

HARLEM WRITERS INTERVIEW

November 2020

Alexandria with Ben T. Mel



This interview was conducted over Zoom and has been edited for length and clarity.

Hey Ben, thank you for making the time, you're here to discuss your script for Adowa with us so let's get to it. We can start with you telling the readers a little bit about Adowa.

Thank you for having me Alex, well, simply put, Adowa is one of the most significant revolutionary events in black history that most people do not know much about, it's a signal event that announced the beginning of the end of European colonial adventures on the African continent with the defeat of a colonial power at the hands of an organized African power—in this case it was the defeat of the Italians at the hands of the Ethiopians during the height of the Scramble for Africa—and much like the Haitian Revolution before it that wrecked the global slavery system, Adowa was a monumental event for Africans and the colonized races around the globe in that it continued the tradition of the dignified resistance of the black races against any aggressive culture of domination.

What was your inspiration to write it as an Episodic Series? You told me that you wrote it as a feature script first.

Inspiration? Well, I don't know if I was inspired to write it, but I have primarily written about Africans or black people in general, and I have always had this burning desire to see African stories with black and brown faces on the big screen. I grew up consuming movies, at the core I am a fan of cinema, so I wrote Adowa first as a feature script and entered it in the Nicholl Fellowship a few years ago and although it did not make the cut, I got a very nice letter from the guy who runs the competition telling me how much they loved it and congratulating me for writing one of the top scripts they received that year. Honestly, I know these competitions don't amount to much in Hollywood, but I was touched that he reached out to me through personal email, not just because I thought no one would care about Adowa, but also because I thought Adowa written as feature was not all that good. I had done lots of research on the background to what led to it, and I had begun putting together an interactive online historical book because I was learning so much amazing and cool stuff that I did not know anything about, so I knew it was a mistake to attempt to tell one of the most significant events in black history in a single feature script. That is the weird thing about writing anything, you just don't know what you're doing or how the projects you begin is going to end up. I felt this in my bones during the writing process but did not think of writing it as a series, I wrote it as a feature in a kind of a dare to see if I could pull it off.

Is that how the script came to attention in Hollywood, through the Nicholl Fellowship which is run by the Oscar folks?

No. I mentioned it because you asked about inspiration. I don't think I would have pursued writing it as a series if it was not for the letter I got from them. I have been thinking about expanding the feature script into a limited mini-series and it was that letter that gave me the push to sit down and outline a version of it. The pilot script started to garner attention long after I moved to LA and had a manager who sent it out around town. The agents and production companies did not know what to make of the pilot script, so my manager advised me to write a TV SHOW BIBLE for it, flushing out my vision for the entire series, and that's when I knew the story could not be contained in a mini-series either, so I began to think of it as an episodic series with three parts.

What year was that? When were you in LA?

I moved there in 2017. I was in Los Angeles prior to that as a young writer fresh out of the Harlem Screenwriting Program run by Columbia University, with a project I workshopped there, and I was flown out by some people at Sony and stayed in LA for two weeks in Culver City, taking meetings around town and such which led to me drinking lots of fancy mineral water than I have ever drunk in my entire life.

That's amazing for a first-time writer, most writers do not get to experience LA the way you did, so you did not have to struggle to find representation.

Yeah, I am very aware, when I moved there the second time, I did not have any representation. I burned my first shot because I was totally unprepared for that experience in Culver City, in a way, I still am. I'm not comfortable with the whole Hollywood thing because I'm not interested in the game and the way it's played. The first time I was there was my introduction to Writing Samples and Assignments based on my writing style, and I knew I was not interested in writing projects for the studios. I know it sounds odd to hear it because that is the job of a screenwriter in Hollywood, it's a hustle and a fierce competition between writers, a battle royal of sorts between desperate writers to land one of those assignments. You've very little control over what you do as a screenwriter in Hollywood and I'm all about control. From what I can tell, there are a very few number of well-established writers at the very top of the hierarchy who have some level of control, they work on the projects the studios want to make, and also they get to rewrite projects of other writers, and unfortunately these are the projects that populate our screens. I have great admiration to whoever makes it out there though, it's not easy, it's a tough gig. Most screenwriters are the least powerful and the most disrespected talent in the entire Hollywood system, and the irony is it's their talent that is the foundation of the business, also keep in mind, according to the stats, it is harder to become a screenwriter in the Hollywood system than to be a football player in the NFL.

I wanted to do this interview with you because I was fascinated by this African historical event that I did not know much about, in fact, I have never heard of Adowa before reading your script. We picked you just so the readers can learn more about it.

Okay, but I thought you guys picked at random on who gets to interviewed by the group.

This time we voted on who to interview as a group, and since you abandoned us and we have not seen you for a couple of years, everyone wanted to hear from you. I am the film graduate interested in Hollywood, so they chose me to do it.

Oh, okay, I feel honored, but I might shake you a little if you're interested in joining the Hollywood system.

Okay, I came ready, so let's get into it. You were mentioning to me before we sat down for this interview, about the many reasons as to why we have not seen anything from Hollywood about the Haitian Revolution which very much like the events you write about in Adowa represents the height of the resistance movements against colonialism and white supremacy across the black world.

Well, I could write a dissertation on that topic alone but simply put, Hollywood, just as any other unjust institution in the American empire, functions under the patriarchal, white supremacist and capitalistic system paradigm – despite the all-inclusive rhetoric it pumps out as a leftist paradise of the liberal minded – Hollywood is a profit driven business that represents the height of the American greed culture at its very core. From its inception until this very day in 2020, Hollywood, for the most part, remains as what I described it, it's one of the most powerful moving image fabrication enterprises in existence that has done more damage to the images of black and brown people than all other mediums put together by deploying the white gaze on black lives.

Ben, talking like that, they must have loved you over there --

Oh, they know, it's like talking about racism, everybody knows it exists, but it's just not spoken about with any truth, it's the neo-liberal crowd over there. Hollywood is a very strange place, everyone pretends like there are no problems out there, it's fantasy land so in a way it encapsulates the entire American culture in a nutshell. I hate to veer the conversation into this territory, but I told you we are going to have a frank discussion today, so apologies in advance, you guys messed up by picking me, I speak my truth no matter what the consequences. But in all seriousness, the reason we have not seen a prestigious movie or television series exploring the Haitian Revolution which was the foundational event that unraveled the global slavery system from inside out or Adowa which ushered in the era of the end of the colonial powers on the African continent is because of the same reason why these two nations that represented the greatest threat to the colonial-imperialistic-white supremacist system in the past find themselves at the very bottom of the world order today. The Haiti and Ethiopia of today are war ridden, unstable and strikingly poor regions that serve as a warning for the black world – these former independent black nations that inspired the resistance movements against the very system that still dominates our lives, are victims of the unjust system that has been running undeterred for centuries. Any narrative that counters the unjust system head on by exposing its weakness, anything that fully obliterates the white gaze in complete by showing black peoples and nations rising above the unjust system is something we have not seen in any screen until this day from the Hollywood system. In short, if black nations were in power, or if we lived in a just society for that matter, we would have had as many iterations of these monumental historical events for peoples of the African origin as the Americans do with their American revolution or the Europeans do with the French revolution.

Wow, okay, I like this, and I did not expect that answer. So, basically, you see this as a racial issue?

Yes, I do. I am not picking on Hollywood as the only institution that practices racism in America. Racism exists in all systems and structures, it is part of our politics, education, finance, law, sports, in every facet of our institutions — the whole system is built on that patriarchal, capitalistic, white supremacist ideology. We cannot have any frank discussion about anything without being aware of how the system

runs. There has never been a direct challenge to destroy the core of this unjust system so what we have got are minor alterations and adjustments that hide the fact that the core itself is rotten. The end results are always the same, the continuing mistreatment of non-white populations across the entire system. Hollywood at its core is an unjust system so it has transformed somewhat overtime, adjusting itself to the mutated form of racism in the American society. It does not take much but a proper analysis of whatever you consume from Hollywood to figure that out, it does not matter from which decade or which studio, you will be stunned by what you discover about the direct and subliminal messages that are being disseminated by this machine that reflects the sentiment of the American society at large. If you look at the treatments of non-white people and women, be it black, Asian, and Arab characters over the many decades, it becomes crystal clear how the Hollywood system operates on what I described earlier, in fact, it is there to magnify it through motion pictures.

It does not seem that way, does it? Hollywood projects itself as a very popular and progressive global business, and overtly racist movies that offend the local or global market can no longer find their way to the screens. In fact, they have been doing the opposite lately, what did you think of movies like “Get Out” and the “Rocky” remakes, do you see them as a change within the system to shift the culture?

Hollywood was even more popular at the height of Jim Crow while it was depicting black people as child-like, beast like, subservient maids and docile or rapacious creatures from the 20's to the 60's, even then the system thought of itself as liberal for its time. There were some exceptions to the rule, as there have been exceptions to the rule throughout the unjust system, even during the times of slavery and colonialism, there were free slaves and abolitionists publishing books to challenge the unjust system. However, the core remains the same, and under the modified unjust system of capitalism, Hollywood studios are still owned by whites, and most of the screenwriters working in the system are mostly white, all of them raised and miseducated within this unjust system that has fed so many damaging images to them since birth that it's not a surprise to see even in the most popular remakes of today like the “Planet of the Apes” or “Indiana Jones” or “Tarzan,” you still find race laced messages packaged as entertainment. It is not just blockbusters, even the most prestigious of mini-series like “John Adams on HBO” in which the slave owning Founding Fathers are represented in a certain manner that has little relation to historical facts is acceptable under this unjust system. Hollywood is part of the American culture; you cannot separate it from the overall culture. If the educational system has been miseducating the public by fabricating narratives that bear little resemblance to facts, it is there to amplify and reinforce these fantasies through images. Under the unjust system genocide of native Americans becomes a fantasy genre of “Cowboys and Indians” in Hollywood, the devastation of inner cities and the war on African Americans becomes a “Crime, Cops and Law & Order” genre that people enjoy so much and cannot get enough of, and on and on. The only way to undue the horrific damage is to confront history but the blow back against Critical Race Theory to reform the American educational system is just one example of our inability to even imagine a truthful accounting of events that challenges the fabricated narratives of the white supremacist ideology. We would rather cling to falsehood to death than allow the truth to heal us, and that pretty much applies to any unjust system we have in our societies as far as I'm concerned. Hollywood banks on our desire to see and hear what we want to see and hear, so under the unjust system, it tends to manufacture pro-military, pro-capitalism, pro-individualism, pro-exceptionalism and on and on with the values of the unjust system.

What do you say to those that say Hollywood has truly changed, that it has become more open to the realities of our time, it's more diverse than it has ever been in the past?

I say, they are right. Hollywood, just as any other institution adopts to the times, my point was the rotten core itself does not change. What we have is refined racism and capitalism. If you examine its latest products, the most popular movies that dominate our global screens today are superhero movies. I am a huge fan of Marvel, as are my nephews, but it's hard not to notice that we get one "Black Panther" or one "Shang Chi" or a few white-women in "A Black Widow or Captain Marvel" for the domination of "The Twenty plus White-Man Avengers" and Hollywood gets to pat itself for diversity and inclusivity of other cultures. As I mentioned earlier, it's a patriarchal, white supremacist, profit driven business at its very core. Even when we do see these other races or genders, on the big screen or small ones as its beginning to happen with the explosion of streaming services, they are mostly there for visibility, and we celebrate their arrival with euphoria as I did with Black Panther, but it's sobering to see the overall message and the development of the characters are but a simulacrum of their white counterparts. They do not represent a radically different perspective, ideology, or any significant challenge to the overall understanding of what it means to be a human clothed in a different skin color or in a different body, or in a different culture in our world today, let alone challenge the unjust capitalistic-imperialistic system as being dangerous for the survival of humanity. In fact, they play the assimilationist role, in the universal sense of that word, which Hollywood loves to exploit to no end. Many of these characters are practically interchangeable to the other superheroes constructed on the white default for what it means to be a hero, what it means to be an American. You see what I mean about Hollywood being in tune to the larger American society, we celebrate the diversity of this nation while being aware that the power remains exclusively in hands of the few absurdly wealthy white capitalists running the unjust system.

You told me that when discussing Adowa, people bring up "Black Panther" repeatedly because Wakanda is obviously a fantasy African nation based on the independent African nation you write about in Adowa.

Yes, I don't mean to cut you off but there is a difference between fantasy and reality. I dismiss the entire ideology of exceptionalism, be it personal exceptionalism or national exceptionalism. The real reason people bring it up is because they are trying to separate a single African nation as being not like the other African nations and I find that notion as divisive nonsense. I wanted to write about Adowa not to valorize this idea of Africa, of Ethiopia being exceptional, quite the contrary, I am very harsh on the way I attempt to examine the regional politics of the country which has resulted in the terrible fracture we see unfolding there today. That is what I meant earlier by the Marvel Universe dispensing the dangerous idea of American exceptionalism even when it applies to a made-up African nation like Wakanda. Nationalism to me is one of the most dangerous ideas ever imagined by humanity in general. The core of the American understanding of themselves is expressing this internalized idea of being special, unique, and unlike any other nation on earth. I write to challenge this view wherever I encounter it. The personal reason for me in writing Adowa is because it provides me with the opportunity to use the most

visible of examples of African and black people resistance to the system of white supremacy and show how the global systems we have today are a continuum of the systems we had in the past masquerading in a different forms, and unless we directly challenge these unjust systems with unity, we are all bound to suffer from further indignities in the future. That is the main goal.

What do you mean by exceptionalism, I am not sure I understand it in terms of narrative, aren't all stories about individuals or events that are exceptional?

Yes, the whole narrative based on Joseph Campbell's hero's journey is the bible for screenwriters and I don't care much for any patriarchal narrative that marries itself well to the white supremacist ideal of the adventurous self-made hero, or the whole Judo-Christian tradition, or the Greco-Roman tradition, whatever early tradition that are all about exceptionalism of a certain region, of some chosen people, these types of narratives do not appeal to me much. When I refer to exceptionalism, it does not only refer to this big ideology, I am also talking about its daily application in our personal lives. In my own life for example, as a reasonably educated, well-spoken, light-skinned African migrant living in a society that is shaped around the racial order obsessed with skin tones, I have always gotten a kind of special treatment by whites who had categorized me as a harmless non-black foreigner, and since I came saddled with the biases and desires to join the dominant white society and avoid the black ones – as all migrants must do when they cross the borders to America and get a glimpse of who has power and who does not – I had thought of myself as an exceptional young man for the very first time in my life here in America. Again, that is in the Western sense, as an individual who made things happen on his own and saw nothing wrong with it. In fact, it felt great to be singled out by the dominant culture, this is the drug that keeps most of us their volunteer prisoners. I don't want to turn this interview to a whole biography of my own experiences but it took me decades to understand the many sacrifices, beginning from my parents, to the countless black and brown lives that had fought against the unjust systems of domination on my behalf, when you finally recognize it, and when it all truly sinks in, it's a humbling thing really, being "Woke" is not some sudden awakening but a long and slow process of coming to terms with this reality. We are all exceptional because of all these sacrifices, and the very idea of elevating one individual over another as exceptional is a blatantly false conception that serves a certain purpose to support a vicious ideology, it is there to sustain this unjust system. Since we are inundated with the individual and national exceptionalism mantra here, there isn't a day that passes without some version of it being expressed from politicians, the military, economist, educators, to just about any area of daily activities, from our news to sports—Hollywood is a major player in pushing this ideology and I mostly write things that counter this ideology.

I see, so what is the alternative, do we have to change the individual or the system itself? Do you see Hollywood inspiring the individual or the nation to change through the stories it tells about our society?

We are moving away from discussing the Adowa script itself, I am not sure if you want me to formulate an answer using Adowa as an example.

Sure, if you like, but I want you to comment on how you see change happening.

Well, I consider my current self an activist first and a writer second, and a prisoner of the unjust system so my answer might make you a bit uncomfortable. As a radical, I no longer believe in the possibility of changing the core of any unjust system by trying to modify it from outside or within. I have lived half my life as an optimist, with hopes and dreams of doing just that, but I now find myself as a radical optimist who realizes we must destroy the unjust system and replace it with a just system, or create our own system. We need a radical revolution to bring down this capitatlistic-imperialstic unjust system. What we have been doing so far is joining the unjust systems in droves and attempting to improve it by chipping away at it from the outside like an iceberg, and this is what the last half millennium of struggle has brought us, with fits and starts, with progress and regress, with varying success and failures across the globe, all the way to the most promising of movements like the one led by Martin Luther and others who aspired to alter the system with the Civil Rights Movement – which by the way is once again under a grave threat as of late 2020 after the rebirth of the spirit of that era with Black Lives Matter Movement, which for a fleeting moment had threatened the core of the unjust system before being assimilated by it. In my reading of the great struggle fighters, from Fanon, Touré, Dubois, Baldwin to Malcolm and Martin, what most people forget is that each of these great men who had dedicated and sacrificed their lives to fighting the unjust system had all ultimately came to realize and fear that the very act of trying to alter the fundamentality unjust system by joining it would eventually lead to disaster. In the end, they saw the core of the system that was based on injustice, with racial superiority expressed by military prowess on global scale, with capitalism stroking the insatiable appetite for material wealth and with perfidious personalities at the very top of the empire amassing the wealth of half the population on the planet — the idolization and mad rush to join this rotten system on equal terms as being another form of injustice. In the later stages of the movement, even the most compromising of those fighters, Martin Luther, had begun to compare joining the unjust system to walking into a burning house, and today, with the nuclear, pandemic, and environmental disasters unfolding in real time, mostly due to the greed and competition driven by the unjust system that devours resources and lives of the many for the benefit of the few, it's hard to believe in joining such a system as being akin to achieving equality. In America, the white supremacist, patriarchal and capitalistic culture remains intact with more than half of the dollar each citizen earns being used to sustain the imperial nation that is policing not just its streets but the entire world. We are living in a nation that is fast becoming a neo-fascist society in its own unique way — and we are all complicit in sustaining this unjust system, so it stands to reason that joining any of its institutions is either empowering the system or at best delaying the eventual collapse by sustaining it with minor fixes.

A few years ago, I might have thought that is an extreme stand but having been isolated for a year, seeing the streets filled with protests and reflecting on what is happening with our divisive politics, I am in the opinion that we need some major changes.

And we need them fast. For me, my own radical transformation is not a recent development, I have always felt odd about my life here. I used to joke with my friends that it is pointless to ask what anyone does for a living in such an insane system because we are all complicit in some way in sustaining injustice of some kind. In fact, I have no interest in asking or talking about what a person does for a

living in this society, you will have a hard time finding anyone, including family members that can tell you what I do for a living. I came up with what I like to call the “monkey suit on and monkey suit off policy,” to remind myself and others not to define me by whatever work I do to earn that dollar which half of it I know goes to the military, to prisons and policing — and I was painfully aware that makes me part of the hundreds of military bases waging wars across the globe. We are all sitting at home watching these protests, but we are the ones paying for the race soldiers acting as police in the streets that might kill us someday, in a black skin, that might happen to me or my nephews tomorrow whether I like it or not, you see, I never thought of myself as a good person ever because I know I am part of the system. That is an inescapable fact, that is why we must fight it to make it just.

How do we change the system if we're all part of it?

I don't know, but the only way to redeem oneself in such a system is to do works that fight the unjust system and not support it. That means, at minimum, I cannot join the military until the military is just, I cannot be a lawyer until the justice system is just, I cannot be a doctor until the medical system is just, I cannot be a teacher until the educational system is just, I cannot be a filmmaker until Hollywood is just, and on and on, but the only way to survive here is to join those institutions to sustain oneself. In that respect, joining some institutions is preferable than others, for example, some doctors join the unjust medical system that is effectively run by big pharma and corrupt insurance companies because some get to save lives; some lawyers join the fundamentally broken justice system to fight back by taking on racial justice; some teachers join to prepare their students on how to live and survive in a hopelessly fragile and unjust world with their deep understanding of subjects they are truly passionate about to awaken the thirst of the young mind, not to miseducate them, separate them into groups with bias examinations and shove confused souls as laborers into the market driven unjust system; some creators join the entertainment industry to inspire people with stories that reflect the shared human truth and living condition that runs counter to the dangerous ideologies and images pumped out by the unjust system — there are however moments like the one we are living through right now when it becomes hard to get around the truth. If we're truly honest the entire system is built on injustice, so under capitalism the people at the bottom that need the most help do not get it, everything is upside down, we have the newest and worst teachers sent to teach in schools with the neediest of students, the best lawyers protecting the wealthiest, on and on...so when the world stops under an existential threat to our immediate survival, we are all confronted by the truth of our condition because we are really confronting the unjust system we are living under as equals. Most people are asking themselves what the hell they're doing with their lives at this very moment.

It feels like the world is ending, do you anticipate the system to change after we get through with this virus, will humanity come out on the other side of this armed with better systems?

I hope so but systematic change is a very hard thing to accomplish. The moment is ripe for a revolutionary change but to get there we must confront hard truth, and I think we are a long way from that happening as a society. So, it mostly comes down to the people and what they do to come to terms with their condition. The pandemic has revealed not just the deep inequality that exists between the lives across the planet but also how decrepit the system truly is and it's hard to deny it. And once you

reach that point, what are going to do about it? My point earlier about not believing in changing the system from within comes down to the doubt I have about the many people that join the system in the first place. We grew up in a capitalistic society, enamored with a culture of success that is shot through with injustice, we grew up as accomplices within it while pursuing this thing called prosperity which under the unjust system is committing some kind of soul death, so we have people that know this deep down about themselves, and when confronted with it as they are doing at the moment, the majority become debilitated, hopeless, powerless, and if we are truly honest with ourselves, we are all suffering with this spiritual emptiness of living in a rotten system so we cannot wait to become quickly readjusted to injustice than challenge it. When you've lived in a rotten system for so long, things only make sense when you're within the unjust system. It seems to me that we have reached a point as species that have lost the capacity to avoid not just self-destruction but also planetary annihilation and there is no one able to do much to put a stop to our collective suicide. In short, I hope to see change, but I don't anticipate it.

Okay, there is a lot to unpack there but I recall Cornel West repeatedly using the phrase “well-adjusted to injustice,” so you basically see humanity as heading to disaster as a collective because we are all part of the system?

You know I am a huge fan of his and I agree with him to an extent because he uses that phrase to mostly describe the middle-class in America, but to me it encompasses the entire global community, including the most desperate souls fleeing injustice from their homelands that find themselves in Europe or here in America. I mean how many of us join the system with the firm intention of challenging it. I think not too many of us do, in fact, most of us follow the blueprint set down by the unjust system without as much as questioning it because our survival, our livelihood depends on it. The strongest arm of the unjust system is capital, we still suffer the continuing mistreatment of the mostly black and brown people under a white supremacist doctrine because we depend on the system for survival and prosperity. I mean, the core of the unjust system does not change, it functions the way it has done in the past, with domination and mistreatment of certain groups of people that are classified as non-white and it's a difficult thing for them to give up this unjust system because its beneficial to their collective group. They get the privilege and material glory, even some fun out of it, and as the dominated, those who desire to join this system want to take part in the fun. They know everything they see around them is made by them and comes from their lands, from cool phones to cars to whatever useful and dazzling object they can think of is made outside their homeland right? That's because the unjust system has achieved such a high level of expertise and excellence when dealing with materials and things that awes and humbles anyone that possesses it. The unjust system is such a hard system to stop because it produces products everyone wants to possess. And in addition to all that, there seems to be peace and very little war in their lands, they seem to have fun and happiness there, so there is a rush to join them and take part in this paradise on earth. You see to me, we are all living under the shadow of the unjust system, and there is no difference between those us who find ourselves in reasonable comfort in the West, well integrated into the unjust system and seeking prosperity, with the poor African souls that get on boats, or Syrians and Afghans that trek through destroyed cities, to Latinx migrants climbing walls — all of them are fleeing from their devastated nations to get to Europe or America with the same desire to join the unjust system and prosper like the rest of us. The irony is that it's the unjust system, this capitalistic-imperialistic system that has created the conditions that had led to the devastation of their

homelands, the creation of this unbridgeable inequality and the continuing misery that so many of the world's population find themselves in, the problem of inequality based on domination is the source of it in the first place.

I am not sure I understand what you mean, are you saying the American dream is part of the problem?

Sorry, I was rambling a bit, that happens. My point was why would anyone challenge such a system, even if it's unjust, if it's an all-encompassing system that allows you to join in its material benefit? This is what the "Occupy Wall Street" movement had to confront when challenging the capitalistic system of greed that led to the global meltdown in 2008. Young people were mobilized against the elites but failed to realize it's the middle-class that sustains the unjust system. Most of the people living under the unjust system are terrified of losing what they own, in fact, their desire is to amass more if possible and join those elites someday. You see, we have confused material progress, possession of things as a measure of the unjust system, we have all bought into the idea of prospering at any cost and we do not care if the system itself is a disaster when it comes to human relations, nature relations, or any other relation. The foundation of the nation we are in is not about some persecuted people who came seeking liberty or equality but their own prosperity. They were perfectly fine massacring the natives and enslaving Africans as long as it meant they were prospering in the new world. Today, we are on the brink of environmental collapse because of this unjust system but who cares as long as some groups prosper while others suffer. It took a calamity like a pandemic to expose these wide gaps that exist not in just our institutions, but between nations on a global scale, it was all out in the open for a brief moment, and we cannot feign innocence from what we saw unfold across the globe — we all saw how little we value the lives of the brown and black lives who died in large numbers because the unjust system is most brutal on non-whites and this time it mobilized and unleashed a radical movement in the middle of a lockdown that called to attention that rotten core of the unjust system but look at how fast the system kicked back into gear just as it did to crush the Occupy Movement. I am still in shock at how fast we are going back to doing exactly what we were doing before the pandemic; like we do not want to face the reality, the truth is a terrifying thing to confront, and we cannot help it but to readjust ourselves back into injustice as our default. We went back to consumption, we went right back to our sports and entertainment, to valorizing the police, the military, the teachers, the big pharma — who all traditionally stand guard for the rotten core whenever it comes under a threat — some corporations even adopted the potentially radical BLM as part of their institution ensuring its total failure in bringing any systematic change. The unjust system is a worldwide government and there is no alternative for anyone living under it. The American dream is the drug that holds the unjust system securely in place with a promise of material progress. It is very difficult to change the unjust system because it produces materials and things we all enjoy, desire and want to possess at any cost.

So you don't see these protests on the streets as having any effect on the system?

Listen, I too was swept up into the movement because I have been waiting for something like it to come along for a long time. The first time I joined BLM and hit the streets in LA was when they were separating families at the borders, and everyone came out; blacks, whites, Latinos, everyone was

enraged and furious. Most of us were arrested, and you felt this rage in the air, and I have never felt anything like it before, and I thought this is it. I imagine it was the same for sexually abused women with the arrival of the Me-Too Movement, things got tense everywhere in Hollywood, there was not a room where Harvey or Cosby were not being discussed around the town and every woman was furious, they were not having it anymore so they hit the streets. Now, mind you, I am a student of the liberation movements of the past, and they all have advised against reactionary protest because they have seen the unjust system crush them repeatedly. If you're not organized, with your own ideology and specific demands that must be met within a fixed time, reacting to what the unjust system does by running out to the street with every police shooting, every sexual abuse, or every horror the unjust system doles out daily, you can only have a minimal effect. I was taught that by revolutionaries. Even when you're organized as in the revolutionary Black Panther Party, with their Ten Point Program, their anti-capitalist ideology, their global outreach, and going as far as arming themselves to police the police state in their neighborhoods — the full power of the unjust system will bear down on you and destroy you. They killed every leader, infiltrated the movement to tear it down from inside out. Revolution is a serious business. This is what we must come to terms with if we really want the system to change, there is not a single movement that can challenge the unjust system by itself, revolution requires everyone to participate. If the masses are not organized and united across race and gender against the unjust system, you can only expect minor changes.

We were talking about a book you're working on about gender and revolution, I read the manuscript and you get into that quite a bit, I am curious, what are your thoughts on the Me-Too movement?

Okay, you're setting me up to mansplain the gender politics, but I think about everything in term of revolution so I will go ahead and give you my thoughts on it. I was in LA when the movement got exposure with the Harvey Weinstein scandal, but to me and my friends, it was the Cosby scandal that rocked our world, and my initial instinct was to keep my mouth shut when people asked me to comment on what was happening. They thought it was because I liked Cosby, you know all of us grew up watching "The Cosby Show," so it was uncomfortable to talk about the man we liked more than our fathers as being a serial rapist, but I did not say much because the entire town was acting like patriarchy only existed in Hollywood and some elite corporations, and sexual assault was limited to celebrities who took advantage of a certain group of women living in relative comfort. At the time, I was deep in research for this Afrofuturistic book on gender and warfare, and there was not a single war I was reading about in which massive sexual assault was not carried out against women. I was reading horrific stuff, not even little girls and children were spared by some of these soldiers. In fact, there were daily reports of gang rapes in a couple of wars I was closely following in Africa, including a brutal one in my own homeland and not one Western media picked upon it or showed any outrage. I bring it up not to lessen sexual assault suffered by any individual anywhere but to give you just a sample of the life value gap in the world due to this unjust system, but also to stress the fact that patriarchy, just as white supremacy, is a rotten ideology with deep roots that exists in every society, and until it is destroyed and replaced, a minor fix here and there for some women in certain nation or society does not mean women in general will stop to suffer from it. We have to start thinking in terms of ideologies, Patriarchy has to be destroyed worldwide with a revolution, as long as it exists, we are assuring that more women will suffer from it. So, I just kept my mouth shut because no one was talking about those black girls, their lives do not matter as much as the others that were being discussed.

You did not talk to them about what was happening in Africa?

I think everyone knows what is happening to some extent. We live in a rape culture here in the west, not long ago, a slave master or any white man really, was free to rape any black woman he owned or desired without suffering any consequences, so a dangerous form of rape culture has emerged out of that, the kind that empowers men from early on to dominate women, so in that way, patriarchy is not that different than white supremacy which trains the entire society from childhood on who has power and who does not. I mean right now, we all see how many blacks and Latinos are dying in large numbers because of this virus and if you cannot get to the root cause of the inequality that has created a divergence in underlying health conditions, you will be talking about the virus and not the social effect of living under the unjust system. So, it depends on which life you value as being more important, to me those girls in Africa have the same value as any woman that was victimized in Hollywood but the world does not function on equal terms under this unjust system. This pandemic is clarifying what our values are in each society, we have a hard time imagining a world free from this unjust system because of the deep inequality that exists in life value. The unjust system has made us very individualistic; so we only think about ourselves, and we think we can avert our eyes from the rest of the world, especially from the black world. This virus is a reminder that we all live in the same world and that is true all the time but we have shielded ourselves from the world that suffers from the unjust system. Why do we have a hard time imagining a global world where every life is equal, where any female born anywhere in this world is never battered, raped, or assaulted, and can control what happens to her own body? Well, we live in an unjust global system and until we destroy the unjust system, really get to the root of the problem which is patriarchy then it's like putting a cream over a cancerous melanoma and expecting to be cured from it. The biggest lesson I draw from both the BLM and Me-Too movements is the impossibility to reform predatory practices under the global unjust system. There is no possibility for telling truth or relating to one another in a just manner when the whole society is shaped by an unjust system. It's not a surprise to me how hollow and shallow any movement that comes along truly becomes over time because the system will not allow the emergence of any radical change to take place. Even when some succeed to a certain extent, it's disheartening to see what the change looks like, a few bad individuals are taken down but the system itself remains unchanged. But hey, I am here to discuss Adowa and how it attempts to challenge white supremacy, which is a worldwide unjust system that has locked an entire continent of Africa to the bottom of the world order creating this value gap in life, anyway, I don't mean to go on and on, it's the quarantine effect...

No, no, this is all good stuff, I wish I could keep most of it but half of what we discuss today will be cut for length. Okay, let's talk about Adowa and the challenge of writing something that takes on white supremacy.

Well, I should clarify that we do not get into the confrontation with European colonialism until much later in the series, so the first part is basically a biographical take on Emperor Tewodros, who was one of the founders of the modern Ethiopian state as we know it today. The entire half of the series explores his relationship with his contemporaries, long before their encounter with Europeans. It deals with his

birth, rise and ascension in precolonial Ethiopia and his attempt to break the divisive regional structures of the time and of course his controversial reign as an emperor hell bent on forming a reunified empire. His story gives me the opportunity to explore African politics before the arrival of colonial powers, and it's kind of cool because there are not many attempts made to show anything about the African continent before the advent of slavery and European conquest. In fact, when it comes to our screens, the only television series that touched on that part of African history goes back to almost half a century, which was the South African produced "Shaka Zulu" in the 1980's.

I remember that, but there was also "Roots" that came out in the 70's...

Yes, but "Roots" does not delve into precolonial Africa but deals with the transatlantic slave trade and the African experience in America. Most stories produced in America about black lives or indigenous lives deals with settler colonialism and slavery and it's rare to find anything about their stories before their encounter with Europeans. "Shaka Zulu" was on the African continent and whenever I meet producers about Adowa, and I stress the fact that the entire series takes place on the African continent, someone always brings it up and I am quick to remind them that the series was produced by white supremacists in the then apartheid run South Africa for the consumption of the global audience that has come to view African narratives through the European or Western gaze, and Adowa is a counter to that kind of pernicious narrative. When they feign innocence about what I am talking about, I direct their attention to the many prestigious shows coming out of Israel as of late, our modern-day apartheid nation, telling stories from their perspective about the Palestinian condition which they dominate with brutality equal to what took place in South Africa, and that's when the meeting usually turns uncomfortable, but we have to tell the truth without worrying about the consequences, I usually don't get a call back. The main reason I wanted to start with precolonial Africa is to immerse the audience in African history that has yet to come in direct friction with European aggression.

And how do they react to you or your take on it?

Listen, it's not easy for any non-African audience to experience narrative through the black point of view, I have come to that understanding through my own uncomfortable and conflicting feelings while watching black faces on the screen, granted most of them were slaves, drug dealers, starving masses, violent criminals, you know the way we are depicted under the unjust system is just brutal, and I identify as an African. We must be honest with ourselves. As non-white people, we all have been taught to hate our own self-image from birth, the famous "Doll Test" experiment where little black children picked white dolls over black ones for imaginative play is a global phenomenon. We are raised to worship whiteness, and if anyone doubts that then how do you explain 70 percent of women in Nigeria bleaching their faces, in fact, more than half the population in Africa use skin lighteners, smooth their natural hairs, and do all sorts of things attempting to resemble whatever passes for the European standard for beauty. It's not just blacks, 40 percent of people in China, Malaysia, the Philippines, and other Asian nations use skin lighteners, the Latin Americans and Arabs too are anti-black because having a dark skin tone makes you inferior in their societies — the unjust system is a global system, and it damages everyone from birth. That is why I take image representation very seriously. The immense power of motion pictures in shaping our image is unquestionable, and you will notice that most of the black

celebrity class are light skinned, just as most of the visible politicians and intellectuals that populate our screens and airwaves, so when I walk into any meeting, I walk in with that knowledge so nothing surprises me about how they react to what I say, or what they say about the material where blackness takes a central stage over whiteness and what that signifies in their mind. I am sure it causes them discomfort but because I am considered that exceptional black man who belongs to them, the Obama type who is well-adjusted to their society, someone non-threatening to them, and even with these big ass dreads you see on my head, the fact that I am allowed to walk into that room signifies I am not like others and have passed through the many invisible screening processes put in place for my kind, so they give me a chance. Everyone is playing a role over there, so I have to play that role, and I perform it well because I was that guy for much of my life. Whatever shaped their taste also shaped my taste, the damage done to me was so profound that I celebrated when Shaka Zulu died, I cheered for Rambo slaughtering a bunch of Vietnamese, or Dirty Harry indiscriminately shooting up black thugs, or Rocky beating up on Creed—I can go days with examples of my damaged self, all the way to cheering for the U.S military when they used Somalians as target practices as the trapped heroic Americans blasted their way out of Africa in “Black Hawk Dawn”. To be honest, it was not until I began to expose myself to foreign films that the dangerous grip of the Hollywood machine began to loosen its hold on me.

I know you're a huge fan of foreign films, you've exposed the group to some amazing international films over the years, when did you begin to watch foreign films, and how did they influence you?

Foreign and independent films have had a profound impact on me. I worked at a cinema that showed foreign films when I was younger, up until then, the only foreign movies I saw were some Indian movies and some martial arts films from Asia, and a few Italian movies when I lived there, but this theater at Lincoln Square, which unfortunately is no longer in business, showed the best of the foreign movies from across the world, and I got to consume them for free. I have such fond memories of that time, it was like discovering a whole new world of cinema for me, and it expanded my mind, I was hooked instantly. I loved them so much, they were the motivation for me to get into language studies. Over the years, I taught myself Spanish and French so I could understand them better and feed my addiction. Today, you can pretty much find any foreign film online but back then, even in a city like New York, there were only a few theaters where you can catch foreign movies, so it was a privilege to get that experience in me as a teenager.

Streamers like Netflix, Amazon, Disney, Paramount Plus and others are moving into the international market so foreign films and television shows are being made at a higher number than before, do you see this as a good thing or a bad thing? Have you approached streamers with Adowa?

I am sure my manager had sent it out to them, but I was adamant that I only wanted to meet with producers and creators whose works I knew about, that is to say, I wanted it in front of people I have vetted myself who had relationships with certain types of directors, so I met with a few people that represented those talents. But speaking of streamers, even when it comes to foreign films, there is a stacking order based on the capitalistic paradigm. There are very few films or television shows of quality coming from the African continent and there is a reason for that, it's all about capital, I am about to go on a tangent, but I promise I will come back to Adowa...

That is fine, go on...

Well, you see, the unjust system operates in the same manner everywhere. Capitalism is a worldwide system because it reproduces itself everywhere. And it is completely intertwined with all unjust systems. In America, you cannot get rid of patriarchy, wealth inequality, white supremacy, or any other arrangement in which you've inequality of any form until you get rid of capitalism. The same is true for Europe, Asia and everywhere else where capitalism has reproduced itself. Africans which were at the receiving end of this unjust system of colonialism and imperialism have yet to come to terms with the tragedy of adopting capitalism without understanding it's the root of inequality just by its mode of operation and they've been designated the bottom of that ladder by the capitalist and imperialists who are salivating over their resources to further their domination. Every society has to produce the means of life for people, you can go back to human organizations from hunter-gatherers to all the other human transitions, to settled agriculturalists, to slavery, feudalism all the way to capitalism in which the things that get produced involve very complex social relations. We don't like to think about it much but what you're wearing, that shirt, that apple watch, it does not matter, all the way to entertainment we consume, the production of all these things involves thousands of people working together. That cool shirt you got on involved thousands of hands touching it, from people growing cotton in India, to some stitching and sorting them in China, then assembling them into boxes made from trees that where timbered in Brazil, shipping them on planes and trucks, not to mention design, advertising, stocking, on and on, production is all highly socialized global activity, but in the end, it is controlled by capitalists who exploit those thousands of workers and the resources for their own profit. We care very little about the young workers in sweat shops or the workers in dangerous mines that the unjust system feeds on at the bottom because capitalism is all about exploiting the cheapest labor and resources it can find anywhere in this world to maximize profit at the very top. All the thousands of names you see scrawling after the end credits of any movie or show are the thousands of people that worked on it. From screenwriters, cast, costume designers, art designers, location scouts, special effects, producers, editors, grips, sound mixers, actors, directors, thousands of highly professional talents are involved in film production. The production companies that hire them work for studios which get their capital not just from their own hugely successful businesses but also from other capitalistic institutions like wall street hedge funds, and increasingly from the powerful tech companies, so you see the rise of streamers that are dominated by powerful corporations like Disney, Viacom, and AT&T...All those companies invest purely for their profit, and once you grasp how capitalism truly operates then you understand why we do not see many black films and narratives on our screens, they are considered a bad or risky investment by the powers to be who are in fierce competition with one another to increase their profit margins.

When you put it that way it's a sobering thing, what is the solution?

Well, I really don't know other than ending the unjust system or creating an alternative to it. In an ideal world, we would have the state step in the way it does in most European, Asian and Latin American and other nations to protect its film industries from the ravages of capitalism, some nations understand they cannot compete with Hollywood, and they value what kind of stories their societies produce, and their

message usually counters the Hollywood system—it's where those interesting foreign movies emerge out of every now and then but that's not going to happen here, all you've got to do is look at the fascist like attacks against PBS for exposing the public to non-commercialized programming. We do have a strong independent cinema but unfortunately, they too exist within the unjust system, and most have been taken over by the giant conglomerates that fund them. The other alternative is to boycott Hollywood and force it to change its mode of operation, but we have already discussed the damaged public who have grown up idolizing what Hollywood produces, and they vote with their money, they pay to see movies and shows that satisfy that desire which began to be shaped in childhood, you see, under capitalism, in any unjust system, the masses are complicit participants and until there is a revolution of the mind, Hollywood will keep producing what the public pays to see, anyway, that is the argument given whenever Hollywood is confronted with why there aren't many stories that deal with Africa or black people in general. They point to the many black faces on the screens but that is part of the unjust system adjusting itself to accommodate changing behaviors with visibility and it's a way to allow the system to rip the profit and most importantly to keep control of the power to decide how to shape minds and maximize their own interests.

There are a lot of black producers moving up in Hollywood, there is Shanda Rymes and Tyler Perry , Jordan Peel, Spike, and of course the powerful combo of Oprah with Eva Duvernay, just to name a few, and many more who are in control of what kind of stories they want to tell through the system, how do you see these black creatives working in the system?

Well, let's begin with the fact that if you're black and you're in entertainment industry, none of the things you make, none of the projects you want the mass public to see can be serious. The people you mentioned, and their projects can highlight what the society already knows to an extent, but they cannot fully assault the core of the unjust system. They cannot expose capitalism, white supremacy, or inspire the masses to revolt against the unjust system. If they do, they will not be put on the screens. It's the whole CRT discussion, the society is not allowed to seriously examine itself. What I mean by serious is, when did we ever examine the formation of the American empire through the Haitian revolution that lit the fire that ended the global slavery system by crushing the French while doubling the land mass of America, when have you ever seen European fascism being wrecked by united black Africans — whatever struggle in which the oppressed black populations struggled to bring down an unjust system cannot be popular entertainment, that's a contradiction. Under this unjust capitalistic system, you've to make money to succeed, so all filmmakers are in the business of making profits, there is a cliché phrase everyone uses in Hollywood, "if you want to send a message, then use UPS," that is to say, Hollywood is an entertainment industry, and if you're not telling stories that appeal to the masses, which is seeking popularity, then your chances are limited. Yet, the slew of Western based epic movies and television series, World War movies, to any depiction of the rise of the unjust systems are considered part of the mass entertainment because Hollywood feeds into that fantasy. Westerners are allowed to examine not just their own history but also global history from their point of view so the South African apartheid is explored through the eyes of the Europeans than the Africans, the American Civil War through the view of racists in the likes of Lincoln, or Grant, and not the 200,000 Africans that fought to bring down slavery, just as the current day apartheid in the Middle East is never explored through the Palestinian point of view but through the eyes of their oppressors — the unjust system is based on the inequality that exists in the life value gap, black lives, oppressed lives do not truly matter under such a system, so

the majority of products that come out of Hollywood reflect that sentiment, and Hollywood seeks to control that narrative through capital.

How do you explain the ones that do, from the top of my head I think of “Raisin in the Sun” “Glory” and “Twelve Years of Slave” and there are many more narratives that were able to tell stories from the black perspective...

I see them as one of those once in a decade phenomenon. They are exceptions to the rule because the majority of what we see under the system does not reflect a systematic change. The majority of films explore stories through the perspective of the dominant culture, there is even a kind of final pass that studios conduct before they release their films in which random potential movie goers are given little cards to check if they liked the movie or television series, and since most of the public is raised on that juggernaut of the system I have gone great length in explaining, then you can pretty much guess their reaction to anything serious that shakes their life long learned beliefs. A few film makers have been able to use the system to sneak messages to the masses, with films and television series that were clothed in popularity that tried their best to counter the unjust system, but there are few of them and come once in a decade. You'll also notice that even the best of these films were never truly serious, but I've to say that it's these attempts that inspired me. Just to give you an example, if you think of the revolutionary leaders, none of the movies about Martin Luther are serious because they fail to show us the radical Martin that countered his “I have a dream” speech with his consecration of the American empire over the Vietnam War and the economic inequality that plagued his people, that was right before his assassination. He was moving toward Malcolm as a revolutionist, and in the end, we have turned him into this saint that we must celebrate each Holiday as a whitewashed integrationist. I liked “Malcolm X” from Spike even though I thought it wasn't truly serious without examining Garvey and the Muslim religion that shaped his parents and led to his rebirth as a Pan-Africanist later on in life, I had a chance to read the script to the upcoming “Judah and the Black Messiah” on the life of the great Black Panther revolutionary figure Fred Hampton, which really does not fully get into what the Black Panther Party truly was all about, but it is at the very least better than anything I have seen from Hollywood. It's a radically different take from the likes of “Dead Presidents” which was more popular, and has shaped the mind of the masses on what they think the Black Panther Party was all about, just a bunch of armed violent men without the community work that eventually led to the free meal program for students in public schools. From there, any movie or series that depicts Mandela as a saint who became a uniter in South Africa and not an armed warrior who wanted his people to rise by any means necessary before he betrayed them in the end, to any African that comes to the screen with the white gaze on him, to be tamed as non-violent or depicted as a violent criminal, always in tune with the time as to not to offend the sensibilities of those well-adjusted to injustice — all these choices made by film makers robs us a serious examination of the leaders that came before us. Now, you can say it's too much to expect from movies or shows, and I agree, for me they have always been a launch off point to delve deeper into the people and events depicted in any moving image. If you really want to learn about this personalities and events, you've got to do your dogged reading; serious reading is the only way to fully inform yourself about them.

I have to admit I loved “Dead Presidents,” and I dug “Malcolm X” and enjoy the many shows like “This is us,” “Empire,” “Power,” and we have come a long way from the days of just the “Cosby show” right?

Yes, I enjoy them too but it does not mean I am not conscious of what is happening in the unjust system. The way I see it, it's the same in all other institutions, so I am not singling out Hollywood, like I said, Hollywood reflects the sentiment of the society in general. If you look at the number of entertainers, politicians, athletes, mayors and governors, police chiefs, if you look in whatever profession that is out there, you will see the number of black and migrants in the position of participation has increased, and although there are economic disparities, racism and all the problems that remain, there is in a sense that there is a continued growth in non-white participation in the society, hell, we even had a black president right? That is a fact, and it came with the united sacrifices of the many that ensured each generation gains a better life than the one that came before it, but when it comes to power, none of those individuals have any power under the unjust system. What we have is a lot of symbolism and visibility, the power remains in the hands of those capitalists that pull the strings to run the unjust system no matter who they choose to put in the public sphere. Obama did not have the power to do a single thing to change the unjust system and help black people, in fact, the unjust system run as it did before him — he bailed out the wealthy on Wall Street while poverty increased in black communities during his presidency, so did police shootings, and not to mention the number of drones that dropped bombs all over the world that surpassed the Bush era before him. Yes, he did attempt to do something about healthcare for all Americans but the fact that he did not say a single word on the new Jim Crow — the monstrous prison industrial complex that has millions of black and brown Americans behind bars — Well, the system is the system. The Obama presidency to me is a reminder that the system cannot be reformed but must be destroyed, it's a wake-up call to anyone who cares about humanity and its survival to challenge the unjust system. It's time for us to put a stop to celebrating the visibility of the wrong people who are put in positions by the unjust system to do its bidding and begin to think in revolutionary terms to destroy the unjust system.

That is heavy, I didn't think we will be talking about revolution but the movie business and scripts when we began this talk...

It's the quarantine effect I guess, I am sorry if I have been going off subject but honestly, I don't know about you but seeing what is happening out there, personally, it feels like the conditions are ripe for a radical change, a revolution, we can truly transform the entire society, so it's a time of reflection for me but I feel like your questions are leading me into this heavy discussion or am I imagining it? It has been a while since I have had a conversation with the group, and I miss you guys.

We miss your voice too, you've not been attending our online meetings, not many people are and it's understandable, this is my way of inviting you back into the group.

You know I hate the Zoom thing, I will never fully adopt to the changes in tech, you know I am anti-social media, I was never even a fan of phones, so it's hopeless for me. I honestly don't know how people are doing this remote work or schooling online, I have a hard time imagining how it works. I attend language

meetings on Zoom to practice with natives from across the world, and it is nowhere near being present in the room with actual human beings, sharing drinks while you chat and fumble over words. Our brains were not wired for it, and I am sure there will be long term consequences, especially for the young. It's a great time for the entertainment industry though, streaming has taken off because of people being confined and hungry for distraction, and there is a shift in the entire Hollywood system, television has replaced the cinema as the dominant form of entertainment, even in features, and global productions have taken off in unprecedented ways.

Is that a good thing or a bad thing in your view, when it comes to more black voices being heard?

Well, that is something I have been mauling over recently, and I will take a long global roundabout to explain to you why black voices are not heard, especially from the African film market. When I was in LA, I lived in Korea town in Los Angeles for a short time, and it is interesting to note Korean movies and television shows were popular and were penetrating the American market with quality shows just as Japanese movies and anime had done prior to them – and obviously, it's not some aberration but the reproduction of the capitalism system in Asia that has pushed those nations into a highly industrialized and technological powers, flush with capital and therefore are able to strengthen and expand the standard and reach of their film industries. We know this because their penetration into the American market is not just in entertainment but also in other realms, Toyota has taken over the car industry globally, Samsung phones are more dominant than apple products in the global market, both nations have utilized the unjust capitalism system to rise as dominant regions in Asia, and now we have China that has surpassed them by employing the same system. China, the capitalistic-imperialistic superpower is operating under the disguise of communism, with the unjust system replicating across the globe, and the harsh results of this rotten system can be clearly seen on the African continent — China is devouring the resources and despoiling the lands of the entire continent for a second colonization through capitalism, but I don't want to get sidetracked here. What I find fascinating is the rise of the Korean entertainment industry, not just in films but also in music with K-Pop, and when I ask the Koreans in K-Town if they ever saw it coming they tell me about the struggles of their parents who had settled in America after the Korean War when their country was a poverty stricken third world nation, and their stories are no different than mine, or any other migrant in that respect. All migrants who come to this nation, be it from Asia, Latin America, Middle East to Africa, it doesn't really matter from where, they all seem to rise in this unjust system within a short time. Some of them, within a generation or so seem to do much better than generations of African Americans who built this country. In Korea Town in LA, there are no homeless Koreans, it's blacks and Latinos that are on their streets, and of course the Koreans are quick to tell you about their determination to create their own communities and businesses despite the many obstacles in America, and yes they regurgitate the same racial laced nonsense about lazy and dangerous African Americans with self-inflicted wounds that have messed up their opportunities, without being fully aware of how the unjust system truly functions. This is true to all other recent migrants to this country who quickly separate themselves from African Americans with their emphasis on owning businesses as their way of grabbing power in America, most quickly assimilate to the white power structure because they understand the rules of capitalism and they play the favorable hands that are dealt to them to prop up the system, while others build an organized communities like the Koreans — and they could care less about visibility or politicians running on their behalf, you see, that would eventually be the result of their power accumulation anyway in America...

Wait, I am not sure I understand what you're saying...

Let me finish my thought, I told you it will be a long roundabout, power is something that comes from a base, from a mass of organized people who unite to form communities as a group, and Korea Town in LA is practically little Seoul. The Koreans own their own grocery stores, hospitals, lavish malls, high end restaurants, movie theaters showing Korean films exclusively, and with the rise of South Korea as a first world capitalistic nation, and their well-organized communities in parts of America, it is this synergy and reinvestment in their own culture and communities that has catapulted them into the front of the world's eyes. There is no mystery about how to succeed under the unjust system, Koreans in LA are a powerhouse that cannot be messed with even by whites who cannot afford to live in their parts of town. I am from Harlem, the so-called Mecca of the black world, and the contrast is striking. African Americans do not own a single supermarket, hospital, or any of what I mentioned in K-Town, in fact, Harlem is being gentrified at alarming rate because there is no organized mass to put a stop to a takeover by anyone. Once you understand that then it's not that hard to see why black voices cannot be in the same league even with tiny populations like Koreans under this unjust system. Only 2% of the 6 million businesses in America are owned by African Americans, Africa, the richest continent in natural resources on the planet produces only 3% of the global GDP, therefore there is no synergy or organized union between Africa and its sons and daughters scattered across America. This is what I mean by the unjust system being brutal on the black races, we are an arrested people and until we breakout with a revolution to end this unjust system, we are destined to be at the bottom of the world order wherever we exist. The unjust system is more than accommodating to elevate some for visibility, especially those doing its bidding, and give the impression of power but our true voices cannot be heard because we do not own a studio or a thriving film industry under this unjust capitalistic system dominated by whites, and other ethnic groups whose nations are rising utilizing the same system by organizing themselves around it.

Wow, okay, I never looked at it that way, Ben, I know I said that a lot today, but I do think we are more visible than Koreans in America. We have BET and OWN --

Visibility does not mean power. We talked about this, Oprah does not even own OWN, she is a wealthy individual, like the many rappers, athletes, and all sorts of professionals who do well under the unjust system by doing its bidding under capitalism. There are many African millionaires and billionaires living in the mildest of unspeakable squalor across the African continent, you judge a community, a nation, not by the few individuals that are doing well but by the masses of the people and the conditions of the masses are getting worse, not better. African Americans have over 10,000 elected officials in this unjust system, but the masses of the people are doing worse than in the 60's, do you see what I mean, Africans have produced millionaires at a high rate but the condition of the masses of the citizens has worsened since independence. The same thing applies in the entertainment industry, we have got marvelous Black and LatinX talent right here in America, from Will Smith to Denzel to Lin Emanuel Miranda, from Hailey Barry, Whoopi, Kerry Washington, and thousands of other individual success stories who are visible all over our screens and stages, but they are all dependent on the system, therefore producing what the system wants them to produce. They can never control the stories they get to tell because there is not a single black owned or Latino owned studio. All studios are white owned, so they work under the rules of

the unjust system, therefore they are all powerless. Just look at their movies and shows, if they are not walking in some slow motion after some explosion, or pushing some integrational message of equality, even when they attempt to do so called “serious work,” they abide by the narratives set down by the unjust system. They are pushing that pernicious ideology of individual grit or some other integrational fantasy nonsense that falls apart under any serious examination. “Hamilton” is the perfect example, to me it’s one of the most bullshit narratives ever told about another slave owning founder of this nation but look at how popular it is on Broadway because it has a bunch of Black and LatinX people praising the father of capitalism with eloquent lyrics and making light of a prancing around Jefferson, a slave owning racist, not to mention a rapist of a fourteen-year-old slave girl. This is the kind of insane system we are living in, but then again, we should never be surprised by anything that comes out of the system, the corruption of the rap game is another example, one of the most powerful cultural inventions that had its roots in revolutionary challenge to the unjust system by poverty stricken young men expressing their frustrations, today, has become the face of misogyny, individual success, and the platinum lifestyle that the unjust system is built on.

So are you suggesting there is no hope until we have a black owned studio in Hollywood?

We must really be careful about thinking of it in those simplistic terms because it depends on what kind of black people come to power right? It’s the whole integrationist Vs assimilationist discussion that goes all the way back to Civil Rights Movement Vs SNCC, Martin Vs Malcolm, Washington Vs Dubois, Garvey Vs Douglas and on and on. We must get back to the fundamentals of that unjust system, which is built on capitalism and commodifying everything, and since the black world owns a very little share of the overall capital under this unjust system, blacks are limited in deciding the kinds of stories they want to tell about themselves. Now looking at the conditions of African Americans in America, it’s clear that the Civil Rights integrationist have won out in the larger American society but it’s obvious that the nation is a long way from being integrated. All you’ve to do is go into our inner-city public schools, you won’t find a single white student in it, almost 70 years after Brown Vs Board of Education, they are still segregated. It’s also clear that power comes with the masses owning their own businesses, schools, hospitals, universities and even police forces selected from their own communities, it’s the only way to guarantee the unjust system does not continue to ravage or mistreat them. At minimum, every community needs to own the culture it produces. African Americans are a three trillion dollar people with a spending power that surpasses any organized black group anywhere in the world, but where is the investment into black communities and cultures? I personally think, it’s downright shameful blacks in America do not own a single sports team, or their own music industry—even in the areas where blacks dominate, the unjust system ensures whites control it. But if the wrong black people come to own those industries only to keep this unjust system going the way it has since the beginning, then nothing really changes. That’s why I mentioned the rap game earlier.

What about Africa, does that mean the African continent has to develop its own film industry?

Yes it does, but under the unjust system, there are not many African nations with enough capital to develop their own film industry, let alone compete with other film industries. Nigeria has Nollywood but the quality of the films coming out from there reflects the lack of this capital, so much so, their explosive

local industry is largely irrelevant outside of their nation. I am sure Haiti would love to tell the Haitian Revolution that remains an untold story for the global audience but there are more pressing needs on the island than developing a film industry. The same thing in my homeland, that is why I am doing my little part trying to get Adowa in front of the global audience from the belly of the beast but if the Haitian Revolution, one of the most significant events that shook the Americas and Europe, both North and South America with the rise of enslaved people that crushed their European masters with force, sending ripples that will forever transform the Americas—if this momentous event has not inspired any of the Black and LatinX people in Hollywood to even reckon with its significance to their own history, it tells you where we are as an organized people. Under this unjust system, you're allowed to make as many iterations as possible about "slavery" about the "nonviolent" resistance movements from Gandhi, Martin Luther, to Mandela, to whatever it is you want to talk about as long as it does not really upset the system. If you even think of showing the masses about how they truly got their freedom and liberation, which was through bloodshed, or challenge the false narratives of white supremacy, or if you want to show anything dealing with what existed before 1492, as far as the existence of the hundreds of indigenous nations and African empires, well, that is something else. That is limited to the Western world telling you about Vikings, the Greeks, Rome, and the countless British royalty shows that flood over our screens to represent the past of humanity.

You were mentioning to me about your frustration with how many television series there are about Britain, Rome and Vikings, and almost nothing about Africa.

Well, it is what it is under this unjust system where the minority have the loudest visibility and presence because they control all the means of capital and production in all industries. If you want to know how weird things get under such a system in Hollywood, I had my manager target the representatives of one of the big-time black creators who directed a popular film about fictitious European knights, I was thinking, here are some African knights that you might not be aware of that existed in the real world that changed the course of global history, and we did not hear back from them. I am not sure if his people got it to him, but I hear the same director is thinking about doing another iteration of Shaka Zulu, and that's why I sent the Adowa Bible to him. In any case, I hope this time, they do Shaka justice, and I wish him all the best. I bring it up because it just goes to show you that stories like Adowa or Haitian Revolution are what Hollywood categorizes as risky projects, so even if he wanted to do it, Hollywood would push him to go for something familiar and less risky first. "Shaka Zulu" broke the global television rating record during its release, it was a wildly successful presentation, the global hit broadcast of the 80's to the glee of the South African apartheid white supremacist that cashed on it, so there is not much risk in retelling that story, it's like the retelling of "Roots" saga that came out a while ago to little fanfare or controversy. The Haitian Revolution and Adowa are the CRT of the image world, they are bound to make people under the unjust system uncomfortable because they challenge white supremacy head-on.

So everyone in Hollywood is compromised in general, then how do you see change, I know I keep coming back to this same question again and again, but how do we see black voices advancing within the system?

The system is the system. We have to see it for what it is first, the confusion comes when we don't even see it. The biggest fight I have with my fellow BLM activists right now is over the fact that that I do not believe in such thing as reforming policing because the police are doing their jobs. The police are carrying out the job the unjust system requires them to do, which is policing blacks and browns in cold blood while protecting the properties of the privileged. All you've got to do is trace the history policing when it comes to what the unjust system classifies as the undesirables, all the way back to the extermination of indigenous population, to the patrolling of runaway slaves, to the rise of the clans who most of them became integrated into the police and military force—all the way up to now to our time, the police have been doing their jobs for centuries, for decade after decades, over and over again, and they are never punished for it because they did their jobs. Today, there is a whole section of black and brown lives in inner cities the unjust system cannot exploit and profit from anymore, so it runs a brutal police state to control them. The fact that blacks and migrants have been joining the police or military force does not change the structure of the unjust system. I am an anti-capitalist because of how brutal the unjust system is on those it considers to be useless to its functioning, so the unjust system which deindustrialized inner cities, and sent off jobs overseas for profit, pins the jobless in ghettos, encourages them to slaughter each other, then on top of all that, it allows its armed officers of whatever ethnicity to kill them indiscriminately, just as it had done under vagrancy and Jim Crow laws in the past when it could not exploit their free labor. As we saw in Ferguson, the entire town was organized to profit from the condition of the oppressed by feeding them into the monstrous industrial prison complex. I have the same arguments with teachers over reforming the educational system. The system is doing what it was designed to do, that is to miseducate and keep down certain groups of people it had prevented from even learning to read in the past. How else can we explain the continuing miseducation of black and brown lives? In New York, we have a more segregated school system than the one that existed in the 60's, with worse student performances than half a century ago, and this despite the countless decades of promises to close the gap with the white students who outperform them by an ever-increasing margin under this rigged unjust system. That is just in New York so you can imagine what school systems are elsewhere, particularly those in the south. We need to bring down the unjust system, but we cannot even see the reality that is right in front of us. The talk is overwhelmingly about reforming these institutions but how do you reform a system performing exactly as it is designed to do? Notice how both the police and teacher unions are the most organized labor unions around, which are both dominated by whites and are the strongest unions under the unjust system with a few visible "other races" thrown in—they won't even hear of firing a cop, a racist thug that kills a teenager, or suspend the large number of racist teachers miseducating and punishing black boys and girls in a higher number than other races. They will throw a few of them under the bus like they are doing now when the unjust system is under a threat, the unjust system does this every now and then to give the masses the illusion of reform, but until the unjust system is taken down by organized masses of the suffering, they are too strong to change and we can expect more of them same for the next century.

Ben, this has been a fascinating discussion and before we close our conversation, I want people to know that despite today's talk, you're the silliest member of our group. Sorry but I don't want the people to get the wrong impression of what you're like in person, so how do you keep your sense of humor, I read some of your work, and it's almost like there is another person that exists there.

That's because deep down inside I am a silly child. I know this because I get along very well with kids up to a certain age, but I have a difficult time dealing with teenagers or adults, and the weird thing is I've been that way as long as I can remember, and everyone notices it. I've this strange ability to enter the world of children very easily, it's like playing for me, but at the same time, children kind of scare me because if they truly let you into their world, you find out that they are so pure and honest, it's a horrible thing to bullshit them. So, when I'm with my nephews or the kids I volunteer with in Harlem, playing or clowning with them, although it comes to me naturally, I am at my sharpest. To me, whatever kids are imagining is serious, and I must drop all my mask to become my best self around them, and just play. I don't know, I feel like they sense it when you're false or pretending, but with adults, it's a whole another world. It's the bullshit world really. It's like we're all acting all the time, to be honest, it's very strange to me to take any adult living under this insane and unjust system seriously, so I don't take myself that seriously around them. Also, playing is the way I learn best, there is no better way to keep your brain sharp than role playing which is essentially looking at the world with the same wonder a child does, that is why they learn so fast. So yeah, I try to bring that vibe of a child who comes into this adult world armed with that silly self, and the result is what you guys, my family and my girlfriend has to deal with from time to time, the crazy Ben that will always be a child at heart. I guess it's the reason I am drawn to the imagination and creative world. Even now, it's hard for me to process what is happening out there because we're attempting to bullshit our way out of it by pretending to care about the whole world while hoarding vaccines like this virus is not going to mutate and come back to bite us again.

Yeah, but people are dying and its terrifying to process what is happening as an adult. I wanted to talk to you during this lockdown because I missed your silliness but then you sent me your latest manuscript which I just finished reading which deals with gender and again, it's almost like who is this person? You're very hard to pin down.

Hard to pin down? Wait, what does that mean?

I did not expect you to write a book on feminism, I thought of you as someone who wanted to write about Africa and politics, and tell stories about black people, do you consider yourself a feminist?

As one of my heroines says, "I am not a feminist, I am a black revolutionary." It depends on what you mean by a feminist right? Feminism under this unjust system is dominated by well to do feminists; the so-called glass-ceiling breaking women entering the world of men, the mainstream feminist movement is a mostly white women fighting for a certain kind of equality with white men. That is the harsh truth. The main representatives of this movement are affluent and privileged women, who could care less about the poverty-stricken women at the very bottom of their societies, which are mostly black and brown people. So no, the feminism that fights for inclusion and diversity within this unjust system, the feminism that capitulates to the process of assimilation into capitalistic-imperialistic system, is the reason I am not too quick to call myself a feminist. I identify with the feminism practiced by the likes of Angela Davis and bell hooks, even with them I have lots of disagreements so it depends on what kind of feminism we are talking about. The same thing with Gay and Queer rights, I do not understand groups seeking marriage equality and assimilating to the unjust system of the capitalistic structure of marriage espoused by this society, it's not a path to true liberation but joining an oppressive system – the people I

support are the ones catching hell at the very bottom like the colored trans community, not the well to do marriage equality seeking types, so my sense of justice is thinking about the people that need the most help first, but I do appreciate some of your notes on the manuscript and if you liked anything I have to say on gender then I know I am on the right track because I have read your amazing works, but this is just the opening to where I plan to take "Sankofa" so I want you to reserve full judgment until I am done with the trilogy.

Okay, we will have to do another interview when the book comes out because I have so many questions to ask you about it...

You know, I think about revolution to end the unjust system in general so everything I write about is connected to it. We really cannot talk about revolution without talking about patriarchy. And true revolution is not possible if women are not united across the globe and this unity has to come from bottom up. Today, it seems to me gender equality is defined by women who have already climbed the steep ladder within the unjust system to strengthen patriarchy by joining it. So yeah, a woman who wants to join the military, the police or get into politics, be a CEO at Wall Street, go into teaching or join whatever profession you can think of so she can go kill innocent people, miseducate the oppressed, subjugate the poor, or you know, just be like the men in this unjust system is not a feminist to me. This is something I had to confront in Adowa too. In Africa, there were many women that had risen to the top of the patriarchal society, African history is replete with Queens and Queen mothers, and although I celebrate them and the African tradition for being more inclusive than other cultures in the past, I bring the same moral consistency while examining them, and you find out that their main job was to sustain the rule of their sons, therefore prop up patriarchal domination. Some had immense power, and were politically savvy, but even when they became Queens, they were like the Hilary Clintons of their times, they were part of the unjust system. They did not stand up to patriarchy but fought to be included into the society and run their nations like the kings. There were a few exceptions, one of my favorites was a renowned queen in Ethiopia named Gundit who rose to power in the 10th century by dismantling the patriarchal church, going as far as burning down every church in her realms, and chasing priests and monks all across the territories, there is not much known about her reign other than that fact, and of course she is harshly judged by the patriarchal society and is referred to as a mad queen.

Interesting, Ben, you know I can talk to you for hours but it's almost time to close our conversation, so if you can say something about writing, how does writing help you with what is going on right now?

You know I have always looked at writing as self-reflection. Writing to me is not about some ambition to becoming someone or seeking something out there, like some prize or a goal, it's all about being present in the moment and struggling with yourself. That is something we do not like to do in general, because it's a hard thing to do. I recommend everyone should keep a journal and write every day, just so they can be still for a moment and let all the distractions fall away and face themselves for a few minutes a day, because you see how trivial life can be, especially when chasing after those outside goals which disappear when there is a virus killing everyone out there. Life can seem pointless because it is, what is happening out there is terrifying but it's not something new, if we're honest about it, this is how most of the people that live at the bottom of their societies go through each day, all around the world. This is

how it feels to live through the horrors doled out by the unjust system, we simply have lost touch with our humanity. I spend most of my time thinking about people at the bottom, there are millions of people dying every day because of viruses and infections that we know how to treat and cure, there are people dying from famine, contaminated waters, and pollutions of all kinds but because of this unjust system, we don't care to think much about those people, so my perspective is a little bit different. When you're living in a capitalistic culture that is so goal oriented, and you're running around trying to be something or someone under this unjust system and feeling bad about not reaching your goal—or even worse when you achieve your goal because of what it means under this unjust system—it's exhausting to become the next Jeff Bezos, or Mark, or any of these horrible creatures that are idolized under this capitalistic system, and notice how their wealth had doubled and tripled while inequality has gone up for the rest of the masses that suffer under this unjust system, the billionaire club that have rigged this unjust system in their favor are doing quite well, even when a jolt like this comes that forces most people to face themselves, they are competing with each other on who gets to fly to space in the middle of a pandemic. This is how insane this unjust system is, and it's not just hurting the people that are at the very bottom, people that have labored their whole lives under this unjust system are losing their minds, they are restless, they are drinking more, drug overdose and suicide is on the rise, those with the means are fleeing away from cities to shelter from the virus, and there is a general sense that everyone, including nations are looking out for themselves and their own citizens – the inequality is such that an entire continent of Africa has yet to receive a single shot while Western nations are already talking about a second shot for their citizens. I find all that worrying because even this experience will not have any lasting effect on anyone, most people cannot wait to get back to distracting themselves with their work, those empty goal pursuits, with their habits formed under this system, and doing all those things they did before the pandemic so they can return to normalcy, so you can pretty much forget about helping those who are suffering the most from this upheaval which are the people that are designated the bottom of this hierarchy under this unjust system. Sorry, I got sidetracked again, what was the question?

I asked about how writing helps you in a time like this, I am getting a lot of questions from the group on how to write in a time like this, everyone is at home, and they have all this free time to write but most of them are having a hard time producing and delivering pages to the group for a review.

Writing to me is my way of keeping touch with my humanity and not running away from myself so in all honestly, not much has changed in my personal life or overall outlook. I try to write most days, but I can relate with the struggle, there are days when I do not feel like it and that is fine, that is life. If your health is suffering or you lost someone it does not make sense to write, you need some self-care. But it's reading and writing that taught me that there is no running away from struggle, from confronting my own past and present trauma, and what it means to live in this unjust system that mistreats people. Writing helps me understand myself and the world better, it lets me glimpse the inner life every time I sit down to do it, and when I attempt to make a connection to the outside world, it's the thing that exposes my privilege, my patriarchal tendencies, my individualism, my prejudices, my loss of humanity, it's also what helps me reprogram and rewire my mind by forcing me to deal with all of my inner conflicts and contradictions. If you enjoy learning and you're compelled and want to share some of the things you learn through this process, and you understand that words and ideas are the most powerful instruments ever invented by humankind, and there is no revolution or ending this unjust system

without changing minds through words and actions, then it becomes part of your life and I'm grateful I get to do it. Sometimes, I even enjoy doing it but those are rare moments because of the kinds of things I think and write about, but it's okay to take a break and not write. That is perfectly fine, depends on what is going on in your life.

What is your writing process; you've talked about this with the group, I'm personally fascinated by how you can move across different genres, it's something I cannot do so I want you to share some of it with the new young members...

The most important thing is that you've to love to struggle, which implies that you really cannot do this thing if you don't like to get close to troubling things in yourself and in the outside world, but that is the cost of trying to achieve anything right? The second most important thing is to know yourself and what you stand for in this world. In my own evolution, I had to learn that there is no such thing as being a dignified person without rooting yourself in your own tradition first, in your own community, and acknowledging and constantly paying homage and respect to the culture and the people that produced you—I am African, and this is what defines me and everything I write about is connected to my ancestors, and it's only after you've taken that journey that you can become part of what we consider to be a universal person that fights injustice for humanity. The hardest part is knowing what to write about, the rest of it is just learning skills. I am learning different disciplines that require me to put on multiple hats to do them, but yeah, it's all challenging work. I've taught myself how to do them as well as I can, and I plan to improve my skills with time, as of now, I like to think of what I produce as being the worst of what I will produce in the future. As for the process of writing, each genre presents you with a difficulty that requires you to solve problems using different skills. Screenwriting to me demands the most attention, technically speaking there is a lot to juggle to do it well, it's much more visual, but if you've a keen visual space and can grab the reader's attention and force them to focus on what you want them to focus in each moment with snippets of scenes, dialogues, and transitions, and there is just a lot you know, your mind-eye is like a camera while you do all this and there is a lot of mental work involved to capture everything. I find it very difficult and challenging. Screenwriting requires you to be extremely creative within a limited number of pages, and if you have a good sense of rhythm, of timing, of propulsion, of surprise and twists, and of course an original narrative that makes it all seem seamless, with unforgettable characters to boot then it comes out okay. Fiction is all of that but is a bit different, there are a whole lot more words to play around with, and you are mostly figuring out what people are saying and doing and thinking, so you don't need that visual space as much, you depend on the interior space of your characters, so it's the opposite of show and tell – but if you're writing an Afrofuturism speculative fiction like I am then you see how I bring the screenwriting skill into it, in fact, "Sankofa" started as a script. Non-fiction is pretty much research and organization; it's tasking in its own right because of the amount of research you have to do. The creativity there is how you structure stuff, it's all about assembling and making the connections that reveal the deeper truth between the past, the present and the future—the latter is a kind of dialogue you have with all the stuff that you come across during research, and I find it to be the hardest part. Everything I write is connected because ultimately, they are all examining the unjust system from different perspectives and in different forms. I control most of the stuff I produce, aside from what I'm hired to write, so I am not accountable to anyone, and I have complete freedom to explore what I want to explore and make mistakes without worrying about being judged by others or how people react to my works or words. For young writers, that is really

important so they can experiment and play, and it's also a way to not compare yourself with others and move at your own speed and pace. I personally plan to write as long as this unjust system exists, that is why I even edit my own stuff, honestly, I depend on creative work to process things and keep me focused in my fight against it, the skills will get better over time.

That must be difficult at times right, seems like there is a lot of stuff you're working at the same time, how do you keep your focus on everything with what is going in this unjust system in a time like this, what do you do to stay sane?

The way I think of my existence is simple. I live under an unjust system, and this system is global in nature, so I think of myself as a prisoner that is fighting for the liberation of people suffering under this system. Whenever I get lost in the process, I ask myself a simple question, are the people that need the most help getting it? The answer is no, there is no justice until the people that suffer the most get the most help, and under this unjust system, the opposite is true. I don't really get distracted by much because I can't think of anything I rather be doing with my life than fight this insane system. After all, we see what is happening out there, I can't think of what any human could possibly be doing with their life other than trying to change the unjust system to save our world, it's now a matter of life and death for everyone. I learn every day, I inform myself as much as possible about this global system, and the more I learn about it, the more focused and determined I am in my fight against it. The truth is a hard thing to accept, I know we are all living under an unjust system, a global system based on racism, patriarchy, and capitalism, and until we dismantle it and bring it down with a worldwide revolution, it will be more of the same to the very end which is going to arrive very soon from the looks of things. Until people actively organize and fight to change it, then nothing truly changes. I am all about revolution at the moment and revolutions are far more complicated than they appear to be so there is a lot of frustration that comes along while engaging the unjust system on its terms, so yeah, it's a constant struggle, I am not going to lie, it's a daily struggle for me. But once you understand it, you know there is no way out for any of us, I honestly don't know if this unjust system can be taken down in my lifetime, or even in time to save our planet, but you can't let this fact paralyze you, you gotta keep fighting it, I plan to go down fighting for what I believe to the very end.

Any final worlds would be much appreciated on how to survive and fight through what is happening, like you said lots of people are struggling and reflecting on life, what can they do, what can you share with the readers to help them get involved in the fight?

I can only talk about myself and my struggle. The irony is the more I understand how the unjust system operates, not just here but around the globe, the calmer I am because I'm like a fire man who walks into a burning building, I don't panic or I am not anxious, stressed or surprised by much of what's happening because I am not as confused as I used to be when I was younger and did not understand why all these things were happening around me and all over the world. The unjust system is more dangerous than any virus, so even at this terrifying moment, I don't get distracted and I am focused on it. This is a lifetime commitment for me, so I try to take care of my body and mind. I exercise, I meditate, I take long walks, and I make sure to get my eight hours of sleep every day—the last one is important because nothing gets done if I don't get enough hours of sleep and recharge. I still practice my "monkey suit on monkey

suit off policy,” the person you’re speaking with today is someone I had to create outside of the unjust system, so I don’t suffer from careerism, wealth accumulation or any of that stuff that comes with what people call success under this system. I go against the system so I tend to make a lot of people uncomfortable in my writing, and because I talk about uncomfortable things that we must all confront as a people, I get a lot of criticism for singling out certain races of people who I believe to be the main cause of the suffering of the many. Whenever it gets to be a bit much and fatalism kicks in, I put myself in a different environment, I speak five languages, so escape into other cultures is my way of getting away from it. I also turn to the freedom fighters, I read quite a lot about the liberation struggle, and I humble myself from their unbelievable sacrifices that has given me every opportunity I enjoy today, and I get right back in the fight. I belong to organizations and groups; I give my time and energy to sustain the fight because I know we cannot keep going with this death-seeking unjust systems. I draw most of my inspiration from the young people I meet at these organizations who seem to be awakening to the unjust system and demanding change because it is ultimately their world. Lately, I don’t waste much time engaging with adults that have adjusted themselves to this unjust system, and I put most of my energy and my time in inspiring the next generation, particularly those living on the African continent. What else do you want me to share?

What is the most important lesson you’ve learned throughout your experience and what do you hope to see in the world after the pandemic?

That’s hard to say because the lessons change with the time for me. Although things look bleak now, for those of us in the fight, it is an interesting time to be alive and witness what is happening. The sense I have of our moment is like we are in one those historical waves that come once in a lifetime but we’re not sure what kind of wave this one is or what it’s going to be, and because I study history and human nature, I am not optimistic about what comes after this pandemic—it’s more of the same as long as the unjust system is around. I might look young, but I feel very old, I am pushing towards middle age, but I feel much older, so I am aware this wave is going to determine if my nephews and nieces will have a future on this planet. I guess the biggest lesson I have learned in life is that we don’t even know how we got here as a people, we have no control over life, we don’t have a choice about where we are born or even how, I mean, our presence on this planet we call earth is a mystery, but wherever we find ourselves on this world, we do have control over the systems that people have created, and if these systems are fundamentally unjust, we have to fight to make them just. It seems to me that is the purpose of life. The more I learn, the more I realize I have nothing to do with a whole bunch of things that happened that have put me in the position that I am in, I’m here because countless people sacrificed for me by fighting this unjust system in the way they could during their time on earth, and I know being alive means you can either be part of the unjust system or against it—to not fight is disgracing all those ancestors that made it possible for me to exist today. It is becoming increasingly obvious that we live in dangerous times and our time is running out. The unjust system is still threatening and gaining strength, you see the frustration it has unleashed out there, large numbers of people are deeply sickened and outraged by this system, and they aspire to something much better. If we are brave enough, and bold enough, and determined to seek the truth and follow the truth wherever it leads, we can have a revolution with a radically different and far better world, we can build a better future for humanity by destroying the unjust system. I hope enough people join the fight to take down the system before it ends up destroying our planet.

That is a perfect place to end it Ben. Thank you so much for taking the time, I know this are strange times, and I wish you and your family a safe isolation. I hope to do this again in person when “Sankofa” comes out, any last word on Adowa which you’re about to share with our readers?

Thanks again Alexandria. I wish you and your family the same, and I do hope this wasn't too depressing, but it's not possible to talk about the unjust system without getting a bit serious and please send my love to the guys, my silly self will be back with the group as soon as the quarantine ends. I do not have much to say other than to suggest that they read the illustrated Adowa Bible first before they read the pilot script so they can have a full grasp of the significance of the entire event. Also, I have included a lot of images of the real characters in the Bible so you can get a feel for the characters, their personalities and swagger, and imagine the scope of what I envision the series would look like, in fact, in most pitch meetings, all I did was give them a quick presentation using the images while filling them in the background of what they were looking at, and it works. I hope your young readers dig it and learn from it. The rights of the scripts for the first season are back to me so I will be putting it out there to inspire the next generation to take up the fight. And thanks again and hope to see you soon.