6 Coaching for the nation

A new ‘moral and ethical assemblage’ for Israel’s last republican generation

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Since the early 2000s, coaching has enjoyed great popularity in Israel, both in the workplace and in the sphere of personal life.¹ A myriad of for-profit institutes and higher-learning institutions offer coaching training programs and thousands of Israelis have become certified coaches.² Moreover, coaching has made its way into mainstream media culture, as indicated by the proliferation of reality TV-shows, radio talk-shows and self-help books dedicated to the topic. The ascendancy of coaching in Israel is not an isolated phenomenon, but can be seen in the context of the rapid expansion of a personal development industry including workshops, seminars, popular success literature and a wide variety of consulting and therapeutic services. Starting in the eighties as a somewhat fringe phenomenon (Beit-Hallahmi, 1992), this industry has flourished in Israel in the last twenty years as a counterpart to the increasing individualization and neoliberalization of Israeli society. As Israeli sociologists have noted, following the decline of the Labor Zionist collectivistic ethos in the late seventies, (mostly) middle-class secular Israelis began looking for meaning and self-fulfilment in the private sphere (Almog, 2001; Ram, 2000, 2008; Shafir & Peled, 2002).

The growing popularity of coaching among Israel’s middle-class may thus be interpreted as reflecting this individualization trend (see Pagis, 2016). As a new therapeutic practice that blends psychological and managerial discourses, coaching aims at the production of autonomous, self-responsible, ‘enterprising selves’ (Du Gay, 1996; Rose, 1996) attuned to the challenges of work and life under neoliberalism. At the same time, it regards all forms of dependence and collective commitments as problematic remnants of an outdated economic and social configuration (Binkley, 2011b). As Mäkinen explains, ‘the conception of selfhood that is constructed in coaching is a variation of a theme that is by now familiar from countless other contexts, namely the ideal subject of neoliberal individualism’ (2014: 826). But as I will argue in this chapter, in order to better understand the appeal of coaching in contemporary Israeli society, we need to move beyond a monolithic and linear interpretation of neoliberal rationalities of government and look into the ways that these rationalities are ‘reorganizing subjectivities tied to earlier social ways of governing [...] rather than simply challenging or replacing them’ (Brady, 2014: 30). Such an approach places analytical emphasis on processes of assembly rather than on resultant formations and therefore highlights

the contingency and provisionality of neoliberal governmentalities. As Higgins and Lerner (2017: 5) argue, ‘these emergent assemblages may cohere in ways that constitute spaces, sites and subjects as “neoliberal”, but they may also at the same time involve multiple, contradictory and overlapping projects and practices that exceed any straightforward reading as neoliberalism’. Hence, instead of assuming coaching’s individualizing and depoliticizing effects, we should ask how its core ideas and practices enter into assemblages that also include existing local discourses and traditions of the self and its involvement in public life.

This chapter is based on a case study of Israeli coaches from what I term ‘the last republican generation.’ Members of this ethno-class generational unit were born in the fifties and early sixties and had their formative experiences in the era before the neoliberal economic turn in Israel (generally dated to the mid-eighties). As members of the veteran,³ mostly Ashkenazi (Jews of European origin) social elite,⁴ they were socialized into the Labor Zionist collectivistic and nationalistic ethos, which tied individual self-realization with the fulfilment of collective goals (such as national security, immigrant absorption, frontier settlement and the building of national institutions) and loyalty to the state. This ethos was crystalized in a republican discourse of civic virtue that placed this group as a ‘service elite’ and rewarded it accordingly (Shafir & Peled, 2002). On the other hand, this was the first generation of the veteran middle-class that adopted a culture of hedonistic individualism and sought to realize its personal and professional abilities in the spheres of work and leisure (Almog, 2001; Ram, 2008). The recent turn of many of its members to the burgeoning field of coaching,⁵ often after long careers as salaried employees in large bureaucratic organizations, seems to conform to this generational pattern of withdrawal into the private realm and increasing preoccupation with the self. But as I will show in this chapter, the adoption of the neoliberal therapeutic discourse of coaching by this dominant social group cannot be reduced to a single and coherent cultural logic of individualization, as it defies the opposition between individual self-development and social and political engagement. Rather, coaching takes part in a new ‘moral and ethical assemblage’ (Zigon, 2010; 2011) that combines neoliberal rationalities with the Labor Zionist republican ethos.

The data for this chapter comes from 42 in-depth interviews with members of the last republican generation who chose coaching as a second (or third) career. The interviews were conducted between 2016 and 2017 in different locations in Central and Southern Israel and lasted two hours on average. All interviews started with the open question ‘tell me about yourself; you can start wherever you want,’ and subsequently turned to the participants’ career paths and their involvement in coaching. Research participants were initially recruited from personal websites, via an e-mail sent to affiliates of the Israeli Coaching Bureau (one of the two main coaching professional associations in Israel) and through personal acquaintances. I then used a snowball sampling technique, asking interviewees to provide the names of friends and acquaintances who are also involved in the field of coaching. Roughly two-thirds of participants were women, which seems to reflect their predominance in the profession. Most interviewees had training in

various self-development techniques besides coaching, such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), alternative medicine, mediation, management consulting and more. Moreover, their coaching practices varied considerably, ranging from business and career coaching to more life-focused forms of coaching, such as relationship coaching, coaching for adults and children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), ontological coaching (a ‘spiritual’ brand of coaching roughly inspired by the Landmark Forum), retirement coaching and more. Notwithstanding this variation, virtually all interviewees adhered to some basic principles and techniques that are characteristic of coaching, such as goal-setting and strategic planning, identification and reinforcement of personal abilities and strengths, a focus on short-term processes and results and an orientation to the future.

The chapter begins with an introduction to contemporary debates on neoliberal subjectivity and the role of therapeutic culture. The following sections examine different modes of articulation between neoliberal therapeutic discourses and the Labor Zionist collectivistic ethos through the interviewees’ stories of involvement in coaching. The concluding section will wrap up the chapter by suggesting a look at these articulations through the lens of assemblage theory.

Neoliberal subjectivity and the critique of therapeutic culture

In the last twenty-five years, a growing body of literature in the social sciences has been preoccupied with the construction of subjectivity under neoliberalism. Inspired by the Foucauldian tradition, these studies analyze neoliberalism as a form of governmental reason that aims to ‘conduct the conduct’ of free subjects (Foucault, 1991). Neoliberal governmentality works through the cultivation of autonomous, entrepreneurial dispositions within subjects and the marketization of social relations (Binkley, 2014; Rose, 1996). As Foucault argued in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, neoliberalism generalizes the enterprise form within the social body and makes it a model of social relations and of existence itself (2008: 241–2). This entrepreneurialization of society has profound social consequences:

the organization of society around a multiplicity of individual enterprises profoundly depoliticizes social and political relations by fragmenting collective values of care, duty and obligation, and displacing them back on to the managed autonomy of the individual.

(McNay, 2009: 65)

This process of social desolidarization (Hartmann & Honneth, 2006) results from the coronation of economic interest and free choice as irreducible principles of human action. The neoliberal subject, or *homo economicus*, is driven solely by his own egoistic self-interest, which is aimed at the maximization of his own happiness and well-being. Moreover, the construction of this neoliberal subject includes practices of desubjectification aimed at eradicating former collectivistic and dependent dispositions rooted in earlier forms of social

governance (Binkley, 2009, 2011a, 2011b). In this sense, the neoliberal governance of the self atomizes our understanding of social relations and erodes conceptions of the public domain (McNay, 2009: 64). Neoliberal subjects tend to recast social and political problems as personal ones and seek for individualized solutions (Scharff, 2016).

In this respect, the neo-Foucauldian critique of the neoliberal governance of the self shares certain key assumptions with what Aubry and Travis (2015) have recently termed ‘the canonical critique of therapeutic culture’. This strand of critique, best expressed by commentators such as Phillip Rieff, Christopher Lasch, Richard Sennett and Robert Bellah (and more recently by Frank Furedi, Philip Cushman and James Nolan Jr.), posits that late modernity is characterized by the rise of a therapeutic ethos that encourages an individualistic conception of the self and depoliticizes and privatizes social life. The ‘fall narrative’ offered by these critics blames therapeutic culture for the decline of public life and the lack of commitment to social institutions. As Eva Illouz (2008: 2) summarizes this critique:

in calling on us to withdraw into ourselves, the therapeutic persuasion has made us abandon the great realms of citizenship and politics and cannot provide us with an intelligible way of linking the private self to the public sphere because it has emptied the self of its communal and political content, replacing this content with a narcissistic self-concern.

More recent accounts of therapeutic culture, though more nuanced and less condemnatory, still draw a dichotomy between individualized self-development and political and social engagement (Gill & Orgad, 2015; Matza, 2009; McGee, 2005; Nehring et al., 2016; Salmenniemi, 2012). While they often acknowledge the multifaceted nature of therapeutic culture and explore its entanglement with local discourses, many of these studies ultimately see therapy as an individualizing and depoliticizing force. In this chapter, I would like to challenge the dichotomous view that opposes ‘the therapeutic ethos to a model of civic virtue or political engagement’ (Illouz, 2008: 223) by suggesting that the adoption of neoliberal therapeutic discourses and practices does not necessarily entail a withdrawal into the private realm nor the abandonment of a vision of the common good. On the contrary, it may give way to new forms of political and social engagement.

The last republican generation: between coaching and *hagshama*

The ethno-class generational unit I termed ‘the last republican generation’ has been described by critical Israeli sociologists as the bearer of a liberal, individualistic turn in Israeli society. From its early days as a colonial frontier society, the Zionist settlement in Palestine was constituted as a community of republican virtue built around an ethos of ‘pioneering’ (*chalutzit*) that placed self-sacrifice and unselfish work for the nation’s common good as ultimate values. This ethos was a central pillar of the Labor Zionist collectivistic and nationalistic ideology that was

hegemonic in Israel until the late seventies. Despite its socialist rhetoric, this ideology served as the legitimization basis for a hierarchical incorporation regime that arranged and rewarded different groups of citizens according to their conceived contribution to the common good of the nation as defined by the Zionist vision. The veteran Ashkenazi elite was placed at the top of this regime, as it allegedly embodied the republican virtue of pioneering (Shafir & Peled, 2002).

Beginning in the mid-seventies, as a result of a combination of several local and global political, economic and sociocultural processes,⁶ the Labor Zionist republican ethos entered an ongoing crisis and started its decline. For the veteran Ashkenazi elite, which was heavily invested in this ethos, this fall from grace spurred an identity crisis and many of its members began searching for meaning and purpose through less collectivistic ideologies and projects (Almog, 2001; Beit-Hallahmi, 1992; Katriel, 2004; Kimmerling, 2005; Ram, 2008; Roniger & Feige, 1992; Shafir & Peled, 2002). The halt to the peace process and the election of right wing Netanyahu as prime minister in the mid-nineties reinforced in this social group 'a sense of alienation not only from collectivism but also from the collectivity itself' (Ram, 2000: 227).

It is in this context that we should analyze the turn to coaching by members of this generational unit. At first glance, many of the interviewees' stories of engagement with coaching seem to fit the macro-sociological picture presented by Ram and others. Take for example the case of Kobi, a coach in his sixties that works mainly with families and children. A retired military person, Kobi makes a living as a freelance high-tech contractor besides his coaching activity. In this sense, he is a rightful representative of 'the middle-class successors of the older state and military elite [who] are withdrawing from the older career-path and turning to the more attractive and rewarding trajectories offered by civil society and the burgeoning market' (ibid.). During our interview, Kobi told me about his plans to leave the business world in order to dedicate himself fully to coaching: 'I am in a phase out from the business world. I want the soul, I want to contribute and I want to make things better.' Later in our conversation he expanded on the reasons for taking up coaching as a profession:

I did a lot of things in my life and I got fed up. And then I said that I need something for the soul, something that will do me good. Today I can define it; back then I didn't know how to define it. The choice of [working with] families and children came while I was undergoing coaching myself. During my studies I understood that the area where I will have the most influence, the area that suits me the best, is the work with children.

Kobi's account reveals two interrelated motivations for becoming a coach. On the one hand, he turned to coaching because he wanted 'something for the soul' after many years in the military and hi-tech sectors. This motivation appears in many sociological and journalistic descriptions of the wide appeal of self-development technologies, especially among the professional-managerial class. These technologies provide overworked professionals in the post-Fordist economy an escape

from the cold and hyper-rational world of work and let them do something more humane and self-rewarding (George, 2013; Mäkinen, 2012; Salmenniemi et al. in this book). On the other hand, Kobi turned to coaching because he wanted to contribute to society and have more social influence. Doing something for his soul in his case does not entail turning inwards, but outwards. In his view, his personal growth and success are deeply tied to his contribution to society. Hence, Kobi also volunteers as a coach among underserved populations, leads community-building programs and has plans for establishing an integrative clinic for families and children. As he said: 'I decided very quickly that in this stage of my life it is time to give back to society.'

This same motivation to contribute to society underpins many interviewees' coaching activities. Liora, a kibbutz member in her early sixties, talked about searching for new fields of action as a coach:

We [she and her associate] looked for something to do and we got to all kinds of organizations of the type we knew: hi-tech, telecommunications, things like that, but after a year we both said that we feel that where Israel needs us most is in the field of education. We want to bring the option of coaching to education. So we started little by little, at first in his hometown, he went to the high school principal and he offered a free intervention.

In this excerpt we see how collectivistic dispositions rooted in the Labor Zionist republican ethos inform Liora's new identity as a coach. Her choice of a field of action is not dictated by individualist concerns (like making money or gaining prestige by working in leading industries), but by a sense of responsibility for the fate of the nation. In this sense, Liora still sees herself as a member of a service elite committed to the achievement of the nation's common good. Coaching is only a new and powerful tool that helps her fulfil this self-appointed social mission. Moreover, much like Kobi, she does not draw a distinction between her social engagement and her individual self-development. In her view, both are deeply related and resonate with each other. She describes herself as an 'enabler', a person that through her own self-growth can make the world a better place. As she explained:

I really believe that things must start from the person; not from an egoistic standpoint, but from the standpoint that I am the source of my own world. If the things I need are not provided, I can't give. I can give from what I have; I can't give from what I don't have. Hence my duty is to increase what I have.

Liora and Kobi's stories exemplify the entanglement of a therapeutic neoliberal discourse of individual self-development with the Labor Zionist ideal of *hagshama*. Translated as 'realization' or 'consummation', the practice of *hagshama* refers to 'the personal implementation of pioneering values' (Almog, 2000: 296). As Shafir and Peled explain, in the pre-state years, *hagshama atzmit* (literally 'self-realization', not to be confounded with *mimush atzmi*, which is the

contemporary Hebrew term for individual self-realization or self-fulfilment) expressed the strongest commitment to national goals as defined by the Labor Zionist movement:

Hagshama atzmit was not an individual's act but the self-realization of the virtuous citizen, namely, the carrying out of the movement's pioneering goal by the individual member as his/her duty *qua* citizen. *Hagshama atzmit* meant personal participation in the collective endeavor of transforming Palestine into a Jewish homeland.

(Shafir & Peled, 2002: 43)

In this way, the Labor Zionist republican ethos tied individual self-realization with the fulfilment of collective goals and service to the nation. While the actual practice of *hagshma* was confined to a small Ashkenazi pioneering elite (and was rewarded accordingly, both materially and symbolically), it became an ideal to which the younger *Sabra* (native-born Jewish Israelis) generations were socialized and measured up to (Almog, 2000; Shafir & Peled, 2002). In recent decades, following the weakening of the republican citizenship discourse, the *hagshama* ideal and its accompanying pioneering ethos have lost much of their appeal for younger generations of Israelis, especially among the secular middle-class.⁷ But as my interviewees' stories show, this collectivistic ideal (and the social responsibility that comes with it) is still a part of their generation's moral landscape and unreflective, habitual dispositions. Therefore, I would like to argue that their use of coaching in the service of collective goals is not just an expression of an ethics of doing good that characterizes the therapeutic professions (Rose, 1996), but is part of a wider identity project aimed at negotiating their complex position as a waning but still powerful elite in search of new sources of social legitimation. In this project, individual self-development and social engagement are assembled together.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will describe two central ways of articulating the neoliberal therapeutic language of coaching with the Labor Zionist practice of *hagshama*. First, as Liora's story shows, therapeutic self-change has become a condition to engage in work for the sake of others. As many interviewees testified, they only felt that they could bring about social change after they underwent change themselves. Second, the forms of social engagement endorsed by the interviewees, while still addressing the common fate of Israeli society as a whole, focus on the ripple effect of individual change instead of political or collective solutions. In this way, they reproduce a vision of the nation's common good that is in line with neoliberalism.

Transforming oneself in order to contribute to society

In most of the interviewees' stories, social engagement is described as a relatively new facet of their lives. While many of them were public or semi-public employees in their first careers (teachers, social workers, military persons), they rarely

see their former work in the public sector as a significant form of social engagement or contribution to the welfare of society. Moreover, virtually none of them mentioned contributing to the common good of the nation (or just '*zionut*', as this kind of altruistic motivation is usually called in Israel) as a central motivation for their early career choices. This seeming contradiction is explained by the institutionalization of the pioneering ethos in the transition to statehood, which turned collectivism from a voluntary, grassroots ideology to a chief principle of government (Rozin, 2011; Shafir & Peled, 2002). For many interviewees then, entering public service was an opportunity to pursue their individual professional aspirations in what was still a state-centered economy (Maman & Rosenhek, 2012; Shafir & Peled, 2002; Shalev, 2000). It was also a common occupational path for middle-class Ashkenazi young professionals entering the workforce in the late seventies and early eighties.

Take for example the case of Nirit, a coach in her early sixties. A social worker by training, she worked for more than twenty years as a public welfare official in her hometown social services office. During her tenure there, she became acquainted with the pensioner population and its specific problems. As her interest in this age sector grew, she started to think about new ways to help them beyond the existing institutional frameworks, but she did not dare to leave her secure job and to embark on an independent project. It was only through her personal experience of coaching that she took courage and made the first steps in that direction:

Only when I started studying coaching and it shook all the furniture inside my head and ordered them in another way... and suddenly I realized that everything is possible, everything I want. [...] We learned to set goals and have dreams and develop visions. I knew that I wanted to establish a pensioners' centre, because there is not such a thing in Israel, and in this centre I want to let pensioners and their families come and get advice and get a push for starting the journey, what do we do when we retire. And I dreamed about it in such a way that it excited and enthused me so much, so I decided to take a sabbatical year.

In Nirit's story we find again the same entanglement between individual self-development and collective commitment. As we learn from the above quote, Nirit's involvement in coaching did not lead to withdrawal into the private sphere, but reinforced and opened new possibilities for social engagement, as she used her newly acquired ability to 'set goals and have dreams and develop visions' in order to contribute to society. Moreover, her newfound realization that 'everything is possible' sparked a renowned interest in direct political participation and in recent years she has been involved in the Israeli pensioners' party and even ran for office.

Nirit's story of renewed social and political engagement following her training as a coach is far from unique. Other coaches also related how the self-transformation they experienced through coaching made them more emotionally available and skilled for pursuing interests beyond their own selves. As Tami, a coach involved in local politics told, 'when you feel complete, peaceful,

accomplished, successful, you have something to give others. [...] I think that if it were not for my work as a coach I wouldn't get too far [in politics].’ In a telling reversal of the sociological critique of therapy, many interviewees talked about how in their previous lives *before* the discovery of coaching they were extremely self-absorbed and preoccupied with their own private issues. Their excessive focus on the self and its problems did not leave room for thinking about social and political issues, let alone do something for the nation's common good (even if in their daily jobs as public servants they were actually engaged in such endeavour). It was only *after* they studied coaching that they started to look beyond themselves and became preoccupied with the fate of Israeli society. By instilling in them new empowering beliefs, qualities and abilities, coaching allowed them ‘to put the head out’ of their ‘little’ private fears and troubles and get involved in public life (see also Salmenniemi et al. and Perheentupa in this book). As Yael, a coach and lecturer on feminist issues, told, being a coach taught her ‘to keep silent, to listen, to be there for someone’, to be less stressed-out and fearful, and this in turn was reflected in her activism for the sake of disadvantaged women.

In this sense, it seems that for the last republican generation, the turn to coaching does not signal a further turn away from the collective, but rather reconnects it (both practically and emotionally) to its historic role as a service elite who sees itself as responsible for the fate of the nation. But as we will immediately see, the form of contribution to the nation's common good that its members now endorse is far from the old Labor Zionist collectivistic repertoire. Instead, as Nirit's dream of a pensioner's centre shows, their social initiatives espouse and reproduce the neoliberal language of entrepreneurship and individual choice.

Collectivistic entrepreneurship: fostering individual change in the service of the nation

As shown earlier, contribution to the common good of the nation is a central motive in the interviewees' stories of involvement in coaching. Some of them even described their coaching activity as a mission (*shlichut*),⁸ a personal calling to act in the benefit of society. But as I already hinted, the kind of contribution they have in mind differs from earlier collectivistic endeavours in significant ways. First, in contrast to the days of Labor Zionist political and sociocultural hegemony, in today's neoliberal Israel it is they (as private but concerned citizens), not the state, who get to choose what the national goals are. Since the mid-eighties, the Israeli state has largely withdrawn from its role in welfare provision and its vacant place has been occupied by a whole field of NGOs, in a process that has been referred to as ‘the NGOization of civil society’ (Herzog, 2008). Initiatives like Nirit's pensioners' centre, Kobi's integrative clinic for families and children and Liora's project of coaching at school, among others, adopt this logic of action and concentrate on niches of activity that were formerly under full state responsibility and have been increasingly privatized in recent years. Hence, whether in the Labor Zionist past members of the veteran Ashkenazi elite were ‘called to the flag’ in order to perform national missions defined by the state, now

they follow flags of their own liking. But still, these flags are nonetheless national and collective, not individual.

Second, for most interviewees contributing to the nation's common good is less a matter of participating in collective endeavours or engaging in outright political activity (though as we saw in the cases of Nirit, Tami and Yael, there is also room for that) than of fostering individual change and self-development. Hence, although they often voiced ardent political criticism of Prime Minister Netanyahu's right wing government and policies during the interviews, they seldom spoke about the need for profound structural change, especially in economic matters. This is less due to feelings of political powerlessness than to their structural position as the 'winners' from the liberalization of the Israeli economy (Ram, 2008; Shalev, 2000). Thus, while they sometimes decried the 'excesses' of the capitalist turn in Israel and the retrenchment of the welfare state, for the most part they did not want to go back to the old Labor Zionist 'socialist' model. Instead of political, structural change then, they conceived societal change as stemming from the ripple effect of individual transformation. As Dov, a coach in his early sixties, argued:

I think that when someone undergoes coaching and comes to it to make a change from a positive place, the change in the end influences his family group, also his extended family, also his group of friends, also his community.

According to this approach, if each of us understands that 'things must start from the person' (to quote Liora) and takes responsibility for himself, the nation as a whole will benefit. Like with Adam Smith's invisible hand, the sum of each individual's autonomous efforts will result in a maximization of the common good (see Klin-Oron, 2014 for a similar argument from the field of spiritual channeling in Israel). Dov provides a vivid example of this neoliberal approach when he describes his project of establishing a 'school for entrepreneurs' that will provide business coaching to small business owners and developers. He came to the idea after he learned that a majority of small businesses in Israel close down after one or two years of activity. While he acknowledges that large economic forces beyond any business owner's control impact on his chances to succeed, he ultimately blames their failure on a lack of entrepreneurial skills. As he says, 'if forty-four thousand businesses closed [last year], this means that at least forty-four thousand people made a mistake at some point.' By teaching them how to navigate a constantly changing economy and think in a strategic, entrepreneurial fashion, he hopes not just to help each individual business owner but to make a significant impact on the national economy. As he explained:

One of our thoughts regarding the school for entrepreneurs that we want to establish is that the more successful businesses there are, it contributes to GNP [Gross National Product] in the end. That is, it helps also at the national level.

While most interviewees did not frame their national contribution as coaches in such an explicit and articulate way, the enlistment of coaching's neoliberal

individualized therapeutic approach to the solution of what they saw as national problems was far from unique. Interviewees often described coaching as a new gospel that can provide innovative answers to Israeli society's most acute problems, such as educational underachievement, social inequality, poverty relief and social and political polarization. Even Israel's arguably most intractable national problem, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, was deemed a legitimate target for coaching intervention. As Haim, a very active coach in his mid-sixties, explained:

I started with the vision that this work will cross borders and I will be able to make some kind of impact in countries beyond our political side. [...] Coaching creates bridges of communication between people, both within themselves and with others. That is, we can learn to send to each other travelers instead of missiles [both words sound similar in Hebrew], tourists instead of terrorists. Being able to learn how to agree while we have disagreements in many areas and to respect the fact that we disagree, that he thinks X and I think Y, and I will respect him that he thinks X and he will respect me that we think Y and we don't have to kill each other. And through this coaching approach, this coaching language, I really believe that it's possible.

In this excerpt, Haim provides an interpretation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the therapeutic ethos of communication (Illouz, 2008). In his view, the key to avoiding violence is to create 'bridges of communication' between both sides of the conflict by fostering open dialogue and acknowledging and respecting their mutual differences. In this way, he simplifies a national problem with complex structural causes and scales it down to the individual level, much like Dov did in the small businesses case. By reducing it to a problem of (mis)communication, Haim depoliticizes the conflict and makes it amenable to therapeutic intervention.⁹

But as I have argued throughout this chapter, the adoption of coaching's highly apolitical and individualized language by members of the last republican generation like Haim does not mean that they have withdrawn into their private affairs and lost their stakes in national issues. If we pay close attention to Haim's words, we can discern the use of the collective 'we' when referring to the Israeli side of the conflict. This use of the collective 'we' betrays a sense of belonging to a bigger collective, an almost natural identification with the nation. In forging a vision to use coaching to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Haim is not acting as a private individual but as a representative of the nation, a self-appointed ambassador of peace. In this sense, I would like to argue that his turn to coaching does not signal a rupture in his commitment to the nation nor a sense of alienation from the collective (Ram, 2000), but rather provides him with a new and more effective tool to fulfil his *schlichut* as a member of Israel's service elite. Therefore, much like in the other cases I presented in this chapter, the neoliberal logic of coaching does not stand alone, but is enlisted to and interwoven with this generation's republican mission to contribute to the nation's common good.

A new moral and ethical assemblage?

In a programmatic text on the emergence of global assemblages, Ong and Collier (2008: 13) argue that ‘neoliberalism’s actual shape and significance for the forms of individual and collective life can only be understood as it enters into assemblages with other elements’. They define an assemblage as ‘the product of multiple determinations that are not reducible to a single logic’ (ibid.: 12). In this chapter, I have tried to show how such an assemblage is being constructed in the new field of Israeli coaching. I have argued that we should not interpret the emergence of this field as expressing a single individualization logic in Israeli society, but rather look at how coaching’s neoliberal therapeutic rationality enters into dialogue with local discourses and traditions of the self as it is adopted by different social groups.

Focusing on the case of coaches from Israel’s ‘last republican generation’, I have pointed at how life-coaching provides them with a new language for ‘linking the private self to the public sphere’ (Illouz, 2008: 2). This language seems to have replaced the Labor Zionist collectivistic ethos that has lost much of its former relevance in contemporary neoliberal Israel. But as I have tried to show, this does not mean that this ethos and its associated republican dispositions to act for the common good of the nation have disappeared from this generation’s moral landscape. Instead, they partake in a new ‘moral and ethical assemblage’ (Zigon, 2010, 2011), which also includes neoliberal discourses of entrepreneurship, individual autonomy and self-development. As Zigon (2011: 44) argues, ‘within moral and ethical assemblages diverse and seemingly contradictory discursive traditions can uniquely combine and support one another in ways perhaps unrecognized by those participating in the assemblage’. Hence, ‘they offer a greater range of possibilities for morally being in the world and ethically working on oneself than any one of these traditions on its own’ (ibid.: 47). For members of the last republican generation then, such an assemblage provides a context for remaking their complex identities in neoliberal Israel.

Finally, this chapter joins a growing body of research showing the implication of self-improvement discourses and practices in the (re)construction of national communities and identities in the wake of neoliberal reform, especially (but not exclusively) in the post-socialist context. In this process, old-time local notions of citizenship, patriotism and the common good are reworked in creative and often unpredictable ways, as they articulate with neoliberal political rationalities (Hemment, 2012; Hoffman, 2006; Matza, 2009). Thus, without overlooking therapy’s role as a globalizing and homogenizing force (Illouz, 2008; Nehring et al., 2016), future research should also consider how it is deployed in efforts to reassemble the nation.

Notes

- 1 This research was supported by The Israeli Science Foundation (grant No. 16/496).
- 2 Like in most parts of the world, coaching is not a state-certified profession in Israel, so there are no official statistics on the number of trainees and practitioners. Available data from local coaching associations suggests that over 10,000 Israelis sought coaching

training, allegedly making Israel the country with the highest number of trained coaches per capita in the world (see Kaneh-Shalit, 2017). However, it is important to note that most certified coaches do not end up working in the field, so that the number of actually practicing coaches is much lower.

- 3 In an immigrant society such as Israel, the term 'veteran' is used to distinguish between older and newer Jewish immigrants. Veterans were those that immigrated to Israel prior to the state declaration in 1948, mostly from Eastern Europe, and conformed the local social elite (see Peled & Shapir, 2005; Kimmerling, 2001).
- 4 Following Israeli researchers of ethnicity, I treat the Ashkenazi ethnic label as a performative rather than as ascriptive identity (see Sasson-Levy, 2013). Thus, my sample includes a few 'pure' Mizrachim (Jews from North Africa and Middle Eastern countries) and individuals of mixed ethnicity that resemble and act as Ashkenazim in most respects.
- 5 Again, there are no official statistics on the age-distribution of certified coaches in Israel. Nonetheless, the central role of members of this generational unit in the coaching field is hard to miss. For example, most of the founders and original members of the two major coaching associations in Israel come from this social group (for similar findings in the U.S., see George, 2013: 191).
- 6 These include, among others, the trauma of the 1973 War, the political turnover of 1977, which ended Labor's forty years of continued government, the liberalization of the economy and the increasing penetration of Western consumer culture.
- 7 As a number of social commentators have noted, the Zionist pioneering ethos has not disappeared, but has been taken up and revamped by the religious-nationalist right in its efforts to gain national legitimization for its colonization project in the West Bank (see Ben-Eliezer, 1998; Ram, 2008; Shafir and Peled, 2002).
- 8 The biblical Hebrew word *shlichut*, which originally referred to emissaries carrying another person or God's mission, has deep Zionist connotations, as it is commonly used to refer to dedication to the achievement of the goals of Zionism. Like *hagshama*, it denotes unselfish work for the sake of the nation.
- 9 Haim's therapeutic approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in fact not original, as the practice of fostering unmediated open and empathetic dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians is a long-time feature of the 'peace industry' (as its detractors call it) that developed around the conflict.

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