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WHAT IS IT THAT TIES...?
Theoretical perspectives on social bond

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Summary

This article identifies and discusses three separate discourses or theoretical perspectives on what it is that binds individuals together. One discourse is dominated by 'solidarity' and largely contains contributions from sociologists; the second revolves around the concept of 'reciprocity', which has been developed by anthropologists, sociologists and social-psychologists; the third discourse is known as 'rational choice' theory, and reflects the work of economists, as well as sociologists. Elements from these discourses are combined in a discussion of three topics considered relevant with regard to some of the common precepts concerning solidarity: motives people may have for supporting solidary relations and arrangements, the socially excluding effects of solidarity as opposed to its including effects, and, finally, the consequences of the process of individualisation for social bonding. One of the conclusions is that individualisation might be seen not as a threat to solidarity but as an opportunity for it and even as a prerequisite for the functioning and viability of complex modern societies.

There seem to be three main theoretical discourses about what it is that ties individuals to groups and makes them behave in accordance with the collective interest; their respective core concepts are 'solidarity', 'reciprocity' and 'rational choice'. In the first three sections of our contribution we will present and discuss these discourses. The fourth section contains a discussion of the implications of these discourses for people's motivations for solidarity, for the consequences of solidarity with respect to inclusion and exclusion and for the way solidarity and individualisation relate to each other. In passing, some of the common precepts concerning solidarity will be criticised.

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1   Solidarity and social ties

For sociologists questions about social ties and about the factors that lead individuals to behave in accordance with group interests relate to solidarity in social systems. Since the early contributions by Durkheim and Weber, the concept of solidarity has rarely been analysed theoretically in sociology. Nevertheless, we found some explicit analyses of the concept in the work of Parsons, Mayhew and Hechter.

Mechanic and organic solidarity
Emile Durkheim perceived solidarity, positively stated, as that which binds individuals into a relatively autonomous society, or negatively stated, that which prevents the disintegration of a society (Luhman 1982). Durkheim briefly formulated the two main sources for social solidarity he identified as: '...*the likeness of consciences and the division of social labour*' (Durkheim, 1966/1893: 226). 'Likeness of consciences' refers to a situation in which individuals share the same fundamental cultural elements, which they use as a basis for recognising and accepting each other as members of the same collectivity. On these grounds such individuals can empathise with one another, become interested on each other's behalf and form a solidaristic whole. In such a situation of mechanic solidarity the individual identifies strongly with the group. The strong sense of 'we' leaves little space for individuality. This type of culturally-based mutual bond implies that group interests can prevail over the interests of the individuals involved. The second source of solidarity lies in the division of labour, which causes people to become mutually dependent on each other for their life opportunities. The division of labour thus gives rise to structural bonds. According to Durkheim the structural interdependence in a modern and complex society needs to be acknowledged and actively regulated to function properly. Modern, complex, organic solidarity has to be organised by means of rules for co-operation which force the individual '...*to act in view of ends which are not strictly his own, to make concessions, to consent to compromises, to take into account interests higher than his own*' (Durkheim, 1966/1893: 227). In other words, organic solidarity presupposes explicitly that individuals allow collective interests to prevail over their own. The coercion accompanying the rules for co-operation, however, need not be experienced by individuals as an unpleasant burden that they are inclined to resist. Like any institutional obligation, these rules can be internalised during the socialisation process. Acting in accordance with the obligations of society and contributing to the common good will then be seen and experienced as an intrinsic moral duty, not as externally enforced behaviour.

Durkheim saw the cultural bond as at the heart of 'mechanic' solidarity, dominant in homogeneous pre-modern societies, and the structural interdependence as central to 'organic' solidarity, which tends to bind modern societies with a highly differentiated division of labour. Durkheim emphasises the functional necessity of solidarity for the existence and survival of social systems. Especially cultural and structural ties

between actors within the system enable the interests of the collectivity itself to be served. Such interests transcend the interests of individual actors and can even conflict with them. A social system with insufficient solidarity where the cultural and structural ties are too few or too weak is bound to disintegrate, simply because its overarching interests will not be served adequately (see also Parsons, 1951: 96).

Furthermore, Durkheim regards solidarity as a characteristic of a social system. The existence and survival of a collectivity depend on the de facto cultural and structural interrelatedness within its boundaries and not on the feelings of solidarity which actors may have towards each other. Admittedly, such feelings are somewhat relevant to solidarity. The solidarity ties actually present in society have to be accepted and supported by the people and groups involved. While feelings may play a role in this acceptance and support we will see later on that other motives are possible too.

Communal and associative relationships

While Durkheim analyses solidarity from a macro point of view by perceiving it as a characteristic of broader collectivities and societies, Max Weber approaches the subject from a micro point of view. According to Weber solidarity characterises social relations between individuals (Weber 1964 [1922]: 136-139).

Social relations, Weber argues, are solidary (*solidär*) if they are directed at interests that transcend those of the individuals involved and as such establish a bond between them. Referring to Tönnies' well known dichotomy of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Weber identifies two types of solidary relations, which bear a remarkable resemblance to Durkheim's concepts of mechanic and organic solidarity. First there is *Vergemeinschaftung*, translated by Henderson and Parsons as 'communal relationship', in which case individuals treat each other according to fellow feeling, a subjective feeling of belonging together. According to Weber, such a feeling can have affective, emotional and traditional bases. Examples include a religious brotherhood, an erotic relationship, a relation of personal loyalty, a national community and 'esprit de corps'. The core of the communal relation lies in a shared we-ness, in the understanding and acceptance that one is a member of the same group. Here Weber formulates the micro version of Durkheim's mechanic solidarity. Second, there is *Vergesellschaftung*, translated as 'associative relationship', in which case people treat each other according to a rationally motivated adjustment of interests or a similarly motivated agreement. The essence of the associative relationship is that it is 'utility directed'. That is, it is aimed at a certain material or non-material utility which is of interest to both actors. Durkheim's organic solidarity, which is derived from an interdependence of life opportunities, is easily recognisable in this second type of solidary relationship.

Weber argues that both types can be present in one and the same relationship. For instance, within family relations there is a we-feeling (communal) but usually also (sometimes only after heavy bargaining) rational agreement on the best way to deal with each member's personal interests and those of the family as a whole. Further-

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more, according to Weber communal solidarity should not necessarily be associated with harmony and voluntariness. On the contrary, conflict and coercion in communal relations, even in the most intimate ones, is not uncommon. Third, solidarity is not the same as equality or homogeneity. This means that extensive sharing does not suffice to establish a communal bond. Explicit fellow-feeling is at the heart of such solidarity, rather than mere commonness in modes of behaviour, situation or qualities[1]. To illustrate his point, Weber submits that two members of the same race do not necessarily have a communal relationship. They achieve this state only when they treat each other on the basis of a sense of we-ness.

Sources of solidarity: shared identity and shared utility

At this stage we can conclude from Durkheim and Weber that both perceive solidarity as a characteristic of social relations, at the macro level as well as at the micro level. They view solidarity not as a cultural value or feeling (although these might be involved in certain types of solidary relations) but as an objective attribute of a social system. The degree of solidarity in a social system is seen by both as a function of those ties between individuals and groups that enable interests to be served in a manner that transcends the ties between the individuals and groups involved. Serving the common good is not equal to solidarity itself but a possible result of social solidarity. This assertion implies, first, that in a social system with strong solidarity collective interests can be served and realised more easily and in greater measure than in a social system with weaker solidarity. Second, broader or more extended solidarity means that more interests can be recognised and accepted as being collective (i.e. perceived as the responsibility of all), or that the collectivity is defined more broadly (for example, the evolution from early local and charitable poor relief systems to comprehensive national income protection systems is a manifestation of social solidarity being extended in both respects).

The main source of solidarity is a mutual sharing of each other's fate. This sharing may be of two types; either people share their fate because they identify with one another: there is a feeling of 'we are one', which means that 'your interest is my interest is our interest'. Or people share fates because they depend on each other for realising life opportunities: there is a perception of 'we need each other'. The first type, which we will call *shared identity*, is a culturally and emphatically based bond, to which Durkheim's 'conscience collective' refers at the macro level and Weber's communal relationship at the micro level. The second type, *shared utility*, is a structurally based bond, to which Durkheim's concept of organic solidarity refers at the macro level and Weber's associative relationship at the micro level.

We learn from Durkheim and Weber that a social system's measure of solidarity, and thus the possibility of realising collective interests, is higher the more people and groups involved identify with one another and the more they depend on one another.

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Institutionalised role obligations

Parsons' view of solidarity ties in with the ideas of Durkheim and Weber in that, according to Parsons, collective interests take precedence over individual interests. In the context of his general theory of action Parsons identifies and analyses different types of action. Solidary action is defined as collectivity-oriented action, which contrasts with self-oriented action (Parsons, 1951: 97-101). The first type of action is explicitly aimed at the interests and coherence of a group or a wider social system, while the second has no such orientation. Solidary behaviour is described briefly by Parsons as '...*taking responsibility as a member of the collectivity*' (p.99). Such a step involves more than just being loyal to the group or the system. Loyalty is collectivity-oriented behaviour based on voluntariness. Parsons sees loyalty as the uninstitutionalised precursor of solidarity, whereas the essence of solidary behaviour is that it derives from and conforms to institutionalised role obligations.

According to Parsons, social ties are construed at the meso level (i.e. within institutions or 'collectivities'). All institutions impose moral obligations to contribute to its collective interests on those individuals who figure in their operations. Such obligations exist for each and every institutional role. Solidary behaviour means that one conforms to the solidarity obligations of one's role. The actual degree to which a collectivity can have its interests served by its members (i.e. the de facto internal level of solidarity) is thus a function of the degree to which the collectivity succeeds in imposing solidarity obligations on its members.

Parsons locates solidarity at the meso level of institutional roles, while Durkheim analysed it at the macro level and Weber at the micro level. Like Durkheim, Parsons states explicitly that solidarity implies a certain coercion of the individuals involved. Durkheim stresses that individuals in a modern society have to conform to rules for co-operation, whereas Parsons emphasises that in any institution individuals are expected to conform to solidarity obligations. Thus, the criticism of some (e.g. Tromp 1985) that solidaristic behaviour within the modern welfare state is mainly enforced and therefore attests to a weak or deficient solidarity base does not hold. From a sociological point of view a certain degree of coercion is inherent in social solidarity.

Emotional ties and shared identity

Mayhew's theory of solidarity elaborates on the notion that we have called 'shared identity' here. He situates the fundamental base for social bonds in human emotional ties which are present in direct, repeated face-to-face relations between individuals (Mayhew 1971). In interactions with others, patterns and networks of attraction and loyalty arise. As a result of such patterns, individuals start defining themselves as members of a broader unified group whose integrity and interests have to be defended. In this stage individuals perceive a certain collective identity and collective interests. Once they have established a sense of fellowship and membership, people will become willing to co-operate toward realising the common good. At that point

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the collectivity turns into what Mayhew calls a system of solidarity: such a degree of identity-sharing has been achieved that serving the collective interest as a co-ordinated action by group members becomes possible. Mayhew sees complex societies as conglomerations of systems of solidarity. To the degree that such systems grow more dependent on one another (as a result of the division of labour and specialisation), they will have to form associative relations aimed at co-operation and exchange. The conglomerative bonds that arise and develop are less intense, more abstract and cover a broader geographic and cultural scope than the bonds within the systems of solidarity themselves. According to Mayhew, such broader bonds are crucial for the existence of complex societies.

Mayhew locates a deeper basis for the identity-based solidarity than Durkheim. This level is not that of shared cultural elements in a collective conscience, since such a conscience presupposes that systems of solidarity have already been established (i.e. that human emotional ties have already resulted in patterns of attraction and loyalty and in group formation). Also, Mayhew's solidarity base is more specific than Weber's communal relationship. It is limited to the emotional, affective bond between people, while Weber considered the possibility of traditional bases as well. A traditional base for fellow feeling, however, like Durkheim's conscience collective, presupposes that a system of solidarity already exists. Mayhew and Durkheim both distinguish between solidarity from a shared identity and solidarity from a shared utility. Durkheim analyses them from a perspective of societal modernisation: shared identity as the core of pre-modern mechanic solidarity and shared utility as the core of modern organic solidarity. Mayhew, however, analyses both sources of solidarity primarily from a perspective of the simple versus the complex. In reality, modern societies are more complex than pre-modern ones, but Mayhew's theory enables us to study solidarity in more or less complex systems and conglomerations within any type of society, modern or pre-modern.

Interdependency and shared utility

Instead of deducing solidarity from a shared identity, Hechter (1987)views solidarity as derived from shared utility. His theory on the principles of group solidarity is based on the idea that individuals rely on each other (i.e. the group) to satisfy their needs. Groups, however, can function only if their members contribute. Therefore, individuals are just as dependent on the group's production as the group is on contributions from its members. Hechter's sociological theory on solidarity concerns the conditions and the mechanisms enabling groups to motivate their members to contribute to the common good.

The least complex possibility in this respect is a situation in which the group can exchange part of it's production for specified amounts and types of contributions. Members contributing to the group's interests and activities receive a proportionate or otherwise fair share of the group's production in return; those who do not contribute receive less or nothing. With collective goods (which no group member can be

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excluded from consumption), however, free-riding and thus sub-optimal production have traditionally been a problem. Hechter does not agree with Durkheim's and Parsons' solution to this problem, which holds that individuals may be motivated to contribute to the production of such goods from a moral conviction or out of a moral obligation. It will always remain obscure whether people act out of moral obligation or for fear of sanctions. More basically, Hechter argues that such normative solutions do not explain why solidarity in one group is stronger than in another (i.e. why people would regard their moral obligations towards one group as more important than towards another group). While norms may be critical in such differences, the normative theories do not reveal people's motives and extent of adherence to them. The mere existence of obligations to contribute does not necessarily mean that they will be met. Crucial to Hechter, then, is not only the extensiveness of obligations to contribute to the common good, but also the degree to which individual members actually comply with these obligations. Compliance will be greater, and thus the degree of solidarity higher, depending on the extent of: (1) individual dependency on the revenues of the production of the collective good; (2) effectiveness of control of contributions. Hechter submits that these two basic variables not only explain differences in the actual degree of solidarity between social systems but also reveal why under certain conditions some individuals exhibit greater solidarity than others.

Since Hechter's 'dependency and control' theory on the principles of group solidarity is based on the 'rational choice' assumption that individuals, if they are to choose freely, will always opt for their personal interest instead of for the group or common interest, we will discuss this theory in additional detail in the section on 'rational choice and social ties'.

The sociologists discussed so far seem to perceive solidarity as a state of relations between individuals and groups enabling collective interests to be served. The essence of and basis for such relations is that people have or experience a common fate, either because they share identity as members of the same collectivity and therefore feel a mutual sense of belonging and responsibility, or because they share utility: they need each other to realise their life opportunities. The scope and strength of solidarity in a social system is a function of such shared identities and utilities. Solidaristic behaviour boils down to acting in the interest of the group and its members.

2 Reciprocity and social ties

Classical anthropological and sociological literature on the social meanings of gift giving suggests that gift exchange functions as the cement of social relationships, because it implies a 'principle of give and take', a moral obligation to return a gift in due time or 'a norm of reciprocity'. Marcel Mauss, in his famous *Essai sur le don*

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(1923), argued that conscious or unconscious expectations of return underlie every gift, and that these expectations are the basis for a common social world. According to Mauss 'free gifts' do not exist. The relationship between gifts and solidarity, then, is obvious: reciprocity in gift exchange is a mechanism that creates and sustains social ties and bonds. As Mary Douglas says in her foreword to the English translation of Mauss' essay: *'A gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction. (..) The theory of the gift is a theory of human solidarity'* (1990, vii, x).

But how exactly does the principle of reciprocity relate to solidarity? Which mechanism guarantees reciprocity and establishes solidarity? Most theories on gift giving point to the element of moral obligation (the subjective need to give in return) as playing a crucial role in forming a solidary community or solidary relationships. But the theories note this element in slightly different ways by concentrating on the different levels where solidarity emerges. Anthropologists focus mainly on culture and society as a whole, whereas the sociologists and social psychologists in their discussions about gift exchange are preoccupied mainly with interpersonal relationships. Remarkably, the intermediate level of collectively organized solidarity, either within groups or within institutions, is not explicitly dealt with in this literature. Another prominent characteristic is that a variety of motives for giving, ranging from relatively 'pure' altruism to explicit self-interest, figure in the accounts by these authors.

The gift: moral cement and principle of exclusion

In his famous study of the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands, Malinowski (1922) stated that the rule of reciprocity does not underlie every gift in equal measure. He ordered different kinds of gifts on a scale of reciprocity. At one extreme, he posited the 'pure gift', for which nothing was expected in return (Malinowski mentioned as an example gifts between husbands and wives); the other extreme was characterised by a kind of market exchange or 'barter', where both parties were motivated mainly to maximise their own profit. According to Malinowski, motives for giving varied according to the nature of the social relationship involved: the closer the social ties (for example family or good friends), the more gift giving is 'free', that is, the less the idea of *quid pro quo* prevails.

Following Durkheim, Mauss (1923) wanted to attack contemporary utilitarian strands in political theory by advancing the values of altruism and solidarity. He moved beyond Durkheim's conceptions of solidarity based on collective representations or on the division of labour, however, by discovering gift exchange as the basic mechanism by which individual interests and the creation of social order are reconciled. Mauss radicalised Malinowski's insights by stating that *do ut des* is the principal rule in *all* gift giving. In his view, giving was not only a material act, but also a symbolic medium involving strong moral obligations to give in return. Mutual giving made communication with other people possible as a means of helping them and establishing alliances. Gift exchange underlay a system of mutual obligations between people

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and, as such, functioned as the moral cement of human society and culture, according to Mauss. He considered giving a subtle mixture of altruism and selfishness. Customs of 'potlatch' - competitive gift giving and collective destruction of wealth in order to acquire personal status and prestige - illustrate this mixture in its most extreme form. Some decades later, these insights were elaborated by Lévi-Strauss (1949; 1957). He regarded the principle of reciprocity as a major determinant of our social values, feelings and actions and thus at the base of social structure. This is illustrated, for example, by the practice in many non-Western societies of exchanging women as 'the supreme gift'. The prohibition of incest functions as a rule of reciprocity and is at the base of systems of kinship relations. The principle of reciprocity is not confined to so-called primitive societies but figures in Western society as well, according to Lévi-Strauss. He mentions examples such as offering food and exchanging presents at Christmas. Forms of potlatch occur in our own society as well: the exhibition of Christmas cards on our mantelpiece and the vanity of extensive gift giving exemplify the squandering of wealth as a means to express or gain prestige.

Apart from clear-cut differences in approach between the functionalist Malinowski, the Durkheimian traces in Mauss' work and Lévi-Strauss' structuralist perspective on gift exchange, all these authors seem to stress a common point: gifts bind and are therefore the moral cement of culture and society. Recent empirical research in the Netherlands (Komter & Schuyt 1993), however, reveals another side to reciprocity's positive function as moral cement. This research shows that certain social categories exchange less than others. In particular, those not in the position to give much themselves prove to be the lowest recipients: the long-term unemployed and the elderly. If one's social and material conditions complicate or preclude giving to other people, one seems to receive proportionately very little. In this case, reciprocity acts as a principle of exclusion (Komter 1996; cf. also Douglas & Isherwood 1979). In other words, the solidarity and bond resulting from reciprocal gift giving exclude those who do not participate in networks sustained by mutual gift exchange.

The gift as a starter and stabiliser of interpersonal relationships
Conscious or subconscious expectations of reciprocity not only bring about social relations, they also stabilise existing relations by making them predictable to a certain extent. Simmel (1950), in his famous essay 'Faithfulness and Gratitude', analysed the moral and social importance of these two feelings for sustaining reciprocity in human relationships. The different psychological motives which may underlie social relations - such as love, hate, passion - are not intrinsically sufficient to sustain these relations. Simmel regarded faithfulness - a kind of loyalty or commitment - as a necessary feeling contributing to the continuity of an existing social relationship. He described faithfulness as a 'sociological feeling', oriented to the relation as such, in contrast to the more person-oriented feelings like love, hate or friendship. Gratitude, like faithfulness, is a powerful means for establishing solidarity and social cohesion. By mutual giving, people become tied to each other by a web of feelings of gratitude.

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Gratitude is the motive which moves us to give in return and thus establishes the reciprocity of service and counter-service. Gratitude is, in Simmel's words, 'the moral memory of mankind' (1950: 388) and, as such, essential for establishing and maintaining social relations. Simmel stressed that gift exchange does not have to be equal in order to bind individuals. He even noted that the first gift within an exchange has a quality that can never be returned, indebting the recipient disproportionately to the one who started the exchange by giving the first gift.

Gouldner explored the meaning of the 'norm of reciprocity' as a mechanism for starting social relationships. The norm of reciprocity is conducive to social interaction '...for it can reduce an actor's hesitancy to be the first to part with his valuables and thus enable exchange to get underway' (1973a: 275). Gouldner, following Simmel, noted that reciprocity does not necessarily mean equivalence. Gouldner then extended the analysis by reflecting more explicitly on the complicating role of power in reciprocity relations and providing a theoretical elaboration. Reciprocal exchange relationships may be very asymmetrical, with one party feeling obliged or actually being obliged to give much more than the other. To understand such asymmetrical relationships the respective levels of resources of giver and recipient should be taken into account, as well as the needs of the recipient and the freedom the giver has either to give or not to give. Clearly, power differences come into play. The division of rights and duties of both parties in an asymmetrical power relationship is not only structurally unequal but may be reflected at the subjective level of personal feelings as well (Komter 1989; 1994). Bell and Newby (1976) have described asymmetrical relationships as a moral order expressed through and by ideological hegemony, characterised mainly by 'deference'. Gift giving, in their view, is an important means for sustaining this moral order. Following Mauss, they argue that giving shows one's superiority, whereas accepting without returning is tantamount to admitting subordination. Although strongly asymmetrical power may characterise relationships of gift exchange (Gouldner still calls these relationships reciprocal, because exchange continues despite manifest inequality), solidarity in the relationship is maintained: the mutual rights and duties are respected, and each partner gives and receives his or her 'due share'.

Apart from the norm of reciprocity, Gouldner identified the 'norm of beneficence' or the norm of giving 'something for nothing' (i.e. Malinowski's 'free gift'): the expression of real altruism. This kind of giving is not a reaction to gifts received from others. Gouldner described it as a powerful correction mechanism in situations where existing social relationships have become disturbed. Paradoxically, writes Gouldner, 'There is no gift that brings a higher return than the free gift, the gift given with no strings attached. For that which is truly given freely moves men deeply and makes them most indebted to their benefactors. In the end, if it is reciprocity that holds the mundane world together, it is beneficence that transcends this world and can make men weep the tears of reconciliation'. (1973b: 277) The norm of giving 'something for nothing' not only functions as a correction mechanism in diverse kinds of social

relationships but also seems to be an important mode of giving among kin relations. Here, Sahlins' notion of 'generalized reciprocity' seems to apply, referring to transactions that are putatively altruistic because the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite (Sahlins 1974). This aspect is shown, for example, in Finch's study about the exchange of assistance and support within kin groups: notions of duty, obligation and reciprocity prove strongly associated with family relations. She notes the moral quality of these relations and calls this morality one of 'prescriptive altruism' or a form of 'sharing without reckoning' (1989: 231).

These sociological contributions give rise to the following picture: reciprocal gift exchange functions mainly to start or stabilise relationships between individuals. An interesting element that is hardly covered by the anthropologists' accounts is the role of power in reciprocal exchange. Although power may complicate these relationships, it does not necessarily disturb solidarity and cohesion. Mutual rights and duties, even if unequally distributed, may keep being observed and respected and consequently enable the process of giving and receiving to be sustained. Thus, the establishment and maintenance of social ties and solidarity continues despite power inequality.

The gift as a 'balance of debt' and a mirror of identity
Social psychologists stress the psychological significance of gift giving, apart from its functions at the level of culture and social relations. Inspired by Simmel, Mauss and Gouldner, Schwartz introduced the notion of the psychological 'balance of debt', in which the participants in reciprocal gift exchange become involved (1967). Depending on their personal biography and specific psychological constitution, people will react differently to this balance of debt. Some will have great difficulty receiving help or material goods from others, because of their inability to deal with feelings of gratitude or of being indebted to another person.
In their study of the meaning of responsibility and obligation within kinship groups, Finch and Mason argue that gift exchange involves a delicate balance of dependence and independence; therefore, issues of power and control are deeply engrained: *'Some very fine calculations (which of course may not be successful) take place to try to ensure that no one becomes a net giver or net receiver, or is beholden to someone else'* (1993: 172).
The issue of power is taken up again by Schwartz (1967). The balance of debt may be disturbed in several ways. A very efficacious means to exercise power is, for example, to *keep* another person indebted by over-reciprocation (Schwartz 1967). Alternatively, returning a gift too quickly can be interpreted as a sign of ingratitude and may therefore be regarded as offensive. As Seneca has said: *'a person who wants to repay a gift too quickly with a gift in return is an unwilling debtor and an ungrateful person'* (quoted in Gouldner 1973a: 258). A certain interval between gift and return gift is also required to find and mobilise resources to be able to return in due

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proportion. According to Schwartz, the balance of debt should, however, never be brought into a complete equilibrium, because: *'The continuing balance of debt - now in favor of one member, now in favor of the other - ensures that the relationship between the two continues, for gratitude will always constitute a part of the bond linking them'* (1967: 8).

Looking behind people's overt manoeuvring on balances of debt reveals the deeper involvement of their personal selves and identities (cf. Schwartz 1967). Schwartz believes that a gift bears some resemblance to Charles Cooley's 'looking-glass self': it mirrors not only ourselves - our taste, social and personal identity - but also the picture we have formed of others; *'Consequently, to accept a gift is to accept (at least in part) an identity, and to reject a gift is to reject a definition of oneself'* (Schwartz 1967: 3). Gifts are the symbolic means by which these selves get expressed within social relationships and may thus be regarded as 'tie-signs' (Goffman 1971).

Again, the gift appears as a binding factor within interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, the social psychological perspective highlights some aspects that are new compared to those we have encountered earlier. First, social ties and solidary relationships between individuals should never reach a perfect balance of debts; some uncertainty about how much one is indebted to another person, and when a gift should be returned, is needed to keep the relationship alive. Perfect equilibrium of the mutual 'book-keeping' would mean the end of the relationship. The second new element is the important role of gift exchange in the mutual acceptance of identity by givers and recipients alike. In the act of exchange, not only material or nonmaterial goods are transacted but also symbolic meanings referring to the identity of the individuals involved. These meanings affirm and strengthen the social bond between giver and recipient, which is at the basis of interpersonal and collective solidarity. The affirmation of personal identity seems, in turn, a precondition for the 'shared identity' which is central to solidary relationships.

3 Rational choice and social ties

Rational choice theories on social bond are based on the assumption that freely choosing individuals prefer serving their individual interest over serving collective interests (cf. Hechter 1987). Collectivities or groups, which rely on the social ties between their members, can survive only if and insofar as these members contribute to the common interest. Few problems for the viability of collectivities, and thus for the social bond between group members, arise when individual and collective interests overlap (as, for instance, in the case of voluntary mutual insurance), or when the group can reward contributing members adequately. In practice, however, such conditions are not always met. The interests of individuals may be seen as directly

opposed to those of the group as a whole, or the overlap might be perceived as too small. In neither situation would freely choosing individuals contribute to the common good, although the group as a whole would benefit from this action. Such situations of conflicting individual and collective rationality are central to Olson's seminal work on the logic of collective action (1977). Olson emphasises the difficulty of producing collective goods, especially in large groups. The basic problem is that none of the members can be excluded from consumption of such goods once they are produced, which leads to small or even negative utilities of individual contributions. This in turn may lead a sub-optimal production of the collective good or to no production at all. In keeping with the basic assumption of the rational choice perspective, Olson then argues that the production of collective goods can be promoted through selective incentives and coercion. The first strategy entails giving those who contribute an extra reward to increase the utility and thus the level of their personal contribution. The strategy of coercion involves forcing people to contribute, i.e. increasing the dis-utility of non-contribution. Olson's view of solidarity as serving the common good would be that the phenomenon results not from affectional or moral motivations on the part of individuals but from rational calculations. From this it follows that collectivities seeking to survive have to organise solidarity among their members actively, for which they can use the instruments of reward and punishment. Hechter's theory on the principles of group solidarity comes very close to Olson's views. This similarity should come as no surprise, since both presume that individuals serve their self-interest and specify the problem of collective action as one of the production of collective goods. Still, they differ in that as a sociologist Hechter acknowledges the existence and significance of moral obligations to contribute to the common good and to act out of solidarity. His central point, however, is that rational individuals will weigh their personal rewards of not fulfilling such obligations against the likelihood and degree of being sanctioned and the chance of losing membership and the corresponding net losses. In fact, Hechter's theory elaborates on the conditions under which Olson's strategy of coercion would be necessary and could be successful.

Rational choice perspectives on co-operation and social bond are not confined to analyses like Olson's and Hechter's regarding ways for existing groups to motivate their members to contribute to their interests. In addition, 'micro-level' theories describe the ways that rational individuals develop social bonds and 'learn' to act in their common interest on a voluntary basis. The work of Axelrod (1984) on the evolution of co-operation is seminal in this respect. Using computer simulations of exchange strategies, Axelrod shows how a simple 'tit for tat' strategy (doing as what is done to you in the last exchange) teaches people that in the long run they benefit more from co-operation as a group than from defection and competition. Co-operation is stronger, as will be the social bond between those involved, in that mutual exchanges are more valuable now and in the future.

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Clearly, the rational choice perspective on social bond revolves around 'shared utility'. Social relations exist and gain a certain stability because individuals need each other and the group. Either by a process of learning, a system of enforcement and control, or a system of selective rewards, rational, self-interested individuals can be motivated to act solidarily.

Furthermore, the rational choice perspective has emphasised the interdependency of social actors. The options of an individual depend on the actions of others, just as his own actions influence the other person's options. Such interdependency may have unintended consequences, particularly in complex social configurations when actors have little information about one another. In such situations interdependency usually exacerbates the problem of producing collective goods. However, interdependency may also be conducive to the development of solidarity. De Swaan's study of the history of collective arrangements of care in Europe and the United States offers an example (1988). In the civilisation process people became increasingly dependent on each other, while the dependency chains between them grew more extended and more ramified. As a consequence people's actions acquired greater influence on others participating in the same dependency networks. The consequence of increased interdependency was that the social needs or deficiencies of some - poverty, illness, lack of education - were experienced as a threat by others. For example, poverty became a threat to social order, epidemics endangered the lives of healthy people, and the low educational level entailed the risk of social exclusion for certain groups and therefore social instability for all. Thus, setting up collective arrangements providing care and education and contributing financially to these arrangements was in the rational self-interest of the 'established' within society. The general accessibility of these collective goods and the concurrent risks of free-riding led, finally, to the ensemble of state-based provisions which oblige every individual to contribute equally to collective solidarity arrangements. In this theory, solidarity appears as the result of the increased interdependency of people and the unintended consequences of their actions for others operating within the same networks.

4 Discussion

Answers to the question of what it is that ties individuals together seem to be based on combinations of two different conceptions of the individual. On the one hand there is the conception of the *homo sociologicus*, in which individuals are seen as essentially social beings, who act in accordance with their affections for others and internalized cultural norms and values. In the conception of *homo sociologicus*, ties with others are taken for granted and contributing to the common good regarded as an inherently legitimate demand from the collectivity, since for the *homo sociologicus*, a basic (though not necessarily complete) overlap exists between the personal and the collective interest. On the other hand, there is the conception of *homo economicus*,

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which sees individuals essentially as non-social beings, who act in accordance with their perceived self-interest and try to maximize personal utility in their relations with others. The *homo economicus* will not engage spontaneously in social ties and contribute to the common good but will do so only if such action is sufficiently profitable, or if (s)he is forced to do so. We recognise this concept, of course, in the rational choice theories, as well as, to a certain extent, in Mauss' *do ut des* basis for social ties, in Durkheim's organic solidarity and in Weber's associative relationship. Earlier we concluded that solidarity might be attributable to two different sources, namely shared identity and shared utility; here, we may link these sources to two corresponding types of motivation to engage in solidary relations: the socio-cultural motivations of the *homo sociologicus* and the self-interested motivations of the *homo economicus*.

Motives for solidarity

The previous sections enable identification of four specifications of what motivates *homo sociologicus* and *homo economicus*. Mayhew, for instance, stresses mainly the role of people's feelings and sentiments, that is, affective and emotional grounds for solidarity. The degree to which people feel attracted to one another and are loyal at the micro level, and the degree to which they perceive a collective identity and we-feeling at the meso and macro level are decisive for the solidarity between them.

The second motive for solidarity, distilled from the theories of Durkheim and Parsons, depends on culturally-based convictions, which imply that the individual feels a moral obligation to serve the collective interest and to accept existing relations of solidarity. Like the affective and emotional motive for solidarity, the strength of this motive may vary. The shared 'conscience collective' may contain fewer or more moral codes for co-operation; institutional role obligations can vary in number and strength; codes and obligations can be strongly or weakly internalised etcetera.

Long term self-interest can be a third motive for solidarity. It is central in the rational choice approach and underlies Durkheim's organic solidarity in a modern differentiated society, where people learn that they benefit from contributing to the collective interest (if not immediately then in the long run). The motive is also the basis for Weber's associative relationship, in which people agree to help one another, either by exchanging goods or services or by co-operating to achieve a common goal.

Fourth, support for solidarity is not necessarily spontaneous, or completely voluntary. According to Parsons, this condition should not be taken for granted, as contributing to the collective interest is an act of solidarity only if it results from institutional role obligations. Purely voluntary contributions do not bind; they are merely manifestations of loyalty and lack true commitment. In Hechter's theory on solidarity, enforcement figures even more explicitly, as it does in Olson's theory of collective action. Free- riding necessitates coercion to and control of contributions to the common good. In the long run, however, enforced solidarity can be stable only if it is legitimised. If enforcement is necessary because the other motives fail, then the

enforcing authority has to be legitimate in itself. For instance, obligations to maintain solidary conduct as imposed on citizens by the state can be perceived as legitimate because the state is seen as a legitimate authority.

So, four different motives for solidarity can be distinguished: 1) mutual affection and identification, 2) moral convictions, 3) perceived self-interest and 4) accepted authority. While the four motives are not mutually exclusive, their respective roles in different situations may vary, depending, for instance, on type of personality, type of social relation and type of collectivity. Solidary relations which are legitimate on the grounds of all four, however, are likely to be the strongest.

The theories about reciprocity and gift exchange give rise to a continuum of motives between those of the *homo sociologicus* and the *homo economicus*, ranging from 'pure' altruism (the free gift), through mutuality and *quid pro quo* (the social gift), to more 'market-like' exchange, where self-interest is the dominant motive. At the same time, however, most anthropologists writing about gift exchange seem to agree on Mauss' statement that, ultimately, *do ut des* is the main factor underlying every gift. Any gift giving, he argues, is at the same time voluntary and obligatory, calculative and moral, even though it may not be experienced as such consciously. After some time, a return gift is given and reciprocity installed. Clearly, the rule of reciprocity combines the motives for solidarity mentioned earlier. The theories about gift exchange differ from the rational choice account, however, in that from a rational-choice perspective gifts are given only if some personal gain is to be expected. Clearly, this view would be too restrictive for most scholars studying gift exchange.

Solidarity, inclusion and exclusion

The concept of solidarity is often connected with a certain community romanticism. Solidarity is seen, then, as something inherently positive, which unites individuals into a group or collectivity and offers them a sense of belonging, identity and protection, as well as a fair share of the group's welfare. Members of the solidary group feel responsible for one another, respect each other and welcome like-minded people or partners in distress. In this view the aspect of inclusion is emphasised. Nevertheless, solidarity always has an aspect of exclusion as well. If solidarity enables collective interests to be served, it concerns the relations among members within the collectivity and not the outside. The confines of the collectivity are also the confines of the solidarity. Such confines can be concrete and pronounced where shared identity and/or shared utility are concrete and explicitly present, as in the case of a religious sect or a national community during wartime. Alternatively, they may be vague where the shared identity is abstract or the relations of shared utility extensive and complex. For instance, where, in these terms, are the borders between Europeans and non-Europeans?

As a general rule, the more inclusive solidarity is, the more pronounced the group's confines will be and the stronger the exclusion of 'the others'. One of the recurring

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results of empirical studies on the relations between 'in-group' and 'out-group' (Sumner, 1904/1960), 'Us' and 'Them' (Baumann, 1990), 'the established' and 'the outsiders' (Elias and Scotson, 1976) is that morality is often confined to members of the in-group. Internally, one has to comply with rules of honesty, acceptance of authority, mutual respect for each other's position, property and rights (or whatever else is regarded as just). In external relations such codes, which essentially guarantee the group's stability and prosperity, are less important. With respect to barbarians, heretics, heathens, savages, foreigners, supporters of the other club, kids from another block etc., different moral standards are applied than those governing relations with 'our own' people.

From an in-group perspective, emphasising the differences with outsiders may serve to strengthen the internal bond. History offers examples of leaders manipulating the image of outsiders to achieve internal cohesion (e.g. Hitler and his conceptions of *Untermenschen* vs *Uebermenschen*). Of course, emphasising the group's (positive) identity strengthens the internal bond too (Americans as 'God's own people' or 'We are the champions' sung by football supporters). From the perspective of the wider collectivity, however, a sub-group's internal cohesiveness may be dysfunctional, because it impedes realisation of the collectivity's interests.

The theories of reciprocity and gift exchange also indicate that exchange relations can exclude. This exclusion is related less to the asymmetrical power in such relations, since, as Gouldner stressed, individuals or groups involved in asymmetrical exchange relationships may remain tied by the norm of reciprocity and included within the bonds of solidarity. The problem arises for those unable to give in the quantity or quality required. As we have seen, not being able to give to a certain extent may have a negative impact on oneself. The rule seems to be that those who do not give do not receive and are therefore expelled from the social bond. The principle of reciprocity then functions as a mechanism of exclusion. Clearly, groups and networks may manipulate membership through the reciprocity mechanism: they can simply demand impossible gifts from individuals they do not want as members.

In short, solidarity and social bond not only include, they also exclude. Therefore, whether strong solidarity is positive and desirable or something negative and detestable is a matter of perspective and aim.

Solidarity and individualisation

The process of individualisation, which is among the most important elements of the overall process of modernisation, has three main aspects (Wilterdink, 1995). First, the relational aspect refers to increasing instability and changeability of social relations. Second, the situational aspect suggests that the range of behavioral options for individuals has increased in nearly all social situations. Third, the normative aspect refers to an increasing stress on the moral significance of individual autonomy. Some sociologists (e.g. Zijderveld 1979) take a rather dim view of the impact of these different aspects of individualisation on social solidarity. Individualisation would

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detach people from close, traditional bonds. As a result collective interests would lose priority, and people would lapse into hedonism, consumerism, egoism and 'calculism'. Frequently, in the socio-political debate on the welfare state, solidarity and individualisation are seen as mutually exclusive and contradictory phenomena: a gain by one would automatically mean a loss for the other. This suggests that solidarity is always at the expense of the individual's interest, and that individualisation threatens solidarity under all circumstances. We will not argue here that the process of individualisation has no consequences for social solidarity whatsoever, but we will present a critique of the views just sketched.

First, binding individuals and groups to collectivities is not just a problem of modern societies. It is a practical problem for groups in any time and place (ask the Romans). In every social system solidarity has to be organised and maintained constantly. In this respect, Durkheim stresses the necessity of establishing rules for co-operation, while Parsons and Hechter show that obligations, enforcement, control and sanctioning are essential instruments for any social system to ensure that its interests are served by its members.

Secondly, solidarity and individualisation need not be contradictory, mutually exclusive concepts and phenomena. In classical sociological studies, individualisation is seen not as a process dismantling solidarity, but as one which gives rise to other types and mechanisms of solidarity. From such a point of view, individualisation is not a threat to solidarity, but a challenge and an opportunity. For instance, in his *Soziologie* (1908) Georg Simmel sketches the double liberation individuals obtain through the increasing division of labour or *Vergesellschaftung*. Structural differentiation releases people from closed, traditional ties and at the same time makes them free to make their own choices and decisions. The division of labour thus leads to the 'birth' of the modern individual and modern individuality. According to Simmel, the new social openness and individual freedom promote 'the general humane' or *das Allgemeiner-Menschliche* as the standard for establishing relations with others. Because traditional ties lose their significance and become blurred, individuals no longer tend to see other people as representatives of a specific group or culture but as separate individuals like themselves. This change enables the establishment of new solidary ties between groups and individuals who are less close in emotional, social and cultural respects. Or, as formulated by Simmel: '...*die Differenzierung und Individualisiering lockert das Band mit dem Nächsten, um dafür ein neues - reales und ideales - zu den Entfernteren zu spinnen*' (p. 713). The new solidarity thus has a wider range and covers a broader collectivity. Since, according to Simmel, span and intensity of solidarity are inversely related, modern solidarity between individualised people will be more abstract and less intense. Simmel regards this condition as a functional necessity rather than as a problem, because intense and strong ties prevent the flexibility and mobility expected from individuals in a modern, complex and changing society.

Clearly, Simmel discerns a broadening of what we would call shared identity in the process of individualisation. Our own identity plus the identity we recognise in others have become less particular, more abstract, more 'generally humane'. In other words, the process of individualisation leads to an individualisation of shared identities, and thus to a broader, albeit a more abstract, base for social solidarity.

The same fundamental process is addressed by Durkheim, where he notes that the division of labour leads traditional, religiously-based moral codes to forfeit their significance. The collective conscience becomes more abstract, but also takes a turn in favour of individual dignity. Durkheim writes: '... *it* [the collective conscience] *more and more comes to consist of very general and very indeterminate ways of thinking and feeling, which leave an open place for a growing multitude of individual differences. There is even a place where it is strengthened and made precise: that is the way in which it regards the individual. As all the other beliefs and all the other practices take on a character less and less religious, the individual becomes the object of a sort of religion. We erect a cult on behalf of personal dignity...*' (Durkheim, 1966/1893: 172). Thus Durkheim also saw, in our terms, an individualisation of shared identities. He did not expect this trend to yield major benefits for social solidarity in a modern society. In this respect he maintained far higher hopes from another effect of the growing division of labour: individuals and groups would realise and experience increasingly that they needed others for realising their life opportunities. This growing appreciation of the idea of interdependence of interests means, in our terms, an increasing degree of shared utility. If society becomes differentiated and complex, the solidarity from shared utility, like that from shared identity, will become more abstract and cover a broader scope. Again, this situation is a functional necessity for modern social life rather than a fundamental problem.

As little theoretical ground exists for fearing that the process of individualisation will fundamentally threaten social solidarity in a modern society, the next question is whether there is empirical support for this hypothesis. Is solidarity really waning? Empirical studies of modern gift giving suggest that such is not the case. They show that gift exchange still figures prominently in our society in terms of the frequency of gift giving, the quantity of exchanged items (material as well as nonmaterial), their financial value and the accompanying feelings (cf. Komter & Schuyt 1993; Komter & Vollebergh 1997). Modern morality and modern life obviously remain permeated by this atmosphere of the gift which helps to create social bond, despite our living in a money economy and despite the importance of market relations in our society. Likewise, empirical studies on solidarity in the macro, socio-economic sphere (specifically regarding welfare state and social security) offer little ground for a pessimistic view of solidarity in our individualised world. Surveys containing questions indicating the degree and direction of support for solidarity have been carried out regularly in the Netherlands (SSSWO 1968, NSS 1976, Van den Berg en Jansen 1985, Van Oorschot 1988, Bernts 1991, SCP 1994, Van Oorschot 1997), as well as in other countries (international comparative studies are e.g. Ferrera 1993, Ploug

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1996, Abrahamson 1997). This research indicates that broad societal support for collective, solidaristic welfare arrangements still exists. Clearly, then, welfare solidarity is not waning among the public at large, and gift exchange remains an important foundation of social ties.

Noot

1.   Weber's point here corresponds with Marx's well known dichotomy of *Klasse an Sich* and *Klasse für Sich*.