



Constructing the Docufiction Characters: "The 37th State", an Academic Docufiction Screenplay in View

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Abstract

This paper explores the complex characters and characterisation techniques employed in the genre of docufiction. As a hybrid form that merges documentary and fictional elements, docufiction presents unique narrative opportunities and challenges, particularly in character development. This paper examines the construction of characters in "The 37th State," an academic docufiction feature screenplay written as part of ongoing Practice-Based research in screenwriting. Content analysis was used in analyzing the content of "The 37th State". Secondary data were collected through books, journals, archival documents, and online sources. The postmodern character theory was deployed to examine characters typically found in docufiction, including historical figures, composite characters, and entirely fictional personas, and how these characters are weaved to reflect the socio-political realities of Nigeria within the 2023 election year. The study found that historical figures are depicted with a focus on accuracy and respect for their real-life counterparts. At the same time, composite characters blend traits from multiple real individuals to represent broader social dynamics. Fully fictional characters are crafted to enhance narrative engagement and provide relatable entry points for the audience. Finally, the paper demonstrates how docufiction characters serve as conduits for narrative progression and thematic exploration, effectively bridging the gap between reality and fiction. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of character construction in docufiction and its impact on storytelling and audience engagement.

Keywords: Keywords: Docufiction, Characters, Academic Screenplay, Screenwriting Character Construction, Socio-political Realities.

Introduction

Docufiction is a hybrid genre that merges documentary and fictional narrative techniques. It is a compelling medium for portraying historical and contemporary events with authenticity and creative expression. This genre, as defined by Renov (1993), "operates at the intersection of fact and fiction, producing narratives that draw on the real while deploying the imaginative strategies of fiction" (p. 27). The academic docufiction screenplay "The 37th State" exemplifies this approach, offering a detailed depiction of a pivotal period in Nigerian history (the 2023 general election and the emigration or "japa" syndrome) through its carefully constructed characters.

Constructing characters in docufiction involves a meticulous balance of factual accuracy and narrative creativity. As noted by Nichols (2010), the authenticity of documentary elements combined with the dramatic engagement of fiction allows for a richer, more immersive storytelling experience. This balance is crucial in "The 37th State," where historical figures, prominent politicians, bureaucrats and fictional personas intertwine to reflect the socio-political realities of Nigeria within the election year. The screenplay not only seeks to entertain but also aims to educate and provoke critical reflection on historical events and their contemporary implications.

The development of characters in "The 37th State" is informed by rigorous research and a deep understanding of the historical context. According to Rosenthal (1999), the credibility of docufiction lies heavily on the authenticity of its characters, which must be believable within both the historical and narrative frameworks. This paper explores the techniques employed in crafting these characters, examining the integration of historical facts and imaginative elements to create multidimensional personas that drive the narrative forward. Furthermore, the screenplay addresses complex themes such as corruption, power, and social justice, which are intricately woven into the characters' arcs. As Bordwell and Thompson (2013) suggest, character-driven narratives in docufiction can effectively highlight broader societal issues, prompting viewers to engage with the material more deeply. "The 37th State" leverages its characters to explore these themes, offering insights into the human condition and the historical forces that shape it.

This paper examines the construction of characters in "The 37th State," an academic docufiction feature screenplay written as part of ongoing Practice-Based research in screenwriting. The postmodern character theory was deployed to examine characters typically found in docufiction, including historical figures, composite characters, and entirely fictional personas, and how these characters are weaved to reflect the socio-political realities of Nigeria within the 2023 election year.

Theoretical Framework

Postmodern Character Theory

The study deployed the Postmodern Character Theory derived from Jean-François Lyotard's (1984) concept of the "incredulity towards metanarratives," influencing how postmodern characters are portrayed. The framework examines characters in literature, film, and other media through the lens of postmodernism. This approach deconstructs traditional notions of character identity, coherence, and narrative roles. It emphasises fragmented, ambiguous, self-referential characters, challenging conventional storytelling and character development.

Significance of Postmodern Character Theory to the Study

The framework is used in analyzing the construction of characters in docufiction hybrid characters in "The 37th State", with a keen interest in how they are constructed and smoothly incorporated into the narrative. However, the postmodern character theory has limitations that could be explored and improved upon, such as:

- i. Postmodern characters' fragmented and ambiguous nature can make narratives challenging to follow and understand for some audiences. This complexity may limit the accessibility and appeal of such works.
- ii. The emphasis on fragmentation and multiple perspectives can overshadow the importance of coherence and continuity in character development. This can lead to characters that feel inconsistent or poorly developed.
- iii. By subverting traditional character arcs and narrative structures, postmodern characters sometimes fail to provide the sense of resolution or catharsis that more conventional stories offer. This can leave audiences feeling unsatisfied.

Literature Review

The Concept of Docufiction and Hybrid Documentaries

Rhodes and Springer (2006) described docufiction as the creative merging and synthesis of documentary and fictional narrative cinema. As a hybrid, docufiction is a more flexible genre that enjoys creative freedom adopted from fictional narratives. 'Its major focus is on portraying events as authentically as possible; hence, it allows the screenwriter to incorporate real and fictional elements in telling stories' (Botha 2017: 1-2). Weinstein, (2020) corroborated this assertion by stating that "In docufiction, you can let true events as they happened to steer the course of your characters' narrative trajectory". The hybrid documentary, as we know it today, refers to documentaries that blend

the elements of non-fiction and fiction filmmaking while incorporating different styles and approaches. Turner (2016) described the hybrid as a 'documentary that moves between two modes', which he means is 'the blending of elements and techniques associated with narrative fiction with traditional documentary filmmaking.' Therefore, we consider docufiction and hybrid documentaries to be the same.

Blending facts and fiction and blurring the lines has generated many questions among scholars and documentary filmmakers. As Moody (2013) queried, 'Hybrid between what and what? One general assumption is that these works emerge from the interstice of documentary and fiction – but what other boundaries do they operate between?' Turner (2016) also asks, 'to what does this compounding or cross-pollinating of elements refer?' In an attempt to answer these important questions, Turner listed some of the parameters to include 'Observation and instigation, life and art, the actual and possible, translation and interpretation, presence and performance, construction and deconstruction, evidence and hearsay, authorship and plagiarism, meaning and abstraction.' adding his voice to the argument, Merewether (2012) posited that,

The hybrid documentary is a non-fiction film which employs a stylised form of representation of the subjective voice and may incorporate experimental and self-reflexive modes of production. The hybrid documentary frequently integrates fictional characteristics and formal innovation in performance, design and mise-en-scène. This mode of production often presents voices from the margins of society, and has been particularly embraced by feminist, queer and avant-garde filmmakers seeking to invert the position of the subject as victim and establish new aesthetic possibilities for the documentary (Merewether 2012).

However, controversies surround the hybrid genres, with some critics observing that the combination of fact and fiction produces uncomfortable feelings and reactions. Some critics even go to the extent of describing it as 'dangerous and misleading.' Moody (2013) warns that not all the transcending devices of the hybrid work towards positive representation; some ethically challenge boundaries, 'from revealing to exploitative, from dissection to disgust, responsible to irresponsible, experimenting with to experimenting upon, dignity to deviation, orchestration to dictation, subjective to subjecting.' Moody insisted that 'despite the hype generated by these films, their ambiguous genre means that many still have a hard time finding a home with funds, distributors, festivals and critics.' moody attributed this to the fact that 'These industry bodies still tend to operate on strict categories of fiction vs. documentary or alternately permit willful ignorance of their fraught distinctions.' Beattie (2004:151) attributed this to the fact that many audiences still adhere to highly structured ways of thinking about 'truth' in film. These criticisms and arguments about blending facts and fiction may linger, but 'screenwriting and filmmaking in general, as products of creativity, will also not remain static' (Iwuh and Patrick 2022:378).

Character Construction in “The 37th State” written by Nicodemus Adai Patrick

Synopsis

“The 37th State” tells a fictitious story of Barrister Adai, a promising lawyer and a patriotic Nigerian citizen who is forced to consider “Japaying” (emigrating abroad) because a clash between him and General, the inept and corrupt politician and the sitting governor of the 37th State whom he helped get to power. The feud between the two ensues after Barrister Adai refuses to help him with his second term bid because of his failure to deliver his campaign promises. However, Barrister Adai abandons the idea of “Japaying” to confront General after discovering that General secretly killed his parents and sponsored his higher education to earn his loyalty. This leads to a campaign that brings the General down during the general elections. The 37th State inserts real comments on events made by political actors and bureaucrats and invented fictitious characters to comment on them.

The Construction of “The 37th State”

“The 37th State” is a docufiction screenplay written as part of an ongoing practice-based PhD thesis in Screenwriting. It attempts to truthfully depict the socio-political realities of Nigerian society with a keen emphasis on electoral malpractices, corruption, and the emigration crisis Nigeria is facing. It captures events in the build to, during, and after Nigeria’s 2023 general. Nigeria has 36 states. The 37th state is a fictitious environment invented to enable the blending of facts and fiction without ruffling feathers or attracting the harsh reaction of the political elites, who are the key antagonists of the story. “The 37th State” uses parallel plot lines to narrate the story. The main plot line follows Bar’s fictitious story. Adai must abandon the idea of “Japaying” (emigrating abroad) to confront General, the inept and corrupt politician who secretly killed his parents and sponsored his higher education to earn his loyalty. The parallel plot lines showcase factual events before, during, and after Nigeria’s February 2023 general elections. Real comments on events made by political actors and bureaucrats on the conduct of the election on National television, Newspapers and radio stations were seamlessly inserted into the narrative through invented podcasts, and partly fictionalized radio programmes and fictitious characters were made to comment on them. Also, real incidents of electoral malpractices ranging from vote buying, ballot box snatching, arson and disruption of the electoral process and bribery of electoral officials and judges to subvert the will of the people were equally injected into the story.

Docufiction Character Construction in “The 37th State”

The study categorizes the types of characters typically found in docufiction, including Hybrid/Composite characters, entirely fictional personas, Self-insertion and historical figures. We will be analysing the significance of these

characters and how they are constructed; paying attention to their backgrounds, motivations, and arcs.

Insertion

Self-insertion

Self-insertion is a technique used by design to introduce the author into the story as a character. Patrick, Adai Nicodemus, the author of "The 37th State," is a Practice-Based researcher in screenwriting and a social realist who always uses his craft to address current socio-political affairs in his country. During his masters in 2017-2019, the hottest issue Nigeria was grappling with was insecurity, with armed bandits and Boko Haram insurgency ravaging Northern Nigeria and killer Fulani herder's attacks in North Central Nigeria, which happens to be his region. He was directly affected by those attacks, losing his elder brother and many relatives. This gave birth to the activist in him, which resulted in scripting *Dissent* (2019) as part of his Master's Dissertation, "Rewriting And Redefining The Nigerian Tele-Hero: A Case Study Of Pam In *"Dissent"* (An Experimental Television Drama Script) used as a case study in this chapter. At the core of the study was the desire to investigate the attention to the prevailing security challenges the country faces from the content creators of Nigerian television dramas. Having studied the content of Nigerian television dramas from inception (1973-2018). The study finds that most television dramas in Nigeria are escapist and do not enable the audience to see pro-activeness in tackling the security challenges in Nigeria. Hence, *Dissent* was used as a template, which may be the equivalent of *Law and Order* or *NCIS*.

In late 2020, as the Covid 19 pandemic was winding down, the author gained PhD admission at the same institution (Redeemer's University, Ede, Nigeria) and in early 2021, he secured a teaching job at the institution and joined the campus radio station as a volunteer co-host/analyst of Jolly Express programme, which serves as his Community Development Service (CDS). Jolly Express is a pidgin English programme designed to reach local audiences with news and current affairs. This allows the author to come across news and trending events as they occur and critically analyze those issues.

The author incorporated these experiences into "*Sey You dey Whine Me Ni?*" which was inspired by Nigeria's February 2023 general elections. As the election approached, the security challenges gradually started fizzling out, to everyone's surprise, making election campaigns and voter education the top priority. Like many individuals and entities, the author connected insecurity to bad governance. Seeing the electoral process as the remedy to bad governance and insecurity, the author joins the campaign against electoral malpractices through the radio medium and makes the electoral process the central focus of his ongoing doctoral thesis, which attempts to analyze the far-reaching consequences of electoral malpractices and violence on Nigeria's democracy, socio-economic development, and international reputation and highlighting how the erosion of public trust in the electoral process undermines citizens' confidence in their government, weakens institutions, and perpetuates a culture of impunity through screenwriting as a method of research inquiry.

One of the major areas of Self-insertion in "*Sey You dey Whine Me Ni?*" (2023) is the insertion of a real campus radio programme, Jolly Express Show at 103.5 Redeemer's F.M. inside Redeemer's University, Ede, Nigeria, anchored by the author who uses his real stage name 'Nico' and his colleagues Lydia Epelle and Emmanuel Oladinjoye. Episodes of the programme addressing electoral malfeasance and voter education are featured in the scripts. Frequent callers on the programme are featured, airing their opinions on the burning issues. A fictionalized version of the programme was also featured when the invented character, Adai, was invited for an interview and voter enlightenment programme at the real radio station.

The second insertion was on Election Day, when the author met with one of the prominent callers on the show and a staff member of the university called Baba Plenty in their voting centre not far from the school campus. Baba Plenty saw people buying votes despite the strict measures put in place to coup monetary inducement, especially the band on old N200, N500 and N1000 naira Nigerian notes placed by the Nigerian Federal government and central bank (businessday.ng), which brought untold hardship on Nigerians. He called the author's attention to come and witness first-hand the anomalies taking place during the election. These real election day experiences are captured in a scene with the real subjects using their real names and participating in real events in real time, representing a typical docufiction format. Below is an excerpt from the insertion in "The 37th State"

NICO

Jesus! What is going on here?
It means all the untold hardship
brought upon Nigerians because
of federal government's reduction
of money in circulation and the
Naira redesign policy is in vain?

BABA PLENTY

Na so my brother. It is sad.

NICO

What is the usefulness of the
security personnel? (52)

The author also recounted how Nico (himself) and Baba Plenty went back to the voter's register and searched for Nico's name but could not find it. They decided to go back to their original polling units. Baba Plenty found his name, but Nico still could not find his. He was advised to check another polling unit about two kilometres away, and he did. On reaching there, Baba Plenty called and informed him that his name was found at the back of their venue. Angry Nico returns and sees another level of electoral malpractice he has never anticipated. He sees agents of some parties writing the names and bank account numbers of voters after they confirm that those voters vote for their party. Nico decides to meet the lady who is writing names and asks.

NICO

Good day, madam!
(smiles and scratches his neck)
Please, ma, I'm just curious.
What is the list for?

LADY

(Looks at Nico suspiciously)
Who are you?
Nico tries to make her feel comfortable by showing her his voter's card.

NICO

(smiles)
I am a voter here. I'm just arriving.

LADY

(a bit relaxed and responds in pidgin English)
Well, the list is for the people who vote for our candidate. You vote, we confirm, and we send you a thank you alert later.

NICO

How will you confirm that I voted for you?
And how am I sure that you'll send me a thank you?

LADY

(smiles)
Don't worry about that; we have our ways.
(53)

Nico turns and sees a man positioned beside the cubicle that is supposed to provide privacy during the voting process, monitoring how voters vote in full view of another security agent. While some of his colleagues try to manage people in the queue, the security personnel comfortably fall asleep. The author inserted this real event, which he witnessed, in the story to boost its credibility.

Entirely Fictional Personas

In "The 37th State" the fictional characters are developed to advance the narrative by serving as the author surrogate, narrator, interviewers or interviewees who comment and react to factual events and comments made by real subjects. Below are examples of the role they play:

i. Narrator

The narrator serves as a conduit for viewers/readers in docufiction to navigate complex layers of storytelling. Their guidance helps make sense of the narrative's intricacies. Therefore, juxtaposing facts and evidence with observation, imagination, and creativity will require clarification for two reasons. First, there is an ethical consideration that the blurring of the line between facts and fiction may generate controversy about the sanctity of the truth, and second, the attempt to guide the viewers or readers in differentiating the real from the invented. Hence, the narrator's voice was introduced to help navigate the murky nature of docufiction that aims to present young Nigerian audiences with facts about the deteriorating polity in the country while entertaining them. "The 37th State" deploys the use of first-person narrative voiceover and Direct Address where the surrogate breaks the fourth wall to engage directly with the audience, thereby adding layers of self-awareness and metafiction at the beginning of the script to introduce the story and later in the body of the script to maintain transparency and ethical storytelling by giving the audience hints about the blend of fact and fiction in a bit to respect the truth of the documentary elements. One such narration happens in the opening scene in Singapore, where the voice-over of the main character gives us a glimpse of what we are to see in the narrative and hints to us about the blending of facts and fiction in the story when he and a lady tour the 12 times world best airport in the world, the Changi Airport, Singapore, the airport garden, the 1.3 billion lifestyle hub, the rooftop swimming pool, the giant doughnut-shaped shopping mall in a sky train where they enter the Jewel, sighting the 130-foot tall indoor waterfall, the tallest in the world as he awaits their flight to Nigeria.

ADAI (V.O)

These state-of-the-art structures remind me of where I come from and the reason why we are where we are. A land richly blessed but cursed by a mystery that lies bare before our very eyes.

(faces the camera and speaks)

Join me in this journey of exploration into Nigeria's complex socio-political realities as I navigate the blend of fictitious stories told to reinforce factual events happening in Nigeria(1).

This narration reveals the author's perspective on the economic strength of Singapore and the sharp contrast to that of his country, Nigeria, which he attributes to "a mystery that lays bare before our very eyes." The mystery is what his eventual journey to Nigeria will reveal. The subsequent scene reveals Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. We see potholes on the runway and cows grazing and crossing the runway. Being the most populous nation in Africa and rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, and various mineral resources, Nigeria still grapples with corruption, insecurity, and poverty, among many vices that prevent it from growing and competing with many developed countries like Singapore that were once struggling but gradually evolved due to sheer resilience and good

leadership. This is the author expressing his frustration about the slow progress in Nigeria as a result of corruption and bad governance and comparing it to Singapore. This nation had her independence within the same period as Nigeria. Another instance where this technique was used in the screenplay is when Barrister Adai is to travel to the 37th State, the invented state created to freely discuss Nigerian situation from Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. He looks directly at the camera and says:

BAR. ADAI

Please join me as I embark on a journey to Nigeria's 37th state. A fictitious state created to discuss Nigeria's socio-political realities and familiar events that took place before, during and after Nigeria's 2023 general elections, using invented characters who embody the qualities of real Nigerians, real personalities and fictionalize version of some real subjects. (30)

ii. Author Surrogate

The author surrogate can represent the author's ideals, convictions, or viewpoints, acting as a channel for the author to communicate their thoughts on the topics covered in the docufiction. This may give the ostensibly objective documentary components a subjective touch. In *"The 37th State"* the screenwriter created fictitious characters and events to comment on and suggest possible reactions to inspire Nigerians to wake up and act against the cruelty of politicians who hijack the reins of power and perpetually dominate them. The screenwriter volunteers as a co-host and commentator of "Jolly Express", a pidgin English programme designed to reach local audiences with news and current affairs on his campus. This allows the author to come across news and trending events as they occur and critically analyze those issues.

The author incorporated these experiences into *"The 37th State"*, "inspired by Nigeria's February 2023 general elections. As the election approached, the security challenges gradually started fizzling out, to everyone's surprise, making election campaigns and voter education the top priority. Like many individuals and entities, the author connected insecurity to bad governance. Seeing the electoral process as the remedy to bad governance and insecurity, the author joins the campaign against electoral malpractices through the radio medium and makes the electoral process the central focus of his ongoing doctoral thesis, which attempts to analyze the far-reaching consequences of electoral malpractices and violence on Nigeria's democracy, socio-economic development, and international reputation and highlighting how the erosion of public trust in the electoral process undermines citizens' confidence in their government, weakens institutions, and perpetuates a culture of impunity, through screenwriting as a method of research inquiry. As the author's surrogate, Bar Adai is imbued with the author's activism and desire for concrete action that will lead to a positive transformation in his society.

Bar. Adai manifests that in different scenes after being made to pass through several hurdles by the author. We see that when Bar. Adai and his girlfriend Angel reconcile after realizing that Gen. had been using them as pawns to advance his political ambition by killing Bar. Adai's parents and sponsoring his law schools so he could have his undivided loyalty and planting Angel in INEC for the purpose of election rigging using her father's dark secrets as leverage against her and, in the process, impregnating her despite knowing her relationship with Bar. Adai. Bar. Adai and Angel pretend to support the general fully but organize a robust underground resistance group in which they constantly leak the general's secrets to them, and they, in turn, leak them to the public. General launches an investigation against the group and discovers that Bar. Adai and Angel are the masterminds behind the group, and he confronts them.

GENERAL

(angrily)

After all I have done for you?

Why did you betray me? I trusted you.

BAR. ADAI

(with a smirk on his face speaks

in pidgin English)

Are you kidding me? After all you

have done to us, you still want us to

help you cheat us again, right?

(chuckles and looks at him

straight in the eyes)

cheating us is your right, right?"

GENERAL

(shocks but quickly snaps out

and gives a burst of sarcastic laughter)

Yea, Cheating you is my right and

There is nothing you can do about it.

ANGEL

Hmmmmmm, we shall see then.(70)

The author uses this hot exchange of words to reflect the bewilderment and shock at the confidence that politicians exhibit when demanding votes and favours from the masses despite their failings and hidden intentions, which lay bare before sensible people were forged. General's lines, "After all I have done for you? Why did you guys betray me? I trusted you." reveal the hidden intention of politicians when they grant favours. The goal is to get something bigger from the masses. And Bar. Adai's reply, "After all you have done to us, you still want us to help you cheat us? She cheating us na your right abi?" shows him as someone whose eyes are open after the terrible experience he had in the hands of General. These questions and confrontation are designed to open the eyes of Nigerians and stir them to act against the antics of the corrupt

politicians, especially Angel's lines "Hmmm, we shall see then", which elicits determination. Hence, the author designed the two questions "You want to make I help you cheat me? " The 37th State" to become the basis of Bar. Adai and Angel's campaign. Despite threats, intimidation and physical attacks, the duo launched a campaign against corrupt politicians.

iii. Interviewers or interviewees

The fictitious characters are also constructed to serve as interviewers or interviewees in a docufiction narrative. The character engages with real people in conversation, asking questions and guiding the readers or viewers through investigating real events. In "The 37th State", the screenwriter/author deployed the interview technique to ask important questions that attempt to reveal the delicate nature of Nigerian polity.

Interviews were conducted by a real subject, Nico, and a real radio show (Jolly Express) with partly fictionalized interviewees and a fictionalized podcast discussing real issues of national importance. Critical questions like:

- I. How can the attention of the Nigerian masses be drawn to the perpetual tricks politicians play against them?
- II. How do the Nigerian masses encourage the fraudulent politicians to trick them and get their mandates during the election cycle despite several failed promises?
- III. Have some political actors in power weaponized some government agencies against their political opponents?
- IV. Are INEC officials used to compromise elections?
- V. Do electoral tribunals take the place of voters in deciding who is elected into political offices?
- VI. Why do politicians desperately seek to retain power?
- VII. Do the Nigerian masses realize the power of their votes?
- VIII. Who are the key players in subverting the people's will during election?
- IX. Is it possible to clean the Nigerian electoral system?
- X. Have Nigerian politicians weaponized poverty and hunger?

These important questions form the basis of Nico's interaction with different guests who make concerted efforts to answer them, thereby shedding light on elections in Nigeria to the masses. The fictional characters use factual data to respond to these questions. Also, Nico echoes Bar. Adai's findings and leaks about General in the Jolly Express radio programme and his personal podcast channel on YouTube with over a million young subscribers, which he created as part of efforts to expose the antics of General and other politicians to the masses. Nico invites Bar. Adai (his surrogate) and Angel, his girlfriend, at the peak of their campaign against General and corrupt politicians, to his fictitious podcast. During the podcast, they referred to real events happening during the filmic period. A real sound bite of Seun Okinbaloye, a real popular broadcast journalist, host of Politics Today & Sunday Politics on Channels TV (Nigeria's award-winning television station), and host of @themiconpodcast interviewing

Femi Falana, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), human rights activist, and former President of the West Africa Bar Association (WABA). This factual video can be found on YouTube. The screenwriter/author uses real and invented characters in the podcast scene to investigate one of the aforementioned questions: Does the electoral tribunal take the place of voters in deciding who is elected into political offices?

As Iwuh and Patrick noted, "The medium of docufiction allows the authors to investigate and tell their personal stories through invented characters and use the real characters and events to serve as evidence. The fictional characters created serve as mouthpieces and the story drivers of the authors". The injection of an actual interview into a fictitious one gives the author an opportunity to discuss real, relevant events happening in his country. In this case, the author uses real and fictitious characters as surrogates to reveal and comment on the judicial anomalies in Nigeria.

Hybrid/Composite Characters

Hybrid Characterization is the blending of the attributes of two or more creatures to form superior or unique creature like in the case of cyborg in science fiction or satires in myths or as Jean Ignace-Isidore Gérard, a French illustrator, forerunner of surrealism and one of the greatest creators of hybrid, depicted fantastic characters, with human bodies and animal heads in his works, *Les Méthamorphoses du jour* (1829) and *Un autre monde* (1844) (Caloian2020:132). However, hybrid characters, in our view, have a blend of two or more types of characters in them. Composite characters in docufiction are a powerful narrative tool that blends real historical facts with fictional elements. By amalgamating traits, experiences, and attributes of multiple real-life individuals into single, multifaceted personas, composite characters represent broader social, cultural, and historical realities. This technique allows docufiction creators to address complex themes with greater depth and flexibility, enhancing the genre's educational and narrative value. "The 37th State", the hybrid/Composite character is Barrister Adai, the major character. He is a fictional character/the hero archetype, author surrogate and audience surrogate. As a fictitious character/the hero archetype and a brilliant lawyer, his goal is to ensure fairness, equity, and justice in Nigerian society, especially the political system, but the General and dirty political system serves as his obstacle. His goal changes to marry his love, Angel, and 'Jagpaying' (migrating) to Singapore, the country he idolizes as the bastion of socio-economic and political prosperity and where he obtained his master's degree in law, which constantly compares Nigeria to. However, he realizes that what he needs is to stay back in Nigeria to bring the General and the dirty Nigerian elites to justice. As the author's surrogate, Bar Adai is imbued with the author's activism and desire for a concrete action that will lead to a positive transformation in his society. Bar.

Adai manifests that in different scenes after being made to pass through several hurdles by the author. We see that when Bar. Adai and his girlfriend Angel reconcile after realizing that Gen. Had been using them as pawns to advance his

political ambition by killing Bar. Adai's parents and sponsoring his law schools so he could have his undivided loyalty and planting Angel in INEC for the purpose of election rigging using her father's dark secrets as leverage against her and, in the process, impregnating her despite knowing her relationship with Bar. Adai. Bar. Adai and Angel pretend to support the general fully but organize a strong underground resistance group in which they constantly leak the general's secrets to them, and they, in turn, leak them to the public. General launches an investigation against the group and discovers that Bar. Adai and Angel are the masterminds behind the group, and he confronts them.

GENERAL

(angrily)
Why did you guys betray me?
I trusted you.

BAR. ADAI

(with a smirk on his face)
"Shey you dey wind me ni? After all you
have done to us, you still want us to
help you cheat us?
(chuckles and looks at him
straight in the eyes)
Shey cheating us na your right abi?"

GENERAL

(shocks but quickly snaps out
and gives a burst of sarcastic laughter)
"Na so. Cheating you is my right
and there is nothing you can do about it.

ANGEL

Hmmmmmm, we shall see then.
(Patrick forthcoming)

Through this hot exchange of words, the title of the script, "Shey You Dey Wind Me Ni?" reflects the bewilderment and shock at the confidence that politicians exhibit when demanding votes and favours from the masses despite their failings and hidden intentions, which lays bare before sensible people were forged, making Bar. Adai is an audience surrogate. The second question: Do you want us to help you cheat us? It is equally important. It further reveals the hidden intention of politicians when they give favours. The goal is to get something bigger from the masses. Hence, these two questions become the basis of their campaign. Despite threats, intimidation and physical attacks, the duo launched a campaign against corrupt politicians.

Nico is another hybrid character in "*Sey You dey Whine Me Ni?*" (2023). Being the author, he serves as a real subject when he and Baba Plenty appear on election day recounting their true experiences, bearing their real names and fictitious/real characters when he echoes Bar. Adai's findings and leaks about

Gen. in the Jolly Express radio programme (real show) and his personal podcast channel on YouTube with over a million young subscribers (fictitious), which he created as part of efforts to expose the antics of General and other politicians to the masses. Nico also serves as a surrogate for the audience, especially after he hosted Bar. Adai (his surrogate) and Angel are at the peak of their campaign, as are other key stakeholders in Nigerian politics. He asks hot questions such as: How can the attention of the Nigerian masses be drawn to the perpetual tricks politicians play against them?

- I. How do the Nigerian masses encourage the fraudulent politicians to trick them and get their mandates during the election cycle despite several failed promises?
- II. Have some political actors in power weaponized some agencies of government against their political opponents?
- III. Are INEC officials used to compromise elections?
- IV. Do electoral tribunals take the place of voters in deciding who is elected into political offices?
- V. Why do politicians desperately seek to retain power?

These important questions form the basis of Nico's interaction with different guests who make concerted efforts to answer these questions, thereby shedding light on elections in Nigeria to the masses.

Historical Figures

In docufiction, historical figures are depicted with a focus on accuracy and respect for their real-life counterparts. Some key historical figures are featured in "The 37th State" by inserting archival footage and documents during a fictitious podcast hosted by Nico, a real footage of Mr. Carol Smith, a British colonial official who accuses the British government of rigging the first and most important election in the history of Nigeria in 1959 in favor of the North. The interview gives a detailed explanation of how the election was rigged. The history of **Lee Kuan Yew** Lee Kuan Yew, the founding Prime Minister of Singapore who played a significant role in transforming the country from a small port city into a developed nation, was also recounted by fictitious characters like Bar. Adai and Tola while in Singapore. Other historical Nigerian figures like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Tafawa Balewa, Obafemi Awolowo, and the roles they played in the historical development of Nigeria's democracy and politics were mentioned.

Conclusion

This paper analyses character construction in "The 37th State," highlighting the challenges and ethical considerations inherent in docufiction. By drawing on scholarly references and theoretical frameworks, the study underscores the importance of character authenticity in enhancing the educational and narrative value of docufiction. Historical figures are depicted with a focus on accuracy and respect for their real-life counterparts, while Hybrid/composite characters blend traits from multiple real individuals to represent broader social

dynamics. Fully fictional characters are crafted to enhance narrative engagement and provide relatable entry points for the audience. Through this exploration, we gain a deeper appreciation for the genre's potential to bridge the gap between historical documentation and creative storytelling, enriching academic discourse and public understanding of history.

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