Postdevelopment Television? Cultural Citizenship and the Mediation of Africa in Contemporary TV Drama

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Despite well-established critiques from African and Africanist scholars, problematic images and narratives of Africa as a site of disease, famine, and conflict continue to circulate formulaically in mainstream first-world media. Meanwhile, many recent complex humanitarian emergencies in African countries have failed to garner significant attention from mainstream Western media and their audiences. This article examines how these power-bearing patterns of representation and omission can be complicated, contested, and disrupted in contemporary TV drama that takes recent African crises as its subject matter. We focus on six episodes of the hospital drama *ER* set in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Darfur region of Sudan. Our analysis of the textual strategies deployed in these episodes and of online audience engagements with them enables us to explore what happens when Africa is brought into the regimes of narrative complexity increasingly associated with television drama in the new media ecology. *ER*'s engagements with African conflict innovatively articulate key aspects of the cultural politics of postdevelopment and postcolonialism in ways that challenge familiar Western media tropes of the "troubled continent" and destabilize the wider knowledges that sustain them. *Key Words: Africa, cultural citizenship, geopolitics, postdevelopment, television.*

尽管存在来自非洲国家的和非洲问题学者们的行之有效的批评，把非洲描绘成一个充满疾病，饥荒，和冲突的，有问题的图像和叙述，继续按惯例在第一世界的主流媒体流行着。与此同时，非洲国家最近许多复杂的人道主义紧急情况都未能从主流西方媒体和他们的观众获得显著关注。本文探讨西方媒体所表现的忽略性的轴承模式是如何具复杂性和争议性，并在当代以非洲危机为题材的电视剧里被打乱的。我们致力于六部设置在刚果民主共和国和苏丹的达尔富尔地区的医院急诊室里的戏剧情节。我们对部署在这些剧情里的文本策略和对网上的观众关注情况进行分析，探索当把非洲带入与新媒体生态的影视剧相关的日益复杂的叙事制度时，到底会发生什么。急诊室与非洲冲突的联系创新性地阐明了发展后和后殖民主义文化政治的重要方面，并在某些方面挑战西方媒体所熟悉的"有麻烦的大陆"的比喻和动摇了维持这些比喻的更广泛的知识基础。*关键词：非洲，文化公民，地缘政治，发展后，电视。*

A pesar de las bien establecidas críticas de eruditos africanos y africanistas, las imágenes problemáticas y narrativas que retratan a África como sitio de enfermedad, hambruna y conflicto siguen circulando de manera desprevenida en los más destacados medios del primer mundo. Entretanto, en tiempo reciente numerosas emergencias humanitarias complejas de países africanos no han logrado atraer suficiente atención de los medios occidentales más influyentes, ni de sus audiencias. Este artículo examina cómo algunos patrones de representación y omisión cargados de poder pueden llegar a complicarse, ser disputados y desbaratados en un drama contemporáneo de la TV que toma como su material de trabajo las crisis africanas. Nos concentramos en seis episodios de la serie *ER* de temática hospitalaria aplicada a la República Democrática del Congo y a la región del Darfur en Sudán. Nuestro análisis de las estrategias del texto desplegado en estos episodios y de las audiencias que lo siguen en red nos capacita para explorar lo que sucede cuando África es el sujeto de los regímenes de narrativa compleja crecientemente asociada con los dramas de televisión en la nueva ecología de los medios. La incursión de *ET* en el conflicto africano articula innovadoramente aspectos claves de la política cultural del posdesarrollo y poscolonialismo en modalidades que desafían los tropos familiares que manejan los medios occidentales sobre el "continente en problemas" y desestabilizan los conocimientos más amplios que los sostienen. *Palabras clave: África, ciudadanía cultural, geopolítica, posdesarrollo, televisión.*

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For many decades, electronic and print media have drawn on centuries-old storytelling traditions and conventions that have saturated the first world with stereotypical narratives and images of Africa. African and Africanist scholars have written extensively on how Western mainstream news and aid agency appeals in the development age have reproduced the colonial imagery of "the Dark Continent" and have consequently generated an overwhelmingly negative and disempowering iconography of Africa as the chaotic site of famine, disease, war, and political instability (van der Gaag and Nash 1987; Fair 1993; Beattie et al. 1999; Fair and Parks 2001; Michira 2002; Campbell 2003; Franks 2005; Mahadeo and McKinney 2007).[1] According to Prunier (2005, 124, cited in Campbell 2007, 368), mainstream Western media have tended to frame African crises through the lens of humanitarianism as issues that are "distant, esoteric, extremely violent, rooted in complex ethnic and historical factors which few understood, and devoid of any identifiable practical interest for the rich countries." Quite different African crises are often portrayed as if they were very similar (Campbell 2007). Scholars have shown how mainstream Western media tend repeatedly to draw on a limited set of dominant codes that include the image of forlorn mother and child, the image of the starving African child with swollen belly and ribs showing, and the generic image of sundry displaced people wandering around or fleeing with possessions to represent an African refugee crisis (Campbell, Clark, and Manzo 2005). Refugees are frequently depicted as a "deterritorialized mass" (Fair and Parks 2001) or as "wallpaper" presented as a backdrop to the expert voice of the aid worker or reporter rather than being allowed to speak for themselves (Wright 2004). As Fiske (1987) wrote,

> Third World countries are . . . conventionally represented in Western news as places of famines and natural disaster, of social revolution, and of political corruption. These events are not seen as disrupting *their* social norms, but as confirming ours, confirming our dominant sense that Western democracies provide the basics of life for everyone, are stable, and fairly and honestly governed. When deviations from these norms occur in our own countries they are represented as precisely that, deviations from the norm: in Third World countries, however, such occurrences are represented as *their* norms which differ markedly from ours. For the Western news media, the Third World is a place of natural and political disasters and not much else. (285)

Western journalism often thereby draws on and promotes neocolonial understandings of Africans as savages who kill each other and are thus incapable of democratic governance (Michira 2002; Franks 2005; Prunier 2005). Western reports on African crises often omit information about important contributing factors such as colonial legacies, the deliberate politicization of ethnicity by colonial powers, support provided for despotic regimes by the U.S. military, the long-standing and ongoing impacts of unfair and exploitative trade policies, and the inadequacies and failures of aid programs (Michira 2002). Western media coverage of the struggles and genocide taking place in the Darfur region of Sudan has, for example, repeatedly painted an overly simplified image of a conflict between northerners and southerners based on ancient tribal hatreds in which Arabs are presented as clear-cut villains and black Africans as helpless victims (Prunier 2005; Campbell 2007; Hawkins 2008, 115). Although such framings are increasingly contested across the world in a variety of ways,[2] they continue to circulate formulaically in mainstream TV news and charity campaigns. Their resilience is demonstrated in the way that many people in the first world who have never visited any part of the African continent find it hard to believe that anything good ever happens there. A survey conducted in the United Kingdom by Voluntary Services Overseas (2001) showed, for example, that the majority of the British public associated Africa with negative imagery of misery and despair, a phenomenon the study's authors have labeled the "Live Aid Legacy."

When African events are not represented as just characterized, they are all too often simply ignored by mainstream Western media (Michira 2002; Hawkins 2008), whose coverage of crises on the continent has declined since the Cold War (Franks 2005). Consequently, many recent complex humanitarian emergencies in African countries, such as those in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Sierra Leone, have largely failed to garner the attention of mainstream first-world TV news and its audiences or do so only when these crises become objects of celebrity activism. The overall historical patterns of representation and omission that characterize mainstream Western media's conventional treatment of Africa should themselves be understood as agents of an "imperializing power" that works to "other" the continent and present it as a "'hell-hole' of inadequacy" (Fiske 1993, 152).

This article examines the extent to which such power-bearing discursive practices have been complicated, contested, and destabilized in recent depictions

of African crises that have crossed generic boundaries from news to contemporary TV drama. Entertainment programs such as *ER*, *The West Wing,* and *Boston Legal* have all screened episodes dealing with the civil wars in the DRC, Darfur, and Rwanda. Since the 1990s television drama has undergone a number of significant transformations that have generated increased levels of narrative complexity and expanded opportunities for audience interactivity and engagement. In light of such transformations to the landscapes of contemporary media, we wish to explore entertainment television's potential to facilitate more complex and interrogatory modes of engagement with questions of development and the so-called third world. This is of interest in part because the seriousness with which media and cultural studies scholars have approached the political complexities and potentials of TV drama has not been matched by academics and practitioners in development studies or by geographers working in the field of popular geopolitics.[3] By the same token, critical scholars in media and cultural studies have often failed to engage effectively with contemporary debates around postdevelopment theory and practice, in part because of persistent misunderstandings of third-world movements that do not promote antidevelopment but seek rather to imagine new ways of understanding and enacting development governed democratically by third-world peoples rather than the neoliberal Washington Consensus (e.g., Cupples, Glynn, and Larios 2007).

ER, the New Regime of Narrative Complexity, and the (Geo)politics of TV Drama

Media studies scholars have noted the appearance of new forms of narrative complexity in the mainstream entertainment television of the past two decades or so. In Sconce's account of this development, TV producers have devised new strategies for "crafting and maintaining ever more complex narrative universes, a form of 'world building' that has allowed for wholly new modes of narration and that suggests new forms of audience engagement" (Sconce 2004, 95). The reasons for the emergence of these new forms of narrative complexity are themselves complex and manifold, although they are centrally related to various pressures toward the increasing serialization of television storytelling. As Mittell (2006, 32) argued, "at its most basic level, narrative complexity is a redefinition of episodic forms under the influence of serial narration." Thus, a central aspect of the new narrative complexity in television has been the historical displacement of more episodic modes of TV storytelling (characterized by the more or less formulaic achievement of satisfying closure on a weekly basis) in favor of an expanding number of degrees and types of serialization. These changes have allowed for the increasing and ongoing exploration of character relationships, greater depths of character development (Sconce 2004), and, arguably, enhanced ideological complexity consequent to the disruption of episodic clotural conventions (Feuer 1995). Sconce argued that such developments have played a crucial role in the facilitation of expanded new modes of diegetic elaboration and intensified audience involvements. The diegetic worlds fashioned under the guise of the new narrative complexity have in many cases generated "a strong and complex sense of community" among devoted viewers. Indeed, the contemporary shows that have brought forth "the most involved audience communities" have been those that "create worlds that viewers gradually feel they inhabit along with the characters" (Sconce 2004, 95).

These developments have taken place in conjunction with the emergence of new digital technologies that facilitate greater audience participation and control over image flows and modes of engagement. Such technologies have spawned interactive digital environments and cultures that extend the "rich storyworlds" associated with narrative complexity "beyond the one-way flow of traditional television viewing" to the point where they may become "fully interactive and participatory realms" (Mittell 2006, 32). Consequently, producers of contemporary TV drama have become less averse to narrative experimentation and to the examination of complexity, nuance, and ambiguity, often "asking viewers to engage more actively to comprehend the story and rewarding regular viewers who have mastered each program's internal conventions of complex narration" (Mittell 2006, 37). Mittell noted that strategies such as the depiction of events through narrative oscillations that generate confusion around the difference between characters' subjective perspectives and the objective reality of the diegesis "may be similar to formal dimensions of art cinema," but can nowadays be readily found "in expressly popular contexts for mass audiences" (Mittell 2006, 37). For Sconce (2004, 99), the new narrative complexity has "injected a more convincing 'realist' aesthetic into prime time, converting the lowly TV series into what one critic has termed the 'prime-time novel.'" Contemporary TV drama is thus increasingly a generic form whose core narrative attractions include intensified forms of character identification

and often highly complex negotiations around competing discourses and emotional perspectives.

Especially in light of such developments, television drama can potentially bring more complex and challenging perspectives to bear on a variety of contemporary social issues than some of the medium's most familiar journalistic forms (Henderson 2007). Indeed, many things taken for granted in modernity about relationships among journalism, citizenship, and the public sphere are nowadays open for reexamination. In the current cultural environment, news is becoming more variegated and entertainment oriented, and understandings of both citizenship and the public sphere are being stretched and expanded by theorists struggling to keep up with the explosion and transformation of media and the emergence of new ways of calling publics into being. Zelizer (2009, 1) asked how our understandings of journalism might "look different were we to insist not on a unitary model of journalism—one which assumes that an elevated form of news works in prescribed ways to better the public good across contexts—but on various kinds of journalisms with necessarily multiple facets, definitions, circumstances and functions." Many commentators similarly argued for expanded understandings of public spheres as multiple heterogeneous spaces where political affects and identities as well as opinions are generated (Dale 2010). Although we do not nominate television drama as either a substitute for journalism or the equivalent of a fully formed public sphere, we do believe that it has made important contributions to what we might call the broader political economy of Western affective and informational engagements with recent African conflicts. As Jones (2010) observed regarding the obsolescence of the artificial distinction between the realms of politics and popular culture, "the conventional lines that once segregated the 'serious' from the 'entertaining' in television programming are largely now eroded, and the location for where institutional politics resides within and across those lines is varied." Nowadays, "the daily and nightly sense-making of political events is processed in new ways by new voices, and rarely operates by the previous assumptions that guided televised political discourse for much of the medium's history" (6). As we argue, in the new media ecology, TV news and drama operate more than ever within a shared and mutually interpenetrating intertextual universe.

Chouliaraki (2008) has recently ventured into the thicket of debates between techno-optimists who tout the emergence of new modes of cosmopolitan cultural citizenship that stem in large measure from the expanded connectivities of a wired world, operating in conjunction with a TV-led "democratization of responsibility" and concern for the suffering of distant others, on the one hand, and techno-pessimists who point to evidence of an abundance of "compassion fatigue," on the other. She argued that analysts must "investigate how television tells stories about human suffering and how, in so doing, it places the spectator in particular ethical relationships to the sufferer, thereby, inviting or blocking" the formation of "a cosmopolitan sensibility," feelings of emotional engagement, connection, empathy, caring, solidarity, responsibility, a demand for social justice and action, and so forth (Chouliaraki 2008, 373–74). A key shortcoming that Chouliaraki and others have identified within predominant modes of Western news discourse constructed through coverage of events that involve distant suffering is their strong tendency to promote a sense of detachment from non-Western others through the persistent discursive division of "the spectator's zone of comfort from the zone of suffering as two worlds that never meet"; such coverage works to strip reports of distant suffering of their "dramatic urgency and moral appeal" (Chouliaraki 2008, 373). Chouliaraki rightly concluded that "the question of expanding our sense of responsibility beyond our own neighborhood, far from simply a matter of transnational networks or global governance institutions, is also a matter of the mundane stories and images of distant others that the media bring into our everyday life" (372) and that TV's all-too-frequent failure to depict "certain sufferings as deserving the spectator's emotion and action results in excluding certain places and human lives from the public space to which the spectator belongs and within which the spectator feels able to act" (379). We therefore wish to examine the degree to which TV drama's new capacities for narrative complexity, as represented by *ER*'s exploration of recent conflicts in Darfur and the DRC, create conditions of possibility that exceed the gravitational pull of an intertextual universe replete with problematic tendencies and arguably overdetermined by the widespread presence of othering discourses. Although *ER*'s Africa episodes must inevitably resonate with intertextual meanings associated with established media iconographies, the narrative complexity of contemporary TV drama has the potential to facilitate a broad range of affective possibilities and identificatory positions that are often missing from global news flows.

For a decade, *ER* (1994–2009) was the world's most watched TV drama. At its peak it had an audience of nearly 48 million viewers (Young 2009), far more than

any nightly newscast. When the Africa episodes aired during three separate seasons (between 2002 and 2006), its average audience was still between 12 and 21 million strong (Elber 2006).[4] *ER* exemplifies many facets of the innovative new hospital dramas that emerged in the 1990s, including high levels of generic hybridity; fast-paced action sequences; serialized character development combined with episodic drama; multiple unresolved narrative threads; a sense of heightened realism established in part through the frequent depiction of graphic images of body trauma; frequent topicality, including a recurrent critique of the inadequacies of the U.S. health care system; and ongoing depictions of the fallibility and numerous personal problems and shortcomings of doctors and other health care professionals (for discussion see Jacobs 2003). From its inception in 1994 to its final season in 2009, *ER* dealt with a range of complex social issues, including the racialization of health care in the United States and the tragic consequences of the private health insurance industry, drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, urban segregation and violence, and gender politics. Jacobs (2003, 130) highlighted how *ER* developed a complex and "flexible aesthetic" that frequently leaves viewers "caught between competing moral systems" as it defies rigidly formulaic narrative patterns and enacts varying degrees of and approaches to closure and to the interweaving of multiple storylines. Narrative complexity and generic hybridity have been hallmark features of *ER* and lie at the heart of its potential to generate alternative forms of political engagement and representation.

The vast majority of *ER* episodes were set in the emergency room of Chicago's County General Hospital. A total of six, however, were set in African countries undergoing complex civil wars and genocide: "Kisangani" (season nine, episode twenty-two, first broadcast 15 May 2002), "The Lost" (season ten, episode two, first broadcast 2 October 2003), and "Makemba" (season ten, episode ten, first broadcast 11 December 2003) were all set in the DRC. "Darfur" (season twelve, episode fifteen, first broadcast 2 March 2006), "No Place to Hide" (season twelve, episode nineteen, first broadcast 27 April 2006), and "There Are No Angels Here" (season twelve, episode twenty, first broadcast 4 May 2006) were set in the Darfur region of Sudan. All episodes feature long-standing *ER* doctors who are central to the show's narrative development, working as medical volunteers serving displaced civilians living in conflict situations. Croatian-born Luka Kovac (Goran Visnjic) and white, independently wealthy John Carter (Noah Wyle) appear in the Congo episodes, and Carter and African American doctor Gregory Pratt (Mekhi Phifer) feature in the Darfur episodes.

Hawkins (2008) has examined the way in which many of the world's deadliest conflicts, especially those in Africa, are routinely ignored or grossly underreported and reduced to overly simplistic dimensions by mainstream Western news media. Despite their scale, complexity, and devastating humanitarian impacts, conflicts such as those in the DRC and Darfur remain persistently and all but completely "hidden from our view." This state of affairs leaves Western publics with a skewed sense of global violence that is "overly focused on certain conflicts (which are very often comparatively minor in scale)" and virtually oblivious to others (7). Hawkins showed, for example, that during the first two years of the conflict in the DRC, 1.85 million people were killed, whereas 2,000 Israelis and Palestinians died violently during the same time period; nevertheless, the amount of coverage CNN devoted to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict outstripped that allotted to the violence in the DRC by a factor of fifty-three (Hawkins 2008, 109). Franks (2005, 131) wrote that

> the fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was part of the fall-out from Rwanda, eventually claimed some 3 and a half million lives in a continuing war of attrition—the highest death toll in any war since 1945, yet for Western purposes it is invisible. Indeed it is sometimes called "Africa's hidden first world war," because as far as the rest of the world is concerned it is hardly ever reported, despite the enormous death toll.

Although it has received more coverage than the conflict in the DRC, the violence in Darfur was similarly subject to a distorted economy of media and public attention. Consequently, by the time the Darfur episodes of *ER* screened in the United States in May 2006, the *Guardian* could characterize them as constituting the "most prominent exposure so far on American television" of the unfolding conflict, which had already taken the lives of 180,000 people and displaced millions of others over the preceding three years (Burkeman and Goldenberg 2006). Indeed, during the five months prior to the U.S. screening of *ER*'s Darfur episodes, the three major national networks had devoted a collective total of only ten minutes of nightly news time to coverage of the conflict (Burkeman and Goldenberg 2006, in Henderson 2007).

With the support of NBC, *ER*'s producers sought to use the show's position as a high-rating primetime drama to raise social awareness of the situation in the DRC and Darfur. Executive producer David Zabel, who

cowrote the Darfur episodes, told the press that he was on a mission to spread information about the region's conflicts to the show's 12 million viewers. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), civil society groups, and human rights organizations such as Oxfam, Doctors Without Borders, and Human Rights First were enlisted and lent their support to the project as consultants. The Darfur episodes were also publicly supported and promoted by George Clooney, whose stint on *ER* as popular pediatrician Doug Ross from 1994 to 1999 had launched his Hollywood career. Since leaving the show, Clooney has used his status and visibility as a celebrity to campaign actively on the situation in Darfur, appearing on talk shows, news programs, and as a speaker at both the United Nations (UN) and Save Darfur rallies in Washington, DC, in addition to making repeated and highly publicized visits to the Darfur region as a UN messenger of peace. Clooney's work on the issue was central to the emergence of a social movement built around a loose alliance of groups that included Hollywood celebrities, conservative Christians, and progressive student organizations that successfully pressured Yale, Harvard, Stanford, and other universities to divest their interests in businesses found to be complicit with the Sudanese genocide (Burkeman and Goldenberg 2006). Moreover, Clooney was instrumental in persuading a reluctant U.S. government to commit to appointing a full-time diplomat dedicated to the pursuit of peace in the region (Curry 2009).

Clooney's high-profile celebrity activism, along with comments made to the media by *ER*'s producers and actors about the importance of the issue and of the Africa episodes, constitute part of what Gray (2010) would call the show's surrounding paratextuality. For Gray, paratexts play a "constitutive role in creating textuality," so that a show or movie "is but one part of the text," which must therefore be seen as "a contingent entity, either in the process of forming and transforming or vulnerable to further formation or transformation." Paratexts are then part of the circulation of intertextual meanings in the broader media culture—meanings that have a way of "sticking" to primary texts and thus "becoming an inseparable part of 'the text itself.'" Paratexts function within a competitive system of "bids and counterbids" for textual meaning upon a terrain of semiotic struggle (Fiske 1987, 119). In Gray's (2010, 30) account, paratexts thereby "help to make texts" by activating their potential meaningfulness in one way or another.

Fiske (1987, 1996) noted the ease with which intertextual meanings cross generic boundaries. For example, TV adventure shows and movies set in "unspecified Third World countries run by corrupt regimes" resonate "all too readily with news reports from Africa or Latin America" (Fiske 1987, 109). It would thus be naïve and unrealistic to expect that *ER*'s Africa episodes could simply and completely break free from the resonance of familiar tropes, visual stereotypes, and narrative strategies that have burdened Western representations of the continent for centuries. Indeed, these episodes do contain negative and depressing storylines. They depict two African countries embroiled in intractable and brutal civil wars marked by widespread killing sprees. They show how dying from HIV/AIDS is an everyday occurrence for men, women, and children in the DRC and how rape is used as a weapon of war in Darfur.

Nevertheless, we contend that *ER*'s Africa episodes do not merely reproduce familiar tropes and stereotypes about Africa, for there are ample moments in the shows when such figures are subjected to interrogation and reworking. Although these episodes do not provide in-depth contextual information about the complex historical causes of conflict, they do clearly point to the fact of U.S. nonintervention, and provide a clear critique of the World Trade Organization (WTO) regime that makes expensive drugs available in first-world countries but denies them to patients in sub-Saharan Africa. And at the end of the episodes, viewers are encouraged to visit the NBC Web site, where much more information is provided. Furthermore, the episodes draw on and elaborate textual repertoires and resources associated with new forms of narrative complexity in ways that promote critical engagement with the politics of development, aid, and humanitarian crisis, thus articulating and exploring several key postdevelopment and postcolonial problematics.

Gray (2010) argued that paratexts often function as mediators that play a key role in constituting niche texts for wider audiences and posited the existence of "critical paratexts" that can "bump a text or genre's meaning-making process off its self-declared trajectory" (34). In light of the underexposure of Western media publics to information about the conflicts in Darfur and the DRC, *ER*'s Africa episodes might therefore be understood as themselves important paratextual mediators of the metatext that is constituted by Western news coverage of Africa in general and these conflicts in particular.

Postdevelopment TV Drama?

The problems associated with dominant representations of Africa are similar to those that plague

development studies more generally. Although understandings about development have been around for centuries, development as a mode of humanitarian intervention in so-called third-world societies with the aim of overcoming poverty or misery is very much a post-World War II phenomenon (Escobar 1995). Postdevelopment emerged as a challenge to dominant development approaches, particularly those based on theories of modernization that asserted that the third world was merely at an earlier stage of development than the first world and with first-world help, technology and expertise would eventually "catch up." After several decades of "development," the feeling emerged among a number of scholars working in the field of development studies (e.g., Esteva 1987; M. Edwards 1989; Escobar 1995; Rahnema 1997) that the development project had been a dismal failure and had not brought the prosperity and progress to the third world that was promised. In many parts of the world, people are still deprived of access to a decent standard of living and are still struggling for basic needs such as shelter, clean water, food, health care, education, and freedom from violence. Escobar (1995) argued that development scholars and practitioners have ended up being part of the problem and not the solution and that top-down and technocratic modes of development, in which first-world expertise is seen as more valuable than indigenous local knowledges, have led to internalized feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among third-world inhabitants (see also M. Edwards 1989). How then might entertainment television in general and these episodes of *ER* in particular help us, as Escobar (1995) put it, "imagine a postdevelopment regime of representation" (11) and enact a postdevelopment era? Although *ER* always remained a U.S. hospital drama, its "flexible aesthetic" enabled it successfully to turn its attention to different discursive contexts, including those of development and humanitarian crisis. Although Jacobs's (2003) book on the new hospital dramas was written before the Africa episodes of *ER* were broadcast and does not deal in any way with the cultural politics of development, his analysis provides important insights into how we might understand these episodes with respect to postdevelopment debates and dynamics.

Jacobs (2003) indicated that one of the major differences between the old and new hospital dramas is that doctors were traditionally represented in a positive light as the face of benevolent modern expertise. By contrast, doctors in the new hospital dramas are flawed and fallible. The *ER* doctors commonly allow their personal feelings to undermine their professionalism; often make serious mistakes on the ward that not infrequently result in patients' deaths; sometimes struggle with debt, drug problems, and alcohol abuse; and have difficult and frequently dysfunctional relationships with partners or family members. Thus, the new hospital dramas decenter the anchoring modernist figure of the unflappable doctor, who with the aid of Western medical knowledge was able to exert a heroic mastery over most situations. Given that heroic modernism and Western expertise also underwrite first-world aid intervention in the third world and are, like Western medical knowledge, similarly and increasingly contested, particularly by perspectives in postdevelopment (including those circulated by third-world subjects), *ER*'s ethos lends itself well to the interrogation of traditional Western development objectives and humanitarianism. When Carter gets to Africa, viewers already know that he comes from a wealthy and privileged background (in an earlier season of *ER*, for example, he tells the chief of staff that he does not need to receive a salary in compensation for his full-time labor). Regular viewers also know he suffered a nervous breakdown after witnessing the fatal stabbing of a medical student and subsequently developed a drug habit that required lengthy rehabilitation.

Postdevelopment perspectives have also put in question the notion of development as a technical fix that can be straightforwardly brought about through the application of specialist Western knowledge and expertise to variety of generic third-world problems. By the same token, *ER*'s Africa episodes clearly demonstrate the futility of efforts to unreflexively apply what one has learned in medical school and the Chicago emergency room to the medical situations that confront the doctors in Africa. It is not that Western medical knowledge is totally useless, and there are times when such expertise is clearly welcomed and desperately needed. Nevertheless, there is a different set of knowledges in circulation that must be taken into account, which indicates a need for the collaborative production of new, hybridized medical epistemologies and practices. When Carter arrives in the DRC and Pratt in Darfur, both doctors come across as awkward and out of place, sweating profusely and producing shell-shocked facial expressions that show how they are struggling to cope with the brutality and complexities of what they find. The Africans and other third-world aid workers, who play a range of roles alongside first-world expats, seem to have much better and more useful localized and situated knowledges.

Carter, for example, makes a series of both cultural and political mistakes as he tries to "help," clearly exemplifying the way that development projects and

practitioners, with the best intentions in the world, sometimes do more harm than good. In Darfur, he mistakenly allows a man to find out that his wife has been raped (or "shamed") by the Janjaweed fighters, causing him to reject her. Although the problematic notion of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1988, 297) is not really interrogated here, the scene does at least draw attention to Carter's lack of culturally appropriate knowledge. His ignorance and third-world experience deficit also lead him to make poor choices regarding the expenditure of scarce and valuable resources on patients who cannot be saved. During a power cut in "Kisangani," he is chided by Angelique, an Indian doctor, for wasting the last of the hospital's generator fuel on a man who will die anyway. When Carter asks naïvely if they were just going to let him die, Angelique responds, "If I take him first, he's going to be at least five hours to stabilize, and then he'll probably die anyway. I have four hours of fuel left and three boys with injuries I can fix. Keep him stabilized. If the lights are still on, I'll come back."

Similarly, after a long day spent with Kovac vaccinating 200 children in the rural village of Matenda, Carter is frustrated that one child will die because a ten-dollar drug for pertussis is unavailable; his frustration prevents him from recognizing that he and Kovac had nevertheless helped save potentially hundreds of lives. Then, in a later episode ("Makemba"), Carter ends up having a major conflict with Makemba, a Congolese woman with whom he will eventually become romantically involved and who is running a pilot project for a small number of HIV/AIDS sufferers. After he befriends Celine, a refugee woman who is HIV-positive but unable to access the expensive patented lifesaving antiretroviral drugs that are provided to U.S. patients, Carter sends for them from Chicago and personally picks up the $12,000 annual bill.[5] When Makemba finds out, she is furious not only because Carter has smuggled unregistered drugs into the country but also because his actions threaten to undermine her work. Although Carter has here attempted a kind of microsubversion of "international biopolitics" whereby the first world "keeps the best AIDS drugs for itself" (Sylvester 2006, 73), Makemba is working to effect large-scale political change by proving to the international community that HIV/AIDS treatment can succeed in Africa and that the WTO pharmaceutical regime must be undone so that many more African lives can be saved. Makemba accepts that this is a long-term goal, which in part involves challenging the notion that things do not work in Africa and abandoning in the meantime the first-world expectation that doctors must try to save every single life. She is angry that Carter has used his money to save one patient rather than using his influence to lobby the U.S. government to change drug patent laws.

Carter's mistakes demonstrate a key point elaborated in the postcolonial scholarship of Spivak (1988), who has stressed the importance of unlearning privilege. Carter has been raised to believe that he can buy his way out of a problem, but he quickly realizes that in Africa his privilege is an obstacle that he must unlearn if he hopes to do any good in the DRC and become part of the solution rather than exacerbate the situation. First-world common sense and Western authority in the third world are thus themselves here problematized and decentered as Carter comes to recognize that third-world lives, needs, and interests are not instantly and transparently knowable to first-world subjects (see Kapoor 2004) and that unreflexive first-world presumptions regarding the needs of third-world peoples often lead to costly mistakes. Makemba's angry outburst at Carter's behavior also begins to illuminate for him and for viewers that the problem they must confront is one of multiple and entangled complicities, exacerbated by the indifference of first-world governments and the cruelty of WTO rules. We can imagine that many viewers are thus confronted, perhaps for the first time, by the revelation of what Spivak (1988, 291) refered to as our continuing complicity with the "imperialist project." It is thus not only Carter who must of necessity begin to unlearn his privilege; *ER*'s audiences are also challenged to ask why it is that we and the world do not seem to be very interested in Africa's civil wars or in the concomitant and preventable deaths of its people. These scenes promote affective engagement with the plight of Africans while refuting notions of development as a technical fix and problematizing conventional forms of first-world intervention in the third world.

Even when our *ER* doctors are depicted saving lives, their mastery within such situations is nevertheless deeply relativized, and their fates are shown to be bound up with those of both their patients and the wider populations to whom they are trying to lend assistance and on whom the first-world doctors must sometimes depend for their own survival. On one level, this reflects developments within the new hospital dramas, when compared with the genre's traditional heroic modernism (Jacobs 2003); in *ER*'s Africa episodes, however, these generic transformations resonate with postdevelopment and postcolonial perspectives. In "Kisangani," for example, during their trip to the village of Matenda, Carter and Kovac find themselves caught

up in a battle between rebels and government soldiers and must conduct an emergency amputation on a little girl, Chance, who is injured in the crossfire. When the others return to Kisangani, Kovac stays in Matenda to care for Chance and other patients who cannot be moved. Chance's mother thanks Kovac for saving her daughter's life, tells him he is a good Christian, places a chain with a crucifix around his neck, and urges him to accept this gift. Later, in "The Lost," Kovac is captured with others by a group of militias. As the soldiers begin murdering their hostages one by one, he begins to pray for his life. The militiamen see this and notice Kovac's crucifix. Chance's mother, who is nearby, then yells that they must not kill a man of God, and the soldiers, persuaded by her injunction, immediately presume Kovac to be a priest and kneel down beside him to pray. Kovac is desperate, vulnerable, and on the verge of death when he is rescued by a third-world woman; hence, although he had saved the Congolese girl's life, it was her mother's situated knowledges and actions that led in turn to his own salvation.

Just as *ER*'s narrative strategies enable the Darfur and DRC episodes to highlight at points that it is not the case that things simply do not work in Africa, season after season of *ER* has persistently revealed that the first world, like the third, is also fraught with powerlessness and that things frequently spin wildly out of control there both within and beyond the hospital walls (Jacobs 2003, 30). Strikingly, *ER*'s Africa episodes seem to invite attention to the ways in which the first world resides in the third, and the third in the first, without losing sight of the significant cultural and political differences between life in Chicago and that in the DRC or Darfur. When Pratt finds out he is being sent to work in Darfur, Frank, the lovable yet racially insensitive desk clerk, makes an offhand comment about Pratt returning to his African roots and people. Over the preceding seasons, we have witnessed Pratt's dealings with and treatment of extreme forms of trauma and violence, much of which is highly racialized. Pratt comes across as a streetwise doctor who has himself had to overcome racism and discrimination. He believes that he will take Darfur in his stride. However, it is as if nothing has prepared Pratt for the horrors he will encounter on his arrival there. As the narrative frequently unfolds through Pratt's point of view, we are invited to identify with his naïveté, lack of understanding of Darfur's complex problems, and unreadiness to experience life there. Yet just when the episodes appear to be flirting with the exoticization of cultural difference, important connections are made that undermine the first world–third world binary. For instance, Pratt, who is at a loss to understand why seemingly nothing is being done at an international level to address the genocide and suffering in Darfur, has a conversation with a Sudanese colleague, Dr. Steven Dakarai, who suggests that the situation there involves the same racializing forces at work in the Bush administration's nonresponse to the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina. "It does not matter whether it is Somalia, Rwanda, Darfur, or New Orleans," says Dakarai. "When the faces are black, the world moves slow."

There is a similar moment of first world–third world convergence in *ER*'s first Africa episode, "Kisangani," in which a militia fighter both holds a gun to Carter's head and simultaneously thanks him for trying to save his brother's life. "Kisangani" was immediately preceded by an episode set in the ER in Chicago ("When Night Meets Day") in which we see gang violence that results in the shooting death of the brother of a young gang member. As one online fan posting noted, the Chicago gang member and the Congolese militia soldier both wore the same bandana. Particularly in the context of *ER*'s multiracial diegetic world, long-standing exploration of complex ethical issues, and inclination toward the exposure of U.S. social and racial inequalities, we would argue that the two episodes' parallel subnarratives involving fraternal relations and violence fueled by inadequate economic resources and extreme forms of social marginalization work to deexoticize, without deproblematizing, questions of tribalism and violence by calling attention to structural similarities between Chicago and the DRC while avoiding effacement of the differences between these very different places. Indeed, these episodes appear successfully to hold in place a series of tensions required for a postdevelopment approach and to pose questions considered crucial by postdevelopment scholars and practitioners. *ER*'s Africa episodes thus seem implicitly to ask how we can build solidarities across space, even while we continue to acknowledge cultural differences and specificities. Furthermore, how can we link wider political and economic relations to the forms of suffering we find in Africa and the forms of exclusion and marginalization at work in Chicago?

Just as postdevelopment seeks to move beyond the emphasis on expert knowledges, technical fixes, and the stimulation of social and political change through modernizing projects found in traditional approaches to development, *ER*'s accentuation of multiple perspectives, interpretive possibilities, and context-dependent meanings, and the show's complex approach to

narrative resolution and irresolution, has important lessons to offer the development sector. Whereas development has conventionally been understood through models of linear progress, postdevelopment is more attuned to what we might characterize in Gramscian terms as a protracted and multifrontal war of position with an ever shifting balance of forces and few clear-cut, once-and-for-all victories (Hall 1996; Cupples, Glynn, and Larios 2007). Indeed, as most development scholars and seasoned practitioners know, just as one problem is attenuated, others arise; as soon as one group of people finds a measure of satisfaction, others begin to express grievances. The notion of narrative complexity is thus of much use in the development arena, for although we must try to make things better, aspirations to final closure generally lead to frustration. Postdevelopment has thus sought to devise more open-ended and radically contextual theories, where "theory" can be understood (after the fashion of cultural studies) as a type of *narrative* oriented toward the development of new conceptual tools with which we might both think about and intervene in the world more effectively (Barker 2000, 33; Grossberg 2010).

The futility of efforts to exert a heroic mastery over conditions associated with humanitarian crisis is underscored not only by *ER*'s narrative complexity but also by its innovative visual techniques. *ER* has devised what Jacobs characterizes as a kind of "embedded" visuality that is quite distinct from the modes of representation associated with traditional forms of documentary and observational media. Unlike the latter, the *ER* camera frequently "reacts, moves and anticipates (often literally confined to small spaces) with the agility of any other staff member" and so creates the appearance of being "embedded, like the characters and patients, in the action itself" (Jacobs 2003, 133). This constrained and embedded visuality is a useful device for depicting the limitations, partiality (in all senses, by contrast with the traditional posture of comprehensive and "objective" vision associated with modernism), and complicity of Western agents in the humanitarian crises in Africa. Although the shows make clear that there are many complex contributing factors involved (e.g., the title of one of the episodes, "There Are No Angels Here," is a recognition that Africans are not merely passive victims of colonial legacies and that they too participate in and perpetuate genocide), Westerners are nevertheless not simply let off the hook, because our indifference is also shown to be an important dimension of Africa's problems. *ER*'s continuous mobile Steadicam is an apt device for communicating the view that development practitioners and Western audiences alike are inevitably embedded within both the unfolding action and a much broader visual economy that rigorously challenges the comfort of detached observation from a distance while others suffer and die. For "Africa" is not (merely) represented in the media but rather brought performatively into being by a range of actors—viewing publics included. Campbell (2007, 360) asserted that thinking of discourse as "enacting what it names through materialization over time" has the potential to transform dominant geopolitical imaginaries and relations. *ER*'s textual operations and audiences' participation in them are as much a part of this performative process of materialization as any other discursive enactment of African conflicts. Exposing our complicity and drawing attention to the ways in which such conflicts are performatively materialized "here and now," we might say, undermines efforts to reduce them to spontaneous wellings-up of ancient tribal hatreds.

ER's Africa episodes furthermore encourage viewers to interrogate two dominant codes in conventional TV reporting on Africa, those of the portrayal of death and the image of refugees. Campbell (2004) and others (D. Edwards 2002; Campbell, Clark, and Manzo 2005) have indicated how mainstream Western media have avoided portraying mass death, even when faced with situations such as those in the DRC, where millions of people have been killed. There are a number of explanations for this avoidance. For instance, mass death is so remote from the experiences of most people in first-world countries that it both defies imagination and is widely considered by broadcasters to be unpalatable to viewers (Campbell, Clark, and Manzo 2005). Furthermore, there are serious ethical concerns regarding the use of images of the corpses of people who have died violently and did not consent to their representation. The erasure of mass death in Western media is nevertheless highly problematic because it hides the magnitude of the problem and so compromises our ability to respond responsibly to humanitarian crises (Scanlon and McCullum 1999; Campbell 2004). *ER* has consistently emphasized new forms of visual realism in medical drama wherein trauma, mutilation, and death are brutally portrayed, and regular viewers are therefore accustomed to seeing the horrific deaths of individuals and the bodies of those who have died in *ER*'s Chicago. In the DRC episodes, the show built on this tradition in ways that attempted to convey the scale of the tragedy by showing large numbers of corpses piled up and people digging mass graves. In "The Lost," when Carter

believes that Kovac has been murdered in the DRC and returns to retrieve his body, Carter is told that it would be virtually impossible to find it among those of the other 20,000 people murdered in the preceding fortnight. When he and Gillian (a Canadian nurse and colleague who had developed a sexual relationship with Kovac) get to Matenda, they are forced to pick through piles of putrid, decomposing bodies, recoiling from the sights and smells of death while flies buzz on the soundtrack. As they frantically turn corpses over in a desperate search for their friend, viewers get a glimpse of the horrendous devastation faced on a daily basis by the Congolese, who do not share in the Western luxury of opting out of direct confrontations with mass death.

Ongoing character development and identification in a show such as *ER*, which turns viewers into dedicated fans, can also contribute to the interrogation of dominant framings of refugees. When Carter makes a trip to a nearby refugee camp in search of Celine, an HIV-positive patient who failed to show up for a clinic appointment, the scene acts as an "intertextual memory jogger" (Fiske 1987, 109). That is, we are presented with the kind of refugee camp image many have frequently seen before in news and charity appeals; here, however, we are encouraged to view it differently, in part because we see it through Carter's eyes and through his sense of being clearly overwhelmed by its scale and the complexity of the issues that have produced and are produced by it. Our potential identification with Carter creates the possibility for affective investments that disrupt stubbornly persistent feelings of detachment from distant others (see Chouliaraki 2008), not least because we are looking for a specific and fully human refugee whom we have already gotten to know as a mother, schoolteacher, and fluent English speaker who is at the camp with other people from her village; in other words, she is somebody who belonged to a particular place and has important kinship, community, and other social connections both to that place and to our world via the shared diegetic space and characters of serial television drama. Although there is no guarantee that viewers won't see the refugees as deterritorialized "media wallpaper," it is arguable that the forms of intensified engagement and participatory culture associated especially with narrative complexity in the new media environment militate against the availability of such responses among audiences who have been avidly following Carter's character development and have begun to follow Celine's. So whereas the humanitarian lens of much news coverage of African conflicts "involves the reification of fluid identities into fixed forms" (Campbell 2007, 377), these *ER* episodes intriguingly invite and facilitate the partial reconversion of such reified forms back into active social relations among fan communities.

Intertextuality and Online Engagement

As much media scholarship has demonstrated, viewers and fans of television programs can be thought of as forming social and interpretive communities that remediate in complex ways the narratives, events, and character developments enacted within programs (e.g., Fiske 1987; Jenkins 1992; D'Acci 1994; Harrington and Bielby 1995; Baym 1997; Hills 2002; Gwenllian-Jones and Pearson 2004; Gray 2006; Costello and Moore 2007). As we have outlined, *ER*'s producers and writers deliberately set out to produce a piece of "edutainment," aiming to inform viewers of the situation in both the DRC and Darfur and to encourage them to take political action. Additionally, these episodes both relied on and complicated dominant framings of Africa frequently seen in news, current affairs, and other media and thereby opened up the possibility that viewers would engage in what Fiske (1987) and Jenkins (1992) have referred to as "genre-shifting," whereby audiences place interpretive emphasis on one or another set of generic attributes and reading protocols, over and against other, competing ones available within a particular, generically hybridized text, and thereby tilt the text's meanings variously toward or away from those promoted through socially dominant ideologies, discourses, and institutional practices. As Fiske (1987) explained such genre-shifting, in its most subversive forms, constitutes "a tactic of popular reading that takes pleasure in its ability to evade or redirect the cultural strategy that serves the interests of the dominant economic or gender power structures" (113). In the case at hand, struggles and debates over such genre-shifting within fan interpretive communities involve not only the activation of different meaning sets associated with one or another genre present within a generically hybrid fictional program; it also involves the increasingly fluid and significant cross-traffic between the world of politics and that of entertainment, as some viewers seek to tilt their interpretive activities toward the genre of news, current affairs, documentary, and political programming, whereas others strive more conservatively to reassert meanings associated with primetime medical drama and thereby exclude the examination of African geopolitics from the category of legitimate

narrative material and express demands for a return to more familiar scenarios and plot entanglements.

Fiske's (1987) influential account of the intertextuality of media culture proposes that we trace its primary consequences across two key dimensions: a horizontal axis comprised of the relationships between primary texts (related to one another through genre in particular), and a vertical axis made up of both secondary texts (e.g., various forms of studio publicity and commentary or reporting by the media on other sectors of the media) and tertiary texts (consisting of the various forms of cultural production undertaken by audiences, ranging from conversations among casual viewers to more durable artifacts such as fan-made fiction). Because intertextuality concerns meanings produced via interactions between texts, secondary and tertiary texts are not only generated from primary ones but are read productively back into them by audiences. Consequently, although textual meanings certainly might at times be temporarily stabilized (generally through the intervention of one form of institutionalized and socially authorized power or another), they can never be fixed once and for all. Meaning making (semiosis) in a media culture is thus an interminable and highly context-dependent process that involves industries and audiences as well as texts and the semiotic interrelations between them. In the new media ecology associated with digital convergence and the so-called Web 2.0 environment, the universe of intertextual relations explodes and expands massively, effectively endangering if not definitively rupturing any clear sense of categorical differentiation among the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of Fiske's analytical schema. Now more than ever, as Gray (2010) wrote in his recent account of the expanding production of media paratexts, "meaning and value are constructed outside of what we have often considered to be the text itself" (ix).

The new media ecology creates opportunities for enhanced engagement by fan groups with the political themes covered in *ER*'s Africa episodes (e.g., Baym 2000; Jenkins 2006; Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007; Papacharissi 2009). Among other things, fan sites on the Web create spaces for deliberation and debate and places where groups can "work to form a collective rather than individual response" (Fiske 1987, 124). Hence, *ER*'s Africa episodes gave rise to a substantial amount of audience discussion conducted across a variety of Web sites. Indeed, because there was a significant *ER* fan base accustomed to posting and sharing views of the show online long before the Africa episodes aired, there likewise existed an established network of discursive spaces wherein discussions of the situation in the DRC and Darfur could take place. This is significant because online spaces and people who might never have paid any attention to the humanitarian crises in Africa began to do so, and their discussions came to form part of the broad intertextual universe to which *ER*'s primary texts belonged. This intertextual universe is, as we have suggested, a dynamic and ever-expanding one that includes a host of other texts and paratexts such as those generated by and around George Clooney's highly publicized humanitarian activism, as well as the public comments made by *ER*'s stars and producers about the importance of these episodes. Such texts and paratexts continuously spill over into new mediated spaces, provoking, generating, and circulating meanings that can in turn be read back into primary texts of all sorts (including actual news reports), thus acting as stimulators of semiotic productivity across the mediasphere. The panoply of paratextual agents that animate this highly interactive, promiscuous, and dialogical universe continuously jostle and engage one another, although within this realm, some voices are more loudly amplified than others, and the conversational encounters and trajectories of any single interlocutor could well be highly idiosyncratic and contingent.

Interestingly, mainstream reporters began to cover the Darfur episodes of *ER*, noting in the process that they had themselves paid inadequate attention to the conflict prior to its primetime dramatization and thus highlighting the uncertain and relative nature of the boundary between news and entertainment in a culture of hyperreality where, as in this case, it might require dramatized accounts of actual conflicts to stimulate news coverage of humanitarian crises. Many comments posted online by viewers suggest that *ER*'s Africa episodes provoked not only reporters but also audience members to become more engaged with the conflicts taking place in Darfur and the DRC; in some cases the episodes had dramatic impacts on viewers' emotional and political orientations toward these situations. Some of the following comments illustrate, for instance, the fluidity of viewers' movements between their attachments to beloved characters and their newly formed affective investments in understanding the situations in Darfur and the DRC and thus demonstrate how *ER*'s forays into African affairs helped promote a sense of democratized responsibility among some members of the viewing audience.

> Firecracker666: The episodes in Africa (including the ones from previous seasons) I think are amazing. They really

disturb me because of all the awful things which are going on. The way reactions to these things are acted and the fact that these things really do happen make it all the more powerful.[6]

palid069: Fantastic!! I love this episodes of ER in africa, the best ER episodes without doubts.[7]

DrHeatherr: the africa episodes are my favorite. Carter is so adorable and all the episodes really open your eyes.[8]

COCOCOCOC1212: I will always have this episode of er in my heart. This episode is a reminder that we all can change the world if we step outside our box. Not just one we all must to rid the world of such sadness. Thank you to all of those great people of ER. There will never be another to ever replace the work you all have done. I guess I will turn off my tv now.[9]

Parricida: I just cannot explain what I feel with this episode—you have to watch it yourself to totally understand it. But there is something that makes it so special and the emotion it gives—it is so worth to watch it. I love that this episode is eye-opener. They have took the events out of usual environment and giving a totally new point of view to the medicine and the life itself. . . . A superb episode. One of my personal favorites.[10]

Auntie Pam: But the show (I think) pointed out what happens when you start to think about the huge problems they're dealing with—it's mind boggling. Where do you start? How can people go on against the apathy of the rest of the world?[11]

Ncis 4 ever: I really like this episode :) It was really different from the usual episodes and you did get to see a lot of Luka and Carter. It was so dramatic. . . . All the sick people and so little equipment, they could barely treat children with whooping cough . . . :(And when the MaiMai came . . . It was terrible and I did really feel sorry for Luka, Carter and all the other people. But I like the way they shoved it and Luka was very brave to stay there with those patients. . . . You must see it! Mich PS. Luka was very hot in this episode.[12]

One viewer made two detailed postings that showed how the Africa episodes had caused her to reflect on a whole series of geopolitical issues, including the war in Iraq and nonexistent weapons of mass destruction, a major U.S. city being flattened by a hurricane, the role of multinational companies and a legal system that all-too-often does their bidding in a manner that results in the denial of HIV medicine to Africans who need it, and the self-serving nature of U.S. intervention. Here is an excerpt from her comments:

KatalynJ: Dakarai, representing an educated African character, was voicing the opinions of much of the rest of the world, that when the US intervenes internationally, it usually is self-serving for all its "doing God's work" rhetoric. If not for the Gallant storyline, Dakarai might as well have added that if a war in Iraq over non-existent Weapons of Mass Destruction had not diverted the funds that were allocated to reinforce failing structures as well as billions more dollars, there would be enough money to help New Orleans.[13]

Another viewer believed the show had made a real political difference to the situation and posted the following:

broken site: I don't usually watch ER but I did see the Darfur show and I was very glad to see some light shed on the subject. I can certainly understand people who didn't like it since it's not a usual show. I have a son who is in Africa and he says that the Sudanese government in Khartoum just signed a peace agreement based partly on the ER segment.[14]

As the previous comment suggests, just as some viewers engage through their cultural practices in genre-shifting in a way that emphasizes the show's journalistic and political as opposed to its hospital drama elements, others practice forms of genre reassertion, maintenance, and policing. Genre policing can be conducted through industrial production and scheduling practices or alternatively, as the following viewer comments illustrate, through audience-driven efforts to assert, stabilize, and maintain conventional assumptions about the acceptable elements and boundaries of particular genres (Mittell 2004, 59). There were many fans who intensely disliked the Africa episodes, believing them to be out of place, and who desperately wanted to get back to the "fictional" story in the Chicago hospital, "where the show belongs." Whereas some viewers simply said they hated or were bored by the Africa plot line or were "sick to death of St. John Carter's African adventure,"[15] others engaged in much more intense forms of genre policing. For one viewer, the Darfur episodes were "out of place in a season of perfection."[16] Indeed, a number of viewers insisted that this material did not belong and was disruptive to their entertainment, although some were careful to stress that they were not unconcerned about the situation in Darfur or the DRC but that they felt that these issues should be kept within more appropriate media genres or platforms, such as documentaries, weekly news magazines, and CNN.

Viewer comments help to reveal the role that such genre policing plays in the naturalization of political imaginaries that assert the need for a rigid separation of "politics" from "entertainment" (or news from drama);

the naturalization of such imaginaries works in turn to promote the reproduction of feelings of detachment from political genres (and thus from political participation) among large segments of the population. As Bourdieu (1984) has noted, although the dominant classes in capitalist liberal democracies officially abhor the widespread disengagement from formal politics practiced by many in the dominated classes, the "abstentionism" of the latter, which is brought about in part through the systemic maldistribution of competencies and opportunities to engage meaningfully and effectively, ultimately serves the interests of the former and should perhaps therefore be regarded as "not so much a hiccup in the system" but rather "as one of the conditions of its functioning as a misrecognized—and therefore recognized—restriction on political participation" (398). The naturalization of a rigidly categorical division between politics and entertainment into a socially effective mode of common sense works to compartmentalize "social life in order to make it both practically and semiotically more controllable" and is therefore "an essentially reactionary" practice that "discourages any critical interrogation of the larger social structure" (Fiske 1987, 287).

Indeed, our next set of viewer comments contrast with some of our earlier examples in ways that reveal systematic distinctions between what Bourdieu would identify as the popular habitus of the dominated classes and the educated, bourgeois habitus of the dominant. Hence, the following viewer testimonies assert a rigid distinction between education and mere TV entertainment, prioritize individualism at the expense of collectivity and solidarity, and suggest a desire to validate print culture over visuality and to promote thematic consistency and creative originality as criteria of value that trump more practical considerations such as politics and ethics. As Bourdieu (1984, 398) demonstrated, "legitimate" bourgeois taste excludes such practical concerns from the realm of the aesthetic and therefore rejects the popular demand for "continuity between art and life," which registers the popular classes' desire for participation and inclusion. Hence, from the standpoint of the official cultural values of the bourgeois habitus, aesthetic objects must never be "for" something apart from their own, self-justifying formal attributes and qualities, and the taste for art that serves any other function or purpose in the world is thus taken as evidence of crude sensibilities. In this case, then, the practice of generic purification and boundary policing ("news" vs. "entertainment" or even "escape") can be understood to operate as a transformation or subspecies of Bourdieu's well-documented bourgeois assertion of the need to maintain an inviolable distance between "art" (television drama) and "life" (real, third-world political and humanitarian crises) in ways that might be accompanied by explicit expressions of regret for widespread popular "abstentionism" around these African crises but that nevertheless reinforce such popular nonparticipation. The dispositions associated with the official cultural taste of the Western bourgeois habitus are faintly resonant (however contradictorily) in responses such as these:

> prairiegirl: I am sickened by what is going on in Darfur, I just don't want it hammered at me in the guise of "entertainment." I can watch the news, and read a newspaper or *Time* magazine. When I turn on ER, that is what I expect to see.[17]

> phredo: Yes, I care about the state of the world, but don't care to become further distressed about it during my one "me" hour of the week.[18]

> Kafski: I watch ER for an escape, to be entertained. I have watched several [other] shows on Darfur and I didn't watch to be entertained, but to be informed. Personally, I don't like it when entertainment shows try to educate me. I watch a ton of documentries and shows like ER are my brain candy.[19]

> Bughunter: I know it's hard after 10 years to think of something original to happen in an emergency room, but if I wanted to watch a show about a medical clinic in Africa, I'd find a show entitled "Rwanda Clinic," or something.[20]

Some of the online postings went further and expressed anger and resentment over producers "hijacking" the viewers' show to push a political message. Others asserted that the Africa episodes made them feel that they had been "condescended to" or "cheated." Two viewers posted the following resistant reactions:

> shadowydreamer: The clips with Carter in Africa are a blatant brick upside the head political statement. Some people at the ER writing staff and the admin got together and said "This is horrible, we must bring it to the people." And it is horrible, and awareness is a good thing, but . . . what does it have to do with ER?[21]

> JCVinEden: I had to get up and make myself a drink after the 40th panicked cry of "Janjaweed!!" Yes, we get it. The crazy men on horseback with assault weapons screaming at you in Arabic and beating your face are janjaweed. We are now all caught up on the vocabulary. Thank you, ER writers.[22]

Despite the textual gestures toward postdevelopment orientations and the *ER* producers' deliberate attempts

to engage politically, there is, of course, no guarantee that viewers will generate their preferred readings or that resistant readings—a topic much discussed in cultural studies—will necessarily be "progressive" (Glynn, Gray, and Wilson 2010). The resilience of dominant Western discourses and codes for the representation of Africa came through in the viewers' postings, partly in the way that even people who liked the episodes just felt sorry for those in Darfur and the DRC but also in the way that some viewers continued to work with notions of a homogenized "Africa." For instance, by the time the Darfur episodes were broadcast in season twelve, some people suggested that it had all been done before, that the producers had "made their point" in season ten and did not need to produce "just more of the same."[23]

> jekyll: We're not seeing [Carter] act and react with the rest of the cast, just dealing with things like intense poverty, civil unrest, and drought in Africa that most people have read about on CNN.com, and have already been touched upon in the other Africa-set episodes, to the point that it feels like most of the episode is a rerun.[24]

> NYGirl: I've come to the conclusion tonight that every single one of them [the Africa shows] is the same. Lots of guns, fighting, doctors about to get killed, yada yada yada. Someone gets beaten up violently.[25]

The intertextual circulation of "bids and counterbids" for textual meaning is, however, a deeply contested and potentially unending process. So, for instance, we noted that as soon as viewers interacting on one TV fan site (TelevisionWithoutPity.com) began to form a collective consensus that the Africa episodes had been "done before" or were "out of place," others in this interpretive community endeavored anew to unsettle the emergent consensus by noting their own shock and sadness at encountering such negative reactions among *ER* fans and reasserting the value and importance of the Africa episodes. In other words, no sooner had it begun to seem that generic and textual boundaries were being restabilized through the assertion of an inviolable barrier between the territories of TV news and drama in a fashion that excludes the consideration of geopolitical relations and events from *ER*'s diegetic universe than this newly reconstituted boundary was subjected to further disruption by other voices from within the interpretive community. As one viewer stated with reference to one of the Darfur shows:

> Phoenixphaerie: I'm a little apalled at the reaction to this episode. Sure I was hoping to a little more headway in the Neela/Ray situation, but I'd *never* complain about ER hilighting the **human suffering** that ALOT of the media is completely ignoring. Frankly, I never see this kind of stuff on t.v. unless it involves supporting a child for ten cents a day.[26]

> bimbo du jour: I'm with you (although I am sad at the reactions rather than appalled). I haven't watched ER in years, but I watched last night because of the article about the episode on CNN. And television coverage of Darfur isn't as widespread as some believe. . . . So, good for ER.[27]

> laserstrike: WRT this episode, I don't buy the argument that it did any disservice to the Darfur conflict. The Doctors Without Borders organization and leading Sudan scholars have lauded the episode for what it did for Darfur. The regularly scheduled dreary Luby bitchfests will return next week. . . . The Africa episodes are the only ones that get taken seriously. Not only do they provide a public service, they also give ER some credibility that no other current storylines do.[28]

> Bklyndeb: Without trying to be overly melodramatic here, as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and as someone who has a family where EVERY SINGLE PERSON of my generation is named for someone who was killed by the Nazis, anything that calls attention to a genocide is welcome. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in Darfur because of their ethnicity. 60 years later, we still seem to have not learned our lesson. If ANY group of people can be annihilated because of their race, religion or tribe, then ANY group of people can be annihilated because of their race religion or tribe, even you. So, even if it isn't entertaining, or fun, it behooves us as human beings, as fellow human beings, to take notice and try to do whatever we can, even it if is unsuccessful to help people who are in such a situation, because, it is just the moral and right thing to do.[29]

Finally, one viewer who felt that the producers had successfully drawn attention to the atrocities in Darfur and that it "had depressed the living shit" out of her, asked others in the group how she could do anything to change the situation, to which another poster replied as follows:

> iMissEthan: There was a website at the end of last week's episode. I believe if you went there, you would have been given information on how you can help, both by donating money and more importantly, contacting your Congressperson and asking for the US government to do more in Sudan.[30]

Conclusion

The often rich, passionate, and deliberative discussions generated by *ER* fans and viewers of the Africa episodes are potent reminders of what some

contemporary media and cultural studies scholars have characterized as the "citizenship qualities" of popular culture (Hermes 2005, 3). Hartley (1999, 157), for example, described television as a "transmodern teacher" whose edutaining electronic pedagogies have come to constitute "a new episode in the historical development of modern citizenship." Hartley reminded us that for more than 300 years, public decision making has been carried out within the realms of media and that citizenship is now more deeply mediated than ever. Hermes (2005, 3) observed that popular media culture provides resources that enable its participants to imagine and dream about the desires, hopes, anxieties, and fears they have for themselves and the world around them. Moreover, it facilitates and orchestrates dialogues, negotiations, and debates over the issues it raises and explores. As van Zoonen (2005, 63) noted, the citizenship qualities of popular media culture include the way in which fan groups, bound by affective commitments to one another and to their favorite texts and stars, create the conditions of possibility for passionate engagement in "strong communal discussions and deliberations." Van Zoonen's work suggests that the citizenship qualities of popular media culture include the cultivation of significant links between "affective identifications" (63), "emotional investments" (64), and deliberative participation. Thus, Hartley (following Richard Hoggart) noted that the education by "entertainment" and "charm" that TV performs has played a significant role in the amelioration of social manners, so that, for instance, decades of "nature programs" helped pave the way for new levels of public recognition of the need for and acceptance of environmental politics and activism, and certain forms of sexism have gradually become widely unthinkable thanks to TV's ongoing, persistent, and transgeneric exposure of women's issues, even among populations that would have preferred not to know about them (180–83).

We appear to be in the midst of the emergence of new modes of cultural citizenship that are being actively forged at the site of a set of rapidly changing relationships between media and popular culture. As Deuze (2009) observed, "the way people perceive and enact their role as citizens and consumers increasingly develops in the context of mediated and networked environments" (18). Hence, "consumer culture and civic engagement seem to be interconnected and co-creative rather than opposing value systems" (21). In this connection, the *ER* fans' dialogues illustrate the potential value of emergent forms of narrative complexity and new opportunities for intense affective engagement across the participatory transmedia realms of the new media ecology. These developments suggest an ever more urgent need to abandon binarized notions of "serious media" versus "mere entertainment" and to pay closer attention to the expanding array of media realms that blur such categories and thereby open spaces that facilitate the emergence of messier and more complex sites of negotiation and dialogue—that is, sites of activities that are citizen-like.

We are plainly not arguing that citizens can gain adequate critical insight into Africa's complex development geographies from fictional TV drama alone but that such programming could have an important role to play within our contemporary media environment. Within the *ER* episodes under discussion here, it is clear that although such critical insight is restricted and contained, for example, by the shows' intertextual resonances with conventional Western media iconographies of Africa, critical insight is nevertheless enhanced at the same time by the program's narrative complexity and postdevelopment-like skepticism toward modernist ways of being and knowing. Indeed, these episodes are working with dominant representations of Africa in a way that repeatedly problematizes such representations and suggests a range of alternative knowledges through which "Africa" might be known—but to call dominant codes into question, *ER* must partially reproduce them. The discussions within the online forums similarly demonstrate how the dominant and formulaic meanings that get attached to Africa are at once resilient and unstable, subject to contestation and amenable to reworking.

In our view, the episodes maintain a difficult balance between acknowledging political, social, and cultural specificity and simultaneously revealing that there are similar economic and racializing forces at work in Chicago, New Orleans, and Darfur and that it is sometimes possible to forge affective alliances and build solidarities across both distance and difference. In "Makemba," after making a series of mistakes, Carter partially redeems himself when, although he fails to change the world, he nevertheless does at least organize a Christmas party with decorations and gifts that provide a moment of happiness amidst war, illness, and hardship. Although on one level this resolution might seem formulaically sentimental, on another it nicely encapsulates how *ER*'s Africa episodes managed to show us something of the horrors of everyday life in the DRC and Darfur—which operate on a scale that is unimaginable to most first-world viewers—at the same time leaving us with a sense of hope that it is sometimes possible

to "cultivate productive connectivities between spectator and distant sufferer" (Chouliaraki 2008, 386). These are precisely the issues that both inform and plague (post)development. Even if we consider development to be an abhorrent neocolonial project, when faced with the issue of people who are deprived of basic needs or fleeing war and conflict, we must respond and do so in a way that is cognizant of difference and fosters an ethic of care and connection. Paradoxically, we end up calling on development to address development's failures. In the process, though, development, like genre, can be contested and rearticulated and can therefore sometimes lead to progressive social and political change.

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Notes

1. We use the term *Western* to designate a discursive construct produced by (and productive of) a complex set of historical power relations. As Frankenberg (1993, 265) wrote, "Westernness" implicates "a particular, dominative relationship to . . . colonial expansion, a belonging to center rather than margin . . . and a privileged relationship to institutions" that include but are not limited to media. We are not suggesting that either the "West" or its media are monolithic, internally undifferentiated, or unconflicted; rather, we are indicating certain well established and predominant (but not uncontradicted) representational tendencies within "Western media." Interestingly, Franks and Ribet (2009) noted that treatments of African issues in Chinese media tend not to promote the "Afro-pessimism" often identified in Western media discourses and representations.
2. See, for example, the photographs taken by Panos Pictures (http://www.panos.co.uk) and the work of Brazilian photographer Sebastião Ribeiro Salgado (discussed at length in Campbell 2003), which aim instead to show a diversity of images of Africa.
3. For example, a 184-page report commissioned by the Department for International Development (DFID, the British government aid agency) and conducted by the Glasgow University media group to explore coverage of developing countries on British television provided detailed information about representations of the third world in news and current affairs; topical and politically oriented comedy shows; and wildlife, travel, and cooking programs but paid no attention whatsoever to coverage in TV drama (see DFID 2000).
4. More than 20 million for seasons nine and ten (2002–2004) and around 13 million for season twelve (2005–2006).
5. This is the second time in the Africa episodes where Carter attempts to uses his wealth to solve a problem and winds up looking foolish. In "The Lost," on the advice of an expat working at the U.S. embassy, he tries to use the Red Cross to give a large sum of money to warring militias in return for Kovac's body and risks compromising their neutrality.
6. Available at http://www.tv.com/er/darfur/episode/578614/summary.html
7. Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=830zEDEA1QU
8. Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=830zEDEA1QU
9. Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWGa_U27r54&feature=related
10. Available at http://www.tv.com/er/kisangani/episode/239241/reviews.html?tag=capsule_reviews;more;bottom
11. Available at http://boards.straightdope.com/sdmb/showthread.php?t=228872
12. Available at http://www.tv.com/er/kisangani/episode/239241/reviews.html?tag=capsule_reviews;more;bottom
13. Available at http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/lofiversion/index.php/%5C%22img48.exs.cx/img48/5945/t3116836–5550.html
14. Available at http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/lofiversion/index.php/%5C%22img48.exs.cx/img48/5945/t3116836–5550.html
15. Available at http://boards.straightdope.com/sdmb/showthread.php?t=228872
16. Available at http://www.tv.com/er/darfur/episode/578614/summary.html
17. Available at http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/lofiversion/index.php/%5C%22img48.exs.cx/img48/5945/t3116836–5550.html
18. Available at http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/lofiversion/index.php/%5C%22img48.exs.cx/img48/5945/t3116836–5550.html
19. Available at http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/lofiversion/index.php/%5C%22img48.exs.cx/img48/5945/t3116836–5550.html
20. Available at http://boards.straightdope.com/sdmb/showthread.php?t=228872
21. Available at http://www.tv.com/er/darfur/episode/578614/summary.html
22. Available at http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/lofiversion/index.php/%5C%22img48.exs.cx/img48/5945/t3116836–5550.html
23. Available at http://www.amazon.com/ER-Complete-Twelfth-Goran-Visnjic/dp/B001JAHQ16
24. Available at http://www.tv.com/er/darfur/episode/578614/summary.html
25. Available at http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/lofiversion/index.php/%5C%22img48.exs.cx/img48/5945/t3116836–5550.html
26. Available at http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/lofiversion/index.php/%5C%22img48.exs.cx/img48/5945/t3116836–5550.html
27. Available at http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/lofiversion/index.php/%5C%22img48.exs.cx/img48/5945/t3116836–5550.html

28. Available at http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/lofiversion/index.php/%5C%22img48.exs.cx/img48/5945/t3116836–5550.html. "Luby" is fanspeak for "Luca and Abby," two central characters involved in a fraught romantic relationship.
29. Available at http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/lofiversion/index.php/%5C%22img48.exs.cx/img48/5945/t3116836–5550.html
30. Available at http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/lofiversion/index.php/%5C%22img48.exs.cx/img48/5945/t3116836–5550.html

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