

Article

The Irony of 'African Solidarity' in Ousmane Sembene's *Mandabi*

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Abstract: This paper deals with the misuse of the African traditional communal mode of living in modernizing post-colonial African societies that have been transformed by Western capitalism and individualism. In the impoverished community portrayed in Ousmane Sembene's film *Mandabi*, this traditional communal mode of living, to which people refer in colloquial term as "African solidarity", is ironically used as a means to meet one's individualistic and selfish needs at the expense of others; thus, turning it into a factor of social and economic regression. *Mandabi* also unveils and suggests a new form of hybrid and productive solidarity that fits better African post-colonial nations that have been affected by Western capitalism and individualism.

Keywords: African film; solidarity; individualism

Introduction

In his paper entitled "Ousmane Sembene: la Théorie Marxiste et le Roman", Enagnon makes the point that the work of Ousmane Sembene, who was trained as a filmmaker in the communist Soviet Union and had embraced Marxist ideology; should be viewed under the lenses of "class struggle": struggle between colonizers and colonized,¹ the new African bourgeoisie and the "masses",² and tradition and modernity,³ just to name a few (Enagnon 1979, p. 120). This paper offers a new perspective on Sembene's work as a filmmaker influenced by Marxist ideology; as it deals with the harmful impact of capitalism and its corollary, individualism, on the Senegalese traditional communal mode of living.⁴ In *Mandabi*, the traditional value of "African solidarity" is perverted by the influence of capitalism; as it is ironically used as a means to meet one's individualistic needs, and even as a trick to dispossess and exploit others. This misuse of "African solidarity" turns it into a factor of social and economic regression in the post-colonial nation. The film does not, however, seem to advocate a return to "African solidarity"; it suggests a new type of productive solidarity that adapts values of the past (solidarity) to the realities of the post-colonial State (individualism).

Mandabi

Mandabi is a scathing social satire that deals with the plight of a Senegalese man who finds himself entangled in post-colonial bureaucracy, in his attempt to cash a money order he received from France. Ibrahim Dieng, the protagonist, is an impoverished, unemployed man, husband of two

¹ *Camp de Thiaroye, Emitai and La Noire de.*

² *Borot Sarret, Mandabi, and Xala.*

³ *Molaade and Faat Kiné.*

⁴ By "tradition", I mean the "cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions" (Merriam-Webster.com) (Merriam-Webster 2011). I consider "African solidarity" as a traditional value in the post-colonial society since it emanates from pre-colonial cultures as I explain further in the text.

wives, and father of seven children. He lives in what appears to be the poorest and most traditional district of Dakar. It is in this state of widespread poverty that he receives *un mandat* (a money order) in the amount of 25,000 Francs CFA,⁵ sent by his nephew, who lives in France as temporary immigrant worker and student.

The letter accompanying the money order, “read” to the audience, provides specific directives about how to use the money. While a penman attempts to read the letter to Ibrahim at the post office, the camera presents a sequence of the film set in France. The nephew is shown working (cleaning the streets), while he narrates the content of the letter through a voice over. From the 25,000 Francs that were sent, Ibrahim is asked to give 3000 Francs to his sister (the sender’s mother), keep 2000 Francs for himself as a gift, and save the remaining 20,000 Francs for his nephew’s return from France. When Ibrahim goes to the post office to cash the money order, he is asked to provide proper identification in the form of a *carte d’identité nationale*. Ibrahim Dieng, who has not quite adapted to the new post-colonial state, has no identification card and can therefore not cash the money order. He goes to the police station in order to apply for a “carte nationale d’identité”. There, he is asked to provide a birth certificate and a 500-Franc stamp, neither of which he has. At the city hall, a civil servant also declines to provide Ibrahim with the birth certificate needed to apply for the *carte d’identité nationale*, because the latter does not know the specific date of his birth.

While Ibrahim struggles with the bureaucracy in his attempts to secure the proper documents needed to cash the 25,000 Francs, news of the money order spread quickly throughout his neighborhood. Friends and passersby who learn about the money rush to Ibrahim’s house to ask for money and food. He also gets in debt as he borrows money from the neighborhood shopkeeper to pay for expenses related to the *carte d’identité nationale*. In the end, a well-educated man, who had offered to help Ibrahim cash the money order on his behalf through the means of power of attorney, steals the 25,000 Francs. Ibrahim thus ends up in debt and poorer than he was before having received the money order. In addition to his state of further impoverishment, he becomes socially marginalized and scorned by his friends and other members of his community, who accuse him of having made up the robbery story in order not to share the money they believe he obtained. *Mandabi* shows that “African solidarity” is ironically used as a means to exploit others meet ones’ own and sometimes selfish needs.⁶

African Solidarity

After reviewing the work of Africanists who have written extensively on the topic (Gbadegesin 1998, pp. 292–305; Gyekye 1998, pp. 215–37; Mbiti 1970, pp. 22–45; Menkiti 1984, pp. 171–80), Samuel Zadi defines “African solidarity” as the communal mode of living that characterized traditional African societies (Zadi 2010, p. 173). This communal mode of living was characterized by: the prevalence granted to the community over the individual; the duty to assist members of the community who are in need; the validation of the individual mainly as a contributor to the community’s welfare; and the necessary reciprocity of assistance (Zadi 2010, pp. 173–76). Zadi notes that the poets of the Negritude movement, who advocated a return to traditional African cultures, also considered “African solidarity” an important feature and value of traditional African societies. In *Liberté I: Négritude et Humanisme* (1964), Léopold Sédar Senghor argued that Africans lived a better type of socialism (African solidarity) before they were colonized by Europe, and did not need to look at the West for models of socialism to import. He rather called on new African States to preserve their traditional solidarity, and enrich Western socialism with the spiritual dimension it lacks: “La société Négro-africaine est de type collectiviste, communal pour être plus précis, puisqu’il s’agit plutôt d’une

⁵ 1 US dollar equals 556 francs CFA as of 26 September 2017.

⁶ The type of irony that emerges from the misuse of “African solidarity” is the “situational irony”. There is “situational irony” when “actions have an effect that is opposite from what was intended, so that the outcome is contrary to what was expected” (dictionary.com). In *Mandabi*, characters pretend to be implementing solidarity; but actually, use others or exploit them to meet their own selfish needs.

communion d'âmes que d'un agrégat d'individus [...]. Nous avons déjà réalisé le socialisme bien avant l'arrivée des Européens. [...] Notre devoir est de le renouveler en l'aidant à retrouver sa dimension spirituelle" (Zadi 2010, p. 175).

Following Marxist theory, which suggests that "the infrastructure determines the superstructure" (Habib 2005, pp. 12–20), Segun Gbadegesin explains that solidarity emerged as a cardinal value in traditional African societies because the non-industrial agrarian mode of production favored mutual assistance, which in turn fostered closer communal relationships: "The structure of traditional African society is communal. This means that the organization of social-economic life is based on common ownership of land, which is the major means of production in a non-industrial substance economy" (Gbadegesin 1998, p. 295). This theory suggests that a change in the infrastructure would also affect the superstructure. In other words, the transformation and modernization of African societies, from non-industrial agrarian to post-colonial capitalistic societies, would make the enforcement of traditional mode of living such as African solidarity problematic.

Mandabi: A Modernizing Society

The Senegalese society portrayed in *Mandabi* is a modernizing one, meaning a society that is in transition between tradition (African cultures) and modernity (European lifestyle).⁷ Modernity can be observed in the city of Dakar portrayed in the film through the European lifestyle of the new elite. Westernized characters who work in the new administration wear Western-style clothing: suits for men and dresses or skirts for women. On the other hand, people from Ibrahim's neighborhood dress traditionally. Men wear the traditional *boubou* and women wear either the *boubou* an African-style loincloth outfit.

The impact of the European lifestyle can also be observed in the way women relate to men in the film. While women in Ibrahim's traditional community tend to dress more conservatively and to show deference toward men,⁸ Westernized or modernized women behave in a more liberated fashion. In the scene where Ibrahim goes to ask for his money to the man who had offered to help him cash the money order via power of attorney, the camera makes a close-up on the man's wife and her interaction with Ibrahim. Contrary to Ibrahim's wives or other women in his community, this modern woman wears a short dress revealing her legs, which makes Ibrahim uncomfortable. To make things worse, she puts her foot on the coffee table as she puts nail polish on her fingernails. Disturbed by this situation, the traditional and conservative Ibrahim takes out his prayer beads to purify his soul or thoughts.

Lastly, modernity is presented in the city of Dakar through the high-rise buildings, paved streets, and European (mainly French) cars. It can also be observed through the French-inspired administration: the post office where Ibrahim attempts to cash his money order; the police station where he needs to apply for his *carte nationale d'identité*; the city hall where he applies for the birth certificate needed to make an identity card; and the Francs CFA currency, symbolic of the French socioeconomic order in the country.

This modernizing society is based on individual ownership and labor in order to meet individual needs. Examples of individual enterprises can be observed through small businesses such as the small open-air barbershop where Ibrahim has his hair cut, roadside merchants, the shop where Ibrahim takes the picture for his identity card, the local shop where everyone buys food. On a larger scale, the bank where Ibrahim goes can be viewed as the epitome of Western capitalism and the individualistic mode of life it carries.

⁷ "Modern" means here "contemporary" and influenced by Western culture, as opposed to "traditional" or deriving from pre-colonial customs and values.

⁸ Ibrahim's wives submit to his authority. His wife Maty brings him his food in his bedroom and attends to him as he eats.

Solidarity Still Valued in this Post-Colonial Society

Although Western capitalism and individualism have become predominant *de facto* values in this post-colonial society, people still profess African solidarity as a cardinal value and symbol, and want it enforced just as in traditional societies. A key feature of traditional African solidarity, which is enforced in *Mandabi*, is the sense of common ownership of goods, along with its corollary, the duty to assist members of the community who are in need, whether known or unknown by the subjects of the requests. Ibrahim, who appears to be one of the few fortunate characters thanks to the money order he received from France, is the subject of multiple requests from his community.

The first instance of solidarity Ibrahim practices toward members of his community can be observed in the exchange he has with one of his wives after having eaten a copious meal. While resting on his bed, Maty informs him of requests for food made by a beggar:

Maty: There is a beggar outside.

Ibrahim: Is he young or old?

Maty: Old.

Ibrahim: Give him the leftovers.

In this instance, solidarity (or sharing) appears to be normal and accepted. Neither Ibrahim nor Maty seem surprised by or question the fact that someone they do not know knocked at their door to ask for food.

In another instance, a lady Ibrahim does not know accosts him to request twenty Francs in order to pay for her bus fare. Ibrahim, who just received 500 Francs from a nephew, gladly gives her the money she requests. Furthermore, he has an upsurge of further compassion and solidarity and feels guilty of not even having asked the lady's name.

The sense of common ownership of goods is also expressed through other multiple requests for food and money. While Ibrahim is out (to resolve bureaucratic difficulties he faces), people who heard about his money order rush to his house to ask for food and money. Some of them brought along *griots* to play music and sing in order to make Ibrahim more sensitive to the practice of solidarity.⁹ In another scene, Ibrahim's close friend Iman, who has heard about the money order, requests 3000 Francs. While Iman is waiting for his request to be met, Ibrahim's other friend Maïssa also comes to ask for 5000 Francs. Yet, Ibrahim should personally obtain only 3000 Francs from the money order.

Aside from material possessions such as money or food, traditional solidarity is expressed through partaking in others' fortunes without being or needing to be invited. After having been helped by someone he called a nephew,¹⁰ Ibrahim decides to bless the latter to express his gratitude. He holds his nephew's two hands, turns their palms upward, and recites Koranic verses of blessings in them. Passersby who see Ibrahim bless his nephew quickly join their hands to those of the nephew and receive the blessings intended for the nephew. Neither Ibrahim nor his nephew questions these uninvited participants; they let them partake in the blessings.

The different scenes—the food beggar, the lady who asked for her bus fare, people who go to Ibrahim's house to ask for food and money, those who participate in the nephew's blessings—are evidence that solidarity (the common ownership of goods) is still considered a cardinal value in this post-colonial society. People feel free to ask for assistance to others they do not know personally because they all belong to the same community, of which solidarity is still considered to be a defining

⁹ In one scene, a man who will later steal Ibrahim's money stops his car by Ibrahim's house. Hearing music and singing coming from Ibrahim's house, he asks his wife if they are organizing a party. Ibrahim's wife replies that those people have gathered at their house with music and singing to pressure her husband to exercise solidarity: "You know how it is in this country. When they hear 'money,' everyone shows up".

¹⁰ This nephew gave Ibrahim 500 Francs to purchase the stamp needed for the *carte nationale d'identité*, a check for 1000 Francs, and asked one of his friends who works at the City Hall to help Ibrahim obtain a birth certificate.

value. However, those same characters, who seem to value solidarity in the form of common ownership of goods, also resist it, as they each attempt to live secret individualistic lifestyles.

The Conflict between Solidarity and Individualism

As explained above, Ibrahim believes in and performs African solidarity when he can. Yet, he wants the news of his money order to be kept secret from members of his community so that he does not have to share it with everyone. When Ibrahim's wives inform him on his way to the mosque that he has received a money order, he interrupts and prevents them from talking about it in a public place: "Let's not talk about money on the street." He returns home with them to further inquire about the money order. After having been properly informed, he tries to make sure that news is kept secret from the community: "I hope the neighbors do not know about this."

The size of Ibrahim's meal along with the part of his house where he eats it can also be viewed as an example of resistance to the practice of solidarity. When Ibrahim's wives learn that their husband has received a money order, they prepare a very good meal with ingredients purchased on credit from the neighborhood store. The scene includes a close-up shot of Ibrahim eating a copious meal in his bedroom—the most private area of his house. Sarah Lincoln suggests that Ibrahim's large meal, made with ingredients purchased on credit, along with his ability "to consume everything that is put in front of him", are metaphors for the irresponsible use and waste of loans African nations receive from abroad (Lincoln 2010, p. 344). I propose a new reading of the large size of Ibrahim's meal. It (the large size of Ibrahim's meal) is symbolic of the traditional Senegalese solidarity. Meals are large because they are usually made for several people and never for one. They are intended to be shared with others (friends or anyone passing by), according to the Senegalese hospitality notion of *Teranga*, also found in many African cultures. Meals are also taken outside so as to allow others to partake in them, and eating alone and inside is conversely considered as an act of selfishness.

Ibrahim is in fact not the only one to hide his goods from the community. Most people act as he does, as suggested by a comment made by Maty, Ibrahim's wife, as she encourages her co-spouse to lie to people asking for rice that they no longer have any left to share: "Many are those who take in their bags of rice during nighttime. And why? Because they do not want to share." People in this community that seems to hold solidarity as cornerstone value hide their goods because they do not want to be compelled and pressured to share them to the point of being completely dispossessed.

Solidarity and Unreasonable Pressures

The solidarity practiced in *Mandabi* in fact compels those who have or seem to have something to share with other members of the community, even beyond what they can realistically or actually afford to give. Responses to such pressures vary depending on whether they come from people that Ibrahim knows or not. Ibrahim can ignore unreasonable requests from people he does not know personally without being labeled as individualistic and suffering any retaliation.¹¹ On the other hand, requests from the immediate community (people Ibrahim knows personally) are difficult to ignore. The reason is that the immediate community punishes by marginalization those who refuse to share what they have, who are labeled as individualistic. Even though the requests of 3000 and 5000 Francs his friends Iman and Maïssa made were unreasonable and impossible to meet, Ibrahim does not deny them, just as he had previously done with a beggar standing by the entrance of the bank. Ibrahim asks his friend to be patient until he cashes the money order, knowing that he cannot fulfill his promise. To his friend Iman, who asks for 5000 Francs, he explains: "I have not cashed the money

¹¹ When Ibrahim leaves the post office after having unsuccessfully attempted to cash the money order, a man standing by the entrance and whom he does not know asks him for money. Irritated for being asked part of the money that he was having so much difficulty cashing, Ibrahim, who had been previously generous with a person he did not know (the lady who asked for a 20-Franc bus fare), sent this beggar away with a harsh gesture of irritation. He suffered no consequence from his (reasonable) refusal to meet demands for which he did not have the means.

order yet. God is my witness.” When Iman insists, suggesting that Ibrahim is trying to mislead him, the latter grabs his hand and begs once more for understanding: “I couldn’t cash the money order. Maybe tomorrow.” Ibrahim even goes as far as to promise what he cannot realistically give: “Allah willing, you can count on me”; or “God willing, we’ll be fine after I cash the money order.” The pronoun “we” suggests Ibrahim’s understanding that the money belongs to the community, and not just to him.

Ibrahim does not deny those unreasonable requests, and promises what he cannot give, because he is afraid of being labeled as individualistic. The community can ostracize those it perceives as individualistic. His friend Iman who had asked for 5000 Francs threatens him twice with this possibility of ostracization, in case he refuses to meet his unreasonable request: “A man is nothing without his fellow man.” He later adds: “One should not lose everything.” For a society that values community and in which the fulfillment of the individual comes from their sense of belonging,¹² being ostracized would equate a certain form of social death.

Solidarity Used as a Trick to Dispossess Others

The misuse of traditional solidarity does not just consist in pressuring others in order to make them share beyond what they have or are perceived to have. Solidarity is also used as a trick to appeal to people’s sense of community or fellowship in order to make them vulnerable to dispossession. The first instance of this ironic misuse of solidarity to meet selfish needs can be seen in the scene where Ibrahim is at the bank in order to cash the 1000-Franc check his nephew had given to help him resolve his administrative difficulties. A man standing at the entrance of the bank who seems to understand the inner workings of the new administration extends solidarity as he offers to help Ibrahim cash the check. Without power of attorney, he cashes the check thanks to the help of someone he calls a “friend” and who works at the bank. However, after having cashed the check, he asks Ibrahim to give him 300 from the 1000 Francs cashed in order to “thank” him for his service. He also asks for an additional 100 Francs for the “friend” who works at the bank and who allegedly made the transaction possible. In all, he dispossesses Ibrahim of 400 Francs; that is, 40% of his check using solidarity as the basis for his actions.

Ibrahim’s neighborhood shop owner is a businessman who has adopted the most exploitative and deceiving tricks of capitalism to take advantage of others. Like a misleading advertiser who lures people into buying, he misuses solidarity as a marketing trick to dispose Ibrahim of his money order. As mentioned earlier, Ibrahim’s wives bought food on credit from the neighborhood shop after having received the money order. In order to lure Ibrahim into buying more from his store, M’Barka (the shop owner) tells him: “You are not a customer in my shop; you are a brother.” He then encourages Ibrahim to take as much food on credit as he can. Yet, he refuses to lend to other community members whom he deems insolvent.¹³ By telling Ibrahim that he is a “brother” and not a customer in his store, the shop owner attempts to destroy the clearly mercantile and capitalistic relationship that he actually has with Ibrahim in order to create a false sense of traditional brotherhood and solidarity that would make him lower his guard and succumb to his greed. Ibrahim apparently falls into the shopkeeper’s trap as he shares a kola nut with the latter, a ritual that symbolizes or reconfirms brotherly communion and unity. He then borrows money and food from M’Barka. However, when the shop owner later realizes that Ibrahim is unable to reimburse him due to the difficulties he faces in cashing the money order, he loses patience and reveals his greedy and capitalistic nature. He first refuses to further lend to Ibrahim, and then pressures him to pay what he owes. Furthermore, the shop owner takes advantage of Ibrahim’s vulnerability to dispossess him of his wife’s expensive jewelry.

¹² The importance of the community in the fulfillment of the individual is illustrated by the proverb: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am” (Menkiti 1984, p. 171).

¹³ A little boy apparently sent by his parents asks M’Barka if he still has rice to sell. He lies to the boy that he has no rice left, in an attempt to make Ibrahim believe that he doing him a favor.

Ibrahim is under pressure from his sister who threatens him and demands that he give her 2000 Francs. In an attempt to give his sister her share of the money, Ibrahim asks the shop owner to lend him 2000 Francs, with the promise to pay back after having cashed the money order. The shop owner first refuses, but eventually has Ibrahim pawn his wife's 15,000-Franc jewelry for 2000 Francs. He gives him a 50% interest rate and a 2-day deadline to reimburse the principal and interest (3000 Francs), or the jewelry will be forfeited. At the end of the second day, Ibrahim, who has still not resolved his administrative difficulties and not cashed the money order, is unable to repay the shop owner. He requests two additional days to pay the 3000 Francs and get his wife's jewelry back. However, the shop owner, who had appealed to Ibrahim's sense of solidarity by calling him "a brother", now refuses to exercise solidarity. He remains indifferent to Ibrahim's pleas, and confiscates his wife's jewelry. After having put Ibrahim in debt and confiscated his wife's jewelry, the shop owner now attempts to dispossess him of his house. He suggests that Ibrahim sell his house to one of his accomplices in order to reimburse what he owes. Faced with Ibrahim's resistance and anger with this attempt to further dispossess him, the shop owner's accomplice takes over.

Pretending to treat Ibrahim as a parent,¹⁴ and to thus exercise solidarity toward him, the shop owner's accomplice offers to help him cash the money order. He has Ibrahim sign a power of attorney in his name, and actually cashes the money order on his behalf. When Ibrahim goes to his house to claim his due, he confirms having cashed the money order, but adds against all decency that he was victim of a pickpocket, and that the entire 25,000 Francs was stolen. He remains indifferent to Ibrahim's pleas and explanation that the money does not belong to him. A victim of the misuse of the traditional solidarity, Ibrahim ends up owing money to the shop owner, to his nephew who had sent the money order, and has also lost his wife's jewelry.

Ibrahim eventually realizes that he has been victim of the misuse of African solidarity, and resolves to no longer give in to blackmail. To his friend Iman who keeps pressuring him to exercise solidarity by sharing what he does not have, he now retorts: "A river never goes back to its route," suggesting that it is impossible to reverse the course of history and culture and return to old traditional lifestyles such as African solidarity. His wife Maty further clarifies that the enforcement of the traditional common ownership of goods in the post-colonial State is counterproductive, as it does not contribute to any socioeconomic improvement, but brings the few who are fortunate down to the general level of poverty: "If you want to assist nine poor, you will end up being the tenth." The film does not just unmask the misuse of traditional solidarity in modern post-colonial Africa; it also suggests a new form of solidarity that is productive and seems to suit post-colonial nations.

Productive Solidarity

The new form of solidarity the film seems to advocate adapts traditional values (solidarity) to the post-colonial society that has been impacted by individualism. It allows those who have more to assist the destitute according to their means, without letting themselves be crushed by their assistance. As Ibrahim experiences difficulties in his attempt to cash the money order, he seeks the assistance of someone he calls "nephew" and who also calls him *tonton* [uncle]. Since their kinship is not explained in the movie, it would be safe to assume that they both refer to a more generous sense of the family that is the basis for solidarity in traditional African societies. This "nephew" is much better off than Ibrahim. He lives in a nice villa located in what appears to be a wealthy neighborhood, drives a car and seems to have enough disposable money. As previously mentioned, he gives Ibrahim 500 Francs in cash, and a check in the amount of 1000 Francs. He also takes Ibrahim to the City Hall and entrusts him with someone who agrees to help him establish the birth certificate needed for the *carte nationale d'identité*.

¹⁴ He calls him *tonton* [uncle], referring to the imagined sense of kinship that characterizes traditional societies and on which the concept of African solidarity relies.

Contrary to the requests Ibrahim receives, the assistance this man provides did not cost him more than he can afford, and helps Ibrahim obtain his birth certificate.

After being helped, Ibrahim in turn helps another person who is more destitute than he is. Ibrahim, who has just received 500 Francs and cashed the check of 1000 Francs, is accosted by a lady who asks him for 20 Francs in order to pay her bus fare. The help Ibrahim provides (20 Francs) to this lady does not cost him more than he can afford. The film thus suggests a chain of solidarity from the wealthiest down to the most destitute, without pressure, and according to one's means.

It is worth noting that givers and recipients of this productive solidarity do not live in the same neighborhood. Ibrahim's nephew lives in an upper-middle-class district, far away from Ibrahim's impoverished neighborhood. Likewise, Ibrahim does not live in the same neighborhood as the lady to whom he gave 20 Francs. This geographical detachment between givers and recipients suggests that the practice of traditional solidarity is more possible between people who do not live in the same community. The practice of solidarity is difficult even impossible in an impoverished community (or geographical area) that values mutual assistance. In such a community, those who seem to have barely enough to meet their own needs (thus more than others who are completely destitute), are compelled to share with others; and are thus brought down to the general level of poverty. The only way to improve one's economic status is either to ignore the requests and be ostracized,¹⁵ or remove oneself from the community if one can afford to do so.

Conclusions

Mandabi denounces the misuse of solidarity in post-colonial African communities that have been impacted by Western capitalism and individualism. In these communities characterized by widespread poverty, many people who do not have the means to meet their needs dictated by the new capitalistic order manipulate the traditional value of solidarity to meet their individualistic and sometimes selfish needs. African solidarity is misused to pressure those who seem to have something (a minority) to share beyond what they can realistically afford to give. The objects of such pressures feel compelled to comply with these unreasonable demands out of fear of marginalization. They thus become even poorer than they were. African solidarity is also used by greedy capitalistic merchants as marketing tricks to lower people's guards and make them vulnerable to dispossession. These misuses of traditional solidarity turn it into a factor of social and economic regression in post-colonial African communities.

The film does not just unmask the misuse of traditional solidarity in the form of the common ownership of goods in post-colonial Africa. It also suggests a new form of productive solidarity that adapts elements of the old (solidarity) to the new individualistic society. This solidarity allows those who have more to assist the destitute while not letting themselves be crushed by the assistance they provide. Both the rich and the poor can perform this type of solidarity. However, the practice of productive solidarity seems possible when the donor and giver do not belong to the same impoverished community.

Finally, *Mandabi* provides a new reading of Ousmane Sembene's work, as a filmmaker influenced by Marxist ideology. In addition to the class struggles he addresses in his work, Sembene is also concerned with the practice of common ownership of goods in the parts of post-colonial Africa that have been affected by capitalism. He does not advocate a return to a type of common ownership of goods that would be problematic. He rather acknowledges the post-colonial realities and suggests a new form of solidarity that takes into account the old (African solidarity) and the new (capitalism).

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

¹⁵ This does not seem to be an option for members of Ibrahim's neighborhood who value their sense of belonging. Ibrahim however eventually decides to adopt a different posture as he promises to change and no longer allow others to take advantage of him: "Me too! I'll become an opportunist, a thief, a liar!" The mailman encourages him not to take that route.

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