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NIGERIA'S VIDEO FILM  
INDUSTRY / 1992-now.  
A free magazine  
by Cinema Forever.

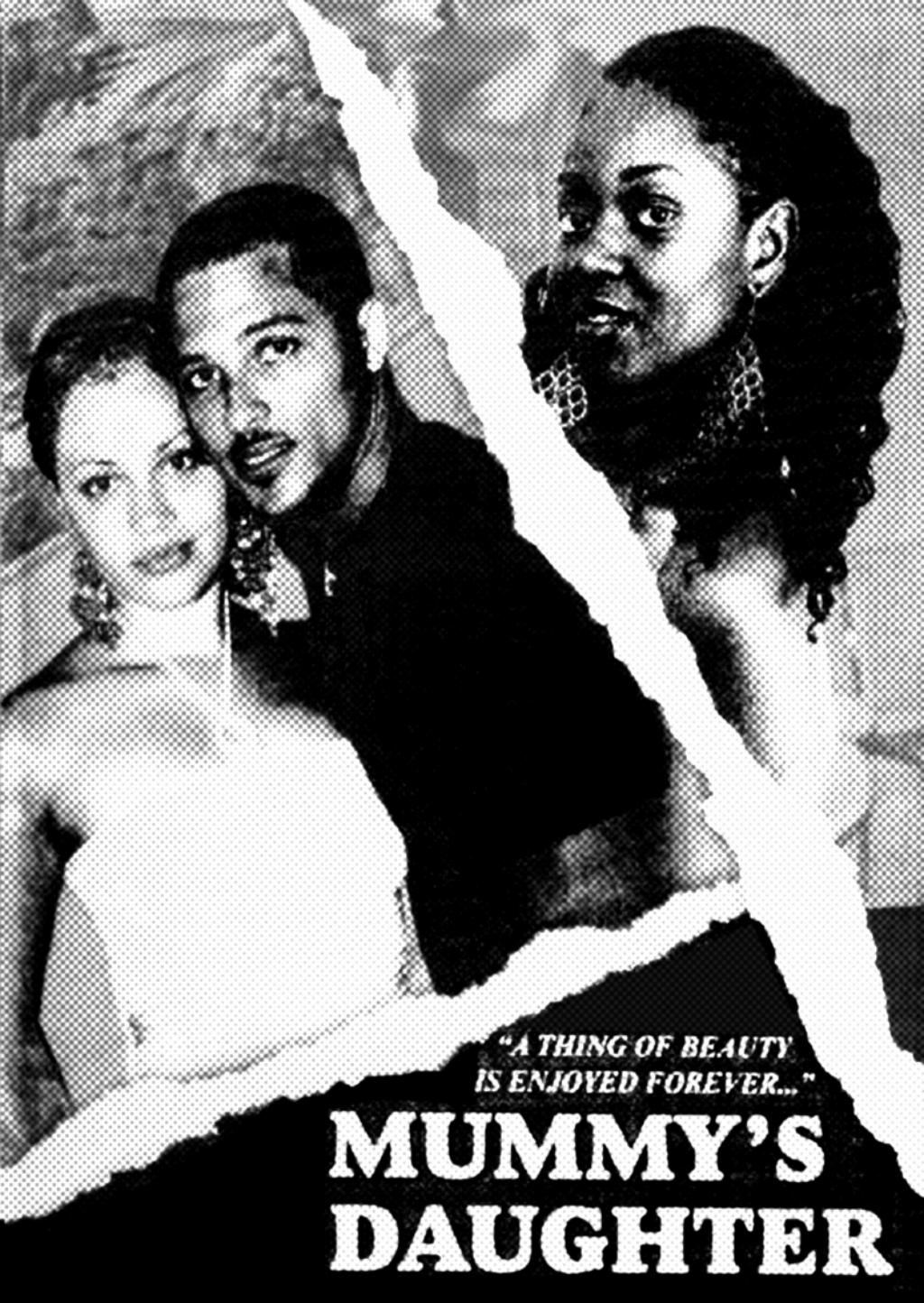


# **NOLLYWOOD NOLLYWOOD NOLLYWOOD**

**NIGERIA'S VIDEO FILM  
INDUSTRY / 1992-now**

Designed and edited by Phoenix Fry  
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[www.cinema-forever.co.uk](http://www.cinema-forever.co.uk)

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*"A THING OF BEAUTY  
IS ENJOYED FOREVER..."*

# **MUMMY'S DAUGHTER**

## HOW I FELL INTO A DEEP NOLLYWOOD ADDICTION

By online movie reviewer Nollywood Forever.

I stumbled upon Nollywood by accident. I was strolling through Brixton market with a friend when we passed a Ghanaian shop that sold DVDs and other African merchandise. My friend began talking to the guy behind the counter, and as their conversation progressed I began to meander around the shop. My eyes scanned over the movie covers on the shelves in the shop and suddenly they stuck on a very handsome guy on one of the covers.

The guy was the movie star Van Vicker and the movie was called *Mummy's Daughter*. So the first Nollywood movie that I ever watched was Ghanaian, not Nigerian, and bought solely on the account of Van Vicker looking mighty fine on the cover. Now who said that sex doesn't sell?

I went home and popped *Mummy's Daughter* into my DVD player and it had me immediately hooked! I enjoyed every single moment of it: Van Vicker of course, but also the over-dramatic storyline with its twists and turns, and what I felt was the "realness" of it all. Watching *Mummy's Daughter* was the first step into the all-encompassing hands of addiction.

I am sure most Black British people who grew up in the 1980s and 90s can relate to that excitement you felt growing up when you saw Black people on the TV. And when I discovered Nollywood, it was like being a kid watching *The Cosby Show* all over again. It was refreshing to see people on screen who looked like me and being represented in a wide variety of ways, rather than watching the usual token black on TV playing a slight variation of just another stereotypical role. And it was the drama, the build-up of tension, the African setting was what

kept me coming back over and over again for more Nollywood. I also loved the fact that it was mostly dialogue- driven and I meshed well with that alongside the stories that were easily relatable. Nollywood became my fix. It was like nothing that I'd ever seen before.

My new discovery brought me immense joy, but at the same time I was mortified that I had obviously been missing out on this Nollywood stuff for so many years. How could that be? Why had my mother, who is Nigerian, and all my Nigerian friends never mentioned these fantastic movies before? Before that Monday in 2007, I wasn't even aware of Nollywood's existence.

But back to *Mummy's Daughter*... I was enjoying it tremendously when the movie came to an abrupt halt. Right on a cliff-hanger the movie finished. It was then that I was hit with the big bold text on the screen: WATCH OUT FOR PART 2! It was as though I'd been punched square in the face by Mike Tyson. I was numb. How on earth was I going to find out what happened between Anita and Princess now? As annoyed as I was, I dashed back to the shop.

*"You sold me this film yesterday but you didn't tell me that there was a part 2!"*  
*"Oh yeah there is - but we don't have it."*

I went back to the same shop on a numerous occasions and they just never had it in stock. I didn't watch *Mummy's Daughter* 2 until about six months afterwards. Of course I know now that practically all Nollywood movies are split up into parts, but back then I had no idea. After that experience I very quickly learnt to always ask how many parts a Nollywood movie comes in. I also learnt that Nigerian vendors sold their movies on VCDs, which are cheaper than DVDs. I was ecstatic, as I could now doubly afford my addiction.

From the Ghanaian movie experience I threw myself into Nigerian movies. My first purchase was *Girl's Cot*. I watched Parts 1,2 and 3 in one night. I was exhausted at work the next day after spending half the night watching it, but at the same time I was unable to go to bed without

finishing it! Next, came *Fishers of Men*. Over the next few months I watched some really fantastic Nollywood movies. The vendors were very good to me, recommending the ones that they knew would make me a truly loyal customer, and their tactics worked. I bought my Nollywood movies faithfully, every week without fail and sometimes up to fifteen at a time.

After I was lured mercilessly into the dark, murky land of addiction, the vendors became not so kind. Very slowly they offloaded onto me all of their dodgy merchandise, the ones that they knew a newbie like me would watch under their recommendation because I knew no better. Oh my! Truly awful films like *Mass Destruction*, *Night in the Philippines*, *True Romance* and *Million Dollar Sisters*. I really suffered during that period, but I do thank them because they only made me stronger.

It was because of them that I started my Nollywood movie review blog, because I could no longer trust buying movies on my vendors' recommendations and I had no idea what to watch. I would scan the internet looking for reviews and would find nothing. I would buy a movie because of who was in it, only to discover that it was a waste of time. I was stuck in playing game of eenie meenie minie mo. So the blog was therapeutic for me. I was helping fellow Nollywood lovers find gems - and at the same time sharing my pain when I stumbled on a rock.

This all happened five years ago and, although addiction no longer has a firm hold on me, I still remain a Nollywood fanatic.



Nollywood Forever is the founder of [www.nollywoodforever.com](http://www.nollywoodforever.com). She has provided unbiased reviews of Nigerian and Ghanaian video films since 2008.



Animated GIFs of Eniola Badmus by Aria Alagha.

Scan the QR code opposite  
or go to [big-gurl.tumblr.com](http://big-gurl.tumblr.com)



## A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO BLACK MAGIC AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Popular culture blogger Bertie Fox on his first brush with Nollywood.



What's in store for the unwary UK viewer trying out Nollywood for the first time? One of my first experiences was watching *Jenifa* and *Jenifa 2*. You can see them online for free if you haven't already and, as I'm about to spoil the whole thing, it might be a good idea.

To start with you notice perhaps a few cosmetic differences from what you're used to seeing on British screens – a certain stylised quality to the acting, a tendency toward long scenes that are soundtracked by chirpy looped music... nothing to distress you unduly. Maybe you'll be thrown for a moment when the subtitles say things like "[Eulogise her ancestral lineage]" when Jenifa is on the phone to her parents early on, but still you get the general idea. And you'll stay for the laughs, the drama, and the startling shifts in tone.

I tend to gravitate to Nollywood films that are dominated by strong bitchy women, and *Jenifa*'s a great example; the insults are tremendous. Village girl Suliat finds herself a small fish in a big pond when she heads to Lagos to study. "She's all dressed up like a masquerade!" jeer the girls from the campus clique. But they soon take her under their wing as a pet project, leading her through a series of makeovers and etiquette lessons – "Ladies, don't pick the nose or dip the finger into the ears."

When you've never visited a country, you look to its films for an idea of what everyday life is like. *Jenifa* paints a ravenous picture of Nigeria: everyone's a hustler, the dogs are eating the dogs and the right shoes can mean the difference between





Funke  
'Jenifa'  
Akindele

an invitation to a party or sleeping on a concrete walkway with a bucket. I suppose you might think it odd that someone can turn up for a university course without anywhere to live having been arranged, but I've seen stranger things happen on *Waterloo Road*.

And there are plenty of familiar cultural reference points for the UK viewer. Two characters watch an Arsenal-Everton match, the girls' dorm is dominated by giant Britney Spears posters and, charmingly, hard-nosed hooker Becky has a *Bob the Builder* duvet cover.

Interestingly, Big Girl – a villain of the piece in a scene-stealing cameo from the magnificent Eniola Badmus – favours a poster for Shakira's *Laundry Service* album instead. And it's with a claim that she's off to get her laundry serviced that she escapes after her greatest act of wickedness, so let's not underplay the symbolism in your choice of millennial pop acts.

And speaking of wickedness brings us to a tonal shift dissonant enough to wake up any viewer. There are hints early on that what we're watching is a morality fable, as the girls fall into prostitution to support their fashion habit and Jenifa quickly becomes a thief and a liar, but it's not until the party that ends the first half of the film that your jaw might drop off completely.

The girls of the campus have been lured to a party in a remote location. It's a jolly affair, and we linger over a dance sequence, before the venue disappears in a shower of sparks and we see the girls are trapped in a black magic lair with giant skulls painted on the walls, ill-intentioned celebrants dancing evilly around drums and in general the full works. A wall supernaturally appears to block the exit, and there are terrible scenes of slaughter including decapitation, eyes impaled and pulled out of sockets, and one girl even transformed into a ceramic statue as she flees.

It's one thing for a five minute outbreak of ravishingly violent horror to suddenly intrude on what, to that point, has been two hours of essentially light-hearted scrapes. Perhaps more startling to British eyes is the realisation that in Jenifa's world, terrifying magical happenings are a very real force. In the UK, supernatural goings on are confined to their own clearly defined

genre shows, and not shunted without warning into the middle of comedies or dramas. We've never followed the model of American daytime soaps who've been cheerfully doing this sort of thing for ages – Marlena in *Days of our Lives* was possessed by the devil, for instance, while half the characters in *Sunset Beach* were turned into mummies after touching haunted rubies.

And this eye-popping interlude marks a tonal shift from knockabout comedy to moral tragedy. In the aftermath of the massacre, a pair of bereaved parents make it fiercely clear that the girls had only themselves to blame for getting murdered – 'waywardness' expressed through singing and dancing, can only be expected to reap such a grisly reward. Perhaps that's why no-one seems to make any effort to track down the cultists. Certainly we don't see evidence of any investigation, and following the "A Few Months Later" caption, the supernatural goings-on are never mentioned again.

From this point onwards Jenifa's moral decline is inexorable. She steals more and more, uses sex as bribery, and worst of all pays a visit to her home village where she lies outrageously to her parents about the state of her life - and says she's too good for the "dirty looking" people she grew up with. All the immoral characters are eventually punished, with a barren womb or an incurable disease, say. And make no mistake, while most of the film has invited us to enjoy the girls' adventures without telling us how to feel about them, the ending is a long montage of weeping and repentance.

In the UK, heavy-handed moral lessons in light entertainment went out of fashion with *Dixon of Dock Green* so this can be hard to swallow. But the film treads a fine line between endorsing what we'd call Victorian values and inviting us to spend hours of our lives enjoying the thrill of watching the sins being committed – in the case of the dance sequence that's apparently so wicked that eviscerating the participants is fair game, we get to enjoy it in quite some detail and at quite some length.

It's this sort of contradiction that makes Nollywood so exciting to a newcomer. And *Jenifa* is a great place to start.

## DISRUPTING NOLLYWOOD

How the Internet has given Nollywood a global platform  
by Jason Njoku, CEO of iROKOTv.



The one and only 'Omosexy' recently graced the front page of *The Telegraph*'s glossy weekend magazine, *Stella*. The portrait was striking and she exuded power and beauty - everything you'd expect from a superstar actor.

The subheading, however, revealed the West's ongoing disdain for Nigerian cinema and its stars: "Omosexy - the biggest film star you've never heard of".

Well, I've heard of her. So has my mum. And my aunties. And my sisters. But then, they're all Nigerian and they all continue to tap into their Nigerian heritage from their homes in the London. I wonder how many Diaspora folk read *The Telegraph*, or indeed how many African folk *The Telegraph* thinks it has in its readership. A small percentage of its total, I reckon. So whilst I thought that the title was a little patronising, considering Omotola's level of stardom and celebrity across Africa, I guess I can see that it was most probably relevant to its target audience.

In my world, the world of Nollywood, everyone has heard of Omotola Jalade Ekeinde. Everyone. She, alongside the likes of Genevieve Nnaji, is most definitely giving Nollywood a more international platform.

Omotola  
Jalade  
Ekeinde



And by international, I mean that they are, bit-by-bit, penetrating the behemoth that is Hollywood. In Africa, everyone has heard of Nollywood. It's the dominant entertainment medium and is finally, thanks to a number of factors, starting to infiltrate the West's consciousness.

Yes, stars like Omotola and Genevieve are instrumental in the popularisation of Nollywood, without a doubt. But more recently, better access to Nollywood outside of Africa has sparked a renewed interest and love of the industry, not only amongst Diasporans, but also new audiences as well, much of which can be attributed to the Internet.

Pre-internet, Nollywood movies were found only on VCDs and DVDs, the majority of which were pirated and found only in local African-centric markets. If you were a Nigerian living in Baltimore, Bradford, Bangkok or Barcelona, the chances of you finding a decent quality DVD of the latest Nollywood blockbuster were slim. Poor access to movies was suffocating the lifeblood of the industry by cutting off a potential audience of 30 million Africans living in the Diaspora. I realised this very soon after I discovered Nollywood, as my mum would pester me to find her new copies of movies and I would struggle to find them either off- or online. By marrying Nollywood and the internet (the world's greatest, most democratic platform), our YouTube channel *Nollywood Love* - which grew into iROKOTv - finally gave the Diaspora a chance to consume all the Nollywood it could get its hands on.

Bringing Nollywood onto the internet and introducing VOD (Video On Demand) to Africa was a game changer. It paved the way for Africans to have greater control of their content and, importantly, it allowed them to promote their wares, their culture, their stories, to the biggest audience imaginable.

So with its shiny new home and platform on the internet, how many more so-called 'obscure' stars like Omotola will materialize on the Western agenda? My guess is plenty more, but it won't be this year, I don't think. Whilst our Diaspora audience gorges on Nollywood for hours and days at a time, our potential audience in Africa isn't online. Yet. In the US, even if you're broke and don't have a job, you will probably be able to afford broadband and can spend your days watching *Single & Married, Mrs. Somebody, Reloaded...* but in Nigeria, even with a good job and some disposable income, broadband internet good enough to watch movies is probably still out of your reach. For the moment. When the cost of internet is priced competitively on the continent, VOD for Nollywood will be totally transformed and the distribution revolution will be complete.

The industry has already been disrupted, flooding the industry with more money thanks to the advent of online licensing - and that's only for an audience of about one million monthly unique visitors that come to iROKOTv for their Nollywood fix. Let's imagine a world where ten million people visit our site - we're not just talking disruption, we're talking about an industry being shaken to its core.

And that's what Nollywood needs; disruption, scalability, new blood, new ideas, new ways of reaching out to new audiences. The internet has given Nollywood a new trajectory, I hope that it continues in this vein and that sometime in the very near future, it starts getting the recognition it deserves.

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iROKOTv is a web platform that provides free and paid-for Nigerian films on-demand. Jason grew up in Deptford, south London.

# OSUOFIA'S DREAM OF LONDON

by film programmer Phoenix Fry.



*Osuofia in London* (2003) is considered one of the most popular Nigerian video films. In this culture shock comedy modelled on the British *Mr Bean* TV series, Osuofia (Nkem Owoh) is a lovably belligerent villager who travels to London to pick up the fortune he has inherited from his brother. He meets his brother's widow and her lawyer, who are secretly scheming to steal Osuofia's inheritance.

The opening shots for *Osuofia in London* invoke a utopian Nigerian rural life of jungle-covered mountains, waterfall and people in harmony with their environment. The film cuts to tourist images of London: Tower Bridge, Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, Piccadilly Circus. Over these urban images, the voiceover explains: “*Elsewhere on this planet, other people built large jungles of concrete and steel*



*where life was tense and often very sad. In our small and peaceful village, big cities and fast lifestyles never entered their wildest dreams.”*

In the scenes following Osuofia's arrival in London, his culture shock is presented as a struggle between the 'wildest dream' of London and a more prosaic reality which keeps invading the fantasy.

In Osuofia's head, he sees excited locals waving reverentially as his limousine glides through *central* London. But we see the disdainful looks he gets from shopkeepers and passers-by, and notice that his car is travelling very much in south-east London. When the chauffeur picks him up after his flight, it's from outside North Greenwich tube station, not Heathrow. The limo crosses over the A2 in Charlton (a route well-known to members of the Nigerian diaspora travelling between Deptford and Woolwich) and on into Welling, where he picks up a open-top tourist bus from which shots of Buckingham Palace, Tower Bridge, Oxford Street and the Houses of Parliament are shuffled haphazardly together like holiday snaps.

While enjoying the sights around Tower Bridge, Osuofia stumbles across an immodestly-dressed young woman - but she's sitting outside North Greenwich tube (again). Then back to Buckingham Palace, a joyful whooping bus ride through the tunnel at Upper Thames Street, and a lunch stop at a big international chain restaurant. But look closely: the hastily-captured interior shots are definitely in McDonalds (albeit back in SE7) – but the dialogue is shot at local takeaway that sells pukka pies. Chicken Cottage, maybe?

Let's be honest, some of these elements are undoubtedly a result of the time and budget restrictions affecting the film-makers' dream of a perfect shoot. And yet these 'errors' tell a deeper truth about reality of migrant life in London. Because while we dream the dream of Knightsbridge and Westminster, newcomers arriving in London for the first time are likely to see a lot more of the likes of Peckham, Dalston and Catford.

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Phoenix runs Cinema Forever. He moved to south-east London in 2007 after living in India, North Africa, New Zealand, Luton and Hull.

## FUTURE NOLLYWOOD: AN INTERVIEW WITH NADIA DENTON

Author of *The Nigerian Filmmaker's Guide to Success: A New Chapter in Nigerian Cinema*. Phoenix Fry asks the questions. Illustration by Aria Alagha.



***The Nigerian film industry began in the 1960s, and was then reborn in the early 90s with the emergence of video technology. Where do you think it's heading in the future?***

I think Nigeria is on the verge of a creative explosion and is at something of a crossroads in its cultural output. A new class of content creator has emerged, and they are challenging established preconceptions about the industry.

***How is this new generation changing the industry?***

There's a rapidly emerging, new class of creative people – both in Nigeria and the diaspora – and they are transforming the industry.

They are not content with straight-to-DVD releases and are largely leaving Nollywood models of filmmaking behind. They're making documentaries, animation films, music videos, experimental films and high-concept Nollywood films. They want to have theatrical runs of their films, compete on an international level, tour festival circuits, secure favourable distribution deals and win academy nominations.

They want the world's imagination of Africa to be different. This includes filmmakers such as Chineze Anyaene (*lje*) Mahmood Ali-Balogun (*Tango With Me*) and Obi Emelonye (*Last Flight to Abuja*) to name a few.



Majid Miskich

***And the film industry has become one of Nigeria's biggest employers, hasn't it?***

The film industry in Nigeria has massive potential to bring about the social change that Nigerians crave. It has modest barriers to entry compared with other professions.

And it has the ability to address many issues of social inclusion and economic inequality that bedevil Nigeria. With intensive training and development programmes, those who are unemployed and/or with low skills can enter and rise up the ranks. Filmmaking has become a new literacy.

***How do you feel the Nigerian film industry needs to develop?***

I believe that the industry is ripe for a new type of producer who knows how to navigate the Nigerian, African and international market. It needs fresh minds to take up the mantle of the industry and to fill under-resourced areas of the industry, such as entertainment law, audience development, film festival curation, exhibition and sales.

***What's the creative future for Nigerian film?***

I feel that filmmakers will emerge from unexpected quarters, and they will create new genres that are a hybrid of western aesthetics and African perspectives. We're already seeing this, but will begin to see more. Kenneth Gyang demonstrated this in *Confusion Na Wa* (winner of Best Film prize at the African Movie Academy Awards, 2013) which was a different type of aesthetic than we are used to seeing coming out of Nigeria.

I also anticipate exciting mixed media projects, where filmmakers merge archive footage, animation and music into their films like never before. The film industry already engages with music and fashion, I believe it also needs to engage with other industries such as science and technology.



On the set of *Turning Point*, a new movie filmed in New York with a cast of Nigerian and US actors.

***How do you think that the Nigerian film industry will maintain its advantage?***

Its population of 170 million is one of the strongest things it has going for it. Diaspora filmmakers, with increased resources have a central role to play in the emergence of a new Nigerian filmic re-visioning and this will be key to further developing a thriving film sector. Nigeria is rapidly on its way to establishing itself as the filmic powerhouse of Africa - socially, economically and politically.

*The Nigerian Filmmaker's Guide to Success* will be released in 2014. Nadia is also the author of *The Black British Filmmaker's Guide to Success: Finance, Market and Distribute Your Film*, which you can download for FREE at [www.nadiadenton.com](http://www.nadiadenton.com)

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