

Black Skin White Guns - Becoming Colonizer in Resident Evil 5

Sabine Harrer

University of Vienna
Department of English Studies
sabine.harrer@univie.ac.at

Martin Pichlmair

IT-University Copenhagen,
Center for Computer Games Research
mpic@itu.dk

“Try to understand this at any rate: if violence began this very evening and if exploitation and oppression had never existed on the earth, perhaps the slogans of non-violence might end the quarrel. But if the whole regime, even your non-violent ideas, are conditioned by a thousand-year-old oppression, your passivity serves only to place you in the ranks of the oppressors.”

Jean-Paul Sartre in his preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963)

INTRODUCTION

It was years before its launch in 2009 that *Resident Evil 5* (RE5, Capcom 2009) became subject of heated controversy around its representation of African people (Totilo 2008, Padilla 2009). An initial game trailer released in 2007 revealed “images from a nonspecific African village, showing off hyperrealistic graphics” (Shaw 2014: 177) and the white, muscular protagonist Chris Redfield attacked by virus-infected black zombie hordes. Journalist Stephen Totilo’s response that “this looks like it’s an advertisement to literally shoot poor people” (Totilo 2008) was seconded by much of the scholarly work ensuing after the game’s release. Academics largely agree that by “racially stereotyping the black zombies and the white protagonist” (Brock 2011) the game reinforces “the myth of primitive Africa, as the zombie is, in many ways, representative of a return to the animalistic, unthinking and manipulated” (Geysler 2013: 105).

This is not the end of the story. After Totilo’s first enragement, he decided to play the game and promptly revised his opinion. Having enjoyed the gameplay, he confided that “the depiction of race and class in RE5 was no longer bothering me” because “these

angry-looking people they want you to shoot are no longer human” (Totilo 2008). What he suggests is that the requirement to play RE5 automatically renders ideological implications irrelevant. What look like humans in the trailer turn out to be merely game tokens, artificial intelligences without any intent to offend. As producer Jun Takeuchi puts it: “There is no intent, no racial content in there, once you see everything in context” (Padilla 2009). The myth that games as interactive artefacts are somehow exempt from ideological baggage, is not only rooted in our common sense association of games with leisure and ‘fun’ (Brock 2011). It is also reinforced by the Romantic claim that players necessarily ignore what they play as soon as they have come to understand how it works (Aarseth 2004, Kirkpatrick 2011, Möring 2013). The myth that the fictional and narrative contents necessarily pale into insignificance through gameplay suggests that gameplay itself - as action - is ideologically innocent. Ironically, this claim is in itself ideologically productive in that it denies the connotative potential of gameplay experiences and blinds itself to possible reality effects: As racialized, gendered players with a history, we never get to enter games and fulfil their gameplay propositions from a “neutral” point of view in the first place. The innocence myth denies this reality and conveniently allows the dismissal of “racial contents” as something dissolving through play.

A complete discussion of RE5’s problems with racial representation has happened elsewhere (Geyer 2013, Brock 2011, Shaw 2013). What this essay will pursue, instead, is the question how we can approach and do justice to RE5’s gameplay experience from a postcolonial angle. Importantly, we seek to dismantle the myth that leisure, fun, and the pleasure of enjoying a well-balanced game are necessarily opposed to problematic racial and gender stereotyping. We do not share Totilo’s conclusion that RE5’s well-balanced mechanics render its ideological propositions less poignant. Conversely, we argue that the way we are invited to inhabit the limited game space of RE5 makes us inhabit a kind of ideology, whether game designers intend it or not (Flanagan 2009: 221, Anthropy 2012).

Our observations are discussed along the work of postcolonial philosopher, psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon, particularly his seminal works *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks*. Though Fanon, born 1925 in Martinique, dedicated his life to unveiling the damage done by French colonialism, his work has been said to “deal passionately with the mechanics of colonialism and its effects on those it ensnared” more generally (McLeod 2010: 22). His writings are personal, drawing together psychoanalysis, patient cases and autoethnographic narratives in an attempt to illustrate the detrimental effects of racism on individuals’ lives and psyches. He thereby makes

tangible the painful consequences of a larger colonial logic, delivering both an experiential model of lived colonial experience in the 1950s and 60s and by proxy a suitable vantage point from which to explore games' current difficulties with colonialism. Approaching games from a postcolonial perspective, we seek to recognise that colonial values still abound in popular culture today, though their form and function might have changed. This perspective "acknowledges that the material realities and discursive modes of representation established through colonialism are still very much with us today, even if the political map of the world has altered through decolonisation." (McLeod 2010: 39). Confronting some of RE5's dominant propositions along the lines of Fanon's voice serves the purpose of highlighting continuity and change. Six decades later, how do his words resonate in the context of digital gaming? In that sense, he is a voice that may assist our awareness of games' neo-colonial tendencies, or in McLeod's (2010) words: "The attention to machinery of colonial discourses in the past can act as a means of resourcing resistance to the continuation of colonial representations and realities which remain after formal colonialism has come to an end: a condition we might term "neocolonialism"" (McLeod 2010: 46).

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon characterises his own voice as "tactical and affective", touching "on the misery of the black man": "I did not want to be objective. Besides, that would have been dishonest: I found it impossible to be objective." (Fanon 1952: 67). Rather than discussing racial dynamics as an abstract phenomena of society at large, he is concerned with how these dynamics bleed into the realm of the intimate, felt life of the individual. His account acknowledges how structures of pain and pleasure are afforded by a larger colonial system. His focus is on the "black man's" condition in this system, providing a much needed position to dismantle the micropolitics of white privilege and supremacy. We regard RE5 as yet another moment in the history of commodity racism, which from the late 19th century onwards allowed popular depictions of racial stereotypes to enter the most intimate spaces of European homes in the shape of household utensils. Most mundane, everyday objects, like soaps and match boxes were henceforth frequently emblazoned with images of "the progress of the great white explorer" (Hall 1997: 240). Not only is misery a matter of felt live, but objectification of the "other" takes place via pleasure, desire and gratification of the coloniser: "Indeed, we might consider that colonial discourses have been successful because they are so productive: they enable some colonisers to feel important, superior, noble and benign" (McLeod 2010: 45). The desire to "dominate and tame the Other" (Eeden 2006) also reflects in leisure activities like the Herrensafari, or gentleman-safari, which started to flourish as a white male luxury activity in Namibia of the 1950's (Henrichsen 2000).

According to Hall (1995: 21) the notion of “adventure” more generally, grew out of a wish to demonstrate the superiority of the colonisers over the colonised. Arguably, there is some historical continuity from adventure as leisure activity “against atmospheric colonial backdrops” to what we see in today’s “adventure” games. As rule-based experiences, games negotiate this history alongside their experiential function - how they structure the felt quality of gameplay and relationships between characters, environments, and among players. Alongside Fanon’s call, we choose to anchor our discussion in the immediate, felt space of our own gameplay experience - telling our “colonial reports” through three autoethnographic vignettes. Writing from the first person, the intention is to create “a window through which the reader can view some of the pleasure and pain” of playing RE5 (Humphreys 2005: 842). According to Humphreys, “autoethnographic fragments become a means by which the researcher can explicitly question and highlight pertinent thoughts and emotional experiences” (Humphreys 2005: 853). This serves our purpose of making mechanisms, dynamics, and values afforded by gameplay activity tangible, taking personal involvement and intimacy seriously as a part of gameplay experience.

Other than suggested by Mäyrä’s (2008) analytical play approach, we played RE5’s coop mode as leisure activity in the domestic space of a living room in central Copenhagen. More concretely, the vignettes revolve around the first author’s experience playing RE5’s cooperative mode with her partner as regular, month-long evening activity. This means that writing this piece of research was not planned from the outset of playing RE5, and did not motivate play itself. Rather, it emerged as a consequence of several impactful encounters with some tribal Majini, which called for the documentation of gameplay situations, emotional responses and player interactions.

Notably, much of the well-established research culture around RE5 revolves around the singleplayer version. We believe that something can be gained by touching on the two-player mode. In particular, it sheds light on the dimension of social interaction, and appropriation of gameplay in a particular social setting. While the singleplayer mode mediates the “adventure” experience through the lens of Chris, casting Sheva in the role of a decorative side character (Brock 2011), the coop experience translates their relationship to the level of a more direct dialogue. What Sheva can and can’t do, then, what she feels towards Chris, and how she contributes to game progression becomes more tangible. This allows us to investigate how the relationship between Chris and Sheva bleeds into the very heart of the game’s functionality: weapon upgrades and resource management.

The three vignettes present three particular situations that are supposed to highlight specific features of RE's neo-colonialism: The first one deals with the way racialized and gendered space is constructed in the game and between the players, and how it establishes the main protagonist Chris Redfield as "great explorer" of an exotic landscape. The second vignette focuses on the objects we live by and through in RE5, and how our relationships to them explain the world. Finally, we will talk about how the game structures interaction between the players, and how it mediates power relationships through the way it establishes interesting gameplay challenges alongside the white privilege/black misery divide. Letting Fanon comment on our experiences with space, objects, and character relationships, we will ascertain how RE5 (and other games like it) invites us to become colonizers.

Altogether, it presents us with the tension between a set of well-thought through, balanced and highly varied cooperative activities markedly contrasted by the ideological implications of what we do. Arguably, this reflects a troubled state of game design and development economics that cannot be argued to be any special to RE5. Even if the game in question stands out as a particularly cringeworthy example of how things can go wrong, it still resides within an "adventure" tradition of similarly designed games. As a general trend, developers choose to spend large parts of their multi-million budgets on polishing battle mechanics, and rendering photorealistic dirt, while they don't seem particularly eager to spend anything on preventing their games from participating in neocolonial politics.

VIGNETTE 1: BLACK WORLD, WHITE VIEW

Having been off the Resident Evil track for a while, I was not sure what to think of Simon's proposition to give Resident Evil 5 a shot. "It is one of the most problematic games in video game history. It is also the pinnacle of coop gaming." That I want to see for myself, and before I know it I am seated in front of a big screen in the living room, holding playstation controller 1. This lands me in the role of protagonist Chris Redfield, while Simon is bound to join as Sheva Alomar. The initial cutscene presents us with a highly resolved "Africa"; I've never been to this continent, but I clearly recognize the bush drums, and realistically disintegrating buildings, sandy roads, black faces lurking behind the crumbling walls. This is the AIDS campaign and the evening news Africa. Finally, I, Chris, enter the scene in my shiny Landrover, piercing the dusty landscape, while my hyperextended muscles fill the driver cabin. Cut. The next shot exhibits a female silhouette from a low angle. I see Sheva's behind before I know her name. "Welcome to Africa" she says, her slim physique, straight hair and Western clothes easily conforming

to what my white Austrian sister and brothers would recognise as “beautiful”. A second later I watch Sheva get groped by a black security man. I do nothing - the cutscene tells me to focus on Sheva’s tightly filled jeans instead. Intermission by loading screen - and Sheva is gone. Chris waits in an authentically run down African place in we-don’t-know-where until Simon has bothered to press “start” on controller 2. A menu appears, which makes Sheva join (again). This causes my immaculately unsplit screen to be cut in half, a splitting process compromising my/Chris’s space whenever we enter the game. Simon apologises on Sheva’s behalf. Hours later, Simon utters the wish to upgrade her sniper rifle. I sigh and pick up the controller again. “OK.” I select the “organize” option. “Which one is it?”, I ask, inspecting our arsenal. “The left one”, he responds, aware that the inventory is not my favorite place. I am incompetently fumbling around on my controller, pressing a couple of buttons and opening random windows until I finally find the desired “upgrade” selection. In the mean time, S. has put his own controller down. “Phew, 3000 Nigerian dollars! That’s expensive”, he says, as look at the “upgrade firepower” option. “Let’s go for something more affordable.” Tired of the inventory, I ignore his suggestion and buy him her expensive upgrade. He waves gratefulness, imitating Sheva’s standard phrase: “Thanks, partner”. As the one responsible for Sheva’s wellbeing, I experience mercy, generosity. “It’s fine” I say on Chris’ behalf.

What this vignette is supposed to highlight is the way power relations are established and distributed between the characters. Importantly, we first get introduced to a nondescript, yet markedly broken place before Chris enters the scene. The uncommented black man’s suspicious face behind the crumbling wall is a first indication that we are in “a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how.” (Fanon 1963: 39). This scenario of an unchanging “native”, “traditional” Africa is sharply contrasted by the male white hero’s sudden Landrover appearance: Chris’ initial association with “driving, mobility and technological supremacy” (Eeden 2006: 355) successfully sets the tone for a Herrensafari 2.0. What we, as audiences, are thereby presented with is the collision of two worlds: the white explorer contrasted against the “black” world of native Africa. This effect is achieved also by means of hyperrealistic graphics that aspire to a detailed portrayal of sun-lit paths, crumbling walls, and racial, and facial features. The effort put into rendering dirt of highest quality, for instance, indicates some of the priorities at work in the portrayal of an “authentic” decrepit native village. This does justice to a colonial order in which “not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some people will argue that the situation has a double meaning. Not at all. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. From one day to the

next, the Blacks have had to deal with two systems of reference. Their metaphysics or less pretentiously their customs and the agencies to which they refer, were abolished because they were in contradiction with a new civilisation that imposed its own” (Fanon 1952: 90). We suggest that this observation applies to RE5 in at least two respects. First, the visual construction of the “black world”, though provided by a Japanese developer, is articulated for a global, mainly Western market (Shaw 2014). What it presented as “authentic” blackness conforms to the projected fantasy of predominantly white gaming audience. Thus, the “black man” is black in relation to “a white gaming world”. Fantasies and myths of the “authentic Africa” are updated in accordance to what supposedly “feels real” to the audiences. Secondly, on the level of game design, as we shall see later, the “black man” becomes alive (as vicious, aggressive agent) only in relation to the white character and his ally. There is no “ontological resistance” in that the purpose of “the black man” is to serve the establishment of fun gameplay experiences. The imposition of a “white world” view through Chris is not only visual decoration, but a central design device mediating our playerly occupation with possessing space and objects, and our wholehearted disregard for the natives’ customs or “metaphysics”.

While Sheva is supposed to be “native African” we see Chris’ glorious enter Africa first. This is only a symbolic foreshadowing of a structural entitlement of “default player 1” that pervades other playable aspects of the game. The vignette above illustrates something about how RE5’s controls serve a function of mediating power relations between Chris and Sheva. In the first example, Sheva’s complicated entering anchors our impression that this game is “Chris’s space”. Sheva needs an extra invitation, which, if we take the detour, will lead to a compromising of “Chris’ space”. This technical detour infringes the message conveyed on the narrative level: Sheva is “African”. However, technically speaking, Chris was here first. The constant repetition of this haptic hierarchy stigmatizes Sheva as a side character, a role that is confirmed throughout countless other aspects of the game (Brock 2011: 11). In reference to the single player mode Brock describes the alienating effect of Sheva picking up objects unprompted that she will not use. “The player must organize her inventory, ration her ammunition, and heal her. This does little to encourage sympathy for Sheva; in fact, her move set and the game’s inventory system encourages players to minimize her agency and treat her as a beast of burden” (2011: 11). In situation two above, Sheva’s helplessness extends to the role of player 2, who has to beg player 1 for help. This communicative act externalizes Sheva’s subordination to Chris, along the lines of an abusive heteronormative relationship. The player controlling Chris, then, silently and thus “naturally” comes to be in charge of managing the resources Chris and Sheva have collected in the course of their team killing

exercises. This dynamic, as we can see above, does not come without humiliation for Sheva. While she fights side by side with Chris as an equally strong character, she relies on his grace to get some weapon upgrades. Worse, even, player 1, as I have done, can simply decide to buy Sheva “something nice” without the co-player’s full consent. Interestingly, none of Sheva’s technical humiliation bleeds into the narrative dimension of her character: She is never angry, hurt, or disappointed by Chris’ arrogance towards her achievements. She patiently waits for his attention, showing only the slightest sign of affection, and appears, overall, markedly stale. Why?

This gender hierarchy between Chris and Sheva is articulated, of course, through racial relations as well. These are reminiscent of Frantz Fanon’s portrayal of “the black woman and the white man”, in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon pays some attention to harmful psychosocial patterns that frequently occur in such cross-racial romantic constellations. More particularly, he talks about the black woman’s “striving for lactification” (29), i.e. the wish to “save the race” by becoming white. “The black woman has only one way open to her and one preoccupation - to whiten the race. The mulatto[sic!] woman wants not only to become white but also to avoid slipping back. What in act is more illogical than a mulatto woman marrying a black man? For you have to understand once and for all that it’s a question of saving the race” (37). From this vantage point, Sheva’s loyalty to Chris - whom she only knows “by reputation” in the beginning of RE5, can be identified as a lactification project. What she desperately wishes for is to frame herself as a “partner”, a term that Chris himself never uses in reference to her. On the contrary, when Sheva is introduced and talks for the very first time about “partnership”, it triggers Chris’ flashback of Jill - the white woman that ought to be on his side, and who is the main motivation for his trip to Africa. As Fanon continues “All these frenzied women of colour, frantic for a white man, are waiting. And one of these days they will catch themselves not wanting to look back, while dreaming of “a wonderful night, a wonderful lover, a white man.” Perhaps they too one day will realise that “white men don’t marry black women”. But that’s the risk they have accepted; what they need is whiteness at any cost.” (31). Whiteness at any cost is exactly what Sheva gets in RE5. Upon Chris’ command, she is willing to eradicate all things black from her home continent, until white blonde Jill is resurrected towards the end of the game and Sheva is history. She has never been more than a plot device to begin with (Brock 2011:11).

VIGNETTE 2: RACIAL POLITICS OF GOLD [SMALL]

After hours of non-consecutive play we finally arrive at the “Marshlands” by boat. Not only does our vehicle come in excellent shape and with an unlimited petrol tank, it is also

equipped with a mini-map indicating our current location as well as the places we would like visit. Like an old tourist couple we are mindlessly drawn towards the bold crosses on the map, eventually reaching the promised dock. On the way to the first village, Sheva takes the first ladder down back into the water. “What are you doing?”, I ask Simon. “Oh, there are just some “Beetle, brown” in the water”, he responds. I excitedly plunge into the shallow waters too, wading Chris around his own axis until I hit the desired jewellery. The Beetles will appear in our “treasure” inventory later, where I can transformed them into valuable weapon upgrades. Back on the docks, we decide to comb the backlands for a more desired object: The “Shaman slate”, a puzzle piece that so happens to be in possession of the so-called Majini villagers. As we enter the settlement on a realistically rendered dirt path, we find the small shacks to be mysteriously abandoned. However, there are valuables to draw from the villagers’ bedrooms and kitchen shelves, and most importantly, from the beautifully designed vases and pots standing outside on improvised verandas. Our kicking and punching of tribal art has a peaceful, meditative melody to it. It is followed by the soft clatter of breaking porcelain, and the flashy rewards hidden inside: Shotgun shells, pot plants, and our all time favorite Gold [Small]. The pottery - far from being meaning- and worthless to us - have a higher purpose: They are to be smashed and transformed into something assisting our mission: to save more Africans from themselves (they are infected!) by “neutralizing” them. I find myself soothed by the prospect of an exotic vase in the distance: It equals the promise of better firepower! To the villagers themselves, the contents of their domestic environments must be utterly useless. The flash grenades, the shotgun shells - these objects are weirdly out of place in this tribal setting. These objects have been placed here for us, ready to be picked up before we purposefully trigger the villagers’ wrath by picking up the “Shaman slate”.

What we see in this scenario above is an extension of Fanon’s “black world” as previously established on the visual level. The contrast between technologically enhanced supremacy and “realistic” misery is nowhere more pronounced than in the carefree motorboat ride through the swamp. While the country is disintegrating, it is also randomly peppered with rewards for the eager explorer. Our running in circles in the waters was entirely done for economic reasons. We did not come here to appreciate the landscape, we came here to rightfully forage for treasure. It goes without saying that the player keeps anything he finds, much along the lines of “the white man” who “wants the world; he wants it for himself. He discovers he is the predestined master of the world. He enslaves it. His relationship with the world is one of appropriation” (Fanon 1963: 106).

While “enslavement and appropriation” of territory might be a common denominator of adventure games, in RE5 it happens along the symbolic lines of racial and ethnical difference. The fact that Chris is white and Sheva is his accomplice aligns with the skill to pick up jewelry and “appropriate” tribal art. It is fitting to say that the enslavement of tribal objects for our pleasure has already ensued through game design: The tribal vases and bedrooms have been prepped prior to our arrival. Their manifest destiny is to serve as containers for objects serving our gameplay progression. Serving the “white world”, these objects have no function outside of it, leading to an interesting break with “authenticity”: While vases and verandas, dirt paths and “indigenous” wooden poles are rendered with utmost care for detail, potted plants, shotgun shells, and health sprays are allowed to awkwardly coexist side by side them without further explanation. One reason for this clash between tribal setting and game objects assisting progression is that the latter are part of the RE series’ established convention. However, in the given context, the difference between (useless) tribal art and (useful) pot plants characterizes the “black world” as a world without values. Furthermore, the way we attribute values to non-tribal objects is clearly inaccessible to the villagers. The game lets us explore their most intimate spaces, yet what we find there has no meaning to their own lives. In Fanon’s terms, not only do we assume a tribal society lacking in values, but we simultaneously declare the native “insensible to ethics” (Fanon 1963: 41). The fact that we can pick up jewelry from their swamps, and take shot gun shells from their cupboards, and they cannot, simply demonstrates their general lack of access to, and understanding of the economic system behind how things demonstrably work. This is, again, because the “black world” is constructed as a place beyond reason, as “insensible to ethics”.

Fanon goes even further in his caricature of the “evil” native, to call them “the corrosive”, destructive element of “blind force” (ibid). Indeed, our smashing of vases and hunting for treasure is excused via the anticipation of violence against us. Knowing that all things native are evil (in RE5 synonymous to infected), we better transform the tribal vase into something useful before the “blind force” will hit us. Thus, our activities of destroying porcelain, framed by soft clatter, are reconstructed as improvement of the objects of the “black world”. Something can literally be gained from destroying, or “clearing” the objects associated as “exotic or “other”. Most importantly, the “clearing of spaces” is exciting and entertaining: The immediate pleasure of “cleaning up” by smashing pottery and picking up Gold [Small] is followed by increased financial power. The satisfying aural feedback nurtures the feeling of entitlement to whatever is being picked up, brushing over the fact that we are stealing things from a local population that we consider closer to animals than to ourselves (Fanon 1952: 134)

VIGNETTE 3: MELÉEING THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH

*We know what is coming. But how? We cannot see the Majini, but we can hear them: The crescendo of exotic bush drums gets more excited, ever more wild - we ought to watch out, this is our chance to get scared and entertained! Have some Majini, please. What pleasant angry shout in the distance - I understand no word - this must be the villagers' wrath that we ordered? Excellent - I glance at Simon: are you excited as well? Can we do this together? We are about to engage in one of the most rewarding trust exercises in video game history: The coop *melée* attack. We get into position, as the enraged mob composed of "town Majini" and "big men" approach us. "Are you ready?" Assures Simon: "If I'm shooting the man in the leg, will you *melée* him?". "OK", I say, suspiciously approaching the rampaging crowd. "No no no, he's got me!" I shout, unaware that Sheva/Simon has just fired a perfectly placed leg shot on the Town Man. Stunned, the Town Majini crouches, holds his leg and yells in pain, performing his "leg grab" animation. A first success! "Now! *Melée* him!" demands Simon. "I'm trying to!" I yell back. I run Chris around in circles, this time unintentionally. I press down all the thumbs I have, but can't seem to fixate the Majini properly. There! A promisingly blinking message, "X uppercut" appears on top of the Majini. Finally! I mash all the buttons I find, including X. There - Chris's white flesh powerfully stabs into the roaring unknown black body, making it fall and disintegrate slowly. As it gets more and more transparent, the dissolving heap of black man gives space to another option: "X pick up Gold [Small]." I am a bit disappointed, hoping that one of the next bodies will contain a pot plant, or maybe some shotgun shells. But rewards are rewards. As I walk Chris over the satisfying sound of "picking up", I feel like this is my well-earned reward for being helpful. I've done something right. I have collaborated with my partner; I successfully uppercut the enemy. I have outplayed my poor navigation skills, and was at the right place at the right time to perform a beautifully animated *melée* attack. Our experiences will turn into memories soon after. Weeks after we've beaten the game, Simon says: "That might have been the most fun I've ever had with you in a coop-game". I agree.*

On the playground of suspense-ridden emotional moments, and action adventure strengthening our - the players' - ties, the Town Majini is the much-needed stumbling block, the "conveniently human-shaped object", as Simon would put it (see Kristeva 1980 on the notion of *abject*). The game does not encourage any interest in history or identity, or even customs of those who kill; it demands us to treat all Majini in terms of the what Fanon has called the "new species of the Negro". According to Fanon, this "species" arises from the systematic denial of black experience from a colonial vantage point: "The

white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am fixed. Once their microtomes are sharpened, the Whites objectively cut sections of my reality. I have been betrayed. I sense, I see in this white gaze that it's the arrival not of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species. A Negro, in fact!" (1952: 95). Via RE5's design of the Majini, "dissection of experience" happens on the levels of visual, aural and haptic design: The arrival of "the savage" is heralded on the aural level via drums and enraged screams, establishing a boundary between us and them. Importantly, the music belongs to our/Chris and Sheva's world, not the Majini's- it is a whitewashed imagination of how "The Negro" would sound, what "he" would say, and how his intentions are nothing beyond evil. It serves our excitement, not their customs. It helps us prepare for and anticipate a deliberately chosen killing spree. Similarly, the "authentic" sounds, colors, and animations of a savage mob are conveniently close to what white non-african people already know about Africa. Its purpose is not to break with those assumptions, but dissection, "fixing" for the sake of continuity. Visual and aural continuity is, however only the tip of the iceberg of entertainment. RE5 makes us work through the Majini to arrive at such pragmatically termed items as Gold [Small]. Throughout confrontations it teaches us to gauge Majini's bodies in terms of killability: Height, movement, sound, and ethnic markers are relevant merely in respect to the number of strikes, the type of weapon required for liquidation. Apart from such differences, Majini are relatively uniform in their nature of inconsolable rage, never troubling our assumption that they are animalistic, bad, wicked, and ugly (Fanon 1952: 93). It is precisely their condition as human beyond human, their status as AI that allows us to deny any "moral ambiguity in the player character's actions" (Geysler 2013: 108).

Much along the lines of Totilo's impression that "the zombies were no longer human", we experienced the Majinis predominantly as a vehicle for interpersonal communication, as platform for stimulating trust exercises: We literally used the black man as an object to test our relationships with. The expensive visual splendor was relatively unimportant, since we were more concerned with the "higher mission" of progression. In an attempt to get better at, and master RE5s, we have met the "colonized native, rob[ed him] of all worth, all individuality, [told him] that [he is] a parasite on the world, that [he] must bring [him]self as quickly as possible into step with the white world" (Fanon 1952, p. 73). Bringing himself "into step with the white world", in our example above, equaled death by uppercut. Not only did his death confirm the politics of a "white world" by dropping a reward on us, but it strengthened the white world's sense of achievement, relief, and collective identity. This gratifying mix of emotions was further aided by the taken-for-granted status of the black body as currency, and its death as solution to evil. Ironically,

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Majini bodies usually dissolve upon dropping dead and dropping gold. A detail is the explicitness in which Gold [Small] specifies the value of this dissolution. The message is that it is worth something to kill an ordinary Majini, but it is far from being special, as would be the case would it yield Gold [Large]. As demonstrated in the vignette, the game teaches us that picking up Gold [Small] is ordinary, maybe even disappointing when one had hoped to receive a pot plant or a case of shotgun shells.

Notably, the function of the Majini is not to establish gameplay variety. Rather, they function as decoration along the way, providing opportunities to improve our *melée* skills until we arrive at truly interesting challenges. As the enemies grow stronger, and more heavily impacted by the antagonists' "bioorganic weapons", the world whitens significantly. More and more cut-sequences featuring elaborately (if awkwardly) scripted characters like Excella, Wesker, and Jill Valentine represent us with the powerful impact of a white world of science, technology. Such visually stunning cut sequences displaying white villains in high resolution alternate with the insignificant Majini slaughter we are used to by now. Along with RE5's update of the colonial entitlement, the game distinguishes not only black from white, but irrelevant from relevant, helpless from powerful, and ordinary from interesting. Majini are used to contrast the diversity and variety of level design and advanced enemies. The latter comes in via the commodification of territory, science and mobility: Chris and Sheva have to explore experimental wards, volcano craters and dark mines lit only by a lantern, handle the giant "bioorganic" monsters developed by Umbrella and Uroborous, and drive through "Africa" on boats and jeeps. Black experience, then, is designed to be inexistent. It is designed to be put in relation to and as a demonstration of white power. What counts are the Majini bodies as materials to work through on the way towards another interesting plot point.

CONCLUSIVE THOUGHTS

This essay has touched on some, but certainly not on all facets in which RE5 reenacts the gendered and racial logics of colonialist adventure through player involvement. We have not mentioned that Sheva can be "won" as a protagonist, and is thereby established as Herrensafari "trophy", for instance. We have not touched on how fashion is used to "help us" discern good from bad in a split second. The main goal with this paper was to dismantle the myth of the neutral game by tracing some continuities between RE5's game design devices and a wider colonial historical horizon. Frantz Fanon's voice has helped us put some of our gameplay observations in context. We were mainly concerned with the way game elements in Resident Evil function, and how this functioning shapes a model

of participation, being in the world constructs complex power dynamics between gendered, racialized positions that are negotiated by the players. We have touched on Western white entitlement, and the role of spatial design in facilitating it. We have talked about how the well-paced mechanics frame mass execution and the eradication of black bodies as virtuous skill. Last but not least, gendered and racialized hierarchies between the protagonists Chris Redford nor Sheva Alomar have been shown to materialize through the game's controls, unnecessarily casting Sheva as inferior and less important.

It would have taken a couple of comparatively minor twists on the narrative level to turn things around and present with RE5 a game whose fiction is on par with its excellent gameplay dynamics. The racist way RE5 commodifies African soil and people for the sake of level design and action mechanics could have been used to satirize, not relentlessly reproduce the myth of colonial purification. The misalignment of "Gold [Small]" and pot plants in African homes, for instance, could have served as a welcome discussion starter. One of Chris' most frequently asked questions throughout his questionable adventure, "What is this?" would have been helpful here. The unqualified strategic power assigned to him as "the man in charge" of the inventory could have been challenged by Sheva refusing to collaborate or getting some control over her own weapons. The room for self-awareness, however, has been completely ignored in RE5's design. Again, this colour blindness may be an effect of the "neutral game" paradigm at work. What we have conversely tried to show is that mechanical and functional layers exert ideological effects in that they exist against a wider horizon of cultural reference. By virtue of being carried out and understood through flesh-and-blood players with a specific cultural baggage, rules and mechanics exist in relationship, not in isolation from, representational history. This means that ideology effects occur beyond the designers' better intentions (Flanagan 2009). What the case of RE5 so poignantly demonstrates that game designers have hitherto broadly avoided facing postcolonial history, privilege, and the question how game designers respond to their medium's entanglement in commodity racism. A more recent example demonstrating the problematic relationship between game design and colonial history is the "Slave Tetris" controversy (Serious Games 2015, Klepek 2015). Intended as an educational, satirical commentary on colonial atrocities, it has been accused of racism itself, reframing slave trade history as light-hearted entertainment for white Danish kids. While the (white Danish) CEO Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen has deflected incoming criticism (ibid), turning our backs to the ideological productiveness of interactive objects does not prevent them from being significant. Turning our back on the way game actions participate in representation turns us oblivious of the fact that it is the very "fun" in our experiences of adventure that go

back to a long history of fetishising and eradicating all things “other” and “exotic”. It turns us oblivious to how for the sake of framing of entitlement and agency games still rely on the myth of a white, male, Western hero facing an anonymous spectrum of passive “others”. It, finally, turns us ignorant towards the fact that we accept such representations in good games, readily inviting the Herrensafari into our own homes, hearts, and relationships.

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