

CINEMATIC REIMAGING OF AFRICAN HEROINES: CONVERSATIONS WITH OKEY OGUNJIOFOR, PRODUCER OF AMINA.

Achibi Samuel Dede PhD

Dept of Theatre and Film Studies
Faculty of Humanities

University of Port Harcourt, Choba

Email: samdede.sdx1@gmail.com

Tel. +234 803 310 7728

Abstract

This interview takes a closer and more engaging look at the story of Queen Amina of Zazzau as presented in film, showing why her legacy continues to matter today, especially in ongoing conversations about women empowerment. Queen Amina is remembered as one of Africa's great heroines, and the film brings her story to life in a way that meaningfully connects the past with present-day realities. Produced through collaboration across Africa, Europe, and America, the film also reflects how African stories are increasingly gaining global attention and appreciation. Set in the historic land of Zazzau, the film traces Amina's rise to power, highlighting her strength as a leader, her bravery in battle, and her lasting influence in shaping her society. It also explores her personal journey from childhood to adulthood, helping viewers understand the experiences that shaped her identity and leadership style. By blending elements from both Nollywood and Kannywood, the film successfully bridges cultural and regional divides within Nigeria's film industry. This study incorporates insights from Interview of Okey Ogunjiofor by Sam Dede, offering behind-the-scenes perspectives on the film's production, creative vision, and cultural significance. Their reflections provide valuable context on how the story of Amina was interpreted for the screen, the challenges of historical representation, and the intention to inspire a new generation through African storytelling. Beyond recounting a historical narrative, the film raises important questions about the treatment of women and girls in society. It draws attention to issues such as inequality and rigid gender roles, while also celebrating the courage and resilience of women. The recognition the film has received, including awards like the AMVCA, further highlights its impact and relevance. Overall, this work demonstrates how storytelling especially through film can preserve culture, inspire social change, and reshape how African history and identity are understood in the contemporary world.

Sam : Nollywood films with historical and traditional themes and ideas (popularly referred to as Epics) have relatively, not been successful at box offices in cinemas. So why the story of Queen Amina at this time?

Okey : Filmmaking is the communication of the cultural tones of a people in a given period to a wider audience via sights and sounds. To that extent I would think the reason most Nollywood epics have not been successful at the cinemas is that they always fall below certain expectations that bother on execution. Most times these so-called epics have made caricature of our cultures with regards to the story they set out to tell. You can agree with me that traditional themes are culturally and traditionally exotic in all ramifications ranging from characterization, costume, sets, props, language, period etc. And to tell such stories convincingly, the producer and or the director must be someone who is grounded in such culture, for only then can they do justice to

the story. But unfortunately, what we have been having has been a case of city people; millennials who know next to nothing pretending to tell stories of cultures they do not understand nor have spent time to research very well. Cultural hermaphrodites born and bred in the cities cannot connect the souls of cultures to a global audience because they are not genuine representatives of the culture they pretend to showcase.

And so for Amina, the authenticity of the story was verified through intensive research, which spanned a period of 25 years. The project was executed using all the benefits of High- Definition Video origination equipment (ALEXA), up-to-date cinematographic support devices and computerized digital edit including motion graphics and 5.1 surround sound. In addition, a trained team of audio-visual professionals responsible for the entire film was composed of a mix of experienced professionals and quite visionary young people with an eye toward constant innovation. Employing simple but ingenious low - cost approaches, which is why the film effectively achieved the level of awe - inspiring global pictures and universal sound quality that it became currently on Netflix.

Although the primary reason for every creative enterprise is entertainment, but apart from this, there are other reasons for embarking on Amina film.

You see, after my pioneering efforts in Nollywood with "Living in Bondage", "Circle Of Doom", "Nneka the pretty serpent", Brotherhood of Darkness and other hits, the whole world took notice of our industry. I felt that there was more we could do to deepen the

acceptance of the phenomenon called Nollywood.

I felt that-we could start telling our indigenous stories to the world not only to entertain Nollywood growing global audience but to research and document the lives and times of our heroes and heroine's past properly in order to re-write the negative narratives against Africa in the global arena, and also create the impetus upon which Africa's growing young population would stand and aspire for higher ideals.

As the "Father of Nollywood" and in keeping with our vision which is to constantly chart a new course for others to follow, especially regarding the movement towards the investors' market, we needed to show the "how" or what is possible so that producers and investors can have a template upon which to base their calculations and decisions in their future film projects. This movie, which is a celebration of our historical heroine, is a cut above anything that has come out of Nigeria since the inception of Nollywood. Our hope was that this film will once again change the landscape of film in Africa like living, in Bondage did in 1992 and then usher Nollywood into her final frontier which I call "the investors' market".

Again, Amina was to bridge the gap between Nollywood and Kannywood. As we all know, there has been a dichotomy between the North and the South of Nigeria in the creative space, while the Northern filmmakers call themselves (Kannywood), the Southern filmmakers refer to themselves as Nollywood. What this dichotomy means is that film products from either divide could hardly penetrate the other side. We needed to build a bridge, a unifying bridge across that divide that would bring Nollywood and Kannywood together to learn from each other when they collaborate on a common project that tells one single story that subsequently lifts the

Nigerian film industry to the global arena, so that the whole world will see, and the northern people and the southern people will as well see that together we can actually be unconquerable when we eschew perceived differences and prejudices.

So, my choice to do Amina - a Northern story was deliberate. Nollywood as a brand is going through defining moments once again and I always try to find new ways to do the old things, it gives me great joy when I attempt the things that looks so difficult, so that others can have something to fall back on when we finally crack the "whys" and "hows" of doing those difficult things. So in essence, we just decided to create a partnership that would network the North and the South together so that the market can get bigger. What we have now is just a small Nollywood and a small Kannywood that could be bigger when we begin to collaborate to tell cross-cultural stories and thereby expanding the creative industry ecosystem for all.

Sam : Now faithful is your version of the story in the film to the actual story of Queen Amina?

Okey : Yes, to a large extent we believe that our version of the Amina story is the actual story of this historical heroine. The research took us to the thirteen Emirates of the Northern Nigeria and at some point Kennedy Centre Washington USA which finally acquired the stage rights for this epic flew in two of their topmost directors who followed us to Zazzau to obtain authentication letters from the Emirs and custordians of Zazzua history and culture. We have letters and other documents authenticating our story from those who should know and we have even produced a historical/literature novel from this research for secondary schools, which was adopted as a true representation. Like I said earlier, the authenticity of Amina story was verified through an intensive research, which spanned over a period of 25years in addition to authentic exotic set, costume and props designs created and built for the purpose of its thematic actualization.

Sam: Did you have to adjust the story for cinematic purposes?

Okey : Yes, we did but only in very few places. The film would have been boring in some places if we didn't. Besides Amina is a trilogy that could not be contained in two hours. We have only told the bit from her childhood that is not in the public domain. The world should wait for the remaining parts of the Amina trilogy when we begin to tell the story of this amazing woman that is in the public domain, that they already know.

Sam: Some reviews have suggested that the film should have been made in Hausa or Fulani language. How would that have affected the outcome of the film?

Okey : We took the decision to make the film in English language with subtitles because we felt that making the film in Hausa indigenous language (as much as it would have been the best) would be injurious to our business plan for obvious reasons. Don't forget that the North is almost like a closed society when it comes to information sharing with outsiders and as such we had a very hard time getting the authentic story during research despite the fact that we had approval letters from the Presidency of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for this purpose. So we feared that Amina film would be dead on arrival if we did the film in Hausa language and the film fails to get their adoption. Truth be told, that decision saved us because the moment Amina was released to global acclaim on Netflix the North remains the only group that criticized it simply because it wasn't done by one of them.

Sam: How long did it take you to make Queen Amina, from concept/research, production and pro production? Please give details of each stage of production.

Okey : Amina took 25years of intensive work to make from concept, research, preproduction, production and post-production. It took exactly 19yrs of research and 6yrs of pre-production, production and post-production.

Like I said earlier, a some point in our journey in Nollywood when it seemed that Nollywood was on a merry-go-round, I felt that we could start telling our indigenous stories to the world not only to entertain Nollywood's growing global audience but to research and document the lives and times of our heroes and heroine's past in order to re-write the negative narratives against Africa in the global arena, and also create the impetus upon which Africa's growing young population would stand and aspire for higher ideals

Since ancient civilization in Africa, women have ruled on the continent. From Queen Nefertiti of Egypt (1292 I3C), Makeba, Queen of Sheba (960 BC) and Empress Candence of Ethiopia (323 BC). Later, we had Queen Amina of Zazzau (c. 1533 - 1633), Queen Anna Nzinga of Angola (c. 1583 - 1663) and Yaa Asantewa of Ashanti Kingdom of Ghana (c.1830-1921), Queen Sarraounia Mangou of Niger (19th Century), Ranavalona of Madagascar, Beatrice of the Congo, to name a few. etc. Despite the exploits of these great women in Africa, inequality, discrimination against women's rights and other gender-based prejudices still persist. Not only in Africa, but the world over. Amina film raises an important question on why there are not many female leaders in the world today when history is full of women who have excelled as leaders.

This is not just in the political arena but in business, the arts and sports etc.

Having seen all the odds against women around the globe, I decided to do a story on the life and times of Queen Amina of Zazzau, in order to draw affirmative actions towards the plight of women and the girl-child. Queen Amina was one of the most charismatic and alluring Sovereign Queens ever to rule on the African Continent when it was not fashionable around the world.

So when the First Lady of Nigeria, Mrs. Maryam Abacha returned from the Beijing conference in China on Women empowerment and gender equality, and her office advertised for programs to actualize the vision of the conference, on the 8th of August 1996, I wrote to the Presidency of the Federal Republic of Nigeria through the Center for Women Development for partnership to produce a gender based book and film based on the life of Queen Amina. They loved the idea and promptly asked me to embark on research so as to produce the authentic story of Amina, but without giving me a dime except letters of introduction to all the Emirs and notable Professors of history and custodians of culture in the 13 Emirates of Northern Nigeria.

I then reached out to Masoma Africa Foundation, a female gender-based NGO led by Mrs. Sylvia Bello, and Mrs. Florence Adeyanju for assistance. They made contacts with

America and got me some funding from The Kennedy Center Washington for the research.

Overjoyed, I left my young wife and our first child who was just about 6months old then and in the company of Sola Ojewusi, my researcher we traversed the length and breadth of the thirteen Emirates of Northern Nigeria in search of the authentic Queen Amina story, it was a journey

filled with obstacles, frustrations and many depressing moments.

On August 20th 1998, exactly two years since we started the research, the Presidency pulled out of the partnership because of a change in government and wished us well. Undaunted, we continued, from Arewa House to University libraries, Museums to Professors of history, traditional historians and Emirs, we travelled to Zaria, Kaduna, Bauchi, DASS, Abuja, Suleja, Kano, Turunku, Jos, Taraba, Kogi, to Ilorin etc. till we had enough information to produce the historical perspective of Amina in a book format. Kennedy Center Washington then flew in two of their topmost artistic directors into Nigeria to authenticate the story and obtain the stage rights of the project for their center.

Let me also mention here, that at some point during the research, some well-meaning Nigerians like late Ambassador Seguri Olusola, Gidado Idris (Former SGF), Mr. Eric Teniola, Hajia Amina Sambo, (Former President of National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), Late HRH. Eze Chris Nwosu (Ebudike of Amaebu), HRH. Eze Laz. Ezenwa (Gbinkwo of Amankwo), and Chief. James Udenwoke gave us sundry contacts and financial helps.

Thus, left alone, but with the research compendium in my hands, my search for funds to make the film began. All the doors we approached or knocked closed before us until the 19th year in 2015 when Project Act Nollywood, Ford Foundation offered us grants, and Bank of Industry gave us a loan to begin this film project with other investors joining subsequently.

Armed with only the audacity of passion and determination, we went to Jos to re-create 15th century horse-sweat soaked battle grounds, majestic medieval palaces of mud and stone, dusty hovels of the desperately poor, the tense intrigues of age-old royal courts while working with over 1000 Northern artistes and 86 Southern crew members.

A feature film made with collaborations that spanned three continents of Africa, Europe and America during the production and post-production of over a 6year period.

Today, 30years after the inception of Nollywood, my joy knows no bound as Sub-Saharan Africa explodes into life, power, and sound in "AMINA", as Netflix took this thrilling epic movie about the most charismatic warrior, sovereign and queen in the history of Africa to the world on the 4th of November 2021. Amina became an instant global hit, the first and only Nigerian film from inception till date to make global top 10 list on Netflix. Amina is a celebration of the African girl-child and woman. A gripping tale, a fascinating narrative! It garnered 13 nominations, winning 4 Awards including the most prestigious Best Overall Movie in Africa at the African Magic Viewers Choice Awards (AMVCA), which took place on the 14th May 2022 in Lagos Nigeria.

Sam: Can you speak freely about your experience (high points and low points) on this project?

Okey : So the main hurdle was how to use limited funds to make Amina film a locally themed, globally relevant product without losing acceptable minimum production values. United Nations' present focus is on women empowerment and Goal 3 of the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs) makes a very strong case also for the empowerment of the girl child & women around the world, therefore we chose this feature film as a medium to drive this message of change to make our nation and the world a more equal place, to give all humans, female or male, poor or rich, the opportunity to rise to national and global leadership. But how do we achieve this dream with limited funds?

An adage says, "Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well". First and foremost, getting authentic Amina story that is acceptable to all was very difficult because there were many versions coupled with the fact that there was no single compendium containing Amina story.

Preparing the place to shoot this epic movie (Location, and we chose Jos for its beautiful filmic topography) took time, then recreating the ancient palaces and cities of Zazzau, how do we get the costumes and props of 15th/16th century? So, we went to the North with 86 crewmembers from the South, and we recruited over 1000 Northern artists - camped them for three months, trained them on how to ride horses, then, trained them on how to use the swords to fight on horse backs, before we went into the shoot proper. Then we built ancient buildings of mud and stones in that place for this shoot because there was no place, we could find a semblance of Amina's palace in those days that wouldn't have the trappings of modernity. So, we needed top set, props and costume designers to re-create. And, these things cost money but in the long run they were all worth the pains.

Don't forget that it was a period of crises in Jos, so safety of cast, crew and even the sets we built were major issues. Then there was the issue of the freezing cold that Jos is known for especially during year-ends. And we shot for three months from November 2015 - Feb 2016 under unfavorable weather conditions in the open forests. There were accidents, and at some point sets were razed by fire and at another time Amina's palace, which was a massive set, made of mud collapsed under heavy downpour before we could shoot. These meant more investments for rebuilding. We had issues with funding as we hardly had enough for what we wanted to achieve. So expectedly, any box office hit able to hold its own with the competition globally requires time and money. But despite all the challenges, the goal was to make Amina film to compete favorably with movies from all over the world and take the Nigerian Film industry to a new level. So there was no need to rush it. Specifically, we took time on the edited film with our partner studios in Germany, Canada and United States for equipment, quality Visual Effects, Picture Grading, Sound design (Foley), Music score etc. At every stage we encountered challenges but we remained focused on the goal. These were necessary to achieve the kind of film that would not only thrill audiences around the world, make Nigeria and the investors proud, but a film that would attract international appeal and distributions, thereby generating enough revenues to repay our loans, encourage more investors to look favorably at Nollywood because of the profit margin:

Sam: What was your source of funding and to what extent did it affect the scope of the film?

Okey : From inception till finish I got funding from the diverse sources some of which I have mentioned earlier. But I must mention that I equally got additional funding from Project ACT Nollywood grant, Bank of Industry, Ford Foundation and several other investors as well as my

personal funds.

Sam: You released the film first on NETFLIX as opposed to the usual cinema release. Can you explain to me the advantages of that?

Okey : As much as my business plan should be a personal company secret I make bold to say that I doubt that we would have been able to pay back our loans and pay our investors if we had taken Amina to the cinemas first.

Fundamentally, our hope for spending so much to make Amina was to grow Nigerian economy through the evolution of an inclusive blueprint that would aid the expansion of the creative industries for all practitioners. Our hope was that Amina would be a top- quality film that meets international standards which our investors and Nigeria would be very proud of when released. Secondly, since distribution has been the bane of Nollywood, we were convinced that Amina would attract global distribution that would subsequently serve as a distribution pipe for other Nollywood films in the future; so taking Amina to the cinemas when we were not sure of the expected numbers was never an option for us. Sc ab-initio, we were fixated on getting global distribution that would enable us liquidate our funding obligations and as well open the door for others. We weren't going to gamble with the few cinemas around with such huge investment.

But that decision paid off. Not only did we get global distribution, we were able to liquidate our obligations with good ROI. Amina remains the first and only Nigerian film to make top ten globally on Netflix, it received thirteen nominations at the African Magic Viewers' Choice Awards (AMVCA) 2022, carting away four awards including the most prestigious "Best Overall film Africa". Amina wouldn't have been a global success had we gone to the cinemas first.

Sam: Wha is your suggestion as a way forward for Nollywood in terms of exhibition? Cinemas or Streaming?

Okey : Business generally is driven by chances, choices and consequences. Every business should have aims and objectives from which the business plan would derive. There is no one cap fits all in business. Both cinema and streaming platforms are very key to film exhibition to Nollywood but the capacity to play on each is relatively dependent on the producer and the quality of his content.

Sam: What would you say of the current trend and projections of the studio to street/home video DVD markets?

Okey : The DVD market is like a ceiling fan that has been switched off from the source, it will continue to rotate till it gradually grinds to a halt in the very near future. For now, the dvd and home video markets are serving the audiences at the fringes of technological shifts. But it won't be for long because current trends have demystified that culture the same way we demystified celluloid in 1992 with Living in Bondage produced with a simple hand held camera.

Sam: Can you comment on the extent of sophistication of the production values of recent Nollywood films in terms of Art and technicals?

Okey: Well, for me I think that there has been tremendous leap in the production values of Nollywood productions of late. There has been more acceptance of Nollywood products, which means more money for the practitioners, better equipment, more professionals in the creative space, more distribution platforms for content monetization, better remuneration of cast and crew, more endorsements and general visibility of the industry around the globe which wasn't there at the beginning.

There are a few factors that endeared Nollywood to the world from inception, which is why they are taking notice of what we are doing. Such values, I would plead that we retain. The resilience and prolific nature of our industry is a factor that labeled Nollywood a phenomenon. Our model of filmmaking is quite different and experimental to the rest of the world. *Living In Bondage* was shot with digital hand held camera instead of celluloid, the big idea behind that experiment was to democratize filmmaking to give the teeming unemployed youths wings to fly, pocket friendly jobs, give Africa a voice and the world a new format for storytelling. It was new and should have been celebrated; nevertheless, our major obstacle at that beginning was acceptance and recognition. Everyone tried to kill Nollywood at its inception; no one gave it a chance globally. There was no government support and even the supposed distributors in the various markets became the pirates of the films they were distributing.

Although digital filmmaking started in Nigeria then, nobody was there to take ownership and tell our story to the world. Older filmmakers criticized our industry and called it nonsense but later they joined the nonsense. Foreign groups derogatorily called us Nollywood - "Nothing near the Wood". While some local journalists praised the feat, others took us to the cleaners rather comparing our experiment, especially quality-wise with the more established Hollywood and Bollywood film industries.

But here we are still today by the grace of God, and by the prolific nature of Nigerians who are "never-say-die" people, changing the narratives about Africa, rewriting the history and what you would call negative prejudices that the world has always had about Africa, above all creating massive employment that grows African economies.

However, the greatest obstacle facing Nollywood presently is the mistake of benchmarking Nollywood products with foreign films especially Hollywood. The drive to conform with Hollywood standards is gradually eroding the Nollywood brand. There were reasons Nollywood products compelled the whole world to pay attention to our style of filmmaking. But gradually, owing to foreign investments, and the quest to be like Hollywood, we are beginning to lose those unique flavors that distinguished our products from all others. While we cannot argue that the Nollywood quality still leaves much to be desired, yet, we, have carved out a niche for ourselves in the global film market space, a niche that if tweaked a little bit with little more funding, and a little more investment in distribution structures, and a little more technical details, Nollywood brand of filmmaking will soon crystalize just like the India's has, just like the Chinese has, just like the America's Hollywood film industry has, without losing authenticity.

Sam: Without doubt, you are a legend in Nollywood. From the era of the unforgettable *Living in Bondage* to the present. Tell me about your background and experience in the Nigerian entertainment industry.

Okey : You see, in the 60s, & 70s Nigeria had a very vibrant cinema industry operated by foreign businessmen. Then, foreign film production companies (Warner Brothers, Sunny Studios, Universal Studios etc) produced and distributed films around the globe, Nigeria inclusive. Then also, notable Nigerian filmmakers like Mr. Ifoghale Amata, Chief Eddie Ugboma, Chief Ola Balogun, Adeyemi Adelowo Afolayan, Mallam Brendan Shehu, Mr. Francis Oladele, Pa Hubert Ogunde etc. were producing classic movies and had them distributed through the Cinema chains built, managed and administered by Americans, Europeans and other foreigners in Nigeria. This was before 1972/75, when the indigenization decree of General Olusegun Obasanjo took away ownership of most of these cinemas (and other foreign concerns) in Nigeria from the foreign filmmakers and drove them away. So, Nigerians, who didn't have the competence, didn't have the resources, nor the administrative capacity to manage the business side of filmmaking then were saddled with the responsibility of manning and servicing these cinema houses across the nation.

Then, for as long as the locals didn't have resources to make enough movies and the competence required to manage film business, it meant that a lacuna was created waiting for smart businessmen to fill the gap. It was also impossible to get the 'Big Fives' who were the major studios making films abroad to bring their products to distribute in Nigeria since they could not have control of their products to the final consumers, how would they get their monies back? So, they short-circuited Nigeria from the content supply chain and the gap became even wider.

It took quite a while for the few filmmakers I mentioned earlier who tried but couldn't make enough movies to satisfy the hungry audiences across Nigeria. So, cinema-going culture began to nosedive and the cinemas themselves began to decay. Amidst so many challenges like infrastructural decay, epileptic power supply, and then insecurity to lives and properties in a country that has so much of downturns in its economy, it was a matter of time before the cinema-going culture finally died. Pirates cashed in on this iacuna.

Those few indigenous filmmakers mentioned above were making films on celluloid. They had very minimal competence in terms of finance; they would gather some local arid foreign crew who worked with them in other to tell the stories. But then, celluloid filmmaking has always been cumbersome. If one wanted to make movies on celluloid, one needed to have a lot of money, have access to foreign exchange because most of the materials you would need were gotten from abroad. The film stock is bought from abroad; storage is not even easy here because you need some temperature range to store the film stocks. Then, when you finish production, you still need to travel outside to get the neck-cuts, matching done during the development of the negatives...in the studio And then you edit, print, package, run into reels - the reels that we then use at the cinemas. So, if one doesn't have the technical competence and money for such long-term investment, one couldn't even dabble into film production.

It was at that period that I left Television College Jos where I graduated in film and television productions in 1987 and headed straight to Lagos to find purpose and destiny for my life.

When we I arrived Lagos, there were no platforms for us to practice our trade, it was like we had gone to school to waste our time. So, we needed to reinvent the modus operandi of the way

things were done in the film sector in order for us to be relevant. It meant that we either reinvented ourselves and the structures available or we just die unemployed. SIMPLY PUT: Nigerian cinema industry was at a cross road and a "Messiah" was needed to find the new ways of doing the old things.

It was a period of employment embargo everywhere in Nigeria. Nigerian Television Authority that would have readily absorbed a few of us could not because government was going through a turbulent economic crisis. So, most of us who really wanted to make a living out of cinema decided there must be something we could do. And, one of the things I thought to myself was to use an ordinary handheld VHS camera to tell my story to the world. **I would take cinema to the homes of people instead of taking people to the cinemas.** In school we were taught that the story-telling quality of picture is the same, no matter the format.

Please keep in mind that no one was in doubt that the quality of the VHS camera intended to use was inferior to cine cameras. No one was fooled; we knew the difference between the quality of the big gauge compared to VHS. The disparity is huge. But I just wanted to survive! And, I wasn't going to be talking about quality when I needed money to feed myself. So, I said, if I could get a VHS camera, with about N150,000 budget, I could make a movie, a low-quality movie though, low budget movie, and put it out there in the homes of the teeming cinema audience hungry for the cinema experience. I wasn't going to take the film to the cinemas that were nonexistent. All I planned to do was put the film in cassettes and take them to the homes of people. So, the model was, take cinema to the homes of people instead of taking people to the cinema. My business plan was also simple. Produce a film for N150K and sell each cassette at N300 only. This is of course excluding all other logistics and incidental costs.

Example A. Cost of production: N150,000 + N60,000 (cost of 1,000 VHS 3hrs cassettes (ft N60each) sold at N300 each = N300,000. Profit = N90,000.

Example B Cost of production: N150,000 + N600,000 (cost of 10,000 VHS 3hrs cassettes @ N60each) sold at N300 each = N3,000,000. Profit = N2,250,000.

Example C. Cost of production: N1 50,000 + N6,000,000 (cost of 100,000 VHS 3hrs cassettes @ N60each) sold at N300 each = N30,000,000. Profit = N23,850,000.

So, with this idea, I hit the road searching for investors, but no headway. I knocked on many doors; nobody was ready to buy into my idea because it had never been done before. I floated from job to job and finally took to the streets to hawk. I did that for four years - from 1988 to 1992 thinking I could raise N150,000 (less than \$15,000USD at that time) to make my film.

After four years of hawking on the streets of Lagos Nigeria to raise this fund, God finally smiled on me in 1992 when I got a referral from Mrs. Ruth Osu to Chief Kenneth Nnebue (an electronics merchant who imports empty VHS cassettes for sale at Oshodi market) who then agreed to invest in *Living in Bondage* when I pitched the idea and the business model to him. The partnership set to work, I produced the film while Chief Nnebue financed and marketed it. Within one month, it was a breakaway success. A new industry was born; later to be called Nollywood. Perhaps, because Chief Kenneth Nnebue sponsored the film, marketed the film and carried the promotional campaigns of the film in his (Nek Video Links) company's name it became so easy to associate him with the idea than the street boy who God used to make it all

happen. But this has to change.

After Living in Bondage, I have produced several well received feature films and television soap opera series, and major documentaries such as Circle of doom, Nneka the pretty serpent, Brotherhood of darkness, When flowers turn black. Born to win, Rough edges, Cyberia, Hope avenue. I founded The African Audio-Visual Awards (TAVA), an annual event meant to celebrate and reward outstanding African youths who excel in film, television, music video and advertising commercials thereby creating a common benchmark for quality that will midwife African productions to global standards.

I produced and directed The Chattered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria (CIBN) 50years Anniversary of banking in Nigeria (2013). I was also the Director, Global Live Broadcast of World Economic Forum (WEF) in Africa, Abuja (2014) and FCMB documentary series (2019)

I upgraded myself academically at the School of Theatre, Film and Television Studies, University of California, Los Angeles equally hold another first degree (B.Sc. Public Administrations) from Imo State University within this period

I was a former active board member of Audio-Visual Rights Society of Nigeria (AVRS), former two-term treasurer of Electronic Media Content Owners Association of Nigeria (EMCOAN) Consulted for The Presidency of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and The Kennedy Centre Washington USA on gender-based research and programs for the empowerment of Women and the girl child. Was appointed one of the Resource Persons, to visiting German Youths in the "Go Africa Go German," a German-African Scholarship Exchange program, a joint initiative of the Federal President of Germany and the Federal Agency for Civic Education.

Presently I am the Producer/Executive Producer of "Amina" feature film project that spanned 2years in research and currently on Netflix. "Amina" which remains the first and only Nigerian film to make top ten globally on Netflix, received thirteen nominations at the African Magic Viewers' Choice Awards (AMVCA) 2022, carting away four awards including the most prestigious "Best Overall film Africa".

Sam: Congratulations on winning the AMVCA with Queen Amina. To what extent would you say Awards and Film festivals have shaped Nollywood?

Okey : I think that Awards and Film festivals have been very important to the growth of Nollywood. Veritable reward systems have been known to encourage sustainable growth and advancement especially to reinforce change and excellence in any given environment. Therefore to a large extent I would say that Nollywood has benefited from the many Awards and Film festivals around the globe.

Don't forget that I am the founder and President of The African Audio-Visual Awards (TAVA) created to midwife Nollywood products to global standards since 2009. It was to honor young Africans behind outstanding films, television productions, music videos and advertising commercials. Essentially, that event was meant to reward those crew members behind the scenes thereby creating the impetus for them to evolve a common benchmark in the African

audio-visual subsector.

Popularly known as The Father of Nollywood, Okey Ogunjiofor is a multiple award winning filmmaker, actor, writer and publisher. He is the pioneer producer of the Nigerian film industry, the global African brand known as NOLLYWOOD. He is a National Peace and Unity Ambassador with great passion for youth empowerment.