CHAPTER 9

Absent Brother: Military Friendship and Commemoration

My final case study deals with an institution and form of sociability that are probably most readily associated with the nation-state and national solidarity: conscript military service and military friendships. Military cohesion and, more broadly, national integration are often viewed through the melting pot metaphor, which depicts the fusion of individuals or differentiated subgroups into a newly acquired collective identity (Hirschman 1983; Leander 2004). In this chapter, I call attention to the role of interpersonal and collective ties as equally important mechanisms of integration. Solidarity conveys more than simple reassurance in the existence of fellow soldiers or compatriots as a collective of individuals; it conveys reassurance in their existence as friends. Particularly in the case of universal military service, soldiers not only consider themselves representative of the wider civic community, but they also come to believe that their socialization as strangers-turned-friends ultimately stands for a similar relationship between compatriots in general. In turn, members of the wider civic community make sense of collective ties as akin to personal military friendship.

To demonstrate this claim, I describe the public staging of personal bonds between soldiers, drawing on my previous work on Israeli men's friendships (2005, 2006). I then go on to discuss the collective and cultural symbolic dimensions of military friendship drawing on a study of solidarity campaigns for Israeli soldiers missing in action (Kaplan 2008). I conclude by analyzing how the temporal dimensions of national solidarity evoke the figure of the brother and discuss its role in the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends.

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The Institutionalization of Military Friendships

The birth of the mass army in Western Europe in the late eighteenth century was closely connected with the rise of nationalism (Posen 1993). Following Gellner's (1983) ideas about the crystallization of national identity through processes of socialization to a common culture, scholars singled out the introduction of mass conscription in the wake of the French Revolution as a key homogenizing force and catalyst for national solidarity. The mass army represented a breakthrough in the ability to instill motivation and camaraderie among soldiers by socializing recruits to a common language and forging strong mutual ties (Conversi 2007). It created conditions for new physical and emotional intimacy between soldiers (Martin 2011) and enabled them to experience a new kind of community held together by common danger and a common goal (Mosse 1993, 14–15). This signifies a gradual historical shift in the meaning of soldiering from that of paid work to its symbolic opposite: a collective civic act of solidarity.[1] The image of combat heroism was similarly transformed from a quality of the individual warrior to an asset of group activity, the so-called brothers-in-arms (Morgan 1994, 174). In turn, the experience of male bonding under fire projected to wider society an ideal of a fraternity of men united in the service of the higher cause of nationalism (Mosse 1982). Terms such as honor, bravery, and duty thus became heavily connected to both nation and manliness (Nagel 1998, 252). The gendered dimension of fraternity formed the basis for the androcentric, female-exclusionary dimensions of the modern civic social contract (Pateman 1989).

The institutionalization of military friendship as a model for national solidarity was reinforced by the establishment of commemoration rituals for fallen soldiers on an industrial scale. The rituals aimed to instill the memory of the fallen in all members of the community and connect them with values of fraternity and sacrifice. Official military cemeteries designed as shrines of egalitarian, collective worship reflected this national spirit. They were first established in the USA following the Civil War and spread throughout Europe in the aftermath of World War I (Grant 2005; Mosse 1990). Commemoration rituals elicited a key sentiment in the relationship between the nation and its soldiers: the need to repatriate the sacrificial dead, to provide an honorable sepulture for them in the nation's name, and to acknowledge that they died so that the nation might live.[2]

Tombs of the Unknown Soldiers, first erected in France and Britain following World War I (Inglis 1993), were considered by Anderson (1991, 9) as emblematic of the disembodied, abstract, "ghostly" imaginings of the national community. He argued that the empty tombs exemplify the kind of abstraction that enables the disentanglement of the trauma of actual, personal death from the productive consequences of the nation's sacrificial dead. James (2006), who shared Anderson's views of national attachments as a growing ability for abstraction, nonetheless conceded that there is still a universal experience of and need for embodiment that creates "bonds across settings of anonymity" and accounts for the fact that bodily symbols and signifiers, including those found in representations of the Unknown Soldiers, "draw on the power of symbolism to make sense through linkage and remembrance" (179).

In most instances, commemoration rituals therefore actually celebrate the familiarity of the dead and adhere to a symbolism of friendship (e.g., Kapferer 1988, 158–160; Mosse 1990, 215) rather than being saturated with ghostly imaginings. This is most noteworthy in the Israeli case, where the culture of commemoration is premised consistently on the notion that "we don't have anonymous soldiers" (Dekel 2003) and emphasis is placed on the imagery and rhetoric of friendship. Ever since the 1948 War of Independence, memorials have depicted fallen soldiers in situations of closeness and intimacy, stressing mainly the personal, individual pain rather than acts of heroism and national glory (Sivan 1991). Verses from King David's lament (e.g., "In life and death they were not divided" 2 Samuel 1:23) have become a common inscription in such memorials (Kaplan 2006, 144). The Israeli media deals with the death of soldiers by repeatedly broadcasting the deceased's close friends extolling the fallen soldier's virtues as a loving and caring friend.

The Public Staging of Personal Bonds Between Soldiers

Military conscription is perhaps the best example of a modern institution that not only makes explicit claims about simulating national solidarity but is also dedicated to turning strangers into a cohesive group of friends. Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz (1948) famously argued that intimate interpersonal ties between military comrades are the key factor in combat motivation and military effectiveness, above and beyond

ideological identification with the national cause. Consequently, military studies began to employ concepts such as primary groups (Cooley 1962), interpersonal attraction (Hogg 1992), and buddy relations (Little 1964), suggesting that strong cohesive ties between fellow soldiers reinforce small-group solidarity, offer long-term emotional support, and become a source of social control in service of group goals (Manning 1991; Rempel and Fisher 1997; Siebold 1999).

This line of work called into question the relevance of broader organizational and ideological indoctrination on soldier's combat motivation. Malešević (2011) proposed a categorical distinction between the "genuine" feelings of solidarity forged between soldiers during face-to-face interactions under fire and the "ideologization" of macro-level solidarity attempted by organizational or state authorities (285–287). In contrast, my own work on homosocial emotions and interpersonal ties between Israeli combat soldiers suggested that micro-level cohesion is deeply connected to military organizational practice and norms and wider national ideology (Kaplan 2006; Kaplan and Rosenmann 2014). The Israeli military (Israeli Defense Forces, hereafter IDF) is noted for stressing interpersonal commitments and mutual support among unit members as part of its tactical doctrine in combat (Kellet 1982). To further this goal, combat soldiers are assigned to organic units throughout their term of service (Ben-Ari 1998).

The point is that military socialization produces a strong sense of continuity between personal, organizational, and collective attachments, which can be analyzed through the mechanisms of public intimacy. The military mobilizes new recruits uprooted from diverse localities into newly formed close-knit units where they are to interact with strangers and quickly transform into the most intimate of friends. As they go through military service, they publicly stage their personal ties in front of others, soldiers, and non-soldiers, while maintaining a sense of exclusivity. By enacting a male homosocial "joking relationship" (Lyman 1987), military buddies create a form of public intimacy based on a coded communication employed during their daily life within the military and in others settings (Kaplan 2005). This unique, shared language involves the use of personal, idiosyncratic expressions as well as wider military slang combining professional jargon and a macho discourse rich with "dirty talk" about sex. It serves to create a common denominator between the men and distinguishes them from their surroundings.

This coded communication originates in specific shared experiences but gains significance as a marker of the military bond when used outside of its original context, as recalled by Judd, one of the Israeli combat veterans that I interviewed:

> We had this special whistle that belonged only to the group, and behind it were two words…wanna fuck. It started as a song and later we turned it into a whistle, so that we could express it in public too. (Kaplan 2005, 578)

The unanimous exclamation by a group of men, "We wanna fuck, we wanna fuck!," is common among IDF soldiers and is often sung during social activities within the confines of the military base as an implicit outcry against the forced conditions of military service. The transformation of the dirty talk into a whistle enabled Judd's group to use it in completely different contexts, its original meaning no longer manifest. Shifting back and forth from private to public spaces, these coded expressions become the "stamps" that give their semipublic interactions the value of intimacy.

This type of communication rarely conveys explicit meaning. A telling example is the practice of using derogatory nicknames or greetings disguised in curses within the group. While these could easily be misinterpreted by an outsider as expressions of rejection or aggression, insiders consider them as expressions of affection and closeness. This was evident in the reflections of Haim, another veteran interviewee:

> I was on leave for a few days, I took my parents on a trip….On the way we passed through [a base where a friend was stationed]. Knowing he'd be there I entered the encampment with my parents, so they could meet him. So I called out to him, "Mussa, how's it going?" and he called me back "you son-of-a-bitch, on your mother's cunt, coming here on your leave, huh?…So my mother said to me "Why does he call you that way?!" and as we entered the tent and he saw my mother and my father he was totally floored. (Kaplan 2005, 580)

The curse form and other forms of coded communication are open-ended expressions that, in themselves, say very little about the emotional intentions of the speaker. It is left to the respondent to make sense of the expression—whether as an act of hostility disguised in joke form or as an act of affection disguised in curse form—and to resolve the ambivalent

emotion in ways that may either extend animosity or further the attraction between the parties. Either way, because the content of such provocative speech or gesture is ambivalent and evades a clear-cut emotional reaction by the participants it teases them and entices them to engage with each other and deepen their mutual involvement.

No less significantly, this performance of public intimacy colored by ambivalent playfulness teases some of the bystanders and sends them a message that they are missing out on something. By sharing the same military-coded language, like-minded spectators—but not others—are invited to "join the club." As discussed in Chapter 3, "clubbability" is an elitist form of male socializing among equals who shared similar values, upbringing, and rank (Capdeville 2016, 77). Soldiers more likely to take part in the social performance are those serving in the same unit, perhaps also those serving in different units but familiar with the same military socialization, jargon, and manners.

By gradually expanding their social ties through practices of social club sociability, soldiers not only enact instances of strangers-turned-friends but also come to experience how their military friendships acquire new meaning as a collective bond. Particularly in countries with mass conscription, members of the same unit are likely to extrapolate from their own experiences of sociability to the larger national community. Thus, as they operate and travel across the country as a team and publicly stage their ties in front of other teams, they display their competence in friendship and gain confirmation about the competence of other members. Through this reassurance in shared codes of sociability, they may over time experience feelings of familiarity, exclusivity, and loyalty to soldiers at the wider military organizational level and to fellow citizens who underwent similar military service, all the while pushing non-serving citizens to the marginalized position of a national outgroup. In this way military male bonding often attains hegemonic status in society and operates as a form of private men's club network beyond the military setting, facilitating participation in the political and economic realm (Kaplan 2006).

From Public to Collective Intimacy: Expanding Circles of Solidarity with Missing Soldiers

While military bonding may impact wider society through concrete interactional mechanisms of public intimacy, much of its collective significance comes from meaning-making processes at the symbolic level. Commemoration rituals for the war dead illustrate how fellow citizens

who are technically anonymous strangers transform at the collective level into fraternal friends. Soldiers known during their lifetimes to only a limited circle of family and personal friends attain upon their death public recognition by distant others through ritualized tributes of friendship. Missing soldiers trigger and sustain an even greater public display of familiarity and closeness. Whereas fallen soldiers are rescued from anonymity after their death, missing soldiers are situated at a unique juncture between the living and the dead. On the one hand, their unknown fate signifies heroic sacrifice similar to that of fallen soldiers; on the other hand, the prospect that they might be alive encourages both close affiliates and distant others to relate to them publicly in terms of an ongoing friendship. Solidarity campaigns for missing soldiers present a unique window into the role of friendship in national subjectivity and demonstrate how processes of public and collective intimacy relate to the symbolic cultural sphere.

Between 2004 and 2006 I conducted a semi-ethnographic study of public campaigns for Israel's missing soldiers. Israel's prolonged state of conflict with neighboring Arab countries, with Hezbollah, and with Palestinian militias has led to a series of military excursions in the borderlands, predominantly Lebanon, from which a number of soldiers have never returned dead or alive. The IDF distinguishes missing soldiers (the equivalent term "missing in action" or MIA is not used) from prisoners of war (POWs) and fallen soldiers with unknown burial sites. Focusing only on the first category, I investigated the public discourse surrounding missing soldiers that appeared in the print, electronic, and digital media, examined websites run by the soldiers' families, the military, governmental agencies, NGOs, and commercial initiatives, and conducted participant observations at selected commemoration sites for fallen soldiers.[3] The present analysis centers on two cases of missing soldiers, the case of Ron Arad, a pilot shot down over Lebanon in 1986 and declared missing ever since, and the case of Beni Avraham, Adi Avitan, and Omar Souad, who were abducted by Hezbollah at Har Dov on the Lebanese border in 2000. The bodies of the three soldiers were returned as part of a prisoner swap on 2004.

Feelings toward missing soldiers tap into the essence of military friendship. An important value in the IDF's code of ethics is fraternal friendship, defined as the soldiers' "constant devotion to each other, their willingness to provide valuable help, come to the rescue and even risk their lives for their fellow men" (Kasher 1996, 233). This includes an obligation not to leave them behind under any circumstances, even

under fire (230). What happens, then, when this imperative cannot be met and the border crosser is left behind? How does it affect his immediate friends in the military unit? How does it affect the wider military community of comrades-in-arms? And how does it affect the wider civic or national community, ostensibly a community of strangers? Major Aviram, the pilot who flew with Arad and was rescued under fire, recalled:

> Every airman feels frustrated that Ron is still in captivity, but I feel the frustration a thousand times stronger. I was there. I was there and came back, and even though it was he who ejected both of us [from the plane] and saved us, he's the one who has eventually remained there. Although I couldn't have done anything to help him, I can't avoid a certain feeling of guilt, a sense of responsibility that lies on me like a heavy burden. (Air Force 1986)

Major Aviram felt in the most tangible way that his own survival depended on Arad's actions and sacrifice, and he experiences a sense of guilt for leaving his comrade behind. Such intimate feelings of identification and devotion to the missing soldier readily extend from their closest circle of personal friends and family to wider circles of affiliation and become a performance of collective intimacy at the national level.

The immediate circle of solidarity includes IDF soldiers who served in the same unit as the missing soldier but did not know him personally. On the website run by the families of the three soldiers kidnapped in Har Dov, a soldier from their unit recounted the atmosphere of commemoration created in the military barracks and its emotional impact. He also conveyed how it transformed into a local heritage:

> The first thing I recall from the day I arrived at the company is a huge number of posters with the names of the boys, their pictures, and a lot of objects made by soldiers in order to remember and pass on the events of the kidnapping, for soldiers who weren't there and didn't know them, like me. I remember suddenly experiencing a huge identification with the families, with the company, and with the boys.…I and every member of the company will do everything to pass on the heritage, just as it was passed on to me a year and a half ago. (quoted in Kaplan 2008, 420–421)

In the civic sphere, various public agents propagate additional circles of solidarity with the missing soldiers. First among the prominent actors

are the NGOs established expressly for the purpose of launching public campaigns for the soldiers. They fund street posters and newspaper and online ads and sponsor rallies and conferences, often assisted by local municipalities. A central foundation at the time of my research was Born to Freedom, which began as a lobby group representing the family of Ron Arad. It was headed by retired military personages and had become heavily funded by the government. After it declared a $10 million reward for any relevant information on Arad, the families of other missing soldiers appealed to the Supreme Court and the foundation was required to expand its advocacy efforts and extend the reward to include all IDF missing soldiers (Melman 2005). The campaign on behalf of Arad was nonetheless the most visible and included the distribution of bumper stickers that became extremely popular among Israeli drivers and a blue balloon that became the identifying mark of the campaign.[4] The foundation also produced public events such as an ultralight aircraft show, a yacht sale, and a parachuting display.

Another agent of solidarity is the educational system. The Ministry of Education prepared a detailed lesson plan guiding teachers how to address the case of missing soldiers in their classrooms and raise student awareness. The teaching kit included a proposal for a ceremony dedicated to the soldiers accompanied by songs and verses from the Jewish scriptures. It also provided guidelines for class discussions on what the students could do to help bring the soldiers home (Ministry of Education, n.d.). Both teachers and students seem to have been highly responsive to this education campaign, with the latter reported to have sent scores of letters to the then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and to have hung huge posters on school buildings. In one high school, students prepared a calendar counting off Arad's days in captivity, just like prisoners do (Levi 1994).

Commercial actors constitute a third and intriguing negotiator of civic solidarity. For instance, the Israeli Paz gas station chain joined together with the Born to Freedom foundation to distribute flyers in its stores and conducted a street poster campaign as part of the company's corporate social responsibility policy. Even more telling is a campaign for Arad funded by a popular fish restaurant. In the summer of 1994, the restaurant owners paid for a small aircraft to fly over the beaches of Tel Aviv towing a huge banner that read "Ron Arad we yearn for you—Ahmad and Salim" emblazoned with the image of two fish, the restaurant's logo (Levi 1994). Here, it seems, the restaurant's Arab owners, catering mainly

to Jewish customers in metropolitan Tel Aviv, made a deliberate attempt to bolster their legitimacy by connecting to the heart of the Zionist-Jewish ethos: the missing soldiers.

Finally, expressions of solidarity with the missing soldiers extend beyond the circle of Israeli citizens to the wider Jewish world, where a broad range of Jewish organizations and denominations take part in public displays of solidarity. For example, in 1993, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism called on all of its North American congregations to participate in the effort to release Israeli missing soldiers by organizing letter-writing campaigns to the US president and members of Congress, posting information on synagogue bulletin boards, writing op-ed articles in local newspapers, and writing letters of solidarity to the soldiers' families (Kaplan 2008).

There are often contradictory interests between the military and government authorities officially responsible for negotiating a deal to return the soldiers or their remains and the grassroots campaigns by families and friends that demand to expand these efforts, but these points of contention are clouded by a generalized and depoliticized stance of solidarity. Given the centrality of military friendship as a national ethos and the public displays of solidarity that nurture support for the retrieval of the missing at all costs, the government, more often than not, chooses to essentially join the campaign rather than make difficult political decisions. A telling example of this depoliticized stance is a bill proposed by members of the Knesset (Israeli parliament) that would require the government to fund family members of missing soldiers who travel abroad to meet with world leaders. The legislators explain that these meetings "are a national undertaking, not a private whim [and]…indescribably more important than a meeting held by any statesman would be" (quoted in Kaplan 2008, 420). This official approval of family lobbying as a substitute for state diplomacy exemplifies the constant blurring of the boundaries between the private interests of the families, the civic sphere, and the government's security and foreign policy considerations.

Solidarity campaigns for missing soldiers can in this way be seen to extend the moral values of military friendship to a large number of fellow nationals who express feelings of familiarity with and loyalty to soldiers they have never met. This includes not only the military community but also Israeli schoolchildren, commercial entrepreneurs, and synagogue goers worldwide. An object of public veneration, the absent soldier operates as a totem for the national community, arousing feelings that

personify the solidarity of the entire collective (Durkheim 2008). In this way, the public campaigns not only reiterate the symbolic relationship between the living and the dead but also recast the collective ties among the living as the potentially intimate bonds of friendship.

Together these examples demonstrate several aspects of the friendship-nation nexus. First, expanding circles of solidarity can be drawn within the national community, all relating to the same interpersonal experience of friendship, even if only on a symbolic level. Although most of the participants in these campaigns do not know the soldiers personally, some of them nonetheless experience concrete and often intense feelings of closeness toward them. Second, these public displays of solidarity demonstrate how the public staging of friendship ties in everyday life can extend, on special occasions, to the public staging of an imagined bond in collective life, in other words, showing how public intimacy culminates in collective intimacy.

In addition, this case study highlights how the collectively shared commitment to the safety of fraternal friends at all costs overshadows the conflict of interest between the different actors and neutralizes the political consequences of the governmental decisions made to rescue the soldiers or recover their bodies. In most cases, the Israeli government has historically opted to carry out disproportionate prisoner swaps in exchange for bodies of missing soldiers, which then may have encouraged the abduction of more soldiers. In one particular case, the abduction of two soldiers by Hezbollah in 2006 provoked the Israeli government to take military action and invade Lebanon in what has become known as the Second Lebanon War. This may well have been the first time in modern history that a country has declared war with the stated objective not of defending its citizens but of rescuing its missing soldiers, in other words, waging war in the name of military friendship.

The Living and the Dead: Between Simultaneous and Mythic Time

Such linkage between friendship and national solidarity would not be possible were it not for an underlying cultural structure that gives meaning to people's emotional experience. Concrete instances of military friendship as well as public campaigns for missing soldiers become part of the discourse of national solidarity through the overarching meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends, a symbolically potent carrier

of feelings that invests a variety of social interactions and situations with sacred significance. The infatuation with missing soldiers taps into two underlying dimensions of the national solidarity discourse: the relationship between the living and the dead and cultural perceptions of time. The national discourse of solidarity juxtaposes the dead, the living, and the unborn in a single community of fate (Smith 1998, 140). Anthropologists have noted how in all kinds of communities death marks the onset of a complex, often heavily ritualized, ceremonial process by which the deceased becomes an "ancestor," in other words, a meaningful presence for the social identity of the survivor (Hertz 1990; Kaufman and Morgan 2005). Similarly, the national community reveres those who acted in the service of the nation and enacts rituals that aim to resurrect the sacrificial dead, as the future of the living is dependent on the symbolic presence of the dead (Handelman 2004, 145).

Fallen soldiers are likewise socially constructed as having symbolic immortality (Bilu and Witztum 2000, 4). In many Israeli war poems recited during commemoration rites, dead soldiers are brought back to life in order to address the living, often restating and reaffirming the collective commitment to sacrifice (Oppenheimer 2002). The imagery of the living dead serves to compensate for the guilt the living feel toward the dead; it operates as a literary solution to the acute paradox experienced by a society that sacrifices the lives of its sons in the name of collective ideals and at the same time assigns a central value to the sanctity of life (Hever 1986; Miron 1992, 95). Fraternal friendship plays an important role in deferring the finality of death. Emphasizing their personal bonds with the fallen soldier and celebrating the promise of eternal friendship help the living to partly conceal the sacrifice of the dead.

The relations among the living and between the living and the dead rest on two alternate perceptions of time: simultaneous time and mythic time (Anderson 1991; Gupta 2004; Singer 1996; Zerubavel 1981). Simultaneous time refers to the continuing reassurance of the existence of fellow compatriots and their ability to engage in collective action. This faculty of collective simultaneity is facilitated by changes in technology and mass communication in the modern and late modern era that have enabled people to imagine how they live their lives parallel to and in synchronicity with millions of distant others they have never met. Accordingly, the notion of "place" has become increasingly "phantasmagoric" and penetrated by distant relationships across space (Giddens

1990, 18–19). Simultaneous time becomes most tangible in ritualized social performances, when all members of the community focus their attention on concurrent events and experience feelings of collective intimacy.

Mythic time, on the other hand, refers to epic narratives in the community's heritage that are experienced as sacred, cyclic, and recurring and are often linked by a transcendent being whose point of view is "outside" the historical, linear sequencing of time (Eliade 1954; Freeman 1998).

In mythic understanding, solidarity is anchored in events and figures that are chronologically unrelated but that together carry significance for the members of the community. By freezing time beyond its contingency and drawing on myths of sacrifice, national rituals of commemoration connect the living with heroes of the past. In short, if identification with fellow citizens in everyday life reflects the simultaneous dimension of national solidarity, identification with fallen soldiers draws on the mythic dimension.

In this regard, solidarity with missing soldiers merges both temporal frameworks. On the one hand, missing soldiers arouse identification in much the same way that fallen soldiers do, namely, as emblems of sacrifice associated with "mythic" time. For instance, American public discourse on MIAs in Vietnam was fraught with mythic imagery of their ongoing torture in Vietnamese prisons (Keating 1994, 245), magnified by stories and movies that centered on MIAs as "icons of veterans' victimization" (Sturken 1997, 88). This ambience helped mobilize public support for their cause and framed attempts to put the issue to rest as acts of national betrayal (Doyle 1992; Franklin 1991). Similarly, Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2008) analyzed techniques of non-closure practiced by Israeli media in its continual coverage of Arad's case and demonstrated how keeping the story unresolved, told, and retold served as a mythologizing strategy that helped sustain the perception that Arad is still alive and connect it with national myths of heroism and sacrifice.

On the other hand, identification with missing soldiers clearly reflects collective perceptions of simultaneity. The very possibility that the soldier is still alive implies that members of the community can imagine how he leads his life parallel to their own. The following account by Lieutenant Colonel H., Arad's former squadron commander, is a telling example of how a rhetoric of co-presence is employed to describe the soldier's absence:

> Ron Arad lives in the squadron at every moment.…His name is mentioned in the squadron almost every day and he is talked of as if he were here. In the squadron's new building, a building he's never seen, there's a locker waiting for him with his name on it. (Air Force 1986)

Another striking account is given by Lisa Katz, a US immigrant to Israel and occasional writer on Jewish affairs:

> I made aliyah [immigration] to Israel in August 1986; Ron Arad was captured by terrorists in October 1986. It is heart-wrenching to compare the life I have experienced in the years since I moved to Israel to that which Arad has experienced in captivity, assuming he is still alive. (quoted in Kaplan 2008, 423)

These and other examples—such as the aforementioned calendar prepared by high school students to keep track of Arad's days in captivity—demonstrate the perception that Arad is living his life, trapped in hell, parallel to the everyday life of the national community. In light of socio-technological changes in communication, distant others can more easily interact and connect through "mediated co-presence" (Auslander 2008, 61) and envision how their lives cross despite their physical distance. Through the faculty of simultaneity the soldiers, the epitome of absence, become the subject of collective imaginings of presence. The missing soldier is, in short, perceived to be alive and kicking like any other citizen, but he is also holier than others, taking his place in the national pantheon of military heroes. By merging simultaneous time and mythological time, he becomes the most intimately felt of all national heroes.

While these socio-technological advances can help us understand how people overcome distance and interact with absent others (known and unknown), and practices of commemoration can help us understand how people honor the dead, these practices alone cannot account for the deep meanings attached to these situations. In order to understand both individual and collective yearnings for connection and belonging, we must consider how social practice is linked to underlying cultural structures and embedded in a specific "horizon of affect and meaning" (Alexander and Smith 2001, 136). In the present case, the cultural process at work is the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends that confers upon a variety of social interactions—whether

between personal colleagues or between distant strangers—an aura of friendship. As can be seen in the preceding quotes, Lieutenant Colonel H. had a personal relationship with Ron Arad, whereas Lisa Katz, the immigrant and writer, conveyed a sense of closeness toward a person she had never met. Yet both articulated their connection to Arad in terms of parallel life experiences and disclosed a similar affect consisting of familiarity, exclusivity, and loyalty. In expressing his devotion to the missing soldier, the lieutenant colonel was abiding to the concrete moral codes of military friendship (Kasher 1996, 233), while Katz was acting upon a vaguer national promise of friendship, her affinity to a national hero validating her sense of belonging to Israeli society. Both cases draw upon culturally shared meanings of emotional experience and demonstrate the continuity rather than disjunction between friendship and solidarity, between instances in personal life when strangers become friends and instances in collective life when strangers are celebrated as friends.

A Meta-Narrative of Strangers-Turned-Friends-Turned-Brothers

National commemoration of the war dead enacts and proclaims a meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends, a narrative that, in more subtle ways, takes place in all nationally bounded social clubs. Throughout this book, I have discussed how this cultural structure encodes a shift from abstractness to concreteness, anonymity to familiarity, inclusivity to exclusivity, indifference to loyalty, and interest to passion. So far I have said very little about this last shift, nor have I discussed the role of passionate love in ties of friendship and particularly in military male bonding. Although soldiers routinely engage in performances of public intimacy, the emotional tone in these staged interactions is often muted, ambiguous, or displaced through the humorous coded communication and aggressive gestures described above. In contrast, during collective rituals of commemoration, public expressions of male intimacy take on an entirely different form and openly celebrate male love. At the same time, the commemorative performance transforms the personal friendship into a collective bond of brotherhood. This cultural dynamic merits a concluding comment.

In one of the grassroots commemorative booklets that emerged during the Israeli War of Independence, a yeshiva student lamented a friend who had died in battle:

> Whenever I talk of him, I do remember him still. My heart yearns for him, and my lonesome soul, orphaned from such a dear, old, and beloved friend, will not be consoled. Therefore, I allow myself to sincerely use the verse from David's lament for Jonathan "very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was wonderful." (Sivan 1991, 166)

Why is it only now, after the friend's death, that the mourner "allow[s] himself" to "sincerely use the verse from David's lament"? The biblical lament, which is quoted extensively in the Israeli culture of commemoration, combines a battle scene with a declaration of a mysterious male love. By subscribing to the heroic script of combat fraternity in the face of death, men are "allowed" to experience a passionate love hitherto silent and unacknowledged.

In her seminal study of men's friendships in English novels, Eve Sedgwick (1985) introduced the phrase "male homosocial desire" to explore the continuum between the homosocial and the homoerotic, noting how in men's interactions emotional and sexual expression is often suppressed in the interest of maintaining power. The repressed erotic component of male desire accounts, she claimed, for "correspondences and similarities between the most sanctioned forms of male bonding and the most reprobate expressions of homosexuality" (22).

National discourse provides a framework for transforming this illegible emotion into a public performance. As I have discussed elsewhere (Kaplan 2006; Kaplan and Yanay 2006), acts of commemoration present a cultural setting in which desire between men is neither denied nor displaced but instead openly declared. Carrying homosocial desire to the collective sphere, the male relationship is removed of its physical–sexual connotations and, precisely for that reason, assumes homoerotic overtones. Only when the friend is dead can he be touched, stripped of his armor and uniform, and addressed by his physical qualities. The poem "HaReut" (fraternal friendship), the most popular Hebrew poem associated with military friendship written shortly after the 1948 War, depicts the fallen soldiers as "handsome of forelock and countenance" (Guri 2000, 147–148). Heroic death becomes the cultural marker that prevents the continuity between the homosocial and the homoerotic and at

the same time stimulates and celebrates passionate male love. The act of declaring the friendship is an act of revelation. It creates a desire that never existed yet always was.

Underlying this declaration is a shift from the personal to the collective sphere, from an experience of simultaneity among the living to mythic relations with the dead, and from ties of friendship to bonds of brotherhood. This threefold shift is encapsulated in what may be termed "fraternization of friendship." Whereas commemoration of fallen soldiers represents only the end result of this fraternization, the public campaigns for missing soldiers reveal some of the underlying emotional processes at work.

First, there is an important difference in how friendship is construed in each of the corresponding temporal frameworks. Through the faculty of simultaneity, compatriots engage with distant others and become reassured of their mutual connection, enabling some strangers to become friends. Such relations between strangers have no place in the mythological framework. Although we do not personally know the mythic figures from our collective past, we do not consider them as ever having been strangers. Their starting point is as our "ancestral" heroes, ingrained in our familial heritage from time immemorial.

Second, and emerging from the previous point, just as the deceased becomes an ancestor in collective rituals of commemoration (Kaufman and Morgan 2005), so too the newly found friend becomes a timeless brother. While we may think of our collective past as preceding our common destiny, it is the experience of simultaneous co-presence and anticipated shared destiny with fellow compatriots that gives meaning to the cultural myth of a shared familial past. Thus, rather than turning strangers into friends, mythic time casts the friend as a rediscovered primordial brother, a discovery made possible by the liberating power of death.

Finally, while fallen soldiers receive public recognition and love only after their death in battle, missing soldiers win public declarations of passionate love prior to their confirmed death. This instance of "suspended death" condenses into one single moment the cultural transformation of strangers into friends and friends into brothers. It is in this moment that the full force of national solidarity as a "deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 1991, 7) becomes apparent, as it dramatizes the ideological transformation of distant, absent others into co-present, beloved brothers.

Notes

1. Soldiering in late Latin referred to paid work, stemming from the word *solidus*, meaning a Roman coin (Free Dictionary, n.d.). Solidarity stems from *solidum*, meaning the whole sum. It was applied in Roman law for a legal unit, such as a family, that accepted liability for the acts of each of its constituents (Brunkhorst 2005, 2).
2. Caroline Marvin and David Ingle (1999, 67) provided a piercing account of these sacrificial "totem" rituals in the nation-state. As elected members of the community cross the border in a violent act of sacrifice, the community reveres and worships those who do not return alive. The violent border crossing, repeated in a succession of military conflicts, serves to produce and reproduce national solidarity in a cyclic fashion.
3. The media sample included articles on missing soldiers in the three main daily newspapers (*Ha'aretz, Ma'ariv*, and *Yedioth Ahronoth*) and their respective online sites and talkback responses, in speeches, in op-ed articles by public figures, and in the television and radio coverage of events and ceremonies relating to the missing soldiers. For more details on the study see Kaplan (2008).
4. The use of banners echoes soldier campaigns elsewhere, such as the wearing of red ribbons by activists of the American MIA-POW movement (Santino 1992).

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