

Aula 10

THE AFRICAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

META

To present and characterize the African literature in general, in its basic three phases:
precolonial, colonial eand postcolonial.

OBJETIVO

Ao final desta aula, você deverá ser capaz de:
To get a general idea of the literary production in Africa;
To read and interpret a piece of African literature in English.

PRERREQUISITO

Notions about the history and concept of literature;
Notions about the concept and classification of the discursive genres as well as their
relations with literary genres.

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INTRODUÇÃO

African literature, in general, can be divided into three basic categories: precolonial literature, colonial literature and postcolonial literature. Many examples of pre-colonial African literature can be found in Ethiopia, where there is a substantial literature written in Ge'ez which goes back to the fourth century AD. The best-known Ethiopian literary work in this tradition is the *Kebra Negast* ("Book of Kings"). One popular form of traditional tale is the "trickster" story, in which a small animal uses its wits to survive when faced by larger creatures. Some of these tales are Anansi, a spider in the folklore of the Ashanti people of Ghana; Ijàpá, a tortoise in Yoruba folklore of Nigeria; and Sungura, from central and East African folklore. Other works in written form appear in the Sahel regions of west Africa and on the Swahili coast. From Timbuktu, historians say that there are about 300,000 manuscripts in many libraries and private collections, most of them written in Arabic and some in the native languages (Fula and Songhai). Much of this work was produced at the University of Timbuktu. In Islamic times, North Africans like Ibn Khaldun had great distinction within Arabic literature. The universities of Fes and Cairo, in turn, had great amounts of literature.

During the period of colonization, the African works best known in the West are slave narratives, such as Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789). In 1911, Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford (also known as Ekra-Agiman) of the Gold Coast (now Ghana) published what is the first African novel written in English, *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation*. Although the book moves between fiction and political pamphletarism, it marks a watershed moment in African literature. During this period, the first African plays written in English began to emerge. Herbert Isaac Ernest Dhlomo, from South Africa, published *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongqawuse the Liberator*, in 1935, maybe the first English-language African play. In 1962, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, from Kenya, wrote the first East African drama, *The Black Hermit*. Among the first pieces of African literature to receive an international critical acclaim was *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe (ver Aula 4).

Towards the end of World War I and independence, African literature represented themes such as liberation, independence, and, among the French-controlled territories, *négritude*. One of the leaders of the *négritude* movement, the poet and President of Senegal Léopold Sédar Senghor, published in 1948 the first anthology of African French-language poetry, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* ("Anthology of the New Black and Malagasy Poetry in the French Language"), with a preface written by Jean-Paul Sartre. Many writers were censured for casting aside his artistic responsibilities in order to participate actively in warfare.

With liberation and literacy since most, as we could see in Aula 1, most of the African nations gained their independence and, consequently, their literature grew in number, quality and recognition. Since then, many African works and writers began to appear in Western academic curricula and in collections of poetry and short stories compiled at the end of the 20th century. African writers, for international purposes, began to write both in European languages and in traditional African languages.

The themes of contemporary African literature, according to many important literary critics, are: the clash between past and present, tradition and modernity, indigenous and foreign, individualism and community, socialism and capitalism, development and self-reliance and, finally, between “africanity” and humanity. Other themes include social problems, such as corruption, the economic disparities in newly independent countries and the rights and roles of women. In 1986, Wole Soyinka became the first post-independence African writer to win the Nobel Prize in literature. Previously, Algerian-born Albert Camus had been awarded the 1957 prize.

Read very carefully the story below:
Tingi and the cows (Ingrid Schechter)

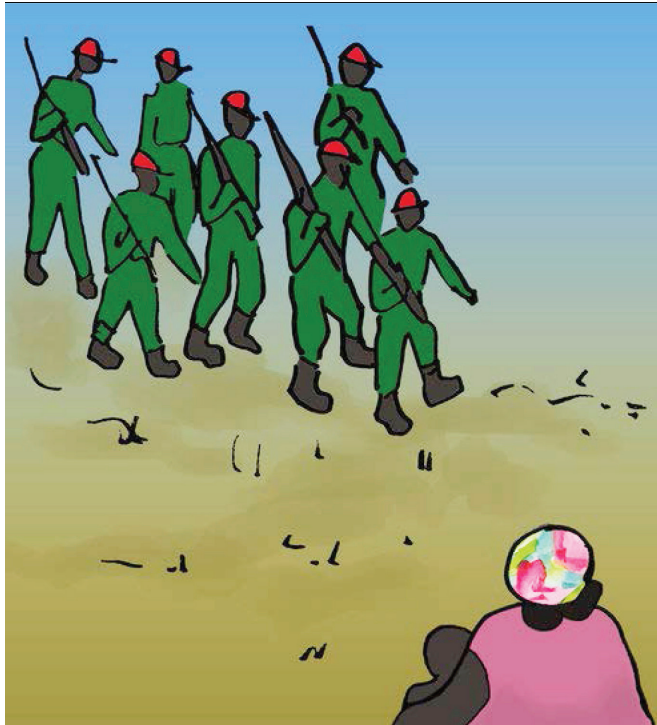
Tingi lived with his grandmother.



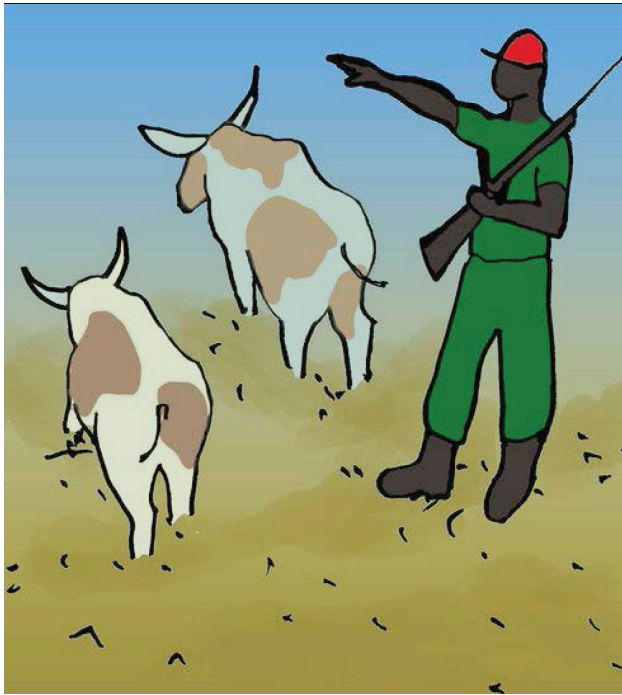
He used to look after the cows with her.



One day the soldiers came.



They took the cows away.



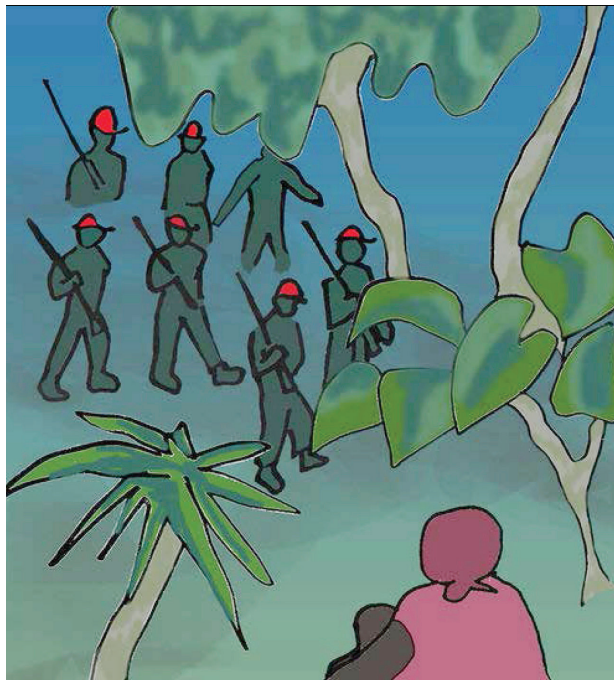
Tingi and his grandmother ran away.



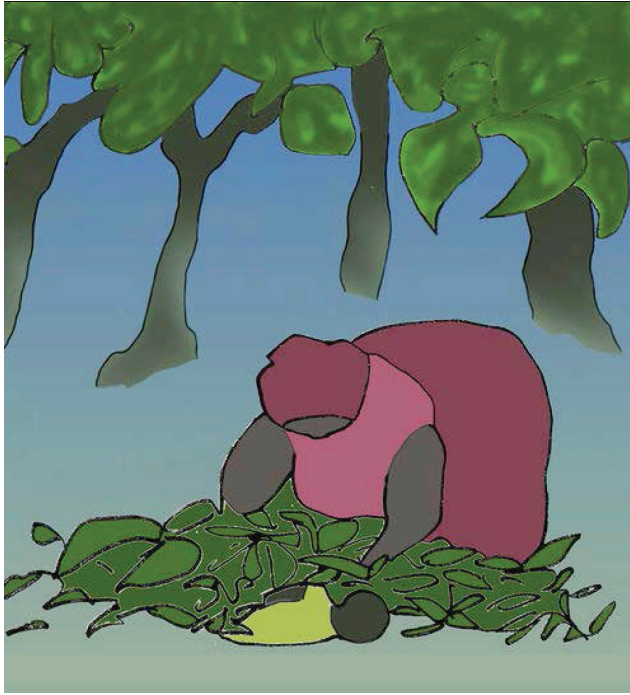
They hid in the bush until night.



Then the soldiers came back.



Grandmother hid Tingi under the leaves.



One of the soldiers put his foot right on him, but he kept quiet.



When it was safe, Tingi and his grandmother came out.



They crept home very quietly.



- According to the website where we found this precious piece of literature and painting, “You are free to download, copy, translate or adapt this story and use the illustrations as long as you attribute in the following way:

Tingi and the cows

Author - Ingrid Schechter Illustration - Ingrid Schechter Language - English Level - First sentences

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Source www.africanstorybook.org

CONCLUSION

As we have already read the most important writer of African literature in English, Chinua Achebe (Aula 4), we decided to dedicate this last activity to traditional African stories, most of them transmitted orally from generation to generation. As we could see, traditional African stories convey a kind of moral lesson or caution against sins and/or vices, such as the Ghanaian story Anansi and turtle. Anansi the spider greedily eats all the food before his dinner guest Turtle gets a chance. But what can Anansi do when Turtle invites him over to her place for dinner – under water? Other stories, like, like Tingi and the cows, are far more serious. It is based on real events and is about soldiers entering a village as seen from the perspective of a young boy.

On the surface, there is the little drama about soldiers stealing cows and a boy hiding with his mother. But, analyzing carefully, we notice that, in African colonial and postcolonial history, soldiers always plunder villages, destroying communities, raping women and children, killing etc. Something much more serious and tragic than the theft of cows. Tingi and the cows invites the reader to think – and talk – about what happens when soldiers march into a village in a period of political, ethnical and economic conflicts. It is, undoubtedly, an excellent starting point for a conversation about the suffering which has affected people across the continent.

We hope this course have inspired you to read and discuss about the qualities, problems and contradictions of a postcolonial world.



RESUMO

Although it is a simplified way of approaching the problem, we can define the term African literature is the body of oral and written literatures in Afro-Asiatic and African languages, which also includes works written by Africans in European languages. Traditional written literature, which is limited to a smaller geographic area than is oral literature, is most char-

acteristic of sub-Saharan cultures which have participated in the cultures of the Mediterranean. Thus, there are written literatures in both Hausa and Arabic, created by the scholars of what is now northern Nigeria. The Somali people also have produced a traditional written literature. There are works written in Ge'ez and Amharic, two of the languages of Ethiopia, which is the one part of Africa where Christianity can be considered to be traditional. Works written in European languages date primarily from the 20th century onward.



Activity:

Based on the content of the story you have just read, and taking into account the previous classes about narrative structure, answer the questions below:

- 1) What is the main theme of the tale, in your opinion? Explain yourself.
- 2) How is the story narrated?
- 3) Who are the characters of the story and what is their importance?
- 4) Is there any moral of the story? How could you explain that?

COMENTARIO SOBRE AS ATIVIDADES

Esta atividade tem por finalidade principal fazer com que você construa uma síntese dos principais conteúdos desta aula e do curso, desenvolvendo o senso interpretativo e o senso crítico. Antes de fazer esta atividade, no entanto, o tutor deverá aproveitar-se da experiência de leitura dos alunos, através de fóruns ou de chats, buscando ver que tipo de narrativa eles mais lêem, com o intuito de, a partir de detalhes das informações, discutir as questões levantadas pelo texto com base nas narrativas por eles lidas (ou assistidas, no caso dos filmes).

REFERÊNCIAS

For a bibliography of works on African literature published in English see the series below produced by Bernth Lindfors. Lindfors focuses on scholarly commentary found in books, periodicals and elsewhere.

Source: <https://guides.main.library.emory.edu/c.php?g=50750&p=325840>

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