CHAPTER 6

# Can We Really Distinguish Between Civic and National Solidarity?

> To speak of "citizenship" without simultaneously speaking of "nation" is to utter an abstraction. (Davetian 2009, 508–509)

Although the theoretical approach presented in this book mainly centers on the question of national solidarity, the actual bottom-up practices of social club sociability do not in themselves differentiate between the various forms of mass solidarity. In particular, since much of the micro-level sociability formed in social clubs operates within and is circumscribed by the existing international state system, it could be just as relevant to civic solidarity as it is to national solidarity. While most sociologists presuppose and take for granted the analytic differences between civic and national attachments, one should bear in mind how both forms of solidarity reflect the same expectation that compatriots will overcome the differentiation and fragmentation of modern institutional life and socialize with one another.

There are, of course, other contemporary forms of mass solidarity below and beyond the level of the state, such as local ethnic and religious enclaves or transnational religions and social movements, which may likewise build on relations between strangers-turned-friends. When membership in social clubs is strictly confined to such sectarian enclaves or to transnational networks, then participants' sense of solidarity is likely to be geared toward these particular collectivities.[1] However, when a significant number of the social institutions that people attend are nonsectarian and operate within a relatively bounded national



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community—which, I suspect, is what has occurred and is continuing to occur since the emergence and dissemination of nation-states—then each of these institutions becomes one of many social clubs that contribute to people's feelings of both civic and national solidarity.

Rogers Brubaker et al. (2004, 48–49) argued convincingly that from the perspective of collective identification and classification, there is little reason to stick to conventional distinctions between nation, ethnicity, and race and suggested treating these categories as one integrated domain of study which examines how people construct their commonalities. But once we shift attention from the ways in which actors assume a common identity to the question of social ties between actors, national attachments stand out as quite distinct from ethnicity or race. For whereas ethnicity can be conceptualized with little regard for the quality of the ties between members, a central rationale of nationalism is to account for cooperation between citizens (e.g., Gellner 1983; Smith 1986), and it thus requires the formulation of an appropriate theory of national attachment.

At the same time, by shifting from identity to solidarity, we face another challenge, namely how to distinguish between national and civic attachment. This question is far more complex than conventional sociological wisdom would have it. In fact, when it comes to the question of solidarity (as opposed to identity), it is only at the symbolic cultural level that civic and national forms of attachment can really be distinguished, shaped by a specifically civic or national discourse of solidarity. I accordingly spelled out in the previous chapter how the symbolic meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends figures in national solidarity discourse. But once the symbolic, discursive dimension is bracketed, it is, I believe, not easy to distinguish between civic and national solidarity.

## Phenomenological Considerations

I illustrate this point on several levels. To begin with, there are very few studies that make explicit analytic distinctions between civic and national solidarity. Rather, political theorists tend to contrast civic solidarity with national *identity*. A telling example is the previously mentioned work by Honohan (2001), one of the few scholars to systematically discuss the difference between civic and national attachments through a vocabulary of friendship. Honohan claimed that civic attachments (which she compared to relations between colleagues but not close friends) may entail

special obligations without being radically exclusive, whereas national attachments may elicit commitment at the cost of excluding outgroups. Citizens can thus cooperate in political interaction despite diversity, dislike, and emotional distance. At the same time, a closer examination of her account reveals a division of meaning such that national attachments (or obligations) are taken to mean national identity while civic attachments are forms of mutual interactions: "Obligations to co-nationals require feelings of shared identity, those to citizens reflective recognition of interdependence….The key feature of nationality is a collective sense of a common identity…and [it] does not intrinsically require interdependence in practices between co-nationals" (Honohan 2001, 64–65). In other words, at no point did Honohan actually compare or distinguish between civic and national solidarity; similar to most scholars, her understanding of national attachment shifts inadvertently to the dimension of identity formation and has little to do with questions of social interaction.

Moreover, from a phenomenological standpoint and contrary to scholarly convention, the common usage in English of the term "compatriot" does not differentiate between co-citizens and fellow nationals (Honohan 2001). This lack of distinction between the civic and the national in folk understanding is revealing, and scholars should give it further consideration rather than trying to prove its analytic fallacy. Although in most political cultures it is common practice to differentiate between citizenship (associated with the state and society) and a more exclusive national primordial core (often a combination of ethnicity and religion), the extent of this differentiation depends on how the national community is defined in the collective imagination.

In some cases, the cultural boundaries of the nation are indeed formulated independently of citizenship status, for example, in officially multinational states like Canada and Switzerland or in states like Israel where unofficial distinctions between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens prevail. In such cases, we can expect the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friend to map onto the (ethnic) national core rather than the civic body. However, countries that lack an explicit definition of national membership beyond citizenship may offer a more inclusive cultural understanding of the nation, which comprises all citizens of the country, as in the case of the USA. This is not to deny that certain (growing) factions in American society and elsewhere promote a more purified version of the national core. But the very fact that they frame their advocacy in terms of a revitalization of society as a whole (e.g., President Trump's

election slogan, "Make America Great Again") means that even they partly conflate the civic with the national. Indeed, they have no choice but to conflate them, because when it comes the social institutions that people attend in their everyday life there is little reason to make an analytic distinction between society and nation (even when, in practice, some institutions may systematically exclude certain citizens). As noted by Alexander (1997), since nation-states continue to form the most effective boundaries for solidary ties, it is not surprising that civil society might be considered, on some levels, as isomorphic with the national community.

This phenomenological ambiguity between state, society, and nation can be partly explained by tracing the historical shifts in the meanings assigned to patriotism in Western political vocabulary. Mary Dietz (2002) and Maurizio Viroli (1995) both suggested that until the mid-eighteenth century, patriotism was understood as a love for members of one's community and concern for the common good along the lines of the (Greek/Roman) republican legacy of civic friendship. The patriot battled in the name of his people against the tyranny and corruption of the throne and was often associated with radical politics in the defense of liberty. By the nineteenth century, however, the rhetoric of patriotism had been adopted by more conservative circles in ways that stressed particularist attachment to one's country, a love for its uniqueness, and cultural homogeneity rather than civic virtue (Viroli 1995). As "patriotism" was increasingly assimilated into the emerging fusion of "state" and "nation," it became an attribute, no longer of the "rebel" against the (old) social order but of the "loyalist" to the (new) national social order (Dietz 2002). As national consciousness spread deeper and more broadly throughout society, the nation and its embodiment in state institutions gradually became the ultimate object of loyalty. In this sense, the locus of solidarity shifted from care for the people in the face of authoritarian rule to care for a community understood to be governed by the people, thus confounding civic and national solidarity.

## Empirical Considerations

Turning to empirically grounded research, prominent bottom-up approaches to mass solidarity also evade a clear distinction between civic and national meanings. For example, Fine's framework of tiny publics (Fine 2012; Fine and Harrington 2004) considers how small-group

interactions align local frames of reference with broader ideologies and symbols and shows how collective concepts such as citizenship or national sacrifice are linked by the localized group to its specific norms and standards of interaction. It is noteworthy, however, that Fine and Harrington's (2004) account alternates between a civic and national vocabulary, as they themselves observed: "while our argument is not fundamentally about the construction of nationalism, we propose that whether we examine civic involvement or national identity, small groups generate the identity and the socialization processes involved in creating citizens" (347).

Another bottom-up approach that is perhaps closer to mine in its focus on institutionally mediated sociability is Putnam's (2000) associationalism. Putnam underscored how localized social interactions in civic associations contribute to a community's "social capital" (social-organizational features that facilitate mutual cooperation) and therefore enhance democracy and civic solidarity. But it remains unclear why associational life and social capital should not be just as significant for national solidarity. For instance, in Putnam's description of the rise of civic activity during bursts of American patriotism in the wake of World War II (268), there is nothing to distinguish between civic and national attachments. He did make a distinction between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital; the former reinforces "exclusive identities and homogeneous groups," whereas the latter encompasses "people across diverse social cleavages" (22). Yet, while this distinction might seem to mirror the dichotomy between exclusive national ties and inclusive civic ties, Putnam made no such claim and confined his discussion to the qualitative difference between "weak" and "strong" ties (Granovetter 1973), in other words, to the structural level of social networks that has no bearing on the realm of meaning through which categories of collective attachments are formulated.

A final case in point is Collins' (2004a) framework of interactional ritual chains. Some of his work (e.g., Collins 2004b, 2012) presents what is perhaps the only bottom-up account of national solidarity per se. Building on Durkheim's (2003) notion of collective effervescence, Collins examined the surge in feelings of solidarity during public events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, both of which generated widespread focused attention accompanied by national symbolism. These feelings of solidarity operate as a capsule of collectively experienced time that dissolves within a three- to six-month period. And

yet, it is, once again, unclear what in the actual interactional account (as opposed to the symbolic, discursive dimension) distinguishes between civic and national solidarity.

## The Debate Over Civic Nationalism

Having laid out phenomenological and empirical considerations for the lack of differentiation between civic and national solidarity, I now turn to a critical examination of two central debates pertaining to the epistemology of nationalism, debates that presuppose a distinction between civic and national solidarity despite the limited evidence for such differentiation in practice.

The first debate is the ongoing scholarly critique of the civic-contractual model of nationalism, commonly referred to as "civic nationalism." Originating primarily in the writings of Hans Kohn (1944), civic nationalism emphasizes the political contract between fellow citizens and conceives of the nation as a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in their attachment to a shared set of political practices and universalistic values and to a common territorial homeland (Brown 2000, 51; Ignatieff 1993). It is contrasted with an ethno-cultural model, which foregrounds perceived primordial origins and shared cultural customs and traditions. While Kohn linked these ideal models to a distinction between Western and Eastern forms of nationalism, historical analysis suggests that a mixture of both ethnic and civic models prevails over time in most nation-states (Kuzio 2002; Singer 1996).

The ethno-cultural model draws on characteristics of the national imagination that render it similar to deterministic and vertical ties of kinship and tribal structure, invoking the notion of an extended family. The civic-contractual model, on the other hand, emphasizes those characteristics that place it in the context of a voluntary and horizontal solidarity between members, thus invoking the notion of friendship. These structural characteristics suggest that friendship could potentially serve not only as a metaphor for national solidarity but also as a deeper account for some of its emotional and cultural underpinnings, once the stress is on the civic-contractual aspects of the nation.

In recent years, the fundamental viability of the civic national model and its universalist vision has been called into question (Brubaker 1999; Xenos 1996; Yack 1996). Bernard Yack (1996) rejected the civic-national emphasis on voluntary contractual ties and accused its proponents

of propagating a political myth. Social contract alone could not set the boundaries of the national community or account for political sovereignty. Without an established cultural legacy associated with a predetermined, prepolitical community, people would find no reason to seek agreement with one group of individuals over another. Contingent communities of collective memory cannot be reduced to voluntary associations united by moral and political principles; they require collective boundaries that predate the formation of political sovereignty.

A crucial point, however, has gone unnoticed in this critique. Definitions of civic nationalism include among other things "a collective enterprise based upon common values and institutions, and patterns of social interaction" (Keating 1997, 690). By rejecting this model, we are left with no account of the interactions and patterns of cooperation and solidarity between compatriots, issues which do not play any part in the definitions of the ethno-cultural model of the nation. I thus argue that instead of distinguishing between these models as ideal types of national ideologies or identities, we would be better to reframe them as two complementary epistemological dimensions of national attachments: processes of collective identity formation and processes of social bonding and solidarity. The former dimension is indeed an extension of ethnic and cultural considerations of commonality, and in this respect, critics were correct to point to the futility of a civic-contractual model of national identity. The latter, solidarity-related dimension, however, addresses the issue of cooperation between citizens and therefore demands a civic-contractual model of national solidarity.

## The Critic of Methodological Nationalism

A second debate that reveals misguided assumptions about clear-cut distinctions between the civic and the national has to do with the bias of "methodological nationalism" and to some of the attempts to avoid it. As discussed by Andreas Wimmer and Nina Schiller (2002), methodological nationalism describes the tendency in much of social science scholarship until recently to take for granted the nation/state/society as one natural social and political form of the modern world. Because societies were structured according to the principles and contours of the nation-state, these contours became so routinely assumed and banal that they vanished from sight altogether. Paradoxically, in their pursuit of the grand schemes of modernity, classical sociological theorists, among them Weber

and Durkheim, ignored the national framing of states and societies in the modern age.

Yet, even as contemporary scholars have attempted to avoid such misconceptions of the nation-state as equivalent to society, they have often reproduced another variant of the methodological nationalism bias in their assumption that civil society and democracy can be studied independently of nationalism and their disregard for the historical links between democratic state-building and the rise of nationalism (Wimmer and Schiller 2002). For when nation and state become two separate objects of enquiry—the former discussed as a domain of identity, rooted in common history and shared culture, and the latter as a system of government and a playground for different interest groups—what once again becomes invisible is "the fact that the modern state itself has entered into a symbiotic relationship with the nationalist political project" (Wimmer and Schiller 2002, 306).

In fact, it is not only the question of methodological bias on the part of social scientists that is at stake; as noted previously, this bias is also central to the way laypeople understand nation/state/society as a single entity such that the civic and the national become one. If, therefore, researchers want to account for the phenomenology of mass solidarity in modern nation-states, they should work from within these folk perceptions rather than against them. They should explore, for example, the pragmatic meanings of civic nationalism as its values are negotiated in certain social clubs and not preoccupy themselves with the analytic contradictions of this model (see Kaplan 2014). This, if nothing else, might help us understand why state politics cannot be divorced from nationalism any time soon.

## Normative Considerations

Given the above, it would appear that the sociological distinction between civic and national solidarity is based not on phenomenological, empirical, or epistemological grounds but on a normative stance that distinguishes between "good" civic and "bad" national ties. The civic is characteristically associated with a universalist, inclusivist ethos and with values of individual autonomy, rational choice, and abstract reasoning, while the national is associated with a "primordial core group" and thus with an exclusivist ethos and more emotionally-laden bonds (Alexander 1988, 80). Furthermore, national struggles, unlike civic struggles, are often associated with intensive and irrational passions (Walzer 2002).

That said, when put into practice the notion that citizenship is more inclusive than national belonging is misleading. For one thing, citizenship forms a barrier to immigration, which, on a global scale, is a stronger source of inequality than the inner, ethnic-based exclusions associated with national solidarity. For another, even within the body of citizens, opponents of the dominant political order often suffer from exclusion (Brubaker 1999). In fact, from a cultural sociological perspective, one could argue that although the normative idea and the values of civil society may be more universal than the themes of national ideology (Alexander 1997), the kind of purifying solidarity generated by the discourse of civil society is no less exclusive. Indeed, Alexander and Smith (1993) stressed that the discourse of civil society is premised on a fundamental and exclusionary binary logic of good versus evil, friend versus enemy—the very same logic that we much more readily associate with national discourse. In both cases, the purifying discourse of sacred friendship necessitates a profane side, the point beyond which membership and hospitality cannot be extended.

One should also bear in mind that despite its particularist and exclusivist connotations, the ideal of national solidarity carries with it also universalistic principles to overcome pervasive social and sectarian distinctions. Alexander's (1997) definition of solidarity is particularly telling in this regard. Perhaps inadvertently,[2] he located his universalist account of solidarity in civil society within a national framework:

> it is the 'we-ness' of a national community taken in the strongest possible sense, the feeling of connectedness to 'every member' of that community that transcends particular commitments, narrow loyalties and sectarian interests. Only this kind of solidarity can provide a thread of identity uniting people dispersed by religion, class or race. (118)

Brubaker (2004) made a similar point, noting how the normative critique of the nation-state feeds into "the prevailing anti-national, post-national, and trans-national stances in the social sciences and humanities," and "risk[s] obscuring the good reasons—at least in the American context—for cultivating solidarity, mutual responsibility, and citizenship at the level of the nation-state" (120). Here too, Brubaker's discussion of solidarity employs an undifferentiated civic-national vocabulary, perhaps more intentionally than other scholars.

All told, despite my claim that national solidarity and civic solidarity are equivalent in many respects, I have chosen to center my argument on national solidarity because it is associated with stronger, passionate emotions and is thus more clearly linked to friendship. As persuasively analyzed by Honohan (2001), civic attachments are more directly comparable to relations between colleagues than to friendship in that they may uphold special obligations and enable cooperation even in conditions of diversity, dislike, and emotional distance. Moreover, from a scholarly standpoint, given the extreme scarcity of work which attempts to theorize and investigate solidarity in national context (unlike the scope and depth of such work in civic context), it seems imperative that we focus the inquiry on national solidarity.[3]

Finally, and most importantly for the present discussion, it is in the symbolic dimension that the meanings of national solidarity differ from those of civic solidarity. The gist of the national imagination lies not only in the transformation of strangers into friends; it is in imagining these newly found friends as rediscovered brothers and sisters of the same primordial tribe. As discussed in Chapter 5, it is precisely this fusion of primordial ethnicity and civic redemption, this weaving together of ancestry and destiny, which not only distinguishes between national and civic solidarity but also gives the former its seductive appeal.

## Notes

1. Because such enclaves or networks are typically associated with specific social institutions and more explicit in defining their common denominator from the outset (ethnic origin or ideological/religious belief), the transition from micro-level interactions to macro-level solidarity is analytically more straightforward in such cases and requires less explication.
2. In an updated formulation, Alexander (2006) expanded the definition to include "the 'we-ness' of a national, regional and international community" (43).
3. The gap in theoretical interest in national solidarity compared with civic solidarity seems even more striking considering the actual prevalence of the two phrases. A search in Google Scholar conducted on September 29, 2017, yielded 29,800 references to "national solidarity" and only 4160 references to "civic solidarity" and "civil solidarity" (combined). This suggests that a focused theoretical and empirical work on solidarity in the national context is long overdue.

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