Sexual Real Estate:

Repatriation, Reterritorialization, and the Digital Activism of Nicole Amarteifio's Web Series An *African City*

Tori Omega Arthur
Colorado State University

CONTACT:

Tori Omega Arthur, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO.
Tori.Arthur@colostate.edu

ABSTRACT

When Nicole Amarteifio, a Ghanaian born-United States raised repatriate to Ghana, uploaded the first episode of *An African City* to YouTube on March 2, 2014, she began a transnational televisual movement. The series, with two seasons completed and aired and a third season in the works, is a global powerhouse that not only shifts narratives about African mass media production and consumption, but also challenges limited notions of African life, especially for a new generation of the continent's women. As the first of its kind on the African continent, the web series not only reconfigured the West African media landscape but also reconstituted gender identity within African televisual culture. Employing Pierre Bourdieu's fields of cultural production theoretical framework for analyzing mass media production (1993, 1998), this study shows that Amarteifio used her cultural, economic, and social capital to deploy production skills and a YouTube distribution and consumption template in a cultural field considered the first Ghanaian series initially made specifically for the video sharing platform and shifted to a paid subscription

model. Ultimately, the study reveals that Amarteifio's access to various capital enabled her to create a series that performs as a form of digital activism designed to actively combat and interrogate gender roles and explicate new ways of thinking about gender and sexuality on the African continent.

Keywords: gender identity, An African City, web series, reterritorialization, fields of cultural production, paracolonial media

Introduction

The episode fades from black to shots of Accra, Ghana's various skyscrapers and posh neighborhoods as a woman explains that the city's cosmopolitanism has led to a real estate market like those in London, Paris, and New York City. The woman is attempting to purchase or rent an apartment in an upscale neighborhood. Yet, cost thwarts her efforts and she grows frustrated with the real estate agent who informs her that the small apartment she wants costs 500,000 US dollars to buy or 5,000 US dollars per month to rent with a down payment of one year's rent and no guarantee of consistent electricity or running water. "That's more than my rent in New York," she says. "This is not New York," the agent says. NanaYaa is an African repatriate; though she is Ghanaian born, she is not Ghanaian. Having spent most of her childhood and young adult life living in New York City, she lacks a deep understanding of her home nation's cultural and globalized economic mores. Her dress, demeanor, natural (unprocessed) hairstyles, heavy American accent, and, as the series progresses, her broadminded views on sex and romantic relationships paint her as an *obruni*, a foreigner. As NanaYaa seeks to secure housing amidst a booming market, she bemoans that the world she must travail to independence is, "distinctly and exclusively owned and [run] by men."

This is the fundamental conceit and metaphor within the hit web series *An African City*: NanaYaa and her four friends are ambitious repatriates who must continuously negotiate Ghana's "Sexual Real Estate," an apt title for this specific episode. *An African City* has been called the African version of the popular Home Box Office series *Sex and the City* because of its progressive gender representations, fashion, and focus on the professional and romantic lives of the twenty-something repatriates. However, unlike the four New York women featured on a show set within an America where feminism and women's self-sufficiency were increasingly celebrated in late the 1990s and early 2000s popular culture, NanaYaa, Sadé, Makena, Zainab, and Ngozi are cultural novelties. They are African women negotiating gender and sexual politics in twenty-first century Accra, Ghana, a city where cultural, social, and gender norms are familiar, yet still very new. The women destabilize what Adedayo Ladigbolu Abah contends are unremittingly supported conceptions about African women as uncouth primitive creatures who must be tamed and forced to become submissive to men (2008, pp. 341). Meekness and obedience are the centrally accepted ideals and have found a place in the prevalent cultural traditions and popular productions found around the continent; these values "reflect what appears to be deep-seated beliefs and attitudes about the social and domestic role of women in society" (pp. 342) and are often posited within proverbs, slang, idioms, songs, and other popular culture. Not *An African City*.

When the show's creator and executive producer Nicole Amarteifio uploaded the first episode to YouTube on March 2, 2014, she began a transnational televisual movement that journalists, cultural critics, and fans alike have applauded. As Amarteifio noted in a 2016 interview with CNN, YouTube was the ideal place for the series to get its start; "I loved that I would not lose any creative control to a TV network. I wanted to push some boundaries and I didn't want

any TV network telling me otherwise" (Karimi, 2016). Over the last four years, the series has acquired millions of views and thousands of comments from fans around the world because of its digital accessibility and its aesthetic, narrative, and production novelty. Christopher Chávez and Ashley Cordes state that there is little empirical research that specifically examines how Ghanaian producers have approached developing content solely for distribution on online platforms like YouTube (2018). Though much African film and television exists on YouTube and other online spaces, most of this televisual work began with a VHS or VCD model of production and distribution (Garritano, 2013; Haynes, 2000, 2012; Haynes and Okome, 2000) that eventually shifted online (Jedlowski, 2012; Krings and Okome, 2012; Tsika, 2015). In the case of the widely popular African (Nigerian Nollywood industry-specific) web streaming platform IrokoTV, African televisual viewing is becoming increasingly subscription based. Though the series' second season is available by subscription (only), the first season of *An African City* is distinctive because it is the first known Ghanaian production created explicitly for free consumption on YouTube.

Undoubtedly, the series is unique in the history of African, particularly West African, production. Film and television production, distribution, and consumption in Ghana began during British colonial rule of what was then called the Gold Coast. This history is broad and offers a glimpse into the deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977) of the nation and its mediascape (Appadurai, 1999); also, it reveals post-independence continuation of political-economic beliefs about the power of media on the continent and over her citizens. British colonial administrators viewed film and television as pedagogical tools for destabilizing and then 'civilizing' its African citizenry to maintain control of the vast resources (oil, minerals, agriculture, etc.) of nations under their rule. Later, leaders of independent African nations saw televisual

production as key to maintaining and solidifying their political and economic power. Additionally, post-independence African administrations attempted to utilize media to re-educate or decolonize the African mind by recreating and instilling traditional cultural values muted or destroyed during colonial deterritorialization (Diawara, 1992; Meyer, 2015; Sakyi, 1996; Ukadike, 1994). *An African City* exists within a vast tradition of televisual reterritorialization, employing new technological production and distribution tools to narratively reimagine gender politics with a markedly feminist twist.[1] During the first season, the series attracted a diverse transnational and African diasporic audience that came back to YouTube each Sunday for ten weeks (and continues to come back several years later) for narratives that defy base stereotypes about the continent, its media, and African women on and off the continent.

To date, only one other study (Chávez and Cordes, 2017) has explored the cultural impact of *An African City*; that work primarily focuses on Ghanaian media productions, Amarteifio's efforts to create the series, and English-language video consumption. As such, this study extends knowledge about the series to offer new ways of exploring how the first season of *An African City* reconfigured the West African media landscape and how it reconstituted gender philosophies within African televisual culture. Using a political-economic (Bourdieu, 1993, 1998) and paracolonial theoretical frame (Shohat and Stam, 2014), the study employs production and critical narrative analysis to examine both the production-distribution of *and* discourses within this groundbreaking web series. While it neatly fits within the record of media production from a deterritori-

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[1]*An African City* exists within a rich tradition of Black feminist scholarship from well-known Black women scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Kimberle Crenshaw, and the members of the Combahee River Collective. However, this study primarily employs African feminist thought to situate the lives and experiences of Black African women living on the African continent.

alized African nation, the series mostly exists within a reterritorialized African mediascape that continuously seeks to represent "Africa from an African perspective" (Armes, 2006, 68). Amarteifio used her cultural, economic, and social capital to deploy production skills and YouTube's distribution and consumption template in a field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993, 1998) that led to the first Ghanaian series initially made specifically for the video sharing platform.

Also, Amarteifio's experiences as an African born, American bred filmmaker who returned to Ghana to begin a new professional life makes the gendered African repatriate perspective more poignant. While African womanhood is often predicated upon the submissive, family oriented, Christian wife ideal that permeates much African film and television, *An African City* features young Western acculturated women who actively interrogate gender roles, heterosexual dating ideas, and freely participate in sexual relationships. As the series shows, "sexual real estate" is a nuanced double entendre representing both the sociocultural milieu within which the repatriate women's lives are represented and the new media terrain that the series' first season on YouTube traverses. At its core, *An African City* articulates *multiple* ongoing reterritorializations, or the constant layered reconstruction of movements, ideas, and technological astuteness within a paracolonial African mediascape that has systemically restrained and reduced women to alarmingly piece-meal narratives.

Media Remaking

Employing Bourdieu's theory of cultural production and practice (1993; 1998) to provide a political-economic analysis of the series, Chávez and Cordes note that with the "advent of online platforms, the relationship between habitus, capital, and field becomes reconstituted in new ways" (2017, pp. 197). Bourdieu argues that within

a "field," of which the web is an inherent part, the process of cultural production and the resulting products are positioned within numerous sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical realities. Thus, producers and products are situated inside an abstruse space of cultural realities, namely the acquisition of knowledge, habits, skills, resources (economic and otherwise), and social positions that lived experience create and shift over time.

The producers and products within a cultural field exist within "a space of positions and position-takings" (1993, pp. 30). Bourdieu states that "analysis of the social conditions of production of the producers and consumers which is based on the—generally tacit—hypothesis of the spontaneous correspondence or deliberate matching of production to demand or commissions" (1993, pp. 34). Cultural, economic, and social capital play a major role in the development of cultural productions. Amarteifio has "been able to successfully convert [her] cultural and social capital into economic capital, which supports the program in three ways: distribution, marketing, and labor" (Chávez and Cordes, 2017, p. 8). The first season was partially funded through corporate partnerships with retail, technology, and hotel brands like Microsoft, African Regency, Dannex, and Coconut Grove Hotels, all of which are visible within the series' narrative architecture (pp. 8-9). As an upper middle class African woman who possessed the capital necessary to fashion international business arrangements and acquire technological acumen, Amarteifio created content for YouTube in a way that many of her Ghanaian peers have not, including women producers. The Ghana Amarteifio creates reflects the nation's relationship with both its colonial history and its current economic environment, one rooted in a citizen's political and social position and/or access to powerful politicians and international businesspeople, mostly men with Western contacts and contracts.

It is tempting to consider *An African City*, or any televisual production coming out of much of the African continent as post-colonial. However, 'post-colonialism' is a Eurocentric concept that centers colonial regimes and often elides the indigenous power systems that existed prior to and immediately after colonial rule. I employ the term paracolonial here to contend that the web series exists within a cultural and media paradigm that both signifies and extends beyond colonialism and its incumbent projects designed to solidify and maintain control. Stephanie Newell notes that the neologism paracolonial fittingly characterizes the social connections and sociocultural forms which arose in response to the British colonial presence in much of West Africa (2001). She states:

> The prefix *para* contains an ambiguity which is ideal for describing cultural flows in colonial West Africa, for it signifies beside and beyond. The shift to paracolonial allows us to discard the centre-periphery model and instead to analyse in historical and sociological detail the local cultural productivity which undoubtedly took place over the generations, alongside and beyond the British presence in the region. (pp. 350).

In this context, paracolonialism refers to the various processes of cultural and social production that took place during British occupation of West Africa. Thus, these processes manifested and proliferated *in spite of* the oppressive colonial forces and resulted in a rich tapestry of history and tradition that has continued to survive in the current geopolitical climate. As Cheryl Rodriguez, Dzodzi Tsikata, and Akosua Adomako Ampofo (2016) note about geopolitical impacts on people around the world, particularly women, the effects of globalization and current neoliberal policies have had devastating effects on African livelihood and these effects must not be ignored. *An African City* is a relevant example of a West African cul-

tural production that simultaneously remembers Ghana's colonial legacy while reorienting its nation's and its region's mass media history and current artistic products; colonialism and neocolonialism are *not* the central focus of paracolonial media. Instead, paracolonial media seeks to explore the lives and experiences of individuals and communities in independent nations and how they exist beyond the machinations of neocolonialism and current geopolitics. Paracolonial media, especially *An African City*, endeavors to express the ingenuity of African media makers and the people who comprise the narratives of that media.

Yet, to sufficiently understand how *An African City*'s first season shifted the Ghanaian paracolonial mediascape, a brief examination of Ghana's media rooted in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's conceptions of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (1977) is fitting. These conceptions' illumination of the intersections of capitalism, class, power, and the orientation of social systems provides the connective tissue that attaches the paracolonial and political-economic theory and production and critical narrative analysis employed here and facilitates an understanding of how Ghana's media climate was remade after independence in 1957 and is continuously remade or reterritorialized in the twenty-first century. However, in her work on transnational African communities, Kamari Maxine Clarke 'Africanizes' Deleuze and Guattari's theory and reinterprets de/reterritorialization to highlight the connections between class, ethnicity, and the reconfiguring of cultural space and social arrangements on the African continent and throughout its diaspora (2004). Clarke argues:

Deterritorialization reflects shifts in geography, wherein territorial spaces, borders, and distances that were previously central to national state affairs are becoming increasingly significant outside physical territories. It provides us

> with an analytic for understanding people's practices in space and highlights the ways that new self-conceptions and self-fashionings are made, and remade, outside the structures of territorially based place alone (pp. 34).

De/reterritorialization describes the affective interconnectivity of people within a nation, the decreasing importance of fixed territories on politics and sociality, and the lingering effects of colonialism. Networked communication systems, like televisual-centric social media platform YouTube, disperse cultural products from the world's major production centers particularly in the West to the far reaches of the globe. Culture, technology, and the ideologies embedded within them spread with little regard to socioeconomic or sociopolitical borders. Clarke states that "the consumption of mass mediation is one of the modalities that contribute to the production of new imaginaries" (pp. 34). As global cultural products circulate, a deterritorialized nation's indigenous cultural fabric is rewoven to incorporate new systems of ideas and values in a process of glocalization where both global and local elements are stitched together to create new sociocultural designs. This deterritorialization process took place during British colonial rule in the Gold Coast and shifted to a paracolonial reterritorialization in the years after Ghana gained independence.

In 1957, Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, saw film as an educational force or method to show the continuity between the colonial and post-independence governments, consolidate his power in the nation, explain new state institutions, and foster social uplift (Meyer, 2015, 46). Under Nkrumah's 'Sankofa' vision, film's primary goal was to consolidate a decolonized cultural identity. Sankofa refers to the Ghanaian Akan symbol of a bird turning its head backward as it moves forward; in Nkrumah's government, the symbol came to stand for a social and political movement that com-

bined African tradition with new artistic and intellectual markers, like film and technology, to bring together colonial era development, creating a novel Ghanaian culture (Hagan, 1993; Schramm, 2000). Ghanaian media, which Nkrumah sought to bring under state operation that until independence had consisted mainly of colonial productions and commercial interests from settlers within and businesses outside the nation, was central to his vision for building a new African nation firmly under his control. However, the reality of limited finances prevented his administration and subsequent governments formed after his 1966 overthrow from producing features that would combat the influence of imported films from China, India, and the United States (Sakyi, 1996).

A video-film boom in the early 1980s created a media paradigm that saw local filmmakers using VHS technology to produce independent films outside government jurisdiction. William Akuffo's *Zinabu* (1985) and Allen Gyimah's *Abyssinia* (1987) were the first video productions in the nation. By the mid 1990s, Ghanaian video-film had boomed; local producers created the Video and Film Distributors Association of Ghana. Marketed in opposition to the increasingly unpopular state-created black and white celluloid features that largely glorified the fledgling Ghanaian government, color video-films were shown in theaters around the country. Seeing the creative ground it was losing to video-film, the JJ Rawlings regime used International Monetary Fund-backed structural adjustment policies to dip its toes into the video waters. In 1993, the once state controlled Ghana Film Industry Corporation became a limited liability company with the state maintaining control of 49 percent of the new company's shares (Meyers, 2015). Many local filmmakers desired to create films by and for Ghanaians that gave voice to a Christian-based identity and worked with the Ghanaian authorities to produce them.

Additionally, the Nigerian televisual industry, known as Nollywood, has largely overshadowed Ghana's efforts and has even pulled what is called Ghallywood or Ghollywood under its widening umbrella. The Nigerian phenomenon's dominance of the African market can be attributed to several factors, most notably narrative and production aesthetics that featured "the superb display of wealth and costumes, the spectacular special effects, the visualization of magic, the stardom of the Nigerian actors, and the emotionally moving plots" (Meyer, 2015, 68). Nollywood productions stood in stark contrast to the Ghanaian content which featured patriarchal family life, crime and punishment, and Christian redemption. Yet, Ghanaian audiences craved the 'sensational' narratives which Nollywood offered, and many local producers developed partnerships with the Nigerian industry to create transnational productions that captivated viewers around the world. While Ghana maintains an independent televisual industry, the lines between Nollywood and Ghallywood are blurred (Garritano, 2013; Meyer, 2015) thanks to Nollywood's presence on social media/subscription streaming platforms like YouTube, Amazon Prime, Netflix, and the global phenomenon IrokoTV.

Thus, the mediascape in which *An African City* exists is a distinctly reterritorialized and paracolonial environment that defies inertia and is continuously reimagined as new technologies enter the media marketplace. Reterritorialization does not replace the old model with the new; elements of the old media models, which are themselves synergetic and coactive, are transformed and cooperatively attached to new elements to expedite cultural forms that resonate with those within and outside a specific territory. Global flows of technology, media, people, and ideas do not travel on a "one-way street in which the terms of global cultural politics are set wholly by…the vicissitudes of international flows of technology, labor and finance" (Appadurai, 1999, p. 228). As Lyombe Eko notes about Af-

rican de/reterritorialization, "for every presentation of reality, there is a re-presentation of reality" (2015, p. 253). Acknowledging this re-presentation or what Clarke calls "new self-conceptions and self-fashionings" (2004, p. 34) is particularly relevant to any conversation of how the series fits within Africa's shifting media/technoscape. In fact, *An African City* is a re-presentation of reality.

Amarteifio has noted her goal was to produce a show that she maintained complete control over, narratively, in its production and distribution, and promotion in online spaces. Pointing to the success of American producer, writer, and actress Issa Rae and her You-Tube series *The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black* Girl, which ran from 2011 to 2013 and led to the acclaimed Home Box Office show *Insecure* that began airing in 2016, Amarteifio sought to fashion an equivalent production featuring African women negotiating life in Africa after living abroad (Chávez and Cordes, 2017; Karimi, 2016; Sangweni, 2014). YouTube's consumer-producer model of content sharing provided Amarteifio the platform and flexibility to accelerate the series' popularity amongst global fans and gain recognition from international news media. Also, social media like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter enabled Amarteifio to reach audiences beyond the run of the first season and build a network of fans who 'consume' the series, its actors, and myriad messages when new episodes are unavailable. Tilo Grätz argues that the proliferation of mass media on the African continent over the last (roughly) thirty years has led to a diverse media system and that "the widespread appropriation of new technical means such as computers, information and communication technologies (ICT), Internet and satellite, has even increased the connectivity and multimediality of media production as one of the new aesthetic formations" (2011, pp. 152). YouTube's social element has ushered in a new media paradigm for African media and it has also allowed for unremitting responding and conversations that carry over to other social media platforms

(Sangweni, 2014). To date, *An African City* has over 5,500 Twitter followers, over 42,000 followers on Facebook, and over 18,000 Instagram followers, making *An African City* an aesthetic and production formation that heavily relies upon rapidly advancing digital technology to reach broad audiences. While most African productions have taken advantage of the digi-sphere for subscription-based watching, Amarteifio's series is unique in that it was at first designed for free viewing on YouTube. Though much free content is available, it is tied to companies that provide costless videos as a gateway to paid content on platforms outside YouTube. Many of these companies use subscription and/or single pay-to-watch fees to finance subsequent productions that are posted for free or behind a pay wall within their platforms. The first season of *An African City* further reterritorialized or remixed the norm and offered a re-presentation of African media-making that disrupted the prevalent online subscription model utilized in much of West Africa.

Amarteifio is a prime example of paracolonial media producers' capacity to create different media universes for transnational consumers. What she has been able to craft easily epitomizes a patent and potent field of cultural production. The mass media opportunities she fashioned would not have been available to women in pre-colonial and colonial Accra, nor in the Ghanaian mediascape that arose immediately after independence. Carmela Garritano explains that no women worked or trained to be media producers in the colonial era Gold Coast Film Unit. The post-independence GFIC mainly employed women as librarians, office assistants, or actors; however, the obtainability of video technology in the 1990s opened the televisual world to Ghanaian women (2013, pp. 116). Expanding technoscapes on the African continent in the 21st century have enabled increasing access to the tools necessary to craft and unremittingly shape televisuals. Amarteifio's adeptness at navigating capitalist financial and technological systems constitutes one

primary form of reterritorialization. The incessant reterritorialization of the development-production and economics of African media-making was predicated upon the paracolonial space in which the series, its creator, and common gender relations and representations symbiotically exist. Therefore, this re-imaging of economic, political, and social capital ultimately enables another primary re-presentation of reality, a reterritorialization of long-held androcentric gender ideologies.

Explicating Paracolonial Gender Politics

In her groundbreaking work on African feminism, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie argues there are several myths that should be avoided when studying or articulating the lives of African women. The most powerful and resonant myths or pitfalls are the myth of the "traditional" woman who wishes to remain "traditional" and the myth of the submissive "traditional" woman (1994, pp. 50-51). Ogundipe-Leslie suggests that the myth of the traditional African woman as child-like, reliant upon men (fathers, brothers, husbands, male romantic partners, etc.), mediator and professor of cultural values, happily domestic, and "subordinate, dependent, and passive" stifles the sovereignty and creativity of African women's interior and exterior lives (1994, p. 51). She states, "Women who desire change are demonised as bad women while their attempts to cope with the changing world and new situation are seen by men as a problem, a betrayal of traditions which only results in a confusion of women's roles" (1994, p. 50). Amarteifio effectively tackles and subdues these two myths, presents a re-presentation of reality, and situates African women as the arbiters of cultural mobility. The characters in *An African City* desire change and, except for development worker Ngozi who believes in patriarchy and is seeking the perfect African Christian heteronormative marriage, are not submissive.

As the series progresses, the gendered metaphors and breaking down of myths within each episode become clear and viewers watch as the women reterritorialize narratives about the continent and its women, from their Western influenced perspectives. At once, the young women collectively declare independence from the paternalistic machinations of pre-colonial and colonial Africa and the cultural norms that routinely relegate women to subservient roles, norms that are increasingly falling out of favor across the continent for women and men alike. Individually, NanaYaa is not a traditional African woman who desires to remain traditional; she epitomizes a paracolonial Africa seeking to constantly assert its agency and reterritorialize a global terrain that consistently infantilizes, feminizes, and views it as incapable of managing its own cultural, economic, and political affairs. Thus, in "Sexual Real Estate" and the remaining episodes in season one, the repatriate women propose "subtle, strategic commentaries about their own and others' access to money, power and patronage" that allow them to ponder "moral concepts such as personal reputation, wealth and success" in their paracolonial lives (Newell, 2001, p. 349). The story lines speak not only to Ghana's current paracolonial sociopolitical and socioeconomic ecosphere, but also to the methods the five repatriates must utilize to succeed as autonomous women. In this way, the narratives provide a re-presentation of reality or new self-conceptions and self-fashionings that fit within a cultural moment that sees the African continent seeking to redefine or reintroduce itself as nations and peoples ready to engage with the world.

In their analyses of Nigerian cinema as a polycultural African system of re-presentations, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue that Nollywood film narratives "are less anti-colonial than paracolonial" (2014, p. 397) and reach beyond stories depicting the political, cultural, and economic intrigues of domination within colonization. Series producer Amarteifio focuses her paracolonial lens on the

plights of her repatriate characters without excessively commenting on Ghana's or the continent's pre-colonial or colonial history. Though the stratagems of colonialism are present within many of the episodes' plot lines, they are delicate and understated, mentioned briefly or as a joke. When NanaYaa has difficulty adjusting to her parents' servants, her friends state that they refuse to have domestic help because it feels too much like colonialism. In another episode, the women jokingly equate the European powers leaving Africa to the 'pull out method' of birth control, a precarious anti-pregnancy scheme that routinely fails; it is a pun that is humorous, yet poignantly accurate. Though the various European nations officially pulled out of the African continent in the mid to late twentieth century, their power arrangements remain in the former colonies through those indigenous leaders who preserved colonial organizations and structures. The joke plays well for laughs, but the characters do not meditate upon its gravity and instead steer their conversation to the sexual and reproductive issues they face in a male-dominated society. Colonialism functions almost in *deus ex machina* fashion to break up long scenes of dialogue; provide humor to push plots forward; or, strategically separate the repatriate friends, elite women, from the long ago established social ordering of the nation's people that reify stark socioeconomic differences in paracolonial Ghana.

In this way, *An African City* as a paracolonial media production reflects the reterritorialization or re-presentation of multidimensional histories of events and experiences not limited to or defined by the formerly colonized society's reactions to or resistance to colonial or neocolonial rule. The series narratively dials down these reactions and resistances as it is evident that the characters have greatly benefitted economically and socially from these quotidian institutions. However, *An African City* does react to the pansophical gender ideologies that operate much like a sixth major character or

great antagonist. Historically, the African continent has been rendered as a feminine ground, ripe for the taking by stronger patriarchal forces more capable of managing its fecundity. The series problematizes this trope. Each character, but particularly NanaYaa, re-presents the present and future African continent. By asserting strong-minded and strong-willed young women who are highly competent and capable, *An African City* very subtly contends that the African continent is adept at self-management and governance. Gender conventions are present in each story and are rhizomatous, connecting myriad ideas about Africa and the roles of women in African society in a style that lacks a discernible beginning and ending. Each gendered idea re-presented in the series is attached or bonded to another, becomes tangled, and develops into a hegemonic web the friends attempt to unravel with varying degrees of success.

For instance, NanaYaa eventually purchases an apartment with her savings and the help of a loan from a bank she calls her "sugar daddy." This lighthearted moment is significant; NanaYaa purchases the apartment without the support of a husband, romantic partner, or the oil baron she briefly dates with the goal of asking him to buy her the apartment. Viewers learn early in the episode that this model of dating for clothing, shoes, jewelry, cars, and houses/apartments is a common practice for even successful women in Accra, an approach one of the repatriates, Sadé, fruitfully uses despite having a well-paying corporate job with a pharmaceutical company. Conflicted about the morality of such an arrangement and its proximity to prostitution, NanaYaa ends the relationship with the oil baron and buys on her own. However, in the episode immediately following "Sexual Real Estate" titled "An African Dump," her friends lecture her on the gravity of the decision of buying a home on her romantic life; Sadé, lawyer Makena, and the naïve virginal NGO worker Ngozi note that because NanaYaa has shown African men that she is financially independent, she has made herself ineligible

for love and marriage. Though their ideas are not decidedly African concepts, they are grounded in what the women understand to be the desirable markers of an African woman. Meekness or obedience to their men and mothers-in-law; devout Christian faith; devotion to African cultural tradition in food, dress, language, etc; virginity prior to marriage; and, a primary focus on home and family are the crucial characteristics of appropriate and sought-after African women reiterated in African media (Abah, 2008; Garritano, 2013; Opoku-Mensah, 2001). They are characteristics the characters in *An African City* openly debate and, except Ngozi, defy.

Garritano notes that African popular culture is a "gender apparatus, a technology that produces and naturalizes particular gender ideologies" (2013, pp. 17). The series as an apparatus or technology acts as a metanarrative of gender. Its plot lines, dialogue, and the behaviors of the actors playing the lead roles reveal that everyone involved with the series is hyperaware that *An African City* is simultaneously challenging and resituating existing heteronormativity and generating alternate gender ideals. The series presents a narrative about a narrative, a re-presentation of reality, that has permeated production throughout Ghanaian and much of African televisual history. Scholars such as Elizabeth Johnson and Donald Culverson (2016), Meyer (2015), Garritano (2013), Jane Bryce (2012), Lindsey Green-Simms (2012), and Audrey Gadzekpo (2009) have noted that the pervasive narrative of the submissive, morally perfect Christian woman has largely gone unchecked in African media and popular culture. Gender, according to Garritano, "is not incidental or supplemental to the worlds and identities imagined...but necessary to the articulation of those identities" (2013, pp. 17-18). Essentially, African cultural productions purposely craft worlds and identities that subordinate women. Yet, *An African City* seeks to topple them through a metanarrative awareness that questions and problematizes basic gender clichés while also presenting new self-conceptions and self-fashionings.

Consequently, each episode propels the message that the series itself is "sexual real estate" that viewers can buy and sell. Also, the episode titled "An African Dump" subtly suggests numerous meanings about this potential 'space.' First, it implies that the women exist on a geographical stage that appears to be a dump, or a dilapidated and disreputable place because of its warped notions of gender, identity, and womanhood. Second, it alludes to the fact that the series actively encourages viewers to dump beliefs that Africa is the trash heap of the world. Towards the end of the episode, NanaYaa ends her relationship with a suitor (Kofi) who routinely announces that he needs to "take a dump" after sex and subsequently defecates with great theatrical aplomb. As she explains to her deflated paramour that she will no longer allow him to use the bathroom in her new apartment, her words and the frustration behind them speak loudly. She is not necessarily upset about Kofi's need to use the bathroom, but because the gesture is indicative of men who dump or defecate upon women or believe that they can without consequence because they are men. NanaYaa resists the role Kofi idealistically wants her to play, that of a traditional woman who 'takes shit' without argument. Additionally, NanaYaa's dumping of Kofi also elusively suggests that the Africa and its women represented in *An African City* will no longer allow themselves to be dismissed as literal and figurative toilets. The series as reterritorializing metanarrative asks viewers to see that the "sexual real estate" (equally the African continent and ideas about gender equity) they are purchasing through consumption of each episode is in no way a dump.

Toward the end of the season, the audience learns that NanaYaa's decision to return to Ghana was strongly predicated upon her wish to reconnect with her first love, Segun, a Western educated Nigerian repatriate and determined businessman who has begun dating another Ghanaian woman. Though the narratives suggest that NanaYaa's agency, ambition, and abject refusal to fit

traditional gender roles led to the breakup, the lovers' relationship operates as a more varied and complicated analogy. Segun symbolizes a modern and continuously developing paracolonial Africa; his Nigerian ancestry, British accent, time spent in the United States, and return to the African continent signify, ever so slightly, his relationship to colonialism, connection to Western power structures, and drive to forge new economic and sociocultural associations. Segun's new girlfriend, who becomes his fiancée, is a traditional African woman. Unlike NanaYaa, she speaks Twi, the language of her native Ghanaian ethnic group, is relatively quiet in the scenes where she speaks, and wears modest African clothing that lacks the almost avant-garde stylishness of the apparel NanaYaa routinely wears. In many ways, the fiancée is a representation of the Africa of old, an Africa anchored in centuries' old customs that modernism has yet to touch. She exemplifies what Ogundipe-Leslie would consider the "male wish-fulfillment that women desire to be repositories of culture and tradition" (1994, p. 50). In contrast, NanaYaa embodies the Westernized immigrant who abandoned her struggling home before it achieved economic and political stability. She is a combination of the conventional and the modern, the global and the local that ultimately makes her unsuitable to be an arbiter of traditional values. Her homecoming to a burgeoning paracolonial Africa hints at her desire to determine how she can attach herself to her home continent and correct her error of not returning sooner. Still, she seeks to right this perceived wrong on her own terms, mostly through maintaining her independence as she attempts to reattach herself to Segun.

The love triangle NanaYaa, Segun, and his (nameless) fiancée re-present to viewers is a literal depiction of the messiness of romantic relationships, break ups, and new partnerships. Figuratively, the three individuals denote the manifold psychic exchanges between an older conventional Africa, a modern burgeoning Africa, and the

contemporary African individual seeking to reconcile with the old and new Africa. As NanaYaa tells Sadé of Segun's fiancée, "It's simple. She represents everything that I'm not. I mean, look at me. I'm a westernized African and I'm lost and then she's Ghana. She's Africa." Intrinsically, Segun's connection with his (nameless) fiancée artfully characterizes Kwame Nkrumah's Sankofa vision of independent Africa; Segun's impending marriage to his (nameless) fiancée embodies a new and emerging Africa reaching back to its cultural customs and rituals and pulling those traditions into the future. They are Sankofa personified. However, NanaYaa and Segun personify the push to leave the past in the past to draft new epistemological, ontological, and phenomenological models for paracolonial African life.

In the penultimate scene in the season's final episode, Segun shows up at NanaYaa's home one month before his wedding to seek her help in securing an oil contract with her new boyfriend, the half-brother of the president of Angola. As they argue about their relationship, Segun states that he chose the new woman because "she makes me feel like a man...she believes in me." This is a powerful and loaded moment. Segun's (nameless) fiancée is solidified as the ideal traditional woman who caters to the man in her life, props him up emotionally and psychologically, and understands her role or place in the androcentric patriarchal relationship. Metaphorically, the (nameless) fiancée is the African who stayed, who did not migrate to another nation, who is not lost, and who nurtured and continues to nurture the continent's growth. In contrast, NanaYaa is the overly ambitious, nasty woman who desires and demands equality and a meaningful life and career beyond that of dutiful wife and mother. She is also the African who left, who did not support or nurture her home's growth, and only returned when she believed the continent possessed social, economic, and political resources, capital, and power she could grab.

Thus, the series operates as a metanarrative and a larger metaphor of the conflict between Africa and her diasporic peoples, especially those born within her borders who move elsewhere. Though the storylines do not rely upon a heavy or overly articulated discourse on colonialism to explain Ghana's paracolonial environment, the narratives suggest that feelings about the institution exist just beneath the surface of the characters' lives. The subtle commentary on the residual effects of colonialism and how it has benefitted certain Africans (namely NanaYaa, Segun, and the rest of the primary cast) perform as a palimpsest. They are visible, yet obscured underneath seemingly facile stories of love, sex, and a pervasive longing for heterosexual marriage. Ideas about past European colonization are not overtly reterritorialized in the series; their cyclical reterritorialization is concealed within each episode's gendered narratives. Therefore, *An African City* painstakingly reterritorializes the African "gender apparatus" that relegates women to an infantilizing story of abjection, conquest, and domination. This multiply reterritorialized apparatus produces and naturalizes new gender ideologies and affords a re-presentation of reality to challenge and depose hegemonic African femininity.

Conclusion

In a 2016 interview, series creator Nicole Amarteifio stated, "*An African City* is trying to be the answer to what is lacking in [the African] film industry; it's trying to be of high production value while incorporating stories of Ghanaians and others throughout Africa" (Karimi, 2016). Amarteifio's statement reveals the series' inherent multiple nature; both high production value and compelling new narratives are central to the goal of a series that is meant to be a distinctly African production that viewers around the world can relate to and enjoy. Because *An African City* is transnational, it must be

viewed within a theoretical frame that considers the origins of a glo-balized/deterritorialized society's dogmas of cultural identity, eco-nomic (in)dependence, and sociopolitical autonomy without privi-leging the histories of those politics. Existing within an Africa that is not necessarily postcolonial but possesses varying shades of neoco-lonial economic and political structures, the series is paracolonial in nature. Paracolonialism lends itself to an engaged analysis through de/reterritorialization as post-independence nations in Africa and in other parts of the world seek to redefine themselves outside the strictures of Eurocentric concepts of post-colonialism. Ultimately, *An African City* exemplifies a multiple reterritorialization of media products and gendered narrative aesthetics that had followed a basic production format as well as storytelling structures that became the standard for many, if not most, African cultural productions.

New media's increasingly transnational technoscape has helped facilitate this reterritorialization. The series reconfigured the cus-tomary form of production and distribution that was typical of An-glophone African media (though not the auteur-based Franco-phone productions). Season one of *An African City* created a new media model that was not profit driven and used a webbased plat-form that would not assert control over the series' production, dis-tribution, consumption (beyond the basic parameters of the You-Tube platform), marketing, and creativity. Also, the series, as a form of digital activism, exemplifies a further reterritorialization of the prevailing notions of African womanhood repeated in African me-dia. The series asserts new ways of thinking about what it means to be an African woman and a media maker in 21st century Africa. Thus, "Sexual Real Estate" subverts the typical African media frame or "gender apparatus" for women with characters that are sexually free (except Ngozi, the devout Christian virgin), highly educated, career-minded women whose lives do not revolve around being tra-ditional submissive African women. Though the series focuses on

the five repatriates' romantic and sex lives, it is clear from the way the narratives render their lives that they are successful professional women who view romantic relationships, hetero-sex, and eventual marriage as the icing on the proverbial cake. Amarteifio has noted that while the lives of the women in the series do not revolve around men, the episodes depict the ways they negotiate their ideas about themselves and the men in their lives (NPR, 2014; Karimi, 2016).

Additionally, Amarteifio has said, "When it comes to the African woman, there is room for many stories. Stories that we as Africans can take control of and share with the world" (Karimi, 2016). Ultimately, Nicole Amarteifio's digital activism is taking control of not just stories about African women, but also stories about African women as media makers possessing the cultural, economic, political, and social capital to tell the stories they want to share. Amarteifio, as a woman media maker, is a re-presentation of the reality of African producers. Her series is a re-presentation of the reality of African televisuals. NanaYaa, Sadé, Ngozi, Makena, and Zainab are re-presentations of African womanhood. Combined, they are all digital re-presentations of the realities of a burgeoning African continent; the possibilities of African televisual production; the power of culturally, economically, politically, and socially connected African women in an industrious and high-powered field of cultural production; and, the positions of African women committed to re-fashioning who they are and how the world views them.

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RESUME

Tori Omega Arthur is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Communication at Colorado State University, Fort Collins. She holds a PhD in American Culture Studies along with a Graduate Certificate in Ethnic Studies from Bowling Green State University. Her research focuses on the intersections of media, race and migration, digital diasporas, and the transna-

tional mobilities of Black people. Specifically, her work explores the myriad ways Black individuals and communities around the world articulate their sociocultural identities in online spaces, particularly social media, as they immigrate to new and unfamiliar nations or travel for leisure. She is currently working on a book-length manuscript on media (old and new) and popular culture representations of Black leisure travelers from the mid-twentieth century to the present.