

VIDEOGAMES AND GLOBAL POWER INEQUALITIES

A study about the representations of the Global South in historically themed videogames released between 2000 and 2020



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Introduction: The beginning of a journey

Millions of people in the entire world experience history nowadays through art and media, amongst which videogames play a huge role. Through my own experiences as a "gamer" I have experienced many Western developed games that took place within the so called Global South. And also as a historian with a particular interest in the Global South I contend that many of these Western representations fall into concepts such as othering, orientalism, colonialism, and the white saviour trope. For example, people from the Global South are more often than not represented as agency-less and in need of rescue by a Western protagonist. What is also interesting is that, in the last two decades or so, developers from the Global South increasingly sought to establish their own videogame studios. Due to the greater possibilities available to small independent videogame developers (known as indie developers), a growing number of indigenous people are making their own games that try to better represent their culture and way of life. A good example of this is the Tarahumara (a Mexican native culture) videogame called *Mulaka*, which is about various Tarahumaran mythologies.¹ By working with the Tarahumara the Mexican developers at Lienzo represented their history, culture, and mythology inside a videogame. The developers gave the Tarahumara a sense of agency through the medium of videogames, which is called indigenous agency in this thesis.

Historiography

Since the year 2000 a small field of study emerged about historically themed videogames. Basically there are two dominant perspectives in this field, which are about historically themed videogames developed in the Western world that are set in the Global South on the one hand, and historically themed videogames set and developed in the Global South on the other hand. In the case of the former, the Global South is, for example, represented as the agency-less other. In the case of the latter, the Global South is represented by the people living in it. It covers the ways in which videogame developers from the Global South added to, differed from, or changed the representations made about their countries in the Western world.

The first four studies from the former perspective are about Western representations about the Global South through the medium of videogames. Firstly, is the 2008 study called *Digital digs, or Lara Croft replaying Indiana Jones: Archaeological tropes and "colonial loops"* in new media narratives by Claudia Breger. It is about the *Tomb Raider series* (1996 -) and its

¹ *Mulaka*, developed by Lienzo and published by Lienzo in 2018.

links to imperialist and colonialist tropes. The player takes on the role of Lara Croft while raiding the cultural artifacts of other cultures.² This trope showed no signs of slowing down in the late 00's and the 2010's with, for example, the *Uncharted series* (2007 -). In these games your objective is also to search for treasure in, mostly, the Global South.

The next relevant study is the 2015 article *From destination to nation and back: The hyperreal journey of Incredible India* by Siddhartha Chakraborti.³ He argues that India has always been imagined as an exotic destination ripe for intervention by the West. This depiction has been carried forward to the virtual world of computer games. In these games India is seen as a passive, feminine destination for the exploits of the western traveller. Furthermore, he contends that videogames about India are built around the idea that the West, in the guise of a so-called traveller-adventurer, needs to intervene in India in order ensure India's existence and to save India from itself.⁴

In 2017 and 2018 Souvik Mukherjee published *Videogames and postcolonialism: Empire plays back*⁵ and *Playing Subaltern: Video games and postcolonialism*.⁶ In both studies he argued that videogames are the latest medium to represent the colonial and the postcolonial world. Many historical videogames are Western-centred and do not challenge the ideas of colonialism. An important aspect of his studies is about colonialism and the spatial practice of mapmaking. Mapmaking was a cornerstone of imperial policy, which can be found in games such as *Empire: Total War* and *Age of Empires 3*.⁷ Mukherjee contends that the tactics of these games are like the ruling and expansion of an empire.

Mukherjee also argued that play is not only an important aspect to bolster colonialist perspectives, but also as a way of playing back. People from the former colonies can tell their own stories through games. Games such as *Empire: Total War* lets the player make their own history by managing a colonial empire.⁸ This makes multiple perspectives possible, because the player can, for example, play as the Maratha Confederacy and conquer Great Britain instead. However, Mukherjee contends that these nations are represented with many historical errors.

² Claudia Breger, "Digital digs, or Lara Croft replaying Indiana Jones: Archaeological tropes and "colonial loops" in new media narrative," *Aether: The journal of media geography* 11, no. 2 (April 2008): 41-60.

³ Siddhartha Chakraborti, "From destination to nation and back: The hyperreal journey of Incredible India," *Journal of gaming & Virtual worlds* 7, no. 2 (June 2015): 183-202.

⁴ Chakraborti, 184.

⁵ Souvik Mukherjee, *Videogames and postcolonialism: Empire plays back* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁶ Souvik Mukherjee, "Playing subaltern: Video games and postcolonialism," *Games and culture* 13, no. 5 (2016): 504-520.

⁷ *Empire: Total war*, developed by Creative Assembly and published by Sega in 2009 and *Age of Empires 3*, developed by Ensemble Studios and published by Microsoft game studios in 2005.

⁸ *Empire: Total war*, developed by Creative Assembly and published by Sega in 2009.

The next two studies are about the power dynamics behind videogame development in the Western world. The first of these two studies is *Toward a political economic framework for analysing digital development games: A case study of three games for Africa* by Jolene Fisher. In this 2016 study Fisher analyses games alongside the organizations and funding structures behind them. In each of the three case studies the organization that made and/or funded the game also incorporated their ideology in it. For example, The World Bank game *EVOKE* (which was targeted for a Sub-Saharan African audience) proposes that neoliberal ideas such as marketization and entrepreneurship are solutions to combat poverty and inequality, while not addressing the role of such policies in enforcing these issues.⁹

The second of these two studies is *The political economy of cultural memory in the videogames industry* by Emil Lundedal Hammar.¹⁰ In this 2019 study Lundedal Hammar argued that ‘the production, distribution and consumption of historical videogames are highly conditioned by the social and economic power hierarchies in which producers operate.’¹¹ Because video game developers and publishers need to make a profit they make games that they know will sell by telling a story they know their primary audience would be invested in. This is an important argument why the Global South is depicted as it is in Western games production. What their audience like is based on assumptions: ‘As such, I propose that their assumptions rest on implicit notions about identity cultivated by the hegemonic values of the society they live in. This means that my informants reproduced their own biases about gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and social class, and how these categories influenced who would be “the target market,” i.e. those with purchasing power’.¹² So, historically themed videogames are structured by the hegemonic mass culture in which they are produced. My main critique of the studies done by Fisher and Lundedal Hammar is that it does not account for Western developers making a game set in the Global South which represent this part of the world with complexity, agency, and understanding of history. A good example is *Total War: Three Kingdoms*, which is about the Chinese Three Kingdoms period.¹³ The American developers at Creative Assembly relied heavily on Chinese texts of the time for their source material. Furthermore, the developers made the Chinese concept of Guanxi a core concept of the game. Guanxi is a system of social networks between people that are based on favours, moral

⁹ Jolene Fisher, “Toward a political economic framework for analyzing digital development games: A case study of three games for Africa,” *Communication, culture & critique* 9 (2016): 30-48.

¹⁰ Emil Lundedal Hammar, “The political economy of cultural memory in the videogames industry,” *Digital culture & society* vol. 5, no. 1 (2019): 61-84.

¹¹ Lundedal Hammar, 76.

¹² Lundedal Hammar, 76.

¹³ *Total War: Three Kingdoms*, developed by Creative Assembly and published by Sega in 2019.

obligations, and reciprocity. The concept of Guanxi gives the game a Chinese perspective and it makes the gameplay complex. Furthermore, Guanxi also deepens the Chinese historical characters and their relationships during the conflicts.

The first relevant study from the latter perspective is the 2005 study *Reclaiming culture: Indigenous people and self-representation* by Joy Hendry.¹⁴ It is about indigenous people reclaiming their own culture. Hendry is not clear about the definition of indigenous people. She mentions both (former) colonized people and marginalized people such as the Ainu of North-Japan, which is a broad definition. I argue that it is better to define indigenous people as the original people of a region. For example, the Tarahumara are the indigenous people of La Sierra Tarahumara in North-West Mexico. These cultures have long thought to be threatened because of processes of colonization and globalization. Western and other dominant powers sought to “save” these cultures by placing their artifacts in museums in order to educate visitors about indigenous cultures. However, in this book Hendry is arguing that over the last decade or so indigenous people have practiced a heightened sense of indigenous agency to represent their culture and history in their own way. Although Hendry mentions a lot of activities where this “reclaiming” takes place, there is no place for indigenous agency and the reclaiming of culture in videogames.

The first study that incorporates indigenous agency in videogames is the 2007 study *The political battlefield of pro-Arab video games on Palestinian screens* by Helga Tawil Souri.¹⁵ It is about three pro-Arab games: *Under Ash*, *Under Siege* and *Special Force*.¹⁶ Tawil Souri explores how these games contest Western hegemony and how they represent the Palestinian perspective against Israel. These games give the defenceless a sense of power against an enemy that they cannot defeat militarily. Roughly the same argument is put forward by Mohammed Ibahrine in his 2015 chapter *Video games as civilizational configurations: US – Arab encounters*.¹⁷ The difference with Tawil Souri’s text is that Ibahrine takes a broader perspective by analysing the wider Arab world.

¹⁴ Joy Hendry, *Reclaiming culture: Indigenous people and self-representation* (New-York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

¹⁵ Helga Tawil Souri, “The political battlefield of pro-Arab games on Palestinian screens,” in *Comparative studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 3 (2007): 536-551.

¹⁶ *Under Ash*, developed by Radwan Kasmyia and published by Afkar Media in 2001; *Under Siege*, developed by Afkar Media and published by Dar al-Fikr in 2005; *Special Force*, developed by Hezbollah and published by Hezbollah in 2003.

¹⁷ Mohammed Ibahrine, “Video games as civilizational configurations: US – Arab encounters,” in *Islamism and cultural expression in the Arab world*, eds. Abir Hamdar and Lindsey Moore (London: Routledge, 2015), 206-221.

The 2019 article *Subaltern Discourses in Video Game Design: Pre-Columbian Cultures and Resilient Strategies in Interactive Narrative Devices* by Daniel Escandell-Montiel is also about indigenous agency, but about Pre-Columbian cultures instead.¹⁸ The study focusses on how some indigenous and current Latin-American cultures have been represented in the videogame industry. Furthermore, the study also discusses how these minoritized groups have developed resilience strategies to reclaim control over how they are represented in public discourse.¹⁹

Video games around the world, published in 2015 and edited by Mark J. P. Wolf and Toru Iwatani, was the first compilation of videogame studies.²⁰ It offers case studies about the video game industry from many countries. For some of these case studies they are the first written accounts on this topic. It also discusses the development process of games developed in the Global South, as well as the objectives the developers wanted to reach with their games.

The last study of this discussion is the 2019 anthology *Video games and the Global South*, which was edited by Phillip Penix-Tadsen.²¹ It is the first major work that discusses videogames in the Global South, with regions including Africa, the Middle East, Central and South America, the Indian subcontinent and parts of Oceania and Asia.²² My main critique on *Video games around the world* and *Video games and the Global South* is that these two works generally do not include historically themed videogames released after 2010, which is a gap that needs to be filled.

In my opinion this historiography is missing an important part, which is a discussion about the impact historically themed videogames set and developed in the Global South have on a global scale. For example, the California based developer Naughty Dog, with *Uncharted: The Lost Legacy* has sold 2.37 million copies worldwide.²³ While another action-adventure videogame called *Hanuman: Boy Warrior* and developed in India has sold 90.000 copies.²⁴ Both games are set in India, but the reach, quality and reviews differ enormously.²⁵ I am

¹⁸ Daniel Escandell-Montiel, "Subaltern discourses in video game design: Pre-Columbian cultures and resilient strategies in interactive narrative devices," in *Glocal narratives of resistance*, ed. Ana María Fraile-Marcos, 56-72. New-York: Routledge, 2020.

¹⁹ Escandell-Montiel, 56.

²⁰ Mark J. P. Wolf and Toru Iwatani, eds., *Video games around the world* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015).

²¹ Phillip Penix-Tadsen, ed, *Video games and the global south* (Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press, 2019).

²² Penix-Tadsen, 6-7.

²³ "Sales for Uncharted: The lost legacy," <https://www.vgchartz.com/game/147591/uncharted-the-lost-legacy/> (last visited on September 2, 2020).

²⁴ Souvik Mukherjee, "India," in *Video games around the world*, eds. Mark J. P. Wolf and Toru Iwatani (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), 238.

²⁵ "Review for Uncharted: The lost legacy," <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-4/uncharted-the-lost-legacy> (last visited on September 2, 2020) ; Owen Good, "India's first game gets India's first game controversy," <https://kotaku.com/indias-first-game-gets-indias-first-game-controversy-5217826> (last visited on September 8, 2020) ; Leigh Alexander, "Hindu statesman criticizes Sony's Hanuman: Boy warrior,"

therefore wondering whether historically themed videogames set and developed in the Global South really have the power to add to, differ from or change the representations made about their countries in the Western world. If so, is the videogame industry yet another arena in which there are global power inequalities between the Western world and the Global South? This is rather important to address, because in its essence this is about who has the power to represent whom. Furthermore, scholarship about historically themed videogames generally, do not include videogames released after 2010. So, in this thesis I am also including videogames released between 2010 and 2020.

This discussion leads to the main research question of this thesis: How does the development of historically themed videogames set in the Global South reflect global power inequalities?

In order to address this question fully, this thesis will take into account games developed in the Western world as well as in the Global South between 2000 and 2020.

Methodology and thesis structure

To answer this question, I shall use eight methodological concepts that can be found in the games discussed in this thesis, which are othering, orientalism, colonialism, agency, stereotypes, the white saviour trope, self-orientalising and indigenous agency.

According to philosopher Robert Bernasconi the process of othering is constituted by our use of discourse, which means the way we think, speak, and act towards something. For example, the man is the other to the woman and vice versa, because we accept this discourse in our society. He also acknowledges that this process of othering occurred when the West encountered Non-Western cultures.²⁶ Othering also occurs in videogames. For example, in *Red Dead Redemption I*, the Mexican governor of Nuevo Paraiso is represented as an incompetent, angry, sadistic, and corrupt southerner. While on the other hand the sheriff of the American town Armadillo just across the border, is depicted as a capable, friendly, helpful, and calm man. In this case the other is represented in a negative way without any nuance.²⁷

https://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/114224/Hindu_Statesman_Criticizes_Sonys_Hanuman_Boy_Warrior.php (last visited on September 8, 2020) ; Mukherjee, "India," 238.

²⁶ Robert Bernasconi, "Other," in *The Oxford companion to philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 92.

²⁷ *Red Dead Redemption 1*, developed by Rockstar San Diego and published by Rockstar Games in 2010.

Orientalism is about the Western construct of the East, mainly Asia. It is a form of othering and could be applied when discussing Western representations of Asia. The founder of this concept, Edward Said defines it in the following way: ‘Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.’²⁸ Asia is constructed as the other to the West. Therefore, Asia is everything that the West is not, and vice versa. For example, the West is represented as “under control” while Asia is represented as chaotic. An example from a videogame is *Beyond: Two Souls* in which the protagonist, who is a CIA agent, has to eliminate a Somali warlord during the Somali civil war (1989 – present). While Somalia is not in Asia, the idea of a (in this case) chaotic South and a “under control” West is also relevant here. The city in which this particular chapter takes place is engulfed in this chaotic civil war. The faceless Somalis are only fighting each other while standing no chance against the calm and deadly effective protagonist.²⁹

The concept of colonialism is also very prevalent in historically themed videogames developed in the Western world. Colonialism means that a country controls another country or area and its populace. A scholar who has done a lot of work on the connection between colonialism and videogames is the already mentioned Souvik Mukherjee. A game which Mukherjee discusses as an example of colonialism in videogames is *Empire: Total war*, where the objective is to build a colonial empire.³⁰ Furthermore, certain policies are also seen as colonialist tropes. For example, Claudia Breger has argued in *Digital digs*, or Lara Croft replaying Indiana Jones: Archaeological tropes and “colonial loops” in new media narratives that games from the *Tomb Raider series* (1996 -) follow a colonialist narrative of raiding the cultural artifacts of other cultures.

Agency is the idea that an actor does or does not have the ability to make his or her own independent choices.³¹ Actors from the Global South are usually depicted without any agency. For example in *Uncharted II* the Nepali guerrillas are represented as faceless cannon fodder who just die all the time.³²

²⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 1-28.

²⁹ *Beyond: Two Souls*, developed by Quantic Dream and published by Sony Computer Entertainment in 2013.

³⁰ Souvik Mukherjee, “Playing subaltern: Video games and postcolonialism,” *Games and culture* 13, no. 5 (2016): 510; *Empire: Total war*, developed by Creative Assembly and published by Sega in 2009.

³¹ Donald M. Macrauld and Avram Taylor, *Social theory and social history* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 39.

³² *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*, developed by Naughty Dog and published by Sony Computer Entertainment in 2009.

According to economist Pedro Bordalo stereotypes are fixed general images or set of characteristics that a lot of people believe represent a particular type of person or thing. These representations are mostly untrue.³³ A good example of a stereotype comes from *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* and is called Mayincatec, which is the stereotype where all important South- and Central-American cultures are represented as one culture.³⁴

The white saviour trope is also a recurring representation regarding Western developed games about the Global South. According to sociologist Ranjan Bandyopadhyay the white saviour complex refers to western people feeling the need to “fix” the problems of suffering nations or people of colour. He compares this modern example with the white man’s burden of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.³⁵ An example from a game is the role of Lawrence of Arabia within the Arab Revolt of 1916-1918 in *Battlefield I*.³⁶

Self-orientalising is the act of people in Asia placing themselves within the Western orientalist framework. For example, the idea that the West is materialist and that the East still maintains its spiritual character. According to Arif Dirlik, this should not be seen as a form of subjugation or powerlessness, but as newly acquired power to represent the self.³⁷ An example of a videogame that falls into this category is *Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror*. In the game, the protagonists parents have just passed away and he has to make their house suitable for sale. But a spirit lives inside the house. What is so interesting about this game is that the idea of respect for spirits, their possessions and their house is important to survive. If, for example you throw away certain objects, there is a higher chance that the spirit will show itself and kill you. The game presents these ideas about respect, material objects and death as core Indonesian values. This fits perfectly inside the representation of the East as a spiritual place, which is also part of orientalism.

Lastly is the concept of indigenous agency. As already discussed earlier in this introduction this concept is about indigenous people taking the representation of their history and culture into their own hands. The concept is discussed in *Reclaiming culture: Indigenous people and self-representation* by Joy Hendry. In this book Hendry is arguing that over the last decade or so indigenous people have practiced a heightened sense of indigenous agency to

³³ Pedro Bordalo, *Stereotypes* (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2014), 1.

³⁴ *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*, developed by Eidos Montreal and Crystal Dynamics and published by Square Enix in 2018.

³⁵ Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, “Volunteer tourism and “the white man’s burden”: globalization of suffering, white savior complex, religion and modernity,” in *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 27, no. 3 (March 2019): 327-330.

³⁶ *Battlefield I*, developed by EA DICE and published by Electronic Arts in 2016.

³⁷ Arif Dirlik, “Chinese history and the question of orientalism,” *History and theory* vol. 35, no. 4 (December 1996): 96.

represent their culture and history in their own way. However, I also discussed that Hendry's definition of indigenous peoples is too broad. In this thesis indigenous peoples mean the original people of a region. For example, the Tarahumara are the indigenous people of La Sierra Tarahumara in North-West Mexico. A good example of a videogame that fits into this category is the already mentioned Tarahumara game *Mulaka*, which is about various Tarahumaran mythologies. By working with the Tarahumara the Mexican developers at Lienzo represented their history, culture, and mythology inside a videogame. The developers gave the Tarahumara a sense of agency through the medium of videogames.

This thesis is structured into three chapters, each trying to answer one sub-question. In the first chapter I shall discuss Western representations of the Global South through historically themed videogames. As discussed in the critical reflection on the historiography there is a gap between 2010 and 2020, so I shall solve this by discussing more videogames from this decade, but I shall also discuss videogames released between 2000 and 2010. The concepts that I shall apply to answer this question are othering, orientalism, colonialism, agency, stereotypes, and the white saviour trope. After I have discussed a game I shall explain how it is related to one of these concepts. The chapter is divided into certain themes in which the Global South is represented, which are "places," "objects," and "people." Besides these three themes, I also argue that there are games which could be considered as exceptions. Meaning games which represent the Global South with complexity, agency, and respect. Lastly, I contend that we should also not forget the added value of these games in the sphere of public history.

In the second chapter I shall discuss historically themed videogames set and developed in the Global South. The concepts that I shall apply in this chapter are indigenous agency for every game and self-orientalising for one game. This chapter is divided into two themes of games which perform this indigenous agency and self-orientalising, which are "videogames which critique Western developed games by telling an indigenous story" and "videogames which try to represent a part of indigenous history and culture by telling an indigenous story." Some of the games in the second theme also make use of what I would call indigenous gameplay mechanics, which are mechanics in which indigenous culture is incorporated within gameplay. There is also a third theme called "Videogames which follow the West." In this theme I discuss one example of a game which uses Western tropes about the Global South. The theme serves as a reminder that, just like in the first chapter, there are exceptions.

Something to keep in mind is that, in order to make a decent analysis, I have to make use of generalizations. This means that I shall look for similarities between Western developed videogames about the Global South and make a generalization out of that. This shall also be

done for historically themed videogames set and developed in the Global South. An example for the West is that objects from the Global South are more than once depicted as something to be raided. An example for the Global South is that videogames which try to better represent a part of indigenous history and culture all share the fact that they include a sense of indigenous agency. But it is important to remember that these generalizations are only probable truths. The possibilities of exceptions are always looming on the horizon.

Within both these chapters I shall also discuss the sales numbers and the review scores. My sources for sales numbers are from videogame journalists and/or websites, and videogame publishers. Two important websites with sales numbers are www.vgchartz.com and www.steamspy.com. My sources for review scores are from videogame journalists and from review aggregator Metacritic. There are four problems with these numbers/scores. Firstly, videogame publishers, vgchartz, Steamspy, and review aggregator Metacritic only make use of averages. While these averages are accurate, they are not exact numbers. Secondly, sales numbers are only available for certain timestamps. For example, when a game is released in 2011 sales numbers are published for that year. Only when a publisher deems it relevant are sales numbers published for let's say 2018. Thirdly, Metacritic reviews are susceptible to change when a new review is published. Most reviews are of course published around the time of release, but it is possible for a reviewer to add a review many years after release. Fourthly, there are some games about which there are no sales numbers and reviews available. What also tends to happen is that sales numbers and reviews are available for one gaming platform, but not for others. This is only a problem for games published on multiple platforms, such as PC and PS. This problem leads to inaccurate or absent numbers. Furthermore, some games from the Global South are rather obscure, which tend to lead to absent sales numbers and review scores. Sometimes only one or two journalists have reviewed the game, which is too few to be representative of the entire player base.

My criteria for the chosen videogames are based on two factors. As an insider I know which historically themed videogames set in the Global South and developed in the Western world are considered the most popular and successful. To spare words I have chosen to not discuss games from which I can make the same argument. For example, I do not discuss every *Uncharted* game, because all of them have colonialist narratives. For historically themed videogames set in the Global South and developed in the Global South I rely on scholarship about the videogame industries in these countries.

In the third chapter I shall discuss the videogame industries of the Global South. Firstly, I shall cover seven developments which have impacted the videogame industries of the Global

South. Secondly, I shall cover three factors which have impacted historically themed videogames in the Global South. The developments of the first part have impacted these industries in a broad sense, meaning videogame companies, and historically themed videogames as well as non-historically themed videogames. The factors of the second part have solely impacted videogame companies which develop historically themed videogames. In the chapter I argue that videogame developers in the Global South, who develop historically themed videogames, are subject to factors and developments that have minimized their companies, and their historically themed games', success in the global videogames industry and market. Subsequently, this chapter shall also show that non-historically themed videogames are way more popular in the Global South. Huge companies, like the Chinese Tencent, have profited greatly from the success of these non-historically themed games. However, most of these games are also developed in the Western World, meaning that here too most of the knowledge and expertise are centred in the West.

Western world

Chapter introduction

This chapter will cover the representations of the Global South by historically themed videogames developed in the Western world between 2000 and 2020. These representations are divided into three themes, which are “places,” “objects,” and “people.” In the chapter I argue that these games represent the Global South from perspectives of othering, orientalism, colonialism, and the perspective that the Global South lacks a sense of agency. However, I also argue that there are games which could be considered as exceptions to these generalizations. Lastly, I contend that we should also not forget the added value of these games in the sphere of public history.

There are these places far, far away...

Based on the videogames discussed in this chapter places can be divided into two categories. The first category is the disordered, impoverished and/or mystical place. These kind of places could be considered as other and oriental. Because also in Orientalism the Orient is depicted as the disordered, impoverished and/or mystical other to the ordered, rich, and/or scientific West. The second category is the place that needs to be possessed, which is related to the concept of colonialism, because this concept is about possessing and controlling other places and people. These two categories are sometimes connected to each other, for example when the protagonist needs to find a place in a mystical environment that he or she wants to possess.

First I shall give a few examples of games from the first category. In 2010 Grand Theft Auto developer and publisher Rockstar went Wild West with *Red Dead Redemption I*.³⁸ It was a huge success with fifteen million sales as of February 7, 2017.³⁹ Reviews are also great with a 95 out of 100 on Metacritic.⁴⁰ The protagonist of the game is John Marston, who needs to kill the members of his former gang in order to save his family. The game takes place in 1911 during the waning years of the wild west. In his quest for redemption Marston also travels to the most-northern province of Mexico, which in this game is called Nuevo Paraiso. And just like “in the real 1911” Mexico is engulfed in the Mexican Revolution.

³⁸ Red Dead Redemption 1, developed by Rockstar San Diego and published by Rockstar Games in 2010.

³⁹ Eddie Makuch, “Red Dead Redemption 2: Take-Two talks competition with GTA online, marketing support, and more” <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/red-dead-redemption-2-take-two-talks-competition-w/1100-6447645/> (last visited September 1, 2020).

⁴⁰ “Review of Red Dead Redemption 1,” <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/red-dead-redemption> (last visited on September 1, 2020).

In the game the theme of progress and civilization play a huge role. For example, on the American side of the border you have the modern town of Blackwater. With its paved roads, electricity, and photo galleries, Blackwater represents at the same time a new modern age and the dying wild west. In Nuevo Paraiso there are no such towns. The capital of the province, Escalera, is nothing more than a degraded village. In “real life” northern towns such as Ciudad Juarez were just as big and modern as American towns like Blackwater. There were paved roads, cars, electricity, et cetera.



Figure 1: The town of Blackwater in Red Dead Redemption I⁴¹



Figure 2: The town of Escalera in Red Dead Redemption I⁴²

⁴¹ Figure 1, “Blackwater,” on nl.pinterest.com (last visited on September 5, 2020).

⁴² Figure 2, “Escalera,” on reddead.fandom.com (last visited on September 5, 2020).



Figure 3: Ciudad Juárez around 1900⁴³

In this case Mexico is represented as the impoverished other to the rich and developed America. One could wonder why Rockstar San Diego chose to represent Mexico this way, because they were clearly able to build a modern city as it would roughly look like in 1911.

There are also games which depict the Middle East and North Africa solely as disordered war zones in need of Western intervention. In 2013 the French developer Quantic Dream developed *Beyond: Two Souls*.⁴⁴ It sold pretty well with 2.8 million copies sold as of July 2018.⁴⁵ Reviews were also good with an average of 72 out of 100 on Metacritic.⁴⁶ In the game there is a chapter where the American protagonist, who is a CIA agent, has to eliminate a Somali warlord during the Somali civil war (1989 – present). The city in which this particular chapter takes place is engulfed in this chaotic civil war.⁴⁷

⁴³ Figure 3, “Recordad es vivir; tranvía en Ciudad Juárez,” on elheraldodejuarez.com.mx (last visited on September 5, 2020).

⁴⁴ *Beyond: Two Souls*, developed by Quantic Dream and published by Sony Computer Entertainment in 2013.

⁴⁵ Pramath, “*Beyond: Two Souls* has sold 2.8 million copies worldwide: *Beyond* was another victory for David Cage, and his team at Quantic Dream” <https://gamingbolt.com/beyond-two-souls-sold-2-8-million-copies> (last visited on September 1, 2020).

⁴⁶ “Reviews for *Beyond: Two Souls*,” <https://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/beyond-two-souls>, <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-4/beyond-two-souls> and <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/beyond-two-souls> (last visited on September 1, 2020).

⁴⁷ Figure 4, “*Beyond: Two Souls* – The mission: Jodie possesses Salim’s father & kills Jamal “He’s your father?” on Youtube.com (last visited on September 5, 2020); Figure 5, “*Beyond: Two Souls* – Gemaal Sheik Charrief’s death,” on Youtube.com (last visited on September 5, 2020).



Figure 4: The protagonist sneaking through the war-torn Somali city



Figure 5: Somali soldier, manipulated by the protagonist, about to execute the Somali warlord and his staff

The Middle East and Africa are often depicted as a disordered and war-torn place. That is also why the majority of the games set in these regions are wargames. While this is the case for historically themed videogames, it happens most often in videogames set in modern times as for example the recently released *Call of Duty Modern Warfare* and its depiction of the war-torn fictional Middle Eastern country of Urzikstan.⁴⁸ Another good example is *Far Cry 2*, with its depiction of a fictional failed African state embroiled in a bloody civil war and consumed

⁴⁸ *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, developed by Infinity Ward and published by Activision in 2019.

by the trade in blood diamonds.⁴⁹ Or the destruction of Dubai in *Spec Ops: The Line*, the list goes on.⁵⁰



Figure 6: An example of a modern depiction of the Middle East in the videogame *Spec Ops: The Line*. A dead American sniper in a snipers nest overlooking a destroyed Dubai⁵¹

Besides *Beyond: Two Souls*, *Sniper Elite 3* is another good example of a historically themed videogame which depicts the Middle East and Africa as a disordered and war-torn place. The game was developed and published by Rebellion Developments in 2014.⁵² The game sold 740.000 copies within three months of release, which is pretty decent.⁵³ *Sniper Elite 3* received mixed reviews with a 69 out of a 100 on Metacritic.⁵⁴ The game takes place in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia during the Western Desert Campaign (1940-1943). You play as commonwealth sniper Karl Fairburne during the fighting against the Axis. What is curious is that you never encounter the local Libyans, Tunisians, and Egyptians in the game. The war takes place in their

⁴⁹ *Far Cry 2*, developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft in 2008.

⁵⁰ *Spec Ops: The Line*, developed by Yager development and published by 2K Games in 2012.

⁵¹ Figure 6, “*Spec Ops: The Line*,” on funnyjunk.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

⁵² *Sniper Elite 3*, developed and published by Rebellion Developments in 2014.

⁵³ “Sales for *Sniper Elite 3*,” <https://www.vgchartz.com/game/78932/sniper-elite-iii/sales> (last visited on September 1, 2020).

⁵⁴ “Reviews for *Sniper Elite 3*,” <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-4/sniper-elite-iii>, <https://www.metacritic.com/game/switch/sniper-elite-iii-ultimate-edition>, <https://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/sniper-elite-iii>, <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-4/sniper-elite-iii-ultimate-edition> and <https://www.metacritic.com/game/xbox-one/sniper-elite-iii> (last visited on September 1, 2020).

lands, but their side of the story is not depicted in the game. Their countries are just violent shooting galleries for Western armies.



Figure 7: Karl Fairburne following a German officer in the destroyed and deserted streets of Siwa⁵⁵

Geographer Derek Gregory has written a paper related to this topic called, *Dis/Ordering the Orient: scopic regimes and modern war*, in which he discussed the relation between Western wars in the Orient and Orientalism.⁵⁶ His paper is about the Western ordering of the disordered Orient through the mapping of Oriental geographies during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Practically this means using digital mapping tools to visualize the Orient in order to control it and to assert power over it. In its core the paper discusses the Orientalist practice of the ordered West who needs to bring order to the disordered Orient. While these games are not really about mapping the Orient, it is about the West trying to control the Orient through violent intervention, either through military intervention by a national army or through a Western protagonist fighting in the disordered Orient.

Now I shall discuss the second category about places that need to be possessed. In a related study from 2018 Mukherjee explores the role and legacy of colonialism in video games.

⁵⁵ Figure 7, "Identifying and tracking the enemy officer: Mission 5 – Siwa Oasis," on guides.gamepressure.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

⁵⁶ Derek Gregory, "Dis/ordering the orient: Scopic regimes and modern war," in *Orientalism and war*, eds. T. Barkawi and K. Stanski (London: Hurst Publishers, 2012), 151-175.

A key aspect of his study is about colonialism and the spatial practice of mapmaking. Mukherjee contends that mapmaking was a cornerstone of imperial policy, which can also be found in games such as *Age of Empires 3* and *Empire: Total War*.⁵⁷ Mukherjee argues that the tactics of these games are like the ruling and expansion of the empire. As I will discuss below, I agree with him.

In 2005 *Age of Empires 3*, which was developed by Ensemble Studios, was published by Microsoft game studios.⁵⁸ With a sales number of two million copies as of May 2008, it sold rather well.⁵⁹ These numbers will no doubt rise in the fall of 2020 because it was announced that Microsoft will re-release the game as a remaster titled *Age of Empires 3: Definitive Edition*. Reviews are also rather good with an 81 out of 100 on Metacritic.⁶⁰ The main narrative is centred around the mystical Fountain of Youth. In the game you play as a commander of the Knights of Saint John called Morgan Black. In the game Black is ordered to find the Fountain of Youth somewhere in the Caribbean. Tales of such a fountain have been around since ancient times, but when European nations started to venture outside of Europe from the late 15th century onwards these tales have been connected to mysterious new lands, such as the Americas. The most famous story about the fountain of youth is the expedition of conquistador Ponce de León (1474-1521).⁶¹ This particular fountain of youth, just like El Dorado, are allegedly based on conversations the conquistadores had with native people. These “conquistador fantasies” are very much related to their colonialist tendencies. These native places are seen as treasures that they could take, just like the land they were starting to colonize. But not only the fountain is ripe for the taking, because throughout the game you can raid various native artifacts. One description of a quest states: “The island of the eastern coast was a place of ritual ceremonies for the Natives. Wonder if they left anything of value behind?”

In the game the fountain is depicted as a sacred native place which at first needs to be possessed, but in the end needs to be destroyed. This to keep the fountain from falling into the hands of the antagonists of the game. Without any nuance the game seems to glorify colonialism. The land and the artifacts of the native other are for the taking, and there is nothing the natives can do about it.

⁵⁷ Souvik Mukherjee, “Playing subaltern: Video games and postcolonialism,” *Games and culture* 13, no. 5 (2016): 507.

⁵⁸ *Age of Empires 3*, developed by Ensemble Studios and published by Microsoft game studios in 2005.

⁵⁹ Author unknown, “‘Age of Empires III’ expands into the Eastern world this fall” <https://www.agecommunity.com/press.aspx?PressReleaseID=161> (last visit on September 1, 2020).

⁶⁰ “Review of *Age of Empires 3*,” <https://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/age-of-empires-iii> (last visit on September 1, 2020).

⁶¹ Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, *Historia general y natural de las Indias* (published in 1526 in Toledo, Spain), Chapter XI of the 16th book.



Figure 8: The Fountain of Youth in Age of Empires 3⁶²

In 2009 Creative Assembly developed and Sega published the next instalment in the highly popular Total War Series: *Empire: Total War*.⁶³ Within a month of release the game sold 810.000 copies, placing it for example on number 1 in the UK top 10 at the time.⁶⁴ ⁶⁵ Reviews were also pretty decent with a 90 out of 100 on Metacritic.⁶⁶ In the game players control countries from the 18th century such as The United Provinces and The Maratha Confederacy and set out to conquer the world. The concept of colonialism plays a huge part in the game, because you can create colonies for the benefit of the home theatre. For example, when you play as The United Provinces you start out with Surinam, Curacao, Bonaire, Aruba, Ceylon, and a presence in the East-Indies.

⁶² Figure 8, “Age of Empires 3 – Act 1 “Blood” campaign scenario 8 “The Fountain of Youth?” (2/2),” on Youtube.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

⁶³ *Empire: Total war*, developed by Creative Assembly and published by Sega in 2009.

⁶⁴ “Sales for Empire: Total War,” <https://www.vgchartz.com/game/24380/empire-total-war/?region=All> (last visited on September 1, 2020).

⁶⁵ Tom Ivan, “Empire: Total war topples Killzone: The first PC exclusive to top the chart for a year-and-a-half” <https://web.archive.org/web/20141017073635/http://www.computerandvideogames.com/210189/empire-total-war-topples-killzone/> (last visited on September 1, 2020).

⁶⁶ “Review for Empire: Total war.” <https://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/empire-total-war> (last visited on September 1, 2020).



Figure 9: Dutch colony of Ceylon with possibilities to gain a foothold in India before the British and the French⁶⁷

It's worth millions!

Based on the three well received videogames discussed in this section objects are always certain treasures that need to be possessed. In her 2008 study *Digital digs, or Lara Croft replaying Indiana Jones: Archaeological tropes and “colonial loops” in new media narratives* Claudia Breger has already stated that games from the *Tomb Raider* series (1996 -) follow a colonialist narrative of raiding the cultural artifacts of other cultures.⁶⁸ One should only visit Europe’s most famous museums, which are full of stolen artifacts. Her study is a good starting point for this paragraph. The last game she discusses is the 2006 game *Tomb Raider: Legend*. After 2006 these colonialist narratives started to become even more prevalent with the phenomenally successful *Uncharted* series (2007 -) and the critically acclaimed *Tomb Raider* reboot trilogy (2013-2018).

⁶⁷ Figure 9, “Trade and taxes explained,” on etw.heavengames.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

⁶⁸ Breger, 41-60.

The first game is *Uncharted II: Among Thieves*, which was developed by Naughty Dog and published by Sony Computer Entertainment in 2009.⁶⁹ The sales were rather impressive with around 6.5 million copies sold as of March 2015.⁷⁰ The reviews were also stellar with a 96 out of 100 on Metacritic.⁷¹ In the game you play as treasure hunter Nathan Drake in his quest to find the Chintamani stone in the mythical kingdom of Shambala. This stone is seen as a wish fulfilling jewel in Buddhist and Hindu mythology. However, this is not an easy journey because he has to compete with the mercenary army of Serbian war criminal Zoran Lazarevic. Their struggle eventually leads them to Nepal and Tibet, where they throw oil on the already raging Nepali civil war (1996-2006) in order to find the pathway to Shambala. When they eventually find the Chintamani stone in Shambala, Drake and Lazarevic engage in a fight leading to the latter's death and the destruction of Shambala and the Chintamani stone.

Uncharted II: Among Thieves follows a colonialist narrative of raiding the artefacts of indigenous peoples. Both Drake and Lazarevic search for this mythical stone, which has great spiritual significance in Buddhism and Hinduism. The game views this significant spiritual Buddhist and Hindu object as a valuable treasure and the developers do not care that the Chintamani stone and Shambala are eventually destroyed. The representations in the game about Tibet and Nepal in general and Buddhist and Hindu mythology in particular are quite disrespectful. The Chintamani stone is seen as something that needs to be raided and in the end destroyed by the Western protagonist, while the struggle between Drake and Lazarevic turn Tibet and Nepal into warzones. This way the stone is not respectfully and properly placed in its indigenous context.

⁶⁹ *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*, developed by Naughty Dog and published by Sony Computer Entertainment in 2009.

⁷⁰ Paul Tassi, "'Bloodborne' may be the PS4's salvation in 2015" <https://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2015/03/16/bloodborne-may-be-the-ps4s-salvation-in-2015/> (last visited on September 2, 2020).

⁷¹ "Review for *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*," <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/uncharted-2-among-thieves> (last visited on September 2, 2020).



Figure 10: Drake finds the Chintamani stone⁷²

In the second game, released in 2017, *Uncharted* went to India in *Uncharted: The Lost Legacy*.⁷³ The game sold well with 2.37 million sales within three months after release.⁷⁴ Reviews were also good with an 84 out of 100 on Metacritic.⁷⁵ You play as the Australian-Indian Chloe Frazier in her search for the tusk of the Hindu god Ganesh in the ruins of the former Hoysala Empire, which was an empire that existed from roughly the 10th to the 14th century in present day Karnataka. Just like in *Uncharted II* the player competes with an adversary, this time it is the Indian insurgent leader Asav. India in this game is witnessing a civil war and Asav wants to acquire the tusk to rally the Indian population to his cause. A few hours after destroying some Hoysala architecture and after raiding some “minor” Indian artifacts, such as a ruby that belonged to a Hoysala queen, it becomes clear that Asav traded the tusk for a military grade bomb that he wants to explode in the centre of the capital. As Chloe the player retrieves the tusks and thwarts Asav’s plan to detonate the bomb. The last scene reveals that Chloe does not want to cash in on the tusk anymore but give it to the Indian ministry of Culture. This narrative move to give the tusk to the Indian government is a step in the right direction, but it does not

⁷² Figure 10, “Uncharted 2 Tree of Life 2 by effunia on DeviantArt,” on nl.pinterest.com (Last visited on September 7, 2020).

⁷³ *Uncharted: The lost legacy*, developed by Naughty Dog and published by Sony Interactive Entertainment in 2017.

⁷⁴ “Sales for *Uncharted: The lost legacy*,” <https://www.vgchartz.com/game/147591/uncharted-the-lost-legacy/> (last visited on September 2, 2020).

⁷⁵ “Review for *Uncharted: The lost legacy*,” <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-4/uncharted-the-lost-legacy> (last visited on September 2, 2020).

change the fact that the player needed to pursue the artifact for almost ten hours, while destroying ancient architecture and raiding “minor” artifacts that are not returned to the Indian government. Besides this colonialist narrative of possessing indigenous artifacts the game also fits into the article that Siddhartha Chakraborti published two years earlier. In his article From destination to nation and back: The hyperreal journey of Incredible India, which was also discussed in the introduction, he argues that videogames about India are built around the idea that the West, in the guise of a so-called traveller-adventurer, needs to intervene in India in order ensure India’s existence and to save India from itself. Given the narrative of the game, this fits exactly inside Chakraborti’s argument.

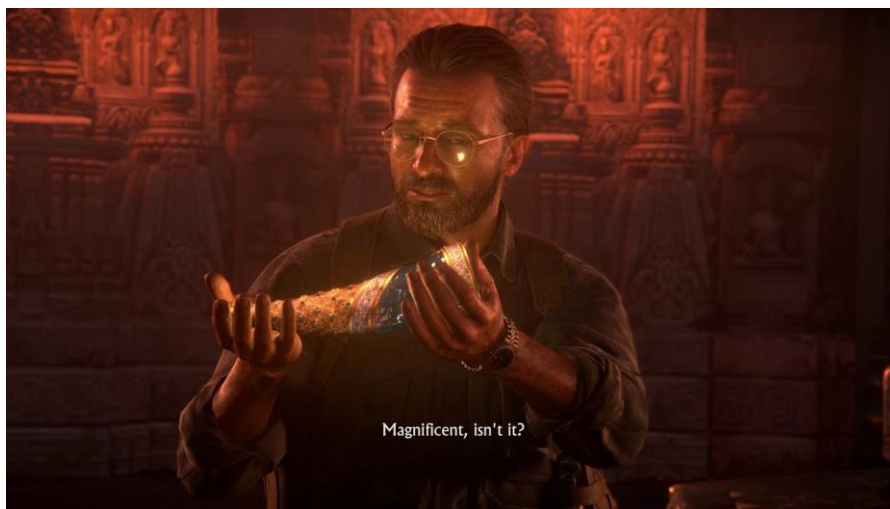


Figure 11: Asav just after he beat you to find the tusk of Ganesh⁷⁶



Figure 12: Chloe acquiring the Hoysala queen’s ruby⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Figure 11, “Uncharted The lost legacy – Chapter 7: Ganesh “He yielded” Asav takes tusk & escapes cutscene,” on youtube.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

⁷⁷ Figure 12, “How to obtain the Queen’s Ruby – Uncharted The lost legacy PS4 Pro,” on youtube.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

The third game is *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*, which was developed by Eidos Interactive and Crystal Dynamics and was published by Square-Enix in 2018.⁷⁸ The game was well received by critics, having received an average score of 78 out of 100 on Metacritic.⁷⁹ As of December 31st, 2018 the game has sold 4.12 million units worldwide.⁸⁰ In the game you follow Lara Croft in her search for the mythical silver box of Ix-Chel, which is the Mayan goddess of midwifery and medicine. Lara's quest takes her from the Mexican Cozumel Island to the Jungles of Peru. On this quest to find the box she also raids other indigenous artifacts, such as masks and sacrificial knives. Furthermore, Lara opens a few crypts which houses sarcophagi belonging to indigenous leaders. Lastly, there are also parts in the game which take place in Croft manor back in England. The manor is full of indigenous artifacts, such as Mayan statues, Persian lions, and Egyptian mummies with their sarcophagi. The game represents indigenous artifacts as something to possess. This shows that the colonialist narratives that Breger wrote about twelve years ago are still prevalent in the Tomb Raider series. But the main issue with *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* is that it is ambiguous. The game tries to teach you about the cultures of the Maya, the Inca, and the Aztecs and Lara is helping these people too, but she is also robbing them of their artifacts. This feels a bit lopsided.



Figure 13: The silver box of Ix-Chel on Lara's desk back in England⁸¹

⁷⁸ *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*, developed by Eidos Montreal and Crystal Dynamics and published by Square Enix in 2018.

⁷⁹ "Review for *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*," <https://www.metacritic.com/search/all/shadow%20of%20the%20tomb%20raider/results> (Last visited on August 23, 2020).

⁸⁰ Rebekah Valentine, "Shadow of the Tomb Raider ships 4.12 million: Lara Croft's latest adventure "got off to a weak start" for Square Enix alongside *Just Cause 4*," <https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2019-02-19-shadow-of-the-tomb-raider-ships-4-12-million> (Last visited on August 23, 2020).

⁸¹ Figure XIII, "Shadow of the Tomb Raider – Post-credit scene easter eggs," on gameplay.tips (last visited on September 7, 2020).

These people need our help!

Based on the videogames discussed in this chapter people can be divided into three categories, which are agency-less, stereotypes, and the white saviour.

First I shall cover the agency-less nature of people from the Global South. As already mentioned in *Uncharted II: Among Thieves* you go to Nepal during the civil war. In the unnamed Nepali city you are competing with Lazarevic to find a Buddhist temple that shows the pathway to Shambala. When you first enter the city you hear that Lazarevic is worsening the civil war to create more chaos in order to provide for some cover in finding the temple. The Nepali guerrillas are represented as faceless cannon fodder for Lazarevic' army. The developers missed the chance to depict the civil war with more complexity and the Nepalis with more agency.



Figure 14: Nepali guerrillas performing a futile attack with a bus. Lazarevic' soldiers are not hurt, but the Nepali's are all blown up in the subsequent bus crash⁸²

Secondly, in the 2011 game *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* the Italian protagonist Ezio Auditore da Firenze travels to the Istanbul of 1511-1512 in order to find several keys to open a secret library.⁸³ The game, which was developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft, sold

⁸² Figure 14, "Face-off: Uncharted 2: Among thieves on PS4: How the Nathan Drake Collection modernises and improves a genuine last-gen classic," on eurogamer.net (last visited on September 7, 2020).

⁸³ *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*, developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft in 2011.

well with nearly seven million copies sold as of February 2012.⁸⁴ The reviews were also great with a 80 out of 100 on Metacritic.⁸⁵ The main story of the Assassin's Creed series is rather difficult to describe in a few sentences, but the main premise is that there is a secret war between the Assassin's and the Templars. Ezio is part of the Assassin's, and when he arrives in Istanbul he meets his fellow Assassin's under the leadership of Yusuf Tazim. Yusuf has two problems, namely that he is incapable to defeat the Templars in the city and that there is a succession crisis about who should be the next Ottoman Sultan, and that he believes the Templars will use this conflict to infiltrate the Ottoman court. In both of these problems the Ottomans are agency-less and depend on Ezio to solve their predicaments.

Early in the game Yusuf and his Ottoman assassins are attacked in two locations in Istanbul. Ezio and Yusuf decide that it is best to split up. In Ezio's struggle he drives of the attacking Templars, but Yusuf was incapable to do so. So, Ezio has to drive of these Templars as well. Throughout the rest of the game it is Ezio, and not Yusuf, who recruits new Ottoman assassin's, establishes new bases for the assassin's throughout the city and diminishes Templar influence. Yusuf's second problem is interesting because, except for the Templar plotline, it is historically accurate. During the last years of the reign of Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512) his sons, Ahmet, and Selim, both wanted to succeed their father, but Bayezid II had already chosen Selim as his successor. Furthermore, Selim was favoured by the Janissaries, who were the Ottoman Sultan's household troops.

In the game Ezio plays a huge part in this conflict. After finding out that the Templars had already found one of the keys under Topkapi Palace, which was the seat of the Ottoman court in Istanbul, Ezio decided that he needed contacts within the Ottoman court. His contact became none other than the future Ottoman Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520-1566). In order to forge a bond Ezio decided to help Süleyman figure out the power struggle at the court, because Süleyman is incapable to figure it out. In subsequent events it is Ezio who brought to light the plots of the janissaries and who in the end delivered the traitorous Ahmet to his brother Selim. The representation of the Ottoman Turks is that they are incapable, and thus agency-less, of solving their predicaments without the help of the superior Western protagonist. This follows the white saviour narrative.

⁸⁴ Eddie Makuch, "Assassin's Creed: Revelations ships 7 million." <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/assassins-creed-revelations-ships-7-million/1100-6350453/> (last visited on September 2, 2020).

⁸⁵ "Reviews for Assassin's Creed: Revelations," <https://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/assassins-creed-revelations>, <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/assassins-creed-revelations> and <https://www.metacritic.com/game/xbox-360/assassins-creed-revelations> (last visited on September 2, 2020).



Figure 15: Prince Süleyman asking Ezio for help in the crisis at the Ottoman court⁸⁶

The 2016 game *Battlefield I* tells its story in the form of five war stories from five conflicts during the first world war (1914-1918).⁸⁷ The game, which was developed by EA DICE and published by Electronic Arts in 2016, sold pretty spectacular with 3.46 million copies sold within a week after its release.⁸⁸ Reviews were also great with an average of 88 out of 100 on Metacritic.⁸⁹ In two of these stories you fight against the Ottoman Empire. In the first story you play as the Australian soldier Frederick Bishop during the Gallipoli campaign of 1915. The goal of this campaign was to capture the Ottoman capital of Istanbul. The problem with this story is that the developers chose to represent the Ottomans as faceless cannon fodder. Furthermore, the Ottoman side of the Gallipoli campaign is not even touched upon. Only two sentences in the credits that say it was a victory for the Ottomans and that some Ottoman veterans from the conflict would found the modern Turkish Republic.

⁸⁶ Figure 15, “Orientalism in modern pop culture,” on modernorientalism.weebly.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

⁸⁷ *Battlefield I*, developed by EA DICE and published by Electronic Arts in 2016.

⁸⁸ William D’Angelo, “Battlefield 1 sells an estimated 3.46m units first week at retail – sales.” <https://www.vgchartz.com/article/266537/battlefield-1-sells-an-estimated-346m-units-first-week-at-retail/> (last visited on September 2, 2020).

⁸⁹ “Reviews for Battlefield I,” <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-4/battlefield-1>, <https://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/battlefield-1> and <https://www.metacritic.com/game/xbox-one/battlefield-1> (last visited on September 2, 2020).

In the second story you play as the Arab warrior Zara who fights for Lawrence of Arabia during the Arab Revolt of 1916-1918. While she is strong and capable, Zara lacks any sense of agency in her decisions. Lawrence makes the plans and Zara executes them. Furthermore, Lawrence narrates the story of the Arab Revolt even though you play as Zara. Representing the Arabs this way the developers neglect the impact and agency of Arab leaders in the Revolt such as Faisal.⁹⁰ Just like in the first story the Ottomans are cannon fodder and Tilikici, who is their commanding officer, is depicted as an evil fool who is thwarted all the time by the clever Lawrence and the capable Zara. Here too the developers miss the opportunity to represent the Ottoman side of the story in the Arab Uprising.

In both stories the developers represent the Ottomans as the agency-less other who are just there to be shot at. While Zara is of course not depicted as the other, she is represented as Lawrence's lackey who just follows what he says. In this narrative Lawrence's genius is depicted as the white saviour of the Arabs. Here the developers really missed their chance of representing the Arabs with their own agency in the conflict.

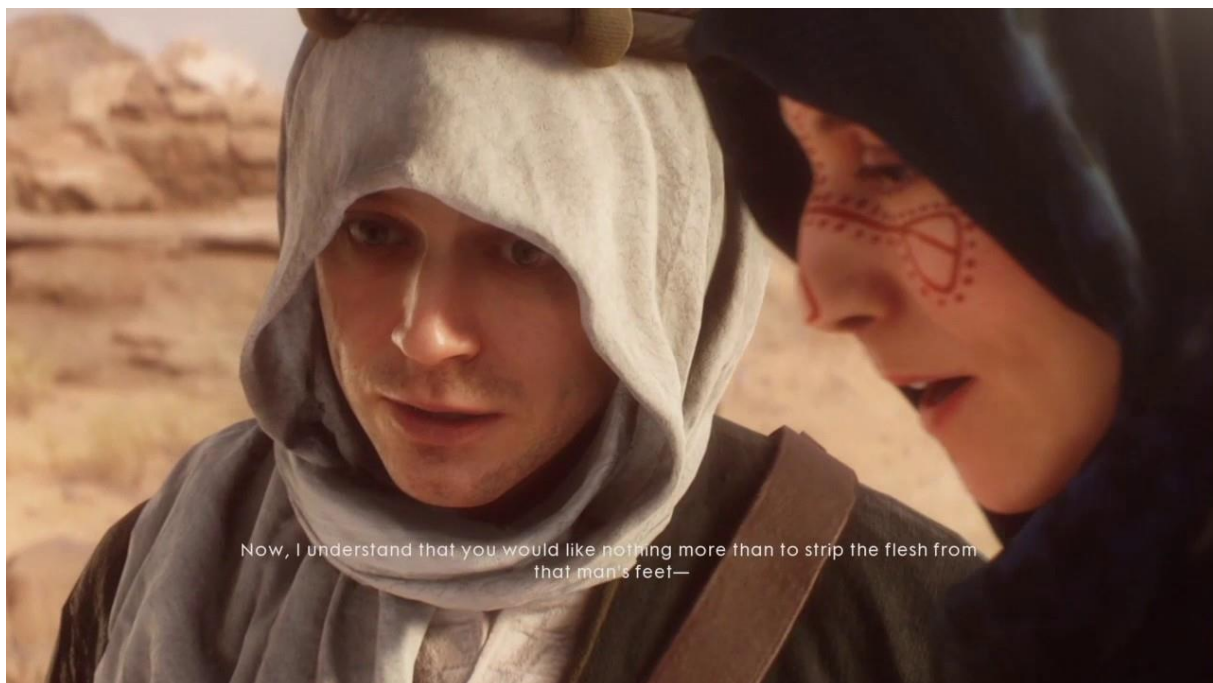


Figure 16: Lawrence calming Zara and giving her instructions on how to best defeat the Ottomans⁹¹

⁹⁰ William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A history of the modern Middle East*, fourth edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 157-161.

⁹¹ Figure 16, "Battlefield I Lawrence of Arabia all cutscenes," on youtube.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

Now I shall cover stereotypes about the Global South. Firstly, the earlier mentioned *Red Dead Redemption I* is also relevant when discussing peoples from the Global South. In the game's depiction of The Mexican Revolution there are three main characters: the rebel leader Abraham Reyes, the governor of Nuevo Paraiso Colonel Agustin Allende, and one of Allende's captains Vicente de Santa. All three characters are depicted as one-dimensional machos. They have no nuance, they are just power hungry monsters. According to historian Daniel Escandell-Montiel the macho-character is a recurring stereotype in popular representations of Latino men.⁹² Rockstar San Diego missed an opportunity to represent the Revolution in a more nuanced way. In the case of the rebel cause they could have chosen for a divided rebellion with complex leaders based more on reality.



Figure 17: Abraham Reyes gives a speech to the rebels⁹³

Secondly, the aforementioned *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* is also relevant when discussing the representation of peoples from the Global South, in this case the Maya, Inca and the Aztecs. In the game these cultures are blended together in a stereotype called Mayincatec, which is the stereotype where all important South- and Central-American cultures are represented as one culture. This stereotype has been used for decades in popular media, such as film and videogames. In the game for example, Maya, Inca and Aztec murals, artifacts, and peoples are

⁹² Daniel Escandell-Montiel, "Subaltern discourses in video game design: Pre-Columbian cultures and resilient strategies in interactive narrative devices," in *Glocal narratives of resistance*, ed. Ana María Fraile-Marcos, 59. New-York: Routledge, 2020.

⁹³ Figure 17, "Reyes' Rebels," on reddead.fandom.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

found among each other in the Peruvian Jungles. Furthermore, the buildings and the clothes of the peoples also look the same. The developers failed to represent these cultures in their own cultural and historical contexts.

Just like in *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* and *Battlefield I* this game makes use of the white saviour trope. The indigenous peoples of Peru are represented as clueless and in need of Lara's help. There is for example a Peruvian village called Kuwaq Yaku where some of the local population is harassed by a militia, and Lara is the only one who can solve it. The indigenous people are represented as the agency-less and clueless other in need of rescue by the Western protagonist.



Figure 18: Lara arriving in the Mayan city of Paititi deep in the Peruvian Jungles⁹⁴



Figure 19: Lara eavesdrops on a conversation where a villager is negotiating with a militiaman⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Figure 18, "Shadow of the Tomb Raider's Peruvian city is bursting with life," on pcgamesn.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

⁹⁵ Figure 19, "Kuwaq Yaku – side missions: Invasive species (part 1)," on tombraders.net (last visited on September 7, 2020).

Well, it can be done!

While the trend seems to be to represent the Global South from a perspective of othering, orientalism, colonialism, et cetera, there are in fact a few games which represent the Global South with complexity, agency, and respect.

An important exception is the first *Assassin's Creed* game, which was developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft in 2007.⁹⁶ The game sold exceptionally well with eight million sales as of April 2009.⁹⁷ Reviews were also stellar with an average of 81 out of 100 on Metacritic.⁹⁸ In the game you play as the Syrian assassin Altaïr Ibn-La'Ahad during the Third Crusade (1189-1192). In the game you are tasked with assassinating historical characters on both sides of the conflict, such as the 10th grandmaster of the Knights Hospitaller Garnier de Nablus (1147-1192) and Geographer Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217). When I returned to the game in 2020 I expected that a game which is about a historical clash between the occident and the orient would be full of orientalisms. Rather I found that both sides of the conflict are represented with a sense of complexity and nuance, with each of the characters having their own perspective on the conflict. Furthermore, it also helps that Altaïr is neutral and doesn't pick a side in the conflict.



Figure 20: Altaïr eavesdropping on Garnier de Nablus and the Knights Hospitaller⁹⁹

⁹⁶ *Assassin's Creed I*, developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft in 2007.

⁹⁷ Author unknown, *Ubisoft unveils Assassin's Creed II*, https://web.archive.org/web/20090419150200/http://www.ubisoftgroup.com/gallery_files/site/270/574/1956.pdf (last visited on September 4, 2020).

⁹⁸ "Review for *Assassin's Creed I*," <https://www.metacritic.com/game/xbox-360/assassins-creed> and <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/assassins-creed> (last visited on September 4, 2020).

⁹⁹ Figure 20, "Assassination (Garnier de Naplouse)," on assassinscreed.fandom.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

In 2016 iNK Studios developed and released *1979 Revolution: Black Friday*, which takes place during the Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979.¹⁰⁰ It was difficult to find the sales statistics of this game. The only estimate which I could find was 50.000 – 100.000 sales on Steam, which is a PC gaming platform.¹⁰¹ Because this game was also published on PS4, Xbox One and Nintendo Switch sales are probably higher. Reviews were alright with an average of 75 out of 100 on Metacritic.¹⁰² You control Reza Shirazi, who is a photography student caught up in the chaos of the Revolution. What is interesting about the game is that you take the same pictures that were actually taken during the Revolution. Furthermore, the game is very nuanced. It is not the Revolutionaries versus the Shah. Within both parties there were differences about ideology, the role of Islam in society, the use of violence, the future of Iran, et cetera. For example you have parties such as the followers of Ali Shariati who were mostly young Shi'a socialists, but you also have the religious conservatives led by Ruhollah Khomeini. Another example is that Reza's brother is an officer in the Shah's military, but Reza is joining the protests. This shows that the Revolution cuts right into Iranian families. In 1980, a year after the Revolution, Reza is arrested by the new regime and thrown in the notorious Evin prison. In Evin, Reza is interrogated and tortured by Asadollah Lajevardi (1935-1998), who was the infamous prison warden. Lajevardi wants to find a leader of the protests, to whom Reza is affiliated.

The player is able to choose how he or she wants to approach the Revolution. In the beginning Reza just wants to take pictures, but he is eventually dragged into the conflict because of his valuable skills with the camera. Then the player can choose to be a pacifist protester or an aggressive militant. In Evin too, the player can choose his or her approach to the questions, torture, and mind games of Lajevardi. The ambiguous complexity of the Revolution was done on purpose by the developers. The director of the game, Navid Khonsari, has stated in an interview that “I want people to understand the incredible moral ambiguity of this story, that this was a country with many different ideas and beliefs. Growing up in Iran when I did, I saw Iranians in the greatest light, and I saw them in the worst light.”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ 1979 Revolution: Black Friday, developed by iNK Studios and published by iNK Studios in 2016.

¹⁰¹ Sergey Galyonkin, App data for 1979 Revolution: Black Friday <https://steampy.com/app/388320> (last visited on September 5, 2020).

¹⁰² “Reviews for 1979 Revolution: Black Friday,” <https://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/1979-revolution-black-friday>, <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-4/1979-revolution-black-friday> and <https://www.metacritic.com/game/switch/1979-revolution-black-friday> (last visited on September 5, 2020).

¹⁰³ Michael Saba, “‘Grand Theft Auto’ director’s next game explores 1979 Iran revolution,” https://web.archive.org/web/20110813064906/http://articles.cnn.com/2011-08-11/tech/grand.theft.auto.iran_1_iranian-nuclear-program-iran-revolution-mahmoud-ahmadinejad?_s=PM%3ATECH (Last visit on August 18, 2020).



Figure 21: Reza being interrogated by Lajevardi¹⁰⁴

In 2019 Creative Assembly and Sega published yet another instalment in the highly popular Total War Series: *Total War: Three Kingdoms*.¹⁰⁵ The game sold exceptionally well with a million copies sold within the first week after release.¹⁰⁶ Reviews were also good with a 85 out of 100 on Metacritic.¹⁰⁷ This time the historical setting is before and during the Chinese Three Kingdoms Period (190-280). At the start of the game in 190 emperor Xian of Han (181-234) was a puppet under the warlord Dong Zhuo (d. 192). Because various warlords and regional officials believed that Dong Zhuo was a usurper they formed a coalition in 190 in order to dispose him. But peace did not arrive when the coalition disposed Dong Zhuo in 192. Between 192 and 220, when the three kingdoms of Wei, Shu and Wu were established, various warlords fought each other for various reasons, one on them being to unify China under their rule as emperor.

The developers have based the game on two historical Chinese texts, which are *Records of the Three Kingdoms* from the third century and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* from the 14th century. These two texts contain information on the various warlords during the conflicts,

¹⁰⁴ Figure 21, “1979 Revolution explores the Iranian revolution: And not from an American perspective!” on destructoid.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

¹⁰⁵ Total War: Three Kingdoms, developed by Creative Assembly and published by Sega in 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Fraser Brown, “Total War: Three Kingdoms sold a million copies in a week” <https://www.pcgamer.com/total-war-three-kingdoms-sold-a-million-copies-in-a-week/> (last visited on September 5, 2020).

¹⁰⁷ “Review for Total War: Three Kingdoms,” <https://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/total-war-three-kingdoms> (last visited on September 5, 2020).

making the game character-centred. Furthermore, the developers made the central mechanic of the game the Chinese concept of Guanxi. Guanxi is a system of social networks between people that are based on favours, moral obligations, and reciprocity. For example, in the game you can play as 12 of these warlords and regional officials. Each warlord has court members which you can skilfully use to further your goals, but you also have to satisfy them, or it can mean trouble, such as civil war. They do stuff for you, but you also have to do stuff for them, such as making them governor of a newly conquered province. The concept of Guanxi gives the game a Chinese perspective and it makes the gameplay complex. Furthermore, Guanxi also deepens the Chinese historical characters and their relationships during the conflicts.



Figure 22: Guanxi of warlord Liu Bei¹⁰⁸

Videogames can educate!

In this chapter I argued that the Western representations of the Global South in historically themed videogames are mostly from a perspective of colonialism, the white saviour, othering, et cetera. While it is important to criticise these representations, we should also not forget the added value of these games in the sphere of public history. In 2018 historian Jeremiah McCall published his article *Video games as participatory public history* in *A companion to public history*. In his article he argued that on the one hand developers offer interpretations of the past, and on the other hand players actively engage with the past by implementing their own rules of play, creating their own modifications, and debating the historical accuracy of games on internet

¹⁰⁸ Figure 22, “Guanxi-3,” on totalwar.com (last visited on September 7, 2020).

forums. Historically themed videogames are platforms for developers and players to engage in their own historical debates and to conduct their own forms of public history.¹⁰⁹

For me personally videogames have taught me many histories of which I knew nothing about. For example, about Shambala, Mayan gods, the Chinese Three Kingdoms Period, and the existence of assassin's in the Middle Ages. And if that is the case for someone who majored in History, then it will no doubt be the case for the millions of people who did not.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter about the representations of the Global South in historically themed videogames developed in the Western world has proven that these representations are often based on othering, the white saviour trope, colonialism, et cetera. Furthermore, being the first chapter with an enhanced focus on the 2010's, earlier scholarship has focussed more on the 1990's and the 2000's, I can claim that these kind of representations continue until the present day. Lastly, I also tried to look at these games from a nuanced perspective by highlighting that there are exceptions and to argue for the added value these games certainly have for the domain of public history.

¹⁰⁹ Jeremiah McCall, "Video games as participatory public history," in *A companion to public history*, ed. David M. Dean (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 405-416.

Global South

Chapter introduction

This chapter will cover the representations of the Global South by historically themed videogames developed in the Global South between 2000 and 2020. These representations are divided into three themes, which are “videogames which critique Western developed games by telling an indigenous story,” “videogames which try to represent a part of indigenous history and culture by telling an indigenous story,” and “Videogames which follow the West.” In the chapter I argue that videogame developers in the Global South assured their indigenous agency through their historically themed videogames. They took the representation of their history, mythology, and culture into their own hands. I also discuss one example of a game which uses Western tropes about the Global South. The argument serves as a reminder that, just like in the first chapter, there are exceptions to these generalizations.

The narrative does a 180

The games discussed in this section are important because they directly or indirectly critique Western developed games by telling the indigenous side of the story. By telling the stories of their own peoples and countries through the medium of videogames, developers from the Global South assured their indigenous agency. These games also have in common that they flip the narrative. For example, in the first chapter nationalities such as the Ottomans were the targets of your British imperialist character. Now, the targets are for example the British imperialists, the Israeli military, and the United States military, while you play as the Palestinians and Indians. You could say these games follow a David and Goliath narrative.

The first game is called *Bhagat Singh*, which was published in India by Lumen Phon Multimedia and Mitashi Edutainment in 2002.¹¹⁰ The game is about the life of Indian freedom fighter Bhagat Singh (1907-1931). The videogame was an adaptation of the popular Bollywood movies about Bhagat Singh which all released in 2002. These media representations of the revolutionary could be placed in a renewed interest of scholars and the Indian government in anticolonial activists who favoured a more violent approach to achieve India’s independence. Much scholarship is focused on non-violent activists such as Mahatma Gandhi and the broader Indian National Congress, but the activism of these revolutionaries was also important in the

¹¹⁰ Bhagat Singh, developed and published by Lumen Phon Multimedia and Mitashi Edutainment in 2002.

path to Indian independence.¹¹¹ The game was a poor attempt to emulate the gameplay mechanics of the first-person shooter *Wolfenstein 3D*, which was released in 1992. *Bhagat Singh* is almost impossible to play due to many technical flaws, which was also mentioned by Neeraj Dikshit, who wrote the only review of the game in 2017.¹¹² Sales numbers about the game are non-existent. The story is about Singh's two acts of anti-imperialism, or terrorism from the British perspective, which were the assassination of British police officer John Saunders in Lahore and the bombing of the Central legislative council in Delhi. This game is a fine example of indigenous agency because of two reasons. The first reason is that Indian developers Lumen Phon Multimedia and Mitashi Edutainment tried to tell the story of the Indian hero and his struggle against imperialism. They took the representation of their history and culture into their own hands. The second reason is that the Indian hero's targets are British imperialists, which is quite uncommon in gaming. From the first chapter it already became clear that the targets of, your mostly Western heroes, are often Indians, Ottomans, Arabs, Nazis, et cetera. Therefore, I also argue that this second reason could be interpreted as a critique of the standards in Western gaming.



Figure 23: Bhagat Singh fighting against the British¹¹³

¹¹¹ Kama Maclean, *A revolutionary history of interwar India: Violence, image, voice and text* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2015), 1-24; Durba Ghosh, *Gentlemanly terrorists: Political violence and the colonial state in India, 1919-1947* (New-York, NY: Cornell University, 2017), 1-26.

¹¹² Neeraj Dikshit, "Bhagat Singh: The game that battled imperialists," <https://qrius.com/bhagat-singh-game-battled-imperialists/> (last visited on September 10, 2020).

¹¹³ Figure 23, "Bhagat Singh: The game," on myabandonware.com (last visited on October 4, 2020).

There are four games which try to give Arab perspectives to the conflicts between the Israeli state and the Arabs. This issue has been a hot news topic ever since the founding of the Israeli state in 1948, making these games a contributing factor to these debates. According to Helga Tawil Souri these games are also critiquing historically themed Western videogames about North-Africa and the Middle East, some of whom I discussed in the first chapter. For example, in these games you are not shooting at Arabs, but at the Israelis, which was a novelty at the time.¹¹⁴

In Lebanon, the political and militant Shi'a group Hezbollah has made two games. The first came out in 2003 and is called *Special Force*.¹¹⁵ Mahmoud Rayya, who is one of the developers, has stated that 'Most games being offered on the market are games in which, unfortunately, the hero is an American, and he is coming to kill the terrorist, who is an Arab. We wanted to provide our youths with an alternative.' This empowering objective is perfectly shown in the following paraphrase from a gamer: 'Karim Arab likes the game because he is able to shoot at Israelis, which he cannot do in real life.' Also according to Rayya the game sold 8000 copies in a week.¹¹⁶ There were no official reviews of the game. In this game you play as a Hezbollah militant who is fighting against the Israeli defence forces. It is a very political game in which the developers directly attacked and criticized Israel while praising the Hezbollah cause. For example, in a shooting tutorial you practice shooting on posters which depict Ariel Sharon, who was the Israeli prime minister when the game released. Another example is in the end credits, which show pictures of Hezbollah martyrs who died fighting Israel.¹¹⁷



Figure 24: Still from *Special Force*

¹¹⁴ Helga Tawil Souri, "The political battlefield of pro-Arab games on Palestinian screens," in *Comparative studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 3 (2007): 536-537.

¹¹⁵ *Special Force*, developed by Hezbollah and published by Hezbollah in 2003.

¹¹⁶ Author unknown, "Hezbollah computer game takes propaganda war on Israel to virtual battlefield," <https://web.archive.org/web/20060424080246/http://www.newstribune.com/articles/2003/05/25/export16774.txt> (last visited on September 15, 2020).

¹¹⁷ Figure 24, "Still from *Special Force*," on Delwiche.livejournal.com (last visited on October 4, 2020).

Hezbollah made a second game called *Special Force 2: Tale of the Truthful pledge*, which they released in 2007.¹¹⁸ The only sales numbers of the game can be found in a Reuters article from 2007, which stated that hundreds of copies were pre-ordered. It is possible that people cancelled their pre-orders, but this is the only number available.¹¹⁹ Just like the first game I could not find official reviews of the game. The game is based on the 2006 Lebanon war between Israel and Hezbollah. Just like in the first game you play as a Hezbollah militant fighting against the Israelis. What is also interesting is that the cutscenes between the levels are edited scenes from the conflict. For example, there is a lot of footage from speeches by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. One of the game developers, Sheikh Ali Daher, stated that ‘this game presents the culture of resistance to children: that occupation must be resisted, and that land and the nation must be guarded.’¹²⁰ These two games are great examples of indigenous agency. Hezbollah, as an Arab and anti-Western organization, directly criticized the West and the West’s representations of their struggles by telling their side of the story.



Figure 25: Hezbollah attacking the Israelis¹²¹

¹¹⁸ *Special Force 2: Tale of the Truthful Pledge*, developed by Hezbollah and published by Hezbollah in 2007.

¹¹⁹ Tom Perry, “Hezbollah brings Israel war to computer screen,” <https://www.reuters.com/article/middleeastCrisis/idUSL16624293> (last visited on September 15, 2020).

¹²⁰ Perry, (last visited on September 15, 2020).

¹²¹ Figure 25, “Special Force 2: Tale of the truthful pledge,” on hardcoregaming101.net (last visited on October 4, 2020).

The second batch of games came from the Syrian developer Radwan Kasmiya and his development studio Afkar Media. The first game released in 2002 and is called *Under Ash*. This game had a limited reach because it was marketed for an Arab audience and it thus only came out in Arabic. But even though this was the case it sold more than 100.000 copies within six months after release.¹²² In the game you play as Ahmed, who is a Palestinian fighting against Israel. What is interesting about the game is that it is so difficult that it cannot be beaten. I believe that Kasmiya and his team did this on purpose to incorporate the massive power imbalance between the Israeli defence forces and the Palestinians.¹²³



Figure 26: Ahmed opening fire on a Israeli patrol

A sequel to *Under Ash* was released in 2004 and is called *Under Siege*.¹²⁴ The story of the game is focussed on the life of a Palestinian family during the period of the second intifada (1999-2002). But the game gets even deeper into this family's struggle by highlighting five different perspectives. The first perspective is from Ahmad, who is a young Palestinian fighter who believes in the Palestinian cause for freedom, not unlike Ahmed in the first game. The second perspective is from Khaled, who used to fight for the Palestinian cause, but now cooperates with the Israeli's because he believes that cooperation ends the conflict. The third perspective is from Mary, who represents Palestinian women in the conflict. For example, how the conflict negatively affects the functioning of the household itself. The fourth perspective is from Mann,

¹²² Radwan Kasmiya, "Arab world," in Video games around the world, ed Mark J.P. Wolf, 29-34. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015.

¹²³ Figure 26, "Under Ash, on qwant.com (last visited on October 4, 2020).

¹²⁴ Under Siege, developed by Afkar Media and published by Dar al-Fikr in 2004.

who is a young boy who just wants to go to school, but his school is closed due to the Israeli occupation. Finally, the fifth perspective is from Abu Himam, who is an old man who has lived long enough to remind the young people of his family the importance of the Palestinian struggle.



Figure 27: Opening cutscene of *Under Siege*¹²⁵

These two games are also great examples of indigenous agency, and I argue that they are also more innovative than the Hezbollah games. The Hezbollah games give Arab gamers a feeling that they can do something about the hardship caused by the Israelis. *Under Ash* also follows this perspective by making the player shoot at Israelis. But *Under Ash* is different because it cannot be beaten, giving the game a more bittersweet feeling that is perhaps more like reality. *Under Siege* is more a story-driven game because it represents how the conflict impacts the members of a Palestinian family. Narrating the story from these different perspectives makes the Palestinian side of the conflict complex. It shows that the conflict is not just simply about Palestinians versus Israelis, it is about individuals and their families who are each affected by the conflict in a different way. Furthermore, these people are also reacting to it in their own way.

¹²⁵ Figure 27, “Under Siege – Opening Cutscene,” on Youtube.com (Last visited on October 4, 2020).

Let me tell you the story of our people...

The games discussed in this section are important because they all represent parts of indigenous history, culture, and mythology through the medium of videogames. Because this representing is done by the people themselves it falls under the category of indigenous agency. Furthermore, some of these games also make use of indigenous gameplay mechanics by incorporating indigenous culture within gameplay.

Years before Creative Assembly chose the Chinese Three Kingdoms Period as the setting for their new *Total War* game, Chinese developer Overmax Studios, later called Object Software Limited, released *Three Kingdoms: Fate of the Dragon* for PC in 2001. Unfortunately, no sales records were published, but there are reviews of the game. The game was received with mixed reviews with a 71 out of 100 on Metacritic.¹²⁶ Writing at the time Dan Adams of IGN also found the game to be mixed. He praised the original Chinese setting and characters, but he criticized, for example, the repetitive gameplay.¹²⁷

For their source material the developers relied on the 14th century Chinese epic called *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* by Luo Guanzhong. The gameplay is related to the real-time strategy game *Age of Empires II: The age of kings*, in which you built up your chosen faction and its army to destroy the enemy faction. The player can choose three factions each headed by a hero from the period, which are Liu Bei (kingdom of Shu), Sun Quan (kingdom of Wu), and Cao Cao (kingdom of Wei). This game is also an example of indigenous agency because it is a Chinese company making a game about an important part of Chinese history.



Figure 28: Still from *Three Kingdoms: Fate of the dragon*¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Review for *Three Kingdoms: Fate of the Dragon*, on Metacritic.com (last visited on September 23, 2020).

¹²⁷ Dan Adams, "Fate of the Dragon: Revisit the intrigue and violence of the Three Kingdoms Period in China," on ign.com (last visited on September 23, 2020).

¹²⁸ Figure 28, "Three Kingdom: Fate of Dragon," on oldpcgaming.net (last visited on October 4, 2020).

In 2007 Kenyan developer Wesley Kirinya and his studio called Sinc Studios developed *The adventures of Nyangi*.¹²⁹ According to an article written by Kirinya the game sold about a few hundred copies.¹³⁰ I could find two reviews of the game. Both critique the gameplay and narrative, but emphasise that the game is important because it is Sub-Saharan Africa's first 3D game.¹³¹ In the game you play as Nyangi, who is an African hero. Her objective is to discover East African artifacts to learn more about them. While playing the game I came across many technical and narrative flaws. From the get-go it is not clear what Nyangi needs to do first, and when I hardly managed to walk out of the hut people started shooting at me for no reason. It is not narratively set up why these people want Nyangi dead. Are they competing with her to find the artifacts? Furthermore, the artifacts that you discover are not found by doing some kind of challenge, but you just come across them while running around on an empty plain. You also don't learn anything about these artifacts. It just says for example, "Kenyan beaded necklace." Although the game is technically and narratively flawed, it is historically important as Sub-Saharan Africa's first 3D game.



Figure 29: Still from *The adventures of Nyangi*¹³²

¹²⁹ *The adventures of Nyangi*, developed by Sinc Studios and published by Sinc Studios in 2007.

¹³⁰ Wesley Kirinya, "Africa," in *Video games around the world*, ed Mark J.P. Wolf, 17-28. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015, 20.

¹³¹ Author unknown, "An African 3D adventure game," on whiteafrican.com (last visited on September 22, 2020); Emeka Okafor, "Adventures of Nyangi," on timbuktuchronicles.blogspot.com (last visited on September 22, 2020).

¹³² Figure 29, "The adventures of Nyangi," on gamesattheperiphery.com (last visited on October 4, 2020).

Since *The adventures of Nyangi* African game development did not sit still. Most recently, in 2016, the Cameroonian developer Kiro'o Games released *Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan* on Steam.¹³³ According to Steamspy the game has around 100.000 owners, which shows the success Sub-Saharan African games have had in the decade after *The adventures of Nyangi* was released.¹³⁴ Reviews of the game are mixed. For example, the game received a 69 out of 100 on Metacritic, while Hardcore gamer gave it a 3.5 out of 5.¹³⁵ I found the narrative of the game very intriguing. You play as two characters, prince of Zama Enzo Kori-Odan and his bride Erine Evou of Soma. During their coronation and marriage the two are ambushed and overthrown by Enzo's brother-in-law. The two then embark on an adventure to regain the throne by seeking support from other countries. These countries represent different cultures of Sub-Saharan Africa, such as the Yoruba (Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Togo, and the Ivory Coast), Cameroon, and South Africa. These representations take all kind of forms, such as in the setting, clothing, animals, objects, music, attacks, religion, and food. The setting is truly Sub-Saharan African, with large grasslands, jungles, small villages with traditional huts, and crowded cities. The people that walk around in this setting wear traditional African clothing. Furthermore, African animals such as the goliath frog of Cameroon and equatorial Guinea could also be found. The screen is also full of African objects, such as African ceremonial masks. The music is a mix of traditional Sub-Saharan African music and modern synths. The attacks which you can perform have also a relation with African history and culture. For example, Erine has an attack called Shango's fire, which is related to the religion of the Yoruba. Shango being an angry spirit wielding an axe. Lastly, African foods are also included in the game. For example, you can buy matango, which is how palm wine is called in Cameroon. These two Sub-Saharan African games are great examples of indigenous agency. While *The adventures of Nyangi* was a flawed start it was important as an early project to make an African adventure game by Africans. The contrast in quality, sales, reviews, and market reach with *Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan* shows that Sub-Saharan African game development has improved in the last decade. This also means that more gamers have access to African games and the knowledge they provide about African history and culture.

¹³³ *Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan*, developed and published by Kiro'o Games in 2016.

¹³⁴ Sales for *Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan*, Steamspy.com (last visited on September 22, 2020).

¹³⁵ Review for *Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan*, on Metacritic.com (last visited on September 22, 2020); Kyle LeClair, "Review: *Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan*," on Hardcore Gamer (last visited on September 22, 2020).



Figure 30: Erine executing Shango's fire¹³⁶

In 2009 *Hanuman: Boy Warrior* was developed by Aurna Technologies and published by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe.¹³⁷ By 2010 the game has sold more than 90.000 copies.¹³⁸ Reviews of the game were not very stellar with critics critiquing the technical errors of the game. The game also sparked religious controversy when Hindu statesman Rajan Zed released a statement that the game 'trivializes the highly-revered deity of Hinduism.'¹³⁹

The game is about Hanuman, who is the Hindu god of strength, knowledge, and bhakti (devotion of the religious believers). The world is under attack by so-called Asuras, which are a class of power-seeking clans. In the game they seek to steal all the light energy and to engulf the world into darkness. The player, as Hanuman, must avert this by defeating the Asuras and their minions. In this journey the player learns quite a lot about Hindu mythology. A few examples are that you fight against nagas (mythological snake-beings) and Vetalas (animated corpses in Hindu mythology). The player also visits sacred Hindu lands, such as the region of Dandakaranya, which is one of the important places in the Sanskrit epic called Ramayana. Another example is that the player also encounters divine beings such as Jatayu (a divine bird). The ending of the game also has an interesting Hindu twist. When Hanuman defeated the leader

¹³⁶ Figure 30, "Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan," on indiemegabooth.com (last visited on October 4, 2020).

¹³⁷ *Hanuman: Boy Warrior*, developed by Aurna Technologies and published by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe in 2009.

¹³⁸ Souvik Mukherjee, "India," in *Video games around the world*, eds. Mark J. P. Wolf and Toru Iwatani (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), 238.

¹³⁹ Owen Good, "India's first game gets India's first game controversy," <https://kotaku.com/indias-first-game-gets-indias-first-game-controversy-5217826> (last visited on September 8, 2020) ; Leigh Alexander, "Hindu statesman criticizes Sony's Hanuman: Boy warrior," https://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/114224/Hindu_Statesman_Criticizes_Sonys_Hanuman_Boy_Warrior.php (last visited on September 8, 2020) ; Mukherjee, "India," 238.

of the Asuras, called Shirkasur in this game, he doesn't kill him, but he ordered him to achieve mukti, which means spiritual liberation. So, Hanuman defeats evil, but he liberates the soul of those affected by evil. For me this was the first time I defeated the main villain of a game by not killing him/her, but by liberating his/her soul. This game is also a fine example of indigenous agency. By telling the story of Hanuman, Indian developer Aurna Technologies gave an insight into the many aspects of Hindu religion and mythology.



Figure 31: Hanuman attacking two Ganesh-like enemies¹⁴⁰

In 2017 the cooperation between Brazilian anthropologists and game developers on the one hand and the Huni Kuin, who are an indigenous people of Brazil and Peru, on the other hand led to the game called *Huni Kuin: Yube Baitana*.¹⁴¹ The game is freely available to download on the internet, but no statistics of owners are available. Sadly, there are also no reviews of the game. In the game you play as a pair of twins on their journey to become Huni Kuin. My interpretation of this journey is that it is some kind of initiation rite of young people to become adults within the Huni Kuin. This journey doesn't take place in the so-called "real world," but in the cosmological world of the Huni Kuin. As these two characters you acquire knowledge and skills that are important to Huni Kuin culture. One example of this is that you need to collect various parts of graphic patterns called "kene." These patterns could be drawn or woven into

¹⁴⁰ Figure 31, "Gaming review: Hanuman: Boy warrior," on getahead.rediff.com (last visited on October 4, 2020).

¹⁴¹ *Huni Kuin: Yube Baitana*, developed by a Brazilian team of anthropologists and game developers on the one hand and the Huni Kuin on the other hand in 2017.

cloth. A core concept of the game is called yuxibu. Yuxibu are entities within Huni Kuin mythology that own all beings that are alive, such as humans, plants, and animals. This concept is also incorporated as an indigenous gameplay mechanic, which is that if you kill too many animals in the hunt the yuxibu will grow angry and will take revenge on you, such as turning normally harmless animals against you. The game is not only about the Huni Kuin, but is also conceived by them. For example, the Huni Kuin made traditional music that serves as the soundtrack of the game, they were cultural advisors for the game's story, they narrate the game, and they have also drawn artwork for the game. This game is a great example of indigenous agency. The Huni Kuin are able to represent their culture, history, and mythology through the medium of videogames.¹⁴²



Figure 32: The main character fighting a mythological snake

One year after *Huni Kuin: Yube Baitana* was released another game was made in cooperation with an indigenous people. This particular game was made by Lienzo, which is a Mexican development studio from Chihuahua, and their game is called *Mulaka*, which is about the Tarahumara people of northwest Mexico.¹⁴³ Lienzo published it on PS4, Nintendo Switch, Xbox One, and Steam. The game has mixed reviews with a 73 out of 100 on Metacritic.¹⁴⁴ There are many other reviews, among which is one by Kevin Mersereau from Destructoid, who gave it an 80 out of 100.¹⁴⁵ Apparently, only the sales estimates for Steam are available, which are about 20.000 owners.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Figure 32, "Huni Kuin: Yube Baitana," on alvanista.com (last visited on October 4, 2020).

¹⁴³ *Mulaka*, developed by Lienzo and published by Lienzo in 2018.

¹⁴⁴ Review for *Mulaka*, on Metacritic.com (last visited on September 26, 2020).

¹⁴⁵ Kevin Mersereau, "Review: *Mulaka*, A fun twist on an old formula," on Destructoid.com (last visited on September 26, 2020).

¹⁴⁶ Sales for *Mulaka*, on Steamspy.com (last visited on September 26, 2020).

In the game you play as Mulaka, who is a Tarahumaran *sukurúame*. A *sukurúame* is a Tarahumaran shaman who is tasked with saving the universe, which is under threat by the lord of the underworld called Terégori. But before Mulaka can face Terégori he has to gain the support and power of several demigods. In Tarahumaran culture these demigods take on the form of spirit animals, such as the serpent, the bear, and the puma. These demigods help Mulaka traverse the landscape of the Tarahumara, such as the Samalayuca dune fields in Chihuahua. But these demigods also help Mulaka against various enemies, such as the Ganokos, who are giants in Tarahumaran mythology. Tarahumaran culture is also hearable in the music, which is performed by the Tarahumarans themselves. An intriguing indigenous gameplay mechanic is that Mulaka can run endlessly without tiring. This is culturally accurate, because the Tarahumara are renowned for their long-distance running ability.¹⁴⁷ *Mulaka* is another example of indigenous agency. By working with the Tarahumara the developers at Lienzo represented their history, culture, and mythology inside a videogame.



Figure 33: Mulaka running towards a Tarahumaran settlement¹⁴⁸

Between 2018 and 2020 the Javanese developer StoryTale Studios developed *Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror* for Steam.¹⁴⁹ According to SteamSpy the game has around 20.000 owners on Steam.¹⁵⁰ Unfortunately, there are no reviews by critics, but the customer satisfaction

¹⁴⁷ Daniel Escandell-Montiel, 63.

¹⁴⁸ Figure 33, “Mulaka,” on n1ntendo.nl (last visited on October 4, 2020).

¹⁴⁹ *Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror*, developed by StoryTale Studios and published by StoryTale Studios and Maple Whispering Limited in 2018.

¹⁵⁰ Sales for *Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror*, Steamspy.com (last visited on September 20, 2020).

on Steam is rated as very positive based of 318 reviews as of September 20, 2020.¹⁵¹ Something to keep in mind is that the game consists of four episodes released within a two year period, so it is for example not clear if one episode was better received than the others. Pamali is the Bahasa word for taboo. In the game's episodes the player should avoid these taboos and respect Indonesian culture. This way the developers teach you about Indonesian folklore and culture by addressing it's taboos. This objective is perfectly stated by Andre, who is one of the developers: 'Essentially, we want to create a horror game that is not just full of jump scares, screams, thrilling kills, and gore gameplay. We believe that horror is different in every culture. (...) in Indonesia, horror is linked with many aspects in our cultural life, like our daily activities, religions, and folklores. We want to build a game that can give an experience of horror with authentic Indonesian culture.'¹⁵²

The first episode is called Kuntilanak (The white lady). In this episode you play as Jaka who needs to sell the house of his just deceased parents. But this isn't a normal house sale because the place is haunted by a kuntilanak, or white lady in English. A kuntilanak, in Indonesian and Malay folklore, is the spirit of a pregnant woman who was pregnant to a child, a demon, or a ghost when she died. Before selling the house Jaka needs to find the right certificates, such as his parents death certificate and he has to clean and repair the house. To succeed Jaka needs to respect the ghost living in the house and avoid any taboos in order not to anger her. For example, you should not throw away objects in the house that have a deep connection to her, such as her doll.

The second episode is called Pocong (The tied corpse). In this episode you play as a gravekeeper called Cecep. As Cecep you need to tend to the graveyard in a respectful manner, such as watering the graves, not playing on ritual drums before prayer, or stepping on graves. The pocong, or tied corpse in English, only appears when you don't follow the proper ritual steps of burial. In Muslim burial culture the dead are wrapped in a shroud from head to toe. This shroud is then tied shut with knots. The soul of a dead person will remain on earth for 40 days after death, so for the player it is important to untie the knots before this deadline. If the knots are not untied the soul will remain in the body and the pocong emerges from its grave.

The third episode is called tuyul (The little devil). In this episode you play as Putri, who needs money to pay for her father's surgery. She decides that the best way to gain access to

¹⁵¹ "Reviews for *Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror*," store.steampowered.com (last visited on September 20, 2020).

¹⁵² StoryTale Studios, "Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror: Kickstarter campaign video," Youtube.com (last visited on September 20, 2020).

cash is to pawn valuable objects from her rich late grandfather's mansion. In this mansion the folklore of the tuyul kicks in. In Javanese folklore, a tuyul is a creature that is being kept by a person practicing black magic. This specific kind of black magic helps people become rich, but in exchange the person has to keep the tuyul happy by performing rituals and sacrifices. Putri's grandfather's house is littered with tuyul, who appear as statues that move when you're not looking. As the player it is important not to anger the tuyul in the house. A few examples of taboos are creating noises, eating their food, reading other people's stuff without their permission, and laughing at the presence of the tuyul.

As of September 20, 2020 the fourth episode called Leak (The hungry witch) is not released yet. A leak is a Balinese creature that is trying to find pregnant women in order to suck the blood of their babies or their newborn children.



Figure 34: The horrors of Pamali¹⁵³

These popular episodes are great examples of indigenous agency. The developers at StoryTale Studios incorporated Indonesian culture and mythology inside the genre of the horror game. In a way they are also critiquing Western, and a few Japanese, horror games which include many jump scares and gore. While the aforementioned developer Andre doesn't state this specifically I believe that he referred to horror games developed in these regions. One should think of games such as *Until Dawn*, *Five nights at Freddy's*, and *Resident Evil*. Furthermore, by stating that their game is more about Indonesian culture and not about jump scares and gore the developers are following the path of self-orientalising. For example, the first episode presents ideas about respect, material objects and the spirituality of death as core Indonesian values. This fits

¹⁵³ Figure 34, "Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror," on store.steampowered.com (last visited on October 4, 2020).

perfectly inside the representation of the East as a spiritual place, which is also part of orientalism.

Follow the leader

In this section I discuss one example of a game which uses Western tropes about the Global South. The theme serves as a reminder that, just like in the first chapter, there are exceptions to the generalizations.

In 2013 the Saudi based developer Semaphore and the Saudi based publisher Semanoor released *Unearthed: Trail of Ibn Battuta*.¹⁵⁴ This action-adventure game, which saw to profit of the popular *Uncharted series*, was a massive flop. Although sales numbers are not available, review scores are. The game was unceremoniously sacrificed by critics getting an 11 out of a 100 on Metacritic.¹⁵⁵ Originally the narrative of the game was supposed to be told across multiple episodes spread out over a year or so, but so far only episode 1 released, which makes the story incomplete. In my opinion the narrative Semaphore was going for could have been promising. It is about Arab treasure hunter Faris Jawad who follows the trail of Muslim scholar and explorer Ibn Battuta (1304-1368 or 1369). Apparently there is treasure to be found in places that Ibn Battuta has “discovered.” But Jawad is not alone on the trail, because he has to compete with antiquities smuggler Quinton. This plot is not unlike a typical *Uncharted* or *Tomb Raider* narrative. Just like these games *Unearthed: Trail of Ibn Battuta* follows a colonialist narrative of raiding the cultural artifacts of other cultures. Because the story is incomplete we have only raided a treasure from the tomb of Pharaoh Ahmose in Egypt, but it is suggested that more would follow when Jawad actually embarks on the trail.

¹⁵⁴ *Unearthed: Trail of Ibn Battuta*, developed by Semaphore and published by Semanoor in 2013.

¹⁵⁵ “Review for *Unearthed: Trail of Ibn Battuta*,” <https://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/unearthed-trail-of-ibn-battuta> (last visited on September 17, 2020).



Figure 35: Jawad in the streets of Cairo¹⁵⁶

Chapter conclusion

This chapter has proven that videogame developers in the Global South assured their indigenous agency through their historically themed videogames. They took the representation of their history, mythology, and culture into their own hands. These developers did this by either critiquing Western developed games or by doing their own thing. This chapter has shown that developers mostly chose the second approach. They were also very innovative in this regard by incorporating indigenous gameplay mechanics in their games. Lastly, at the end of the chapter I have discussed one example of a game which uses Western tropes about the Global South. The game serves as a reminder that, just like in the first chapter, there are exceptions to the generalizations.

¹⁵⁶ Figure 35, “Unearthed: Trail of Ibn Battuta – Episode 1,” on Playstation.com (last visited on October 4, 2020).

The videogame industries of the Global South

Chapter introduction

This chapter will cover the videogame industries of the Global South. Firstly, I shall discuss seven developments which have impacted the videogame industries of the Global South. Secondly, I shall cover three factors which have impacted historically themed videogames in the Global South. The developments of the first part have impacted these industries in a broad sense, meaning videogame companies, and historically themed videogames as well as non-historically themed videogames. The factors of the second part have solely impacted videogame companies which develop historically themed videogames. In the chapter I argue that videogame developers in the Global South, who develop historically themed videogames, are subject to factors and developments that have minimized their companies, and their historically themed games', success in the global videogames industry and market. Subsequently, this chapter shall also show that non-historically themed videogames are way more popular in the Global South. Huge companies, like the Chinese Tencent, have profited greatly from the success of these non-historically themed games. However, most of these games are also developed in the Western World, meaning that here too most of the knowledge and expertise are centred in the West.

Opportunities and obstacles

The following seven developments have impacted the videogame industries of the Global South. The first development is that tinkerers from the Global South have been copying hardware made in the West and in Japan in order to manufacture a more affordable product.¹⁵⁷ An example from the 1980's is the Argentinian Family Game, which was a copied version of the Japanese Famicom console made by Nintendo.¹⁵⁸ But this copying also continues in more recent times with for example the Chinese OUYE, which is a copied version of the PS4.¹⁵⁹ Although there is a culture of copying hardware in the Global South, the real versions also reach the markets of the Global South. For example, the Xbox One could be bought in Thailand.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Phillip Penix-Tadsen, ed, *Video games and the global south* (Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press, 2019), 13-15.

¹⁵⁸ Graciela Alicia Esnaola Horacek, Alejandro Iparraguirre, Guillermo Averbuj, and María Luján Oulton, "Argentina," in *Video games around the world*, ed Mark J.P. Wolf, 35-55. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015, 51.

¹⁵⁹ Paul Hulsebosch, "Chinese console lijkt op zowel Playstation 4 als Xbox One," on tweakers.net (last visited on November 2, 2020).

¹⁶⁰ "Xbox One," on ubuy.co.th (last visited on November 2, 2020).



Figure 36: Family Computer (Famicom), released by Nintendo in 1983¹⁶¹



Figure 37: Family Game, released in Argentina during the 1980's¹⁶²

The second development is that piracy is very prevalent in the Global South.¹⁶³ Videogames are imported or bought in official stores and then copied on blank discs. These pirated copies are then used in various kinds of cybercafés, exchanged between friends, and/or sold in stores. Some of these stores have gained a cult-like status over the years, such as stores operating in and around Lamington Road in Mumbai and stores operating in the basement of Polvos Azules in Lima.

¹⁶¹ Figure 36, Damien McFerran, “Hardware review: Famicom Classic Mini,” on Nintendolife.com (last visited on November 2, 2020).

¹⁶² Figure 37, Guly, “Family Game en Argentina,” on retrogaming.com.ar (last visited on November 2, 2020).

¹⁶³ Phillip Penix-Tadsen, ed, *Video games and the global south* (Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press, 2019), 15.



Figure 38: Computer store alongside Lamington Road in Mumbai¹⁶⁴



Figure 39: Videogame store in Polvos Azules, Lima¹⁶⁵

The third development is the overall digital poverty in the Global South. This digital poverty is even more prevalent in rural areas of the Global South.¹⁶⁶ This is a stark contrast with the Western World, Uruguay, the UAE, and a few Asian countries, which are Japan, Hong Kong, Macau, South Korea, and Singapore. This contrast is called the digital divide, which is measured by the United Nations International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in an index called the ICT Development Index (IDI). This index is based on research which has looked at access, use, and skills.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Figure 38, Mohamed Thaver, “Lamington Road: An electronics hub loses battle to e-commerce,” on [Indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com) (last visited on November 2, 2020).

¹⁶⁵ Figure 39, “Araujuegos – Polvos Azules,” on [Youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) (last visited on November 2, 2020).

¹⁶⁶ Phillip Penix-Tadsen, ed, *Video games and the global south* (Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press, 2019), 18.

¹⁶⁷ Measuring the information society report 2017 (International Telecommunication Union: Geneva, 2017), 24.

Disparities in IDI value – LDCs falling behind in ICT development

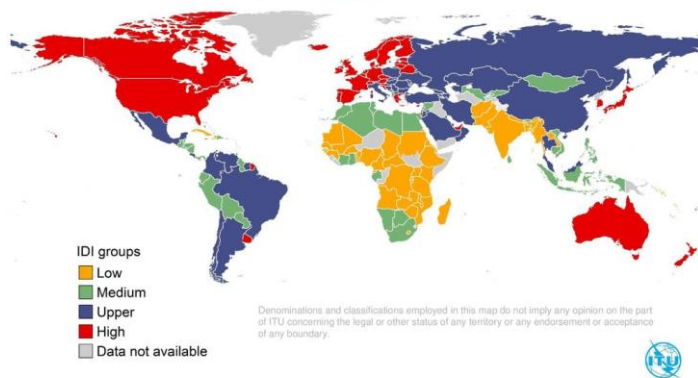


Figure 40: Global ICT Development¹⁶⁸

The fourth development is that mobile technology became increasingly inexpensive in the 2010's, which has created many opportunities for videogame developers in the Global South. Because of this development and because videogame consoles and game pc's are expensive, the videogame industries of the Global South are centred around the mobile phone with videogames being offered as apps.¹⁶⁹



Figure 41: Indian gamers playing PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds on their smartphones in Mumbai¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Figure 40, Barnard Phelps, "Jaroslaw K. Ponder head of ITU office for Europe," on Slideplayer.com (last visited on November 3, 2020).

¹⁶⁹ Ben Aslinger and Nina B. Huntemann, "Introduction," in *Gaming globally: Production, play and place*, eds. Nina B. Huntemann and Ben Aslinger, 1-15. (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), 1.

¹⁷⁰ Figure 41, Kunal Guha and Rahi Gaikwad, "Game on," on Mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com (last visited on November 5, 2020).

These four developments have impacted the videogame industries in the Global South in two ways. The first impact is that copied hardware, pirated videogames, and inexpensive mobile technology have democratized access to these goods. A pirated version shall more often than not be cheaper than the original version. It is also cheaper to buy a mobile phone than it was ten years ago. And mobile videogames are either free or sold at a low price.¹⁷¹

The second impact is the combined negative effect of this culture of copied hardware, pirated videogames, inexpensive mobile technology, and the overall digital poverty in the Global South. This effect is that these developments led to the absence of major videogame companies in the Global South. It is difficult for a company to grow big in such an environment because of revenue losses due to piracy. Large, good quality videogames take years to develop, so the prospect of your game being pirated could scare away developers embarking on such huge projects. Besides this, these games also tend to be more expensive to cover for the costs of a longer development process, which is a price many people in the Global South simply cannot afford. Also, based on the ICT Development Index I believe that the overall digital expertise is lacking in the Global South. A mobile videogame is easier to make than a large console or pc game. The lack of educated developers such as computer programmers also has an effect on the development of successful videogame companies. I argue that these are important reasons that videogame developers in the Global South consist of many small development studios which develop small, affordable, low quality videogames for the mobile market. These smaller projects are safer bets for these studios. Lastly, innovative hardware is not being developed in the Global South, but in the West and in Japan. The development of major videogames is also still centred in the West and in Japan. In the Global South these are often copied and adapted to appeal to local markets.

The fifth development is that videogame companies in the Global South are poorly represented in videogame expos around the world, which limits their marketing reach. I have based this on a reading of company attendance in major expos across the last few years. In important expos such as E3 in Los Angeles, Paris Games Week in Paris, Gamescom in Cologne, PAX East in Boston, Tokyo Game Show in Tokyo, Brasil Game Show in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, and China Joy in Shanghai, Western and Japanese companies are strongly represented.¹⁷² While Brazilian companies are of course represented during Brasil Game Show,

¹⁷¹ Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz, *Postcolonial piracy: Media distribution and cultural production in the Global South* (Bloomberg: Shepherdsville, KY, 2014), 18.

¹⁷² Currently listing the 2020 editions, but if someone wants to check these webpages for previous editions he or she should go to the Waybackmachine on archive.org/web/ (For the 2020 edition some expos were cancelled due to the Covid19 Pandemic, but the line-up was already scheduled): E3, on e3expo.com, Paris Games Week, on

they are not represented outside of this event. Exceptions are videogame companies from China, who are increasingly present from the late 2000's onward, showing China's rise in the industry.¹⁷³

A new marketing trend has also occurred in the 2010's, which is to market the newest games and hardware outside of these expos by uploading streams and trailers on internet websites such as YouTube. Nintendo has been doing these since 2011 with their Nintendo Directs, and Sony has been doing it since 2019 with their State of Play's. For videogame companies from the Global South uploading trailers online is a great opportunity for marketing their games, but their view numbers are nothing in comparison with a regular Nintendo Direct or a trailer from a Western developed historically themed videogame. For example (as of November 3, 2020), the latest Nintendo Direct has 352 thousand views and the trailer for *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* has 3,6 million views, while the trailer for *Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror: The White Lady* has 58 thousand views.¹⁷⁴



Figure 42: China Joy 2020 in Shanghai

parisgamesweek.com, Gamescom, on Gamescom.global, PAX East, on east.paxsite.com, Tokyo Game Show, on expo.nikkeibp.co.jp, Brasil Game Show, on brasilgameshow.com.br, and China Joy, on chinajoy.net (last visited on November 5, 2020).

¹⁷³ Figure 42, James Batchelor, "ChinaJoy still taking place despite pandemic: Nation's biggest games showcase will run in Shanghai from July 31 to August 3," on gamesindustry.biz (last visited on November 5, 2020).

¹⁷⁴ "Nintendo Direct Mini: Partner Showcase – October 2020," on YouTube.com (Last visited on November 3, 2020); "Shadow of the Tomb Raider – Official Trailer," on YouTube.com (Last visited on November 3, 2020); "Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror – Gameplay Trailer – Folklore 1: The White Lady," on YouTube.com (Last visited on November 3, 2020).



Figure 43: State of Play title card from August 6, 2020¹⁷⁵

The sixth development is the role of the government by censoring the videogame industry, supporting it, or not investing anything at all. An important example of this is the Chinese ban on videogame consoles, which was enacted in 2000. But when the ban was lifted in 2014 the Chinese government would still ban or censor “hostile” videogames.¹⁷⁶ An example of this is the banning of WWII strategy game series *Hearts of Iron*, which was banned because of “historical inaccuracies” such as the possible independence of Manchuria and Xinjiang, which is contested by Beijing.¹⁷⁷ However, besides these constraints the Chinese government has also promoted the industry, for example by promoting ICT skills in education and investing money into companies.¹⁷⁸ Besides China most governments support their countries’ videogame industries, such as Cuba and some Arab countries.¹⁷⁹ The only exceptions are the really poor countries such as the Congo’s.

¹⁷⁵ Figure 43, “State of Play August 2020: Every trailer from the show,” on gamesradar.com (last visited on November 5, 2020).

¹⁷⁶ Tom Phillips, “As console ban lifts, China reveals “hostile” games block: We still need a screen to block the flies and mosquitoes,” on eurogamer.net (last visited on November 3, 2020).

¹⁷⁷ Nathan Simmons, “The real reason these games were banned in China,” on looper.com (last visited on November 3, 2020).

¹⁷⁸ Fung, Anthony Y.H. and Sara Xueting Liao, “China,” in *Video games around the world*, ed Mark J.P. Wolf, 119-135 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), 124-126.

¹⁷⁹ Nabih Bulos, “Gaming is flourishing in the Arab world – and governments are taking notice,” on latimes.com; Miguel Ernesto, ““Made in Cuba” videogames: A reality around the corner,” on Panamericanworld.com (last visited on November 8, 2020).



Figure 44: China lifts the console ban!¹⁸⁰

The seventh development is that major Western and Japanese videogame companies have sometimes difficulties with cultural localization. This usually occurs in Islamic and conservative countries such as Saudi Arabia.¹⁸¹ For example *Red Dead Redemption* is banned in Saudi Arabia because of depictions of nudity, prostitution, violence, and cruelty.¹⁸² It does occur that developers self-censor their games for certain regions, such as removing blood effects. But if the whole idea of a game is rejected self-censorship is not possible. The main trend is that videogame developers in the West and Japan refuse to censoring the main ideas of their games, but they are willing to censor minor protests such as removing blood effects.



Figure 45: In the summer of 2020 multiple countries in the Middle East banned Naughty Dog's and Sony's latest blockbuster *The Last of Us Part 2* because the main character Ellie has a lesbian relationship in the game¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Figure 44, Sebastian Anthony, "China finally lifts 15-year ban on manufacture and sale of games consoles," on arstechnica.com (last visited on November 5, 2020).

¹⁸¹ Phillip Penix-Tadsen, ed, *Video games and the global south* (Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press, 2019), 20.

¹⁸² Tommy, "15 countries that ban video games," on codeswholesale.com (last visited on November 4, 2020).

¹⁸³ Figure 45, "The Last of Us Part 2 banned in Middle East," on gameslaught.com (last visited on November 5, 2020).

The combined effect of the culture of copying and piracy, and these last two developments have led to the hesitant nature of multinational videogame companies from the West and Japan to invest in the videogame industries from the Global South.¹⁸⁴ These companies are afraid of losing revenue due to these piracy and copying practices. Furthermore, the prospect of censorship or difficulties with cultural localization could steer the focus of videogame companies away from certain countries within the Global South. Sales data shows that Western companies, such as the French company Ubisoft with their *Assassin's Creed series*, are focussing their products on safe bets such as North America and Europe, instead of investing a whole lot of money and time in possible problematic markets such as China, Africa, and the Middle East.¹⁸⁵ A great example is from India. Over the last decade or so Microsoft tried to sell the Xbox on the Indian videogame market, but they were not willing to share their development licenses with Indian developers.¹⁸⁶ A development license is something a company requires to legally develop a game using, for example, an engine from another company. Such an important license would no doubt have put a lot of fire in Indian videogame development.

History as the little dwarf and non-history as the elven king

The following three factors have impacted historically themed videogames in the Global South. The first factor is that in the Global South other genres are way more popular than the history genre. In India for example mobile game adaptations of popular Bollywood movies sell amazingly well. 99Games, which is a development studio from New Udupi, released *Dhoom: 3 The Game* in 2013,¹⁸⁷ *Fan: The Game* in 2016, and *Sultan: The Game* in 2016.¹⁸⁸ Their first game sold around 10 million times, their second game around 500.000 times, and their third game around 10 million times.¹⁸⁹ Compare that with the Indian developed historically themed game *Hanuman: Boy Warrior*, which sold around 90.000 copies.

¹⁸⁴ Phillip Penix-Tadsen, ed, *Video games and the global south* (Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press, 2019), 19-20.

¹⁸⁵ "Assassin's Creed Odyssey," on vgchartz.com; "Assassin's Creed Origins," on vgchartz.com; "Assassin's Creed," on vgchartz.com (last visited on November 4, 2020).

¹⁸⁶ Adrienne Shaw, "How do you say gamer in Hindi?: Exploratory research on the Indian digital game industry and culture," in *Gaming globally: Production, play and place*, eds. Nina B. Huntemann and Ben Aslinger, 183-201 (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), 187.

¹⁸⁷ Figure 46, "Dhoom: 3 The Game," on gamezplay.org (last visited on November 6, 2020).

¹⁸⁸ *Dhoom: 3 The Game; Fan: The Game; Sultan: The Game*, all on 99games.in (last visited on November 8, 2020).

¹⁸⁹ Sales for *Dhoom: 3 The Game; Fan: The Game; Sultan: The Game*, all on play.google.com (last visited on November 8, 2020).

Another example is the esports phenomenon, which is huge in Asia. The top game in this competitive environment is *League of Legends*, which is developed by the American developer Riot Games. Each year the finals get millions of views, and the stadiums in which these events take place are filled with thousands of people.



Figure 46: Still from Dhoom: 3 The Game



Figure 47: The 2020 final of the League of Legends World Championship in Shanghai. Normally there would be thousands of people more, but because of the Covid19 Pandemic “only” a few thousand were allowed, however there were over 2 million registrations for the event!¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Figure 47, “League of Legends Worlds 2020 Finals records over 2 million registrations,” on esportsanalyst.medium.com (last visited on November 6, 2020).

The second factor is the poor sales numbers of historically themed videogames in the Global South, which I have also discussed in chapter II. However, for many games there is no sales data available. I argue that you can still claim that these sales numbers are low, because when you try to find information about these games there is not a lot of search hits. For example, when googling “Huni Kuin: Yube Baitana” you get 8.940 search hits, but when you Google for another popular esports game “Counter-Strike,” which is developed by American developer Valve Software, you get 279.000.000 search hits.¹⁹¹ *Counter-Strike* being one of the most popular games in countries such as Egypt, Argentina, and India.¹⁹² Perhaps the low sales data of historically themed videogames in the Global South could be linked to the genre being not that popular in these regions?

The third factor is that historically themed videogames from the West and Japan are competitors of local developers in the markets of the Global South. Given that the genre is not very popular in the Global South, competition from better quality games from the West and Japan doesn’t make the situation more appealing for local developers. For example *Uncharted 4: A Thief’s End* could be bought in Egypt for about 16 euros.¹⁹³ *Age of Empires III – Complete Collection* could be bought in South-Africa for about 23 euros.¹⁹⁴

Addressing the red dragon in the room

Before ending this chapter it is important to address the red dragon in the room. If you would ask gamers about what they think the biggest videogame company in the world is they would probably say Nintendo, Sony, Sega, Capcom, or Microsoft. I know this because I asked this question quite a number of times over the last few months. The answer is neither of them, but a little-known Chinese company known as Tencent, which is a Chinese technology company. However, they are not number 1 because they have developed some of the most played and well received games in the world, but because they have bought a share in a few Western development studios, and one South-Korean, that did develop some of these games. It is important to discuss these studios to show Tencent’s position in the industry. They own *League of Legends* developer Riot Games, They own 40% of Epic Games, who develop the incredibly

¹⁹¹ “Huni Kuin: Yube Baitana,” on Google.com; “Counter-Strike,” on Google.com (last visited on November 6, 2020).

¹⁹² “Most played esports games in Egypt,” on esportsflag.com; “The most popular online games in Latin America,” on soundsandcolours.com; “India’s most popular online games,” on indiawest.com (last visited on November 6, 2020).

¹⁹³ “Uncharted 4: A Thief’s End,” on egypt.souq.com (last visited on November 6, 2020).

¹⁹⁴ “Age of Empires III – Complete Collection,” on loot.co.za (last visited on November 6, 2020).

popular videogame called *Fortnite*, they own 11.5% of the South-Korean developer Bluehole, who develop *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*, they own 5% of both Ubisoft and Activision Blizzard, lastly they also own 84.3% of Supercell, who develop *Clash of Clans*. Tencent has shares in more companies, but these are the most important.¹⁹⁵ It becomes instantly apparent why Tencent is the largest videogame company in the world, because the games of the developers they have a share in are all heavy hitters. But Tencent's position does not endanger the main idea of this thesis, it solidifies it even. Most of the development studios Tencent bought are Western companies, which shows that the knowledge and expertise is still mostly centred in the West. Furthermore, Tencent is not involved in the business of historically themed videogames. Of course they own 5% of Assassin's Creed developer Ubisoft, but this is peanuts in comparison with for example their share in Supercell. All these games are non-historically themed. What it does show is China's rise in the videogame industry. It will be interesting to see if Tencent tries to enter the market of historically themed videogames in the 2020's. Furthermore, it would also be intriguing if Tencent tries to set up some major Chinese development studios to develop games locally.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter has proven that videogame developers in the Global South, who develop historically themed videogames, are subject to factors and developments that have minimized their company's, and their historically themed games', success in the global videogames industry and market. Subsequently, this chapter has also shown that non-historically themed videogames are way more popular in the Global South. Huge companies, like the Chinese Tencent, have profited greatly from the success of these non-historically themed games. However, most of these games, such as *Fortnite*, *Clash of Clans*, and *League of Legends*, are also developed in the Western World, meaning that here too most of the knowledge and expertise are centred in the West.

¹⁹⁵ Steven Messner, "Every game company that Tencent has invested in," on pcgamer.com (last visited on November 8, 2020).

Conclusion: A journeys' end

In the introduction of this thesis I asked the following question: How does the development of historically themed videogames set in the Global South reflect global power inequalities? In the thesis I haven taken into account games developed in the Western world as well as in the Global South between 2000 and 2020. I have tried to answer this question in three chapters.

In the first chapter about the representations of the Global South in historically themed videogames developed in the Western world, I have argued that these representations are often based on othering, the white saviour trope, colonialism, et cetera. Furthermore, being the first chapter with an enhanced focus on the 2010's, earlier scholarship has focussed more on the 1990's and the 2000's, I can claim that these kind of representations continue until the present day. A great example from a videogame which represents the themes of the chapter's argument is *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*. The main issue with *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* is that it is ambiguous. The game tries to teach you about the cultures of the Maya, the Inca, and the Aztecs and Lara is helping these people too, but she is also robbing them of their artifacts, which shows it's colonialist narrative.

In the second chapter about the representations of the Global South in historically themed videogames developed in the Global South, I have argued that videogame developers in the Global South assured their indigenous agency through their historically themed videogames. They took the representation of their history, mythology, and culture into their own hands. These developers did this by either critiquing Western developed games or by doing their own thing. They were also very innovative in this regard by incorporating indigenous gameplay mechanics in their games. A great example from a videogame which represents the themes of the chapter's argument is *Mulaka*. This game is filled with Tarahumaran history, mythology, and culture. Such as the interesting indigenous gameplay mechanic in which Mulaka can run endlessly without tiring. This is culturally accurate, because the Tarahumara are renowned for their long-distance running ability. *Mulaka* is a great example of indigenous agency.

In the third chapter I have argued that videogame developers in the Global South, who develop historically themed videogames, are subject to factors and developments that have minimized their company's, and their historically themed games', success in the global videogames industry and market. For example, I have shown that videogame companies in the Global South are poorly represented in videogame expos around the world, which limits their marketing reach. Subsequently, I have also contended that non-historically themed videogames

are way more popular in the Global South. This could, for example, be found in the sales numbers. *Dhoom: 3 The Game* sold around 10 million times. Compare that with the historically themed game *Hanuman: Boy Warrior*, which sold around 90.000 copies.

Based on these conclusions I argue in this thesis that historically themed videogames set and developed in the Global South do not have the power to add to, differ from or change the representations made about their counties in the Western world. What this entails is that the West is able to represent the Global South from its perspective, but that the Global South is not able to combat this. At the moment historically themed videogames set and developed in the Global South are drops of water in the ocean of historically themed games set in the Global South. This means that the videogame industry is yet another arena in which there are global power inequalities between the Western world and the Global South. This is rather important, because in its essence it is about who has the power to represent whom.

The added value of this thesis to the status quaestionis is that historians should be more critical about the development of historically themed videogames set and developed in the Global South. It is wonderful that these games exist, and that their number seems to be rising, but we should never stop asking ourselves the question whether these games do have the power to add to, differ from or change the representations made about their counties in the Western world. At the moment I answer this question with a no.

For further research it would be great if there is more focus on the Japanese, Taiwanese, and South-Korean development of historically themed videogames set in the Global South. I have mentioned Japan a few times in this thesis, but a separate focus on these countries would have made this thesis too broad and too big. Furthermore, it will also be interesting to enquire whether there is a link between the development of some nation states in the Global South and the development of videogames. Some of these young nations are not as rooted to a degree which is found for example in England or Russia. The many border conflicts and civil wars, some of which continue to this day, are an effect of this non-rooted character. Representations of these countries in historically themed videogames could touch a few painful strings in their histories. An example is the ban of the *Hearts of Iron Series* in China because of “historical inaccuracies” such as the possible independence of Manchuria and Xinjiang, which is contested by Beijing. Maybe this could be another argument why the development of historically themed videogames in the Global South is less developed? So, I hope that someone would embark on these journeys in the future.

Ludography

Historically themed videogames developed in the Western world that are set in the Global South

Age of Empires II: The age of kings, developed by Ensemble Studios and published by Microsoft Game Studios in 1999.

Age of Empires 3, developed by Ensemble Studios and published by Microsoft Game Studios in 2005.

Assassin's Creed I, developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft in 2007.

Assassin's Creed: Revelations, developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft in 2011.

Battlefield I, developed by EA DICE and published by Electronic Arts in 2016.

Beyond: Two Souls, developed by Quantic Dream and published by Sony Computer Entertainment in 2013.

Empire: Total War, developed by Creative Assembly and published by Sega in 2009.

Far Cry 2, developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft in 2008.

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves, developed by Naughty Dog and published by Sony Computer Entertainment in 2009.

Red Dead Redemption I, developed by Rockstar San Diego and published by Rockstar Games in 2010.

1979 Revolution: Black Friday, developed by iNK Studios and published by iNK Studios in 2016.

Uncharted: The Lost Legacy, developed by Naughty Dog and published by Sony Interactive Entertainment in 2017.

Shadow of the Tomb Raider, developed by Eidos Montreal and Crystal Dynamics and published by Square Enix in 2018.

Sniper Elite 3, developed and published by Rebellion Developments in 2014.

Tomb Raider: Legend, developed by Crystal Dynamics and published by Eidos Interactive in 2006.

Total War: Three Kingdoms, developed by Creative Assembly and published by Sega in 2019.

Uncharted 4, developed by Naughty Dog and published by Sony Computer Entertainment in 2016.

Historically themed videogames developed in the Global South that are set in the Global South

Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan, developed and published by Kiro'o Games in 2016.

Under Ash, developed by Radwan Kasmyia and published by Afkar Media in 2002.

Three Kingdoms: Fate of the Dragon, developed by Overmax Studios and Object Software Limited and published by Eidos Interactive in 2001.

Bhagat Singh, developed and published by Lumen Phon Multimedia and Mitashi Edutainment in 2002.

Special Force, developed by Hezbollah and published by Hezbollah in 2003.

Under Siege, developed by Afkar Media and published by Dar al-Fikr in 2004.

Special Force 2: Tale of the Truthful Pledge, developed by Hezbollah and published by Hezbollah in 2007.

The adventures of Nyangi, developed by Sinc Studios and published by Sinc Studios in 2007.

Hanuman: Boy Warrior, developed by Aurna Technologies and published by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe in 2009.

Huni Kuin: Yube Baitana, developed by a Brazilian team of anthropologists and game developers on the one hand and the Huni Kuin on the other hand in 2017.

Unearthed: Trail of Ibn Battuta, developed by Semaphore and published by Semanoor in 2013.
Mulaka, developed by Lienzo and published by Lienzo in 2018.

Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror, developed by StoryTale Studios and published by StoryTale Studios and Maple Whispering Limited in 2018.

Non-historically themed videogames

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare, developed by Infinity Ward and published by Activision in 2019.

Clash of Clans, developed and published by Supercell since 2012.

Dhoom: 3 The Game, developed and published by 99Games in 2013.

EVOKE, developed and published by The World Bank in 2010.

Fan: The Game, developed and published by 99Games in 2016.

Five nights at Freddy's, developed by Scott Cawthon and published by Microsoft Windows between 2014 -.

Fortnite, developed and published by Epic Games since 2017.

Hearts of Iron series, developed by Paradox Development Studio and published by Paradox Interactive in 2002, 2005, 2009, and 2016.

League of Legends, developed by Riot Games and published by Riot Games, Tencent, and Garena since 2009.

PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds, developed by PUBG Corp. and published by PUBG Corp., Microsoft, and Tencent since 2017.

Resident Evil, developed and published by Capcom between 1996-.

Spec Ops: The line, developed by Yager development and published by 2K Games in 2012.

Sultan: The Game, developed and published by 99Games in 2016.

The Last of Us: Part II, developed by Naughty Dog and published by Sony Interactive Entertainment in 2020.

Until Dawn, developed by Supermassive Games and published by Sony Computer Entertainment in 2015.

Wolfenstein 3D, developed by Id Software and published by Apogee Software (DOS Version) in 1992. Note: This is a historically themed videogame, but it doesn't take place in the Global South. I didn't find it necessary to create a separate section for this game alone.

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