CHAPTER 10

# Toward a Research Program for Studying National Solidarity

## The Nation and the Promise of Friendship

The novelist E. M. Forster (1951) famously stated that if he needed to choose between betraying a friend and betraying his country, he hoped that he would have the courage to do the latter (68). While the potential moral contradiction between devotion to personal friendship and loyalty to a collective cause could not be stated any clearer, from a cultural sociological point of view this statement is not readily applicable to national attachment, as it ignores the deep cultural associations between friendship and national solidarity. This book argues that people's sense of national attachment depends not only on the collective identity they seem to share with others but also on a longing for connection with these multiple others, a longing that is cultivated (although often taken for granted) through recurrent participation in shared, nationally bounded social institutions, best considered as social clubs.

The overwhelming majority of research on national attachments centers on the study of identity rather than solidarity, privileging questions about the commonality of actors and overlooking the role of social ties and sociability between actors as an alternative and complementary category of analysis. Despite important contributions made by recent reappraisals of national identity discourse in foregrounding the study of institutional processes and everyday life (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Edensor 2002; Eriksen 1993; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008), sociological literature on



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nationalism has mostly remained silent on the role of interpersonal interactions and social networks (Eriksen 2004, 56). The limited theoretical work that explicitly addressed national solidarity highlighted primarily the analytic differences between small-scale, face-to-face relations and macro-solidarity understood as abstract relations between strangers (Calhoun 1991; Malešević 2011). Another body of work connects social networks and group interactions with rituals of solidarity (Collins 2004) or norms of civic engagement and democracy (Fine 2012; Putnam 2000) but makes no theoretical claims about national attachment.

Against this backdrop, I call for the systematic study of interactions between compatriots premised on a sense of continuity between personal and collective ties. This requires two things: first, the recognition that national attachment is comparable to the preferential and particularist attributes of friendship in projecting a sense of exclusivity, familiarity, and loyalty, and second, a research program for studying *how* national solidarity emerges from social ties and patterns of sociability.

Theories on the spread of nationalism have typically focused on one of the three processes: a political movement, a shift in institutional state structures, and a process of nation-building understood as the dissemination of a "national consciousness" among the local population (Wimmer and Feinstein 2010). My proposal centers primarily on the third process and partly on the second but does not assume an explicit consciousness-raising project nor does it concern state structures. Instead, it concentrates on the emergent properties of a particular community-building structure that has developed since the early modern era. Sociologists have offered various conceptualizations for the kind of modern social formation that has replaced the traditional clan, village, or medieval guild such as secondary groups (Cooley 1962), civic associations (Putnam 2000), or tiny publics (Fine 2012). At the risk of adding sweeping generalizations to the already reified distinction between modern and premodern formations, I would like to introduce into this discussion the concept of social club sociability. By this, I refer to any form of institutionally mediated social interaction that revolves around a common activity, interest, or purpose, establishes criteria for membership, prescribes certain rules of conduct, and, above all, occasions cooperation between strangers. Individuals in premodern societies participated in a limited number of differentiated institutions and relied primarily on familial ties

of *filiation*. In contrast, the proliferation of social clubs in modern societies has provided the most extensive avenue for creating trust based on ties of *affiliation* (aligned by social, political, and professional practice), the precondition for building national communities.

Most of these social clubs were not, of course, intrinsically connected to the rise of nationalism or nation-states, and nor are they today. In order to understand the extent to which membership in a given social club corresponds to national groupings, we still need to address questions of group classification and boundary maintenance—issues that are widely researched in studies of nationalism (Erikson 1993). But to explain the mechanisms of national solidarity, we need to go beyond the questions of identity or boundary-work and examine the interactions taking place in these clubs and their symbolic meaning.

Given the historical observation that face-to-face social formations gradually transformed into attachments between distant others (Anderson 1991; James 1996), a phenomenological and cultural sociological approach is needed which asks how friendship can model for collective ties, such that a mass community is experienced as a close-knit bond, and, in turn, how the collective can model for friendship ties, such that interpersonal interactions become sanctified in the name of the nation. This recursive relation between concrete social ties and cultural collective meanings remains undertheorized.

The suggested research program translates into a particular research strategy for studying social club sociability both in everyday life and in public events through the mechanisms of public intimacy and the emergent feelings of collective intimacy. Others have addressed the term "intimacy" as a form of confiding communication that is extended to the national sphere (Herzfeld 2005), drawing on the growing legitimacy of authentic self-disclosure in public life (Ringmar 1998). I, however, employ intimacy as a form of exclusive relationship between actors which can carry interpersonal, public, and collective significance.

Thus, public intimacy refers to the staging of interpersonal ties in front of face-to-face as well as mediated audiences. Partly resonating with Simmel's (1949) discussion of informal sociability, it is a dramaturgical mechanism for establishing the exclusivity of interpersonal bonds and for seducing outsiders into becoming confidants and, ultimately, participants. By focusing on the ways in which institutions shape interactions between

actors rather than on the identity of actors, the analytic construct of public intimacy provides more leeway for exploring how interpersonal bonds can extend to wider circles and give rise to feelings of collective intimacy. Having participated in similar social clubs throughout the course of their lives, compatriots acquire a sense of shared competence in making friends. What they develop is more than generalized trust in the ability of others to follow shared norms of civility, it is mutual feelings of familiarity, exclusivity, and loyalty. Consequently, when these anonymous strangers meet at public events and achieve collective effervescence and fusion (Alexander 2004; Collins 2004; Dayan and Katz 1992; Durkheim 2003), what is at stake is not only reassurance about the existence of like-minded citizens and confirmation of an imagined community (Anderson 1991); it is the fulfillment of the promise of friendship.

In and of itself, social club sociability cannot differentiate between national and civic solidarity, as there are not two different kinds of clubs when it comes to the basic process of forming friendships between strangers. While a strong we-feeling is more readily associated with the exclusionary ethos of nationalism than with the inclusive ideals of civil society, in terms of solidarity both are premised on the same purifying binary logic that distinguishes between friends and non-friends. It is only at the symbolic level and through the complex ways that national solidarity discourse is implicated in the temporal, epistemological, and semiotic aspects of the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends that we can connect social club sociability specifically to national attachment.

Viewed in this light, it is important to distinguish national attachment from ethnicity on the one hand and citizenship on the other. Although analytically and empirically one cannot readily separate national identity from ethnicity (Brubaker et al. 2004) or, as stated, national solidarity from civic solidarity, national attachment relies on a unique symbolic structure that has no parallels in the cases of ethnicity or citizenship. Simply put, while ethnicity invokes the notion of brotherhood and citizenship relates to a community of strangers, national attachment is the only category of belonging that encompasses and merges both terms through the lens of friendship, codifying a moral shift and a unidirectional movement from strangers to newly found friends to timeless brothers.

Throughout this book, I have described how this meta-narrative operates through a set of binary codes that transform mundane interactions in institutional life to sacred ties of collective life in such a way that abstract, anonymous, inclusive, indifferent, and interest-based relations between individual strangers become concrete, familiar, intimately

exclusive, loyal, and passionate relations between fraternal friends. This deep-seated cultural structure conveys a quest for salvation (Alexander 2003). It reflects not only an understanding that compatriots share a common heritage and cooperate in a common public sphere but also that they share common lives, passions, and destiny.

Most intermediate social institutions in the modern era were male dominated, if not male exclusive, and many still are. In fact, the very term "club" continues to bear such gendered undertones, at least in the English language. While not all the case studies described in Part Two were explicitly structured along gender lines (*Big Brother* reality TV show can be seen to project a relatively gender-egalitarian ethos), they all employ the symbolism of brotherhood and fraternity in ways that link the social and cultural structures of national solidarity with male ascendancy.

For instance, mainstream Freemasonry and most military organizations continue to bar or restrict female participation while offering male members hands-on experience in managerial roles perceived as a model for good citizenship and civic engagement (e.g., Kaplan 2014; Sasson-Levy 2002). This serves to legitimize and reinforce male hegemonic arrangements in society at large, privileging male networking and men's participation in economic and political life. On a deeper symbolic level, these social clubs serve to uphold a fraternal social contract (Pateman 1989)—a political bond powered by passion rather than interest. On rare occasions, such as during commemoration rituals for the dead brothers, this social glue of homosocial desire is publicly celebrated as a declaration of love between men. Such passion rarely surfaces in everyday life, yet it drives the pursuit of sociability and friendship throughout men's routine activity in social clubs.

In advocating a research program for the study of national solidarity, I do not imply that a national community is necessarily a uniform, cohesive group of individuals forging long-lasting bonds. Similar to the way in which critics have underscored the incoherence and instability of national identity, a study of national solidarity must take into account both instances of integration and disintegration (Lainer-Vos 2012), consider how acts of inclusion for some are, by definition, acts of exclusion for others (Handler 1988; Nagel 1998), and, moreover, how the affect of political friendship is deeply entangled with that of hatred and enmity, as discussed by Niza Yanay (2013). But it is only by acknowledging the experiential relevance of friendship for people's sense of collective belonging that we can begin to examine and interrogate the social construction of national solidarity.

What is called for is a combined historical and ethnographically informed cultural analysis of a variety of social clubs set within national boundaries. By identifying and studying from bottom-up how mechanisms of public intimacy and feelings of collective intimacy shape distinct institutional manifestations of strangers-turned-friends, we can gain a better understanding of how national solidarity works at the micro-level, how it has remained the world's dominant social glue from early to late modernity, and why this societal glue may be weaker in societies characterized by limited institutional differentiation and therefore offer a more restricted choice of exclusive local clubs.

## Structural Considerations in the Empirical Study of Social Clubs

In closing, I would like to spell out the main structural issues to be considered when applying the proposed research program to specific social clubs. The three very different social clubs presented in Part Two were purposely chosen so as to demonstrate diverse institutionalized forms of sociability, which in turn entail various configurations in the relative position of participants and spectators in the social performance and different cultures of participation in civic and national life. The case studies were analyzed according to the three-layered theoretical model of national solidarity. While each study covered all three aspects of the model, it also served to highlight and showcase one specific element.

*Institutional setting.* Of the three cases, the study of Masonic lodges provided the clearest example of an institutional setting structured along the traditional lines of a social club, comprising concrete interpersonal ties of friendship between members and a network structure in which every member is, in principle, an equal actor who can assume various roles in the organization.

*Public and collective intimacy.* The *Big Brother* reality TV show demonstrated how concrete and mediated triads of public intimacy can turn the audience into confidants and confidants into accomplices. Social exchange about the show among viewers becomes a social performance in its own right, in which the contestants assume a totemic symbolic presence in the life of their audience. By concretizing the promise of social ties among all participants, the mass public event engenders feelings of collective intimacy.

*Meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends.* The final case of military friendship highlighted how the national discourse of fraternal friendship infuses grassroots campaigns for missing soldiers in such a way that spectators in public displays of personal friendships become performers in collective displays of solidarity with the dead or the missing. This social performance provides perhaps the most explicit demonstration of the symbolic cultural codes that transform anonymous strangers at the interpersonal level into cherished friends at the collective level.

These case studies also differed in several important dimensions. First and foremost, in terms of organizational structure and modes of connectivity, social clubs straddle two forms of infrastructure: horizontal social networks and hierarchical social performances. Mid-range associational formations, groups, and communities that are based on either a thick or thin network of interpersonal ties exhibit a form of connectivity and communication that is horizontal, decentralized, dialogical, and interactive and that makes no a priori distinction between performers and spectators. In contrast, a public social performance that caters to a mass audience is based on a monological, centralized, and hierarchical form of connectivity consisting of performers and viewers, an infrastructure of attention that links individuals to a social and political center in synchronous time (following Frosh 2012). This distinction can be best illustrated by contrasting online social media such as Facebook and mass media outlets such as television. Given the horizontal structure of social network sites, all actors in the network can potentially shift from the position of passive spectator to full participant; in the case of viewers watching a live media event on television however, agency is seemingly restricted to those social actors actually performing on screen. In this regard, the international spread of Masonic lodges since the eighteenth century formed perhaps the first social network of global scope in modern times. Despite its obvious differences from online social networks, this "offline" precursor played a similar role in promoting a culture of civic participation.

Both the network and the social performance aspects are, nonetheless, central to social club sociability and vital for the enactment of national solidarity as a continuum between personal and collective ties.[1] A historical example of French cycling clubs can briefly illustrate how both these organizational structures are at play in nation-building processes.[2] Eugen Weber (1986) noted that from the mid-nineteenth-century cycling clubs in France began to stretch from the upper classes to wider social circles

and were the first form of organized sport to suggest the pursuit of sport for pleasure among the general population. Clubs that combined cycling and touring played a role in the "democratization" of the French countryside, taking cyclists into remoter parts of the country equipped with pocket maps of the local landscape and monuments. The cycling culture was promoted by the sporting press and gave rise to dedicated cycling newspapers that covered track meetings and road races (203–209).

In 1903, as part of the growing competition of the sporting press, one newspaper came up with a grandiose publicity venture: a bicycle race around the whole of France to be named the Tour de France. The Tour became an immediate national success with the French public lining the roads to see the cyclists and following the race and its progress in the newspapers. The winners instantly became national heroes. The Tour de France brought civic festivity and spectacle into rural communities that seldom took part in high profile public events. Local fairs, concerts, and happenings accompanied the Tour and mobilized different sectors of society such as tourists, merchants, artisans, and laborers (Weber 1986, 210–212). All in all, the story of organized French cycling interweaves a concrete social club, a newspaper initiative, and a national media event. It would be interesting to investigate how mechanisms of public intimacy operate in each of these organizational contexts and how they serve to collapse the structural distinction between horizontal social networks and a hierarchical social performance and blur the lines between the amateur cyclist, professional competitor, and national hero.

A second dimension to be considered when studying social club sociability is whether the institution in question represents an explicit "model of" or only an implicit "model for" national solidarity. In this, I follow Don Handelman's (1990, 23–24) typology of public events in the nation-state. In line with the basic distinction between "knowing that" and "knowing how," public events and institutions may possess a certain "knowing how" and "modeling for" solidarity between compatriots even when they do not make explicit claims to be "models of" or to represent the nation. Thus, the case of military friendship and combat fraternity is state-related and makes explicit claims about the representation or simulation of national solidarity.[3] In contrast, institutions such as Freemasonry, reality TV, or Facebook have no intrinsic connection to national life. Similarly, there was no such connection in the emergence of the early modern newspaper reading community, most famously analyzed by Anderson (1991) as the epitome of the national imagination. In all of

these cases, which characteristically involve mundane social activities, the implications of sociability for national solidarity may be less direct but no less revealing. Masonic organizational practices and triads of public intimacy in *Big Brother* offer a "pattern in miniature" (Handelman 1990, 23) that stands for the national community, not because they necessarily share with it a distinct set of features but because they encapsulate and embody similar patterns of relationships. In fact, such cases of "banal" social clubs may prove to be more illuminating for explaining the omnipresence and endurance of national solidarity.

Consideration of historical trajectories is a third important point of comparison. The three social clubs described in the book originated at different historical junctures in the development of national communities and exemplify different modes of participation in the public sphere. In the case of the Freemasons, contemporary lodge sociability consecrates and preserves an organizational model and values of civic friendship that took shape in eighteenth-century Europe and sanctioned an elitist version of liberal democracy coupled with enthusiastic patriotism, best encapsulated in the model of civic nationalism.

The institutionalization of military friendship and commemoration rituals for fallen soldiers and their use in nation-building in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries projected a more egalitarian ethos of civic participation and an impression of the national community as a horizontal comradeship and, at the same time, reinforced an image of vertical solidarity between the living and the dead.

The popularity of reality TV formats such as *Big Brother* at the turn of the twenty-first century points to the rise of a populist democratic ideology that favors authentic emotional expression over merit, civility, and rationality and establishes a culture of mass participation that conflates between witnessing and complicity and in so doing erases the distinctions between the personal, the political, and the national.

The growing contemporary use of interactive technology enhances the experience of collective intimacy and unearths how it is founded on interactions of spectators-turned-participants. The groundbreaking success of online social clubs founded purely on mechanisms of public intimacy, such as Facebook, attests to the omnipresence of the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends, which can now be fulfilled by a mere click of a button, by simply sending a "friend request" to a stranger. Facebook epitomizes the missing link between personal friendship and collective solidarity as it capitalizes (figuratively and literally) on the same

promise of friendship inherent in earlier "offline" versions. On the one hand, the implications of Facebook for civic and national life are not all that different from the ways in which nineteenth-century European cafés negotiated intimacy in public (Haine 1996) and literary salons mobilized local public opinion (Habermas 1991; Romani 2007). On the other hand, social media sites introduce or enhance patterns of sociability that were absent or highly limited in earlier institutions, among them bottom-up social norms generated by the end users, hyper-accessibility, an egalitarian and seemingly classless platform, and a restructuring of privacy norms (Livingstone 2008; Rosen 2007).

These are, however, only preliminary observations. A research program that explores and compares more systematically a range of social club platforms from the early modern era to the present time could indicate long-term transformations in collective patterns of sociability and identify additional cultural codes underlying national attachment.

A final dimension to be considered is the extent of the formalization of social clubs. Whereas traditional clubs have official criteria for membership and explicit rules of conduct, this research program can extend to social institutions whose access is less restricted and rules of participation more subtle and informal, such as coffee shops and most media outlets. For even a newspaper that is available to all and, in some cases, free of charge relies on a network of like-minded individuals as its organizing principle (Black 2012). Consequently, although social clubs vary greatly in the kinds of formal boundaries, selections, and exclusions they impose, the basic logic of clubbiness operates just like friendship: it entails both a sense of universal choice (I have many options from which to choose my friends) and a particularist practice (once chosen, my friends take precedence over others).

According to the civic-contractual model of nationalism, nation-states follow the same logic. In connecting citizenship with the symbolism of friendship and fraternity, national solidarity encapsulates the tension between universalist and particularist aspirations. Whereas the ethnocultural model of the nation invokes only a particularist preference for a predetermined group of people that precedes the formation of political sovereignty, the civic-contractual model entails both a celebration of voluntary political ties and the veneration of a selected group of citizen-friends.

The logic of clubbiness goes hand in hand with the advent of modern liberal societies. As forcefully argued by Wimmer (2002): "The main promises of modernity—political participation, equal treatment before the law…and social justice and security—were fully realized only for those who came to be regarded as true members of the nation. The modern principles of inclusion are intimately tied to ethnic and national forms of exclusion" (1). Whether or not one considers civic nationalism a "political myth" (Yack 1996, 198), its logic has been practiced and propagated by multitudes of social club members over the past three centuries and has thus contributed to both the spread of participatory democracy and its implementation as an exclusionary national attachment.

The magic of social clubs lies in their ability to mediate the Great Divide between the structures of mass society and the cultural quest for community. While this divide has attracted generations of sociologists, a cultural sociological research program that is both empirically driven and theoretically grounded can help us understand how the interactional and symbolic aspects of social club sociability contribute to national solidarity so that the nation may come to be imagined as the ultimate social club of chosen friends.

## Notes

1. The pioneering work of Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld (2017) already demonstrated the functional significance of a two-step flow of communication between a centralized form of communication and interpersonal networks. They explored how the influence of mass communication on the general public is mediated by individual actors acting as informal opinion leaders who intercept, interpret, and diffuse what they see and hear to the social networks in which they are embedded.
2. I thank Philip Smith for suggesting this example.
3. The prototypical example of this would be a state parliament, which is often conceived as a social club (Crewe 2010), but also non-state institutions that occasionally make explicit claims about friendship and sociability as a simulation or model for the political and national spheres, such as certain youth associations (Lainer-Vos 2014) or feminist organizations (Polletta 2002).

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