

Nigerian Publishers Speak: Engaging Interviews with Founders and Directors of Selected Publishing Houses in Nigeria

Mary B. Aiyetoro, Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State

Transcript of an interview with Steve Shaba, founder of Kraft Books
Limited

Aiyetoro: Good afternoon, sir.

Shaba: Good afternoon.

Aiyetoro: I want to know, for record purposes, how Kraft Books started.

Shaba: Kraft Books was incorporated as a private liability company in 1987. It became operational in 1992. I had produced many works before then, because I was a full time staff of Heinemann Educational Books Nig. Ltd, which is now called HEBN publishers. Precisely, I worked in Heinemann between 1984 and 1990. While in Heinemann, the seeds for the birthing of Kraft Books were sown. Arising from my observations, particularly, on literary publishing in Nigeria and the role Heinemann was playing then as the foremost literary publisher in Nigeria, I knew that I could carve a niche for myself in this area of publishing. Because of the quantum of manuscripts that were being sent to Heinemann on regular basis for publishing consideration, there was a need to start a local series or an in-house series by Heinemann Nigeria to complement the African Writers' Series. This gave rise to Heinemann's Frontline Series which was divided into three levels - upper level, intermediate level and junior level. Even then, as I worked with Sir Aigboje Higo who is now late, I discovered that people wanted to publish, particularly, creative literature. There were so many manuscripts available for publishing and I began to nurse the idea that if I ever stepped out of Heinemann, then I would want to be a literary publisher. So, between 1984 and 1987 I took steps to register a company.

I was ready to do anything to realise my dreams. By nature, I like my freedom. I enjoy my freedom; I was not ready to stay a long time. Having worked with Heinemann for six years, I moved out; and I got engaged as a publishing consultant with UNICEF. So I became a publishing consultant with UNICEF in 1990. Six months after, I got fed up and I really wanted to be on my own, midwife a book, bring life to a book. By the time I finished my contract with them, I came back to Ibadan and discovered that I had a publishing house that I had incorporated which was dormant because I did not do anything about it. At old Heinemann, there were so many manuscripts that were gathering dust, likely not going to see the light of the day. So I told myself, I love literature from my own background, poetry in particular, of course, by training, I am a theatre artist. I studied drama. But, clearly, I love anything written in verse, meaning anything hidden; and, specifically, I like literary publishing. So, in 1992 I started doing my work from my dining table as a one-man publishing outfit. Incidentally, one of the earliest books I published had nothing to do with literary publishing – *Fundamental Statistics for Education and the Behavioural Sciences*. It was a book with 424 pages. This book has about ten reprints up till date. Eventually, between the 1992 and early 1993, I rolled out my first set of literary books in the genre of poetry.

Aiyetoro: Can we know your area of emphasis and focus? In other words, how can we describe Kraft Books publishing company?

Shaba: In Kraft Books, our focus is on literary publishing. By that, I mean we publish literature books in the area of poetry, prose, drama, short stories, and textbooks relating to literature, critical studies and all of that. That is our main focus. Along the line, for us to survive, we have had to do a number of biographies, autobiographies, books of reading. We also publish for corporate bodies and institutions. But our emphasis is on literary publishing and that is what we are trying to really do to develop and make sure that what we started some years back has blossomed to the extent that we have published so many books. We have published over a hundred poetry collections, fifty drama texts, twenty books in

the prose fiction genre as well as a number of short stories and children literature.

Aiyetoro: Do you print your books yourself?

Shaba: No, no, no. It does not make sense to print yourself. It is like having about five or six children and you set up a school because of their number. Even abroad, I do not know of any publishing house, I stand to be corrected, outside Nigeria that has a printing press of its own. I know that in England, they will leave the city to the hinterland to print and they indicate where the books are printed. Even the major publishing houses in Nigeria do not have printing presses. That is why many of them print abroad. But really, I do not believe in printing outside. I believe that we can print locally and have very good books. As you are aware, ABC also circulates our books abroad. One of our titles *Trends in Nollywood ...* is reprinted abroad by Lighting House, a publishing house.

Aiyetoro: What do you consider to be the unique traits of Kraft Books, and what differentiates it from the other publishing houses?

Shaba: Well, I think it is the vision we caught early enough. Our unique trait has to do with the fact that, right from the start, we are operating all three forms of publishing, namely, contract, subsidy and author finance. The normal publishing that people are aware of is the contract publishing – you have a manuscript, you offer it to a publishing house, they decided to publish it because it is good, and put the author on a royalty for a number of years, for a specific number of copies and all of that. As I mentioned earlier, our vision is to publish quality books and give emerging writers opportunities to publish their books, thus encouraging them so that their voices will also be heard. So far, we have been able to do that. Our mission is to produce high quality books that will compete with the books done anywhere in the world. I was on Channels recently to interact with the members of a book club, I took samples of the book we have done and asked them to bring out some foreign books that they had with them. I pointed out the fragile spines of the books which break easily unlike our own, which we sew before binding them. Our books are very durable as tiny as it may be – 60 pages. We ensure the book covers are laminated ... 80 grams

aesthetically awesome; so, the journey is on. We are brainstorming. There is no end to human knowledge. We got information that some publishing industries are trying to copy us; we are maintaining that cutting edge and going ahead in terms of standard, not money. I want to believe that it is succeeding, that is why we have prominent Nigerians publishing their books with us locally. I don't want to mention any names – governors, diplomats, traditional rulers. They are all quite satisfied.

Aiyetoro: Can you say that Kraft Books Limited has carved a niche for itself?

Shaba: Yes. In fact, one of the things we try to do, whatever the form of publishing, is adjusting in quality control. We want to assess the content of the manuscript before publishing it. If you bring all the money and if your book is not good, we are not going to publish it, because when people read, it should help in vocabulary building, language power and all of that. So if students pick up a book that is badly written, with bad English or bad sentence construction, it would not contribute to the growth of our educational system.

I see a lot of books that are self-published. A lot of them, to protect the authors' interest and names, came back to us to republish. There is no perfect book, but all the same, you must put all your effort into whatever you are doing. Publishing is an academic venture so if you are not academically good and sound, there would be problems. We put in our best in Kraft Books. We have just eleven permanent staff and out of that six belong to the publishing department – editorial and production. Our editors are from different academic backgrounds – linguistics, English language, Theatre, literature – and so we do what is called double checking, assessment, editing (we even rewrite some works). I found out that the problem with some authors is that they are not patient enough to write very good books. By the time we invite them for a meeting and show them the editing we have done, they are always surprised. Many writers are just too eager to have their books published. However, we are very thorough here, because when books are badly produced, the condemnation will not only be for the author, the publisher will share even the larger part of it.

Many of our literary titles have won awards – ANA prize, NLNG prize and so on. So, I think this is a kind of testimony and legacy we want to keep. Like I said, we operate all three kinds of publishing. If we find out your book is very good and we do not have the funds to publish it, we consider author-finance or subsidy publishing. When the authors finance the publishing process, all the copies belong to them but we still assist to promote, market, and sell the books. We enter some of them for competition and prizes, and as we go around for conferences, we display our books for people to see them and that is how some of our books get on the reading list in schools, universities, polytechnics and colleges of education spread across the country.

We help authors who have paid for their books but kept them with us, including authors who are not in Nigeria, to market their books twice every year: in May and November, respectively. We also take care of the royalty. However, there are some titles that we published through author finance and the books are selling. The author might say that he/she does not have the money to reprint the book any longer and that we should take over the financing of reprints and we will do it. The system is fluid. You can start from contract publishing and end up doing author finance because the money is available. I will liken it to the situation where you are thinking creatively, strategically, looking into the future, being dynamic, so that you would not be at a standstill. Any author whose work is good enough will be granted entry into the market. This is because hindering someone's creative spirit would make the person begin to doubt himself and his ability to excel as a writer.

Once you have a book out, it is like the woman who has successfully given birth to a baby. The woman is joyous and wants to have more babies. The impetus, the zeal is now there to have more. But when the zeal is not there, it's a lot of frustration. So, our emphasis, basically, is creative literature, but we also do textbooks.

Aiyetoro: Do you also publish educational books?

- Shaba:** Oh yes. We publish books on Film Studies, Literature, English, Mass Communication, Computer Science, Statistics etc.
- Aiyetoro:** Do you also publish educational books for the secondary schools?
- Shaba:** No, no, no. We are not into primary or secondary schools book publishing. We are into tertiary and general interest book publishing; motivational books, cultural studies books and so on. For example, we have worked with a cultural association to produce a book such as *The Igbo Nation: History and Challenges of Rebirth and Development*. It is a two-volume book totalling 1220 pages.
- Aiyetoro:** This means you are mainly into tertiary educational, cultural, communication, general interest publishing.
- Shaba:** Yes, but our real focus is literary publishing.
- Aiyetoro:** Do you influence your writers on what they write? Do you influence their views? Do you suggest to them the topics that are marketable?
- Shaba:** Okay. Well, indirectly I will say we influence what writers do because I mentor young writers and authors. Some of them bring their manuscripts to me and being a literary person myself, I put them through.
- Aiyetoro:** On a lighter mood, I want to ask whether your publishing house is gender friendly. Do you publish men only or women only or both? What is the percentage?
- Shaba:** Kraft Books is gender friendly, starting from the staff, we have more females than males. Honestly, it was not by design. It just happened like that. People are employed based on merit. When it comes to publishing books, more men have brought manuscripts than women. This is also not by design at all.
- Aiyetoro:** Different publishing houses pursue different ideologies. Now, what is your own ideology or motivation in publishing books?
- Shaba:** I am guided by this maxim, "let the thousand flowers blossom and contend with one another." Let all the ideas come because no idea is useless. Whether you have taken a Marxist, socialist or capitalist approach to issues does not really bother me. I have published books in Arabic language,

on Arabic culture and literature. I have published esoteric books which some people may in fact classify as occultic.

Aiyetoro: How would you describe the Kraft Book brand?

Shaba: Kraft Books Limited is the home of quality books. A lot of people outside who have seen our publication are fascinated by the quality. Take for instance, one of our authors, Professor Anyakoroma. When his book came out, he went for a conference somewhere outside Nigeria where he met a professor whom he gave a copy of his books. The man asked if he had printed the book in Germany. He was surprised that such work could be from Nigeria. I am a perfectionist by nature. I am not easily satisfied by just anything. If you print rubbish for me, I simply reject it. For instance, there was a book that I had to deliver on a due date and from my own perspective, the book came out badly. I called the author that I was not satisfied with the production and that I would just send him fifty copies for the launching and later deliver our standard to him which was eventually what I did. My staff suggested that the books are better than some books out there but I told them that they were below our standard. The man observed this difference and called to show appreciation and even offered to compensate me but I said no. I had to deliver what I had promised. We have also received many awards from institutions, organisations, because of the quality of our books.

Aiyetoro: What do you have to say about the reading culture in Nigeria, and how does it affect Kraft Books?

Shaba: Though it has been said that Nigerians don't read, and that this is having a negative impact, I am of the opinion that people read but probably not enough. People may be reading for different reasons—for examination, leisure, literature, gossip magazines. People are also writing, although most of their works may not be published. On the other hand, Nigeria was under-published in literary publishing.

Aiyetoro: Now, let us link literary content with ideology. What is your opinion about literary content versus ideology? How do you relate writers' ideology to the literary content of their works?

Shaba: What I can say about that is this: for most of my authors, it is not an issue of ideology. These writers use their talent to

express their anger about the anomie of the society they live in: the inequality, injustice, the yawning gap between the haves and the have-nots, the oppression, brutalisation and the flight of decency from the society. These are the things they write about. They write about their future, the future of the country as well as the future of their children and the unborn also. The late Abubarka Gimba wrote a *Letter to the Unborn Child*. He took a flight into the future; like a reverie, a dream about what will happen to the unborn with what is going on. His art highlights the problems associated with bad leadership in Nigeria and the docility of the followership who find it extremely difficult to resist or change bad leaders. Gimba's book is a subtle reply to Achebe's *The Problem with Nigeria*. Achebe says the problem with Nigeria is the leadership problem and Gimba, while not denying that there is a leadership challenge, feels that it has to do more with the followers who are not taking their destinies in their own hands. So, we are confronted with writers engaging themselves to address the anomie in the society. They are not talking about ideology because globally, we know that capitalism has its own flaws while Marxism, as evident in the collapse of the USSR, is not effective. If you ask me to fashion out an ideology which is not far from what people already have, I will say welfarism. I see a lot of writings just concerned about the welfare of the people, their society and all of that. Is there something for them? Is there a future for them? If there is no future for them, what about their children? Therefore, whatever ideology the government is working with must provide a future, must provide welfare, must be egalitarian, and must be equitable. There must be justice, there must be honesty. There must be integrity, and there must be leadership. We must have sound moral and societal values. Writers are like the conscience of the society. Therefore, the first motivation of writers is to write about societal issues from the point of view of a certain ideology. They want to shout about the erosion of their cultural values, tradition and all of that. Right now, I am waiting for writings about this whole gay question, homosexualism. How somebody will postulate that in the next few years, if homosexualism takes root, there will be problems with

population. The impact on the church, morality, society and everything would be much, especially in this part of the world. I want to see writers write about this in a creative, entertaining and educative manner.

Aiyetoro: So what is your view about how more Nigerian writers are now focusing on politics, as predominant themes, in their works?

Shaba: As a literary person, with a critical mind and having studied literature myself, I look at drama, I look at history and how politics has come to distort history. Yerima's *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen* comes to mind. Why is Yerima's account different from Ola Rotimi *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*? He researched and he found that what Prof. Ola Rotimi wrote is flawed. The Oba as a tragic hero in the context of Ola Rotimi's rendering of the story is different from Yerima's, where he has become a tragic victim.

Iredi War, written by Sam Ukala, is about the resistance of the (Ika) Agbor people against oppression and domination by the British. This book won the 2014 NLNG prize for Literature. He has used this work to examine the whole question of politics and injustice. The leadership flaws that led to the Iredi war could also lead to war in Nigeria. The subtle message is that when people have been pushed to the wall they would react and fight for their rights.

You also find some works discussing the challenges of illiteracy, especially the problems caused by ignorance, of flawed genotype leading to childlessness in marriage or children dying at infancy.

Aiyetoro: On a final note, why did you name the company, Kraft Books Limited?

Shaba: Kraft is from the word, strength. That picture just came to my head. That's how I came about Kraft Books, with letter K and C. It is a German word really which means strength. There is something I love about the Germans. They are very rugged. And my own middle name too has a kind of German colouration, Styrmor, Styr is German.

Transcript of an interview with Eghosa Imasuen, M.D. of Farafina Books

Aiyetoro: Can you briefly talk about the history of Farafina books?

Eghosa: Farafina is an imprint of Kachifo Limited. Kachifo Limited was founded 2004 by Muhtar Bakare. The first of several imprints, our first Farafina book, *Purple Hibiscus* was published in 2004. Since then, we have expanded our imprint list by including Farafina Educational, Prestige (which also offers publishing services), Kamsi (for non-fiction, lifestyle and poetry), Breeze (for genre fiction), and Tuuti (for children's books).

Aiyetoro: What were you doing before you veered into publishing?

Eghosa: I am a medical doctor. I am also a novelist. I was published by Kachifo via its Farafina imprint, first in 2008, and for my second novel in 2012. I had a stint as managing director for my family's business, a mortgage bank, for two years: 2009-2012. After that, I was offered this challenge of running Kachifo Limited, and I accepted.

Aiyetoro: How do you source for relevant manuscripts?

Eghosa: We receive manuscripts via two major routes, as it is traditional in the publishing industry. First, we get manuscripts recommended to us by our friends (editors, other writers and agents); and second, we accept manuscripts submitted via email.

Aiyetoro: What is your mission, vision and house style?

Eghosa: Our firm's motto sums it all: *Telling our own Stories*. This is our mission statement and sums up our style. Beautiful stories told in a very honest manner.

Aiyetoro: What is your company's editing style or process?

Eghosa: We have a style guide that we have developed. We have in-house editors for most of the work, and may outsource to freelance editors, who are given the style guide so that they stick as close as possible with our style.

Aiyetoro: Does your preferred ideology influence the contents of your writers' published work?

Eghosa: I do not know. However, if our ideology is what sells, then it will influence our writers. If our ideology is what keeps our readers as an audience, then by extension, it will affect what our writers create. If there is any ideology, it is the ideology

of the market and the ideology embedded in our logo, "telling our own stories," as it is in the best interest of society.

Aiyetoro: What then is your motivation as a book publisher?

Eghosa: That's the answer. That means the answer was always there. Telling our own stories and making sure that we make money while doing it.

Aiyetoro: In the past, we talked about printing, then we talked about publishing, now there is a new development in that we now have e-books, audio books, do you understand? How do you see printing in the future? Will Farafina stick to printing in the next 10-30 years?

Eghosa: In Farafina, we are inching towards having our books in every media; however, the deployment of technology in the publishing industry has had almost no effect practically on Nigerian publishing, because it is the printed books that still sell most.

The audio book market in Nigeria is almost impossible to enter because, how do you sell an audio book? An audio book is the easiest thing to pirate. If you try an audio book, the next thing you will know is that it is being pirated and sold at a cheaper price and one may incur loss in the venture. The peculiar idiosyncrasies of each market are many. The e-book market is not presently as financially rewarding as the print market, but we are into it because we can foretell it will get bigger in the nearest future and we do not want to be left behind. Now how has e-book publishing affected us as publishers? I think my answer to that is simple: not really much. E-book users are not in Nigeria. For example, a kindle is N19, 000/20, 000. It is very cheap and you can put up to 2000 books on a kindle. However, Amazon does not sell kindle here; so, people have to use phones and other devices to read. Meanwhile, how long can you use your phones to read before the battery runs down and you need to charge? Also, the fraudulent acts of Nigerians have discouraged foreign publishing houses from selling in Nigeria and Amazon is not hungry. The kindle is one device you can use anywhere, even in the sun you can read with it because it does not use the same technology as the telephone screen but it is not being sold here. E-book readers are beginning to

make an impact in certain African countries, because we have people who are getting second-hand kindle in places like Uganda and Ghana. In Nigeria, if you have a kindle it will be stolen from you.

If you see a kindle, a book or a sony kobo, when you see it and hold it, you would know it is a lovely device because when you open a page and you are in the sun, it gets brighter, the book becomes clear because it uses what they call electronic paper. However, the print book is not going anywhere just as the radio did not go out of use when television was invented. These things do not kill each other; it can only shift relevance from one to another. E-book is a new market. Even if Nigerian publishers decide to go into it they have to worry about the industrial property right, intellectual property issues, where can you sell, and what rights do you own, what right has the author given you to exploit? Right now, we are focusing solely on making sure the books we are selling are good works, so that in the nearest years, people like you can applaud our efforts.

Aiyetoro: What are the prospects of literary publishing in Nigeria?

Eghosa: Literary publishing does not bring in a lot of money. It rarely does. What literary publishing does to you as a publishing house is that you may realise the amount of money you put into the bank without making much profit. Some stories will not sell and the publishing of novels will actually make one lose money as so many people in Nigeria do not read. So, what makes money for publishing house worldwide is recommended reading, school books. You can go as far as the Ministry of Education to market your book (literary text) after publishing. You can also just publish textbooks when you know you have a guaranteed market.

The publishing industry is a schizophrenic industry. It does not make decisions purely on business considerations. It tends to mix up the quality of the texts that are published. You find publishers taking decisions to publish a book even if it may not sell very well.

Aiyetoro: How many titles do you publish in a year?

Eghosa: We do up to 10 or 15 titles in a year.

Aiyetoro: Since the inception of this publishing house, how many titles do you now have?

- Eghosa: I do not know. I don't have the figures, maybe 60 titles.
- Aiyetoro: How do you see Farafina and her brand in the international market?
- Eghosa: We have a good reputation because we are trying to bring back traditional publishing, not just the glorified printers. I do not know how we are seen but on our own, we see ourselves as maintaining a high standard.
- Aiyetoro: Your company published Adichie's *Americanah* and Segun Afolabi's *A Life Elsewhere*. Has the reading public accepted the books?
- Eghosa: Yes. Farafina published *Americanah* in Nigeria. Farafina owns the right to publish *Americanah* and should the need arise, if the Americans want to publish it in their country; we will give them the right to publish it there.
- Aiyetoro: Do you think that your publishing house is gender friendly?
- Eghosa: We do not even think in those terms. We publish any good material. We just want to publish good stories.
- Aiyetoro: Thank you very much sir.

Transcript of an interview with Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, founder of Cassava Publishing Company

- Aiyetoro: I would like you to start with the history of Cassava Press, how it was started, your vision, your mission, and your goal, what you set out to do.
- Bibi Bakare-Yusuf: I am not very good with dates, but I think in 2003 or 2004, we moved to Nigeria, my husband and I, for me to work at OAU as a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Gender studies. I was there for six months, and then I resigned. I was not very happy. While I was at OAU, I realised, by talking to literature students, that there were all these contemporary African writers that I did not know while I was abroad, and whom I had never heard of. I also realised that students in Nigeria, most especially literature students, in different universities, were not reading the same books. For example, if you are in the UK, if you do literature, at Oxford, Durham, wherever, it is pretty much that all of your generation would have read similar things, right, in the same way that my mother in her generation would have read.

My mother talked about books like *So Long a Letter* and *The Passport of Mallam Illia*. These were the kind of books that her generation read. However, something happened with Nigeria's education. SAP happened and then everything changed. So, I realised that people were not reading and when I looked at all the stuff they were reading, some of the literature texts that were recommended for them to read were the classics like Achebe's books, and co. or they were books published by the lecturers themselves and they were not only abysmal in terms of quality, they were also terrible in terms of production value.

Aiyetoro: So, what step did you take to correct these flaws?

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf: I decided to get friends who are more business minded, to consider setting up a publishing company. Some people said that the idea sounds really interesting. They were like, we want textbooks. However, I did not want textbooks. Textbooks, maybe from a business perspective, are very profitable. For me, the kind of motivation for setting up a publishing company was more ideological than economical. I felt that these people were not thinking along the same line with me. So I thought, let me just start it. Now, if I have to come back again in another life, would I still have set it up? Probably not, especially if I know what I know now. So I started it. I knew nothing. I have a lot of friends in publishing in the UK. The mistake I made was not consulting any of them. On one hand, it was a mistake, on the other hand, it was good because through the baptism of fire, I learned the hard way. I made all the mistakes you could possibly make. At first, we printed in Nigeria because I felt that we needed to support local printers. We printed ten thousand copies of two books, twenty thousand copies. When they gave us our first batch, the quality was horrible. It was just disgusting. I started the company with my husband, but I was the main brain behind it. Everything I learnt about publishing, I learnt it online. I decided that I wanted to own the means of production and control it, control the narrative, and add to the narrative that is told, and also add to the way it is presented. I wanted to show that we can produce quality in Africa. Quality can come out of this continent. It does not necessarily have to come out of Europe.

Aiyetoro: So, packaging is very important to you?

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf: Yes, the way a book is packaged and presented is very important. So, for me, I felt I wanted something; I wanted to control the means of production, I wanted to produce an object of beauty. Something that is beautiful, that we can be proud of. So, that was the kind of underlining mission and vision that is driving Cassava Republic.

Aiyetoro: It seems as if you only publish female writers.

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf: No, no. We also publish male writers. However, I have a deliberate approach that I want to publish more women. If I was a lot more confident when I started, I would have made a choice to just publish female writers only. I would have called it a feminist press. Behind the scene is a feminist ethos. It means that we try and think about the text, even editorially, to make sure that we do not promote anything that would denigrate women, children, or even men, or other forms of sexuality. We want to promote and present narratives that question the status quo. I am really interested in stories which reflect the kind of complexities of what it means to be a woman. For example, women do not always love their husbands, desiring other men and I feel that we need to explore these kinds of stories. We need these kinds of stories in our children's books as well. I think the children's books are where they learn the socialization process. They learn how to become boys and girls, men and women, and so we are deliberate about the kind of stories we put out for our children and the kind of picture. Here, we do a lot of picture books and you can see men take care of babies, feeding their babies, being more at home, assisting their spouses with house chores.

Aiyetoro: What do you really consider to be unique traits for Cassava Republic which makes it different from other existing publishing firms?

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf: If you look at our books and compare it to other publishers' books, our books are beautiful; they can stand on the shelf anywhere in the world. We spend a lot of money on cover designs, paying people well, for good covers. We may be small but we want as many people to buy our books. So we reduce our profit margin, so that we can achieve the price

points that we have, even though some people still complain that our price point at 700, 800, 1,200, 1000 Naira are too expensive. However, if I was to actually listen to our accountant, our books will be a lot more expensive because there is just so much it costs you to produce. We usually print maybe three thousand or five thousand copies and the less you produce, the more expensive it is. Another unique selling point is that in Cassava Press, we really focus on promoting every book we bring out. We do a publicity blitz especially on the social media, because more and more Nigerians are engaged in the social media terrain. We engage with lecturers. Often, I would pick up the phone and call lecturers and say: look, apart from the novels, what about all these theoretical articles, you need to think about introducing them to your students. Unfortunately, I find that a lot of lecturers in Nigeria do not read enough.

Aiyetoro: What do you think is the status of Cassava Republic in the international market?

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf: Well, we are small, but we have a bigger footprint than our size. I am always amazed when I go to book fairs and I meet people, and say oh, I am from Cassava Republic, Nigeria, and they are surprised seeing me. So, I think Cassava Republic is probably one of the most well-known brands from Nigeria, you know, and one of the highlights for me is a magazine called *Monocle*. *Monocle* is a magazine, a design magazine. We love it. We always read it, my husband and I, because my husband used to teach philosophy to architectural students. We all love this magazine, and so when *Monocle* named Cassava Republic as one of the brand for the future in Africa, I was amazed. When people mention African Publishing, Cassava republic is likely to be there. It is likely to be at the top. Yes we are small, but we have a big brand. We want to remain small while making big impacts on the literary scene.

Aiyetoro: Now, let me take you back a bit. Why the name Cassava? Why the name Cassava Republic?

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf: I wanted something that would connect Africa to its Diaspora, something that is eaten, that people recognize across the black world. If you go to Brazil, they know about Cassava, they eat it because they have people of African

descent. If you go to Cuba, Jamaica, and other parts of the Caribbean, you will find these people. So, I wanted something that would connect Africa to its own Diaspora and so that we could produce books. So the idea was to produce books that are affordable, accessible, that are Pan African and also beyond the continent.

Aiyetoro: What are your manuscript collection's criteria in this publishing firm?

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf: We do not have manuscript collection criteria. We assess whatever comes to us and then take a decision.

Aiyetoro: Do you want to make any comment on literary content and the role of ideology?

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf: For me, a book that is overly ideological in literary merit is pointless. It becomes boring. So I think all writings, whether explicitly or implicitly, tend to have a sense of the author or narrator's political and ideological position. The problem is when that becomes overriding and you are swimming in their ideology so you are not allowed as a reader to just enjoy the story and allow the ideology to secretly sink into you. When it is banging you on the head, then it becomes a problem and I tend not to appreciate those kinds of novels.

Aiyetoro: Thank you very much for your time.