

AFRICAN LITERATURE AND MIGRATION

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Abstract

African literature is a unique type of literature that relates African stories and experiences with a reflection of the African culture, traditions, values system and norms using major African narrative ingredients such as proverbs, idioms, riddles, myths and the panegyric mode of story-song technique to add sonority to the narrative. It is properly appreciated as a creative writing of a sort within the bounds and ambience of African worldview. Migration which is the human movement across the shores of African continent masterminded by slave trade, incessant globalization and industrialization, contemporary colonization of the African minds and thoughts, insecurities, religious cum ethnic clashes and a quest for better human enterprise have in the long run deeply affected the originality with regard to the Africanity and consequently the Orality of contemporary African literature. Using the method of philosophical analysis, the researchers undertake an evaluative study of the extent of damage continuous migration of Africans have done to the quality, originality and Africanness of African literature, and find out that migration has profoundly affected the originality of the quality of African literature to worth the name. The paper, therefore, recommends a reconceptualization of the African belief system and an indoctrination of same to African writers, infrastructural improvement in African countries to reduce the desire of Africans to migrate to western countries, a decolonization of the African mind and thought on the belief that African literature is inferior to western literature, and an easy accessibility of African literary works to African children both at home and in diaspora.

Keywords: African literature, Migration, Orality, Slave trade, Belongingness

Introduction

African literature is literature that has its root from Africa and deals with African issues. It is a form of literature that is peculiar to the Africans because of African varieties it possess. Put differently, African literature is a literature of Africans, by Africans and for Africans. Although, this definition does not stand in all cases because, a European who has lived in African and have been able to understand African ideologies, norms, values and culture can also tell African stories. An African who has lived in Africa but does not understand African ideologies may not be able to write African literature. To tell African story well, a writer must have understood to a large extent the history, tradition and belief system of the African.

A striking disparity between African Literature and western literature is that western literature perceive literature as a separation of art and content while African literature combines both art and content.

This assertion is in line with George (1996) view about African style of literature:

Literature" can also imply an artistic use of words for the sake of art alone...Traditionally, Africans do not radically separate art from teaching. Rather than write or sing for beauty in itself, African writers, taking their cue from oral literature, use beauty to help communicate important truths and information to society. Indeed, an object is considered beautiful because of the truths it reveals and the communities it helps to build

Migration is the movement of people from one geographical location to another either in search of better opportunities, trying to escape from a problem, disease or outbreak or for mere change of environment. People can decide to relocate from one community or country to another. Some may be forcefully transported to different geographical location. For instance, during the period of slave trade in African, many African families sold their loved ones to Europeans as slaves against their wills and while, some people were able to trace their roots when slave trading was abolished, other remained and became part of the countries where they had worked as slaves. As Africans continue to migrate and have contact with the European, chances exist that core African values reflected in her

literature will continually be lost. Most Africans sold as slaves got entangled with western ideologies, some got married to European men and women and never came back, many even forgot how to speak their local dialects and most importantly, lost the African story telling techniques.

Africans traditionally ordered their lives, preserved their history, customs, traditions, religious beliefs and literature with stories. Before the advent of writing, African events were internally stored in the human brain and were often related from one generation to another through literature and with the help of an oral artist. African literature springs from an in-born love of telling a story, of arranging words in pleasing patterns, and of expressing in words some special aspects of our human experiences. Over the years, Africans have been able to pass their messages, unravel mysteries and entertain themselves through their literature. Hence, the indispensability of the African literature in sustaining and upholding peace, unity and progress in African. Sadly, this heightened appreciation of the African literature as basic tool for preserving, relating and extolling the African identity has been relegated to the background with excessive drift of Africans to European lands.

This paper undertakes an evaluative study of the extent of damage continuous migration of Africans have done to the quality, originality and Africanness of African literature, and find out that migration has profoundly affected the originality of the quality of African literature to worth the name. The paper, therefore, recommends a reconceptualization of the African belief system and an indoctrination of same to African writers, infrastructural improvement in African countries to reduce the desire of Africans to migrate to western countries, a decolonization of the African mind and thought on the belief that African literature is inferior to western literature, and an easy accessibility of African literary works to African children both at home and in diaspora.

Concept of Migration

According to the National Geographic Expedition (2015), migration is the movement of people from one geographical location to another to settle either permanently or semi-permanently:

Migration (human) is the movement of people from one place in the world to another for the purpose of taking up permanent or semi-permanent residence, usually across a political boundary. An example of "semi-permanent residence" would be the seasonal movements of migrant farm

laborers. People can either choose to move ("voluntary migration") or be forced to move ("involuntary migration"). Migrations have occurred throughout human history, beginning with the movements of the first human groups from their origins in East Africa to their current location in the world (para. 1)

Migration is certainly not a recent phenomenon; on the contrary, it has been part of the human history since its very beginning. People have migrated from one continent to the other, from country to country or internally, inside the same country.

While migration has been beneficial in one aspect, it has equally been destructive on the other hand. People move with the intention of living a more promising life, have access to basic life amenities and advance the developmental and infrastructural conditions of their countries of origin. Many remit money, foodstuffs, cars etc. to their families, introduce new innovations to their communities and assist in improving the infrastructural and technological standards of their countries while away and for these purposes, many parents, relatives and communities do not object to either the temporary or permanent migration of their citizens.

Migration is the movement of people from one place in the world to another for the purpose of taking up permanent or semi-permanent residence, usually across a political boundary. It is a process of moving, either across an international border, or within a State. It encompasses any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people, and economic migrants. In Africa, a number of socio-economic, political, cultural as well as historical and linguistic ties, geographical and environmental influences have often coalesced to exert pressure on people, causing them to migrate.

From the time of slave trade where many Africans were forcefully uprooted from the African soil and taken to European countries to serve as slaves to the era of colonization and even the modern neo-colonial period in Africa where the European ideologies and philosophies have combined to overthrow African religion, culture, leadership system, beliefs, norms and values, migration whether voluntarily or forcefully has never stopped occurring. Heightened activities of terrorist attacks, high unemployment rates and low infrastructural development, religious and political extremists in most African countries have

equally contributed to increase the widespread forced displacement and drifting of persons, in search of safety and security and an improved standard of living,

Meaning of African Literature

African literature is the type of literature that is peculiar to Africans. It can be writing or orally transmitted. This is the type of literature that tells African stories. It is mostly written by Africans or someone that has indebt knowledge of the traditions, values, norms and culture of Africans.

African literature mirrors the life of the African people. As has been noted above, Africans had a way of life including how they related events, educated their younger once, entertained themselves and ordered their communities without the help of external bodies. But with the coming of westernization, the introduction of a new religion, and acculturation necessitated by continuous migration activities of Africans to Europe, Africans have encountered a drastic shift and readjustment in their literature. They have begun to embrace new ideas, language, religion, new ways of acquiring knowledge and telling their stories to suit European literary standards.

Literature depicts man and his environment and the true origin and story of man and his environment can best be told through their literature. Literature across ages and continents has served as an embodiment and interpreter of people's culture, a conveyor of a people's language as well as their philosophy, politics, sociological and psychological identity.

African literature refers to works done for African audience, by Africans and in African language. Although, the contemporary African literature now has African literary works that are not written in African languages, what makes those works true African works is in the fact that they possess African varieties. It is quite disheartening that most contemporary African works have moved away from these varieties and works produced do not effectively relate the African stories well. They have been a gross shift from the language, means of telling their stories and even the issues that are being discussed especially for Africans writing from diaspora or those that have had prolonged contact with European works and culture of storytelling. These changes especially in language could be traced to the fact that most African words and expressions have no English equivalence. Therefore, in a bid to fully capture their real story, they rely on transliteration which is the direct transfer of indigenous words and

expression to English language without any modifications. Through this means, the meaning and intentions of the writer has often times be altered.

Also, African literature are embellished with proverbs, idioms, riddles and folk songs to give the reader or listener the desired pleasure. Before the advent of writing, Africans made use of literature to entertain, educate and enlighten themselves. This type of literature was orally transmitted and because, the oral artist who is usually skilled having either inherited the act of storytelling from his parents or learnt it through the process of apprenticeship, every story was always told differently with high concentration on the three basic components of oral storytelling; the artist, the

Components of African Oral Literature

What differentiates oral literature from every other forms of literature is what is referred to as the components of oral literature. These components make oral literature unique and outstanding among other forms of literature. They include:

The Oral Artist

This is the person who tells oral stories and sings oral songs. An oral artist is an important person who composes and relates his stories in the most appropriate way. They are two types of oral artist; the innate artist and the professional oral artist. The innate artist is the artist who inherited storytelling from his parents or family line while the professional artist acquires his skill through apprenticeship. Such a person may not have the gift of storytelling but have the desire or interest to tell stories. In such a case, he goes to learn the art from artist who is already into the art. The disposition of the artist goes a long way to determine his output during performance.

The Audience

These are the people who listen to the story of the oral artist. The audience play a large role in the success of every story. Without the audience, there will be no reason for any performance. These performances where usually carried out in the night and during festivals when the audience will be disposed to watch or listen to such performances.

The Oral Moment

This is the period when both the artist and the audience are in the mood to listen to any story or performance. The oral moment is equally very important in

ensuring the success of any oral performance. To this effect, the oral artist has to be in a good mood to perform and the audience need to be willing to listen. In the pre-colonial African community, it was said that any day the artist has a performance; the entire household must ensure that he is happy. Any change in mood will affect his performance. However, there are exceptions in the case of most innate artist who can get in the mood at any given time without been propelled or stimulated. The stories where accompanied with songs and action with call and response to ensure full participation of all.

Ingredients of African literature

African literature are unique type of literature because of the kind of embellished languages that they employ and the use of proverbs, idioms, lyrics often accompanied with musical instruments, satire, etc. some of these ingredients are discussed below:

Proverbs

Proverbs according to Achebe are the palm oil with which words are eaten. Elders in the traditional African society employ proverbs during communication. It is however what distinguishes an elder or a wise man from a youth. Proverbs play important roles in communicating wisdom and before the coming of European civilization, any elder who could not interact with proverbs was not supposed to be in the gathering of elders because, he will not be able to air out his view as well as understand what others are saying.

Proverbs are very important element in African literature. Oral artists and even modern African storytellers use it to embellish and teach the audience and readers important truths. Sometimes, they made use of proverbs to communicate expressions which were not meant for everybody. Proverbs are a rich source of imagery and succinct expression on which more elaborate forms can be based. Sometimes, a moralizing story, songs and poems may end with, or imply, a proverb to drive home its point.

According to Nketia (1958), proverbs give Africans especially the Ghanaian expressions the freshness they deserve:

The value of the proverb to us in modern Ghana does not lie only in what it reveals of the thoughts of the past. For the poet today or indeed for the speaker who is some sort of an artist in the use of words, the proverb is a model of compressed or forceful language. In addition to drawing on it

for its words of wisdom, therefore, he takes interest in its verbal techniques – its selection of words, its use of comparison as a method of statement, and so on... (as cited in Finnagan, 2012).

In many African cultures, a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs. The figurative quality of proverbs is especially striking; one of their most noticeable characteristics is their allusive wording, usually in metaphorical form.

Satire

This is a form of literature that criticizes societal vices with a view to correcting them. Abram (1981) defines satire as the literary art of drama sharing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards its attitude of amusement, contempt, indignation or scorn (as cited by Okafor, 2001, p. 2).” This means that satire condemns comically. Sharing the same view, Iwuchukwu (2009) says that “Any literary work which holds up a society to ridicule or shows the foolishness or weakness of an idea or custom and towards its attitude of amusement, contempt or scorn is called a satire (p. 20).” In the views of Iwuchukwu, satire is not only targeted at a person but a system, custom, culture, tradition and religious beliefs. Its main function is helping to keep the society in check and ensure that all is working out as it ought to. Satire has been a favourable and age-long tool used by Africans to maintain order, peace and stability in her society. The activities of noble and powerful men who sometimes act as though they were above the law were checkmated using satire.

Satire has been broadly classified into two main types; Formal or Direct and Indirect Satire.

According to Abram (1984), satire comprises of formal and indirect satire

Critics make abroad division between formal and indirect satire. In formal satire, satiric voice speaks out in the first person that is “I”, may address himself either to the reader or else to a character within the work itself, who is called the adversaries” (as cited by Okafor, 2001, p.3).

Effects of Migration on African literature

Migration either through slave trade, colonization, or acculturation has had adverse effect on the originality of African literature. When we are referring to African literature, it goes beyond works writing in Africa and by an African or even works that recount happenings in Africa and proceeds to African literary works that are seasoned with African salts of writing. This African salt which could come in the form of, African languages, music, proverb, idiom, chants riddle, and folktale helps to give African literary works the true taste of Africanness. At a time, African writers who decided to write in European languages for instance were subjected to pressures and tensions, including an immersion in the European tradition and literary canon in order to produce texts that look like those of their masters. With this desire to produce works that are western in quote and can be appreciated by the European writers and critics, there has been a great deviation from the act of African method of storytelling to the production of literary works that have European taste. Beginning from the use of western languages to the use of western styles of writing which most of the time reduced African works to chaff and lacking beauty in its expression. African literature is notable for its use of embellished expression while trying to pass its message. This combination makes African works educative as well as entertaining. In the words of Griffith, he underlines what most of these African works take to by saying that these works:

inevitably concentrates mainly on the interrelationship between the European forms, structures and poetics imported along with the notion of a literature in English, and less on the equally important effect of the many and diverse local oral traditions" (Griffith, 2000).

African writers, especially Achebe, reacted against western criticism of African literary works. Achebe said that

The Latter-day colonialist critic...given to big-brother arrogance sees the African writer as a somewhat unfinished European who with patient guidance will grow up one day and write like every other European" (as cited in André, 2014).

The valuation of all African writers' works from the point of view of assimilation of western mode of writing does not do justice to them but creates problems. The quest to write like a European has made many African writers deviate and continue to struggle to meet up with the demands of European critics and readers.

Effects of Slave Trade as a form of Migration on African Literature

The African slave trade is widely seen as one of the most important events in African history and its consequences on African development and literature are enormous. This is in agreement with Nunn's (2008) belief that the "slave trades may have been at least as important as colonial rule for Africa's development" (139). There are many accounts describing how slaves were captured and transported to the African coastlands and how people from inland communities were sold into slavery by their family members to slave merchant on the coast in the hope of protecting themselves.

Slave trade started in Africa when the European traders arrived on the shores of the African countries with trade intentions that enlarged within a short period of time beyond the initial trade by batter of consumable goods that existed between them and the Africans. Starting from the middle of the 17th century, Africa was the scene of a socio-economic phenomenon, the likes of which the world had never seen before. Large parts of the continent, from the Senegal River to the high plateau of Angola, became specialized in the capture, distribution, and selling of slave. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade merchants were largely claimed to have come into the business through the exchange of trade items for the local produce of the people. Oral narrations showed that the items introduced to the Africans by these merchants included those things that were appealing to the people. Prominent among these were mirror, sugar, guns and gunpowder, fabrics and beautifully decorated bottles of drinks with alcoholic contents. This initial trade relationship later graduated in a gradual manner, to the exchange of Africans for the purchase of the same European sales items. During the time of the slave trade practice, increased wealth was said to have been associated with the traditional slave dealers who by now have come to enjoy the supply of improved standards of slave catching equipment that were provided by their European partners. It is at this point that many African families sold out their children and brothers to the Europeans. The Aro sub-culture group of Nigeria no doubt played important role in pre-colonial period as oracular agents woven in slave trade. According to Nwankwo (2013):

They were mainly slave merchants whose oracle played the role of a spiritual conduit through which its unsuspecting client were sold intoslavery. In other words, this dreaded oracle, Ibinu-Ukpabi, also known as the long juju, which is situated at Arochukwu played the

dastardly role of sending those who appeared before it but could not pay themselves through for freedom into slavery. (p.1)

Arochukwu of the eastern part of Nigeria play a great role in propagating slave trade in Nigeria. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, incalculable numbers of people were subjected to enslavement through kidnapping, religious determination, debt, and organized military campaigns. The scale of enslavement was massive, accounting for the 1.6 million people who were forced to embark on slave ships for the Americas. Slave trading and slave production became the most important economic activities for many African states (Klein, 2003, p. 504). The slaves performed a variety of menial tasks in the households of the wealthy, rendered services in commerce and public administration, served in the army, and worked as raw labour in the mines and in large plantations. Europeans were in need of labour for their highly profitable sugar plantations. African slaves became the solution for Europe's labour needs in the Americas for simple yet irresistible economic reasons: they were about two times cheaper than European labourer. Indian textiles formed a very large component of the goods that Europeans exchanged in Africa against slaves (Inikori, 1992, p. 175).

In European societies, and the colonies they controlled, slaves were employed to carry out duties which no hired labourer or tenant could be found willing to undertake under the condition that the land owners wished. Consequently, African slaves typically had difficult, degrading and demeaning works to do, and were also mistreated by their exploitative masters. With nearly insatiable demand for labourers that grew with European conquest of Africa, a large number of slaves emerged from African countries. These slaves had few rights and were generally at the mercy of their land owners, (Partick, 1990, p. 37). It was not long before some of them especially the younger ones forgot their local dialects as they were forced to learn European languages for easy communication. Some were forced to drop their beliefs, change their names, cultural practices and live in isolation to avoid any form of conspiracy. A good number also could no longer trace their roots to return home after the abolition of slave trade and others got used to the European type of literature such that even after being set free, they appreciated it more than the African literature. Through slave trade, many African slaves who began to tell their stories told them from European perspectives and adopted European descriptive methods, thereby, shredding African literary narratives of all forms of Africanness. They worked hard to ensure that African expressions fit into European literary

demands. For instance, as many African words and expressions have no direct English equivalents, therefore, in a bid to make it suit western demands, these expressions are translated instead of transliterated, thereby, losing their original meaning. The works of Achebe, Nigugi, Efuwa, Senghor and many other African writer was an attempt to revive the original African method of narration.

Migration made many African slaves lose touch of what makes an African work truly African and has ended up rendering their works African by name of authors but European by mode of narration and line of story.

Effects of colonialism on African literature

Colonization of Africa by European countries was a monumental milestone in the development of Africa. The Africans consider the impact of colonization on them to be perhaps the most important factor in understanding the present condition of the African continent and of the African people. Therefore, a close scrutiny of the phenomenon of colonialism is necessary to appreciate the degree to which it influenced not only the economic and political development of Africa but also how Africans see themselves. The two largest colonial powers in Africa were France and Britain, both of which controlled two-thirds of Africa before World War I.

Ali Mazrui's three broad reasons for European exploration of the African continent, which later led to colonization, provide a good starting point. According to Thomas (1973), the first reason has to do with the need to gather scientific knowledge about the unknown. Africa, then referred to as the "Dark Continent," provided just the right kind of challenge. It held a lot of mystery for European explorers, who travelled and observed and recorded what they saw. Many of the early explorers of Africa were geographers and scientists who were beckoned by the mysteries and exotic qualities of this new land. Expeditions of people like Samuel Baker, Joseph Thompson, Richard Burton, John Speke, and others in the nineteenth century, conducted in the name of science and knowledge, served to attract Europeans to Africa. They "discovered" rivers, lakes, and mountains. They studied the African people and wrote about them and most of their writing was opposite of what Africa stands for

Another reason for the colonization of Africa was for religious penetration. Implicit in the Christian doctrine (as well as in Islam) is the requirement that followers of the faith spread the gospel (or the Koran) to others and win converts. Since much of Africa followed their own traditional religious beliefs,

Europeans felt that there was a definite need to proselytize and convert Africans to Christianity. In the early years of both Christianity and Islam, evangelical work was often carried out with military campaigns. Later, other methods of persuasion were applied. Missionaries were dispatched to Africa. They set up health clinics, schools, and social service centres. They treated the sick and taught people how to stay healthy. They taught European languages to Africans, who in turn assisted missionaries in translating the Bible into African languages to help disseminate Christian doctrines. Individuals like Dr. David Livingstone were able to combine missionary activities with extensive scientific research and geographic investigations. When missionaries or other explorers encountered hostility or when their lives were in danger (as happened, for instance, to Bishop Hannington, who encountered religious resistance in Uganda and was eventually murdered on orders of a local king), foreign troops were dispatched promptly either to punish the groups involved or to protect other foreign nationals like what Achebe recollected in *"Things Fall Apart."* The third reason was based on imperialism, the desire by European patriots to contribute to their country's grandeur by laying claim to other countries in distant lands. Incidence such as this was also experienced by the eastern people of Nigeria as recounted in *"Things Fall Apart"* by Chinua Achebe. Okonkwo had killed messenger of the whites in a bid to resist western dominance and was invariably sentenced to death and this had led Okonkwo into taking his own life.

In the colonial period, the European rulers concluded that as the Africans had no culture and history of their own, it was their duty to civilize the native Africans. They regarded themselves superior to Africans whose culture they considered inferior, uncivilized, and savage. In the name of spreading civilization, they dominated, oppressed, tyrannized and persecuted the native Africans not only economically and politically, but also culturally. When the Europeans eventually left, the Africans got political freedom, but the foul practice of imperialism persevered and this camouflaged imperialist practice is turning Africa into a museum of acute poverty, hunger, corruption, famine and enemies of themselves (Shafiqur, Rawshan&Rashed, 2017, p. 9).

Shafiqur, Rawshan and Rashed (2017) reiterates that:

The influence of neo-imperialist countries such as USSR and the USA led to the decolonization of Africa which began in the 1960s. But the colonial traditions and the dirty games of the former and present imperialist power kept Africa within the iron curtain of neo-colonialism (p. 9).

Colonization led to a breakdown of traditional African family values. Extended family that was wonderful instrument like a social verve, social security in our community has given way to nuclear family. Little wonder that there is no more respect for age; no more respect for values that we held sacrosanct in Africa; actions are carried out by people with no regard to what the cultural and family laws stipulates. To further heighten this breakdown of family unity and composition, we now have children of single parents, a phenomenon that is identifiable with America. People no longer communalize. Even our building pattern which depicted the African communal way of living has been changed. The pre-colonial African nation featured people who built huts and these huts were built in clusters such that one can know what goes on in his neighbour's compound. But what we have today is people living individualistic lives. Also, colonialism led to rural exodus and the displacement of large segments of the population.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The thought of migration is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of African people because of the instability in many sectors of the economy. When other continents thrive to improve, African countries seem to become retarded in terms of development, thereby, prompting many to abandon Africa with all her prospects to European lands. Many who migrated have no plans of returning while other only return been rived of all Africanness and continually singing sweet songs of the numerous benefits that await those who may wish to migrate.

Apart from slave trade, most Africans who are opportune to travel to some European countries either to study or work have equally been influenced by the European superiority syndrome. With the belief that everything European is perfect and everything African is inferior and of low quality, African writers now prefer to write like the Europeans to gain prominence.

More so, the rising in globalization, industrialization, religious cum ethnic clashes, political and economic instabilities as well as education and employment breakdown in many African countries have chased many Africans to European countries and on arriving such countries, many tend to abandon their African value system in a bid to fit in and adopt the slogan "while in Rome, behave like the Romans." Many parents migrate with their children and others give birth abroad and never see reasons to come home. These children attend European schools, live in the same environment with the Europeans and even worship with European children, thereby, making them vulnerable to European dictates

having been accustomed, taught to respect and appreciates European cultures and traditions and read books with European contents and contexts. When such a child wants to write, he may never have had access to African books, language, food, dress codes or mode of narration, he writes ends up writing from a totally European point of view.

We cannot have an African literature that we can be proud of without addressing the incessant migration threats in African countries which have led to the loss of our cultural heritage, language, religious beliefs and a gross distortion of African narrative techniques.

To restore the dignity, prominence and appreciation of African literature and most importantly, ensure that African literature does not go into extinction in the nearest future, the following must be critically and urgently considered:

1. African belief system must be conceptualized and indoctrinated to all African children such that African writers both at home and in diaspora will be proud to write from African worldviews.
2. The government have to put in place infrastructures and rehabilitate those fallen and dead cultures, traditions and basic life amenities that will keep Africans at home instead of rushing to European countries.
3. African children both at home and in diaspora must be taught to learn and appreciate African languages, cultures and traditions.
4. African literary works imbedding the original African literary narrative styles must be made available to all children both in schools and at home.
5. African countries must progress along the global line to meet up with other developed nations.
6. All African must learn to appreciate their origin, colour, race, and ways of life instead perceiving themselves to be second class citizens.
7. Literary works embellished with African narrative techniques must be giving credence and appreciated as other European works.

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