle 2010: 417), in a follow-up study Fanning/ O'Boyle explored "individual motivations for political participation, status factors (i.e. residency/ citizenship) and finally, how social capital interacts and combines with other forms of capital (human and cultural capital) in affecting the political agency of immigrants" (Fanning/ O'Boyle 2010: 418). They employed the term "socio-political capital" (ibid.), based on Bourdieu's concept of capital, in order to "reflect the interrelationship of these various forms of capital" (ibid.).[10] Besides the influence of political socialisation on the development of a "distinct political habitus" of the immigrant candidate interviewees, the authors found that a candidate's social relationships, especially "outside the community of origin, would foster political participation" (Fanning/ O'Boyle 2010: 433; cf. also Softic 2016).

---

9 Anthias (2007) argues in favour of using the term "capital" over the term "resource" with regard to the "mobilisability" of the former across borders and contexts.

10 As examined here, it includes the educational qualifications of respondents and their socio-economic status; prior political socialisation; membership of immigrant and Irish organisations; and religiosity (Fanning/ O'Boyle 2010: 419).