



Civic Service and Social Class: The Case of Young Arab Women in Israel

Galit Yanay-Ventura¹ · Liana Issaq¹ · Moshe Sharabi²

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Abstract This study examines the motivations of young Arabs—as a national minority in Israel—for enrolling in civic service contrary to the discourse of the Arab leadership, which repudiates their participation. Thirty-eight interviews were conducted with Muslim, Christian, Bedouin, and Druze Arab volunteers who acknowledged that although civic service would not end discrimination against them, it could improve their subjective feeling in their homeland. Civic service also plays a major role in resource accumulation, and a combination of meager family resources and significant high school achievement compels them to volunteer in order to pay for their undergraduate education. The program offers particular benefits for Druze and Bedouin women: in the absence of suitable jobs for religious women, it provides them with economic independence as well as religious protection. The draw of civic service stems from its role as a path that meets the unique needs of minorities, the middle class, and women.

Keywords Civic service · Motivation to volunteer · Social class · Arabs · Qualitative research

✉ Galit Yanay-Ventura
gality@yvc.ac.il

Liana Issaq
ishaqliana@gmail.com

Moshe Sharabi
moshes@yvc.ac.il

¹ Human Services Department, The Max-Stern Academic College of Emek Yezreel, 19300 Yezreel Valley, Israel

² Department of MA Studies in Organizational Development and Consulting, The Max-Stern Academic College of Emek Yezreel, 19300 Yezreel Valley, Israel

Introduction

Civic service is a unique voluntary framework undertaken as full-time work for a number of months, for which the volunteer receives various benefits (McBride et al. 2004). In some countries, civic service constitutes an alternative to military service; in other countries (those with no mandatory draft), it serves as a voluntary system to increase the welfare and development of young adults (Davis Smith 2004; Eberly and Gal 2006). The service facilitates the meeting of different ethnic groups and thus contributes to shared identity (Perry and Thomson 2004). The contribution to the community encourages civic engagement in the future (Frumkin and Miller 2008). In this way, civic service constitutes a mechanism through which the state creates citizenship among its young population while expanding its social services apparatus (Garcia 2015; McAdam and Brandt 2009).

The literature highlights the role of civic service as a draw for vulnerable groups in society, especially ethnic, religious, and racial minorities living in the social and geographical periphery (Nesbit and Brudney 2010). In the USA, there is a distinctive trend of African American, Hispanic, and Southern volunteers, and volunteers of low socioeconomic background in the military service, and similar trends have been observed among volunteers in the civic service programs (Bachman et al. 2000; Maki et al. 2015; Marshall and Magee 2005; Simon and Wang 2002). In Europe, in light of a mandatory military draft for men, civic service attracted primarily women with high academic achievement (Davis Smith 2004). In the recent years, European civic service programs have been expanded as an alternative to military service and now also engage adolescents, low-income adults, and people with disabilities (Kuti 2004; McBride et al. 2003). In the Arab