CHAPTER 5

The Meta-Narrative of Strangers-Turned-Friends

Friendship is forward-looking. Unlike passing interactions between strangers, close personal relationships entail an "expectation of future events" (Hinde 1997, 38). Similarly, when individuals see each other as belonging to the same national community, they expect that in the course of future events they will treat each other in ways that differ from relations between strangers. Whether or not this expectation is warranted, national attachment can be understood as a cultural expectation for future interactions with compatriots and as reassurance (often in an unreflective and taken-for-granted manner) that in times of trial these fellow strangers will act as friends. At the same time, both friendship and nations are also backward-looking. As noted by Bhabha (2013), despite the historical association between the emergence of national ideology and "modern" social life, "nations, like narrative, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (1).

In this chapter, I discuss how this belief in a shared destiny with individual strangers viewed in the mind's eye as a long-standing, collective group of friends is central to the discourse of national solidarity. I outline the overarching meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends; a sense of emergent intimacy between two or more individuals that develops gradually or instantaneously and combines the institutional logic of the state—which prescribes cooperation between anonymous citizens—with the mythic logic of the nation—which considers interaction between citizens as a modern incarnation of tribal-fraternal ties.

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Before I unpack this cultural structure, it is worth quoting a beautifully articulated argument made by Zygmunt Bauman (1991) on the role of friendship, strangership, and enmity in national ideology:

> The national state is designed primarily to deal with the problem of strangers, not enemies. It is precisely this feature that sets it apart from other supra-individual social arrangements. Unlike tribes, the nation-state extends its rule over a territory before it claims the obedience of people. If the tribes can assure the needed collectivization of friends and enemies through the twin processes of attraction and repulsion, self-selection and self-segregation, territorial national states must enforce the friendship where it does not come about by itself. National states must artificially rectify the failures of nature (to create by design what nature failed to achieve by default). In the case of the national state, collectivization of friendship requires conscious effort and force. Among the latter, the mobilization of solidarity with an imagined community…and the universalization of cognitive/behavioural patterns associated with friendship inside of the boundaries of the realm, occupy the pride of place. The national state redefines friends as natives; it commands to extend the rights ascribed "to the friends only" to all—the familiar as much as the unfamiliar—residents of the ruled territory.…Were the national state able to reach its objective, there would be no strangers left in the life-world of the residents-turned-natives-turned-patriots. There would be but natives, who are friends, and the foreigners, who are current or potential enemies. The point is, however, that no attempt to assimilate, transform, acculturate, or absorb the ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural and other heterogeneity and dissolve it in the homogeneous body of the nation has been thus far unconditionally successful. (63–65)

In this quote, Bauman identified the basic logic of nationalism, which he described as "a religion of friendship," as transforming strangers into friends. Unlike tribal ties based on the binary politics of friendship versus enmity, nation-states deal with the problem of anonymous strangers under its rule. Ideally, all state residents are to turn into natives and natives into patriots through the expressive dimension of friendship. However, Bauman offered limited insights as to *how* this is accomplished, except to assume a conscious effort and force by state authorities engaged in an "artificial" project of social engineering, since, in his words, collectivization of friendship cannot happen "naturally" or "by default."

In contrast, I believe that rather than being simply a deliberate effort by state authorities (who use the idea of extended family far more than

the trope of friendship to mobilize national solidarity), this process is a forceful yet banal outcome of modernity itself—a byproduct of the fragmentation and rationalization of institutional life. Thus, throughout this book, I discuss the mundane institutions where strangers practice social club sociability and become confidants and friends. This entails a twofold process of socialization and cultural interpretation; it depends not only on the interactionist mechanisms of public intimacy that mobilize spectators to become participants but also on the symbolic lens of national solidarity discourse that gives meaning to certain instances of sociability, conferring on them an aura of friendship and solidarity.

The Friendship and Family Tropes in National Solidarity Discourse

The rise of modern nationalism is closely related to the partial decline of kinship ties as a central organizing principle of the social order and a displacement of the family as a historically situated political institution (McClintock 1994). In turn, I argue that nationalism is equally related to the emergence of friendship as an alternative organizing principle of society and a potent symbol of collective solidarity. Political friendship is the main social construction that energizes and galvanizes national awareness, whereas strong localized kinship networks and tribal ties often hinder nation-building. Perhaps precisely because of this need to override tribal loyalties, national rhetoric actually invokes the family imagery more than it does the imagery of friendship.

Studies have repeatedly noted the use of family metaphors in the discourse of national solidarity, summoning the warmth and support of kin relations and the stability of an inter-generational structure with common ancestry and a shared future (e.g., Handelman 2004, 125; Lauenstein et al. 2015; McClintock 1994; Smith 1991, 78). Family imagery is also employed to describe historic moments of national dissent and dissolution. Struggles for independence are depicted as an inter-generational conflict between children and parents (e.g., the American Revolution framed as a revolt of the "Sons of Liberty" against "Father England," see Nelson 1998, 35) and civil wars as instances of fratricide (e.g., the American and Spanish civil wars, see Anderson (1991, 201–202).

Much less attention, however, has been given to the rhetoric and imagery of friendship. George Mosse (1982) examined the historical

correspondences between the rise of nationalism and the cultural discourse of friendship in the writings of modern German intellectuals, noting a shift from an emphasis on the individualistic-humanistic values of friendship to a focus on comradeship—a mode of sociability subscribing to the higher cause of nationalism. My own work on Israeli men's friendship (Kaplan 2006) is one of the few studies to systematically examine some narrative parallels between retrospective accounts of the development of personal bonds over time and prevalent cultural frames used in national solidarity discourse to account for the strength of the collective bond. A central framing of their ongoing friendships which emerged from the men's stories was the notion of a "shared past," namely, the idea that their friendship had grown gradually through shared experiences and activities. Colored by a familial rhetoric, the friend is perceived in such accounts to have been part of the family for years and to have become as close as a brother. An alternative framing, however, was that of "shared destiny," set in the context of a dramatic encounter with a stranger who immediately and miraculously transformed into a friend. This encounter was tinged with a romantic rhetoric, highlighting mutual "chemistry" and flowing communication, emotional thrills, and exclusive spaces where the confidants can enjoy their intimate bond as best friends forever (Kaplan 2006, 2011).

National discourse incorporates parallel cultural framings of "shared past" and "shared destiny" as a way to make sense of the temporal dimensions of solidarity. As famously noted by Anderson (1991), the nation is "imagined to loom out of an immemorial past" and "glide towards a limitless future" (11–12). More specifically, the symbolism of friendship is apparent in declarations of national independence or commemoration, bonding between alienated groups or uniting between the living and the dead. Anderson (1991) provided striking examples of revolutionary junctures in national history when interactions between groups of strangers were reframed as familial/fraternal unions. Thus, in 1821, Latin American liberator Jose San Martin invited marginalized and alienated groups into the newly formed Peruvian nation by declaring: "in the future the aborigines shall not to be called Indians or natives; they are children and citizens of Peru and they shall be known as Peruvians" (quoted in Anderson 1991, 193). By the same token, violent conflicts between rival groups who had little in common but reached a degree of political reconciliation were reframed in collective memory as instances of "fratricide," as in the American and Spanish so-called civil wars: the

former effectively a war between two sovereign states and the latter between European cosmopolites and local Fascists (201–202).

This allusion to strangers as fraternal friends appears also in grassroots initiatives of commemoration. As I describe in Chapter 9, in solidarity campaigns for Israeli soldiers missing in action citizens expressed feelings of familiarity and loyalty to soldiers they have never known and participated in public awareness campaigns projecting exclusive intimacy with the soldiers and their families. By turning anonymous citizens into familiar national heroes, rituals of commemoration epitomize the ways that the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends juxtaposes and intersects interpersonal and collective experiences; it prescribes a sense of instantaneous familiarity between individuals who were personally indifferent to one another but turned into friends at the collective level.

The discourse of national solidarity elaborates on the family and friendship tropes in a way that echoes the pervasive analytic distinction between the ethno-cultural and civic-contractual models of nationalism, respectively (Kaplan 2007). On the one hand, ongoing ties of solidarity between citizens are made meaningful through the notion of a primordial (ethnic-tribal) past and are inscribed in collective memory through rituals of commemoration, education, popular culture, and the like. This shared past is encapsulated in the prevailing imagery of the nation as an extended family (Smith 1991). On the other hand, these ties are also made meaningful through the notion of shared destiny and are dramatized and romanticized through the magical transformation of strangers into friends. The trope of friendship stresses civic-like qualities of national attachment such as voluntary, horizontal relations between citizens and mutual cooperation rather than vertical, authoritative relations as in traditional family ties (Kaplan 2007).

What is particularly striking is how the national discourse reconciles these two opposing tropes. The only way to construe a relationship as both familial and a friendship is by invoking the figure of the "brother," one who is a family member yet who signifies the mutual ties and equal status of a friend (Kaplan 2011). It is for this reason that "fraternity" and "brotherhood" are perhaps the most common relational terms to appear in national rhetoric.[1] Thus, the magic of the national imagination lies not simply in the transformation of strangers into friends but in imagining these newly found friends as lost brothers and sisters of the same primordial tribe. This second transformation is located on a longer mythological timeline. And while we may think of "shared past" as preceding the

notion of "shared destiny," the causal sequence is more likely the other way around: only after going through the initial move from strangership to a forward-looking friendship, can the friend gradually transform into a brother, and as the tie becomes tinged with familial rhetoric, it eventually becomes a timeless familial bond. It is precisely this fusion of romantic (civic) redemption with primordial (ethnic) origins, destiny, and ancestry that explains the attraction of national solidarity.

Friendship as an Imagined Social Construct

Common among scholars of nationalism is the assumption that the association of national attachment with the emotional bonds of family or friendship is merely a metaphor, in other words, that a comparison of national ties to interpersonal interactions is mostly a "rhetorical device" or form of social engineering utilized by state authorities or nationalist elites and activists and not a legitimate account of what national identity or national attachment really comprise (e.g., Breuilly 1982, 349; Hobsbawm 1983, 13). Similarly, it is assumed that contrary to face-to-face interactions the interactions that characterize large-scale entities such as nations are not a "genuine" form of solidarity (Malešević 2011, 284).

However, this premise is problematic on many levels. First, while attributing familial qualities to a large-scale society could indeed be considered metaphoric given the limited size of an actual family unit, the structure of friendship ties is more amorphous to begin with and can more readily accommodate a larger number of participants (Kaplan 2007). Second, in terms of emotional experience more generally, Schwarzenbach (1996) noted that one should be cautious not to confuse emotions, which must by necessity be concrete, with being by necessity also personal; sharing a personal bond with others is not a prerequisite for caring for them in concrete ways. Indeed, just as we readily acknowledge the role of hatred and fear in collective action, so too should we recognize the role of collective affection and care.

Third, according to the strong program of cultural sociology (Alexander and Smith 2001), metaphors should not be dismissed as fabricated representations dwelling outside the objective social world. On the contrary, precisely because culture should be considered analytically as relatively autonomous from social structures, metaphors should be taken as part of the cultural realm that gives meaning to social life in the first place. This holds true not only for the way in which symbolic

representations shape collective ties such as national solidarity but also for how they shape interpersonal ties such as friendship. It is, therefore, wrong to assume that national sentiments of solidarity are somehow more socially constructed than interpersonal ties or that the latter are more "genuine" than the former. The fact that friendships and family ties are more universal than national ties does not imply that they are somehow more natural, spontaneous, or less constructed.[2]

Fourth, while on some level it can be argued that personal friendships are constructed differently than national attachments, they may also share some similar narrative building blocks (Kaplan 2011). Thus, cultural constructs such as "shared past" and "shared destiny," as in the aforementioned stories of men's friendships (Kaplan 2006), are retrospectively employed to explain why a certain bond began or why it endured, irrespective of actual historical contingencies. It is not the actual accumulation of random-shared activities but rather the shared rituals of recollecting these shared activities that gives meaning to their ties, moving them into the realm of folklore. In this sense, personal friendships are, like national attachments, partly premised on "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm 1983), illustrating the effect of collective memory played out in the smallest of possible collectives—the intimate group and even a dyad.

Finally, one of the reasons that scholars tend to dissociate national attachments from friendship is connected to the distinction between interpersonal trust and generalized social trust. For example, Florencia Torche and Eduardo Valenzuela (2011) argued against the assumption of a gradual quality of trust situated on a continuum between personal and impersonal interactions. Such an assumption underlies influential works on trust, such as by Piotr Sztompka (1999) and by Putnam (2000), who both posited that relationships can extend from strong, thick ties between friends to weaker or thinner ties among strangers. Torche and Valenzuela, on the other hand, asserted that personal reciprocity between friends should be clearly distinguished from general trust among strangers: "Building personal relations requires, by necessity, time, but once they are established, trust ceases to be a conscious choice, becomes embedded in reciprocity, and usually acquires the taken-for granted character of familiarity" (187).

It is true that at the interpersonal level strangers rarely become instant reciprocal friends. However, when it comes to the collective sphere, at important junctures in national life compatriots draw on the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends and do come to perceive each other

in that instance as friends. These are occasions when generalized trust in strangers transforms into feelings not only of familiarity and mutual exclusivity, as described by Torche and Valenzuela (2011), but also of loyalty. In Jack Barbalet's (1996) compelling differentiation between trust and loyalty, trust has to do with cooperation and the confidence that the actions of others will live up to our expectations of them. In contrast, loyalty, like friendship, is forward-looking; it is the confidence that trust can be maintained in the long term. Actors can feel loyalty to a person, relationship, or institution even in the absence of individual trust in those they rely on. For "it is precisely the feeling of loyalty which maintains relationships when they might otherwise collapse, and which assumes, implicitly or explicitly, that irrespective of present circumstances, the thing to which one is loyal will be viable in the future" (Barbalet 1996, 79).

Thus, the notion of a continuum between personal and impersonal interactions criticized by Torche and Valenzuela (2011) is actually key to understanding the national imagination as a move from generalized trust between individual strangers to feelings of loyalty to the nation incarnated in a collectivity of friends. And as with Torche and Valenzuela's description of the shift from general trust to personal reciprocity, one could say that once national solidarity is established, trust ceases to be a conscious choice and becomes embedded in a collective experience of friendship that acquires the taken-for-granted character of familiarity, exclusivity, and loyalty. This shift can be gradual or sudden; the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends may create magical shortcuts along the way.

Since both friendships and national attachments are socially constructed emotions, the interesting question is not simply *whether* the framing of national solidarity as a close-knit bond is a metaphor, a rhetorical strategy, an invention by national elites, or an analytical extension of the meaning of trust—for these are all epistemological devices inevitably used in the social construction of all types of emotions—but *how* interactions between strangers are culturally constituted so as to acquire national meanings.

The Cultural Codes of Strangers-Turned-Friends

In order to explore how interactions between strangers acquire collective and, specifically, national meanings, we need to consider how they tap into an underlying cultural expectation of solidarity. As discussed by

Alexander (2003, 12) and demonstrated in the studies of civil society discourse (Alexander and Smith 1993), cultural structures operating through symbolic codes and narratives form a relatively autonomous realm independent of social practice and can, therefore, shape social life in powerful ways. However, unlike the rich and systematic scholarship on civil society discourse, cultural sociology literature has remained virtually silent on the cultural codes of national solidarity.

The meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends represents what Alexander (2003) identified as the continuing demand for immediate, transformative salvation in modern social life—the existential concern with "how to be saved, how to jump to the present from the past and into the future" (8). Family members are expected to share a common future no less (if not more) than close friends; only the friendship trope, however, can account for the fact that compatriots actually form new ties on daily basis. Thus, recalling that the very raison d'être of nationalism is to legitimize cooperation between citizens by construing civic interactions as potentially newly formed friendships, this political project becomes a quest for transcendence. The liberal account of citizenship and civil society, as discussed by Maurice Roche (1994), presupposes a community of strangers whose members share equal status, civic rights, and duties and negotiate common interests, obligations, and expectations. But they also "accept that in principle and in fact they are and will remain strangers to each other" (90). In contrast, the national account of citizenship presupposes a community of strangers-turned-friends who not only cooperate for common interests but who also share their lives, passions, and destiny.

More empirical research is required in order to identify and establish a comprehensive set of binary codes that would best encapsulate and elaborate on this transformation from individual strangers to collective friends. However, from the breadth of the arguments presented thus far—and building on the recurring allusions to feelings of familiarity, exclusivity, and loyalty in the previous illustrations—five such binary codes can be pinpointed that give meaning and structure to the rhetoric and discourse of solidarity as well as to mundane institutional practices of sociability. These comprise a shift from intangibility (or abstractedness) to tangibility (or concreteness), anonymity to familiarity, inclusivity to exclusivity, indifference to loyalty, and interest (or instrumentality) to passion (or expressivity).

From a semiotic and epistemological perspective, this set of cultural codes operates on multiple levels. First, at the most basic level, it

functions as both a key "summarizing symbol" and an "elaborating symbol" (following Ortner 1973, 1338–1345). It not only encapsulates, synthesizes, and collapses complex and ambiguous social experiences in an emotionally powerful way, but through the overarching meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends it also dramatizes and orders culturally appropriate modes of action.

Second, the meta-narrative operates not only in sacred moments of national life but is incarnated in everyday practices of sociability in institutional life, investing them with an aura of idealized friendship. The move from strangership to friendship epitomizes this Durkheimian distinction between the mundane and the sacred, and, most crucially, it highlights the oscillation between the two spheres (Kaplan 2006; Mallory and Carlson 2014). The meta-narrative could be conceptualized as a symbolically potent carrier of feelings operating in a recursive and cyclic fashion; everyday interactions of sociability generate ambiguous feelings that are then understood through the meta-narrative and its underlying cultural codes. This background understanding, in turn, prompts and reproduces further attempts to engage in interactions between strangers and to consider them as friendship. Thus, the first of each pair of binary codes depicts mundane relations between individuals in any social institution; the second represents sacred relations between fellow nationals. As discussed by Peter Mallory and Jesse Carlson (2014), a Durkheim-inspired perspective must take into account the vacillation between the sacred ideal of friendship and the profane practices of sociability in concrete social institutions and to consider how "moral ideals and beliefs could be produced, sustained, and given force in everyday life" (338). Moreover, theorizing stranger relations through the idealized norms of friendship opens the possibility for understanding "the symbolic and ethical qualities of bonds between strangers" (330).

Third, as part of the moral dimension of national discourse more generally, as it appears, for example, in commemoration rituals, the shift from stranger to friend is codified as a unidirectional movement from low to high, from the ordinary and the morally inferior, to the extraordinary and morally superior (Handelman 1990). However, it is important to note that "friend" and "stranger" are not morally antithetical in the sense that "friend" is antithetical to "enemy" or "evil" is to "good." This is because, unlike the coding system of civil society discourse (Alexander and Smith 1993), in this meta-narrative the "sacred" is juxtaposed to the mundane and not the profane.[3] Consequently, from a normative perspective, some

of the mundane countercodes in this typology, in particular "intangibility" and "inclusivity," need not carry a strictly negative connotation in order for them to be subordinated to the opposing code.

Finally, and related to the previous observation, it is important to bear in mind that this meta-narrative does not address the "enemy" as an explicit countercode. Although the category of the enemy is central to national identity discourse (e.g., Bauman 1991; Nagel 1998) and has been researched extensively in interactional and social psychology studies (e.g., Druckman 1994; Eriksen 1993), in this specific and highly idealized narrative of strangers-turned-friends excluding hostile strangers and targeting them as enemies is not part of the story. Unlike the politics of friendship and enmity in premodern societies, the underlying rationale is to turn strangers into friends not to keep them from becoming enemies (Silver 1990) but to overcome the fear of alienation in mass society, the growing perception that citizens are strangers to themselves.

In this, I draw on Sennett's (1977) illuminating distinction between two types of strangers in urban life: strangers as "outsiders" and strangers as "unknown" (48–49).[4] Strangers are readily identified as outsiders and foreigners when group identities are well-defined and distinctions between "us" and "them" can be easily made. But in periods when social identities are in flux and traditional rules of distinction no longer apply, strangers are all those experienced as "unknown"; for example, the new social class of mercantile bourgeoisie which emerged in eighteenth-century London and Paris and formed "a milieu of strangers in which many people are increasingly like each other but don't know it" (Sennett 1977, 49). Thus, to return to the quote by Bauman (1991) that opened this chapter, the modern nation-state was "designed primarily to deal with the problem of strangers, not enemies" (63), because it faced a flood of unknown (rather than foreigner) strangers who did not consider themselves similar to each other, at least not until they imagined themselves as a nation. This is where the national meta-narrative comes into play, seeking to re-enchant modern social life and resurrect this community of unknown strangers as a community of friends. Indeed, the meta-narrative becomes truly magical once we consider how the underlying binary codes reverse the basic qualities said to distinguish between interpersonal and collective ties; for it is the latter which suddenly become tangible, familiar, exclusive, faithful, and passionate.

To conclude, compared to premodern communities, occasions for turning strangers into friends are far more pertinent to modern societies

in which the intensity and fragmentation of everyday life requires people to engage socially in a wide range of different institutions. In this respect, whether or not one considers the nation as a modern phenomenon, the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends presents a uniquely modern aspect of the national imagination. It transpires in sacred public events, when the social performance attains fusion and gives rise to feelings of collective intimacy, which is, in effect, an alchemic transformation of all members of the community from strangers to friends. At the same time, these feelings are the result of the less magical individual acts of friend-making that accumulate in the course of a person's daily participation in social institutions mediated by the mechanisms of public intimacy. In Part Two, I demonstrate empirically how these interactionist mechanisms operate in specific social clubs, each providing a different manifestation of the symbolic meta-narrative.

Notes

1. A good example is the extensive of use of fraternal terms in national anthems (Lauenstein et al. 2015). It is also striking that despite decades of feminist critics pointing to the gendered and exclusionary implications of the term "fraternity," it is still pervasive in popular discourse. Carole Pateman (1989) and Dana Nelson (1998) have described how the term fraternity was employed in both the French Revolution and the American Revolution to convey a move from absolute paternal rule to a civic-national "rule of the brothers," retaining male supremacy by endorsing a fraternal social contract.
2. Alexander (2006, 48) noted a similar claim made by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963) who insisted, in opposition to functionalist and reductionist anthropological accounts, that kinship exists "only in human consciousness; it is an arbitrary system of representations, not the spontaneous development of a real situation" (50).
3. More specifically, if we follow Dmitry Kurakin's (2015) suggestion to consider the opposition between the sacred and profane in Durkheim's sociology as totally different than the opposition between the sacred pure and the "sacred impure" (or polluted) (381) then the profane might in fact be better understood as simply the mundane or banal, because it is not actively sacrilegious. As Kurakin put it, the profane "originates from the individual sphere of experience, which is characterized by low intensity, ordinariness, and subordinated position" as compared with the collective mode of life associated with the sacred, which is characterized by extraordinarily intense emotions (384). A similar comment has been made

by Bryan Rennie (2007, 188) with regard to Mircea Eliade's perception of the sacred. According to this logic, unlike the binary cultural codes of good and evil (the sacred pure and the impure), the sacred and profane in Durkheim's work do not stand in a mutually transformable relationship: the sacred can transform the profane into the sacred but not the reverse (Kurakin 2015, 381). This coincides with how the national meta-narrative reflects a unidirectional movement from mundane interactions between strangers to a sacred community of friends but not the other way around.

4. This distinction echoes Simmel's (1950) discussion of the role of the stranger not only as a non-native or foreigner but as a constructive social role which can unify society (either by linking the separate elements of the group or by taking on a special task) and which may form a universal otherhood (see Karakayali 2016).

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