

# Solidarity and Human Insecurity: Rethinking Solidarity from the Point of View of Africa

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What is meant by ‘solidarity’? Although the notion seems to lie ‘at the heart of our social relations, the essence of the “living-together” which shapes our communities and which underpins much of our humanitarian action’ (Aucante, 2006: 9), when we try to think about it from an African point of view, we come up against a certain number of difficulties. To account for ‘African solidarity’ as a set of altruistic behaviours and specific values is to fail to take into consideration the social shifts that are currently taking place on that continent, the interchange under way between the cities and the rural regions, as well as the effects of globalization. The difficulties encountered are all the greater in that the ‘African solidarity’ that we are seeking to come to terms with is for the most part presented as being contrary to individualism as it was thought of by de Tocqueville in the nineteenth century.

In reality, Africa appears to be the continent in which the practice of solidarity among family members is the norm, even if individuals are confronted with all manners of risks from a very young age, well before they can act in a way that allows them to take responsibility for themselves. In such circumstances, the lack of civil protection mechanisms ‘guaranteeing basic freedoms and assuring the security of property and person within the framework of a rule of law’ (Castel, 2003: 5), as well as of any system of social security covering individuals in the case of illness or other risks, has the effect of transforming contemporary African societies into places dominated by violence and social insecurity.

But there is a paradox here. The more individuals become aware that their interests are not the same as those of the community, whatever form the latter might take, the more they come to depend on it through a putative ‘foundation pact’ (Konaté, 2010) which, it is supposed, protects them and to which they are required to render obedience. This dependency, it is believed, is associated with the idea of repaying a debt. As a result, one might wonder whether the notion of the human person is not at the heart of all actions of solidarity, for solidarity only exists within situations where one strives to make both the other and oneself more human. In this brief study, we shall show that alongside philosophical reflection, it is first and foremost in literature that tales of solidarity are presented and told. From a comparativist perspective, we shall also make a detour via authors such as Durkheim and Léon Bourgeois who, from the point of view of the history of

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ideas in France, were actively caught up in the bubbling intellectual and scientific ferment of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, an age during which the idea of solidarity became a concept and led to the emergence of a doctrine. Do these authors' viewpoints have anything to say to us today, and do they justify our taking a new look at the question of solidarity as it relates to the choices of a just and human society in an Africa that is in a complete state of change?

### **Solidarity: from the word to the idea**

Literature provides us with good examples of the benefits, or, on the other hand the unfortunate consequences, that arise from expressions of solidarity within a family or social environment, or from an intergenerational perspective as a link between the living and the dead. Indeed it is perhaps particularly around death that a primary manifestation of what might be called solidarity<sup>1</sup> in some African societies may be located. In Mariama Bâ's 1979 novel *Une si longue lettre* [Such a Long Letter] which has become a classic in African literary history, there are minute descriptions of the ways of life of the characters, as well as the successive stages of the ceremonies around the death of the character Modou, husband of the narrator Ramatoulaye. The circumstances of urban living in villas or apartment buildings in Dakar, the setting for the story, bring out a certain form of modernity now evident in Africa, within which there still subsist older conceptions of communal living. Indeed, from the moment Modou's death is announced, firstly there arrive groups of acquaintances and non-acquaintances from many parts to pay their respects at the deceased's home. Then, once the funeral is over, a 'ceremony of the third day' is organized, followed by an 'eighth day' one, and finally one on the fortieth day. The novelist relates how the dead man's wives stay surrounded by relatives, neighbours and people come from afar who show their sympathy through the words they express and who help out with gifts in money and in kind. So is it just a matter of simple compassion?

Everything takes place as if the purpose of these ceremonies was not only to support the deceased's family, but also to show that the society as a whole was united in solidarity. The gift of self seems to be a constituent element of the type of solidarity described by the novelist. One gives of oneself by one's physical presence at the ceremonies. Material items are offered, but gifts are never simply one-way. Rather, giving is undertaken in the clear awareness of anticipating receiving in return, since what is shared is a common destiny characterized by life and death. One makes gifts to the family of the deceased because the element shared in common is that of one's humanity. In becoming one with the dead person and his or her family, one is not merely showing simple compassion, but solidarity in the true sense of the term. The word's etymology shows that the idea of creating cohesion, of forming a whole, is part of the semantic field of the word 'solidarity', whose root relates back to the Latin 'solidus'. This latter word is an adjective whose first meaning is *firm, dense, compact, whole*, but secondly *sound, solid, substantial, genuine, real, durable ...* One might therefore infer that this root points towards a composite object where the whole is held firmly together. In the text we have taken as an example, this object is the society itself, which retains its stability even when a tiny part of it – an individual member – disappears from it. It is perhaps around death – and not around life – that the ties of solidarity are most plainly evident in contemporary African societies.

Is it pure chance that the literary text cited also relates what the novelist refers to as 'the most perplexing moment of that third-day ceremony'? (Bâ, 2005: 20). This was the moment at which 'each group displays how far it has contributed to the costs [...] Today this contribution is expressed openly in the form of banknotes, and no-one wants to be seen giving less than another' (Bâ, 2005: 21). As is certainly well known, the Latin word 'solidus' as a noun referred to a Roman gold coin which

was in circulation from the beginning of the fourth century (under Constantine the Great) until the eleventh century in the Byzantine Empire. This gold coin seems to have enjoyed a dependable stability. This monetary origin for the word ‘solidarity’ is still eloquent today. However, it is not a symbolic sum of the order of a ‘shilling’<sup>2</sup> that is given, but rather an amount reflecting the giver’s level of wealth that is overtly displayed in the intention of giving more than the next person. In this regard one might speak of a distortion of the essence of solidarity (Boni, 2011: 42–45). This aspect did not pass unnoticed by the novelist: ‘A worrying extension of a precious internal impulse, to set its value in francs! And I thought: how many people may not have died if, instead of turning their funerals into expensive gatherings, a relative or friend might have used their money to pay for the prescription that could have kept the deceased alive or for them to go to hospital?’ (Bâ, 2005: 21). The depiction of the solidarity shown around the death of Modou, allied to the novelist’s own thoughts about it, emphasizes how much solidarity is associated with issues of health, education, the realization of a person’s potential and the protection of life, whereas being deprived of such solidarity could represent a serious social deficiency that the person so isolated would be intensely aware of and which could well lead to their symbolic, and even clinical, death. Would the words that they uttered or other attempts at communication still have any meaning? Such people would be in danger of losing an essential part of their humanity, and could well end up dying of loneliness. Solidarity among human beings is therefore associated with being bound to others through an oral or written law. This law is the common measure of what belongs to all and which all commit to respect and to protect. Nevertheless, beyond any law, however positive, it is life itself that is important, the thing that each person should protect. But, from Mariama Bâ’s perspective, it is precisely this that tends to be forgotten.

Because citizens live within the framework of a state, the association of solidarity from a political point of view consists of a weaving<sup>3</sup> of pluralisms rather than a division or parcellization according to identity or belonging. For the underlying principle of solidarity is that of solidity, the *soliditas* of juridical Latin, which referred to a rule in the Byzantine Code of Justinian in the sixth century CE. By this rule, each of the parties to a collective debt was liable for the totality of the sum mutually contracted. In our times, this ‘solidity’ may be termed a ‘confidential obligation’ when one belongs to an association built around a system of informal savings, as is the case with the mutual revolving credit societies currently functioning in Africa. Michel Lelart (1989: 274), who studied such systems in Benin, defined their operation as follows: ‘A simple procedure is followed: a set number of individuals (say, 12) contribute on a fixed date (say, the last day of each month) a fixed amount of money (say, 10,000 CFA francs). 120,000 CFA francs will thus be available for use each month over a period of twelve months. Each of the twelve members will “draw” this amount in turn. Each will thus have effectively loaned his or her own contribution eleven times, and borrowed once the contributions of his or her eleven partners.’ This system is an adaptation of earlier rural practices, those mutual assistance arrangements which allowed poor farmers to take turns working in each other’s fields. It is used by many groups of women in African cities, and outside of Africa by migrant African women. In her novel, *The Matrimonial Parliament*, the Mozambican novelist Paulina Chiziane portrays a group of women who form a ‘parliament’ to bring judgment on their polygamous and unfaithful husbands. Through their mutual assistance and by engaging in a revolving credit union, they acquire their financial autonomy, the first and most important step towards personal fulfilment for each of them.

Thus, depending on the point of view where one is situated, whether in time or space, solidarity may be perceived as a word belonging to the vocabularies of economics, art, justice, ethics, ecology, politics or sociology. And the notion of solidarity can serve as an anchor-point for rethinking how human beings live together, taking into consideration the concepts of social justice together with the protection and development of the individual in societies in the midst of change.

## The paradoxes of solidarity

In reference to the literary example that we quoted, one might speak of a gathering of sources of strength and energy, expressed through words and acts, around the wives of the deceased man, enabling them to grieve appropriately for the lost husband and then to go on peacefully living. But there is a potential impediment to this, in that acts of solidarity, as Mariama Bâ has shown, can also act as limitations on individual freedom, something that other African novelists and essayists have also pointed to. Among the more recent to have examined the issue of social solidarity is Moussa Konaté.

In *L'Afrique noire est-elle maudite* [Is Black Africa Cursed ?] (2010) Konaté reviews a series of gloomy assertions regarding Africa made over the last two decades or more by writers and essayists. This 'Afro-pessimism' he thinks can be traced back to Hegel who, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, relegates the Black African to his natural state, thus distancing him from the social man of enlightened mind. Thus, the African could not have any history and Africa, the hybrid continent where he lives, could therefore be considered ahistorical. It is thus in opposition to what he calls the 'new African' literature composed in European languages and other commentaries<sup>4</sup> that tend to corroborate Hegel's ideas from the 1830s that Moussa Konaté rises up. To provide a positive vision of Africa, he gives prominence to the idea of solidarity as a composite of debt and dependency: but, paradoxical as it may seem, the analysis that he puts forward of this concept shows how far solidarity in Africa can appear to be destructive of individual freedom. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, he gives his approval to the idea of intergenerational solidarity through which the young have an obligation to care for their elders.

Konaté shows that, at the base of African cultures, there exists a 'foundation pact' in which since time immemorial are orally inscribed the rules of behaviour that preserve the harmony of the group, whose primordial form is that of the family. Among these rules, the respect for elders, which is a basic characteristic of African cultures when compared with others, is the foundation upon which the cohesion of the family is built.

The solidarity bond reposes on the idea of good and evil, which is expressed in terms of blessings and curses for each member of the family: 'The fear of the curse arouses anxiety each time one strays from the path laid down since times immemorial. It is a moral barrier which prevents the sinner from attaining the benefits of the chains of life' (Konaté, 2010: 49). But the curse is not directed merely at an individual – who ultimately has no separate existence, since he is subsumed by the group. The effects of the curse do not blight only the person committing a fault, but all the members of his or her family who are joined by a common, intergenerational pact. This notion of solidarity as a common debt no doubt extends further than that of the 'mechanical solidarity' propounded by Durkheim with reference to traditional societies for, in Moussa Konaté's essay, the societies mentioned are at once traditional but also contemporary. The foundation pact is passed on through a process of education that instils submissiveness and a sense of honour and dignity, at the same time as other values inherited from colonialism and learned in the Western schools are circulating. As a result, the persistence of the 'foundation pact' in the community's sphere of imagination leads to the employment of 'hedgehog tactics' (Konaté, 2010: 107) involving an inward withdrawal so as to better resist violence from without.

This way of conceiving solidarity as a form of resistance to external aggression is also 'the heart-stone of the African social model' (Konaté, 2010: 143). But there is a problem with this social model, as it accentuates anxiety, stress and feelings of insecurity among those who are supposed to, materially speaking, take care of the community. In the absence of laws protecting the elementary rights of citizens, family solidarity can become perverted, since it rests on the shoulders of certain members who are thought sufficiently well off to meet the needs and counter the risks facing the

more vulnerable. This perverted form of solidarity is then changed to one of redistribution. The corruption that is so common in contemporary African societies could be seen as a form of redistribution when the character of the debt and dependency which defines the bond of family solidarity becomes purely economic.

Moussa Konaté's way of conceiving solidarity is not lacking in relevance. It emphasizes the omnipresence of insecurity on two levels: as a feeling associated with lack of certainty and control over your life when you think you have only just enough to live on but where you are required to share it all with the community; and as the lack of civil and social protection for the great majority of Africans who depend on family solidarity as though there were no state to recognize the rights and duties of citizens. These aspects of social solidarity have been reflected upon notably by Emile Durkheim and Léon Bourgeois.

### Solidarity and 'solidarism'

It is possible to confuse solidarity with other bonds of religious, social or family origin such as charity, generosity or fraternity. But the social bond of solidarity does not depend on any divine source, and religion seems to be discounted when thinking of the solidarity that is apparent within a secular society. At the close of the nineteenth century, the emerging discipline of sociology took this non-religious view of solidarity, even though the fact of reciprocal dependency among all living peoples was universally observable. In this regard, Marie-Claude Blais, introducing a new edition of the works of Léon Bourgeois in 2008, pointed to Bourgeois's observation that: 'This universal law, recognized as present since the earliest times, for example among the Stoics, is today attested by the immense advances made by the biological sciences' (Bourgeois, 2008: 23). Or as Alain Supiot (2004: 1) affirmed: 'Whatever may have been its importance in the work of the founders of sociology, the idea that every person is intimately involved in a network of relationships which both restrain him and sustain him, that exercise control over him and also uphold him, does not date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is in no way the sole prerogative of the social sciences.' Solidarity could be an idea as old as the world itself and its forms encountered in African societies could well be very much like those met elsewhere. It was such a work of conceptual clarification that Durkheim and Léon Bourgeois appear to have undertaken.

In truth, from the history of ideas point of view, the end of the nineteenth century in Europe was a time of a remarkable ferment of ideas. New ways of thinking had appeared over the course of the previous centuries. In philosophy the notion of the social contract had come out of the thought of Hobbes and Rousseau. The idea of modernity was underway since there was a real hope that man could become 'master and possessor of nature', as Descartes expressed it. Science and technology were opening up new horizons in physics, biology and medicine. It was in such a climate of great social and intellectual upheaval in the Western world that questions were being asked about social progress and the place of man within society, a time when liberalism was on the move. Thinking was developing both on the notions of work and the means of production but also on property. Durkheim took an active part in this thinking through the publication of his treatise *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), in which social solidarity finds a fundamental place. In this work, the problem posed from the outset is that of the division of labour which, says Durkheim (1984: 2) 'is not peculiar to economic life', and whose theory Adam Smith had been the first to elaborate. But the generalization of the consideration of the division of labour across multiple domains, including that of philosophy itself, meant that it no longer was 'a single science' since 'it has become fragmented into a host of special disciplines, each having its purpose, method and ethos.' (ibid.). The division of labour is a law that 'applies to organisms as well as to societies' (Durkheim, 1984: 3).

What social need does it meet? What is its role or function? The basis of solidarity, that on which it rests, is the need for complementarity, it is reciprocal attraction, the nearness that comes from difference. One of the examples Durkheim gives is eloquent in this regard: the mutual attraction between men and women who ‘passionately seek each other’, not so much because they are dissimilar parts of a concrete whole, but in the final analysis because there exists a set of lawful rules, designated by the term marriage, which serves simply to ‘symbolize the state of conjugal solidarity’ whose strength or weakness depends on the rigour and the complexity of these laws. Thus Durkheim goes beyond the economic dimension of the division of labour in the extent to which the economic services that this division can render are minor in comparison with the moral effect that it produces, and its true function is to create between two or more persons a sense of their solidarity with each other (Durkheim, 1984: 21). In passing comment on his research method that he intended to be scientific and rigorous, he declared: ‘The procedures we have employed will be assessed to impart the greatest possible rigour to our proofs’ (Durkheim, 1984: xxix).

Solidarity cannot be conceived of outside of the systems of rules and laws currently applying in the societies we are dealing with. Thus, one might refer to as a ‘mechanical solidarity’ the form which applies in traditional segmented societies characterized by groups of similar individuals. This form of solidarity is associated with rules of law that are repressive, with penal codes which are, in their origin, religious in nature. In such societies punishments and sanctions are meted out for errors and crimes committed. Organic solidarity, on the other hand, is that form found in modern societies where the laws are more complex and diversified and where the juridical functions tend to be more specialized. However, the Durkheimian classification of social solidarity, which is now regarded as the classic one, cannot be envisaged except in accord with the strongly expressed ideal couched in the following terms at the end of Durkheim’s great work: ‘the only power that can serve to moderate individual egotism is that of the group; the only one that can serve to moderate the egotism of groups is that of another group that embraces them all’ (Durkheim, 1984: 336–337). In this ‘science of morality’ proposed by Durkheim, regulation and intervention are admitted at whatever level one is situated. It is worth considering whether, more than a century after these principles were formulated, such moderating power does not now transcend the level of the state, to be now located on the international or global level. For ‘bringing aid’ to the other happens equally on other levels beyond those governed by the rules of states and the intervention of social groups.

But how can one at once be autonomous as an individual and also depend so closely on one’s society? ‘How does it come about that the individual, whilst becoming more autonomous, depends ever more closely on society?’ Durkheim asked (1984: xxx). For Durkheim it was undeniable that these contradictory tendencies were nevertheless pursued in parallel. Such questions seem still pertinent to us today, whatever the society that we personally belong to. It was also these questions, but taking a different point of view that was doubtless more political, that three years after Durkheim, Léon Bourgeois tried to answer through proposing a reformist doctrine he called ‘solidarism’.

What is interesting here, from Léon Bourgeois’s work entitled *Solidarité* (1896),<sup>5</sup> are the notions of dependency and debt, which are indissociable from the notion of solidarity. Dependency and debt are two words found in the vocabulary of globalization which characterize the relations between the developed and developing worlds. These words, as we have shown, also relate to the rights and duties of persons who have difficulty in retaining their personal autonomy within the framework of the family group. But what do they mean for Léon Bourgeois? How does he address the relation between the individual and the society? And what types of relationships does he perceive between individuals? Does it come down to an incessant struggle of one against the other, as Darwin’s theory of the evolution of species would have it? While in agreement with the idea of the necessary bond of solidarity between individuals advanced by many of his contemporaries, he

was to lay out the causes, limitations and conditions for this social bond. From the very first pages of his book one can see emerging the confidence of the researcher who grounds himself solidly in the history of science to buttress his points of view, closely linking moral truth to scientific truth: in Bourgeois's words, 'it is through a close accord between the scientific method and the idea of morality that political and social renewal may be accomplished' (Bourgeois, 2008: 70).

The advances of science have seen human beings included within the realm of living creatures, and like other creatures, man is also subject to relationships of reciprocal dependence which tie him to things and to living entities transcending both space and time, in, as Bourgeois says, 'a terrestrial and cosmic milieu' (2008: 64). This universal dependency, when applied to man, is also intergenerational: 'This linkage does not bring together only those parties coexisting at a particular moment. It also joins together what is today and what was yesterday, everything in the present and everything in the past, as it will associate all of the present with all of the future' (Bourgeois, 2008: 64). We can thus say that, in Léon Bourgeois's view, humanity lives in a world where everything is inter-related within a long uninterrupted chain. We receive life and its riches as an inheritance from the past, and we have the duty to pass these on to those who will come after us. In this idea may be found a forerunner of the idea of the lasting heritage as is advanced today in the field of ecological politics. Because we are all interdependent, we also have debts to meet towards each other. But Léon Bourgeois went further than just the idea of the interdependence of nature. Taking the point of view of justice, he turned towards the idea of a consciously and freely accepted solidarity that is tantamount to a duty: in a just society we are all debtors in the same way as we are all shareholders in it. The idea of a 'quasi-contract' referred to by Bourgeois in the final part of his book illustrates the stakes of the debate: man can enjoy his 'personal' freedom only to the extent that he participates in 'the advantages offered by the social milieu' (Bourgeois, 2008: 100). Here we see the first glimmerings of the idea of social security, which is one of the forms in which social solidarity is realized in certain societies.

While speaking principally of social solidarity, the model for which is universally observable in nature in the interdependence of living creatures, but whose particular characteristic is to be founded on the notions of rights and duties, Léon Bourgeois gave emphasis in passing to his research method that highlighted another form of solidarity, that of ideas and knowledge. Philosophy is no longer a single science but an integrated set of specialities, as his contemporary Emile Durkheim conceded. However, this does not simply mean pluridisciplinarity or interdisciplinarity, as might be thought, but rather a state of uninterrupted 'intellectual heritage', being something fully assumed by each and by all. The scientist, the philosopher, the artist and the writer are not isolated individuals, as no individual is isolated. Everything occurs as if each person had their own particular part to play within the overarching framework of a community, both making her or his personal contribution and drawing on that of others.

Bourgeois's book, *Solidarité*, was republished a number of times. It carried in addition the texts of various other speeches on the same topic and was subjected to critical analysis during the lifetime of the author, a leading figure of the French radical left during the late nineteenth century, who later was a representative to the League of Nations and who received the Nobel Peace Prize for 1920. His training as a jurist and his career as a politician and diplomat led him to reach a conception of solidarity that was more open to the immediate concerns of his contemporaries. It is therefore entirely appropriate that this book should still be relevant to us, more than a century after its initial appearance, whatever form of society we might belong to. That said, the way European societies appear today, where democracy is being sorely tested with the rise of unemployment and poverty, difficulties around migration, inequality and exclusion, points clearly to the fact that the state of 'solidarism' as conceived by Léon Bourgeois has not been realized in that part of the world. But has it been any more so further to the south, in Africa, a continent which has quite a

different history arising from its subjection to various forms of violence such as the traffic in slaves and colonization? Yet these historical forms of violence do not explain the present-day tensions of individuals confronted most of the time by a juridical vacuum or the lack of application of laws relating to their civil and social rights.

## **At the crossroads of cultures and values**

From the popular conception to critical analysis of the idea of solidarity, several varieties of social relationships present themselves, depending on the types of people involved, the ways in which actions are carried out and the moment when interventions inspired by a sense of solidarity take place. Solidarity means in the first instance community practices by which individuals are taken care of and protected by their family or by other groups formed by association. However, postcolonial African societies are today living at the crossroads of different cultures and value systems. We are witnessing societies in the midst of change. But however hybrid the nature of these societies might be, forms of social solidarity, whether distorted or not, persist within them in the form of two-way relationships binding individuals together. Such relationships are both imagined and experienced as involving dependency and obligation. Dependency in at least two senses of the term: first of all as tacit acceptance of the values, paradigms and laws currently prevailing in the community; then secondly as a lack of freedom on the part of the individual striving to find ways and means to realize his or her own ambitions. In the majority of today's African societies, the less the state fulfils its proper role, the more family and intergenerational solidarity is reinforced, giving rise to all sorts of tangential manifestations in a period of globalization, where cultural practices are evolving along with the sciences, skills and technologies, the way time and space are thought of, and how good and evil are conceived.

Under these conditions, it is the freedom of the individual which is brought into question, at the same time as the protection of citizens and the assessment of risks around life, work, education, health and the environment. Broadly speaking, it is the entire social role that should be played by the state that comes into question. How can one be an individual when one is brought up with the idea that one owes everything to a community, to a family for example, and that as a consequence, out of duty, one has a moral obligation to discharge towards it? These days, this moral obligation easily becomes an economic obligation, a material responsibility for a community left to its own devices, without external assistance, without any certainty of being able to survive by itself, unprotected by state laws. Indeed, if laws protecting the rights and duties of citizens did exist, they might ward off the feelings of insecurity that are prevalent at the level of family-based communities and other types of association for the very large number of people who are living in precarious states; but they would also provide some measure of protection for those who are obliged to take care of others since they are thought to have the means to do so through their apparently enviable social situation. They are under the obligation to put the concern for others ahead of the concern for themselves. If they do not, they risk being treated as being individualists. But individualists, as de Tocqueville observed, reflects a spirit of withdrawal from civic and political activity in favour of family and friends: 'a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of his family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself' (de Tocqueville, 1966: 477). In the African societies in change today, it is something quite different, something that we might call self-concern but which does not exclude the concern for others. One might thus think that there could be a way of balancing these two types of concern so as to preserve the bond of solidarity as a fundamental human bond which goes beyond any economic, political or social aspect. The only thing is that, in a period of globalization, the problems associated with migration



and the reception of strangers throughout the world show that solidarity as an essential human bond is a generous idea which nevertheless is far from being realized in those places where it already should have been.

This human bond is observable in different situations. One of these is that mentioned by Léon Bourgeois when he spoke of intellectual inheritance. This inheritance can become apparent as a manifestation of intense intellectual activity around a movement of ideas. One example of such a movement is that of negritude. In the book she published on Léopold Sédar Senghor in 1990, Janet G. Vaillant shows how, in Paris around Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas, were grouped friends, some women, notably Paulette Nardal and her two sisters, and certain American visitors. Hence Senghor was in contact with the Parisian Caribbean community. He also became interested in the ideas of Alain Locke, particularly that of the ‘New Negro’ – ‘with pride in himself and his heritage, determined to create his own culture [which] appealed immediately to Senghor’ (Vaillant, 1990: 94). People from the French-speaking world could meet and debate with the Americans, and study one another’s texts. Jazz also established a link between Africa and America, along with a few sporadic journals and publications. Such contacts enabled the notion of heritage to be understood as the passing down and diffusion of ideas, but also as a manifestation of ‘solidarity’. Everything was happening in that era as though there existed a single ‘Black World’, as the periodical *La Revue du monde noir* (1931–32) thought, an idea picked up again in 1947 in the early numbers of the journal *Présence Africaine*, which brought out a double issue in 1950 directed by Théodore Monod devoted to ‘Le Monde Noir’.

This also allows the understanding of why the idea of negritude (that of Senghor in particular) insisted as much on the notion of intellectual heritage as on that of the interdependence of all persons. The intellectual heritage refers to the cultural contributions of a broad variety of peoples made since the time of the most ancient civilizations, which Senghor in his essays does not cease to recall. In this sense, ‘what the black man brings’ is the life-rhythms as well as the conception of a man who is whole and entire, combining both reason and emotion, who finds his place in the chain of life. In Senghor’s words: ‘The service rendered by the black man will have been to contribute, along with other peoples, to restoring the unity of Man with the World: to join flesh to spirit, man to his neighbour, the pebble to God. In other words, the real to the super-real – through mankind not being the centre but the hinge, the navel of the world’ (Senghor, 1964: 38). The paradigm at the heart of Senghor’s thought – distinguished from that of Bourgeois by the essentialism that pervades his essays – is that of liaison, of encounter, of exchange, of ‘giving and receiving’ as he himself said. It was primarily in this manner that Senghorian humanism was constructed, through solidarity in the field of thought. He has in common with the ‘solidarism’ of Léon Bourgeois not only the idea of the interdependence of persons but also that of the ‘intellectual community’, a term used today to characterize the division of labour in the domain of the professionalization of thought and intellectual expertise.

## Conclusion

In the preceding text we have not studied one other aspect of solidarity which is perhaps the most well-known and publicized form: the solidarity shown towards people in need on the international scale which, today, seems governed by other principles, those of humanitarianism. From our observation, in Africa the most current use of the word ‘solidarity’ is applied by developmental experts, humanitarians, state institutions or non-governmental organizations who take part each year in very high profile campaigns to bring attention to human need. In 2005 the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the 20 December each year to be ‘International Human Solidarity Day’ so as to underline the importance of human solidarity in the context of development and the

struggle against poverty. But how is human solidarity expressed at the international level? It comes to the fore in situations of crisis such as wars, natural or climatic disasters, when normal systems of order break down and chaos reigns. The primary need in such cases is to save lives and assist ongoing survival. But who does the assisting and who are the assisted? What types of bonds are established between these two parties? These questions point up the complexity of situations of humanitarian intervention, which can become the theatre of political or economic contests. Yet the predominant idea governing actions of solidarity is ethical in nature, whose essential locus is the bond of shared humanity, even though in emergency situations the aid provided to the other may be material or of some other nature. For is not bringing succour to the other the manifestation *par excellence* of the right and proper action that one should accomplish as though one were responding to a categorical imperative, an inescapable moral law?

## Notes

1. In all languages, notions of ‘help-bringing’, mutual assistance or solidarity may be found. As an Ivoirian proverb has it: ‘only a hand can wash its fellow hand’, because they both belong to the same living body.
2. In the former Imperial currency of the United Kingdom and many of her former colonies, the denominations of ‘pounds, shillings and pence’ were designated by the symbols *Lsd* where the ‘s’ was derived from the Latin ‘solidi’.
3. We are thinking here of the paradigm of weaving in Plato’s dialogue *The Statesman*.
4. Such as the speech of French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Dakar (July 2007) or the book entitled *Négrologie. Pourquoi l’Afrique Meurt* [Negrology: Why Africa is in a State of Decay] by Stephen Smith (2003).
5. We are drawing here from the new edition of 2008, with an introduction by Marie-Claude Blais.

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