

Learning by Ear

“Once upon a time... in Africa”

Episode 7: “AFRICAN CIVILIZATIONS DURING COLONIAL TIMES”

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CHARACTERS:

Intro/Outro (female/male)

Scene 1:

- June (13, female)
- Mum (38, female)
- Grandpa (77, male)

Scene 2:

- Mum (38, female)
- Women (from 30 on)
- 1. Woman (45, female)
- 2. Woman (30, female)

Scene 3:

- June (13, female)
- Grandpa (77, male)
- Mum (38, female)

Scene 4:

- 1. Woman (45, female)
- Mum (38, female)
- 1. Man (45, male)
- Elder Woman (75, female)
- Village People (all ages, both genders)
- 2. Man (40, male)
- Men (from 30 on)

Scene 5:

- June (13, female)
- Grandpa (77, male)
- Mum (38, female)

Intro:

Hello and welcome to the “Learning by Ear” series “Once upon a time... in Africa” about African History! In today’s episode, June experiences something for the first time and finds out from Grandpa Peter that a long, long time ago, once that happened, a girl would have to assume all the responsibilities of an adult woman. Stay with us and find out how life was in an African empire during colonial times...

Music 1, then cross fade with SFX

First Scene: At home at the end of the afternoon.

SFX: Kitchen (pots, fire), mother singing while preparing dinner. In the background: chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

1. June: (from a distance) Mum, Mum, come here!

2. Mum: June, you know that you should come to me when you want something! What's up, now?

SFX: Footsteps going away on gravel path. In the background: chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

3. Mum: Don't you see I'm making dinner?

4. June: Mum, I think I... hhhmm... what is this?

5. Mum: Huh?! June, you've started to menstruate!

6. June: Menstruate, Mum? I don't want to menstruate!

7. Mum: Oh, come on, June! It's a sign you're becoming a woman! And it's time!

8. June: Mum, what shall we do? We aren't going to tell Dad or Grandpa, are we?

SFX: Footsteps from two people on gravel path. In the background: chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

9. Mum: Why ever not? What's the problem?
Menstruation is the most natural thing in the world!

SFX: Footsteps approaching on gravel path. In the background: chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

10. Grandpa: **(surprised)** Menstruation? What? June?
You've begun to menstruate? **(emotional)**
Oh, my little girl is a lady, now! Soon you'll find a young man and leave home...

SFX: Footsteps of three people on gravel path, door opens, footsteps, kitchen (fire). In the background: chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

- 11. June:** Oh, Grandpa! Don't say that! I'm still a child! **(clears her throat)** I mean, until yesterday I was. Now, I'm a teenager...
- 12. Grandpa:** But, Daughter, there is nothing to be ashamed of in starting to menstruate! Look, there was even an empire, of the Ashanti, a people from West Africa, in which the first time a girl began to menstruate was a reason for celebrating!
- 13. June:** Really, Grandpa? What funny people, those Ashanti... How can people celebrate something like that? They must have lived on the moon...
- 14. Grandpa:** **(laughing)** No, they still live in a region that is now part of modern day Ghana. Just that there is no Ashanti Empire anymore. But that was only one aspect of their culture. When a girl began to menstruate it meant that she was ready to get married, so it was a huge event. **(whispering)** If you were an Ashanti girl, you would be doing some household duties or, let's say, making some pottery. These were the tasks of the women... and teenage girls!

15. Mum:

(from a distance, approaching. SFX: Footsteps) I heard that, Father! Doing some household duties, that's what she would be doing in the Ashanti Empire, is it? So, little girl, as I know you're going to stay here and listen to Grandpa's stories, start peeling the potatoes. Come on!

SFX: Footsteps going away on cement ground, then someone peeling potatoes. In the background: chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

16. June:

(whispering) Grandpa, would Mum tell me to peel potatoes on the first day of my menstruation if we lived in the Ashanti empire?

Flashback music

Second Scene: In an Ashanti village.

SFX: Footsteps on gravel path, iron how being beaten with a stone.

In the background: birds, fade under

17. Mum: (shouting, happy) My daughter is a woman now! June is a woman!

SFX: Doors being opened, footsteps approaching on gravel path, cheers from women, someone spilling some liquid on gravel ground. In the background: birds, then fade under

18. Mum: Supreme God of the Sky, who alone is great upon whom men lean and do not fall, receive this wine and drink! Goddess of the Earth, receive this wine and drink! Spirits of our ancestors receive this wine and drink! Oh do not come and take her away and do not permit her to menstruate only to die!

SFX: Old women clapping their hands and cheering. In the background: birds, then fade under

19. Women: Oh, Emily, congratulations! You can get June married off now! My boy is of marrying age, too, you know? Congratulations!

SFX: Women congratulating Emily. In the background: talking drums, birds, then fade under

20. 1.woman: Shhh! (**silence**) Did you hear that?

21. 2. woman: What's the matter?

22. 1. woman: Was I the only one to hear the talking drums?

SFX: Talking drums get louder. In the background: birds, then fade under

23. Mum: No! Someone is sending a message!

24. Women: Oh, my goodness! What is it this time?

Flashback music

Third Scene: At home at the end of the afternoon.

SFX: Kitchen (pots, fire). In the background: chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

25. June: What was that, Grandpa? It really seemed like drums!

26. Grandpa: June, Daughter, calm down! Didn't you want to know how the women reacted when some girl began to menstruate for the first time? We'll get to the drums later!

27. June: All right, Grandpa! **(pause)** Did they really used to do that? Women just shouted the news like that? How embarrassing!!!

28. Mum: **(from a distance)** How about my potatoes?

29. June: They're coming, Mum!

30. Grandpa: Come on, June, keep peeling the potatoes so that Mum doesn't get angry. Do you actually know how lucky you are? Ashanti women weren't allowed to cook for the men nor even touch anything cooked for them whilst they were menstruating.

31. June: Is that really such a bad thing? (**whispering**)
I wish I would not have to peel potatoes
today!

32. Grandpa: Of course that's bad! And you know why?
Women weren't allowed to eat anything that
had been prepared for the men either. And
they couldn't enter a man's house and had to
spend those days in a separate house.

33. June: Huuhhh! *Then*, I prefer the potatoes!

34. Mum: (**from a distance**) Did I hear something?

35. June: (**speaking loudly**) They're coming, Mum!

SFX: Someone picking up a plastic bucket from the floor, footsteps going away. In the background: June kissing mum (June: "Here they are!"), footsteps approaching

36. June: Now, Grandpa, tell me what those drums
were!

37. Grandpa: The drums, my daughter, have the purpose to
send messages.

- 38. June:** Were they the ancestors of cell phones?
- 39. Grandpa:** **(laughing)** Let's say, they were the ancestors of fax machines! But the talking drums are special! Only the village chief is allowed to own one and there are special messengers who can play them. Talking drums aren't used to make an appointment between friends. Villages exchange messages with them.
- 40. June:** How do talking drums work, Grandpa?
- 41. Grandpa:** Both the Ashanti, from Ghana, and the Yoruba, from Nigeria, speak tonal languages. That means it's the way they pronounce a word that gives it its meaning – through high or low tones. What the talking drums, the "atumpan", do is not reproduce whole words but syllables, rhythm. In a tonal language that's enough to understand the message.
- 42. June:** And if they want to say something in a language I don't speak?
- 43. Grandpa:** Then you won't understand it. **(laughing)** It's said that during colonial times, the message of the coming of the Europeans was carried to the villages a step in advance of their arrival. Now listen to what happens...

Flashback music

Fourth Scene: In an Ashanti village.

SFX: Fast footsteps from many people approaching on gravel path, then stop. In the background: talking drums, birds, then fade under

44. 1. woman: Shhh! Everybody quiet!

45. Mum: **(murmuring)** Now? But... I was praying for my daughter!!! Oh, God of the Sky, protect my child, now that she's a woman!

46. 1. woman: Emily, let the praying be for now! Don't you hear? The white men are coming!

47. 1. man: "Ye ko bisa aberewa", We are going to consult the old woman! Eh, everybody! Let's go!

SFX: People murmuring, footsteps from many people walking fastly on gravel path, then footsteps disperse. Footsteps from one person, then stop, someone knocks on door, door opens, footsteps from one person on gravel path

48. 1. man: May I come in, mother?

49. Elderly woman: I was expecting you, my son! I see everybody's assembled under the big tree on the square! Help me walk, son! My legs won't take me far anymore!

Elderly woman stands up with difficulty, murmuring, then slowly leaves the house

SFX: People murmuring in preoccupation. In the background: slow footsteps from two people coming nearer, birds, then fade under

50. 2. man: Mother, our counsellor!

Everyone greets the elderly woman, some offer her their seats in the shade, elderly woman sits down

51. Elderly woman: **(breathes deeply)** Sons and daughters, calm down! We all know that the white men are conquering more and more land!

52. Men: **(nervous)** But, Mother, they mustn't come to the village! No! We cannot allow them to take our land!

53. Elderly woman: Calm down! We won't get anywhere like that! Our region is rich in natural resources and minerals, we have wood, we have gold! And that's what they're looking for!

54. Men: **(nervous)** But, Mother, they've managed to conquer many villages already!

55. Elderly woman: My children, if these whitemen think they will take over this village, they're mistaken! Over my dead body perhaps! Until then we will fight!

Everyone agrees with cheerings

56. Elderly woman: Go to your houses, hide all the food and your goods and protect your children! And you men: get your weapons!

Flashback music

Fifth Scene: At home in the evening.

SFX: Kitchen (pots, fire, kerosene lamp). In the background: crickets, then fade under

- 57. June:** **(surprised)** What, Grandpa? Does the elderly woman decide everything in the village? She says something and everyone obeys?
- 58. Grandpa:** That's right! The eldest woman of every village is the one who has the last word within the Ashanti community.
- 59. June:** **(giggling, then whispering)** Like Mum?
- 60. Grandpa:** **(laughing, then whispering)** More or less... Although the women suffered many restrictions while they were menstruating, they were the ones who ruled. They even started wars not because the men wanted to but because the women decided so.
- 61. Mum:** **(from a distance)** Those Ashanti recognised the power of a wise woman, it seems... June, come here, wise girl, come set the table!
- 62. Grandpa:** **(speaking loudly)** Just one thing, Daughter!
(talking to June) The Ashanti believed the Golden Stool from the king, the Asantehene, symbolized the union and the soul of the Ashanti nation. The people would give everything to protect it. Especially if it was a woman commanding it!

63. June: They gave everything? What do you mean, Grandpa?

64. Grandpa: It was the War of the Golden Stool in 1900/1901 which led to the defeat of the Ashanti against the British, who then incorporated the Nation into their colony of the Gold Coast, today's Ghana. But by then, the biggest part of the exploitation of Africa's resources was yet to happen...

65. Mum: **(from a distance)** June! The table!

Outro:

And this is the end of the seventh episode of "Once upon a time... in Africa", the "Learning by Ear" series about African History!

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Good-bye until next time!