



# THE SUPREME PRICE

A FILM BY JOANNA LIPPER



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# THE SUPREME PRICE

*The Supreme Price is a feature length documentary film that traces the evolution of the Pro-Democracy Movement in Nigeria and efforts to increase the participation of women in leadership roles. Following the annulment of her father's victory in Nigeria's Presidential Election and her mother's assassination by agents of the military dictatorship, Hafsati Abiola faces the challenge of transforming a corrupt culture of governance into a democracy capable of serving Nigeria's most marginalized population: women.*

## SYNOPSIS

In 1993 Nigeria elected M.K.O. Abiola as president in a historic vote that promised to end years of military dictatorship. Shortly after, the election was annulled and a military coup brought General Sani Abacha into power. M.K.O Abiola was imprisoned and his wife, Kudirat, took over the leadership of the pro-democracy movement. She organized rallies and the longest oil workers strike in Nigerian history, winning international attention for the Nigerian struggle against human rights violations perpetrated by the military dictatorship. Because of this work, she too became a target and was assassinated in 1996. Director Joanna Lipper elegantly dovetails past and present as she tells this story through the eyes of their eldest daughter, Hafsati Abiola, who was about to graduate from Harvard when her mother was murdered. Her father died in prison two years later. Determined not to let her parents' ideals die with them, Hafsati has dedicated her adult life to continuing their fight for democracy. Returning to Nigeria after years abroad, she is at the forefront of a progressive movement to empower women and dismantle the patriarchal structure of Nigerian society. A startlingly intimate rendering of the epic and tragic inter-generational Abiola family saga, THE SUPREME PRICE provides a unprecedented look inside of Africa's most populous nation from the perspective of women, exposing a deep history of political corruption and a culture where a tiny circle of political elites monopolize billions of dollars worth of oil revenue while the vast majority of 165 million Nigerian people remain impoverished.

# CHARACTERS IN THE FILM



**M.K.O Abiola**

*President-elect of Nigeria  
(1993)*



**Kudirat Abiola**

*Leader of the Pro-Democracy Movement*



**Hafsat Abiola**

*Eldest Daughter of M.K.O. and Kudirat Abiola; Founder of Kudirat Initiative For Democracy; Special Advisor to the Governor of Ogun State on the Millenium Development Goals*



**Olalekan Yusau Abiola**

*Eldest Son of M.K.O. and Kudirat Abiola  
Head of Mosque on Family Compound*



**Khafila Abiola**

*Daughter of M.K.O. and Kudirat Abiola,  
US Citizen*



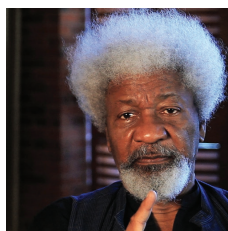
**Abdul Mumuni Abiola**

*Younger Son of M.K.O. and Kudirat Abiola; Was a child when his mother and father were killed*



**Dr. Joe Okei-Odumakin**

*President, Women Arise for Change Initiative and Campaign for Democracy;  
Winner of the US Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award*



**Wole Soyinka**

*Writer and Political Activist  
Nobel Laureate in Literature*



**Amy Oyekunle**

*Executive Director KIND  
Member of Roundtable Discussion*



**Hon. Akindele Opeyemi**

*Politician  
Member of KIND Roundtable Discussion*



**Oluwatobi Raheem**

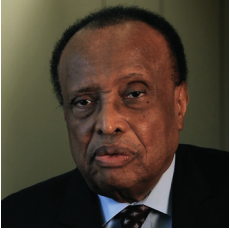
*Trainee at KIND  
Member of Roundtable Discussion*



**Nicholas Costello**

*Hafsat's husband, father of their two children; British Diplomat based in Brussels, Belgium; Worked on Nigeria Desk for European Union*

## CHARACTERS IN THE FILM



**Walter Carrington**  
*U.S Ambassador to Nigeria  
(1993–1997)*



**John Campbell**  
*U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria  
(2004–2007)  
Senior Fellow for Africa Policy Studies  
Council on Foreign Relations*



**Gen. Ibrahim Babangida**  
*Nigerian Military Ruler  
Head of State (1985–1993)*



**General Sani Abacha**  
*Nigerian Military Ruler  
Head of state (1993–1998)*



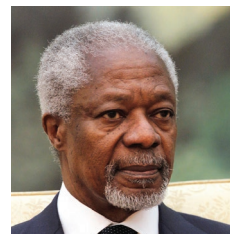
**David Attah**  
*Chief Spokesman  
Nigerian Military Government  
(1993–1998)*



**Ken Saro Wiwa**  
*Writer and Environmentalist  
Executed (1995)*



**Nelson Mandela**  
*President of South Africa  
(1994–1999)*



**Kofi Annan**  
*Secretary-General  
United Nations (1997–2006)*



**Goodluck Johnathan**  
*President of Nigeria  
(2010–Present)*



## BIOGRAPHY OF FILMMAKER

Joanna Lipper is an award-winning filmmaker and Lecturer at Harvard University where she teaches *Using Film for Social Change* in the Department of African and African-American Studies. Her work as a documentary filmmaker has been supported by the MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, ITVS, Britdoc Foundation, the Gucci Tribeca Documentary Fund, Women Make Movies and Chicken & Egg Pictures. Her latest documentary, *The Supreme Price*, received the Gucci Tribeca Spotlighting Women Documentary Award. An extended trailer from the film was commissioned to launch Gucci's Chime for Change Women's Empowerment Campaign at TED 2013. Previous films Lipper has produced and directed include *Inside Out: Portraits of Children* (1996), *Growing Up Fast* (1999) and *Little Fugitive* (2006). Lipper is the author of the nationally acclaimed book *Growing Up Fast*. Her photography has been published and exhibited in the US and overseas.

For more information please visit: [www.JoannaLipper.com](http://www.JoannaLipper.com)



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Several years ago when I began working on my documentary, I had no way of knowing that in the month leading up to the film's premiere at the Human Rights Watch Film Festival, Nigeria would be front and center in news around the world. The horrific kidnapping of over 250 school girls in the north part of the country is a tragic story that touches upon the film's key themes: the need to protect, educate and empower women and girls; the need for increased numbers of women leaders in political positions of power to represent their best interests; the violent backlash in the face of progressive change when it comes to traditional gendered stereotypes that involve the oppression of women; and the complete absence of a Nigerian government that is accountable to the masses. My film aims to provide context and a historical backdrop for understanding these kinds of developments, while also highlighting the efforts of heroic Nigerian women who are working every day to educate women, to hold their leaders accountable, and to improve their country so that Nigeria can realize its enormous potential.

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Kudirat Abiola Corner is located on Second Avenue and 44th Street in New York City. The street sign was erected in honor of Kudirat Abiola's martyrdom as a human rights activist. It hangs directly in front of the Nigerian consulate just one block away from the UN—yet most pedestrians passing by know nothing about Kudirat Abiola's heroism or Nigeria's history.

I set out to make a film that honored the personal and professional sacrifices that Kudirat and other women activists make on a daily basis as agents of change in Nigeria. For these women, entering the public sphere and speaking out against the government required the courage to fight against deeply entrenched cultural, religious and political norms—often with severe repercussions including arrest, incarceration and in the most extreme cases, death. For me as a filmmaker coming from outside the culture, the opportunity to tell this significant Nigerian story was a huge responsibility and an intimidating challenge. What gave me the confidence to undertake this project was my access to Hafsat Abiola and her willingness to provide introductions to other family members, to the staff of her NGO, KIND, and to professionals she knew in the Nollywood community who welcomed me and facilitated filming in Lagos and Ogun State. Hafsat's expertise and first-hand experience as an insider was my point of entry into this complex story.

I was intent on visually capturing the vast economic disparities between the elites and the masses, the energy of the crowds, the diverse sounds and the incredibly vibrant colors of Nigeria. I sought to portray the collaborative efforts of Christian and Muslim women working together towards the shared goals of democracy and women's empowerment. I wanted the film to resonate for Nigerians while also being accessible and informative for international audiences without any previous exposure.

From my perspective as a director, the universal emotional core of the film was always the parent-child relationships between M.K.O and Kudirat and their children. Kudirat Abiola made sure that Hafsat and her other daughters had educational opportunities that she herself never had growing up as a Muslim girl born and raised in Northern Nigeria. Her parents couldn't afford to send all of their children to university so they sent their sons. When M.K.O married Kudirat, he paid a bride price. Kudirat regretted not continuing her education beyond secondary school and made sure that her bride price was used to pay for her younger sisters to go to university. Years later, Kudirat sent Hafsat and her siblings to study in the United States where they were exposed to different cultural conceptions of gender roles.

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## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT (continued)**

Hafsāt's focus on empowering women reflects the influence of several key factors including her mother's activism and martyrdom; her own education at Phillips Academy Andover and Harvard; and her experience as a child growing up in a polygamous family, witnessing competition amongst her father's four official wives for status, resources and recognition. In her personal life, Hafsāt has dramatically departed from the structure of her family of origin, choosing monogamy and marrying outside her race, religion and culture. Her openness to making difficult, controversial choices when it comes to balancing her roles as a Muslim woman, a wife and a mother with her career, make her a revolutionary role model for young women who feel pressured to conform to gendered stereotypes.

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**Ensuring that this film has an impact in Nigeria and educationally around the world is a high priority for me. Two of the film's major funders (the MacArthur Foundation and Ford Foundation) have offices in Nigeria and do extensive impact and outreach work both in the North and in the South. In addition to these two alliances, I have established partnerships with Women for Women, Vital Voices and a number of Nigerian grassroots organizations including the Mobile Cinema Initiative, KIND, and Women Arise. In all countries around the world, women suffer gender-based violence and discrimination and have to contend with many obstacles in their way to become leaders in their chosen fields of work. I hope that this film will reach and inspire women who might not otherwise have the opportunity to see it, and that it will provoke conversations around the world about global solidarity amongst women when it comes to equal rights and leadership and protecting the rights of the most vulnerable.**

Joanna Lipper  
*Cambridge, Massachusetts*



## DIRECTOR'S NOTES ON ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

I set out to tell the intergenerational story of the Abiola family's epic rise and fall unfolding against the historical backdrop of Nigeria's evolution from independence in 1960—through the Biafra War, subsequent military dictatorships, and the tumultuous transition to civilian rule—to present day. In constructing the historical sections of the film I relied on archival footage gathered from a vast array of sources on three continents. During the Abacha's military regime, Nigerian media was highly censored. To get around the censorship, international news organizations hired Nigerian cameramen, then smuggled their footage out of the country. This footage was digitized, well preserved, catalogued and easily obtained. I was also able to obtain some archival amateur footage from that period via Witness, a human rights organization that distributes cameras to civilians who can then document human rights violations as they are occurring. However, some of the key footage of Kudirat and MKO Abiola on the campaign trail during the 1993 election was not found in any archive and might never have reached any audience at all. It came from the home of the Nigerian cameraman who had accompanied the Abiola delegation on the campaign trail in Northern Nigeria as well as in the South. His VHS tapes had not ever been copied, logged or labeled and were in rough shape but we were able to have them transferred and restored so that this historic campaign, these charismatic leaders and the Nigerian masses from that moment in time could be preserved and brought to life on film.



Kudirat Abiola, Leader of the Pro-Democracy Movement in Nigeria (1997).



# VERTUMNUS PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS



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Joanna Lipper

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Richard Sands  
Joanna Lipper  
Lisa Rinzler

*Film Editor*  
Geoff Richman

*Editors*  
Tina Grapenthin  
Ali Muney

*Music Composed and Conducted by*  
Nathan Larson

*Motion Graphics*  
Joe Fuller for MediaStorm

*Co-Producer*  
Tunde Kelani



MacArthur  
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