Original Article

Social club sociability as a model for national solidarity

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Abstract Whereas theorists of nationalism often consider mass solidarity to be an abstract relation between strangers, this essay presents a new theoretical approach for studying national solidarity through the prism of friendship and sociability. Building on Simmel's relational approach and Neo-Durkheimian accounts of intermediate associations, it is argued that modern institutions operate as social clubs of sorts where unaffiliated strangers can transform into friends. Drawing on a range of examples ranging from the mass army and Masonic lodges to interactive media, it is shown how social club sociability engenders a form of "public intimacy" that extends feelings of familiarity, exclusivity, and loyalty to wider society. The growing segmentation and differentiation of institutional life place increasing demands on individuals to successfully transform strangers into friends. This competence carries symbolic meanings and is part of what enables a mass society to be continuingly imagined as a nation.
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Social Club Sociability as a Model for National Solidarity

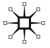
Although it is widely acknowledged that the raison d'être of nationalism is to account for and legitimize cooperation between citizens within political state structures (e.g., Smith, 1991; Gellner, 1983), the role of sociability in national attachments seems too often to be either taken for granted or explicitly rejected as a valid avenue of study. Much of the literature on nationalism has focused on the study of collective identity rather than solidarity, privileging questions about the ways actors assume a common identity (e.g., Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Eriksen, 1993; Smith, 1991) and overlooking the question of social ties between actors

as an equally important category of analysis. Scholarly discussions that explicitly address national solidarity describe it primarily as a form of abstract, impersonal relationship between strangers. Although some authors, notably Gellner (1983) and Anderson (1991 [1983]), highlighted the importance of shared institutions, rituals, and cognitive processes that enabled unaffiliated individuals to socialize into a common culture, they did not explore this process in terms of sociability and friendship. In this article, I suggest that complementing cognitive processes of national identification are feelings of solidarity that emerge through interactions in shared social institutions where participants learn how to transform strangers into friends while alienating others.

People in modern societies live the greater part of their lives in a range of institutions which, regardless of their instrumental purpose engender informal sociability: from state organizations (kindergartens, schools, military units, prisons) to civic associations (social movements, youth groups, fraternities), and to interactive media practices (television reality shows, social network sites). These institutions orchestrate encounters between unaffiliated – but often preselected – strangers who often transform into acquaintances and friends. I refer to these non-instrumental institutionally mediated interactions as instances of "social club sociability" and suggest that they operate as a form of intimacy that carries collective significance.

Having participated in similar social clubs in the course of their life and sharing partly overlapping social networks, compatriots acquire a sense of competence in making friends. They also gain reassurance in the ability of like-minded 'clubbers' – but not others – to do the same. This bottom-up socialization into mutual norms of sociability is not intrinsically related to nationness. But with much of institutional life circumscribed (and some directly controlled) by nation-states these accumulated acts of friendship are likely to correspond to national boundaries and ultimately acquire national meanings through symbolic-cultural processes.

In what follows, I spell out this proposal. First, I describe the neglect of interpersonal ties in studies of national attachment and problematize the dichotomous distinction often drawn between friendship and solidarity. Second, straddling between Simmel's (1950) relational approach and Neo-Durkheimian accounts of intermediate associations, I explain why social clubs could be a useful way to conceptualize the continuum between interpersonal and collective ties and propose a strategy for studying this continuum based on an analytic concept of "public intimacy," the staging of interpersonal bonds in front of an audience that can also become a participant. This is followed by brief illustrations of this strategy in three, arguably very different social institutions to have developed between early-to-late-modern era, all of which are dedicated to transforming strangers into friends: the mass army, Masonic lodges, and interactive media practices. I turn to address an underlying "meta-narrative of

strangers-turned-friends" operating at the symbolic-cultural level, through which mundane institutional interactions acquire sacred meaning associated with national solidarity. Finally, I discuss how this proposal relates to other bottom-up approaches to the study of solidarity, which center mainly on civic solidarity. In conclusion, I recap how, through such recurrent participation in shared, nationally bounded social institutions, compatriots develop a sense of competence in turning certain strangers into friends and come to imagine the nation as the ultimate social club of chosen friends.

A Strange Thing Called Solidarity

In sociological thought, nationalism is commonly understood as a sense of and quest for community within the structures of modern mass society. Weber (2009 [1948], p. 176) made a preliminary distinction between nationalism as a "community of sentiment" and state structures as a form of polity. Anderson's (1991) seminal work on the national imagination can be likewise understood as asking, in effect, how mass society is imagined as a community. National communities attempt to overcome the institutional differentiation and social segmentation of modern life by making a variety of categorical distinctions (ethnic, racial, religious, ideological, and gendered) between those strangers that count as friends and those that are considered enemies (Bauman, 1990). Interestingly, however, scholars of nationalism have paid far more attention to the ways that the national discourse produces boundaries and exclude the national 'other,' in other words, transform strangers into enemies (e.g., Bauman, 1990; Handler, 1988; Nagel, 1998), than to the ways that they relate to each other as strangers-turned-friends.

First, theories of national attachments have focused on questions of identity formation far more than on the question of solidarity. A rich body of research in sociology, anthropology, political science, and social psychology examined the cognitive dimension of identity formation – the ways that individuals establish or modify their sense of identification with an abstract entity known as the nation and set boundaries around a shared categorical commonality through collective symbols, rituals, customs, historical narratives, and everyday practices (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Billig, 1995; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Eriksen, 1993; Handler, 1988; Theiss-Morse, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 1993). In contrast, scholars rarely addressed the actual social ties between members of the national community and the socialization processes, which result not from cognitive perceptions but from the experience of these mutual interactions – the ways compatriots connect, interact, and acquire shared norms of sociability and in turn distinguish themselves from outgroups precisely through these very same interactions. In this, current scholarship privileges actors (whether individuals

or groups) as the primary unit of analysis and overlooks the role of ties between actors as an equally important epistemological category.[1]

To some extent, a similar gap appears in the study of civic solidarity. As noted by Alexander (2006b, p. 53), while social scientists have written much about the ways that conflicts between groups polarize society, "they have said very little about the construction, destruction, and reconstruction of civic solidarity itself," remaining silent "about the sphere of fellow feeling, the we-ness that makes society into society" and "about the processes that fragment it."

Addressing the question of cooperation and sociability is perhaps more fundamental to "civic" models of nationalism, which presuppose a semi-voluntary, contractual union of individuals forming a sovereign collective will than to "ethnic" models that presuppose a shared collective identity predating the formation of political sovereignty (Smith, 1991; following Kohn, 1944). However, since it is by now widely acknowledged that a mixture of both ethnic and civic aspects of national attachment prevails in the development of most nation-states (Kuzio, 2002; Singer, 1996), an understanding of national attachments should take into consideration how compatriots cooperate through shared norms of sociability.

Second, even those studies of nationalism that explicitly address national solidarity often describe it as a form of impersonal relationship between strangers. Gellner (1983) considered effective communication between strangers as central to achieving national integration. Processes of industrialization supported by the nation-state mobilized the masses to become modular individuals capable of performing a variety of assignments by obeying the same set of rules and sharing a common idiom (Conversi, 2007). Central to this was the development of a uniform, relatively context-free, national vernacular that enabled standardized communication between strangers (Gellner, 1983, p. 34). Thus, Gellner's work underscores how increasing opportunities for standardized interactions with unaffiliated individuals in industrial society has resulted in a form of solidarity between strangers. Anderson (1991, p. 36) likewise considers abstract representations and anonymity as the hallmark of modern nations.

Finally, the few scholars that directly compare interpersonal and national ties often draw a dichotomous distinction between personal friendship and collective solidarity. Thus, Calhoun (1991) rejects the use of equivalent terms

[1] For lack of space, I shall give but one example of the ways scholars of nationalism tend to take-for-granted the study of solidarity as a residue or by-product of collective identity formation. Theiss-Morse (2009), a social psychologist actually interested in questions of solidarity, underscores that national identity "is inherently social and is centered on people's strong bond and sense of community with their fellow group members." She then presupposes that it is the boundaries of national identity that explain the feelings of solidarity, or in her terminology, who counts as American explains "how Americans treat one another" and help each other in times of trouble (Ibid. p. 3). But she provides no explanation as to why identifying someone as fellow American should lead to mutual feelings of solidarity and cooperation and how these feelings are generated.

to refer simultaneously to face-to-face networks and whole nations and argues that in large-scale collectivities, individuals are linked through their membership in a set of abstract categorical attributes rather than through their participation in webs of concrete interpersonal relationships. Likewise, Malešević (2011) underscores that it is epistemologically important to analyze personal and collective attachments as two different phenomena. He contends contra Durkheim that "deep-felt emotional solidarity" is only possible on the micro level of face-to-face of interactions, whereas the kind of organizationally produced interactions that characterizes large-scale entities such as nations are not a "real" and "genuine" form of solidarity (ibid. p. 284).

This dichotomy between personal friendship and solidarity can be traced back to classic liberal thought. As highlighted by Silver (1990), enlightenment theorists such as Adam Smith and David Hume envisioned the new civil society as premised on cooperation between sympathetic but "authentically indifferent co-citizens." In this, they replaced the dichotomy of 'friend' versus 'enemy' in premodern social and political life with the figure of the stranger. An emotionally regulated solidarity between strangers in the newly formed public sphere provided the possibility for a new kind of intimate, personal friendship, but one that was to inhabit a distinctive domain of private life.

Taken together, these various discussions fall short of answering exactly *how* this modern community consisting of abstract, impersonal ties between strangers is experienced as a "deep horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1991, p. 7). For, while there is no nation in which all members know each other personally, it is precisely this imagined continuity between personal and collective ties that is worthy of studying as such if we want to account for the phenomenology of national attachments. First, an understanding of national solidarity as a form of impersonal relationship between strangers underestimates the degree of connectedness between fellow citizens in modern states where people live in multiple interdependent and relatively enduring relationships (Honohan, 2001). Second, feelings toward others readily extend beyond microlevel interactions. For one should not confuse emotions, which must be necessarily concrete, with their necessarily being personal. Individuals need not experience a personal bond with others in order to feel strong emotions toward them and care for them in concrete ways (Schwarzenbach, 1996).

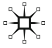
Since national solidarity involves both multiple interdependent ties at the interpersonal level and feelings of closeness at the collective level, it is worth considering how the two levels interact. Several lines of research have addressed this question, among them political philosophers exploring the term friendship and its derivatives as a normative model for civic or national attachments (Honohan, 2001; Mallory, 2012; Schwarzenbach, 1996; Yack, 2012), as well as historians and gender scholars examining male fraternal friendship as a key cultural trope for mobilizing national identification (Kaplan, 2006; Mosse, 1982; Nelson, 1998). While these inquiries point to the recursive relation

between concrete ties of friendship and symbolic meanings associated with national solidarity they remain largely at the discursive level. A more grounded and empirical approach is called for to address the continuum between interpersonal ties and macrolevel solidarity and to explore *how* the social bonds of friendship are engineered to stimulate national sentiments.

Why Social Clubs?

There is a long sociological tradition of turning to intermediate social spaces between private and public life as means to overcome the Great Divide between community and society and address the question of mass solidarity, albeit with little direct allusion neither to friendship nor to nationalism. Tocqueville's (2003 [1835/1840]) famously considered the institutionally organized realm of sociability taking place in civic associations as beneficial for wider societal integration. Civic associations allowed people to engage in differentiated, interpersonal interactions based on horizontal bonds of friendship through which they could negotiate the nature of their common life (Mallory, 2012). Durkheim's (1960, p. 28) view was even more explicit: "A nation can be maintained only if between the State and the individual, there is intercalated a whole series of secondary groups near enough to the individuals to attract them strongly in their sphere of action and drag them, in this way, into the general torrent of social life." By this view, secondary associations not only assist in overcoming alienation but also promote positive forms of individualism by enabling members to develop collective loyalties independent of state rule or familial allegiances.

This neo-Tocquevillian tradition remained influential in twentieth-century social thought, the most noteworthy example being social capital theory (Putnam, 2000), which underscores the significance of mutual, face-to-face interactions in localized associations for democracy. Habermas (1991) likewise connected between certain localized associations and democratic culture, noting especially the rise of Bourgeois coffeehouses and salons in the eighteenth-century Europe, which provided a differentiated public sphere where citizens could deliberate about their common affairs by engaging in face-to-face yet depersonalized, rational-critical debate. Alexander (2006a, p. 99) has further highlighted that it is not the mere existence of rich associational life that is instrumental to democratic life, nor the public engagement in rational deliberation; rather it is whether associations display an outward civil orientation and are able to publicly communicate and justify their interests in terms of the universalizing discourse of a civil society. Despite their differences, these various theories share what is essentially a normative approach in that they focus on whether and which middle-range associations or forms of public

engagement are instrumental to the common good of society, understood in terms of democracy or the civil sphere.

However, if we shift our attention away from instrumental and normative considerations and focus instead on the expressive dimension, there is something to be said about the way that myriad forms of intermediate social institutions – from state organizations to civic associations to interactive media practices – shape practices of sociability. For central to all of them is the basic act of making friends, which, as I hope to show, bears significance for collective solidarity irrespective of its contribution to democratic society or lack thereof. To underscore this expressive dimension of social institutions, I suggest replacing terms such as "secondary," "voluntary," or "civic associations," and simply consider them as "social clubs," broadly defined.

Social clubs occasion interpersonal encounters between members that typically revolve around a common activity, interest, or purpose, establish official criteria for membership and prescribe certain rules of conduct. But regardless of their moral purpose, effect, and organizational structure, social clubs constitute an arena of sociability, a form of social interaction pursued for its own sake irrespective of anything participants have to gain from it (Simmel, 1950, p. 45). Through these interactions, members transform from unaffiliated strangers into acquaintances and friends. Crucially, this process is founded on elements of 'clubbiness.' It is based on the pre-selection of those strangers that qualify to become members (whereas others do not). Accordingly, the deepening of the relationships between members consists not only of growing familiarity and mutual loyalty but also depends on a shared sense of exclusivity and privilege.

As further discussed by Goffman (1967, pp. 113–114), when the purpose of socializing becomes talk for its own sake, the social gathering becomes a "little social system with its own boundary-maintaining tendencies; a little patch of commitment and loyalty with its own heroes and its own villains." When members of the group take care not to threaten the sense-of-ease of other members, they can create euphoric moments of harmony that confirm and solidify their sense of shared identity. Precisely because such practices of informal sociability are open-ended and avoid purposeful closure, they provide relief from the demands of utilitarian life (Davetian, 2009).

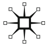
A preliminary illustration of my conception of social club sociability can be found in the rich historical accounts of café sociability in the nineteenth-century France. Despite their mundane and seemingly spontaneous nature, interpersonal interactions in this relatively unstructured social institution held collective significance for the formation of modern French civility (Davetian, 2009; Haine, 1996). The flourishing of café culture accommodated both working class people and some members of the Bourgeoisie. This space of "intimate anonymity" (Haine, 1996, p. 150), provided an opportunity to create relations based on spontaneous solidarity.

This sociability was mainly expressive although it served some instrumental purposes. Coined by Balzac as the "parliament of the people" (cited in Davetian, 2009, p. 132), the effects of French café culture were both political and civic. In extreme cases, it served as a hotbed for political dissent and for influencing public opinion, such as during the revolutionary era. But from a broader civic perspective, it facilitated networks of sociability that gave citizens the right to assemble, address current topics, and engage in discussion of ideas for their own sake. The fact that political and ideological topics were being discussed in a public space, rather than confined to the private spaces of the courtly or intellectual salons, allowed discourse to be more animated, less restrained by formalities, and more expressive emotionally. The habit of collective drinking had its own liberating effect and added to the experience of group solidarity. At the same time, the co-existence of people from varied backgrounds gave rise to café etiquette and to practices of sociability designed to contain disagreements and minimize outbursts of violence (Davetian, 2009; Haine, 1996).

As is clear from this example, social club sociability is not directly related to national attachment. Only in some historical instances is the connection between the two readily identified, such as during formative phases of a national movement, when practices of sociability among national (or proto-national) activists directly affect local processes of nation-building. One example is Romani's (2007) account of the linkage between literary salons in the nineteenth-century Italy and the creation of a national public opinion that preceded Italy's political unification (Romani, 2007). The salons provided a space for intellectuals to come together and share novel ideas and news which immediately circulated among the vaster literary community. They served as an actual and imagined social space representative of the national political body. The salons' code of polite behavior enhanced the idea that in order to be part of the Italian national elite, one had to earn access to the prestige of the group.

A different example is the movement of Practical Zionism at the turn of the twentieth century, which materialized in the founding of Jewish agricultural settlements in Palestine. Central to these was the close-knit socialist commune known as the Kibbutz, considered a model for the Jewish nation-state and forming the political leadership for its future institutions, and military organization. The Kibbutz movement was above all a geographically dispersed network of elitist and exclusivist social clubs. It entailed official criteria for membership, pervasive rules of conduct, and a rich arena of sociability, one which formed the blueprint for wider Sabra (native-born) Israeli sociability (Almog, 2000; Kaplan, 2006).

The case of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons provides yet a third and unexpected case in point for how social networks among political activists consolidate national solidarity. Since the 1970s onward, large numbers of Palestine Liberation Organization and Hamas militants convicted for terrorism have been held captive in Israeli prisons. Upon their release, some assumed

leadership positions in the Palestinian national movement and military struggle. Arriving from diverse social backgrounds and from geographically dispersed localities, the inmates transformed from loosely affiliated strangers into a committed group of mates and comrades to the cause. This forced social club of sorts engendered collective attachments through complex channels of formal and informal communication and stimulated processes of community-building both within and outside prison walls (Nashif, 2008).

In all of these latter cases, which deal with practices of sociability among activists involved in nation-building or preoccupied with national ideology, identifying emergent feelings of national solidarity can be likened to searching under the lamp post. The greater challenge is to consider how mundane interactions between compatriots taking place in a variety of social clubs not directly implied in nation-building processes can likewise contribute to feeling of national solidarity. It is, in other words, cases of "banal" social clubs, to borrow from Billig's (1995) conception of "banal nationalism" that may be particularly illuminating for the study of national solidarity. I elaborate on such cases in ensuing examples of Freemasonry and interactive social media.

At the same time, what is crucial for the present argument is that at the minimum, the social institutions in question are bounded and circumscribed to various degrees by the nation-state and that as a result, the networks and norms of sociability that develop are likely to impinge on national-level solidarity. As noted by Alexander (1997), because national states continue to form the most effective boundaries for solidary ties and determine patterns of inclusion and exclusion civil society can be currently considered as a community roughly isomorphic with the nation.

It should also be emphasized that modern institutions are by no means unique in forging instances of strangers-turned-friends. Presumably life in premodern societies also offered specific forms of social clubs where individuals could meet unrelated kin (e.g., workplace, place of worship, village square). But with the growing intensity, differentiation, and fragmentation of modern institutional life, people increasingly participate in a sequence of social clubs and are also more likely to attend various social clubs simultaneously. Consider, for example, how modern schooling consists of a series of institutions from nurseries and preschool to three different stages of mandatory school system to the various phases of higher education. In each of these consecutive stages, children and young adults enter a distinct social club that entails the acquisition of new friends and new norms of sociability. Moreover, whereas in most schools pupils are at least likely to share the same class year after year, in some educational systems, such as in the US, they may participate in several classes simultaneously depending on their choice of courses (as in the university system). This means that they effectively participate in several social clubs concomitantly and partly change clubs every year. In other words, possibly more than children elsewhere, American children are required to learn over and

over again how to transform strangers into friends. This competence, I suggest, is part of what enables a mass society of this size and complexity to be imagined as a nation.

The effects of social club sociability go beyond a given institution. Having traveled through various social clubs, each with its own differentiated norms of conduct, compatriots learn how to generalize informal codes of sociability and reemploy them in future interactions. This acquired competence is remindful of Gellner's discussion of national homogenization in terms of "exo-training" and "exo-socialization." According to Gellner, the nation-state trained the masses to the demands of industrialization by uprooting them from local communities and mobilizing them through public institutions such as schools and the military. The aim was to facilitate efficient interactions between strangers by advancing standardized, precise communication "involving a sharing of explicit meaning, transmitted in a standard idiom and in writing when required" (Gellner, 1983, p. 34).

I would argue, however, that shared institutional life is constitutive of national solidarity not so much because it facilitates sharing explicit meaning, but because the sociability that it creates is premised on the suspension of explicit meaning and on sharing something that is more implicit, namely, the actual bond between the participants. Along these lines, Simmel (1950, p. 52) underscored how the purely sociable form of talk "is the fulfillment of a relation that wants to be nothing but relation—in which, that is, what usually is the mere form of interaction becomes its self-sufficient content." Thus, by acquiring the 'right,' exclusive idioms of intimate communication learned and generalized from one institutional setting to the next unaffiliated individuals can become confidants and friends. In so doing, they are not simply pursuing standardized communication in modern society but rather are trying to overcome the pressures of differentiation and segmentation through the fulfillment of social bonds.

To conclude, although it may appear overly broad in scope, the notion of social club sociability may prove valuable for studying how institutionalized forms of group-level interactions contribute to feelings of solidarity at the broader societal level. Club membership is based on choice, trust, and rules of inclusion and exclusion. While the universe of members in a national community is seemingly 'given' and compatriots cannot be admitted or excluded depending on some measure of trustworthiness (Offe, 1999), there are nonetheless some basic similarities in the boundary work of clubs and nation-states. Although most states grant citizenship automatically based on birthright or kinship ties, they are still understood as "associations of free and equal citizens" premised "on the principles of voluntariness" (Habermas, 1995, p. 25) and often provide a second path of admission that involves an oath of allegiance to the state and its founding principles (Pickus, 2005). Moreover, just as social clubs build friendship through exclusiveness and privilege national

communities often attach transcendent meaning to its members as belonging to an elect, “chosen people” (Gorski, 2000). In practice, social clubs vary greatly in the kinds of boundaries, selections, and exclusion that they make, as do nation-states. But all social clubs and all national communities are premised on a purposeful selection of strangers with the intention of transforming those, and only those, who have been thus distinguished into confidants and friends.

The Social Mechanism of Public Intimacy

In order to understand how social clubs transform strangers into friends, we need to take into consideration three dimensions of interpersonal interactions: (1) interpersonal ties of friendship between particular social club members, (2) the public staging of such ties in front of other members or nonmembers, and (3) ritualized performances of collective solidarity between members of the institution as a whole. I refer to the social mechanism that mediates between interpersonal, public and collective dimensions of social ties as “public intimacy.”

In institutional life, interpersonal ties are inevitably disclosed and staged in public in front of a face-to-face audience or a mediated audience. Public intimacy is thus effectively a dramaturgical mechanism for managing personal bonds and for establishing their exclusivity under the gaze of spectators. Under certain circumstances, spectators are also invited to become participants.

Public intimacy is an interactional mechanism that captures the dual outward and inward orientation of solidarity. Eriksen (1995) highlighted how group identity formation entails both an external viewpoint of us-hood, associated with the “communication of a difference” and an internal viewpoint of we-hood, where solidarity is “articulated through sharing of certain practices” (p. 429). In us-hood, people are kept together against the gaze of a third party, differentiated from “them” through competition, enmity, or the contrastive use of stereotypes and boundary symbols. Being “we”, on the other hand, entails an experience of interdependence, integration and cohesion by virtue of shared activities and practices that build on some degrees of institutional support.

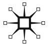
The analytic construct of public intimacy replaces the need to theorize ‘us’ versus ‘we’ as a distinction between two separate modes of collective identity formation and underscore instead the study of solidarity as a single process of friendship formation that entails a combined outward/inward orientation. Indeed, as noted by Eriksen in passing (1995, p. 435; following Sartre, 1943), the outward staging of personal bonds against “the gaze of the third” is what inwardly gives participants a sense of “producing meaning together.”

I initially developed the analytic construct of public intimacy in a study of personal friendships among Israeli men (Kaplan, 2005). I noticed how confidants maintained social ties that evolved in particular institutions (school,

workplace, military) and carried over to other settings through the constant outward performance of their friendship. The men staged their bonds in everyday life in front of peers, colleagues, and outright strangers, employing a humorous, ambiguous, and often unintelligible 'code language' involving nicknames, curses, nonsense talk, and affectionate–aggressive physical gestures. This provocative, homosocial (male-to-male)-coded communication does not so much convey explicit meaning as it teases participants and others to respond, drawing them to engage deeper in the interaction. These observations can be generalized beyond homosocial male enclave. In fact, they are reminiscent of Simmel's (1950, p. 52) discussion of informal sociability which consists of "talk for the sake of talking" (in effect, small talk) as a purely sociable form of interaction that derives its significance from the "fascinating play of relations which they create among participants, joining and loosening, winning and succumbing, giving and taking." Simmel (1950, pp. 369–370) stressed that exclusivity is a basic factor in defining and shaping the boundaries of close groups and friendships, privileging access to private information. But it is the public disclosure of relationships that are usually kept private that, in actuality, defines them as intimate, differentiating them from more casual interactions (Schwarz, 2011). In this sense, public intimacy underscores that bonds acquire a sense of exclusivity, hence intimacy, only as the end result of the publicly staged performance.

Despite the exclusionary quality of public intimacy, it is also a mechanism of inclusion, as the audience can shift from a position of passive spectator to confidant to full participant. This goes back to Simmel's (1950, pp. 135–169) discussion of the qualitative difference between a dyad and a triad. Once a third party enters into contact with a dyad the tie is no longer dependent solely on the individual will of each member and can continue to exist even if one member departs. Thus, for Simmel, a triad is the cornerstone for larger close-knit cliques. The mechanism of public intimacy realizes this generative quality of a triad by staging a friendly exchange between two speakers in front of a third and seduce him or her to join.

The aforementioned historical accounts of French coffeehouse sociability (Davetian, 2009; Haine, 1996) provides a discerning account of the ways that the nineteenth-century café etiquette regulated precisely these dynamics of seduction and teasing, inclusion, and exclusion (Davetian, 2009, p. 133): "A small group could initiate a discussion and then bring in people from the periphery to participate; meanwhile, a person was expected to observe cafe etiquette and not interrupt a conversation already in progress (Haine, 1996). Witty comments were the best admission ticket to an ongoing conversation. Jibes and remarks were not to be taken too seriously, nor was a person to press the point and request a fight to settle a point of honor.... the wounded party [was expected] to come back with his own verbal *riposte* (a fencing term describing the exchange of blows of the sword). Conversation remained a

competition of wits, and this verbal competition went a long way in avoiding potential violence." Haine concludes that the small-scale nature of most groups congregating in cafés and the informality and mutability of these groups "permitted individuals to have much more chance of joining in the interaction" and "to find friends and contacts in the café" (Haine, 1996, p. 177). Through such recurrent dynamics of spectators-turned-participants, feelings of closeness emerging at the interpersonal level can bear on wider circles and inform the collective experience of solidarity.

This latter point can be illustrated in ritualized public gatherings, a performance of solidarity that received the lion's share of scholarly attention. Studies in the Durkheimian tradition have highlighted how mass gatherings taking place in sacred events reaffirm collective identity and shared values and bring about solidarity by stimulating collective "effervescence," a social energy: "bring[ing] all those who share them into more intimate and more dynamic relationship" (Durkheim, 2003 [1915], p. 140). Neo-Durkheimian scholars offered various analytic and empirical models, such as "interactional ritual chains" (Collins, 2012), as well as "media events" (Dayan and Katz, 1992) in order to examine more explicitly the implications of ritualized gatherings to national solidarity, but with no allusion to underlying friendship processes. The ritualized event focuses widespread attention such that each participant is assured that others are paying attention to the same object and feel the same emotions. Ideally, when such instances succeed in achieving "fusion" and authenticity the performance enjoys widely shared understanding of intention and content as the ritual "intensifies the connection of the participants and the symbolic objects with the observing audience, the relevant 'community' at large" (Alexander, 2006b, pp. 29–30).

Perhaps the climax of such fusion is when audience and participants become one. An illustrative example of can be found is Shoham's (2009) study of the annual Purim festivals celebrated in Tel Aviv prior to the establishment of the Israeli state. At its peak this site of pilgrimage attracted possibly more than half of the entire Jewish population in Palestine. Shoham suggests that through this periodic gathering the masses could literally encounter the newly formed Jewish nation, not as an abstract, discursive construction, but physically and visibly as an independent social entity, presented by and to the people. Anderson's (1991) famed analysis of the newspaper reading community is another, albeit more abstract example of a public gathering that can generate solidarity. The appearance of newspapers in mass circulation occasioned daily mediated 'encounters' between fellow citizens who share the same news stories. Although the stories are read in silent privacy, each reader gathers visible reassurance about the existence of like-minded readers in public spaces and can imagine the existence of millions of others.

But despite the role of face-to-face (or mediated) interactions in these mass public gatherings the analytic focus in much of these studies is directed to the

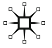
question of shared identity and pays little heed to interpersonal ties and sociability. Durkheim, for one, was not preoccupied with actual social ties and did not highlight their foundational role in communal solidarity. Instead, most studies of effervescence in public gatherings direct attention to the fusion of differentiated elements in the performance and specifically the integration of autonomous individuals into a unified collective body, a collective body that is momentarily visible or otherwise made tangible through the ritual activity.

I would argue, however, that what becomes tangible for participants in these events is more than the ontological existence of a collective of individuals; it is also the existence of social ties between these individuals. Public gatherings are social spaces where participants not only gather but also interact with one another, engaging in pre-existing social ties as well as forming new ties, and – most significantly – these ties are staged and performed in front of all other participants.

Three points can be made in this regard. First, the importance of sociability for feelings of familiarity can be demonstrated in Anderson's aforementioned reading ceremony. When readers share media stories they become intimately familiar with the actions and motivations of fellow individuals – politicians and laymen, successful heroes, and failed antiheroes. The reader not only learns of individuals who came to fame but familiarizes and sympathizes with the way that these strangers interact and perform socially. In a study of early American novels, Barnes (1997) noted how literary and political texts began to represent sociopolitical issues and concerns through the vocabulary of personal life staged as family dramas. Building on this work, Rai (2002) has highlighted the ways that readers could increasingly identify sympathetically with public strangers shown to be like themselves. He notes that this combination of sympathy and familiarity became the definitive way of "practicing human relations" in American national culture (Rai, 2002, p. 11), or, rather, the definitive way of forming solidarity by observing how others perform these social relations.

Second, this familiarity through sociability becomes all the more powerful in public gatherings (and mediated public gatherings) when spectators encounter a multitude of others that are all privy to the same social performance and share strong feelings of collective complicity. In this sense, unlike the gradual transformation of strangers into friends in everyday life public gatherings enact a unique experience of alchemic, instant transformation of spectators into participants and strangers into confidants. These interactional and relational dimensions of collective effervescence were not addressed by Durkheim nor by subsequent studies of public gatherings.

Third, at stake is not simply a collective process of shared focused attention (Collins, 2012) but dynamics of seduction and complicity made possible through the interpersonal mechanisms of public intimacy. For in order for this sense of solidarity to emerge, participants must have some prior reassurance in the ability of others to form close-knit mutual ties based on shared norms of

sociability. This reassurance could only develop through successful past experiences with making friends, as these accumulated in a variety of social institutions in everyday life, in other words, through accumulated staged performances of public intimacy. Thus, if we want to account for national solidarity as continuum between personal and collective attachments and between everyday life and public events, we should shift our attention to mezzo-level social institutions dedicated to transforming strangers into friends.

Examples of Social Clubs Sociability

In many modern social institutions, strangers negotiate modes of cooperation through face-to-face or mediated interpersonal interactions. As a form of social club, each institution embodies a particular version of a common underlying logic of strangers-turned-friends. This would apply both to institutions with a clearly defined organizational structure, such as military units, prisons, schools, voluntary associations but also to more loosely structured associational forms such as festivals and media practices. Given the preliminary nature of this proposal I will provide only a brief illustration of social club sociability in three ostensibly very different institutions: the mass army, Masonic lodges, and interactive media practices.

I do not argue for any direct homology between participation in these institutions and membership in a national community. Beyond the fact that they are bounded by the nation-state, if they can be considered as "patterns in miniature" that stand for the national community, it is not because they necessarily share with it a distinct set of features but because they encapsulate and embody similar patterns of relationships. Thus, following Handelman's (1990, pp. 23–24) work on public events in the nation-state and in line with the distinction between "knowing that" and "knowing how," they may possess a certain "know how," "modeling for" solidarity between compatriots even when they do not make explicit claims about "modeling of" or representing the nation.

The mass army

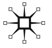
The mass army is regarded by many as the central institution implicated in the emergence and maintenance of the nation-state (Posen, 1993). Following Gellner's (1983) theory of nationalism as premised on homogenization and socialization to a common culture, scholars singled out the introduction of mass conscription in the wake of the French Revolution as a key homogenization force and as catalyst of national solidarity. The mass army represents a breakthrough in the ability to instill motivation and solidarity among soldiers by socializing recruits to a common language and forging strong mutual ties

(Conversi, 2007). 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). Thus, conscript military 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. Furthermore, in many countries military bonding enjoys hegemonic status in greater society and operates as a form of 'private men's club' network beyond military service, facilitating participation in the political and economic realm (Kaplan, 2006).

Shils and Janowitz (1948) famously argued that personal loyalty to military comrades is the key factor in combat motivation above and beyond ideological identification with the national cause. Building on such observations Malešević (2011) makes a categorical distinction between "genuine" feelings of solidarity forged between soldiers during face-to-face interactions under fire and the "ideologization" of macrolevel solidarity attempted by organizational or state authorities (Malešević, 2011, pp. 285–287). In contrast, my own work on homosocial emotions and interpersonal ties between combat soldiers suggests that microlevel cohesion is deeply connected to military organizational norms and wider national ideology (Kaplan, 2006; Kaplan and Rosenmann, 2014).

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 intimate ties in front of other soldiers, along the lines of the aforementioned homosocial coded communication (Kaplan, 2005). This performance of public intimacy teases bystanders and sends them a message that they are missing out on something. Sharing the same military coded language, bystanders are, in effect, invited to 'join the club.'

Through this accumulation of intimate performances staged in front of like-minded spectators-turned-participants the repeated experience with strangers-turned-friends acquires new meaning as a collective bond. Particularly in countries with mass conscription unit members are likely to extrapolate from their own experiences of sociability to the larger national community. Thus, as unit members operate and travel as a team and publicly stage their ties in front of other teams, they display to others their competence in friendship and observe the competence of other members. Overtime, through this reassurance in shared norms of sociability they may experience feelings of familiarity, exclusivity, and loyalty to soldiers at the wider military organizational level and with fellow citizens who underwent similar military service, all the while shifting other citizens to a position of the national outgroup.

Military cohesion and national integration more broadly is often associated with the 'melting pot' metaphor, which depicts the fusion of individuals or differentiated subgroups into a newly acquired collective identity (Hirschman, 1983; Leander, 2004). The present analysis calls attention to the role of interpersonal ties and shared sociability as equally important mechanisms of integration, for 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.

Freemasonry

The military is a state institution that makes explicit claims about forging national solidarity. But the implications of social club sociability are just as significant when studying institutions with minimal explicit "flagging," or reminding of the national ideology (Billig, 1995), but which nonetheless facilitate the transformation of individual strangers into a collective of friends at the national level. A case in point is the worldwide social club of Freemasonry, a male fraternity practicing an elitist stance of civilizing the self (Hoffmann, 2007). Although not a national movement, Masonic practices propagated a "civic-national" consciousness and are implicated in several national revolutions (Kaplan, 2014a). Freemasons adhere to a collective mission of society building premised on a civic-democratic political vocabulary (Jacob, 1991) and an understanding that friendship could serve as the sound basis of the modern social order (Loiselle, 2010).

Following ethnographic research in Israeli Masonic lodges (Kaplan, 2014b) I examined how members' sense of personal friendship and feelings of organizational and civic–national solidarity is structured by Masonic institutional practices. To begin with, Masonic coding system provides a distinct form of public intimacy: members around the world can identify each other as fellow Masons in public through their secretive coding system (specific visual markers, posture, handshake, and wording) and in doing so they recount strong feelings of strangers transformed instantly into friends.

Within the confines of the Masonic lodge, social ties between group members oscillate between the sacred activity of worship held in the lodge assembly room and informal sociability taking place in social events and club dinners. The ceremonial gatherings resemble assemblies in a state parliament. But they are public only in the sense of simulating a collective body, not in the sense of communication and negotiating public concerns. On the contrary, because Freemason regulations forbid conflictual discussions during worship, lodge work is purified of political negotiations. Instead, such negotiations take place primarily during club dinners under the framing of informal sociability, personal gossip, and joking relations. The lodge room thus emerges as at once the most private space in the organization, secretive and concealed from view,

and the most collective, fostering an intimacy shared by all lodge members. The purified, disciplined, conflict-free, and depoliticized assembly becomes an emblem for collective solidarity. As in ritualized performances of the nation-state, it arouses collective effervescence and presents a moral order of unity and singularity (Handelman, 1990).

Unlike the atmosphere of inclusion fostered by this sacred space of worship, the secular spaces and mundane interactions of Masonic everyday life provide an arena for staging the exclusionary functions of public intimacy. Members apply an elaborated coded communication that is constantly displayed in public in front of nonqualified audiences. This forms a multilayered boundary-generating mechanism, at once seducing and excluding out-groups in order to fuel and reaffirm the in-group friendship.

This constant oscillation between sacred solidarity and mundane friendship, between private and public spaces, secrecy, and seduction shapes Masonic sociability such that the personal-mundane and the official-ceremonial become closely linked, each acquiring an aura of familiarity and reverence simultaneously. This is a good example of how through staged interaction small groups may "represent the state and the nation in microcosm" (Fine and Harrington, 2004, p. 347). Ultimately, participation in what is technically a private men's social club becomes a moral–political project of collective significance. Participants attach civic and national meanings to lodge practices and, in turn, extend feelings of familiarity, exclusivity, and loyalty to members of wider society (Kaplan, 2014b).

Interactive media

Finally, the study of public intimacy could be readily applied to institutions that lack a clearly defined organizational structure, such as interactive media practices. I bring up these media examples not because they bear on national identity, but because they play a fundamental role in enabling familiarity between strangers and underscore the cultural significance of a meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends, which I describe in the next section. Whereas the traditional print newspaper provides little occasion for actual interactions between the audience and the protagonists contemporary, media practices – from live radio and television broadcasting to mobile text messaging to online social media – enhance the capacity for mutual interaction and familiarity, blurring the distinction between audience and participants. Thus, on radio shows, listeners are increasingly invited to share their personal stories not only with the host but also with other listeners who go on air, practically performing "group dynamics on the air" (Katriel, 2004, p. 250). Even in the everyday practice of instant messaging on mobile phones, intimate interactions between two actors become totalized as texts on the mobile screen, which can then be

shared immediately with others who gain direct access to the interaction and may get involved (Schwarz, 2011).

Similarly, television talk show and reality programs rest on small talk sociability and confessional conversations between host and interviewee or between participants on the show. These performances have been studied mainly in terms of the public display of an authentic self in the wake of the therapeutic discourse that encourages individuals to disclose their inner feelings in the media (Illouz, 2007; Hill, 2005). However, such performances are all the more significant in terms of public intimacy: the public staging of intimate interactions between two or more participants gives their bonds a sense of exclusivity and at the same time seduces the audience to become involved, both in practice and emotionally. Viewers can vote for their favorite contestant or participate in the show's social media site. They may also develop strong feelings of companionship toward the contestants, a phenomena examined extensively in media studies under the term "parasocial interactions" (Giles, 2002). Whereas the public display of self turns anonymous strangers into celebrities, the dynamics of public intimacy facilitated by interactive media practices turns anonymous strangers into a collective group of complicit friends.

Perhaps the epitome of public intimacy and its role in collective solidarity can be found in social network sites such as Facebook, where the system allows users to present in public not only their personal profile but also their list of friends and, no less significantly their ongoing communication with these friends that appears on their wall (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). In this manner, other users can be privy not just to the user's identity but also to his or hers ongoing personal interactions with friends. This sends bystanders the message that they may be missing out on something and seduces them to join the party by a click of a button, by simply 'sending a friend request.' The magical transformation from strangers to friends, the hallmark of modern-day communities, was never made more explicit and more immediate.

This virtual performance of spectators-turned-participants has collective implications. Various studies have examined the active role social media in mobilizing public opinion and political action, such as during the 2011 Egyptian national-democratic revolt (Alexander, 2012; Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Zhuo *et al*, 2011). In the face of government censorship on traditional mass media, activists rallied popular support for the revolution by expanding their ability to communicate the events from the word-of-mouth to social media. The use of social media supplanted the strong ties of kinship and personal friendship with more diversified networks within Egyptian society that could bridge between localized groups. The crux of the matter, however, is not simply the advantage of spreading information across weak ties and thus exploiting more resources to potentially bring about social change (Zhuo *et al*, 2011); it is in considering these weak ties as equivalent to strong ties in their affective expression and their sense of involvement, connection, and solidarity

(Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, 2012). In other words, social media users were able to express their feelings and convictions about current affairs as if they were talking to a selected group of friends. In turn, distant others were encouraged to respond as if they were their friends.

This is but one example of public intimacy on social network sites and the way it collapses the traditional distinction between interpersonal and collective ties: although each user sets up a selected list of chosen friends and acquaintances to form his or her very own 'public' due to network connectivity, this personalized public sphere readily becomes part of a much wider collective. In this way, interpersonal networks gain new members and grow in size and may ultimately lead to a sense of solidarity at the collective level, but which – unlike the interpretation of public gatherings made by aforementioned Neo-Durkheimian scholars – are premised on actual interactions between individual members. In lieu of the basic structural distinction between spectators, confidants, and full participants, which characterizes most social performances (Alexander, 2006b), given the horizontal structure of a social network site, all actors in a networked social performance can effortlessly shift from a position of passive spectator to confidant to full participant.

To conclude, enduring performances of public intimacy on social network sites where spectators consistently turn into participants provide users with the sense of familiarity, exclusivity and loyalty that partly echo both the interpersonal ties of friendship and the collective ties of a national community. If people in the early modern era sympathized and familiarized with compatriots by reading stories about the private life of a selected few (Rai, 2002) – stories which then triggered their abstract identification with the larger national community (Anderson, 1991) – social media personifies this imagined community no longer as a one-way relationship with others, but a concrete social network of mutual, like minded sympathizers. So rather than making stark distinctions between face-to-face networks and whole nations and limiting our understanding of the latter to membership in a set of abstract categorical attributes (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Calhoun, 1991) websites such as Facebook reveal and epitomize the missing link between friendship and national attachment, enabling one's compatriots to become less abstract and anonymous, for a growing number of them now have a name and a face. This can explain why despite its clear potential in connecting people beyond localized and territorial borders, it seems that the use of social media does not undermine national attachments but may possibly reinforce them. Indeed, current research points to the ways that communication preferences among internet users continue to reproduce communities that correspond to national structures, engage in national discourse, and sustain national networks (Eriksen, 2007; Soffer, 2013).

The Symbolic Meta-narrative of Strangers-Turned-Friends

In order for institutional practices of social club sociability to be able to mediate between personal and collective ties, they must rely on, and to some degree actualize an underlying deep-seated cultural expectation for solidarity. Here I follow Alexander's (2003, p. 12) proposal for a cultural sociology that considers how social actions are embedded in a "horizon of affect and meaning," a relatively autonomous cultural realm independent of social structures and which can therefore shape these structures in powerful ways. This cultural realm operates through codes and narratives that create the background understandings from which a specific expectation about social and emotional experience emerges and within which it is continuingly reproduced (Alexander, 2003; Alexander and Smith, 1993).

Along these lines, I suggest that interactions between strangers acquire collective, and specifically national significance by way of a symbolic "meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends," a sense of either growing or instantaneous familiarity between two or more individuals who may be technically strangers but experience feelings of exclusive intimacy and mutual loyalty. This meta-narrative could be usefully conceptualized as a symbolically potent carrier of feelings related to friendship, one which operates in a recursive, cyclic fashion: interactions of sociability and performances of public intimacy generate ambiguous feelings that are then made sense of through the meta-narrative and its underling cultural codes; in turn, this background understanding induces and reproduces further attempts to engage in interactions between strangers and to consider them as friendship.

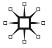
This meta-narrative pertains to interpersonal ties, mediated collective ties and most crucially to the intersection between the two. Let me begin with the ways that it is implied in national discourse of commemoration, forming a symbolic friendship among the dead or between the living and the dead. Anderson (1991) provides illuminating 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, 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, p. 193). By the same token, violent conflicts between rival groups who shared little in common but reached a degree of political reconciliation were reframed in collective memory as instances of "fratricide" between brothers, as in the American and Spanish "civil wars," the former effectively a war between two sovereign states and the latter between European cosmopolites and local Fascists (pp. 201–202).

This allusion to strangers cast as fraternal friends appears also in practices of commemoration initiated from bottom up by grassroots civic groups or commercial actors. For instance, during public displays of solidarity with Israeli soldiers missing in action citizens expressed feelings of familiarity with and loyalty to soldiers they never knew and participated in public awareness campaigns projecting exclusive intimacy with the soldiers and their families. This held true not only by the soldiers' peers and the wider military community, but also for Israeli school children, members of youth movements, and even worshippers in Jewish synagogues worldwide (Kaplan, 2008). By turning anonymous citizens to familiar national heroes, rituals of commemoration epitomize the ways that the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends juxtaposes and intersects interpersonal and collective experience: it depicts a sense of instantaneous familiarity between individuals, initially anonymous strangers at the interpersonal level but who transform into friends at the collective level.

Much more empirical research is required in order to identify and establish a comprehensive set of binary codes that best encapsulate and elaborate this movement from strangers to 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 preceding illustrations – one can pin-point five such binary codes that give meaning and structure to public rhetoric of solidarity as well as to mundane institutional practices of sociability: a shift from 'intangibility' (or abstractedness) to 'tangibility' (and concreteness), from 'anonymity' to 'familiarity,' from 'inclusivity' to 'exclusivity,' from 'indifference' to 'loyalty,' and from 'interest' (or instrumentality) to 'passion' (and expressivity).

From a semiotic and epistemological perspective, these cultural codes operate on multiple levels. First, at the most basic level they function as both a "summarizing symbol" and an "elaborating symbol" (following Ortner, 1973, pp. 1338–1345): they not only synthesizes, or collapses complex and ambiguous social experience in an emotionally powerful way but also dramatizes and orders culturally appropriate modes of action. On another level, the move from strangers to friends epitomizes the Durkheimian distinction between the mundane and the sacred, that is, between interactions of sociability in everyday life and idealized friendship or solidarity in collective life, and, most crucially, it highlights the oscillation between the two spheres (Kaplan, 2006; Mallory and Carlson, 2014). Thus the first of each pair represents mundane relations between individuals in modern mass society whereas the second represents sacred relations between members of the national community. Understood in this way, the meta-narrative does not remain at the purely symbolic level but 'incarnates' in everyday life situations, prescribing not only how practices of sociability should be interpreted but how they should be transformed.

Third, as part of the moral dimension of the national discourse more broadly, as it appears for instance 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, not the profane. 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 discourse (e.g., Bauman, 1990; Nagel, 1998), and has been researched extensively in interactional and social–psychological studies (e.g., Eriksen, 1993; Druckman, 1994), and while the mechanisms of public intimacy highlight how friendship is premised on acts of exclusion, the idealized narrative of strangers-turned-friends disregards these negative implications. Enemies and hostile strangers are not part of this story for, unlike the politics of friendship and enmity in pre-modern societies, the underlying rationale is to turn strangers into friends not so that they would not become enemies (Silver, 1990) but in order to overcome the experience of alienation in mass society. Because the ties of mass society are construed as abstract, anonymous, indifferent, interest-driven, overtly inclusive relations between strangers, the purpose of the meta-narrative is to re-enchant modern social and institutional life and resurrect this alienated society as a community of friends.

Beyond these various semiotic and epistemological considerations, we have yet to address the main question, namely, how does the actual content of this meta-narrative and its temporal sequence figure specifically in a discourse of national solidarity (as opposed to a civic discourse, for instance)? Unfortunately, unlike the discourse of civil society, a general discourse of national solidarity and its underlying cultural codes have not been systematically delineated in the sociological literature. For the sake of the present discussion, and at the risk of gross simplification, I shall make only three important observations in this regard.

First there are important temporal correspondences between cultural narratives of friendship and of nations (Kaplan, 2011). Elsewhere I have studied stories of male friendship and identified two alternative accounts for the development of close relationships overtime. The first is the notion of "shared past," the idea that the friendship has 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 was that of "shared destiny," set in the

context of a dramatic encounter with a stranger who immediately and miraculously transforms into a friend. This encounter is colored by a romantic rhetoric, one which underscores emotional thrills, mutual revelation, 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 means to makes sense of the development of the collective bond overtime. As famously noted by Anderson (1991, pp. 11–12), the nation is "imagined to loom out of an immemorial past" and "glide towards a limitless future."

Second, in so doing a discourse of national solidarity elaborates on the two central tropes of close-knit relations – family tie and friendship – in ways that echo the principal analytic distinction between the ethnic-cultural and civic-contractual models of nationalism, respectively (Kaplan, 2007). Thus, on the one hand, ongoing ties of solidarity between citizens are made meaningful through the notion of a primordial (ethnic-tribal) past, inscribed in collective memory through rituals of commemoration, education, popular culture, and the like. This shared past is encapsulated by the prevailing imagery of the nation as an extended family (Smith, 1991). On the other hand, ongoing ties of solidarity between citizens are also made meaningful through the notion of shared destiny and cast as encounters between strangers transformed into friends. The trope of friendship, while less pervasive than that of the family, underscores 'civic'-like qualities of national attachment such as voluntary, horizontal ties, choice, and mutual cooperation, rather than the vertical, authoritative qualities of traditional family ties (Kaplan, 2007). What is particularly striking is how the discourse of national solidarity reconciles these two opposing tropes. For the only way to construe a relationship as both familial and as a friendship is by invoking the figure of the 'brother,' that which is a family member yet signifies the mutual ties and equal status of a friend (Kaplan, 2011). It is for this reason that 'fraternity' is perhaps the most central relational terms to appear in national rhetoric.[2] Thus, the magic of the national imagination lies not simply in the transformation of strangers into friends, but in imagining these new friends as lost and rediscovered brothers and sisters of the same primordial tribe. And while we may think of "shared past" as preceding the notion of "shared destiny" the causal sequence is more likely the other ways around: only after going through the initial move from strangership to newly found friendship can the friend gradually transform into a 'brother' and the tie eventually becomes a 'timeless' familial bond. All in all, it is precisely this fusion of romantic civic

[2] It is also striking that despite decades of feminist critic pointing to the gendered and exclusionary implications of the term 'fraternity' it is still pervasive in both popular and academic discourse. Pateman (1989) and Nelson (1998) describe how fraternity was employed in the French and American Revolutions 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.

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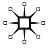
 

redemption with primordial ethnicity, destiny, and ancestry, which explains the attraction of national solidarity.

Third, and this is perhaps the basic function of the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends – it represents what Alexander (2003, p. 8) identifies 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." Family members are expected to share a common future no less (if not more) than close friends. Yet only the friendship trope can account for the fact that compatriots actually form new ties on daily basis. Thus, reminding that the very raison d'être of nationalism is to legitimize cooperation between citizens by construing civic interactions as newly formed friendships this political project becomes a quest for transcendence. As opposed to the classic liberal account of solidarity that presupposes a 'community of strangers' whose members share civic rights and negotiate common interests and obligations this national account presupposes a community of 'strangers-turned-friends' who share their lives, passions, and destiny.

What About Civic Solidarity?

Although the theoretical approach presented here centers by and large on the question of national solidarity, social club sociability, and the specific mechanisms of public intimacy in and of themselves cannot differentiate between various forms of mass solidarity. In particular, since this form of microlevel sociability is mediated by institutions that are circumscribed by the nation-state it could be just as relevant to civic as it is to national solidarity. Indeed, both forms of solidarity reflect the same expectation that compatriots overcome the differentiation and fragmentation of modern institutional life by turning strangers into friends.

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 microlevel interactions between strangers-turned-friends. If a person participates in a set of social institutions that are strictly confined to such ethnic or religious enclaves or engages primarily in certain transnational networks than he or she may experience feelings of solidarity associated with these particular collective attachments.[3]

But if a significant number of the social institutions that a person attends map onto a relatively bounded national community, which, I suspect is what has

[3] Because these networks are from the outset more limited in their institutional infrastructure and more explicit in their common denominator (ethnic origin or ideological/religious motivation) than national and civic attachments the transition from microlevel interactions to macrolevel solidarity is analytically more straightforward in such cases and requires less explication.

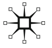
occurred with the emergence and expansion of nation-states, then each such institution becomes one of many social clubs that contribute to one's feelings of both civic *and* national solidarity. In this regard, it is telling that the term "compatriot" as it is commonly used does not distinguish between co-citizens and fellow-nationals. It is only at the symbolic-cultural level that these forms of attachments can be told apart and made sense of through a specifically civic or national discourse of solidarity, as I describe at the end of this section.

For although citizenship is readily differentiated from national attachment as a category of collective identity, when it comes to the question of solidarity the major distinction between the two is not empirically grounded but rather conceptual or normative. As delineated by Alexander (1988, p. 80) the 'civic' is associated primarily with universalist, inclusivist ethos, with abstractedness and rational choice whereas the 'national' is associated with a 'primordial core group,' and thus with an exclusivist ethos and more emotionally laden bonds. Indeed, nationalism is often associated with irrational, intensive passions, whereas civic struggles are not (Walzer, 2002).

That said, the notion that citizenship is more inclusive than national belonging is misleading. For one thing, citizenship forms a barrier for 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 – among them individual autonomy or rational voluntary action – may be more universal and less particularistic than the themes of national ideology (Alexander, 1997), the kind of purifying solidarity generated by the discourse of civil society is no less exclusive. As underscored by Alexander and Smith (1993) the discourse of civil society is premised on a fundamental exclusionary binary logic of good versus evil, friend, and enemy, indeed, the same logic that we much more readily associate with national discourse.

Moreover, from an empirical standpoint prominent bottom-up approaches to civic solidarity likewise evade a clear distinction between civic and national meanings. A case in point is Putnam's work on civic engagement (Putnam 2000; Putnam *et al*, 1994), which follows the neo-Tocquevillian tradition in considering localized, face-to-face social interactions in voluntary associations as beneficial to democracy and civic solidarity. In essence, Putnam and his associates argue that the interpersonal networks and norms of reciprocity that develop in civic associations – including leisure activity organizations such as choral societies and bowling leagues – matters for democracy and solidarity irrespective of the content of the association or its ideological purpose, if any.

While I share this general view I believe it is true not because the kind of cooperation that is required for singing in choirs or for bowling together has

instrumental or normative implications for society but because it holds a strong expressive dimension for the participants. The informal sociability that develops in a specific social club such as a choir or a bowling league – the internal codes, distinctive jargon, intimate humor – provides a sense of mutual connection, one which can then be staged and extended to wider circles through mechanisms of public intimacy. In short, a choral society is but one of many social institutions where clubiness can be practiced, learnt, and extended to other social interactions in life, projecting norms of cooperation and feelings of solidarity in the wider community. People who join associations need not contribute to democracy or publicly justify their civic-moral standing in order for them to enact these emotional building blocks of an undifferentiated civic–national solidarity.[4]

Thus, it is not clear from Putnam's work why associational life should matter for civic solidarity more than it does for national solidarity, as for example when he describes the rise of civic activity during bursts of American patriotism in the wake of World War II (ibid. p. 268). Putnam does make a distinction between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital, the former reinforcing "exclusive identities and homogeneous groups," whereas the latter encompassing "people across diverse social cleavages" (ibid. p. 22). Yet although this distinction might seem to mirror the normative dichotomy between exclusive national ties versus inclusive civic ties, he makes no such claim and confines the discussion to the qualitative difference between "weak" and "strong" ties (Granovetter, 1973), in other words, to the structural dimension of social networks, one which has no bearing on the realm of meaning from which categories of collective attachments emerge.

Ultimately, Putnam's work does not provide any mechanisms that would account for the continuum between group-level interactions to macro level solidarity. Another bottom-up approach that centers more closely on interactional practice and its collective implications is Fine's and Harrington's (2004) "tiny publics" perspective, which considers how small-group interactions align local frames of reference with broader ideologies and symbols. Among other things, they point to constructs of national significance, such as citizenship or sacrifice, linked by the localized group to its specific norms and standards of interaction. It is noteworthy, however, how this analysis alternates between a civic and national vocabulary, as Fine and Harrington themselves observe: "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" (Fine and Harrington, 2004, p. 347).

Lichterman and Eliasoph (2014) provide yet another bottom-up approach to civic relations, one which offers perhaps the most systematic framework to-date

[4] While lacking this theoretical lens several case studies point to a historical connection between European choral societies and the assertion of national identities (Lajosi and Stynen, 2015).

for studying the civic outcomes of microlevel group interactions. They conceptualize the civic as patterns of action rather than as an organizational sector and show how the distinct cultural repertoires shared by activists in specific social movements can be analyzed in terms of "scene styles." Each style is characterized by a common cognitive map defining the group's boundaries, shared assumptions about the ways members bond with each other and distinct speech norms. Members within the same organization often switch from one style to another depending on the setting.

However, in attempting to pluralize the political outcomes of civic action and underscore how distinct styles of action engender "different kinds of solidarity" (Lichterman and Eliasoph, 2014, p. 852) this approach does not solve the basic puzzle of solidarity motivating the current proposal, namely how despite the growing differentiation and fragmentation of mass society strangers in modern communities experience a "deep horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1991, p. 7), one which is premised on a monolithic order of unity and singularity (Handelman, 1990). This imagined monolithic experience does not distinguish between civic and national solidarity, let alone between different kinds of civic solidarity.

Finally, Collins (2012) is perhaps the only scholar to provide a bottom-up account of national solidarity per se, building on his framework of interactional ritual chains and on Durkheim's notion of "collective effervescence." He connects mass public events that generate widespread focused attention with a surge in feelings of solidarity. These feelings operate as a capsule or "time bubble" of nationalism and diminishes overtime. But again, it is not clear what in the actual interactional account distinguishes between civic and national solidarity.

In the end, I have chosen to center my argument on national rather than civic solidarity because only the former is associated with strong, passionate emotions and hence is more clearly linked with friendship. In fact, as persuasively analyzed by Honohan (2001), civic attachments are more directly comparable to relations between colleagues than to close friendships in that they may uphold special obligations and enable cooperation even in conditions of diversity, dislike and emotional distance.

Furthermore, unlike the scope and depth of work on civil society in connection to solidarity studies of national attachment focus overwhelmingly on collective identity and ignore or take for granted the issue of solidarity. Thus from a scholarly perspective it is far more imperative to engage in a systematic study of solidarity in national context.[5]

[5] The urgency of filling the scholarly gap in the study of national solidarity becomes evident when one compares the prevalence of the phrases "national solidarity" and "civic (or civil) solidarity." A search in *Google Scholar* conducted on 27 May 2016 yielded 24,500 references to the former and only 3486 to the latter (civic and civil combined), yielding a ratio of 1–7. Thus, although scholars bring up the word "solidarity" in national context far more than in civic context, the theoretical and empirical aspects of national solidarity as such remain understudied.

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Finally, and crucial for the present discussion, it is in the symbolic dimension that the meanings of national solidarity differ from those of civic solidarity. For the magic of the national imagination lies not only in the transformation of strangers into friends, but in imagining these newly found friends as rediscovered brothers and sisters of the same primordial tribe. In other words, 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 gives the former the appeal that it has.

Conclusion

I presented a preliminary proposal for studying collective and specifically national attachments through the prism of social ties rather than collective identity based on a theorization of "social club sociability." Whereas national solidarity is often considered an abstract relation between strangers (Anderson, 1991; Calhoun, 1991; Gellner, 1983), I have called attention to the ways the national imagination presupposes a continuum between personal and collective ties. This requires first the recognition that national attachments are comparable to ties of friendship in projecting feelings of exclusivity, familiarity, and loyalty and in considering ties between members as tangible and passionate rather than abstract and interest-based. Second, it requires an understanding that these feelings are structured by the myriad social institutions where unaffiliated individuals come together and irrespective of their instrumental objectives engage in expressive, informal practices of sociability.

Whether state-controlled, civic, or privately owned, diverse modern institutions within the nation-state offer variants of such social club sociability and bring to the fore to various degrees the cultural codes of an underlying meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends. This sociability can be studied empirically through the proposed interactional mechanism of "public intimacy," the staging of interpersonal bonds in front of face-to-face or mediated audiences. Straddling between Simmel's relational approach and Durkheim's interest in macrolevel solidarity this analytic concept mediates between interpersonal, public and collective dimensions of social ties. It is a dramaturgical mechanism that establishes the exclusivity of the intimate bond while at the same time can place spectators in a position of confidants and eventually participants. Simply put, performances of public intimacy enact instances of strangers-turned-friends in institutional life both during everyday interactions and in public or mediated gatherings. In this way, the circle of friendship can potentially expand beyond the localized group or network to a wider solidary group.

The effects of social club sociability go beyond a given institution. With the growing differentiation of modern institutional life, people increasingly find themselves concomitantly involved in a range of social clubs. As such, they

come under increasing demand to successfully transform strangers into friends and to generalize informal norms of sociability. This perceived skill or competence, I argue, is a central building block of national solidarity: having traveled through various social clubs overtime participants gain reassurance both in their ability to turn certain strangers into friends and in the ability of like-minded 'clubbers' – but not others – to do the same. To the extent that their shared networks of social clubs partly transcends localized ethnic, class, or religious communities, this accumulative experience with public intimacy extends to the level of the nation-state. This collective solidarity has little to do with the instrumental considerations underlying civil society and democracy such as rational deliberation (Habermas, 1991) or civic engagement (Putnam, 2000) but has everything to do with the expressive dimensions of a national or civic–national community.

This is not to say that institutions such as Freemasonry or Facebook are intrinsically connected to nationalism. Nor was there such a connection in the emergence of the early modern newspaper reading community analyzed so insightfully by Anderson (1991). To understand the extent that the boundaries of social club networks correspond to national groupings, we still need to address questions of group classification and boundary maintenance, issues that are widely researched in studies of nationalism (Eriksen, 1993). But to explain the mechanisms of national solidarity we need to go beyond the questions of identity or boundary work and examine institutionally meditated practices of sociability.

In and of itself, social club sociability cannot differentiate between national or civic attachments for there are not two different kinds of clubs when it comes to the basic transformation from individual strangership to collective friendship. While this we-feeling is more readily associated with the exclusionary ethos of nationalism than the inclusive ideals of civil society, in terms of solidarity both are premised on the same purifying binary logic that distinguishes between friends and non-friends. It is only at the symbolic level, and through the complex ways that national solidarity discourse is implicated in the epistemological, semiotic and temporal aspects of the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends that we can connect social club sociability specifically to national attachment. I have tentatively proposed that this meta-narrative operates through a set of binary codes intended to transform mundane interactions in institutional life to sacred ties of collective life such that abstract, anonymous, inclusive, indifferent, interest-based relations between strangers transform into concrete, familiar, intimately exclusive, loyal and passionate relations between friends.

Only by embarking on a systematic, ethnographic and historically informed analysis of a variety of social institutions can we begin to identify from bottom-up this 'glue' that binds compatriots together. By applying the interactional mechanism of public intimacy and the underlying symbolic coding to specific

social institutions one can not only make comparisons across institutions but also across historical periods and national cultures (Alexander and Smith, 1993). For instance, the rise of social network sites in early twenty-first century – an 'online' institution founded purely on the mechanism of public intimacy – epitomizes and reveals the 'missing link' between personal friendship and collective solidarity as it capitalizes (literally) on the same quest for friendship inherent in earlier 'offline' versions such as the mass army and Masonic lodges. On the one hand, the implications of Facebook for public and national life are not all that different from the ways that the nineteenth-century European cafés negotiated intimacy in public (Haine, 1996) and literary salons mobilized local public opinion (Romani, 2007). On the other hand, social network sites introduce or enhance patterns of sociability that were absent or highly limited in earlier institutions, among them hyper-accessibility, an egalitarian, seemingly classless platform, and a restructuring of privacy norms (Livingstone, 2008; Rosen, 2007). In this, different institutional 'incarnations' of the meta-narrative of strangers-turned-friends may point to additional cultural codes and shed light on novel aspects of national attachment yet to be identified.

To conclude, the magic of social clubs, broadly defined, lies in their potential ability to mediate between the structures of mass society and the sentiments of communal, aka national solidarity. Although this magic has attracted generations of sociologists, a more focused and empirically driven theoretical approach is called for in order to explore how the interactional and symbolic aspects of social club sociability contribute to national solidarity, such that the nation may come to be imagined as the ultimate social club of chosen friends.

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