

A Loose Connection?: The Impact of Video Films on Literary Culture in Nigeria

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The interests of a wide corpus of contemporary readers of Nigerian fiction seem to hover around 'soft' subjects located in the interstices or confluence of the profound and the (melo)dramatic. This class of readers who buy reading materials voluntarily differs from the class whose consumption of reading materials is directed or educationally oriented, but on whose tastes the canon has largely been constituted. The potentials of the former category of readers in evolving and sustaining a reading culture, so often described in the discourses as rare in Nigeria, is now being clearly understood by writers and publishers. The frequent appearance of narrative fiction representing social life in dazzling details, colour and contours tends to validate this point, but shows as much that the novel is responding to the initiatives, force and agenda of the Nigerian video film.

This paper explores the interesting connections between film and narrative fiction as being shaped by the Nigerian entertainment space. Its central claim is that the video film culture and the narrative fiction are in a productive alliance likely to alter prevailing ideas about what is valuable and canonical in the construction and representation of social experience in Nigeria. Evidence from a selection of novels written by Nigerians at home and in the Diaspora will be used to investigate the spread and recurrence of this decimal in Nigerian fiction. Particular emphasis will be on the evolving capacity of the novel to respond to popular tastes by representing profound and topical issues in less complex textures. Do writers, eyeing the large market of the video films, have filmic versions of their novels in mind while writing? How are the appropriations of video film subjects and techniques by novelists (re)defining the ways we think or would come to think of the novel as a form for the articulation of 'profound' issues in Nigeria? How far can the development be read as statement that the canon can no longer be woven around narrow subjects,, interests and personalities?