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SCANDALS, CONTROVERSES AND AFRICAN LITERARY PRIZES
Between Intertextuality and Plagiarism

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Introduction

Literary awards in Africa are major canonising agents that play the role of promoting the text and the writer in the global literary markets. In addition, awards contribute to the accumulation of cultural and symbolic value to the literary networks within which the writers and their texts circulate. These networks may include the publishers, writers’ collectives and organisations, writing workshops and literary festival organisers, among others. In this chapter, I look at the value of scandal within the context of contemporary African literature in the prize industries and its role in establishing and destabilising prestige, exploring what this means in the context of African popular culture today. To analyse this, the chapter focuses on the short story “All Our Lives” by Tochukwu Emmanuel Okafor which was marked by controversy and scandal involving plagiarism accusations in 2019. Before and following the controversy, the story was awarded and circulated by the AKO Caine Prize for African Writing, Brittle Paper Literary Awards, and Short Story Day Africa Prize — major award bodies for short stories by African writers. The chapter explores the concept of literary scandal through an analysis of “All Our Lives,” the controversies around it, and the networks in which it circulated as a prizewinning short story.

In the global literary marketplace, associations with major literary prize bodies are highly valued, and especially with the international prize whose prestige is not necessarily pegged on the monetary worth of the award but by the value of the networks it opens to the winners. Pierre Bourdieu (1993), in The Field of Cultural Production, affirms that prestige in a literary prize is not only associated with the economic capital but the cultural and symbolic value too. A literary award does not only confer the cash reward on the winning writer, it is also engaged in the exchange of cultural and symbolic capital. The interplay between symbolic capital, cultural capital and economic capital in the production of literary culture directly influences the production of prestige. Randal Johnson (1993) defines symbolic capital as the “degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge and recognition,” while cultural capital “concerns forms of cultural knowledge, competences or dispositions” (7).

James English and John Frow writing in “Literary Authorship and Celebrity Culture” explain that “symbolic power is determined by the relative strength or value of all the different kinds of
currency that participants bring to a cultural transaction” (2006, p. 55). These may include “the currency of academic credentials, political office, religious rank, a jail record; or of bestseller status, good reviews, honors and awards, social connections, street cred, physical attractiveness or photogeneity” (English & Frow 2006, p. 55). In this sense, capital is used to “designate anything that registers as an asset, and can be put profitably to work, in one or another domain of human endeavor” (English 2005, p. 9). By analysing the value of scandal and exploring how it circulates within the different literary platforms hosting the short story, the chapter presents a reading of the story beyond the plagiarism accusations to focus on literary prestige and genre hierarchies.

I demonstrate how this particular scandal has helped raise important questions regarding the assumptions of originality and intertextuality in literary production, pointing to the promise of popular culture lenses in reframing these assumptions.

In African literature, accusations of plagiarism have provided enough fodder for scandals both locally and globally over the years. This has been in addition to the publicly played-out controversies and scandals arising out of literary award rejections and retractions. On the back of these, there have been numerous discussions both in academic settings as well as in different media spaces on originality, intertextuality and plagiarism. Commenting on Nigerian writer Cyprian Ekwensi’s work, critic Bernth Lindfors accused Ekwensi in *Jagua Nana* of imitating and copying American “juvenile adventure fiction” (1969, p. 3). Further, various critics such as Sunday Anozie (1972) in *Christopher Okigbo: Creative Rhetoric* as well as Donatus Nwoga (1975) in “Plagiarism and Authentic Creativity in West Africa” have written extensively on Christopher Okigbo’s poetry and his accusations of plagiarism. While Anozie, for instance, interprets the poetry’s similarities with other published and oral works as Okigbo’s “inspiration” from other creative spaces, Nwoga adds that this does not necessarily diminish his authentic creativity. Nwoga notes, “It is an interesting scholarly exercise tracing these borrowings and parallels. But I have yet to see any critic who is so bothered with them that he casts doubt on the creativity of Okigbo and his ‘authentic Africanness’” (1975, p. 36). Other examples include the similarities drawn from Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* (1966) to Alex La Guma’s *A Walk in the Night* (1968) and Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* (1969); and between Bessie Head’s *Mau* (1987) and Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* (1961).

Recently such narratives have included, for instance, Chimamanda Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and Anne Giwa-Amu’s *Sade* (1996). In 2019, Giwa-Amu accused Adichie of plagiarising her debut novel, a claim that was later stricken by the court. And in South Africa’s recent history, similarities have been drawn between Zakes Mda’s novel *The Heart of Redness* (2000) to the historical text *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856–7* (1989) by Jeff Peires. As a result, Mda has been accused of unacknowledged debt to Peires. Indeed, in a much publicised piece that was later followed by opinions and counter opinions on the topic in local South African newspapers at the time, Andrew Offenburger accused Mda of “paraphrasing, borrowing sections sequentially, copying, and replicating semantic strategies” from Peires’s work in a manner “contrary to postmodern theoretical leniency in reading plagiarism as intertextuality” (2008, p. 168). In his article published in *Research in African Literatures*, Offenburger concludes that Mda’s novel “must be seen as a plagiarizing, unoriginal work, a derivative of Peires’s historical research” (168).

Indeed, before Okafor’s case, there were numerous other major scandals arising out of plagiarism accusations but Yambo Ouologuem’s case stands out because it played out within the context of an international literary award. Ouologuem, a Malian writer, was awarded the 1968 Prix Renaudot Prize for his first novel *Le Devoir de Violence* (20168). Four years later, several writers and critics called out Ouologuem accusing him of plagiarising the works of Western authors Graham Greene (*It’s a Battlefield* 1934) and André Schwarz-Bart’s novel, *Le
This was followed by a lawsuit by Green and ended with Ouologuem’s novel being banned in France. He later published two other novels under the pseudonym Utto Rodolph. However, there has been a recent re-publication of the novel *Le Devoir de Violence* in France. As Boniface Mongo-Mboussa argues, this re-publication “provides an opportunity to reflect upon the misunderstandings and preconceptions in the appraisal of African works” adding that “[b]y accusing Ouologuem of plagiarism, people ignored his text’s obvious intertextuality at a time when modern literature was developing this very same trend” (2003, p. 1).

The earlier discourse surrounding plagiarism and intertextuality was, however, majorly centred outside the literary award scene owing mainly to the fact that only a handful of prizes were open to African writers/writings. Today, however, the African literary award scene is wide and covers a large area that spans different genres and geographies and with capital extending from African to northern or Euro-American funding bodies. When such a scandal as Okafor’s is read against the position of a major canonising body like the international literary prize, it provides the lenses for analysing the circulation of cultural capital in the international literary marketplace and what this means in terms of local literary production.

The Literary Prize and its Networks: Valuing the Scandal

In an official statement released on September 3, 2019, the AKO Caine Prize for African Writing noted that they had received allegations of plagiarism levelled against the shortlisted story, “All Our Lives,” and after referring the matter to the year’s judging panel, the award body had withdrawn the story from its 2019 shortlist for the writer’s “failure to attribute an original source.” The story is viewed as being “very similar” to Iranian-American writer Laleh Khadivi’s “Wanderlust.” The 2019 Caine Prize shortlisting was announced in May and the winner feted at a gala in July. The winner, Lesley Nneka Arimah with her short story “Skinned,” won the total cash prize of £10,000 as well as a writing fellowship. In addition to the winner’s package, each shortlisted writer was awarded a cash prize of £500. The withdrawal of “All Our Lives” from the shortlist did not extend to a refund of the money he had already been awarded or the expenses the prize body had incurred. This is a nod to the fact that literary prestige in prizes is more invested in the cultural and symbolic capital than in the economic.

According to the Caine Prize submission rules, submissions are made by publishers, and not writers, and they must be short stories published or translated not more than a year before submission. “All Our Lives” appeared online in the July 2018 edition of the *Johannesburg Review of Books* and was first published in print in the Short Story Day Africa’s (SSDA) anthology *Identity: New Short Fiction from Africa* (2018) and edited by Hellen Moffett, Nebila Abdulmelik and Otieno Owino. The anthology is co-published by SSDA and New Internationalist. SSDA is a pan-African literary platform that is involved with various stages of literary production from writing and editing workshops, to publishing and awards. The award that launched this platform was in 2013 with its first theme focusing on “Feast, Famine, and Potluck.” The award was followed by the publication of the best stories from the competition. “My Father’s Head” by Kenyan Okwiri Oduor won the Caine Prize the next year. In addition, one of SSDA shortlisted stories, “Chicken” by Zambian/Ghanaian Efemia Chela, was also shortlisted for the Caine Prize the same year that Oduor won. This was a great start for a new award because the later winnings of their best writers at the international prize level was considered a stamp of authority not only on the winning writers but the writing networks that had helped curate the short stories. As with many awards open to unpublished work, the selection of the best entries is usually followed by months of revision that sometimes takes
the form of writing and editing workshops. SSDA works with their shortlisted and longlisted pieces to prepare the winning manuscripts for publication. Each year, a new anthology is realised featuring stories curated through this process.

SSDA’s 2018 anthology *ID Identity: New Short Fiction from Africa* brought together twenty-one longlisted stories. “All Our Lives” was the winning entry for the 2018 SSDA Prize and the award was presented in June 2018. The cash value of the award was $800. Okafor had earlier been shortlisted for the same prize in 2017 for his short story “Leaving.” A few months after winning the SSDA Prize, Okafor was shortlisted for the 2018 Brittle Paper Award for Fiction. The award describes itself as “aim[ing] to recognize the finest, original pieces of writing by Africans published online.” Okafor was shortlisted for the Brittle Paper Award together with Stacey Hardy whose short story “Involution” was longlisted for the SSDA prize alongside Okafor’s. Other shortlisted writers that year were Kiprop Kimutai with “The Man at the Bridge,” Christine Odeph with “Our Husband Grief,” and Lauri Kubuitsile for “Moon Secrets.” Hardy was the eventual winner with a cash reward of $200.

This extensive background of the literary spaces within which the story “All Our Lives” circulated from its preproduction to post-award stage demonstrates the significance of literary networks and the value of the cultural and symbolic capital that each of these platforms bestows on the text, the writer and similar literary platforms. As is evident from the three major prizes that shortlisted this story, the cash reward does not necessarily guarantee prestige. Bourdieu explains that “possession of economic capital does not necessarily imply possession of cultural or symbolic capital, and vice versa” (1993, p. 7). Further, James English notes that “involvement with the prize is not a matter of performing work in exchange for payment [and] compensating with economic capital for the shortage of symbolic capital . . . is more difficult than it may appear” (2005, p. 123). In our context then, the plagiarism scandal associated with “All Our Lives” held enough currency to potentially discredit the writer while undermining the prestige of the award bodies associated with it through these interlinking networks. At the same time, reading the scandal through the lens of African popular cultural concepts allows for an exploration of the ideas of originality, influence, intertextuality and intertextual borrowing, and the presentation of these through canonical literary platforms which helps to challenge the concept of the binary between high and low cultures.

While the SSDA and the Brittle Paper awards come with a very small cash reward, $800 and $200 respectively, the popularity of these two platforms has continued to grow immensely since they were launched. This is partly owing to the value of the cultural and symbolic capital that they provide. Cultural and symbolic capital is particularly important in the field of literary production and may be converted to economic capital and vice versa. In *Manufacturing Modern Japanese Literature*, Edward Mack coins the term “capital intraconversion” to describe “a process through which the value, or symbolic capital, accumulated in the literary field could be exchanged for other forms of capital, whether economic, social or political” (2010, p. 5). This is especially magnified by the fact that the output of these literary platforms is not linear and one-sided. Beyond the competition and award, SSDA also provides a publishing platform, further skills in writing and editing and social networks between upcoming and established writers, among others. Brittle Paper on the other hand started as a writing platform dedicated to amplifying African literature online through book reviews, publishing new works online and publicising news on African literature and prizes. The platform crafted itself as a one-stop shop for current developments in contemporary African literature, and with this, it was able to accumulate a lot of social and cultural capital. When the award was launched in 2017, seven years after the platform’s launch, it benefited a lot from the prestige that had already accrued to the platform.
This background of the literary networks demonstrates the linkages that are created and maintained between the writer and different literary platforms. These linkages become a currency for both writer and writing organisation. For instance, Okafor is described in SSDA as a 2018 Rhodes Scholar finalist from Nigeria. His work has appeared in *The Guardian, Litro, Transition, Warscapes, Columbia Journal*, and his writing has been shortlisted for the 2017 Awele Creative Trust award, the 2016 Problem House Press Short Story Prize, and the 2016 *Southern Pacific Review* Short Story Prize. His winning story in *ID: New Short Fiction from Africa* has been shortlisted for the 2019 Caine Prize for African Writing.4

In Brittle Paper, he is described thus:

Tochukwu Emmanuel Okafor is a Nigerian writer whose work has appeared in *The Guardian, Litro, Harvard University’s Transition, Warscapes, Columbia Journal*, and elsewhere. A 2018 Rhodes Scholar finalist, he won the 2017 Short Story Day Africa Prize, having been previously nominated for the award. His writing has been shortlisted for the 2017 Awele Creative Trust award, the 2016 Problem House Press Short Story Prize, and the 2016 *Southern Pacific Review* Short Story Prize, and nominated for the Pushcart Prize. A two-time recipient of the Festus Iyayi Award for Excellence for Prose/Playwriting, he is currently a 2018 Kathy Fish fellow and writer-in-residence at *Smoke-Long Quarterly*.5

Writers draw their cultural and symbolic capital from their creative works as well as from the literary networks within which their texts circulate. Therefore, a scandal involving the writer and his or her work also directly affects the networks in which both the writer and the work circulate, threatening to devalue their prestige in the literary marketplace. Affirming the continued relevance of these networks, the SSDA and Brittle Paper also had to give statements after the plagiarism accusations with allegations that “All Our Lives” was similar to “Wanderlust” by Khadivi. But while the Caine Prize dropped the short story from its shortlist, SSDA and Brittle Paper published statements in support of Okafor and his award-winning short story.

**Reading Scandal as a Theme**

“All Our Lives” narrates the lives of Nigerian men struggling with their economic and political situations. Through the first-person plural narration, the reader follows their lives at different ages and stages of life as they deal with the realities of their existence. The narrative point of view demonstrates how each of these men is different, but their economic and political situations merge their experiences. All of them are in search of better lives that can only be achieved by financial power. They all leave home at an early age and the narrative focuses mainly on their lives in the city after they have left home. For these characters, the easiest way to make money is by taking false identities online and duping people across the world who are looking for love on the internet, starting from “the year the internet arrives in [their] city.” Most of the action in the story takes place in cyber cafes. Sometimes the gullible victims send money, and sometimes their targets see through the lies. When this happens, they keep adopting new dreams, new ideas, new lives, new identities.

Okafor has been accused of copying the DNA structure of the short story “Wanderlust” by Khadivi. “Wanderlust” was published in *The Sun* magazine in 2014 and won the 2016 Pushcart...
Prize. Like “All Our Lives,” this story uses the rare first-person plural and is told in present continuous tense. It is the story of Russian mail order brides told from the point of view of a group of women. It follows the lives of different young women brought together by the need to escape the poverty and harsh realities of their lives by emigrating to countries that are perceived to be doing better economically and politically. The emigration dream can only be achieved by marrying strangers they meet online who then send tickets to get them out of Russia. The mediating tool between the girls and potential suitors is the internet, and they spend a lot of time in cyber cafes. Many of these relationships end with the girls facing violence and mistreatment from the lovers they later meet, while other lovers fail to honour their promise of facilitating the emigration for these young women.

Okafor and Khadivi’s stories share many similarities: the centrality of the cyber cafe, the shared narrative point of view, and the fact that both stories follow the lives of a group of people with the story markers being the characters’ ages that serve to give a background to each story as well as place the stories within certain historical and political contexts. For instance, Khadivi places her story around the social and economic implications of the breakup of the Soviet Union which happens when the narrators were children:

At six, seven, eight years old we watched television all day to see a wall in Berlin – a
cold, gray city not unlike our own cold, gray city – tumble and tumble and tumble
again. When we asked our mothers what was happening, they shook their heads and
tried to explain it to us in terms we could understand.

In similar vein, Okafor places his story within the context of a country struggling with eco-
nomic disempowerment and how this influences the characters’ futures:

At four, five, six, we were running naked around the dusty grounds of our villages.
We attended schools that had no blackboards or desks or libraries. We never went to
school. The lucky ones among us were taken away to live with a rich uncle or an oga
and madam, who turned us into slaves and made us sell wares on the street.

Alongside the cyber cafe’s centrality to both stories, the similarities are further amplified by the websites the characters visit. While Khadivi’s characters cautiously type into their computers “RussianBride.com,” “UkrainianDelight.com,” “YourRussianLove.com” and take on identities such as “RussianDoll5399,” “Bride_to_Be21482,” “Misslady953,” the characters in Okafor’s story populate such sites as “Matchmake.org,” “CupidHearts.net,” “DateMe.com” where their identities keep changing from successful men looking for women and men to beautiful women looking for love, to poor Africans looking for international charities to fund development projects at home. Their identities are fluid and determined by the gullibility of the market.

Other similarities emerge in the style and structure. Consider these two paragraphs for instance – the first is from Khadivi’s first paragraph and the second is from Okafor’s second paragraph:

We are Inna, Yulia, Victoria, Yana, Snezhana, Tamara, Olesya, Nadesha, or Lena. We
come from Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Kursk, Barnaul, Kharkov, Odessa, Yekaterin-
burg, Stavropol, or Novosibirsk. Our hobbies are running, skating, biking and/or sail-
ing, aerobics, dance and/or kickboxing, stretching and/or chess. We were born under
the signs of Aquarius, Pisces, Virgo, Capricorn, Gemini, Cancer, Sagittarius, Scorpio,
Taurus, Libra, Aries, or Leo. Some of us are 1.6 meters tall; some of us are 1.8 meters
tall. We believe in God, or we are Orthodox, or we are spiritual, or it is not important. Our English is preliminary (need a translator) or conversational or excellent or fluent. We smoke occasionally; we never smoke. We drink occasionally; we never drink. We have been married once; we have never been married; we are divorced. We have no children; we have one child.

We are Chikamneleanya, Ogheneakporobo, Abdurrasheed, Olarenwaju, Alamieye-seigha, Tamunodiepriye, Onuekwuchema, Toritsemugbone, or Oritshetimeyin. We are twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven years old. We are from the North, South, South–east. Some of us do not know where we come from. We are tall, plump, lanky, short. We speak Igbo, Yoruba, Kalabari, Hausa, Itshekiri, Ijaw, pidgin English, or a mix of them all. We are Catholics, Pentecostals, Muslims, Adventists. We do not believe in any god. We are single, we have wives and children that we have left behind in our villages. We come from families of five, eight, ten. Or we come from polygamous homes. Or we do not know if we have families at all. We like to eat akpu and ofe ogbonno, eba and gbegiri, amala, tuwo, beans, rice. We do not eat salad or chicken or pizza because they are expensive.

While it is important to demonstrate the similarities between these two short stories, there is also a need to acknowledge similarities between Khadivi’s “Wanderlust” and Japanese-American writer Julie Otsuka’s 2011 novel *The Buddha in the Attic*. Three chapters from this novel were originally published as short stories in two different literary magazines. The first and the fifth chapters were published in *Granta* as “Come, Japanese” and “The Children” respectively while the chapter titled “Whites” appeared in *Harper’s* as a short story under the same title in 2011. Otsuka’s work also employs the first-person plural as the point of view to narrate the experience of a group of Japanese women sent to America as brides. The story opens in the early 1900s, following the lives of these women into the mid-1900s during World War II. It tells of their experiences wanting to escape the farm and rural life at home by marrying Japanese men who had earlier emigrated to the USA. It starts as a story of hope followed by deceit and ends as a story of resilience for these women and the generation of Japanese immigrants to the USA in the 1900s. The DNA structure of *The Buddha in the Attic* is similar to Okafor’s and Khadivi’s short stories. For instance, there are echoes of Otsuka’s description of the women in her novel who are emigrating from Japan in search of husbands in both Okafor’s and Khadivi’s descriptions of their characters:

SOME OF US on the boat were from Kyoto, and were delicate and fair, and had lived our entire lives in darkened rooms at the back of the house. Some of us were from Nara, and prayed to our ancestors three times a day, and swore we could still hear the temple bells ringing. Some of us were farmers’ daughters from Yamaguchi with thick wrists and broad shoulders who had never gone to bed after nine. Some of us were from a small mountain hamlet in Yamanashi and had only recently seen our first train. Some of us were from Tokyo, and had seen everything, and spoke beautiful Japanese, and did not mix much with any of the others. Many more of us were from Kagoshima and spoke in a thick southern dialect that those of us from Tokyo pretended we could not understand. Some of us were from Hokkaido, where it was snowy and cold, and would dream of that white landscape for years. Some of us were from Hiroshima, which would later explode, and were lucky to be on the boat at all though of course we did not then know it. The youngest of us was twelve, and from the eastern shore of Lake Biwa, and had not yet begun to bleed.
Read together, these three works rely on a similar narrative structure to tell different human experiences covering different historical, geographical and cultural settings. The women in Otsuka’s novel board the boat in the hope of meeting young successful husbands in a foreign land that will help them escape poverty. When they get to America, they are confronted with the reality that the young men whose photos they fell in love with are not the same ones, or they have since aged significantly, and they must make a decision on whether to stay, return to Japan where they are unwanted or flee to another unknown destination.

Khadivi’s short story exposes the extents to which human beings can go in an effort to escape the despair of an oppressive, hopeless system. For these young Russian women, the internet gives so many examples of online love relationships going wrong, but they nurse the hope that their experience will be good or that they will be strong enough or smart enough to escape a bad reality. While Otsuka’s story focuses on the lives of the women after getting to their final destination, Khadivi’s story concentrates on the efforts these women pour into escaping their economic realities: the efforts at taking the best photograph to send to the online lovers, the persuasion to stay by those who do not understand their realities and needs, the gradual breaking down of the high standards they had set for the kind of love they are looking for, their negotiations with would-be lovers and their changing perceptions on moral standards. In both Otsuka and Khadivi’s stories, the characters are victims who fall into the trap of trusting strangers.

SSDA, where the story “All Our Lives” was first submitted as an unpublished piece and later moulded for publication, acknowledged the similarities between Okafor’s and Khadivi’s short stories. However, while others looked at the plagiarism accusations, SSDA chose to focus on influence and intertextuality. The argument made was that Okafor was highly influenced by the Iranian writer and his mistake was not making that influence public. SSDA argued:

SSDA does not throw its authors to the wolves, especially not when they have made an honest mistake, and one which we missed. We find “call-out” and shaming culture, all too easily whipped up online, both saddening and alarming. It’s easy to see how a twenty-three-year-old engineering student might have read Khadivi’s interpretation (Russian brides) of Otsuka’s work (Japanese brides) and been inspired to dream up a Nigerian alternative that involved young men.6

The writing body concluded by saying:

We have worked with him for several years, both in our Flow Workshops, and during the editing process for two of our anthologies. Our team has supported his journey over the years and will continue to do so, as we believe him to be a person of great integrity and a writer of exceptional talent.7

Brittle Paper, where the story was shortlisted for the fiction award prior to the scandal, also released a statement that focused on intertextuality in fiction and the question of “author’s intention.” In addition, Brittle Paper dwelt on the author’s “inexperience” that influenced their decision to continue supporting him even after the Caine Prize had withdrawn the short story from its shortlist. The statement read in part:

While we agree that the lack of acknowledgement – in interviews – of its shared DNA with “Wanderlust” is unacceptable, we will not be withdrawing our shortlisting as we believe this to have resulted from inexperience rather than intentional withholding. We welcome the important conversation on intertextuality, particularly as it applies to
“standards” and examples by “Western writers, for whom intertextuality in publishing is a matter of implicit cultural heritage.” This is a teachable moment.8

The responses to the plagiarism allegations and questions on originality and credibility raise two major issues: the impact of scandal as a threat to the currency of prestige in “formal” literary landscapes, and their positioning of the African writer within the international literary markets. James English (2005) in *The Economy of Prestige* has written extensively about cultural and literary prizes and the various ways in which the institution of the prize has and continues to influence cultural and literary production. In his analysis of prizes, he argues that “there is perhaps no device more perfectly suited than scandal to making things happen on the field of culture” and citing Bourdieu and Haacke (1995), he adds that the scandal is the “instrument *par excellence* of symbolic action” (English 2005, p. 190). This perspective allows for an analysis of the literary scandals and controversies associated with “All Our Lives,” paying attention to the literary markets within which the prizewinning text circulates. It opens up an avenue for the discussion on the scandals and controversies such as plagiarism accusations as currency in the prestige markets of the award bodies, presenting it as a theme worthy of investigation.

This chapter’s analysis of scandal, therefore, expands from the person and character of the author to the prestige of the literary awards that gave value to the short story under different contexts. Indeed, English (2005) starts by arguing that the literary prize as an institution of confering value is illegitimate and therefore the very act of establishing a prize is a source of scandal in itself. He notes that “there seems never to be a shortage of prize scandals . . . all of which ultimately derive from the scandalous facts of the prizes’ very existence, their claim to a legitimate and even premier place on the fields of culture” (2005, p. 190).

Major literary awards in the world like the Nobel Prize in Literature, the Booker Prize and the AKO Caine Prize for African Writing continue to generate substantial controversy on their role as authenticating agents, especially for writers from previously underprivileged regions. The Caine has especially been a significant part of academic discourses on the role of international awards and patronage of African literature. In an unpublished dissertation, “Priz ing African Literature: Creating a Literary Taste,” I explore the deliberate production of literary taste through the award sector arguing that major prize bodies continue to encourage material and political dependence in the field of African literary production which then “promotes the production of a literature weighed by patronage and this is reflected in the texts as well” (Kiguru 2016a, p. 170).

Sandra Ponzanesi, in *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry*, echoes the voice of many critics who have condemned the Nobel as a Eurocentric prize “which has been slow to recognise the talents and literary worth of authors from former European colonies, and writing in the language of their former masters” (2014, 74). The Booker has also been called out for its failure to acknowledge its long history of economic and colonial oppression in the Caribbean Islands. It must also be remembered that in 1964, French Marxist Jean-Paul Sartre refused that year’s Nobel Prize in Literature, arguing that writers should not allow themselves to be turned into an institution. He proposed that writers should be wary of who is validating and canonising them. Following his refusal to accept the Nobel, in an interview with Simone de Beauvoir published in *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* (1984), Sartre stated the following:

> These honours are given by men to other men, and the men who give the honour, whether it’s the Légion d’honneur or the Nobel Prize, are not qualified to give it. I can’t see who has the right to give Kant or Descartes or Goethe a prize which means now you belong in a classification. We have turned literature into a graduated reality

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and in that literature you occupy such and such a rank. I reject the possibility of doing
that, and therefore I reject all honours.

(qtd. in Carter 2012, pp. 35–36)

David Carter, writing later in How to Win the Nobel Prize in Literature, emphasises that for Jean-
Paul Sartre, “standardization and placement in hierarchical structures (by awarding prizes which
recognized achievements of specific values) meant the loss of individual freedom” (2012, p. 33).
Namwali Serpell was awarded the 2015 Caine Prize for African Writing and, echoing Sartre,
called for the erasure of literary hierarchies that are instituted by the prize competitions. While
Sartre refused to accept the Nobel, Serpell on the other hand did accept the Caine but decided
to distribute the £10,000 cash prize equally among the five shortlisted writers that year. In
her acceptance speech, Serpell protested the Caine Prize’s structure arguing that it created an
unhealthy competition amongst writers. Serpell maintained that literature is not a competition
amongst writers and that an award should aim to honour a writer but not to create hierarchies
and ranks, privileging one text over another based on the judges’ literary taste. This scandal
served to promote the argument against ranking of writers in the literary market.

It is also worth noting here that the hierarchy debate also moves beyond writers to literary
genres where major prize bodies for African literature are viewed to be heavily biased towards
literary fiction, with little room afforded to genre-approaching fiction that fits in well-defined
genres such as romance, thriller and dystopic horror or science fiction, among others. This
exclusion in terms of genre also means that print/digital publications are prioritised over oral
texts. In this light, I argue that while the literary prize is a significant body in the canonisation
of literature, there always are some categories of creative writing that are automatically excluded
from the canon because of the prizes’ submission rules and guidelines. However, it is worth
noting that the very idea of a canon is exclusionary in itself. It is for this reason that when a text
such as “All Our Lives,” which gives a nod to popular culture, makes its way to a major canon
body such as the Caine Prize albeit briefly, it becomes important to analyse the idea of value
creation and distribution. It is also a direct challenge to the concept of canonisation.

Scandal under the Lenses of Popular Culture

The structure of a literary award usually includes selection of the judging panel, a call for writers
or publishers to submit or nominate eligible submissions, clarity on deadlines and the value of
the award, among other requirements that differ from one award to the other. The second step
after the close of the call is a public announcement of a long list, followed by a short list. The
final stage is usually the award ceremony at which the winning works and writers are celebrated.
These rituals of announcements and celebrations in the public space through the mass media are
deliberately framed to whip up excitement, curiosity and interest in the authors and in the texts,
and this calls for a further analysis of this literary presentation through the lenses of mass culture.
Focusing on dissemination and audience, Dominic Strinati argues that the “social significance
of popular culture in the modern era can be charted by the way it has been identified with mass
culture” (2004, p. 1). Adding on to the voices of earlier critics such as Karin Barber and Steph-
anie Newell, Strinati in An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture notes that “the concept of
mass culture provides a picture of a debased, trivialised, superficial, artificial and standardised
culture which saps the strength of folk and high culture, and challenges the intellectual arbitra-
tion of cultural taste” mainly because of its mass production for a mass market (2004, p. 19).

The commodification of the prize literatures through the mass media, as well as, increasingly,
in social media where the winning texts and their authors are consumed, commercialised and
promoted for mass consumption blurs the ostensible boundaries between “high” culture and popular culture, posing a challenge to the hierarchies of the value that frame the principles of bestowing or withholding prestige, often on the basis of a logic of exceptionalism, originality, accomplished artistic merit and implicit artistic integrity.

The contradiction, however, arises in mainstream literary art’s overreliance on, and desire for, mass attention ordinarily associated with commercial or mass literature. In our case, this contradiction, and irony, is further emphasised by the Caine Prize’s sole focus on the short story genre. While various critics of the postcolonial short story such as Nadine Gordimer, Ernest Emenyonu, Shola Adenekan and Helen Cousins, among others, have foregrounded the significance of the genre, with Adenekan and Cousins arguing that the “Anglophone African short story . . . provides a model for a new kind of postcolonial text” that “has always already displaced . . . the novel as the postcolonial genre,” the short story especially in the West where the major international prizes are based continue to be viewed as a secondary genre (2013, p. 78). Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell argue that “[p]art of the reason may be due to the fact that the short story tends to appear in ephemeral publications: either the mass circulation or little magazine” (2013, p. 7). They present the short story as occupying the in-between spaces of both elite and popular culture, arguing that this is what attests to its political potential:

The form’s potential capacity for dissidence is magnified by its ambiguous cultural position: on the one hand, a visibly commercial product residing in popular magazines and sub-literary genres, and on the other hand, an artistic medium praised by writers for its technical difficulty and associated with small-press, avant-garde or counter-cultural titles. Simultaneously a product of mass and minority culture, the short story defies categorization.

(Awadalla & March-Russell 2013, p. 4)

The ephemeral nature of the short story viewed from the literary platforms that continue to host it is interpreted as contributing to its categorisation in the field of mass culture. Using the lenses of popular culture, the removal of “All Our Lives” from the Caine’s shortlist months after the award was given can be interpreted as a rejection of the popular within the elite cultural circles. This serves to give more emphasis to the focus of this chapter on the literary prize and popular culture by a demonstration of the interlinkages that exist between different forms of literary and cultural production mechanisms that usually serve to break literary hierarchy boundaries. Further, it is in this contradiction, read within the context of a literary scandal involving accusation of plagiarism, that the chapter is set.

In the literary award scene, mass attention and publicity become significant tools necessary not only for the writer but for the publisher and for the award body because it contributes significantly towards the symbolic capital that is necessary for creating prestige. Indeed, an award body validates itself in the market by the consistency and the publicity of its award ceremonies. Publishers rely on the award as a marketing strategy for their works, while the writer usually uses the award platform as an avenue to advance his or her career backed by the validation of an award. However, this structure is not always adhered to and sometimes a confrontation within the award body results in the suspension of the award; sometimes a literary work is pulled out of the prize either before or after the award, because of plagiarism or a question of the writer’s or a judge’s stand in the moral markets, or the award fails to be presented for either lack or misappropriation of funds.9 Because of the highly public nature of awards, such a move away from the expected flow of events usually results in scandals that extend from the award bodies to publishers, to writers and to writers’ collectives, among other spaces within which the texts
and writers circulate. And as English argues, “[a]ll such scandals are pitched against the ‘politics’ of prizes, their inescapable entwinement with the movements not just of money but of social capital” (2005, p. 194).

To reiterate on English’s positioning of scandal as one of the most significant sources of symbolic capital in the field of culture, I argue for the need to analyse how this value is acquired, quantified and utilised as a theme and as a currency. There are two major ways to analyse scandal in this context: from the perspective of the text and writer, as well as from the perspective of the award body associated with the text in question. However, as William Cloonan (2000) notes, it’s the human element that drives the value of the scandal. Writing about literary scandal and the novel in France at the end of the last millennium, he argues that “probably nobody would take a literary scandal seriously if it did not have strong personal element” (2000, p. 14). The personal element in this case is embodied by the person of the writer or the judging panel for the award body. As a literary theme, the scandal is perhaps most suitable to the memoir and self-help books in which the character of the writer is the driving force in the text. Leigh Gilmore writing about scandals associated with the memoir genre in the US suggests that “scandal is less an anomaly than an integrated feature of how memoirs are currently consumed in the US” (2010, p. 657). She goes ahead to illustrate this with an example of the redemption narrative in James Frey’s memoir, *A Million Little Pieces* (2003), that was later exposed as fictional although it was initially marketed as a memoir.

The scandal was elevated by the fact that the memoir was publicised by the television host Oprah Winfrey who has actively engaged with the canonisation of literature through her book club and the magazine *O: The Oprah Magazine*. Indeed, English affirms Winfrey’s position as a canonising agent, noting that the popularity of Winfrey’s book club has come near to being “a new kind of book prize” (2005, p. 34). In her analysis of scandal, Gilmore highlights the significance of the celebrity in fuelling scandal, asserting that “Winfrey’s promotion of Frey relied on the structure of celebrity (hers and then his), which made him both typical and atypical among the exposed” (2010, p. 668). Through the personal element of the scandal, therefore, its value gains the currency that could be commodified and used either positively or negatively. In the case of Frey’s “memoir” and the scandal about the authenticity of the supposed real-life narrative, Winfrey’s celebrity status was used to discredit her work as a literary canonisation agent “not only for being gullible, but for overreaching” while “sympathy shifted to Frey” (Gilmore 2010, p. 667). In the case of Okafor and the scandal surrounding his short story, the celebrity status shifts from the writer and focuses on the literary platforms that produced and awarded his work and as demonstrated earlier, this made it important for all the three platforms to make public statements on their stand(s) regarding the alleged plagiarism accusation.

Because of the virtual presence of these networks within which the story continues to circulate, and its online publishing history, the scandal mostly played out within the online space from the Caine withdrawal announcement to the support by SSDA and Brittle Paper, and to the readers’ responses. In fact, the scandal was amplified on social media sites where readers found a platform to engage with the allegations of plagiarism from a social and a critical perspective. The online platforms where these literary platforms, magazines and stories exist provide for an immediate interactive space with the audience as well as with other literary production spaces. In these online spaces, especially on social media, the audience expressed their varied opinions on the scandal with the most popular opinion being held by African literary scholars such as Mukoma wa Ngugi, who Tweeted: “Shame on @CainePrize for this heavy handed career threatening corporate-like response to what should be a debate about influences, style and form. I am with @ShortStoryAFR and @brittlepaper nuanced responsible responses. We write well when we read and are influenced by others.” And Nii Ayikwei Parkes, who was one of the
Caine prize judges that year replied: “Mukoma, as your friend, fellow misfit, editor & Caine Prize team member, I have to disagree w/you on this. Many of us on the Caine Prize team are writers, editors, ‘storyphiles’, champions of new writers + intertextuality + new ways of writing. This was not a thing done lightly!”

While the literary platforms such as Brittle Paper and SSDA continued to engage the audience on social media beyond their announcement of support for Okafor, most of the audience waited for a response through the author’s social media pages. In the nature of scandals, which takes on a similar DNA structure as rumour, the author deactivated his social media presence, therefore blocking the main avenue for any “official” response from him. This lack of response from the author on his stand regarding the accusations only fuelled the scandal narratives that took on the aspect of rumour. Anjan Ghosh in “The Role of Rumour in History Writing” defines rumour as a genre of rebel communication, noting that it is “anonymously authored speech which conveys the collective will of a section of the people, often contrary to the dominant discourses” (2008, p. 1235). Further, Grace A Musila affirms that “rumor as a genre gains its legitimacy from precisely the suspect nature of officially produced truths” (2013, p. 261). The social media audience in this particular case, relying on only the “official” and contradicting truths released by the three literary prizes, drew on rumour to expand the scandal from the author and the short story to the prize bodies that awarded the text, thereby threatening the credibility and, by extension, the prestige of these platforms. From the perspective of the text and author, however, the scandal served as a double-edged sword in that it played a role in threatening Okafor’s credibility, but on the same note drew more traffic to the short story. The scandal generated publicity and interest in reading the story and therefore, despite the threat on credibility and prestige, it impacted positively on readership, therefore confirming Ghosh’s conclusion that “rumour [and by extension, scandal] engages in a dual task. On the one hand subverting the authority of the dominant powers and on the other enhancing the unity of the rebels by creating a community of believers” (2008, p. 1238). In this context, the community of believers served to increase the popularity of the author and the circulation and readership of the text. Further, with this increased online popularity came the call for reading this short story beyond the scandal, with readers and critics asking for a need to engage with the textual context, viewing the references to Khadivi and Otsuka in the context of intertextuality.

Intertextuality is a poststructuralist, deconstructionist and postmodernist theory that acknowledges that a text does not function in isolation and as a static structure but rather is a product of other interrelated texts. María Jesús Martínez Alfaro writes that “the theory of intertextuality insists that a text cannot exist as a self-sufficient whole, and so, that it does not function as a closed system” (1996, p. 268). The term intertextuality was first used in Julia Kristeva’s “Word, Dialogue and Novel” in 1966 in which she expounded on the concept, noting that the literary world is “an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings” (1980, p. 65). Further, Mevlüde Zengin, expanding on this concept, affirms that all texts are intertext because they draw from pre-existing texts:

Any work of art . . . is an intertext which interacts with the other texts, rewrites, transforms or parodies them. Intertextuality suggests a range of links between a text and other texts emerging in diverse forms as direct quotation, citation, allusion, echo, reference, imitation, collage, parody, pastiche, literary conventions, structural parallelism and all kinds of sources either consciously exploited or unconsciously reflected. By so doing an intertext transforms or reproduces the texts preceding it.

(2016, p. 300)
Oge Ogede aptly notes in *Intertextuality in Contemporary African Literature* that intertextuality is a common feature in literary writings in which “works by African writers share mutually influenced forms, ideas, shapes, and sounds,” and he argues that whether the writers do this consciously or unconsciously, this “is a practice that says something about the esteem in which the authors hold each other” (2011a, p. x). Further, Ogede brings in an interesting term borrowed from Wole Soyinka’s *Myth, Literature, and the African World* – literary grafting. Explaining this term, Soyinka argues that “originality is not all about the absence of influence but more suggestively about the resourceful uses of it – the ability on the part of a writer to redeploy recycled patterns of communication innovatively” (1990, pp. 5–6). Indeed Wole Soyinka has provided an insightful rereading of Ouologuem’s novel asserting that a literary text can still make “an original contribution to literature, in spite of the borrowings” (1990, pp. 98–99). In this light, Ouologuem’s work has been lauded for its unapologetic look at Africa’s precolonial time, shattering the image of an idyllic land with the absence of violence.

The same argument can also be made regarding Zakes Mda’s novel *The Heart of Redness*. Revisiting the plagiarism accusations made against Mda, Andrew Offenburger (2008) argues that the relationship between Mda’s novel with the historical text *The Dead Will Rise* does not qualify as intertextuality. In fact, he accuses Mda of “excessive intertextuality” (2008, p. 171). The idea of “excessive intertextuality” as presented by Offenburger, therefore, hints at a limit of acceptable dialogue between texts. However, Mda’s (2008) reply to Offenburger also raises major issues about definition of terms in the context of “plagiarism” and “intertextuality,” as well as the use of historical work in fiction. Mda firmly places his work’s relationship with Peires’s within the context of intertextuality as defined previously by Zengin (2016), in which he relies on an already recorded historical event in order to make sense of contemporary South Africa through his fiction. He further acknowledges his conscious dialogue and interaction not just with the print history as reproduced by Peires but also as inherited through the oral histories of the Xhosa people. However, despite the differing arguments of Mda’s moral position in terms of borrowings/plagiarisms, critic Kathryn Barbara Highman warns that their common weakness is the “implicit understanding of history and literature, fact and fiction, as inhabiting linguistically distinct spheres” (2011, p. 255). Highman argues that this position carries the risk of viewing literature as apolitical and instead calls for a reading of Mda outside the plagiarism accusation. In this way, Mda’s novel offers new ways of looking at the history of violence and injustices, and how this keeps being replicated in the present postcolonial state.

On the same note, it becomes important to read a work such as “All Our Lives” by Okafor beyond the shared DNA with Otsuka’s and Khadivi’s work. For as Ogede notes in his reflection that precedes this scandal:

> In wrestling with the controlling power of accumulated cultural capital, a promising young writer may, concomitantly, choose the option of imitating one established writer alone, as the single ideal that serves as the pattern of good writing, or follow an eclectic array of literary models. What will ultimately differentiate a new text from precursor texts will be how an aspiring young author redefines the registers of his or her model texts since to compose a work is to bring about an individual modification to tradition. (2011a, p. 202)

In line with these expansive views on a text beyond the scandal, the focus of this chapter on the short story “All Our Lives” and its central positioning within three major prize bodies allows for a reading of the plagiarism scandal beyond the moral question. It opens the way for the
analysis of the text and its circulation within the context of African popular cultures. It is an acknowledgment that the text plays different functions when viewed under different logics of value. When read through the lens of popular culture conventions, Okafor’s borrowings demonstrate popular arts’ openness to borrowings and reinvention of prior arts; and suggest another approach to understanding the scandal as reframing the conventions of “high” art which place a high value on uniqueness and originality. Popular arts define originality differently; they are less interested in citation practices and acknowledgements, since they start from a point of acceptance that some narrative plots and character types are ubiquitous and are often refashioned by new artists. The originality then, lies in the flavour of new refashioning, rather than on claims to be the originator.

A closer reading of the three similar narratives exposes various similarities as well as a deliberate effort by Okafor to go beyond the structure and the focus of Khadivi’s story. “All Our Lives” moves beyond the victim trope. It exposes the realities of the unknown online lover revealing both his preying nature and his vulnerabilities. It goes beyond the emigration narrative, painting the con artist as both the perpetrator and the victim. It exposes the realities of current political and economic situations in some parts of the continent and the effects of this on humanity where morality takes a backseat. Above all, looking at the story through its sociopolitical context, “All Our Lives” engages with a common style in oral narratives by the use of the first person plural, and engages with a common modern trope of the online con artist in a narrative that veers closely towards a moralising element. In this regard, it becomes important to analyse the text not only within its plagiarism allegation charges, but also through the lenses of popular culture.

Karin Barber (1987) in “Popular Arts in Africa” and Stephanie Newell (2002) in Readings in African Popular Fiction both acknowledge that popular culture encompasses a wide range of creative output and that because of its open-ended nature of definition, it is able to accommodate many genres outside of the “official” categories. As Barber notes, the definition of popular art is best captured “in terms of absences and deviations from established categories” (1987, p. 11). Indeed, Newell adds on to the focus on the official and unofficial binaries, emphasising that the “popular” can never designate a clearly bounded category and “[a]ny effort to define popular fiction in Africa must account for the manner in which local practitioners constantly absorb new cultural currents, poach upon so-called ‘traditional’ and ‘elite’ discourses, adapt and innovate and operate outside of ‘official’ art forms” (2002, p. 4).

Looking at “All Our Lives” from this perspective allows for a reframing of the narrative away from the moral question of copying versus borrowing and provides a way of reading it as a contemporary folktale commenting on global inequality and the forms of desperation and precarity produced by this inequality and exploitation which necessitate these options for the characters. Indeed, Barber, as well as Stephanie Newell and Onookome Okome (2013), have foregrounded the fact that popular culture is a productive rather than a reflective field of activity, with Newell and Okome affirming that “African popular art forms do not simply mirror sociopolitical conditions nor should they be celebrated as the naïve voice of ‘the people’ in everyday contexts. Rather, they represent people’s proactive responses to complex and dynamic power relations on the ground in urban areas” (2013, p. 7).

Further, the short story under analysis embraces other aspects of popular fiction by its resemblance to “those types of narrative which never fail to generate debate amongst readers on moral behavioural issues” and in terms of content being a story that’s popular “in terms of containing ubiquitous character types and plots” (Newell 2002, p. 5). In her introduction to Readings in African Popular Fiction, Newell draws on Barber’s seminal work on African popular culture to argue that “[h]er emphasis upon innovation allows us to appreciate local authors’ experiments...
with global genres” and that “when writers who are neither mainstream nor canonical take on 
popular genres . . ., the genre becomes an uprising form” (2002, p. 4). In this context, “All 
Our Lives” viewed under the lenses of the innovative nature of popular culture allows a further 
interpretation of the modern folktale of the fake online lover who is only after swindling money 
from gullible people over the internet. Indeed, as Ode Ogede in “Prolegomena to the Study of 
Influence in African Literature” explains on the concept of intertextuality,

For a new text to come into its own it must wrestle against those within the surviving 
order, staking out its claim to significance by insisting upon assimilating, modifying, 
extending, regenerating, and redrawing the shape and spirit of the inherited forms in 
surprising ways. Implicitly, then, authentic creativity or ingenuity is thus not neces-
sarily about the use of untried material but, rather, consists of the ability to repackage 
existing stocks by infusing them with new life as a new vision reacts to the old at the 
strategic point of creative contact – as an unseasoned writer talks back, as it were, to 
the text he or she is interacting with.

(2011b, p. 42)

The short story “All Our Lives” manages to move beyond the issues raised in “Wanderlust” 
and The Buddha in the Attic, and, therefore, a critical focus on intertextuality allows for a deeper 
analysis of the issues raised in the short story ranging from human resilience to the reinvention 
of identity, qualities that are important in navigating through oppressive systems. The characters 
in “All Our Lives” do not just adopt the identities of rich men looking to spend money on 
strangers online, they also act as beautiful men and women looking for money and favours in 
exchange for sex and companionship. Further, Okafor describes how sometimes the identities 
move from the search for cyberlove to take on the form of exotic representations for the benefit 
of foreign donors.

We are tired of our fake lives. We are bored. We become ourselves again, or we 
become partly ourselves, or we give up on cyberlove for a while. We take pictures of 
slums and send them to foreign organisations, and foreign men and women to whom 
we profess our love. We beg for their pity. We say we are poor Africans who sniff glue, 
or poor Africans who exhume freshly buried people and roast their flesh for food, or 
poor Africans fleeing tribal wars.

This shifting of identities in the online space where the fraudsters adopt a performative mode 
for each fraud/project echoes the African folktale of the trickster figure. In the trickster narra-
tive, usually embodied by a small or physically disadvantaged animal like the hare or the squir-
rel, the trickster usually outwits the bigger, more gullible animals. And although sometimes 
the tricks are cruel on the larger animals, the audiences’ sympathies are always invested in the 
trickster for two main reasons: the story is told from the trickster’s point of view, and the larger 
animals are usually presented as bullies who leave the smaller animals with no chances of survival 
in the jungle except through trickery. In “All Our Lives,” Okafor uses his fraudster characters 
and repurposes the trickster figure to comment on the now-infamous 419 online scam phe-
omenon as a distinctly local response to the precarity produced by global capital, just as the 
Russian brides are a product of post-Cold War dynamics.

The 419 online scam has been theorised from different perspectives including within the 
creative literary spaces. Writing about internet crime, Blaise J. Bergiel, Erich B. Bergiel 
and Phillip W. Balsmeier (2007), as well as Harvey Glickman (2005) and Kimberley Noble
(1998), among other scholars, argue that the scam, taking its name from the Nigerian penal code address that focuses on this kind of fraud, originated in Nigeria from “the mid-1980s when dropping oil prices forced university-educated white-collar workers in the West African nation to scramble to survive” from where they became “master forgers, starting with stamps and letterhead and ploughing the proceeds into what is now an enormous infrastructure” (Bergiel et al. 2007, p. 113). Today, these scams are usually planned through the email. From the African literary space, perhaps the most well-known cases are Petina Gappah’s short story “Our Man in Geneva Wins a Million Euros” which tells the story of a Zimbabwean in Europe who falls victim to a 419 email; and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s 2009 novel I Do Not Come to You by Chance in which the protagonist is pushed by his material and social conditions into the fraud profession. Nwaubani’s narrative, like Okafor’s, is set from the point of view of the fraudster. Both Nwaubani and Okafor present an awareness of the reliance of the scam as a literary genre as well as 419’s success for its reliance on the stereotype of global hierarchies and privilege.

In an analysis of Nwaubani’s novel, Nicole Cesare notes that the “fictional scammers eschew passing as insiders, instead emphasizing cultural and geographical difference in order to appeal to their targets’ deeply engrained beliefs about global hierarchy and privilege. Thus, they position their targets to append certain identities such as the benefactor or the mercenary, identities the scammers then exploit” (2013, p. 83). She continues to note that in these carefully constructed scam emails, the fraudsters are conscious of the “deeply engrained notions of global hierarchies” and they therefore strategically deploy “various colonialist identities” (2013, p. 84). In the short story “All Our Lives,” the characters move from rich men in search of love to poor beautiful women waiting to be saved by rich Western men, to poor citizens waiting for philanthropy from the West; all the time urging on the would-be victims to embrace the all-too-familiar identity of the saviour figure. Okafor presents his characters as being consciously aware of the place of exotic representation of Africa in the literary field and within the global capital economy. As Glickman concludes:

More broadly, in terms of relations between Africa and Europe/North America, 419 scams may be the reversal of contemporary collaboration to essentially loot African resources by opportunistic Westerners and corrupt local officials. Going even further, these scams may reflect a peculiar cultural trend that undermines the growth of markets and legitimate institutions in circumstances of severe economic and social change.

(2005, p. 462)

Through the short story’s contents and by adopting what can be considered a popular narrative trope of the 419 fraudster and presenting it to the world through the “high culture” of international awards, Okafor is actively engaged with contemporary conversations on exoticisation of African literature at the international literary marketplaces. Okafor manages to move the narrative started by Otsuka and advanced by Khadivi about immigration, resilience and determination to cover a contemporary topic on the exotic gaze and the value of what Graham Huggan (2011) has termed strategic exoticism. Okafor achieves this by a focus on the con artist as both victim and perpetrator, relying on the trickster narrative format to demonstrate how the con artists’ shrewd packaging of their stories tap into the rhetoric of the white saviour and their humanitarian assumptions. At the beginning of the story, most of the identities the characters take are victim identities: people with no agency, awaiting help from outside. And although part of this identity is true, the characters later expose the fact that they are not as helpless as they want their targets to think.
Okafor, through literary grafting and borrowing, relying on earlier forms to tell a contemporary common story, engages with contemporary discussions on exoticism and strategic exoticism, and the relevance of this point of view in gaining visibility. The short story enters into conversation with critics such as Graham Huggan (2011) who is of the opinion that postcolonial writers strategically participate in their own marginalisation by allowing themselves to be defined by international literary institutions like publishers and award organisations; and Sarah Brouillette who advances on this discussion by introducing the concept of “postcolonial authorial self-consciousness” (2007, p. 7). In *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007), Brouillette looks at contemporary postcolonial literature as a body of work that involves different literary strategies shared between the reader and the author aiming to place a work of art at a vantage position in the global literary scene. Furthering on this topic in “Prizing African Literature: Awards and Cultural Value” I (Kiguru 2016b) explore these concepts from the perspective of the international award for African literature. I analyse the role of the award in “prizing otherness,” exploring the different ways in which African writers navigate around the patronage of award bodies in order to escape the exotic codes of representation. Read from this perspective, the irony of a story about fakery and imposters being flagged for potential plagiarism could be read as a narrative that is aware of the idea of authorial self-consciousness as a method deployed to fit within the literary market demands and, in the process, gain global visibility.

In conclusion, this chapter uses the idea of literary scandal to explore two major concepts: the idea of prestige within literary awards and how this is affected by scandal, and how scandal acquires value through popular culture. By focusing on the recent case of Nigerian writer Tochukwu Emmanuel Okafor’s short story “All Our Lives” as an entry point, the chapter has demonstrated how the scandal involving this story was quantified in terms of literary value and its effects on destabilising the prestige of the awarding platforms associated with it while at the same time shining a spotlight on the text and author. While the scandal may have negatively affected the prestige of some of the award bodies associated with it, challenging the idea of “high culture” associated with international awards, the symbolic capital associated with it also allowed for analysis of the text beyond the moral element of the scandal to focus on how the “intertextual” borrowings successfully engaged with contemporary issues through the genre of popular fiction. In summary, the analysis of “All Our Lives” in this chapter has involved placing it within its mechanisms of literary production in an attempt to map out the circulation of cultural capital within contemporary African literary networks.

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**Notes**

Doseline Kiguru

6 http://shortstorydayafrica.org/news
7 http://shortstorydayafrica.org/news
10 This link provides the Twitter thread on this discussion: https://twitter.com/mukomawangugi/status/1169225189734924288

Works Cited


