

# New Netflix thriller tackling theme of justice in Nigeria is a global hit and a boon for Nollywood

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**Online Desk:** A Nigerian action thriller that tells a gripping story of corruption and police brutality in Africa's most populous country has reached record viewership numbers on Netflix charts globally. It's a reminder of the power and potential of Nigeria's rapidly growing film industry.

"The Black Book" has taken the streaming world by storm, spending three weeks among the platform's top 10 English-language titles globally, peaking at No. 3 in the second week.

It garnered 5.6 million views just 48 hours after its Sept. 22 release and by its second week was featured among the top 10 titles in 69 countries, according to Netflix.

"Films are made for audiences, and the bigger the audience for a film, the better the chances of your message going out," producer Editi Effiong told The Associated Press. "The reality for us is that we made a film, made by Nigerians, funded by Nigerian money, go global."

Nollywood, Nigeria's film industry, has been a global phenomenon since the 1990s when it rose to fame with such films as "Living in Bondage," a thriller with Kunle Afolayan's Anikulapo released in 2022 and peaking at No. 1 on Netflix's global chart. It is the world's second-largest film industry after India based on number of productions, with an average of 2,000 movies released annually.

Nollywood's latest blockbuster, "The Black Book," is a \$1.0 million movie financed with the support of a team of experts and founders in Nigeria's tech ecosystem and is Effiong's first feature film.

It tells the story of Nigeria's checkered past, spanning a period of 40 years from when military regimes killed and arrested dissidents at will until the present day, when police brutality and abuse of power remain rampant.

The film opens with the abduction of family members of the head of the Nigerian oil regulatory agency, aided by corrupt police officers working for top politicians.

To cover their tracks, the police kill a young man framed as the suspect in the kidnapping not knowing he was the only child of a former special operative who abandoned his weapons for the pulpit.

In his prime, the character of ex-officer-turned-pastor Paul Edima – played by Nigerian movie icon Richard Mofe-Damijo – was known as Nigeria's "most dangerous man" with a past punctuated by assassinations and involvement in several coups across West Africa.

Portrayed as a repentant man who has turned over a new leaf after being inspired by his favourite Bible passage 1 Corinthians 5:17, Edima feels compelled to take revenge for his son's death after failing to convince authorities his son is innocent.

The issue of delayed justice is not new in Nigeria. Many on Friday remembered the deadly protests of 2020 when young Nigerians demonstrating against police brutality were shot at and killed. Three years later, rights groups say many victims of police abuse still haven't gotten justice.

For Edima, justice for his son comes at a cost. One by one, he hunts down the officers behind his son's death, leading him to the army general behind the plot—coincidentally, his former boss.

“It is a fictional narrative, but this is what Nigeria was,” Effiong told the AP.

He believes Nigeria is not doing a good job of teaching its history in the schools and letting young people understand how the country’s past is shaping the present.

“A society must be changed positively by art, and so there was an orientation on our part to, through the film we are going to make, reflect on this issue (of police brutality),” Effiong said.

While a government-commissioned panel of inquiry investigated the protest shootings in Nigeria’s economic hub of Lagos in 2020, Effiong attended its meetings and provided live updates via his page on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter. At the same time, pre-production for the movie already had begun.

“We must tell the truth in spite of the circumstances,” he said. “Justice is important for everyone: the people we like and the people we do not like – especially the people we do not like,” he said.

Some have said the movie’s plot is similar to that of the American action thriller John Wick. It is a surprising but flattering comparison that also testifies to the movie’s success, Effiong said.

The movie also has been lauded as signifying the potential of the film industry in Nigeria as well as across Africa. The continent’s streaming on-demand video (SVOD) market is expected to boast a robust 18 million subscribers, up from 8 million this year, according to a recent report from market intelligence firm Digital TV Research.

According to a Netflix spokesperson, entertainment with local stories remains the core of the platform’s main objective in sub-Saharan Africa. “Africa has great talent and world-class creatives, and we are committed to investing in African content and telling African stories of every kind,” Netflix said in a statement.

In Nigeria, the movie industry is at “the point right now where the world needs to take notice,” Effiong said.

He said that’s because “The Black Book is a film by Black people, Black actors, Black producers, Black money 100%, and it’s gone ahead to become a global blockbuster.”