

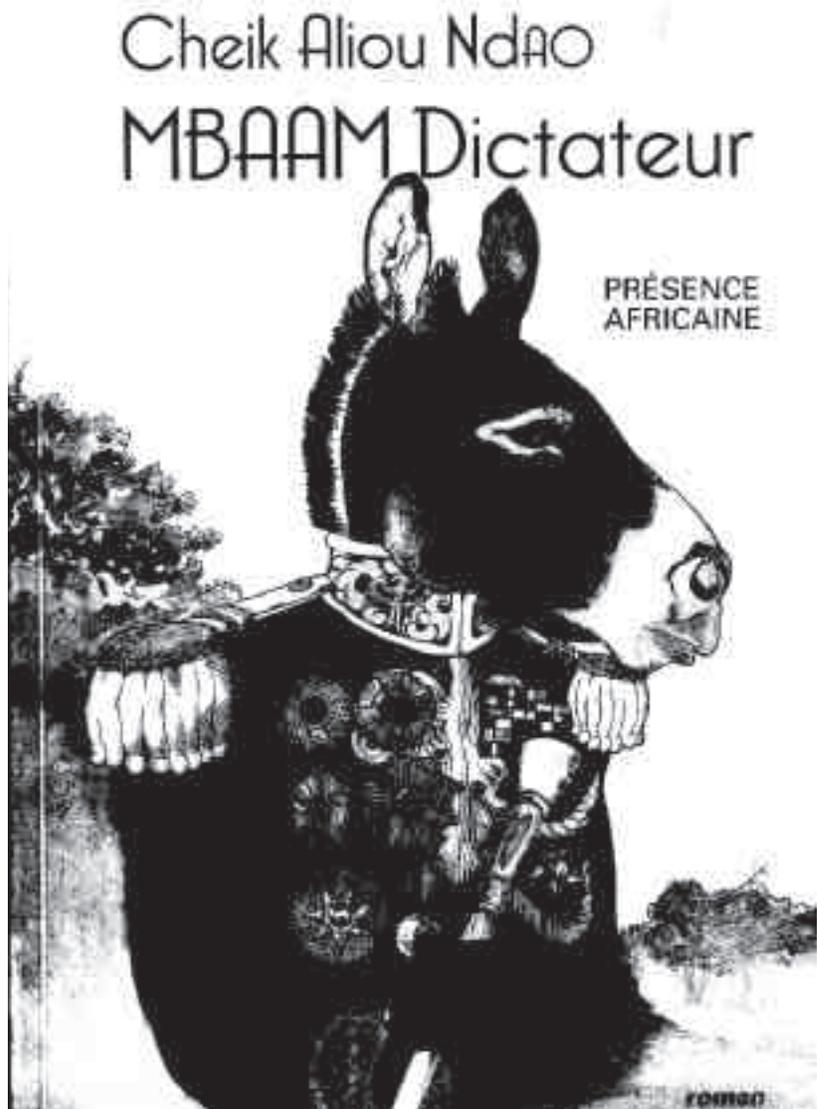
Democracy in the West African Novel

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After a 22-year career with the US Department of State at the American Embassy in Dakar, Senegal, where I worked respectively as Cultural Specialist and Political Analyst, I decided to pursue the dream deferred of advanced literary research. The objective of my research is to examine the problematic of democracy and nation-building in the West African novel, in English and French, published in the period 1960 to 2010. This 50-year time frame covers the period that anthologies typically present as going from the euphoria of independence to the disillusionment of the post-independence reality and the current era of democratization. 2010 was a landmark for the 50 years of political independence that most African countries recently celebrated with great panache and, some would add, indecency. The time of literary production highlights the homology between West African novels and the political arena. As a cultural and literary field, West Africa presents a lot of similarities however, the large number of countries and novelists who emerged in the post-colonial period led me to focus on five countries with significant literary production on the themes such as the military and power, governance, one-party state, and civil society disengagement. Among key writers studied are Amadou Kourouma (Cote d'Ivoire), Cheikh Aliou Ndao (Senegal), Ibrahima Ly (Mali), Ayi Kwei Armah (Ghana), Aminata Sow Fall (Senegal), and Chinua Achebe (Nigeria).

Through intertextuality, novels such as Kourouma's *Waiting for the Vote of Wild Beasts*, a real fresco of African dictatorships, will allow us to compare and define the specificity of West African literary production and democratization in relation to other parts of the Continent during this period from the one-party state era of the 60s to the emergence of a stronger civil society and multi-party systems in the early 1990s.

That the novel has reacted to and reflected, to a large extent, dominant political trends is a fact underscored in most thematic



studies in this field. The main contributions of the present research are its traversing of cultural and linguistic boundaries and its focus on the overarching issue of nation-building, identity, and democracy as they have impacted cultural production, textualization, and contestation.

Borrowing the concept of literary field (*champ littéraire*) from Pierre Bourdieu, I will

examine West African societies in reality and fiction and as fields in which the confrontation of forces in the aspiration for democratic change occur.

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