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## Nigerian Film Industry in the Mirror of African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA)

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### ABSTRACT

Worried by the drastic decline in the quality of content of Nigerian movies as evaluated by critics, this paper analyzes the evaluation of Nigerian movies by the African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA) between 2006 and 2016. The objective is to review the decisions of the AMAA jury and to present the academy's position on the prospects and deficiencies of the Nigerian Movie industry. The paper employs analytical research approach using both primary and secondary sources to explore assessed contents of the Nollywood movies and how far the industry has fared in the mirror of a renowned African movie assessor like AMAA. This paper assembles data of the awards of AMAA since inception and graphically presents the data. Findings reveal a sharp drop in quality of content of Nigerian movies over the years with a hope of an upsurge as adjudged by AMAA since 2006. The study recommends the private sector's all round support to Nollywood and the federal government's training or retraining of filmmakers as well as sustained funding for the steady development of the Nigerian movie industry.

**Keywords:** AMAA, evaluation, film, jury, Nollywood.

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### 1.0 Introduction

Nigeria is currently faced with a myriad of issues including a drastic recession in the economy, the political arena and the art industry. Film art is unquestionably relevant in the development of every nation's image. In Africa and beyond, Nollywood movies are famous and speak volumes about Nigeria. Despite the fame, the movie industry is faced with serious technical, language and acting challenges. Quality questions bothering on storylines and directorial vision or concept are some of the other most bugging experiences affecting the image of Nollywood (Shimsenge and Agav 2014:105). Such deficiencies ordinarily should not dent the fame of Nigeria's movie industry that is widely considered as the second largest in the world (behind India's Bollywood) (Ovoke, 2015:125).

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How Nigerian film scholars have arrived at the conclusion that Nollywood is the second largest movie industry in the world is a matter that deserves adequate substance. Nollywood was undoubtedly the most important and most popular industry in Africa in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Adenugba, 2008:1). Between 2005 and 2007, the African Movie Academy Award (AMAA)'s assessment indicated that the Nigerian movies had more quality than their counterparts in other parts of Africa. The academy's assessments however indicated a fluctuating performance about a year later; a trend that reflected the most challenging year of quality performance of the Nigerian movie industry.

It is pertinent to fill in some information gaps with answers from research questions such as: to what extent are the Nollywood movies famous in terms of quality? To what extent are technical factors, acting and storylines in Nollywood movies more advanced than those of other African movie industries? To what extent are the assessors of Nollywood movies' credentials dependable? What is the African Movie Academy Awards' rationale for assessing Nollywood movies? Film critics are of the view that criticism and analysis of any movie depends on the critic's ability to watch and assess the work against numerous frameworks of reference (Geiger and Rutsky 2005:28).

In the light of the above, this paper seeks:

- i. To examine the rationale for AMAA's assessment of quality of Nollywood movies.
- ii. To assess the credentials of members of jury of the Academy.
- iii. To demonstrate how Nollywood movie industry has fared in the past ten years as assessed by the Academy.

This study is an analytical research using both primary and secondary sources to explore assessed contents of the Nollywood movies and how far the industry has fared in the mirror of the renowned jury of AMAA. The study derives data on AMAA from 2005 to 2016 from different national dailies in Nigeria and facts from research articles from specialized journals, books and online sources. The data of the awards of AMAA since inception is presented in tabula form while the trend of Nollywood's performance is presented graphically. Data is analyzed inferentially and discussions based on findings.

## 2.0 Nollywood and filmmaking

The beginnings of the Nigerian video film industry popularly referred to as Nollywood dates back to 2002, exactly ten years after Kenneth Nnebue' success in *Living in Bondage* produced in 1992, the year popular film is said to have been born in Nigeria. The industry since then has not looked back but continued to excel in the African continent as well as competing in the global media sphere for popularity. Film making in Nigeria is reputed to have started in the colonial era "on the shoulders of free entertainment" with documentary productions and then moved to celluloid productions, when in the 1980s pioneering effort of Ola Balogun, Eddie Ugbomah, Sanya Dosunmu, Ladi Ladebo, Brendan Shehu, Hubert Ugunde, Adamu Halilu, Afolabi Adesanya, among others had witnessed a boom (Ekwuazi, 1987:1).

Around the early 1990s, the films in Nigeria started gaining popularity. In fact, after the production of *Living in Bondage*, an Igbo popular film (1992) followed by *Nneka*, another Igbo film and others that came thereafter, there was a move to establish a movie industry that would stimulate the development of the sector. This led to the establishment of Nollywood, coined after America's Hollywood and India's Bollywood. Today, Nollywood is reputed to be the second largest producers of films in the world churning out not less than 4,000 films annually and at least, 300 monthly (www.nigeriafilms.com). This rating puts the industry second only to Bollywood in terms of film production.

The name Nollywood had been in contention as to when and who coined it and it is still unclear where Nigeria's film industry got its name "Nollywood" (Iorapuu and Uzoji, 2012:106). However, Nollywood has become a generally accepted name for Nigerian films because it covers the diversity of Nigerian films, the multicultural identification of the product, whether they are celluloid, video, short film, documentaries, film literatures, training projects, equipment and capacity building of the industry and

its highly secretive professionals. The name Nollywood, from one dimension refers to the movies made in English, which is the reason they have a universal appeal in the first place. However Adenugba argues thus:

The term covers the diversity of Nigerian film production in the same way that Bollywood covers the production of Indian films in Tamil, Bengali, Telegu and other languages besides Hindi, in other parts of that huge country. Nollywood covers Nigerian films in Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and English, although it is speculated that the Hausa filmmakers are trying to separate themselves by adopting the terms 'Kaniwood' and 'Kallywood'. (Adenugba, 2007:1)

The Nigerian film industry is the world's third largest producer of films, howbeit, video films (Adenugba, 2008:1). However Nollywood films are generally criticized for having trite plots, poor dialogue, and poor production values and for being stereotypical of negative practices such as witchcraft and violence in the country (Iyorza, 2008:14). Nigerian films, despite their simple but dramatic and emotional storylines, are condemned for use of foul/vulgar language, extraneous background noise or interferences, low audio, music conflicting with dialogue, non-crediting of music used in the work, spelling errors, editing problems, poor picture quality and use of lengthy and unnecessary flashbacks and scenes. Other shortcomings of Nigerian movies are incomplete storylines, short composition, and excessive brutality in content, recycling of stars and the star system and excessive promo of films in other films. Other problems are stereotypical and above all, indecent exposure.

Most producers of movies in Nigeria are marketers of movies who have little or no knowledge about contents of an effective movie. They fund movies no doubt, but the relentless zeal to maximize profits from their investments within a short period of time over-shadows their efforts to encourage directors to inject quality into the contents of their movies. In a related development, some movie producers who are schooled in the art of movie production are constrained by finance to produce quality movies. Most artistes of Nigerian movies have some innate acting skills, yet they lack knowledge of the theoretical principles guiding the trade.

The contents and forms of Nigerian films are trailing far away from expectations of film guidelines for awards. This is primarily because the business of the filmmaking in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to make quick profits from rushed productions sponsored by authoritative film marketers, most of whom are becoming producers and directors overnight. This business of film in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerian is a complete antagonism of the real business of film as discussed by film scholars – to make pictures speak, to reflect the true nature of our society with the view to articulating the ills and correcting wrong impressions before the international community and to interpret humanity correctly communicate through articulate sound, image and motion.

A good and effective movie “demands much energy and time during the “preproduction” activity..., not just about a subject but about the rendition of that subject for particular reasons and to create certain meanings” (Corrigan, 1994:2).

Films are not just about a story, a character, a place or a way of life; they are a way of seeing these elements in our lives and effectively reflecting people's self consciousness and self-expression as rooted in the realities of the society (King, 2006:64). It must therefore clearly fulfill its function as a future historical reference material. An effective film must therefore tell a story of the known and unknown audience and must insist on the clearest mode of expression through the film language, to enable the audience consume the most palatable ingredients of the message.

On the other hand, bad movies are characterized by wordy titles with offensive words, pictures on the cover made with Photoshop and use of pictures from another film. Other characteristics include use of inexperienced professionals from other disciplines as actors and uncertainty of the plot (Badmovies.org).

### 3.0 AMAA jury, rationale and evaluation process

The African Movie Academy Award (AMAA) was instituted in 2005, and for 10 years has remained relentless in the business of criticizing and evaluating selected African movies and awarding excellence in various categories. The movie assessing institution's initiative is borne out of the need to award and celebrate the brightest and best African movies with style, glitz and class. Part of the academy's objectives includes promoting African films, uniting Africans and encouraging the development of young African filmmakers. Its activities include the annual award and recognition of Artistes who have contributed in making the African movie industries a success.

Just as the Oscars has help improve the quality of films coming out of Hollywood, AMAA also has the aim and objectives to promote excellence, to create awareness, to create employment and to encourage creativity and newer innovation in the African movie industry. From inception of AMAA, artistes from South Africa, Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Ghana and a host of other African States have participated in the event.

The first edition of the AMAA recognized excellence of African films in best original sound track, best sound, original screen play, achievement in make-up, best upcoming artists, best actress in supporting role, best Nigerian film irrespective of language, achievement in costume, best visual effect, best performance by child, best edit actor in supporting role. Most Nigerian movies passed the selection process positively and bagged awards in different respects.

The selection process is rigorous. There is a call for submission of movies which are screened by the college of screeners, peopled by film journalists, scholars, critics and accomplished practitioners who work on the entries to pick the best 30 film that will go to the jury which determines which film to make what categories and the eventual winners. AMAA gains ascendancy and acceptability in Africa and outside of the continent because of the integrity of the awards, the professionalism and diversity of its jury members involved in the selection and evaluation process. The college of screeners usually stays in camp for about 8 weeks watching all the films before final recommendations are made. The jury is made up of world acclaimed film critics, programmers, curators and scholars as presented below:




Berni Golbert	Steve Ayorinde	John Akomfrah
		

**Berni Golbert** is Swiss born filmmaker who has directed and produced films in West Africa. He has been an AMAA Jury member since 2007. He is also a Jury member of Imagé Santé International Film Festival in Liege, Belgium between 2008 and 2010. He was also a member of the jury of the International Francophone Film Festival of Namur (FIFF Namur) in Belgium in 2011. **Steve Ayorinde** is a journalist and an author who has served on the Jury of International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) at major film festivals like Cannes, Berlin, Toronto, Stockholm, Cairo and Mumbai International Film Festival and is a foundation juror of AMAA since 2005. He is Nigeria's country representative and contributor to the influential International Film Guide (IFG).

**John Akomfrah** has directed twenty-five critically acclaimed and award winning creative documentary films, four feature films and several short films and has served on numerous film festival juries including the Accra, Mumbai and Marseille International Documentary Festivals. He is a member of many documentary festival committees including the Sheffield International Documentary Festival. He has also sat on a number of panels for a range of film industry organizations and awards juries including the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA), the Royal Television Society (RTS) and the British Film Institute (BFI). He was in 2011 Chair of the Jury for the African Movie Academy Awards annually held in Nigeria.

Keith Shiri	June Givanni	Hyginus Ekwuazi
		

**Keith Shiri** is an international film curator and writer on African cinema programme advisor to the London Film Festival and the Venice Film Festival. He is a member of the World Cinema Fund from 2004 – 2007. He has been an expert advisor for the EU-ACP Films and has served as a juror on a number of festivals including the Berlin International Film Festival, the Dubai International Film Festival, Pan African Film Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO), Tampere Film Festival and many others. **June Givanni** is an international film curator who ran the African Caribbean Film Unit and edited the Black Film Bulletin at the British Film Institute. She programmed “Planet Africa” at The Toronto International Film Festival for 4 years and has worked as a film curator in the Caribbean, the USA, in Africa (AFRIFF) and with festivals in India (International Film Festival of Kerala and Samsung Women’s International Film Festival). She is an Adviser on Focus Features ‘Africa First’ scheme; and she is currently developing a Pan African Film Archive based on collections from 3 decades of working in the field. She is Editor of the book ‘Symbolic Narratives: Africa Cinema’. **Hyginus Ozoemen Ekwuazi** is university lecturer/Professor and pioneer Director, National Film Institute, Nigeria. He has also been the MD/Director General, Nigeria Film Corporation.

Shaibu Hussein	Ayoku Babu	Asantewa Olatunji
		

**Shaibu Hussein** is a performing artiste, a journalist and a film critic. He is reputed to be one of the most consistent documentary producers of the Nigerian movie industry. He was an erstwhile National Chairman of the Dance Guild of Nigeria and a Pioneer member of the National Dance Company of Nigeria. He is the current Secretary General of the Nigerian section of the Federation of International Film Critics (FIPRESCI) and Federation of African Film Critic (FAFC). The astute commentator on arts and film development has sat on the Chair, for four years running now, of the College of Screeners of Africa’s premier film award-the African Movie Academy Award (AMAA).

**Ayoku Babu** is currently the director of the Pan African Film Festival who has sat on numerous film festival juries including FESPACO, the Cinema Africano Festival in Milan, Italy, and the Zanzibar International Film Festival. He has also sat on numerous panels and forums discussing the production, distribution and marketing of African American and African films. He served on the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Peer Grant Review Panel and the Los Angeles Arts Commission Grant Review Panel. He is an official delegate to the World Festival of Black Arts and Cultures in Dakar, Senegal for his contribution to Pan African Cinema. **Asantewa Olatunji** was the chairperson for the 2012 AMAA jury. She is one of the founders of the Pan African Film Festival (PAFF) who served on several film festival juries. In 2012, she was the guest programmer for the Zanzibar International Film Festival.

**Dorothee Wenner**



**Dorothee Wenner** has been member of the jury of the African Academy Movie Awards, based in Lagos/Nigeria since inception in 2005. She curates Indian films for the Dubai International Film Festival. She made a documentary about the Nigerian film industry. She is a freelance filmmaker, writer and curator who specialize on cross-cultural and women issues (AMAA, 2014: [www.ama-awards.com](http://www.ama-awards.com))

#### 4.0 Nollywood and AMAA rankings

When the AMAA held its maiden edition of the awards night in 2005, no African movie was involved in the contest apart from Nigeria; therefore only Nigerian movies bagged awards in all 14 categories. In 2006, few other African movies from countries like Bukina Faso and Ghana entered the contest and there were 16 internationally competitive categories. Nigerian movies bagged awards as best movies in 9 out of the 16 categories. In 2007, Nigerian movies won awards in 15 out of 18 internationally contested categories of the awards.

More specifically that year, the best Nigerian Film was, *Sitanda*, directed by Izu Ojukwu. The best movie in Africa in terms of cinematography was Jeta Amata's *Amazing Grace*. The best film in Africa in terms of costume was a Nigerian Movie, *Apesin*, directed by Muyiwa Ademola. The *Snake Girl*, a Nigerian movie directed by a Nigerian too, won the best visual effect. *Sitanda* again won the original screen play award among others in Africa while Ali Nuhu (*Sitanda*) won the Best up-coming Artiste in Africa. The Best Actress in Lead Role in Africa was also a Nigerian – Chioma Chukwuka who featured in *Sins of the Flesh*. Bruno Iwuoha won the Best Actor Lead Role. The Nigerian Movie Industry exhibited excellence to some extent.

In 2008 when the Awards were organized on 5<sup>th</sup> May in Bayelsa State, Nigerian movies, actors and actresses bagged only 13 awards out of thirty (30) that were internationally contested for by other African movies. Actors like Nkem Owoh and Emeka Ossai as well as actresses like Joke Silva and Kate Henshaw made Nollywood proud. In 2009, the Nigerian movies bagged 7 out of 23 categories of awards contested internationally. The other 16 categories were won by different countries like South Africa, Kenya and Egypt. In 2010, Nigerian movies maintained the statusquo of 7 out of 23 categories. In 2011, the drastic depreciation in the number of awards bagged at AMAA by the Nigerian movies was unimaginable. Nigerian movies struggled to win in 3 competitive categories out of 23. The categories

were: Best Sound track (Jeta Amata’s “Inale”), the best costume (Niji Akanji’s “Aramotu.”) and best African film for African abroad.

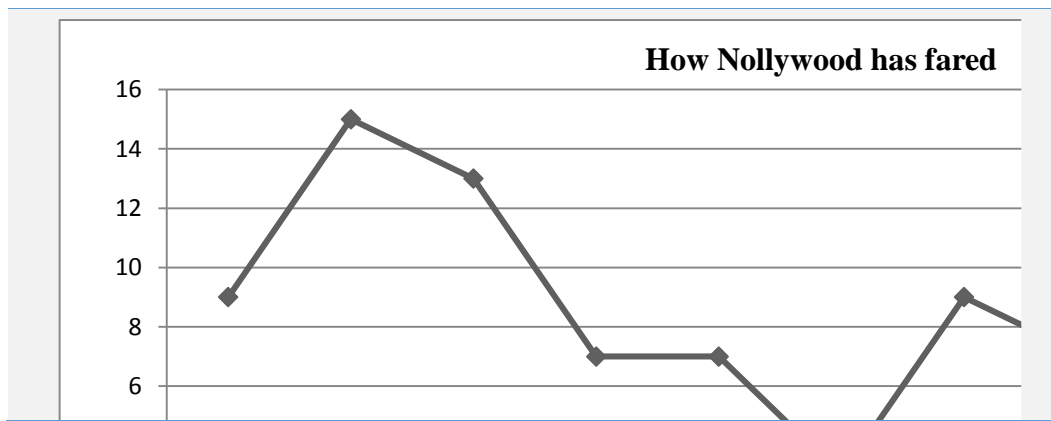
A drop from 15 awards in different categories in 2007 to 3 in 2011 was an indication of a sharp drop in the quality of the Nigerian movies and a great challenge to Nollywood’s excellence. Nollywood by implication at this point was screened and certified to have lost its prestigious position as a quality movie industry in Africa and the world at large. Although the Nigerian Movie industry won 9 out of 24 awards contested internationally in 2012, the number dropped again to 7 out of 24 in 2013 and 6 out of 24 categories in 2014. By 2015, only 4 Nollywood movies won out of 28 internationally contested categories but in 2016, 10 Nigerian movies won out of 26 categories of the movies.

The 2016 edition of AMAA shows that movies were assessed in various categories such as best short film, best animation, best documentary and best film in African Language. Other categories include best film by an African living abroad, best diaspora short film, best diaspora documentary, best diaspora feature and award for achievement in production design. Others are achievement in costume design, achievement in make-up, and achievement in sound track; achievement in visual effect, achievement in sound, achievement in cinematography, achievement in editing, achievement in screen play and the best Nigerian film. Others are best young/promising actor, best actor in supporting role, best actress in supporting role, best actor in leading role, best actress in leading role, best first feature film by a director, best director and best African film.

Summary of AMAA Annual events showing Nollywood’s Performance			
Year of AMAA	Categories of Competitive Awards	No. of Awards Won by Nollywood Movies	
2006	16	9	
2007	18	15	
2008	30	13	
2009	23	7	
2010	23	7	
2011	23	3	
2012	24	9	
2013	24	7	
2014	24	6	
2015	28	4	
2016	26	10	

It is obvious that the much anticipated upsurge in content and form of Nigerian movies is fast declining rather than improving, except for the increased number of awards won in 2016. There are set standards that qualify movies for awards in AMAA and Nigerian movies have derailed from meeting up with those standards. Such standards are not different from the views of the film scholars. At the 2011 event, the Chief Executive Office of African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA), Peace Anyian – Osigwe who doubles as the founder of AMAA, called upon film makers in African and Diaspora to explore more stories that project the continent truly and positively rather than projecting views that validate some of the negative stereotypes that Europeans and Americans have about Africans.

The Congolese film “Viva Riva” was named the best film in Africa at the 2011 AMAA which took place at the Gloryland Centre, Yenogoa, Bayelsa state, Nigeria. Nigeria had once occupied this envious position; however the events of AMAA became a clear indication that the quality of content in the Nigeria Movie industry has experienced a fluctuating rise and a sharp decline, with a significant hope of rising again as illustrated below:



African countries that have participated in the AMAA events include Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Uganda, Kenya, Mozambique, Morocco, Mali, Gabon, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Mauritius. Others include Togo, Cameroon, Seirra Leone and Namibia. To buttress his disappointment over Nollywood's performance at the 2014 AMAA, Lasisi writes:

...unlike what was more or less the norm at inception, not many Nigerian film makers won laurels. Instead, two South African Films, *Of Good Report* and *The Forgotten Kingdom*, won in vital categories. For instance, the AMAA Award for Best Film, Best Director (Jamil X.T Quebeka), Best Actor in a Leading Role (Mothusi Magano) and Achievement in a Screenplay were all won by *Of Good Report*. *The Forgotten Kingdom* won the AMAA Award for Achievement in Cinematography and Award for Achievement in Sound. (Lasisi, 2014: [www.punchng.com](http://www.punchng.com))

With a worse decline in 2015 AMAA and a sudden upsurge in the Nigerian movies' return to winning streaks in 2016, there appears to be a ray of hope for the Nigerian movies: a sign that the quality of movies in Nigeria may rise to occupy an enviable position among their peers in other African countries.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA) is instituted for the promotion quality film production in Nigeria and Africa at large. The academy is made up of reputable scholars and individuals who are well grounded in the film industry worldwide. These individuals, given the pedigree of their experiences and academic prowess in the world of film, are qualified to screen movies that are nominated for AMAA awards. The academy awards movies in different categories such as best African film in terms of form and content, best actress in African films, and best actors.

The Nigerian film industry has excelled by bagging most of the prestigious awards amidst stiff competitions, especially at the inception of AMAA between 2005 and 2008. With movies from other African countries making the competition stiffer, the excellence in Nollywood movies from the 2009 edition of the awards diminished drastically until 2016. At inception, Nigerian movies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century bagged over 15 awards in different categories in 2005. Perhaps, it was obvious that the 2005 edition of AMAA witnessed the selection of Nigerian movies only. By 2011, Nigerian movies bagged only three (3) awards in two categories that involved participation from other countries. In 2014, Nigerian movies bagged only six (6) out of twenty-four (24). This is a clear indication that the Nigerian movies have depreciated in content, cast quality, story line, costume and other aspects. It further indicates that Nollywood has gained fame as the third largest movie industry in the world without quality movies. The African Movie Academy Awards' role in evaluating the qualities of African films is therefore justified by giving it positively to the Nigerian film industry when due, and giving them negatively just when the industry deserved it.

If Nollywood remains the third most popular movie industry in the world, then its popularity would soon be viewed negatively except producers and directors sustain the current efforts by adding the



desired quality to filmmaking in Nigeria. AMAA is therefore a wakeup call to the Nigerian film industry. For now, the Nigerian movies have indeed fallen, not by AMAA but by their inability to meet up the demands of filmmaking in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It behoves the key players in the Nigerian film industry to indulge in research in order to bring out internationally acceptable stereotypical themes and topics as it has been done in films that have excelled such as “Sitanda,” “Amazing Grace” and the 2010 Jeta Amata’s “Inale.”

Nigerian film producers must shun the habits of rushing to produce movies for the purpose of making quick money from sales. Such films lack the desired quality in form and content to communicate the ideals of its society as intended. Nigerian film directors need to go back to the classroom to learn the basic arts of advanced film directing in order to apply creativity in all aspects of any movie they have to direct. Much as it may difficult to avoid featuring ugly scenes in telling a story, Nigerian film directors should handle negative themes in a manner that will not promote negative stereotypes about Nigeria and Africa.

Producers and directors who are experienced in film production should dictate the tunes of film productions, not the inexperienced marketers who have the finance. Members of the production crew, script writers, costumiers and artistes should be given basic training by the Nigerian Film Corporation because most of them may have the acting skills or qualities without the necessary theatrical background. All departments of Theatre, Media and Film Studies in Nigerian Universities should undertake certificate or Ordinary Diploma courses in Theatre and Film at reasonable prices in order to train and encourage Film Directors, Actors, Costume and Make-up Designers and Technical Directors in Nigeria to attend, owing to the fact that some filmmakers and artistes are drawn from various disciplines. Though they may be born with the innate passion or qualities of acting, they require knowledge of the basic principles of acting and directing movies. It is high time the actors and actresses in Nigeria stepped up their roles. It is expected that apart from the 2016 edition, Nigerian movies will excel once again in subsequent AMAAs.

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