

# Selling Subversion: An African City and the Promise of Online Television

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## Abstract

When *An African City*, an online television series produced in Ghana, debuted in 2014, the show immediately garnered a following, both within Ghana and abroad. The success of *An African City* demonstrates not only the capacity for independent filmmakers to reach global markets in the digital age, but by subverting dominant narratives about Africa it also suggests that, under certain conditions, creating counter-hegemonic narratives can be economically successful. Using Bourdieu's theory of practice as an analytical framework, we examine how the creators of the show use various forms of capital to produce a commodity that can circulate within the global marketplace. At the same time, we also examine how the transnational nature of the show also determines the degree to which its creators can disrupt western discourses about Africa.

## Keywords

web television, Africa, linguistic markets, habitus, cultural production

## Introduction

In the winter of 2014, Nicole Amarteifio, an independent filmmaker, posted the first episode of *An African City*, a web television series centering on five successful, career women living in Accra, Ghana. The show centers on Nana Yaa, a native Ghanaian who returns to Accra after living and working as a journalist in New York City. Back home, Nana Yaa re-establishes relationships with four friends, all returnees to Africa. *An African City* has been compared to HBO's *Sex in the City* because of its focus on high

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fashion and the sexual politics of dating; however, the show may also be seen as a distinctly Ghanaian product, addressing issues that are specific to the region.

Within months of the show's launch, *An African City* became a global phenomenon, garnering an audience consisting not only of Ghanaians living in Ghana but also those living in the diaspora. The first season of *An African City* was well-covered by Ghanaian media, but also received substantial attention in Europe and the United States, including features on BBC (Tomchack 2014), CNN (Karimi 2014), and NPR (2014). In April of that year, French *Elle* ran a fashion spread featuring the five actresses of *An African City* (Signognac 2014).

The success of *An African City* is remarkable for two reasons. First, with relatively few economic resources and no major studio support, Amarteifio has accomplished the goal of attracting a global following. Thus, *An African City* demonstrates the capacity for independent filmmakers to cultivate a transnational audience in the digital age. But the show is also remarkable because it showcases the ability for Ghanaian filmmakers to circulate counter-hegemonic discourses nationally, regionally, and globally.

In recent years, significant attention has been paid to the transformative nature of online television. In his analysis of "Indie TV" in the United States, for example, Aymar (2014) argues that innovations in communications technologies have enabled amateur filmmakers to circumvent the traditional studio system, thereby opening the door to more diverse content. However, while narratives around online television are framed as new developments, this transformation occurred in Ghana, only decades earlier. Beginning in the 1980s, the advent of video production enabled new players who had traditionally been shut of the system to produce new kinds of stories to be circulated within Ghana and abroad (Meyer 1999).

To what extent does online television promote or constrain this project? To examine this question, we investigate the processes by which Ghanaian filmmakers create programs intended for distribution on online platforms. Using Bourdieu's theory of practice as a framework, we examine the Ghanaian film industry as a field of cultural production, in which various competitors are engaged in an ongoing struggle to define what Ghanaian film is. Furthermore, focusing on *An African City* as a case study, we examine how the show's filmmakers use various forms of capital to produce a commodity that can circulate within the global marketplace, but we also examine how the transnational nature of the show shapes the degree to which its creators can disrupt western discourses about Africa.

## Background

Since its inception, the Ghanaian film industry has reflected larger discourses surrounding Ghanaian national identity. In 1945, Britain's Information Services Department established the Gold Coast Film Unit as a way to facilitate colonial rule by educating Ghanaians on British dictates (Osei-Hwere 2008). After Ghanaian independence was achieved, the Gold Coast Film Unit was repurposed as the Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC), a state-owned apparatus. With aspirations that film

could serve as an educational resource, Ghanaian filmmaking was seen as a way to remedy distortions of Africa prevalent in western cinema (Meyer 1999).

Despite the government's vision of promoting a unified national identity, Ghanaian filmmaking was slow to take root. The GFIC produced only a limited number of films, leaving Ghanaian cinemas to run films produced in the United States, China, and India. The amount of economic capital needed for producing celluloid films was cost-prohibitive in Ghana, limiting participation to the privileged few who possessed the cultural and social capital to be employed by the GFIC, to gain entrance into the National Film and Television Institute, and to secure the financing necessary for production (Garritano 2013).

Beginning in the late 1980s, however, developments in communications technologies led to a disruption to Ghanaian film industry, enabling new players to enter the field. Both amateur and independent filmmakers took advantage of inexpensive VHS video equipment to produce cheaply made, but highly successful productions (Meyer 1999). No longer the purview of the cultural elite, producers who had previously been shut out of Ghanaian film production, had the opportunity to enter the marketplace and tell more localized stories, performed by Ghanaian actors in local languages. Sold primarily through informal markets, filmmakers circumvented the traditional exhibition system and reached Ghanaian audiences directly.

Given the exhibition strategies available to Ghanaian filmmakers, the boundaries that separate television and film in Ghana are less distinguished. As Adejunmobi (2015) notes, the number of screens in much of Sub-Saharan Africa is limited. Consequently, television has become the primary form of consuming "films" around Africa. Furthermore, given the dominance of home viewing, the exhibition strategies used by filmmakers include distributing direct to DVD, or combining initial theatrical distribution with simultaneous launch of DVDs.

Today, the Ghanaian film and television industry has developed into a mature marketplace. Like other African production centers such as Nollywood (Nigeria), Riverwood (Kenya), and Bongowood (Tanzania), Ghallywood is producing a variety of products ranging from local-language films intended for regional consumption to highly westernized, English-language films intended for international distribution. The diversity of Ghanaian films has prompted new conversations regarding the degree which Ghanaian filmmakers should appropriate or resist Hollywood aesthetics and values. At the same time, Ghanaian filmmakers are also facing increased competition from the influx of videos from Nigeria, which are perceived to have higher production values and more marketable actors. Faced with intense competition from regional and global competitors, new questions emerge regarding the role that filmmakers play in preserving and promoting Ghanaian cultural identity.

### *Online Television Platforms and New Disruptions to the Marketplace*

In recent years, the prevalence of online platforms has yet again disrupted the traditional relationship between producer, text, and audience in Ghana. Online platforms have given producers the capacity to cultivate niche audiences while gaining access to

distribution channels that extend far beyond the nation state. Decades earlier, the advent of video production had enabled new producers to enter the marketplace and tell new kinds of stories about Ghanaian lived experience, but online television has the potential to build on this project by facilitating the global circulation of such goods. Filmmakers are no longer bound to the physical constraints associated with analog media, including the copying, distribution, and merchandising of VHS tapes or DVDs. This has led to renewed optimism about the capacity for Ghanaian filmmakers to more easily produce and circulate new kinds of stories to global markets.

At the same time this optimism has been tempered by the limitations of digital television. While online platforms like YouTube provide access to amateur filmmakers, the platform is still dominated by established producers, thereby maintaining existing hierarchies. For example, Wall's (2009) content analysis of YouTube videos about Kenya and Ghana suggests that YouTube merely replicates distortions of Africa that are already prevalent in much of western media. While Wall's study provides important insights into the ideologies about Africa embedded within YouTube videos, there is little empirical research on how Ghanaian filmmakers develop content specifically for distribution on online platforms. Nor do we have much insight into the ways in which specific creative decisions facilitate the flow of Ghanaian films across borders. This study addresses this deficit by examining the ways in which Ghanaian filmmakers access resources to create a global commodity.

## The Ghanaian Video Industry as a Field of Cultural Production

To examine the ideals and practices of Ghanaian filmmakers, Bourdieu's (1993) theory of practice provides a useful framework. Bourdieu (1998a) argues that the television and film industry may be considered a field of cultural production, one that is occupied with the production of symbolic goods. According to Bourdieu (1998a), the success of players within this field is dependent upon their access to various forms of capital, including economic, social, and cultural capital. Those who hold dominant positions in the field generally possess relatively high volumes of at least one form of capital.

Bourdieu further argues that not all players within any given field are destined for equal success. Different agents have, to varying degrees, an intuitive embodied feel for the game, what he calls *habitus*. Thus, the success of any given agent is dependent upon the congruency between one's *habitus* and the field they occupy. In *Practical Reason*, Bourdieu (1998b, 81) describes the relationship between *habitus* and the field:

The good player is the one who anticipates, who is ahead of the game. Why can she get ahead of the flow of the game? Because she has the immanent tendencies of the game in her body, in an incorporated state; she embodies the game.

As it relates to this project, we situate the creators of *An African City* within the field of Ghanaian video production. While *An African City* may be considered a global

product, Amarteifio, the show's creator, lives and works in Ghana and her stories are located in the country's capital city, Accra.

Bourdieu further argues that fields of cultural production can be conservative or transformative in nature. Fields can be conservative in that agents that hold dominant positions within the field will seek to maintain the status quo. However, fields are marked by a constant influx of newcomers, who possess unique points of difference. These players have potential to act as forces of transformation in that they can only establish themselves by marking their difference with existing agents (Bourdieu 1993). Although these newcomers are met with resistance from established players, they may benefit from disruptions from neighboring fields including technological changes, changes in media systems, and migratory shifts.

The advent of online platforms may be seen as yet another disruption to the field, which benefits particular kinds of Ghanaian filmmakers over others. From a field theory perspective, we are interested in how the producers' access various capital, in ways that enable them to compete ably within the field. According to Bourdieu, economic and cultural capital are said to be of particular importance in fields of cultural production, with dominant players possessing high levels of at least one. At the same time, we are also interested in the role of linguistic capital, or the capacity to produce expression *à propos* for a particular market (Bourdieu 1999). Here, we are interested in how the filmmakers' use of English and local languages enable them to exploit the system of differences to their advantage.

## Researching Ghanaian Video Production

For this study, we employ a case study approach which is conducive for investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context (Yin 2009). To examine the show from various viewpoints, we employed the technique of triangulation, drawing from multiple sources of data. First, to understand the producers' own ideals, backgrounds, and motivations, we conducted two in-depth interviews with Nicole Amarteifio, the creator of *An African City*, in Accra. The first interview was conducted on June 2014, several months after season 1 had debuted. The second interview was conducted in July 2015, when Amarteifio was involved in production for season two. In addition to our discussions with Amarteifio, we also corresponded with Millie Monyo, the show's executive producer. These testimonies were supplemented with press on the show as well as other public statements, including panel discussions and interviews conducted with various media outlets from January to June 2016.

Second, we sought out data on the show's audience by extrapolating data from user comments posted on Twitter and Facebook. This allowed us to ascertain where viewers were coming from based off of their self-identified locations. Furthermore, we used Twarc, a Python tool that grabs tweets and their metadata to geo-locate those who tweeted with the hashtag: #AnAfricanCity and other geotags. Twarc was used three times during the time frame of the second season.

Finally, we analyzed the show itself, which included two seasons. Specifically, we examined the ways in which the producers of the show engage and disrupt colonial

discourses. Therefore, we were attentive to the recurring storylines, themes, and tropes that are embedded within *An African City*. We were also interested in the economic factors that set the preconditions for the show's content. Consequently, we addressed the ways in which *An African City* reflects economic relationships, including various forms of corporate sponsorships that help to subsidize the show's production.

## Capital in Play

According to Bourdieu (1993), economic and cultural capital are of particular importance within fields of cultural production, with dominant players possessing significant amounts of at least one of these. Bourdieu further argues that one form of capital can be converted into another, but overall access to various forms of capital is largely the result of congruency between one's habitus and the field they occupy. Under the auspices of the state-controlled GFIC, for example, only filmmakers who possessed the requisite levels of social and cultural capital could be employed by the GFIC, and to secure the financing necessary to subsidize a film production. During the transition from film to video, however, this relationship was disrupted. No longer controlled by a centralized legitimizing authority, filmmaking was opened up to a new corps of filmmakers who possessed different types of cultural sensibilities, professional skills, and linguistic practices, making them more adept at producing mass-produced commodities.

With the advent of online platforms, the relationship between habitus, capital, and field becomes reconstituted in new ways. Players must now possess new kinds of technical, professional, and cultural knowledge necessary for creating content for online platforms, but also the economic savvy needed to secure partnerships that facilitate global distribution. During our research, we found there to be a high level of synergy between the creative premise of the show, the corporate sponsors the show attracts, and the premium distribution platforms that Amarteifio uses.

Amarteifio has publicly stated that she sees her show as both a commodity and a creative product, stating during a panel discussion that, "I love what I do. And for me to do what I love I've got to treat it like a business" (AiD 2014). Amarteifio's success at turning her "business" into a successful enterprise, however, is largely a function of her access to social, economic, and cultural capital, which enable her to broker between various players, including distributors, sponsors, producers, and audiences.

As Featherstone (1991) argues, it is the class position of cultural producers, which enables them to create new markets for symbolic goods by mediating between the elite and the masses. Like her protagonists, Amarteifio is herself a returnee to Ghana. After fleeing the Coupe of 1981, Amarteifio's family moved to the United States, where she spent much of her life in New York state and Washington D.C. After earning her graduate degree at Georgetown in Public Relations and Corporate Communications, Amarteifio worked with Rosa Whitaker, the U.S. trade representative to Africa. Early in her career, Amarteifio worked in African development and up until the time of her production of *An African City*, she worked as a social media strategist for World Bank's Africa region and for the United States African Development Foundation.

Millie Monyo, the executive producer of *An African City*, also has Ghanaian and U.S. ties. Born in New York, Monyo has lived in Ghana at different points during her career (Bonya 2014). In 2003, she began her career in New York City at Lizzie Grubman Public Relations where she specialized in representing clients from the entertainment and fashion industries. As Senior Publicist of the Entertainment and Fashion divisions, Monyo worked with clients such as designers Kai Milla, Claudenette Jean, and musician Sean P. Diddy. In addition, Monyo has worked in television in New York City (NYC) for VH1 and TLC as well as worked in Ghana with Sparrow Productions, a production which was founded by Ghanaian filmmaker Shirley Frimpong-Manso.

According to both women, Amarteifio and Monyo met through a shared contact from the Diasporic African Women's network (DAWN), an organization whose stated goal is "to unlock the diaspora's potential, one woman at a time." As DAWN's founder Semhar Araia describes the mission of the organization, DAWN serves as a change agent for educated women who not only have a strong connection to Africa but who also have the capacity to speak to and be heard by western power-brokers (DAWN 2014). Although Araia is primarily talking about development in Africa, Monyo and Amarteifio have been able to use this form of cultural brokering in service of the show.

Specifically, we found that the creators of *An African City* have been able to successfully convert their cultural and social capital into economic capital, which supports the program in three ways: distribution, marketing, and labor. With regard to distribution, Amarteifio uses an exhibition strategy that combines YouTube, premium cable television, and paid subscription. Season 1 of *An African City* was initially distributed on YouTube, which is free to its viewers. For season 2, however, Amarteifio moved to a subscription model, distributing her program through VHX, an online distribution platform that allows filmmakers to sell their work directly to fans. The new business model allows the producers to generate additional income, but imposes a cost of \$20 to viewers.

After the success of season 1, Amarteifio has been able to generate additional revenue by negotiating deals to distribute the show as second runs, including EbonyLife TV, which began airing second runs of *An African City* shortly after the network launched. A premium cable channel targeted to upscale African women, EbonyLife describes itself as "Africa's first Global Black Entertainment and Lifestyle network" and is distributed through a license agreement with Multichoice (DStv) Africa, Africa's largest Pay TV platform. The channel reaches 49 African countries (EbonyLife TV 2016).

In addition, Amarteifio negotiated an agreement with France's Canal+, which had recently launched A+, a Pan African, entertainment cable network. By dubbing the show into French, *An African City* has been made available to not only audiences in Francophone Africa but also residents of France and Canada. According to François Deplanck, director of channels and content at Canal+ Overseas, A+ was established to "respond to a request from Africans living in France and also to help producers from Africa to show their programs outside the continent" (Briel 2016). To accommodate the longer format of premium cable television, the producers of *An African City* have

had to increase each episode in length from about eight minutes to twenty-seven minutes.

Amarteifio's capacity to secure these distribution deals is largely dependent on the audience to which her show appeals. As Ang (1991) points out, despite their pretenses of artistic excellence and social importance, television programs are designed first and foremost to deliver audiences to marketers. In this case, the appeal of *An African City* is its capacity to deliver upscale African viewers to EbonyLife and A+. Furthermore, *An African City*'s capacity to deliver this audience also makes it an appealing proposition for the luxury brands that subsidize the show.

We found that *An African City* is partially subsidized through corporate partnerships with brands that are affiliated with the show. For example, an examination of the show's website indicates that there are three levels of sponsorship depending on level of investment. Season 1's "Platinum Sponsors" included prestige hotels such as the African Regency and the Coconut Grove Hotels. "Gold Sponsors" included Dannex and Citi-FM, which are closely associated with Amarteifio's family (Dannex, n.d.). Finally, "Regular Sponsors" included several Ghanaian fashion designers and retailers including Christie Brown, Ki Ki Clothing, and Osei-Duro. Sponsors of the show are listed in the show's credits, but several of the products were also featured in the show itself in the form of product placement.

When these brands are written into the script, they are meant to be organic to the lives of these five women. Their affluent lifestyle becomes a natural fit with high-end brands. When, for example, the five women walk into a Microsoft store and Sade tells the service representative, "Hi, I'm looking for the best fucking Internet money has to offer," this dialogue should come across as natural to the character. These characters live in a world in which it is normative to shop at Koala, a premium grocer in Accra, or order a glass of Dom Pérignon at the African Regency.

The show's focus on affluent, African women also lends itself to high fashion, which has become a defining characteristic of the show. Described by Millie Monyo as the show's "sixth main character" (Kwateng 2014), the show's producers have used fashion as an opportunity to promote African designers by showcasing a mix of dresses and separates, which blend western cuts with African aesthetics, including colorful wax prints and traditional kente cloth. The goal of aligning African fashion with upscale European tastes appears to have paid off. The show's designers have been lauded by western fashion publications including *Elle* (Signognac 2014), *Vogue* (Carlos 2016), and *StyleBlazer* (Kwateng 2014).

The presence of high fashion has also translated into free media space in western fashion magazines, increasing the show's profile globally. This kind of promotion is essential, given that *An African City* competes within a crowded global marketplace against other products supported by established media companies with robust marketing budgets. The fact that an upstart, online network has been able to gain free press in such high visibility publications is a testament to the marketing capabilities of her team. Certainly, Monyo's experience in public relations and Amarteifio's background in social media have been instrumental in launching *An African City* and enabling it to compete with major studio products. Furthermore, Monyo's experience in fashion



public relations was instrumental in accessing African fashion designers such as Christie Brown, Osei-Duro, and Chemphe Bre, whose clothes appear in the show.

Finally, we found that both women have been able to use their social capital to access the talent necessary for the show. In her description of the Ghanaian film industry, Garritano (2013) characterizes video production as a nonformal process, in which money is exchanged for favors, and artists and crew will often negotiate their fees directly with producers, rather than working through a professional mediator such as a union. Under these conditions, accessing one's social capital can facilitate the recruitment of talent. Amarteifio's testimony supports this characterization, and during our interviews, she described calling on her personal contacts to participate in the show in various ways, both on-screen and off.

However, the success of *An African City* ultimately depends on finding the right partners who can establish the high production values and aesthetics that fit the creative vision of a show which focuses on upscale women. For someone who was not initially trained as a filmmaker, having access to this kind of talent was necessary. During our correspondence, Monyo described how her social connections were beneficial by linking Amarteifio with contacts in local production made during her previous experiences working with Sparrow productions. Here, Monyo describes linking Amarteifio with 6 Miludo, the studio that produces the show:

I had met Jayso and Deon of 6 Miludo Productions through a mutual friend while I was in Ghana and suggested them to Nicole as a production house because I really felt they could do the job from what I've seen of their work. The Co-Director we worked with, I had also worked with a few times while at Sparrow Productions and he was suggested to Nicole via a friend. (Personal correspondence, July, 2014)

Monyo is referring to by Paul Nuamah Donkor ("Jayso") and Gideon Wilson ("Deon"), coowners of 6 Miludo. The studio not only provides the video and graphics services for the show but also makes professional equipment like Blackmagic cameras available to Amarteifio, which are not typically found in more modestly financed web series. Jayso also serves as a link to the musicians who are regularly featured in the show. His involvement with Skillions Records gives him access to local music talent, highlighting hiplife, dancehall, and other popular genres of the region.

## Linguistic Capital

As part of this study, we were interested in how linguistic usage facilitates the show's distribution across transnational borders. As Bourdieu argues, under certain conditions, one's linguistic habitus, their way of speaking, can become a form of currency, which can be converted into other forms of capital. As Bourdieu puts it, players can benefit from a way of speaking that comes natural to them.

Having been raised in the United States, both Amarteifio and Monyo speak fluent English, which appears to drive the decision to write the script in English. Conversely, when local languages are depicted in the show, it often takes the form of one of the

characters uttering phrases to the ancillary characters, but these scenes are written in a way that does not isolate English monolinguals, including the use of subtitles. This distinguishes *An African City* from a large number of Ghanaian videos which are deliberately produced in the Akan language in order to limit their consumption to within Ghana. The decision to privilege English impacts the show in two ways. First, it fits the creative vision of the show as an upscale product. Given their privileged backgrounds, the main characters all speak fluent English, inflected with British and American accents, which is consistent with Adejunmobi's (2002) point that English operates as a linguistic signifier of wealth in African videos.

Scripting the show in English, however, facilitates its flow beyond Ghana to Europe, the United States, and Canada. As Sinclair et al. (1996) argue, within the global marketplace, television programming tends to flow within geo-linguistic regions. Our analysis of Twitter and Facebook data using Twarc supports this claim. We found that *An African City* reaches Anglophone and Francophone countries globally. These data indicate that the vast majority of the show's audience is centered in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, and Western Africa.

### ***An African City* and the Limits of Counter-Hegemonic Discourse**

When asked to describe the audience for whom she writes, Amarteifio stated during our interviews that "my target audience is upper middle-class women of African descent and Midwestern women who don't know anything about the continent" (personal interview July, 2014). Amarteifio's desire to both reach an affluent, African viewer, while reeducating non-Africans, reflects the show's ambivalence, critiquing some forms of social inequality while benefiting from others. It is the bifurcated nature of the show that both promotes and impedes its capacity to disrupt ongoing discourses about Africa.

Within the field of Ghanaian video production, Garritano (2013) characterizes Ghanaian films as existing within a spectrum. On one end of that spectrum, Garritano places filmmakers like Socrate Safro, who produce films made in the Akan language. This choice intentionally limits the distribution of these films to within Ghana. These films are made as quickly and cheaply as possible and rely on various forms of local knowledge, shared experiences, and beliefs. On the other end of the spectrum, Garritano places filmmakers like Shirley Frimpong-Manso, whose films and television shows are produced in English and boast high production values. Her products are meant to have broader circulation and have achieved a substantial regional and international viewership in Africa and the diaspora.

Within this spectrum, *An African City* most closely resembles Frimpong-Manso's work and *An African City*'s connection to Sparrow productions ensures many of the same values and aesthetics. Both filmmakers focus on the romantic interests of young, educated, attractive, and affluent Ghanaian women. At the same time, *An African City* also simulates Frimpong-Manso's consumerist sensibilities. All five

women are relatively affluent, and engage directly with the luxury brands that sponsor the show, which is markedly different from early Ghanaian video filmmakers in which the presence of poverty was a defining characteristic (Garritano 2013). Like Frimpong-Manso's work, *An African City* has been accused of simulating Hollywood romantic comedies.

*An African City's* capacity to reflect affluent, transnational sensibilities, makes it conducive to global markets made accessible through online platforms like YouTube. As Yudice (1995) argues, media practitioners focus disproportionately on those who have the means to participate in a capitalist economy. But to reach upscale markets that extend transnationally, local, national, and ethnic identities must be reconfigured in new ways, despite the clear ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences that persist within Africa. In an effort to reach the widest possible markets, cultural producers must create content that can appeal to various cultures. In his own work on the Ghanaian television production, Thalén (2011) argues that, in response to neoliberal conditions within Africa, Ghanaian cultural producers are attempting to access upscale, transnational markets by internationalizing their product. In doing so, they provide ways for the young, urban elite to imagine themselves as part of a broader African community.

To this end, Amarteifio has created an ensemble that blends traces of not only Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone but also the United States and the United Kingdom. All five women are African by birth, but each was raised in the United States or the United Kingdom and educated at elite western universities. The character of Nana Yaa was born in Ghana but grew up in the state of New York and educated at Georgetown (Amarteifio's alma mater). Zainab is Ghanaian, but born in Sierra Leone and reared in Atlanta. Ngozi is Nigerian, but grew up in Maryland and obtained a degree in international development at Johns Hopkins University. Sade is Ghanaian-Nigerian, reared in Texas and graduated from Harvard. Finally, Makena was born in Kenya, reared in London and graduated from Oxford University.

The intent to reach global audiences also becomes evident in the development of the script, which assumes a "tourist gaze" (Urry 1990). Here, Ghanaian culture is often presented from an outsider's perspective. Stories are told through the point of view of the returnee; those who left West Africa for political or economic reasons but have returned to the continent after an extended period abroad. Because these women are struggling in their own way to transition back into Ghanaian culture, they serve as tour guides for audiences who may be accessing African culture for the first time. To this end, the script is written in a way that introduces Ghanaian culture to an audience that is not familiar with Ghanaian social mores. To assist this viewer in this process, the filmmakers include scenes that explain some of the attitudes and behaviors of its characters. For example, when a character is scolded for using her left hand to pick up a menu, another character will explain that using the left hand is considered taboo in Ghana. Or during season 2, when Makena is frustrated by the lack of attention paid to her by the clerical workers employed at her law firm, her lover explains that Ghanaian professional culture is built on interpersonal relationships.

In short, the filmmakers have created a product that is in sync with the sensibilities of western audiences. Consequently, they are well positioned to engage western audiences in discourses about Africa. Amarteifio's interest in subverting western stereotypes echoes the GFIC's original mission of providing an alternative to colonial tropes of sex, primitiveness, and disease, but Amarteifio's strategy for accomplishing this goal is to challenge these tropes through the female body. *An African City* explores sexual politics from a variety of perspectives. The character of Ngozi is the most overtly religious while the character of Sade is the most daring sexually. The remaining three characters, Makena, Nana Yaa, and Zainab, fall somewhere on the spectrum.

In an interview with Ghana's *Un-Ruly* (Antonia 2014), Amarteifio stated that "for so long, mainstream media has shown African women as one who has HIV, lives in poverty, and needs to be educated about maternal and child health. That has been the recurring visual of African women." This theme is confronted in several ways. None of the main women have children, which is a clear alternative to the maternal trope. Amarteifio also endows the characters with sexual reproductive health knowledge, bringing in discussions of condom use into many sex-scenes, and STD, HIV and pregnancy prevention.

Thus, *An African City* may be seen as a locus of feminist action: a show created by women, with strong women actresses, for strong women audiences. Like Frimpong-Manso and filmmaker Juliet Asante, Amarteifio's show offers a wider range of possibilities for African women on-screen. The writers of *An African City* address sex as a normal part of the lives of single women. Here Amarteifio uses a method of replacement, offering images of African women as sexually empowered rather than as sexual victims.

Often these issues are explored within a Ghanaian context. Some storylines focus on the main characters and their ambivalent relationship to Ghanaian cooking, while others focus on the norms and expectations of marriage based on Pentecostal values. But the show is transformative for its depiction of African women as sexually empowered with their own desires rather than those of men. The characters frequently engage in candid and open discussions regarding their sexual preferences and often to the disapproval of African men who find their sexual mores too westernized. Through the show, Amarteifio connects with African feminist filmmakers who, according to Ayisi and Brylla (2013, 127), "not only give a voice to [African] women, but they also present dignified images that offer alternative perspectives."

In addition to gender, the writers also explore issues related to social inequality, class privilege, and African self-reliance. These themes are most directly addressed in the character of Ngozi (played by Nigerian-American actress, Esosa E), who grew up in Maryland, but has come to Accra to work in development. During an episode titled "Sweating the Small Stuff" (February, 2016) for example, Ngozi struggles with whether or not to sit in the front seat with the driver who has been assigned to transport her to areas outside of Accra. Ngozi fears that sitting in the back represents a form of elitism, but sitting in the front may be a reflection of her western upbringing. The running joke in the episode is that Ngozi becomes paralyzed at the thought of making this small decision.

In other episodes, Ngozi makes a direct case for African self-reliance. During an episode titled “Love, Grief and Jollof Rice” (February, 2016), Ngozi removes a portrait of a blond haired, blue-eyed Jesus, which hangs on the wall in the church she attends because, in her words, “I don’t think it’s healthy for us as Black people, as Africans, to consume that message.” One of the most overt critiques of western paternalistic values, however, came during an episode titled “The List” (February 2016). During the episode, Ngozi is hopeful about beginning a relationship with Max, a German expatriate who has arrived in Accra to work in development. Any hope of romantic involvement dissolves, however, when the two engage in a heated debate over his work recording data on African poverty. Ngozi confronts Max for assuming the role of white savior, arguing that this kind of research may be good for his resume, but does little to help Africans on the ground level. During the scene, Ngozi gives voice to the filmmakers’ concern that development research does the ideological work of framing Africans as uniformly impoverished and in need of western intervention. During the scene, Ngozi pushes back at this stating, “what if I were to come to Germany and treat all these Germans like these economically disenfranchised objects that need to be studied?”

This particular storyline generated a large amount of social media activity. In response to the episode, one viewer wrote, “#PovertyPorn is a real thing. I’m glad #AnAfricanCity is touching on that,” while another stated, “Love how Ngozi read the German and his poverty porn self. Useless sucubuses. @AnAfricanCity.” These comments were consistent with others who applauded the show for attempting to present a more empowered and modern view of Africa. As one viewer wrote, “#AnAfricanCity shows everyone the dangers of associating an entire continent with a single story. Not mud huts, darling.”

During our interviews, the producers of *An African City* have been clear in their intent to disrupt the single-story narrative described by Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie (2009). During our interviews, Amarteifio has stated that her goal is to use this show as a platform for directly challenging the recurring tropes in western media of Africans as “sick, poor, and violent” (Bonsu 2009), stating

I was really trying to punch western media in the face by showing the extreme opposite of poverty. These are women can at least look at apartments that cost \$5,000 a month. She might struggle in her own way to pay for that, but she can at least look at it. (Personal interview July, 2014)

Thus, the creators of the show seem to be making the case that the way to fight poverty porn is by depicting affluence. A focus on consumerism is also a thread that came through in the social media activity, and our analysis of viewer-generated comments indicate that viewers are attracted to the high-end products consumed in the show. “The fashion on #AnAfricanCity is so gorgeous,” wrote one viewer, while another noted that “MaameYaa Baofu is rocking MO SAIQUE shoes in season 2 of @AnAfricanCity! #mosaiqueshoes.” Another viewer wrote, “These outfits are amazing. @AnAfricanCity, do any of these designers sell online? #AnAfricanCity.”

The show's focus on fashion and sexual politics has drawn comparisons to HBO's *Sex in the City* (1998–2004) and the producers have not been coy about drawing explicit connections between the two shows. *An African City*'s twitter feed features the verbiage, "Think 'Sex in the City' meets Africa!" Because *An African City* has modeled itself closely on *Sex in the City*, its creators have opened themselves up to the same critiques that the show focuses solely the privileged slice of a large, diverse metropolitan city. From this perspective, *An African City* has been accused of doing to Accra, what *Sex in the City* does to New York. It presents an idealized version of "the city," which can often seem out of touch from the lived experiences of a majority of those who reside there. However, cities include diverse populations and one's experience of the city largely depends on his or her access to capital and social standing. As Sassen (2000) argues, disproportionate concentrations of a nation-state's population, employment, and economic wealth are bound within a single city, typically the capital. It is within these centers that economic disparities are most overtly revealed. This is particularly problematic for African countries, in which urban primacy and economic disparity are becoming more pronounced.

From this perspective, *An African City* works in the tradition of discourses that articulate national identity within the language of consumerism and neoliberal ideology. Quail's (2015) research on Canadian reality television and Tuwei's and Tully's (2017) research on Kenyan advertising, both demonstrate the ways in which cultural producers actively promote national identity in ways that are tied to consumption, national economic development, and individual success. However, Kania-Lundholm (2014) argues that such articulations ultimately conceal the deep social structures and inequalities that are a necessary part of the process of articulating nationhood.

Amarteifio is not unaware of these critiques, and to address this concern, her writing team briefly introduced a new character named Adoma, Nana Yaa's cousin, in an episode titled "Another Return." Adoma, who is less affluent, served as a counterpoint, often chastising the five major characters for becoming too westernized. Here, Amarteifio addresses the issue:

The returnees are different, you know. So you have Nana Yaa who comes from an affluent family. With Adoma she doesn't come from an affluent family. I would want every episode of a new season to show a different returnee experience but I'm not going to focus on her because it's really about those five girls. You know, but there were some critics of the show that said well that's not the returnee experience. Well it is a returnee experience, there's gonna be many returnee experiences. (Personal interview July, 2015)

The character of Adoma was meant to show a broader range of the Ghanaian experience, but as Amarteifio makes clear, her main focus is concentrated on the five main characters. This suggests that she is interested in a particular kind of returnee; one that is the ideal participant in a global, consumer society.

The African women featured in Amarteifio's show are not poor, but rather solidly middle class and, like the very women who have created them, they are highly mobile. Consequently, we find that the creators of the show do challenge dominant tropes within western media. However, their way of addressing this issue is to situate a version of African culture squarely within the parameters of elite western culture. Consequently, the show is ambivalent in its treatment of class, both attempting to critique privilege while also being the perfect embodiment of it.

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