7 The Interviewees' Objective Position in Israeli Society: Jews, Russians, Israelis?

The participants in the present study do not talk about their civic engagement in a vacuum. Social action, here: civic engagement, takes place in a particular social environment, here: the political, field, against the background of objective opportunities or restraints and individual power resources. In the present chapter, I will briefly discuss the participants' objective position in Israeli society as the social space within which the present study has been undertaken. I consider the participants in the study members of the social group of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, arriving in Israel after its collapse. The consideration of Israelis with an FSU family background as a social group is for methodological reasons rather than based on assumptions about the group's identity. As outlined above, according to Bourdieu, members of a social group share a similar objective position in a given social space based on their possession of capital. Having said this, it is likely for members of that social group to share particular experiences of opportunity and restraint in the process of incorporation.

The short description shall mark the starting point for an analysis of the interviewees' objective position within this social space. As outlined above, time is essential for the accumulation and validation of capital as well as the development and reorganisation of habitual dispositions. In this context, I will provide an analysis of the power resources the interviewees present to have at their disposal during time.

7.1 THE OBJECTIVE POSITION OF FSU IMMIGRANTS: MAJORITY OR MINORITY?

Israel is an immigration country, encouraging in particular "return migration" from the Jewish diaspora. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union have arrived in Israel under the Law of Return (1952) which regulates (Jewish) immigration to Israel. The objective position of those immigrants can be analysed along two dimensions: their legal status, i.e. citizenship status (Delanty 1997: 9), and their social status. According to the Law of Return, immigrants are granted immediate Israeli citizenship and the allocation of full political *rights* (e.g. Israeli passport, active and passive voting *rights*); and they receive full economic *rights* (e.g. access to welfare).

The recognition of diploma or formal education in general—and thus the immigrants' economic incorporation—has been easier in Israel than in other countries of Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union (Glöckner 2011; 2005). Glöckner (2011) states that in Israel—unlike in other receiving countries—FSU immigrants have joined the dominant group (Israeli Jewish citizens). Like every other (Jewish) citizen of Israel, military service is mandatory for FSU immigrants—its length however, depending on age and family status upon arrival—and they are obliged to pay taxes.

Thus, legally, immigrants and their families who arrived in the country from countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU) have become Israeli citizens. However, there is collective discrimination against a particular group of immigrants—in theory not targeted against those from FSU countries, but in practice it concerns mainly them as a social group—under the Law of Return and their family members with regard to their cultural.

In the hegemonic discourse Jewish immigrants are considered *home-comers*. Those new citizens are expected to integrate quickly and smoothly into Israeli society, "be committed to the Israeli national ethos" (Lomsky-Feder/ Rapoport 2001: 1) and become "real Israelis" (Golden 2001). However, Jewish immigrants—though sharing more or less of a common cultural heritage based on "Jewish Law" (Fromm 1989 [1922])—bring experiences different from those who stayed "at home"[1] and are newcomers in the specific cultural context of Israeli society. Their social status in the

1 On home-comers cf. also Schütz 1945

context of established-newcomer relations, suggests a more peripheral position.

7.2 ANALYSIS OF POWER RESOURCES I: "MOVE UPHILL"

Most of the interviewees have lived in the reality of migration and incorporation. They mention economic problems at home, and usually they connect these difficulties with their family's migration background. Zeev, for instance, tells me his parents "don't have time for us [Zeev and his little sister], they are working all the time" (Zeev, p. 7); in a similar token, Katya states: "[my mother], she is working a lot, so, my grandmother looked after me" (Katya, p. 9).

But the interviewees refer to those experiences differently, depending on the extent to which they have made those experiences and their individual strategies of coping and the issues they emphasise in their narratives. Crosscutting these individual factors, there are differences between those who have already started their professional careers and those who are still in school, i.e. with respect to the length of their stay in Israel. The former would hardly speak of any difficulties in their families. Katya, for instance, immigrated as a 10-year-old girl with her mother and grandmother from Moscow in 1993, has lived in Bat-Yam near Tel-Aviv, ("the centre" [Katya, p. 1]), ever since. She finished school, did her military service, received higher education and started working; she had spent more than two thirds of her life in the country, has a mixed circle of friends and speaks of herself as "Russian-Jewish Israeli, this is the end of the immigrant era" (Katya, p. 1). Her emphasis is rather on her present personal achievements and experiences of success and living "a normal life" (Katya, p. 21) than difficulties in the context of migration experienced in the past.

For those interviewees still in school and living at home, those difficulties are still a central part of their everyday experience. Their families often live at the periphery of the country—not Katya's "centre"—with regard to geographical as well as economic concerns. Boris's story shall serve as an example here. Boris was finishing school at the moment of the interview; he grew up in Hadar, a geographically lower neighbourhood in the northern Israeli city of Haifa with a higher percentage of more recent immigrants as

well as low-income families than elsewhere in the city. He is aware of living at the periphery, saying of his place of residence: "immigrants who made it [economically] move uphill" (Boris, p. 2).[2] He is well aware of the economic difficulties in his family, his parents' hard work in order to advance economically, and the does not complain about their absence, but simply states it is that way. Yet, Boris personally experiences the consequences of the difficult economic situation in the family, not only in terms of money but also with regard to his sense of belonging:

Boris: "My grandmother and grandfather were not very interested in looking after me. Why? Because I am not Jewish (.), like, in Ukraine I was Jewish, here I am not, actually, in Israel (.) [I am] Ukrainian, there [in Ukraine] I am (Jewish)"
Interviewer: "(Mmh)".
Boris: "Here it goes according to the mother, and my mother is Ukrainian, so my grandparents were not very interested in looking after me ((because)) I am, well, again, I am not Jewish." (Boris, p. 2)

In Boris's story, the family's financial situation links what is happening on the collective level (e.g. hegemonic discourse on *home-coming*, stereotypes about recent immigrants) with the individual level of dealing with the consequences of migration. The child is directly confronted with the consequences, and finally accepts that he does not belong ("I am not Jewish") and thus is not as worthy to be "look[ed] after". In Boris's view, this even divides his family. Summing up, Boris states: "I was more a street kid, hanging out with friends" (Boris, p. 2).

In single cases, like Avi's, the issue of physical violence at home is brought up. Avi, now living in Natserat Illit, grew up in Hadar as well. Even before their immigration to Israel, the family was in financial difficulties. Originally from Moscow, after his parents' divorce and his mother's remarriage, the family "was forced to move to Kharkiv [Ukraine]" (Avi, p.

2 However, the interviewees perceive their everyday life at the periphery differently. Lukas, who like Boris has almost finished school and lives with his family in Hadar, tells me of a quiet everyday life. The family already has improved economically and moved a little "uphill", both parents work, but his mother has already found the spare time to become actively engaged in their neighbourhood (Lukas, p. 10).

1). In 1993, when Avi was eight, Avi's family, including his grandparents, immigrated to Israel for economic reasons ("[The decision to immigrate] didn't derive from any value, any value, any Zionist value" (Avi, p. 1) and settled in Natserat Illit. Yet, the financial situation of the family did not improve until his stepfather finally found work. The family moved to Haifa, and Avi's little sister was born. Avi does not speak much about the situation at home. Regarding his step-father, he simply summarises: "we did not have a good relationship, we had [physical] fights, I was hospitalised" (Avi, p. 2). Also, later, already as an adult, Avi refers to second-hand experiences of physical violence: when he speaks about his own civic engagement later on, he tells similar stories about young people from families with an FSU background growing up in Natserat Illit. In their relatively weak objective position as newcomers in Israeli society, the interviewees experience subtle discrimination of immigrants in everyday life. Acts of discrimination are exercised by individuals against individuals but also perceive them as members of a particular social group, new citizens.

This is neither a particular Israeli problem nor a problem concerning especially Israelis with an FSU family background. As previous empirical research shows, especially in economically weak or peripheral areas, social problems interfere with ethnic cleavages (e.g. Gonzalez-Sobrino 2016; Barth 1969). Correspondingly, especially those interviewees living in peripheral towns or neighbourhoods directly experience social cleavages in their everyday lives and they fight those cleavages on the street. Emmanuel, who immigrated with his family in 1998 from Novosibirsk as a five-year-old and also lives in Hadar with his parents and his little sister—tells me about an incident on the street:

> "They called me a 'stinking Russian' on the street, they also humiliated my little sister, [...] they think of themselves that—if arrives here some immigrant and he doesn't know the language nor has he work nor connections, meaning he is no one, so you can do with him whatever they want (..), and till today they simply think of themselves that they are much better and this, this is simply humiliating." (Emmanuel, p. 1)

Elsewhere in his story, Emmanuel clarifies who "they" are: "those from Morocco" (Emmanuel, p. 5), Israelis of Mizrahi origin. Again, there is a difference between those—usually the younger ones—for whom social cleavages are an everyday reality because they live in a particular

neighbourhood and those who have "move[d] uphill". The latter rather consider those experiences as past and hardly mention incidents in this context. However, there is a commonality between the younger and the older in their strategies of coping with those incidents from a backward perspective. Basically, the interviewees fight a cultural "war with words" (Brekle 1989) in their narratives. Mizrahim are presented as culturally different and even inferior because of particular values of "honour, [...] and the status of women" (Emmanuel, p. 28; Avi, p. 22) ascribed to them. Emmanuel has adapted the hegemonic discourse about the weaker social status of Mizrahi Israelis and the justification of that status on grounds of a claimed cultural inferiority. Yet, the style of Emmanuel's narrative—he tells it in the 3rd person—suggests the encounter he tells me about is not a very recent experience but one he looks at already from a distance. And indeed, he tells me about another incident later in the interview: The positive experience confuses him and makes him reflect about the truthfulness of the stereotypes he holds toward Mizrahim:

"I hated those people my whole life, and now, like, I suddenly have some friendly relationships with them—and this I understand, you begin to understand that not everything, not all of them, well, again, you understand that the majority, that anyway they run around [...] 'you are bad Russians'." (Emmanuel, p. 9)

As Boris's story already suggested, the interviewees also experience a more abstract form of subtle discrimination. In the hegemonic discourse, and particularly the media, recent FSU immigrants have been suspected to have fled their home countries for economic reasons rather than "coming home" to Israel for ideological reasons, i.e. based on Zionism (e.g. Remennick 2007; Dayan 2004). The lack of ideological reasons for immigration to Israel—to make Aliyah, i.e. to ascend, as would be the corresponding ideological term—clearly violates the "Israeli national ethos" (Lomsky-Feder/ Rapoport 2001) of home-coming. Due to the successful overall incorporation of Israelis with an FSU family background in the long run, it is probable that this has become less of an issue in public. But especially the older participants in the study are aware of that discourse. Accordingly, Vicky directly refers to the discourse of home-coming when she stresses the particular "Zionist" atmosphere at home. As an eight-year-old child Vicky moved with her family from Belarus to Israel in 1992. Vicky's statement

suggests that the emphasis on being Jewish has entered her home only after arrival in Israel; yet it can be read as a means to prove her right of immigration:

"We didn't talk about politics, but we did talk, we talked about that is important that we are in Israel, ehm, (...) and (...) that we are happy and that we are well here and that we are here to stay, [...] so maybe that those are my roots, that from there I already developed my opinions." (Vicky, p. 17)

Katya adds:

"[Back in Russia the atmosphere at home was] maybe less [Zionist], maybe it was less ideological, ehm, to go to Israel because we are Jewish, but (..) it was not the ideology of the 1970s when people fled the SU because they were strong Zionists, but I can ensure you that here [in Israel] I, here, me and mother—ok, grandma, grandma, she was always very anti-, anti-nationalistic, she, she never was connected to Russian, Christian, Jewish, whatever—so [about] the Aliyah I can't tell, but here I altered into being very, very Jewish." (Katya, p. 18)

The narratives reflect a constant reference to the hegemonic discourse of home-coming and Zionism; and Vicky's and Katya's statements have to be understood as a discursive reproduction of this discourse. Both present their lives in Israel after immigration as an adaptation to the "national ethos". By doing so, both prove—in contrast to Boris—to those who have raised those accusations, the invisible audience they talk to here, that they *belong*.

From that position of *belonging*, Katya reflects upon the individual reasons of such discriminative behaviour and manages to reconcile her negative past experiences with a present feeling of having moved beyond:

Katya: "Here [in Israel], I was offended when I was called "Russian" because there [in Russia] I always knew I was Jewish (..), that is why here, here it bothered me very much (..) but I have overcome this, too."
Interviewer: "What does that mean, to be 'Russian'? How did you deal with that?"
Katya: "How I dealt with that? I was always (.) directly becoming emotional and to explain: 'why do you call me like that, I am Jewish, and my mother is Jewish, and all my family is Jewish, and me, (.) who are you to say that to me', so, I took that very,

like, very, very (.) emotional, but, ehm (..)—again, that came from kids, usually, that did not come from, from—, well, adults, I was a kid back then".
Interviewer: "Yes, but you also said, your mother either was called 'Russian'?" Katya: "Y—yes, (..) but also, (..)—people who, ehm (.) (laughing)—are less successful in life, suddenly see someone who comes to the country as a stranger (.), who comes to the country and slowly gets along better than those people—which is also very natural [that they] say (.) "he takes my place", that is very natural, that is natural self-defence of people, now I understand that, so, now I don't care about them (..), ehm, (..)—indeed, generally, the Aliyah of the 1990s was, was, also helped the country—well, Aliyah always helps, immigrants always help, because they raise the level of the population that already lives—that is not true only (.) from my point of view, I believe it is true also (.) for other countries, not only Israel." (Katya, p. 23)

Katya's qualification at the end of her quote ("I believe it is true also (.) for other countries, not only Israel") suggests that the experience she tells is in the past ("that came from kids, usually, that did not come from, from—, well, adults, I was a kid back then") and that Katya has developed a way of coping with those experiences. Yet, the story also reveals that the she had not expected confrontation with or questioning of her sense of belonging ("I was offended", "I was always (.) directly becoming emotional [crying?]").[3]

Both Katya and Vicky connect the experienced confrontation in Israel with personal experiences of anti-Semitism back in the former Soviet Union. They present those experiences as a similar confrontation of not belonging in their narratives. Vicky remembers how she learnt that she was Jewish and what it meant; it is easy to get her sarcasm:

"At home I heard talking that we are Jewish and that we are different. In our class were only two Jewish kids, we had the knowledge that we both were Jewish and that we need to take care of each other, but also the kids in class helped us to know because they told us." (Vicky, p. 11)

Katya describes strategies of hiding her Jewishness:

3 Katya's example confirms that an individual's sense of belonging contains an emotional component; this emotional component will be revisited throughout the interviews.

"To Judaism we [Katya and her mother] became connected already here [in Israel] (6), ehm, wow, I really—actually not (.) though—wow, that's funny, that's really funny—, when, ehm, my mother had taken the decision that we come here and I already knew that we would leave—I was in school, I was in 1st grade, nine years old, ten—(..) the moment my mother would say something to me (.) on the street (.), ehm, well, 'listen, we leave, you need to, in school you need to do so and so', I would always say to her: 'Mama, schschschsch! Don't talk about that! Schschschsch! Keep that a secret, so no one knows!'. I don't have a clue where that came from, but obviously it came from some built-in fear (..) that it is forbidden to talk about that we are Jewish, forbidden to talk about that because of all that repression—my great-grandfather, the father of my grandfather, he was in prison from 1937, they released him when Stalin died [in 1953], that is just—what did he sit for? Because they had found a picture in his home, ehm, (..) a picture of [Mikhail Nikolayevich] Tukhachevsky,[4] that is one of, one of (..) the leaders of (..)—if I remember correctly—of the Whites. A picture, because of a picture you take a human being to prison and you leave a woman with three children at home, why? (.) In private talks, it always came up that one must not talk about that we are Jewish—also our family name does not sound exactly Jewish (.), it does not sound Jewish at all, my father's family name sounds more Jewish, but I added it only here in Israel, ehm (..), so, so, there was such a thing (.)—a nine-year old girl who did not suffer from anything carries an inner fear, which is very sad. I don't want my children to carry the same fear, I don't want them to fear to say they were Jewish, or, Israelis, or, whatever (.)—it's very, very sad (..)—at school I didn't tell anyone that we would leave before, before the last week, simply because I was afraid—of what?" (Katya, p. 22-3)

The children in both families grew up with a feeling of being "different" and not "belonging" that they finally embodied in the form of a particular habitus. Yet, in contrast to findings of previous empirical studies (e.g. Rapoport et al. 2002), those interviewees do not "normalise" their personal experiences with anti-Semitism. Instead, they use the reference to those experiences, not only their own but their families', as an argumentative strategy to claim their right to be in Israel.

4 Tukhachevsky was a marshal of the Red Army and part of Stalin's inner circle until 1937. He was executed in 1937 during Stalin's Great Terror (cf. Harris 2016; Snyder 2010).

7.3 ANALYSIS OF DISCURSIVE PRACTICE I: "SABRAS" VS. "RUSSIAN WHORES"

A minority of interviewees positions themselves as established citizens and looks at the newcomers. Igal's story shall serve as an example here. When I explain to Igal—living in Natserat Illit and waiting to enrol at the local college —I will anonymise his name, he answers directly: "make it an Israeli name, I am Sabra" (Igal, p. 1).[5] His biographical background differs from the others with regard to personal experiences in the context of migration. Igal neither shares the personal experience of leaving nor that of starting over; his parents had immigrated to Israel already in the mid-1980s, before the Great Aliyah. In his family, the issue of adapting to a new cultural environment was hardly discussed. Igal became interested in his mother's experiences only when she became a member of the Knesset:

"Regarding your question [about Igal's parents], regarding what happened to my mother during Aliyah, at the beginning it didn't interest me, with the time it began to interest me, so I started to ask my mother questions about her Aliyah, how it was, how here, how there, how it can be that a new immigrant—it's possible to say she is an old immigrant of course, but—how it can be that an immigrant is—like, in my head, it dawned on me—when my mother was elected to be a member of the Knesset, I didn't believe it, even when she had been a member of the Knesset for some time I simply was totally shocked, I didn't believe that my mother, the mother that I see at home, that suddenly she has become a member of the Knesset, [although] her Ivrit—there is nothing to do about it, her Ivrit is not smooth, it's a tiny bit bumpy, here and there she makes mistakes—, so how can it be that such a mother suddenly is elected to be a member of the Knesset? Since then I started to ask questions." (Igal, p. 34-5)

Two things are striking in Igal's story. First, he becomes interested in his mother's biography only after she has been successful, after she "suddenly [has been] elected to be a member of Knesset" though, in Igal's eyes, she still is "an immigrant". Those two pieces of experiences—an "immigrant",

5 In Israeli discourse, speakers address someone as a Sabra who—in contrast to recent immigrants—was born in the country in order to make a qualitative distinction between those who have grown up, even partly, in the Diaspora and those who have been raised in the culture of the newHebrew (e.g. Almog 2000).

an outsider, entering the Parliament, one of Israel's centres of political power—obviously do not match in his view ("I simply was totally shocked"). Second, Igal is not as interested in his father's story because he "has stayed in his position [as a factory worker] ever since his arrival" (Igal, p. 38). Thus, while his mother is a constant reference in his story, Igal mentions his father only towards the end, and only when I ask specifically about him.

Against this background, Igal talks about Israelis with an FSU family background:

"The Russians, the Ukrainians, or all the Soviet Union, they come to Israel for social reasons, for economic reasons, they do not come because of Zionism, that means that Judaism is already not essential, not (...)—'give me money, give me economic, don't talk to me about a *Jewish state*, that does not interest me, I don't care about it, don't want to (...)—give me my money, I don't care if we'll have a Prime Minister who is an Arab, my pleasure, the main thing is I'll get my money, that is what I care about.' This hurts us a lot, it hurts the previous Aliyot a lot. [Igal goes on talking about separate TV programmes in Russian], now, I don't say this concerns only Russians, it's also Arabs and everyone, there are TV channels in every language, if there is one, two, three, I don't have a problem with that, but now it's eight, nine—I [i.e. the immigrants] go to a coffee shop, and I don't need to know Ivrit, I simply, there is always someone who speaks Russian, so I can talk in Russian, I don't need to know Ivrit." (Igal, p. 25-6)

Igal's demand to speak Ivrit as a means of assimilation stems from his everyday experience. He links his personal experience of an (assumed) lack of proficiency in Ivrit with the argument that using Ivrit in everyday life, i.e. adapting the host society's language/ culture, is the ultimate sign of being a member of the *Jewish collective*. By adapting a "hegemonic position [(]national, collectivist, Zionist, Israeli, [...] Ashkenazi (European descent), secular, male[)]" in Israeli collective identity (Ram 1999: 335), Igal aims at distancing himself from FSU immigrants of the 1990s and presenting himself as "normal" and, thus, belonging. Correspondingly, Igal refers to the newcomers as "the Russians". Though the term is common in public discourse, it also cuts off those citizens from the *Jewish/Israeli collective*. In order to show he belongs to that collective, Igal adopts his mother's biography and even speaks from her position ("This hurts us a lot, it hurts the previous Aliyot a lot"). Yet, he is not able to adopt her position

completely because he lacks knowledge and personal experience of the background of Jewish life in the Soviet Union and the aftermath of its breakdown as well as their process of incorporation. Accordingly, he must admit: "this [the assimilation of FSU immigrants] is the only thing we [Igal and his mother] argue about" (Igal, p. 26). However, later on it becomes clearer why Igal aims at distancing himself from those "Russians" so eagerly:

> "When they arrived, there started all kinds of rumours: Russian [girls] are whores, they go to Arabs, and so on. Now, why does this happen? Because in the last waves immigrated gentiles, Russian gentiles, they are not Jewish, now, when they arrive in Israel, and they get connected to an Arab who is Christian, for them this is not problematic, because a Christian Arab and a Christian Russian [girl], this is not a problem, no problem, it's ok. But that Israeli Sabre like me who looks at this from the side, I understand this, but some people don't understand this, they only see a Russian, they immediately generalise him as Russian, it doesn't bother them, Jewish, gentile, they don't care, they see a Russian, now when they see a Russian, they generalise all the Russians, all together." (Igal, p. 28)

Igal tells the incident in the third person as if talking about somebody else. But it is as likely that he speaks about a personal experience where he was "see[n as] a Russian", and, thus, his own *sense of belonging*, his Jewishness, questioned. The argumentative strategy Igal applies here is twofold: on the one hand, he adopts his mother's biography and places his story in the context of former waves of immigration. In line with public discourse, Igal claims immigrants of these waves had come to Israel for ideological reasons and adopted the "Israeli national ethos".[6] On the other hand, Igal adopts the public discourse about "Russians" and the stereotypes raised in this discourse, but not without qualification: in order to bridge the gap between discourse and his personal experience of being linked to that social group in everyday life, Igal claims some of the newcomers were "Russian gentiles, they are not Jewish"— adopting here another line of the same discourse questioning the newcomers' Jewishness—and those stereotypes were to be ascribed to them alone. At the same time, however, Igal reproduces the

6 Igal does not use the term *otkazniki* (e.g. Beizer 2005), however probably because he does not know. It is also not clear whether his parents arrived in this context.

generalisation of stereotypes he has criticised before ("all the Soviet Union, they come to Israel for social reasons, for economic reasons, they do not come because of Zionism, that means that Judaism is already not essential").

In summary thus far, it is possible to make some general statements about the interviewees' objective position as members of the same social group in Israeli society. Yet, there are a number of individual factors–e.g. age at the time of the interview, place of residence, socialisation, social network, etc.–, and not to forget the temporal aspect which make it impossible to draw general conclusions about each individual member's objective position in Israeli society and the political field in particular.

Thus, the objective position of the study participants within the Israeli society is a composition of resources true for the social group of FSU-immigrants and resources rooted in individual social action. On the one hand, they, as a collective, have shared the same political and economic *citizen's rights* and *duties* as Israeli-born citizens since their arrival but have lacked resources and social status as relatively new citizens. On the other hand, individual social actors have made individual experiences and integrated them into their habitual dispositions and acquired different forms of capital on an individual basis. At the same time, first individual members have acquired the necessary resources, earned that social status due to individual achievements and become part of the Israeli elite in various fields (cf. Glöckner 2011), and as a consequence, the social group as a whole has improved its social status.