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Social Capital and Sociology: Towards a More Sustainable Marriage
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SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL: BRIDGING THE MICRO-MACRO GAP

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1. Introduction

One of the enduring contributions of the social capital literature is that it provides insight into the agency of the poor, with social capital being one of the few resources that the poor have to further their agency. An exclusive focus on this aspect of the social capital problematic leaves the literature open to the criticism, however, that it does not investigate the constraints to the agency of the poor, and may thus end up advocating policies that advocate withdrawing state support from the poor in the misguided belief that social capital can compensate for the lack of other resources (see González de la Rocha [2007] for criticism along these lines). Such a focus also does not allow investigation into the ways in which the wealthy and powerful have more agency than the poor. This is connected to the perennial criticism of the social capital literature that it ignores issues of power and exploitation. Another problem is the connection that social capital theorists sometimes make between cooperation on the level of small groups and communities, and cooperation on the level of society as a whole.

The social capital problematic is thus how one retains the advantages of social capital while avoiding the limitations of the concept. Some versions of the concept, particularly those embedded within the rational choice framework, are more vulnerable to these weaknesses. In order to address this problematic it is necessary, in my view, to firstly survey the most prominent versions of the concept in order to establish how they address these challenges. The second, related, task is to marry the social capital literature with a theoretical framework that can place it satisfactorily within the agency/structure and micro/macro continuums. This is necessary because the issues of agency and the constraints to it can only be addressed effectively from such a framework. This will hopefully enable us to create space for the strengths of the social capital literature while at the same time pointing to places to search for solutions to its weaknesses. At the very least we should discover the limits to the ambitions of the concept. This will also be helpful, given that one of the major problems with the concept up to now has been its conceptual overreach. As Ben Fine (2010:22) has sarcastically remarked: "(s)ocial capital is truly a wonder drug." This indicates the need to settle in principle what it is that social capital can and cannot

do.

This article attempts to do both of the above tasks. It firstly tries to give an account of some of the variety within the social capital literature. Despite the surface agreement in the definition of the concept of social capital by different authors (e.g. Putnam and Bourdieu), the insertion of the concept into different conceptual frameworks has the effect that the concept actually means different things for different authors. Because of the variety between these strands of the theory as well as within them, it is difficult to engage social capital theory in a generalised fashion, as one is constantly in danger of making general statements that apply only to one version of the theory. In order to overcome this problem, the first half of this paper is devoted to an analysis and comparison of the main authors within social capital theory.

I distinguish three broad approaches: 1) the notion of social capital as a property of individuals and small groups, sustained by norms, networks and trust; 2) social capital as a property of nations, flowing from distinctive national configurations of values and norms; and 3) Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital as a property of fields. The first two groups of theorists take selfish individuals as their point of departure and then ask how cooperation, and by implication society, is possible. Social capital is then offered as the solution to this problem. I refer to this strand of social capital theory as theories of cooperation. The third version, of which Bourdieu's work is the most important exponent, regards social capital as a resource in the hands of individuals in their striving to improve their absolute and relative position in society. For this strand, the focus is on stratification rather than cooperation. In contrast to the first group, social capital forms a relatively minor part of Bourdieu's social theory, with his notion of social capital interwoven in a complex fashion with the rest of his theory. This presents a challenge, because the article can easily become unmanageable long if too much attention is given to all of the complexities of his theory. On the other hand, too much brevity can result in a distortion of his conception of social capital. I will attempt to steer a middle way between these two extremes.

In the rest of the paper, I attempt to situate these approaches to social capital theory within the context of the work of Nicos Mouzelis (1995, 2008). This is the second of the two tasks that I set myself. Mouzelis has provided very useful pointers for thinking the micro/macro and

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agency/structure connections and I will apply his ideas to the social capital literature. For theorists of cooperation the concept of social capital, and its associated norms and networks, generally exhaust the notion of the social. As a result, these theorists often have an undifferentiated and oversimplified understanding of the social. This shortcoming is connected to a lack of attention to constraints to agency, power relationships as well as a tendency to project solutions to collective action problems on the micro-level simplistically to the macro-level. In some ways, Bourdieu's theory offers a useful way in which to overcome some of these shortcomings, but his theory has problems of its own. I end the article by suggesting a few pointers to a solution to these shortcomings.

2. Social capital paradigms

2.1 Theories of cooperation

In this version of social capital theory the focus is on explaining how cooperation for the common good is possible. It arises from the rational choice assumption that the actions of people can be explained as attempts to maximise their individual utility. With this conception of human motivation, it becomes difficult to see how collective action towards the common good is possible. People will not participate in any act that they will not personally benefit from. Even if they are willing to participate, they will shy away from being the first mover in a mutually beneficial relationship. This is because they fear that any sacrifices they make for a common cause will not be reciprocated. This situation may result even if the individuals concerned are not selfish, but merely believe their counterparties to be (Gambetta 2000). As a result, very little cooperation will transpire in a purely selfish society. This problem has become known as the collective action problematic.

Theories of cooperation go beyond the assumption of individual selfishness by incorporating the impact of social norms in orienting the choices of people in a more cooperative direction. It has a vision of individuals whose choices are shaped, not only by their selfish inclinations, but also by social norms and sanctions. This increases the likelihood of a positive gesture being reciprocated, reduces the chances of being exploited in interaction with others, and increases the amount of mutual trust among people. The norms that develop in interaction can be either formal, as in

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contractual relations, or more informal. Theories of cooperation tend to emphasise informal norms.

This literature tends to regard social norms as a natural outcome of repeated interaction in social networks. As a result, social capital is often defined with reference to trust, norms and social networks. An example of this is Putnam's (1993: 31) definition: 'Social capital here refers to features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions'. Social capital is regarded as capital because, like human and physical capital, it increases productivity, without itself being used up in the production process (Coleman 1988).

A distinction is often made between trust in particular individuals, based upon a history of previous encounters that have established the other person as trustworthy, and generalised trust, where feelings of trust are extended to strangers (Field, 2003:63). Social capital authors differ with regard to which kind of trust they emphasise most. Economists and political scientists for the biggest part focus on generalised trust, which they regarded as crucial in lubricating the wheels of commerce and government in a society (Foley & Edwards 1999). Writers from within the sociological tradition tend to emphasize particularized trust, as this agrees more with their belief in the importance of social networks as the medium of mutual trust.

Theories of cooperation generally argue that high trust facilitates economic exchange because it reduces transaction costs (Fukuyama 1995:26-27, 336; Williamson 1985). Formal norms, as captured in contracts, have the disadvantage that they may become so complex and demanding in an attempt to capture all possible eventualities that the transaction costs they impose may become prohibitive. Trust relations based upon informal norms and personal relationships can reduce the need for expensive lawyers and complicated contracts. Coleman (1988) used the example of the diamond traders of Antwerp who can dispense with expensive insurance when they exchange diamond parcels for valuation because they trust each other. Mutual trust also improves the functioning of state institutions, with knock-on effects on the success rate of development initiatives.

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This leaves the last of the triumvirate of trust, norms and social networks to be discussed. The issue of social networks divides the social capital literature (Foley & Edwards 1999). In keeping with their emphasis on values rather than norms, some authors, typically from the disciplines of political science and economics, do not follow the path of norms arising from networks of interaction, with norms then explaining generalised trust. They rather emphasize the connection between values/attitudes (imprinted on the individual through socialization) and macro social outcomes (generalized trust), with social networks on the meso level not carrying any explanatory weight (cf. Fukuyama 1995: 26-27, Uslaner 2001, 2002, 2004, 2009). This contrasts with the networks position of Putnam and Coleman, among others, for whom social networks are central.

Among the latter group, different aspects of social networks are emphasised. Putnam (1993, 2000) puts his faith in civic relationships among people with the same social status. He was particularly concerned about the health of voluntary organisations, which he believes are where people learn the habits of cooperation. Coleman emphasised the notion of closure. Closure is a structural attribute of social networks, and, according to Coleman, increases the chances that social networks will instil expectations of high performance in pupils and teachers.

The capital produced by dense social networks and close relationships has come to be known as bonding social capital. Coleman's scenario of social closure represents a form of bonding social capital. It is because of closure that bonding social capital tends to be exclusive (Putnam 2000:22). The conception of bonding social capital as strong ties agrees with Woolcock's (1998) definition of bonding social capital as intra-community ties (he also calls it "integration"), as well as Gittel & Vidal's (1998) notion of ties with known others. Bonding social capital is also defined as ties with those who are similar to oneself (Putnam 2000: 22; Schuller 2007:15), which brings a slightly different focus to the concept. For this to agree with the previous definitions, community members have to be similar among themselves, know one another and share close bonds, which are not unproblematic assumptions. One can argue that knowing one another is a precondition for close bonds, so there is no a conflict there, but there is no need for close bonds to occur only among those who are similar. In addition, one can have ties with similar people that are quite weak. This introduces an element of incoherence into the concept of bonding social

capital. I return to this issue below.

Bonding social capital contrasts with another type of social capital, called bridging. Bridging social capital has firstly been associated with ties with people who are unknown to community members (Gittell & Vidal 1998) and/or those that are outside of the group (Woolcock 1998). This can be connected to Granovetter's (1973) idea of 'weak ties'. Unlike a closed network where information flows are more likely to be redundant, weak ties can provide access to new information and generate opportunities for advancement.

Bridging social capital has also been associated with social relationships with those who are dissimilar from group members (Putnam 2000; Schuller 2007). The same problem of incoherence that I identified with bonding social capital crops up here as well, as there is no necessary connection between weak ties and dissimilarity. For example, Vidal (2004:166) defines bridging social capital as links with people community members do not know. However, soon after that she points to the need to construct bridging social capital within the community among people with different interests and points of view. This indicates a shift of emphasis away from 'knowing one another/not knowing one another' as defining criteria for bonding and bridging social capital to 'sharing/not sharing interests and points of view'. Woolcock (2001) later made a distinction between bridging and linking social capital that helps to solve this conundrum. Bridging social capital refers to weak ties that ego has with people similar to him- or herself. Linking social capital on the other hand refers to weak ties that ego has with people who are different from him- or herself. Unlike the wealthy and educated, who can find many advantages in their more distant connection to those who are like themselves, linking social capital is especially important for poor and uneducated people, because they need connections with wealthier and educated people to access many resources.

In general, social capital theory finds it difficult to distinguish consistently between bonding and bridging social capital partly because it neglects the meaningful nature of social interaction. Poor people will, for example, search for ways in which to redefine a relationship with a stranger (bridging social capital) into a much stronger relationship of bonding social capital. We see this in Larissa Lomnitz's (1977) study of the notion of *confianza* in a Mexican shantytown. In this

example, poor people actively try to manipulate the meaning of their relationships in such a way that the relationship with a stranger is eventually transformed into a form of fictive kinship relations, thus changing bridging social capital into bonding social capital.

2.2 Bourdieu's version of social capital

Bourdieu's (1986: 248) definition of social capital is on the surface similar to that provided by the other social capital theorists: "(T) he aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition". On the next page he says that social capital is "a 'credential' that allows them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (we return to this below). This similarity is more apparent than real, however. Once one considers the location of Bourdieu's approach to social capital within the rest of his theory, the differences become apparent.

Bourdieu's notion of social capital is, to begin with, inseparable from his conception of the field. For Bourdieu social capital is one of four kinds of generic capital (Bourdieu 1992:98). The other three types are economic capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital. These kinds of capital are generic because they are used in all fields, although they are produced only in their associated field. The social field that produces social capital is the sphere of direct interaction in neighbourhood and friendship circles (Bourdieu 1985: 742, n.2). Fields are relatively autonomous parts of society, as we shall see below. They are Bourdieu's equivalent to the notion of institution as it is used in sociological discourse. Besides these four types of capital, Bourdieu also identifies numerous types of capital that are specific to each of the fields in society, e.g. intellectual capital in the university field. Fields are the settings for contests between people over the allocation of the capital at stake in each field: in the university field people compete to accumulate the recognition by peers that is implied by the possession of high intellectual capital, whereas in the economic field people compete over the distribution of economic capital, for example. Each participant approaches the contest with a different portfolio of capital. Some have more of one type of capital and less of the other, and vice versa. The total amount of capital possessed by the different participants is vastly unequal. Because of these inequalities, the

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playing fields are not level. Because the field is warped by these inequalities, one can use the physicalist metaphor of a field of forces: each participant approaching the field is pushed and pulled by the competing portfolios of capital possessed by others (Bourdieu 1985:724; Bourdieu 2005:193). In line with this metaphor one can equate a field with the objective distribution of positions with varying amounts of capital attached. The closest equivalent to this in sociological discourse is the roles that together structure an institution.

For Bourdieu (1985:724-725), possession of capital is linked to power, that is the ability to get things done. Each of the forms of capital is therefore a different way of getting hold of valuable things. Possession of economic capital in the form of money and goods allows one to buy or produce valuable things, or to hire others to do so; cultural capital provides, besides the skills to do a job, also the credentials linked to that job as well as the subtle signs in the form of good manners and good taste that indicates one's ability to fit into a particular class. Cultural capital is therefore an effective instrument of distinction, used, in Bourdieu's terms, to exclude those who are regarded as not belonging to a particular class. Social capital provides access to information, influence and support.

For Bourdieu (1986), the different kinds of capital can be converted from one to another. For example, economic capital can be converted into social capital, as in the case of someone buying friendship. They can also interact with a multiplier effect: for example, a given allocation of cultural capital in the form of a degree can become much more powerful through the mediation of social capital, as when one's social connections make it possible to find a job using that qualification. The same applies to the combinations of the other kinds of capital. In the case of social capital, the resources that are potentially available to a network member consist of the total amount of capital that network members have access to. Even though social capital can be transformed into economic capital, as we saw above, this process is limited by the total amount of capital available in the network. For this reason, social capital can for Bourdieu only be to a very small extent an alternative to possession of the other forms of capital. If people become impoverished as a result of the withdrawal of government grants or subsidies one cannot hope that social capital will come to the rescue, as is sometimes alleged in neoliberal discourses (González de la Rocha 2007).

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For Bourdieu capital represents the weight of the past on the present. Due to previous cycles of accumulation of capital, certain possibilities are closed off for some people, because they have too little capital (Bourdieu 2005:195). This is why capital can be seen as "a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible" (Bourdieu 1997:46). Thus one important difference between Bourdieu's approach to social capital and theories of cooperation becomes apparent: Bourdieu's focus is more on the role of social capital in reproducing inequality among people than on its role in facilitating cooperation. In fact, due to his rejection of the utility maximising model (that is, the belief that people consciously strive to maximise their own economic welfare), he does not accept that there is a collective action problem at all. Nevertheless, as we shall see below, he does identify a number of factors that facilitate people working together.

Bourdieu's reference to institutionalised relationships in the definition is more significant than is immediately apparent. While all four forms of generic capital need to be maintained to be continuously useful, social capital is particularly dependent on continuous maintenance. The process of institutionalisation is central to this maintenance process. It is the process by which groups are created and stabilised. This is not a once off occurrence, but needs to be continuously repeated. It typically involves what Bourdieu (1991) calls rites of institution. Although he does not give Durkheim much credit here, it seems as if Durkheim's notion of the performative role of ritual in creating and periodically reaffirming groups is central to his understanding. These rituals do not need to be religious in the normal sense of the word, although they do contain a sacred element. In the case of academic departments, for example, rites of institution include departmental meetings, oral examinations, graduation ceremonies, and so on. Besides ritual, another important mechanism of creating solidarity is the gift. Even though it rests on chains of reciprocal exchange, the gift is typically misrecognised as pure generosity, according to Bourdieu, and as such creates feelings of gratitude and love.

Consistent with Bourdieu's emphasis on the embodied nature of our social interaction and the consequent role of emotions in defining its nature, ritual and gift exchange create social capital by manufacturing solidarity. Solidarity is a feeling among participants in social interaction that

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they belong together. Because Bourdieu downplays the collective action problematic he does not give issues of trust much consideration, which is a weakness of his theory. Nevertheless, one can easily extend his theory and argue that from his perspective trust would look very different from the version of trust that appears in theories of cooperation. In the latter, trust is mostly just a cognitive phenomenon. It is in fact not really trust at all, but more like confidence (Barbalet 2009). Because of the existence of norms and sanctions, people calculate that they are less likely to be exploited in their exchanges, which increases their confidence in the outcome of the result. Most of the time this is not enough, however, and there is a gap between what participants know (and can infer) about the other person's past trustworthiness, as well as the interaction situation, on the one hand, and how they will behave in future on the other. Trust overcomes this gap through a leap of faith (Möllering 2001; Barbalet 2009). This leap of faith transpires because of the positive connotations that the trust giver project onto the trust receiver, and is facilitated by the solidarity within the group. Thus trust implies both a cognitive (confidence) and an emotional element. Another way to put this is Keith Hart's (2000) definition of trust as being in the middle on a continuum from faith on one side and confidence on the other.

Relations of mutual recognition, as captured in the definition of social capital above, are produced in ritual and gift exchange (Bourdieu 1991). This means that to be accepted as part of the group, and thus to share in the social capital produced there, one has to build respectability by participating in the rituals and gift exchange relations that define the group. This is also captured by the part of Bourdieu's definition of social capital where he relates it to a credential that allows actors to credit (Smart 1995). Social capital is a credential because it is only available to individuals who are members in good standing of the group. One must be recognised by one's peers as a valued member of the group in order to benefit from group membership. This means that one must be part of the chain of gift exchange, and able to reciprocate gifts that have been received. On that basis one is allowed credit, which is the obligation of group members to provide support when it is needed. Providing such support to a member in need gives credit in another sense, which is the good will of the group. Not doing so means losing status within the group (Smart 1995:394). According to Du Toit & Neves (2009) this respectability is called *isidima* in the rural communities that they studied in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Maintaining this status demands attendance at and contribution to community rituals, such as

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funerals. The poorest are often not capable of doing this. They are in addition unintentionally excluded, and in effect exclude themselves, because they cannot live up to informal norms regarding the standards demanded at such gatherings. Cleaver (2005) refers in this regard to the spotless white uniforms that are necessary to participate in singing and dancing groups in rural Tanzania.

In his discussion of the family Bourdieu (1998: 68) remarks that it functions both as a group, characterised by solidarity, and as a field, characterised by power differentials and conflict. The dual nature of social capital as involving both support and exploitation has been remarked upon by other researchers as well. Describing the social context of grants recipients in rural Eastern Cape, Du Toit, Skuse & Cousins (2007: 534) state: 'This closely-knit social context simultaneously provides both marginal opportunities for survival for the poorest as well as an opportunity for better-off households to absorb cheap local labour and expand their economic base in the process through income diversification strategies.' Wood (2003) similarly argues that the poorest often become involved in patron-client relationships that provide short term security but retard long term advancement.

The last point to be made about Bourdieu's notion of social capital is that despite all the references to social networks in his discussion of social capital, the analysis of social networks actually receives little analytical priority compared to the analysis of fields. The objective distribution of positions within a field underlies the actual structure of social relationships in which people will engage (networks), and to some extent determines who will engage in relationships with whom, according to him (Bourdieu 1992:114). This is another point of difference between Bourdieu and network theories of cooperation. For the latter, as we saw, analysing the actual structure of social relationships in networks is a central part of the social capital enterprise.

3. Issues of definition

Coleman's (1988) offered one of the first definitions of social capital as an academic concept. He regarded it as an element of social structure making individuals more productive. This definition,

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while very evocative, has been the source of some controversy. According to Portes (1998:5) Coleman included "under the term some of the mechanisms that generated social capital (such as reciprocity expectations and group enforcement of norms); the consequences of its possession (such as privileged access to information); and the 'appropriable' social organization that provided the context for both sources and effects to materialize." He ends by saying that "it is important to distinguish the resources themselves from the ability to obtain them by virtue of membership in different social structures". If this is not done, there is a risk that the researcher will see the acquisition of resources (such as easy access to credit) as an indication that social capital exists, and the inability to access resources (lack of informal credit) as an indication that social capital does not exist. This obscures the possibility that, in the latter case, the willingness to help the needy person may exist, but the resources in the form of money to lend, may not. The needy person may have social capital in the form of a network of relationships of mutual obligation, but the network may not be able to help.

The distinction between social capital and the resources acquired through it is necessary to avoid tautological statements, according to Portes (1998:5). This is especially an issue in those versions of social capital theory that sees social capital as an attribute of nations, and that test for causal connections between social capital and positive social outcomes (as in the case of Uslaner discussed below). Portes is especially critical of Putnam's work (he primarily refers to his work on Italy here), because he says that his definition of social capital in terms of the existence of civic traditions leads to logical circularity, and ends up saying that traditions of civicness leads to civic behaviour. In other words, what he tries to explain (civic behaviour), or the explanandum, is already contained in the explanans.

Bourdieu (1986), like many others (cf. Putnam 1993, 2000, 2007) defines social capital in short as the resources linked to membership of a social network. According to Portes, Bourdieu's definition of social capital is superior to that of Coleman because he makes a clear distinction between the resources associated with social relations and the social relations themselves. This does not necessarily solve the problems encountered here, as becomes apparent when we realise that Putnam's definition of social capital is not really different from that of Bourdieu. It is also the case that the causal relationship between social organisation and the advantages derived from

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it is already contained within Bourdieu's definition, which carries an immediate red flag in terms of the danger of tautological empirical tests of social capital.

The alternative is to define social capital simply in terms of aspects of social organisation, such as norms, trust and networks, and leave out the resources (such as neighbourly help and information) derived from them. This may overcome the problem of tautology, since social capital is defined here separate from the advantages flowing from it. This definition is problematic however, because it does not make it clear that we are dealing with **capital**, that is, a stock of useful things. It also means that we must then define the social relationships in question very restrictively, in order to avoid equating the social with social capital. In addition, social capital may be negative in the sense of creating disadvantages rather than advantages. Portes & Landolt (2000) name a number of such disadvantages, such as downward levelling norms. As a result, I think that we have no alternative but to stick to a definition such as that of Bourdieu (also incorporating the notion of disadvantages), and be very careful when we do empirical analysis that we distinguish between the explanandum and the explanans.

4. Production and appropriation of social capital

From the above discussion it should be clear that the cooperation branch of the social capital literature views social capital as a resource that primarily benefits the whole group, whether that group is the immediate social network or the whole of society, in the sense that it enhances the collective capacity to engage in common projects. Increasing the social capital of one person does not reduce the social capital of another. It is generally also impossible to exclude anybody from its benefits. If there is, for example, a decrease in crime as a result of high social capital in a community, it is not only the producers of social capital in the form of organisers of neighbourhood get togethers that benefit, but all community members (Putnam 2007). It is for this reason that Coleman (1988, 1990) and Putnam (2007) regards it as a public good, and why they are concerned about free riders who benefit from but do not contribute to community efforts. This distinction between the production and the appropriation of social capital is important, as I will demonstrate below. In contrast to this, Bourdieu regards it mostly as a private good that benefits the holder of social capital rather than the greater community. Participants in

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the field compete with each other over the allocation of capital, and thus an increase in the social capital of one lead to a decrease in the social capital available to another. (I said 'mostly' because he also regards social capital as an important basis for agency).

It is important to acknowledge that social capital has both a public and a private face and that both of these need to be analysed. If circumstances are propitious, all members within a particular group can benefit from the social capital of the group as a whole. Social capital can also be a private good, however. This occurs if the boundaries of the group sharing in the social capital is strictly drawn and actively policed. In that case, those who fall outside of the boundaries of the group do not necessarily benefit from the social capital produced within those group boundaries. As Portes & Landolt (2000) among others have pointed out, it can thus happen that the social capital of the beneficiaries create negative social capital for outsiders, as in the example of the solidarity among gangsters.

This can also be seen in the case of Coleman's (1988) diamond merchants of Antwerp. The particularistic ties between the merchants lower the transaction costs among themselves; however, Coleman did not consider the way in which these relationships increase the transaction costs for those who are not included in this group and who may want to break into the exclusive world of diamond trading. For this group, these relationships pose a formidable barrier to entering this occupation. To complicate things further, the implications for outsiders of in-group solidarity does not only have to be negative, as in the examples above. It can also be neutral, or positive. If we consider the famous social networks that made Silicon Valley so successful through their support for innovation, it is firstly clear that, to the extent that these networks delivered new technologies and economic growth, outsiders often gained in an indirect fashion (except of course for those whose jobs were replaced by machines, or outsourced to cheap labour countries).

Just as Giddens has argued with regard to structure, social capital can be both enabling and constraining. On the one hand it is an important basis for agency, as Bourdieu has argued. This is especially the case for poor people, for whom social capital is one of the few resources at their disposal. Social capital can be produced and appropriated outside of a market context, which is

its virtue of those who are excluded from the market due to their lack of money. Although economic and cultural capital are often necessary for its production (participation in community activities may necessitate money and intimate cultural knowledge), it is possible to produce social capital via a form of self-provisioning that is only rarely the case for other forms of capital (see Pahl 1984 for the use of the concept of "self-provisioning" in the context of economic capital). By combining the resources of a number of people, social capital can also have a multiplier effect on the agency of any particular individual. In working together, the group can be more than the sum of its individual parts. On the other hand, the social capital possessed by others may prove a barrier to the agency of those who are excluded from the in-group (as has also been argued by Bourdieu).

Despite these positive aspects of social capital, it is also the case that those who are already privileged often have an advantage as far as the operation of social capital goes. Men and women typically engage in different kinds of networks, and this has negative implications for women (Molyneux 2002). For example, in South Africa rural black African women who get married find it more difficult to maintain links with their home-town friends due to the patrilocal settlement pattern, while men do not experience this problem (James 1991). Female networks generally also control fewer resources, while women are typically excluded from more powerful and better-resourced male networks (Molyneux 2002). Another example is the problem faced by young adults who grow up in households where none of the adults are in gainful employment when they try to look for work. Because the production of social capital is not costless (it takes time and money to maintain contact with a community), it may be difficult for some to do. In addition, some may be excluded from the start from the better resources networks due to social structural issues.

Given their rational choice background, those social capital theorists who emphasise cooperation tend to see free riding as an inevitable outcome of human nature. If it is impossible to exclude people from the advantages of social capital, and if contributing to the creation of social capital is voluntary, people will tend to free ride, unless norms and sanctions, as well as incentives, are aligned to discourage this. Free riding is not just a matter of individual human motivation, however. Social structural factors such as gender and class can produce a systematic asymmetry

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between those who are expected to produce social capital and those who benefit from it. As Molyneux (2002) has pointed out, women often carry an unequal burden in maintaining community networks, while men have a socially sanctioned capacity to free ride on the contribution of women in this respect. The same can be said for class: as a result of globalisation, the level of integration of wealthy executives in the United States into communities as local leaders and members of voluntary organisations has declined since the 1980s (Sennet 2013:174, Skocpol). This increasing social isolation from local communities was associated with increasing integration into global networks. Despite their decreasing contribution to local communities, they still gained from the social cohesion produced within local communities.

5. Interdependencies between macro and micro

5.1 The impact of macro actors on the solidarity among micro- actors

A major failure of the cooperation strand of the social capital literature is its inability to appreciate the extent to which micro actors are influenced by macro-actors and macro structures, as well as the interdependencies between sets of micro-situations. The notion of macro-actors, as well as the point about the interdependencies of micro-situations, is derived from the work of Nicos Mouzelis (1995, 2008). Mouzelis's work is original in so far as he conceives of the relations between actors as occurring on the micro, meso and macro-levels. In his view, micro-actors are those with the least power in social hierarchies and macro-actors are those actors with the power to make a difference on a society wide scale. Macro actors have a level of agency that is unavailable to less powerful actors, because the resources at their disposal are far more and the constraints to their actions are far fewer. Macro-actors can be either collective (for example the state and multinational corporations) or individual actors (powerful politicians and businesspeople). Institutional structures similarly appear on micro, meso and macro-levels. He therefore rejects the tendency in the literature to conceive of agency as micro and structure as macro. Add here: micro still have agency, just less.

In what follows I provide a list of some of the ways in which macro-actors can impact on the capacity of micro- and meso-actors to cooperate.

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- **Macro-actors regulate access to resources.** Macro-actors can incite conflict if the distribution of resources they impose contradict norms of fairness. By increasing conditions of scarcity, as in the practice of deficit cutting by governments or downsizing by firms, they can bring on conflict either directly, as a result of increasing competition prompted by diminishing resources, or indirectly, as in the case of cost-cutting in voluntary organisations that increases the load on volunteers and reduces the incentive to be part of the organisation (Sennet 2013:252). Macro-actors can alternatively increase the potential for cooperation by actively mediating in the conflicts over distribution of resources among subordinate groups.

- **Macro-actors develop/enforce norms.** In contrast to theories of cooperation, which see social norms arising from the bottom up as a solution to collective action problems, norms are in many cases imposed from the top down. By formulating clear norms and enforcing them equitably, macro-actors can guarantee contracts and increase trust among subordinates. The impact of this will be reduced if macro-actors do not abide by their own rules, as it will foster cynical attitudes and perfunctory rule observance among their subordinates.

- **Macro-actors impinge on the settings of interaction.** Settings of interaction are understood here as the space-time contexts within which interaction takes place. Micro-actors interact within spaces that are strongly influenced by the actions of macro-actors. For trust to develop it is essential that there is a degree of stability in the relationships between actors (Sennet 2013:156). If this is not forthcoming, social capital will be weakened, or generally struggle to develop. In the community interaction setting this involves residential stability, as demonstrated by Sampson (1991) who has made a connection between what he calls community efficacy and average length of residence in a neighbourhood. Because they have so little capacity to resist, poor communities are very vulnerable to relocation initiatives that flow from housing and infrastructure projects, mining, proclamation of nature reserves, and so on, and their consequent erosion of community solidarity (see for example Chris De Wet's [1995] study of the corrosive impact of apartheid era relocation initiatives in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa). Enduring social relations are also an important factor in group solidarity in the workplace. As is well-known, the trend over the last thirty years in the Western world has

been towards the erosion of job security. As a result of this increase in short-term work, it has become more difficult to build long-term relationships in the workplace, with a negative impact on workplace solidarity (Sennet 2013:169).

- **Macro-actors manage group solidarities.** Unlike the previous bullet points, where the impact of macro-actors is unintentional, in this bullet point we discuss deliberate attempts by macro-actors to impact social capital. Because the actions we are dealing with here impact the relationship between groups, rather than relationships within them, this discussion is more relevant with regard to bridging/linking social capital. Macro-actors can attempt to instil broader identities, or suppress narrowly defined identities. The prominent case of this is nation building by a centralised state, but this strategy can also be applied by non-state actors. Such a strategy may, under ideal circumstances, improve the capacity of smaller groups to cooperate. In contrast to this, macro-actors can follow a strategy of divide and rule which, if successful, will worsen cooperation among micro- and meso-actors. Such a strategy may of course also backfire, increasing the resolve of dominated groups to cooperate against the dominant one. Favouring some groups in society on the basis of particularistic preferences (in other words, discrimination) can worsen cooperation between those who are least and more favoured, at the same time as it can increase cooperation among the out groups.

Because of the influence of macro-actors on micro-actors, the social capital produced by micro-actors cannot be analysed in isolation from macro-forces in society. These forces may facilitate or counteract the attempts by micro-actors to create, maintain and benefit from social capital. The lack of consideration of such forces is one of the major shortcomings of theories of cooperation. However, this should not by any means be interpreted as meaning that micro-actors do not have agency – it simply means that their agency is more constrained that that of macro-actors.

5.2 Horizontal relationships

The impact of macro-actors on the attempts of micro-actors to establish social capital is connected to Mouzelis's criticisms of rational choice theory. According to him, rational choice theories tend to assume that the relation between micro agents and society is simply one of

aggregation (Mouzelis 1995:29-30, 2008:276). However, this strategy is of limited usefulness, because the relationship between micro and macro in many cases is not one of aggregation Mouzelis (1995:21, 2008:276). Instead, the projects and preferences of less powerful individuals and groups are subsumed under the projects and preferences of more powerful actors. The latter control the resources and the norms that enable, and constrain, the actions of micro actors. This was demonstrated in the previous section. Because the actions of macro-actors impinge on micro-actors, and because various micro-level situations are interdependent, it is impossible to derive the state of play at the macro-level simply be aggregating micro-situations. There is a tendency to generalise the requirements for cooperation directly from the micro-level to the macrolevel without taking the implications of these interdependencies into account.

The micro-level relationships among people trying to use social capital are influenced not only by macro-actors, but also by the interdependencies they have with other groups of micro-actors. One way in which these interdependencies express themselves is when the trust and solidarity that can grow within groups can intensify the conflict between these groups in the broader society. As a result, the solution of the collective action problem on the level of these groups impedes the solution of these problems on the level of society. This point has been made both by Granovetter (1985) and Sennet (2013:5). In such cases, the whole is less than the sum of the parts, as in-group solidarity reduces between-group solidarity, with the result that it detracts from the total amount of social capital in the society.

As a result of the impact of macro actors on micro-actors, as well as the horizontal interdependence between different individuals and groups, the meso dimension only enjoys a limited degree of autonomy from the rest of society. If this is not constantly recognised the danger exists of misguided theories and policies. These interdependencies may make it more difficult to develop social capital among a particular group of people when their solidarity is impacted negatively by macro-actors or other micro- and meso-actors. They are also likely to be the cause of numerous unintended consequences of policy measures.

6 A few applications

6.1 The prisoners' dilemma

By way of illustration I will now apply the previous discussion to the prisoners' dilemma, which is the basis of all rational choice approaches to social capital (including Coleman and Putnam). The tradition of experimental economics that focuses on standardized games with a small group of players in an experimental setting makes this illegitimate projection of microlevel games to the macrolevel most explicitly, but all versions of social capital that depart from the prisoners' dilemma are guilty of it to some extent. Like the first group of theories of cooperation they emphasise the impact of social norms within small group settings. The weakness of these theories is that they assume that the interaction of a few strangers in a lab reveals some general truth about how people behave in society (see for example Paulson 2009, Fehr & Gächter 2000). They therefore make a direct connection between the micro-interaction observed in the lab and the problem of cooperation on the societal level. In these games, the problem of cooperation in society is reduced to the problem of cooperation of a few players in a game.

The ultimate demonstration of collective action problems within this literature is the prisoners' dilemma (see Hargreaves Heap & Varoufakis 1995:146). The game is clearly used to make a formal point about cooperation, but it is telling that the actual content of the game has escaped notice (see Sobel 2002 for an exception). The game is after all about the dilemma facing two criminals strategising about how to stay out of jail. If large numbers of criminals start avoiding jail time because they have solved the collective action problem, it will produce a reaction among other actors and organizations in society. Communities will mobilize in vigilante groups, pressure will be placed on law enforcement officers to convict more criminals, and so on. It is therefore clear that the collective action problem on the micro-scale defines a set of interests for a particular group, which is opposed to the interests of other groups. As a result this particular micro-situation will not be independent of other micro-situations, as well as the macro-context in which it occurs. The strategy of simply aggregating what happens in these micro encounters (that is, multiplying the prisoners' dilemma to engage all of society) will consequently not be able to account for these interdependencies and thus represents a false view of collective action problems on the macro scale.

6.2 The untheorised need for bridging/linking social capital and the problematic production of it.

The value of weak ties in the form of bridging social capital in the case of the wealthy and

linking social capital in the case of the poor and uneducated is well established: weak ties and a more open network structure allows more and more useful (in the form of less redundant) information to circulate. In the case of the latter group, the advantages of social capital go beyond this. The poor and uneducated seemingly struggle to access formal institutions such as banks and government bureaucracies on their own, and often need help from development practitioners, well-meaning employers, and other forms of outreach initiatives. For example, church based initiatives in the informal settlement in the Salvokop-area of Pretoria, South Africa, fulfil an important function by helping residents to access identification books, which are, in turn, a precondition for accessing other state services. One of the weaknesses of the social capital literature is that it does not analyse why poor community members cannot access these resources themselves and why they need mediated access in the form of linking social capital to do so. The literature also ignores the implications of such mediated access. These weaknesses of the social capital literature are related to its failure to analyse social structures, about which more below.

There are two categories of reasons why poor and uneducated community members need mediated access. This need originates firstly in the characteristics of the members itself, in which case we should ask what the poor and uneducated lack, and why they lack it. The second, related, set of reasons concern the institutions that members need to access, and their exclusion of people who do not have a middle class background. We can summarise what community members lack with the term 'cultural capital'. This entails, firstly, information about opportunities outside of their network. In addition community members need access to the communication media that carry this information (the internet, newspapers) as well as the skills such as literacy and computer literacy that are needed to access these media. Another problem they face is a lack of fluency in languages such as English, as well as the specialised codes, such as 'officialese' and 'legalese' that are used by officials to conduct their business. Because of this, as well as the mostly unintentional (but sometimes deliberate) opaqueness of bureaucratic rules, institutions often exclude the poor and uneducated. Such exclusion is made worse if community members differ with regard to factors such as nationality, race and ethnicity from the officials in charge of these institutions.

Although some of these mismatches between the cultural capital of community members and the

logic of the institutions that they are excluded from are inevitable, social capital theorists need to be more cognizant, and critical, of the dynamics at play here, and not restrict themselves to offering what may be second-best, if at times the only realistically available, solutions. It is true, for example, that facilitating access to identity documents for the poor and uneducated is a virtuous undertaking when they provide a means to claim the advantages of citizenship, and it is equally true that it is a more viable undertaking for an NGO with limited resources than changing the nature of bureaucracies and providing the intensive education needed to access these institutions. However, it should not be forgotten that these structural barriers should ultimately be removed and that the best kind of bridging/linking social capital is that which destroys its own necessity over the long term.

This becomes more important if one recognises that there is always the danger of exploitation in a bridging/linking relationship. Community members have to trust the good intentions of those who are mediating on their behalf, and this trust is not always justified. Sometimes the confidential information and money that they provide to the mediators are not used for the purposes it is claimed to be for. Another limitation of the bridging/linking relationship is that social closure will place barriers to its realisation, as noted below.

Another implication of the interdependencies between different micro-situations, as well as the impact of macro-actors on micro-situations, is that bridging/linking social capital can be difficult to produce. Because they ignore these interdependencies, theories of cooperation tend to underestimate the huge gap between the relatively uncomplicated processes needed to achieve bonding social capital on the one hand and the challenges in achieving bridging/linking social capital on the other. Talking about cooperation across what he calls 'tribal' lines, Sennet (2013:6) puts it as follows: '(It) is a demanding and difficult kind of cooperation; it tries to join people who have separate or conflicting interests, who do not feel good about each other, who are unequal, or who simply do not understand one another.' Bridging/linking social capital is difficult to create and maintain because it often has to overcome the various forms of social closure by which groups exclude those that do not belong. Examples of these are language, class, ethnic origin, race and gender. Studying these lines of division necessitates focusing on many issues that go beyond the typical remit of social capital theory, such as the level of mobilisation along these divisions, leadership, nature of social identities involved, resources at the disposal of

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groups, organisational forms, and ideologies forming the basis for this mobilisation. It is unlikely that a simplistic notion such as an attitude of generalised trust is going to be enough to explain the origin of bridging social capital. As in the case of bonding social capital, one can investigate the performative role of ritual in unifying fractured societies as a partial solution. These rituals often try to re-enact and invoke 'imagined communities' (Anderson) that provide a basis for national cohesion.

6.3 The link between trust and society-level social capital

As I indicated previously, there is a group of authors who take the attitudes of individuals as their point of departure and generalize from this to good outcomes in society. Unlike Coleman and Putnam they therefore do not concern themselves much with social networks. Uslaner (2001, 2002, 2009) is the best representative of this group among political scientists. For him, generalized trust is a core social value with resulting ethical prescriptions that those who are different from the trust giver should be trusted. Societies where people believe in the value of trust are more likely to be democratic and prosperous. Individuals learn these values through socialisation. Uslaner (2002: 22) also says that the levels of inequality in a society are the strongest determinant of trust. Increasing equality makes poor people more optimistic, reduces the social distance between groups of people and increases the size of the moral community that people perceive themselves belonging to.

Some of the major objections against Uslaner's work are methodological, and not theoretical, and may appear extraneous to the narrative that has developed up to now in this article. However there is a connection between the methodological and theoretical shortcomings, which is why the next paragraph will deal with methodological issues. Like many other political scientists and economists (e.g Bjørnskov 2007), Uslaner uses a research strategy of cross-national regressions of the causal relationship between what is claimed to be 'generalised trust' and a variety of positive outcomes in society. He uses the answer to a question about trust that appears in the World Values survey, namely whether 'most people' can be trusted or not, as the indicator of his main variable of generalised trust. It is doubtful that such a complex variable can be tested with a single question, as it contains a number of dimensions, and therefore probable interpretations, that are not distinguished here. This questions leaves open whether trust is seen as a cognitive

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(rational evaluation of actual trustworthiness of others), emotional (the respondent's feeling about others), behavioural (does the respondent in his/her practice trust other?) or ethical (others should be trusted as a matter of principle) orientation. Uslaner (2002: 3) thinks that respondents interpret the question in terms of the ethical, not the cognitive dimension, but his basis for saying so is weak. According to him (2002: 9) a factor analysis he did of survey results from Philadelphia in 1996 indicated this, but there is surely no basis for generalising this interpretation to the rest of the world. The trust question also leaves open whether the appropriate time frame for trusting is the past, present or future. Nannestad (2008), in his survey of some of the shortcomings of these kinds of analyses, points to the validity concerns that are raised by the variety of cultural frames through which this question is interpreted globally, particularly the moral community that is implied in the reference to 'most people' (does that include foreigners, gays, communists, or not?). These objections are lessened by the fact that the answers people give to the trust question are generally closely correlated with levels of social inequality, as we have mentioned above in the context of our discussion of Uslaner. In unequal societies people are more likely to feel exploited, and thus see other people as less trustworthy. This correlation with a measure that common sense tells us should be connected increases the level of confidence that one has in the validity of the trust question somewhat.

Uslaner's methodological strategy entails the making of a connection between three variables: inequality, the value of generalised trust (as measured by the trust question), and positive outcomes for society. This somewhat simplistic theory assumes firstly that one can deduce causation from this correlation, and that there are no confounding variables that may impact on both the supposed value of trust and societal outcomes. The other assumption is that the causal direction is from values to behaviour, and not the reverse one of rationalisations of pre-existing behaviour in terms of values. One thing that casts doubt on the simplistic connection Uslaner makes is the old conundrum of social psychology, which is that attitudes are generally very poor predictors of actual behaviour (LaPiere 1934). The fact that respondents' responses on the trust question are poor predictors of their behaviour in experimental games is an illustration of this (Serra 2011), although this is probably as much a criticism of the lack of realism of these games as it is of the trust question. As LaPiere found, the nature of the actual social context is crucial to how attitudes are going to impact behaviour. In our case, the actions and interactions of meso-

and macro-actors, imbued with their own interests, subcultures and portfolios of capital will play a vital mediating role in determining how values will influence the behaviour of individuals. The amount of power people have will determine the extent to which they are capable of acting in terms of their own values, rather than rules imposed from the top. In addition the powerful have more influence in determining the values of society than the powerless, due to their control over the media and systems of education. Values also arise, and are transformed, in the context of the interaction of people.

7. Conclusion and issues for further investigation

Concepts such as bonding social capital and bridging social capital assume that the relationships between the individuals in these networks are supportive. The underlying assumption is that the exchanges will take place in terms of a norm of reciprocity, which Gouldner (1960) states is generally regarded as a transcultural norm in exchanges. However, it is also possible that there may be a degree of 'unbalanced reciprocity' or 'exploitation' in this interaction, where the more powerful partner in the interaction does not reciprocate in full, or at all (Gouldner 1960:167). Power imbalances make it easier for the powerful to ignore normative requirements without suffering any negative consequences. As is clear from the analysis of collective action problems in the beginning of this article, there is a close relationship between reciprocity and trust. This adds force to the idea that a perceived lack of reciprocity on the part of the powerful toward the powerless influences trusts levels. This is one avenue that can be explored further in future.

A more contentious undertaking would be to explore the connection between power, reciprocity and trust for the relationship between macro-actors in society. For example, if the share of profits of the financial industry in the US (about 40%) is compared to what it has delivered in return, as well as the hundreds of billions of dollars received in tax payer support, new questions can be asked about issues of reciprocity and trust in society that goes beyond the typical focus of the social capital literature up to now.

Before I get to the limitations of theories of cooperation, it is necessary to say what they get right. It is certainly correct to state that there is an instrumental dimension to social relations. People routinely use their social connections to advance their own position in life. This is the

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case even if one accepts that social acceptance and social intercourse are important consummatory values in themselves (Sen 2000). It is also the case that support from neighbours, friends and family is an important means for the poor to get by: as Sen (2000, 2006) says, social capital is one of the basic capabilities of people, a lack of which may cause destitution. This is true despite the fact that the poor have less social capital than the wealthy due to having fewer friends and belonging to fewer organizations (Light 2004:149). Social capital is also an important resource used by the wealthy to reproduce their advantageous position over time (Bourdieu 1986). As pointed out to devastating effect by Moessinger (1996/2000), the notion of people as utility maximisers that serves as point of departure for the rational choice framework is problematic. However, any realistic anthropology has to accept that free riding is a common threat in all human endeavours. For these reasons the search for the conditions of cooperation in society is a worthwhile exercise.

It should be clear however that the solution to the cooperation problem is going to require concepts that go beyond social capital theory as it has developed up to now. The conditions for cooperation on the macro-level cannot be derived from the behaviour of people in small groups. At the same time, meso-and macro-actors as well as macrostructures impinge on microlevel interaction, with the result that the conditions for cooperation on the microlevel are influenced by meso-and macro-actors and forces. This has important policy implications. In the first place, the typically optimistic assumption that social capital will inevitably develop when individuals start interacting has to be tempered with the realisation that social capital is quite vulnerable to destructive forces on the meso-and macrolevels. As we saw in the case of Bourdieu's notion of social capital, constant institution of social relationships are necessary. For proper trust to develop, more is needed than norms and sanctions that produce a merely cognitive conception of decreased risk of being exploited. However, trust can be damaged by unbalanced reciprocity resulting from power imbalances, and this can impinge on the capacity of groups to cooperate. This opens up a research agenda in which the relationships between actors on the micro-, meso- and macrolevels, as well as the extent to which they engage in unequal exchange, are investigated. A more precise understanding of how social capital articulates with broader social forces will hopefully also temper the unrealistic claims for social capital as a 'wonder drug' (Fine 2010).

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