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Ryan Lizardi
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Repelling the Invasion of the "Other": Post-Apocalyptic Alien Shooter Videogames Addressing Contemporary Cultural Attitudes

RYAN LIZARDI

The current videogame cultural landscape contains many popular genres and formats. Frequently, certain types of games that deal with the same subject matter are released within a relatively short time period. Much like dynamics present in other forms of media, this can be explained partially by the economics of the culture industry, which will latch onto a profitable popular idea. However, it can also be explained by examining cultural preoccupations with certain themes and ideas. One such subject matter that has recently become prevalent within the videogaming world is the post-apocalyptic game that depicts an invasion and defense from an outside and most times alien force. From the enormously popular *Halo* series (Bungie, 2001 – present) to the *Gears of War* series (Epic Games, 2006 – present), there are countless versions of the same basic story of an alien force that must be repelled by the human race to secure their freedom and future existence.

The US video game industry, in particular, has recently been flooded with these alien invasion videogames. That is not to say that other areas of the world do not delve into this subgenre, but when viewed in terms of popularity and volume of titles the appearance of a cultural preoccupation is evident in the US. Over the past seven or eight years this type of game, with its generic and stylistic similarities has consistently finished in the top ten of US game sales with certain series like *Halo* (Bungie, 2001) and *Gears of War* (Epic Games, 2006) dominating sales when they were released (NPD Group, 2009). For instance, "*Halo 3*, the best-selling title of 2007, took in more revenue in its first day of sales than the biggest opening weekend ever for a movie" (Guzder, 2008). If one compares sales of these kinds of games in Japan, one of the most important global videogame markets, other than the first *Gears of War* such games never finish close to the top ten and many times do not make the top one hundred (Famitsu, 2009). There are many series, such as *Crysis* (Crytek Frankfurt, 2007 – present) and *Killzone* (Guerrilla Games, 2004 – present) that are published in Europe and that deal with many of these issues, but they typically sell better in the US market so remain important for this analysis.

What are the cultural implications of the US preoccupation with these dynamics and themes occurring so often in the videogame medium? With the frequency and potency of these games on the rise, there is no doubt that American gamers are preoccupied with this form of story, immersing themselves in the post-apocalyptic world with increasing frequency. If one wants to make sense of this attraction, it is important to understand the historically contingent issues that have surrounded the rise of this subgenre's popularity. Ismail Xavier has posed a useful theory for these purposes, known as historical allegories, which looks at the way media texts address historically grounded issues through symbolism (2004). Along these lines, scholarly works have dealt with videogames addressing issues like post-9/11 culture, but little

attention has been paid to the alien invasion games that, while trading in the same fear of destruction, have transcended these political and cultural concerns. Instead, they address deeper held Western ideas, such as a Eurocentric view of the world, which features a sharp distinction between Insiders and Outsider "Others," and the related theme of US reputation overseas.

Videogames are viewed many times as the province of children's toys, and to some they appear to constitute mere "entertainment," but one could also argue that because of the level of interactivity, their cultural impact is significant. Game designers may feel as if they are simply telling multidimensional stories, but when interactive texts are imbued with latent political significations and disseminate ideological positions, then nothing could be more important to study. Structuralist theorist Louis Althusser advised that "a work of art can become an *element* of the *ideological*" (1971, p. 244), and Roland Barthes, in dealing with cultural myths discussed how anything from laundry detergent to wrestling can carry great ideological significance (1972). For this analysis, it is most significant that these games speak to contemporary US politics and ideological beliefs that may be damaging to society and US reputations.

In studying this cultural phenomenon, it will be important to look at the videogame texts themselves to see how they deal with important historically contingent issues. This textual analysis will employ a semiotic framework and will look at both the in-game narrative content, such as story, characters, and environments, as well as the equally important gameplay elements, such as player controls, perspectives, and interfaces. Both areas of the texts are to be explored, aligning this analysis with Jesper Juul who discusses the "'war' between ludology and narratology" and says that there should be a "balanced" approach to this debate (Nielsen et al., 2008, p.195). In fact, Juul's work in this area of video game research is invaluable when trying to consider both these areas. Juul states that "fiction *matters* in games and it is important to remember the duality of the formal and the experiential perspectives" (2005, p. 199). Narrative elements speak allegorically to contemporary issues and ludic elements can be seen as a way players "work through" and reify difficult cultural ideologies that arise in important historical contexts.

There are quite a few examples of these games to examine, with the "shooter" subgenre being no stranger to the videogame world. Games like *Duke Nukem* (Apogee Software, 1996), and close relatives *Half-Life* (Valve Software, 1998) and *Doom* (id Software, 1993), were released long before the current trend this analysis is addressing, but videogames are currently inundated with post-apocalyptic alien shooters. This analysis will perform a close examination of the *Resistance* (Insomniac Games, 2006 – present), *Gears of War*, and *Killzone* series, while touching briefly on other examples from the subgenre, such as *Halo*, *Bioshock* (2K Games, 2007 – present), and *Dead Space* (Visceral Games, 2008 – present). These specific series are emblematic of the larger subgenre of games that deal with an alien force that must be destroyed or repelled for the sake of mankind. There will be a specific focus on videogames of this subject matter that are part of a series, both because of the large amount of content and gameplay to be viewed, and also to show the remarkable consistency of symbolic allegorical content over time.

Allegories, 9/11, and Ethnocentrism

Though Xavier's theory for understanding historical allegory has mostly been used to study films, it is also helpful for unpacking the abstract subject matter and narrative structure of videogames. Historical Allegory theory is especially adept at making sense of rashes of a specific subject matter, in that they can adapt at different key historical junctures to symbolize "an encompassing view of history presented in a condensed way" and "can intervene in cultural and political debates" (Xavier, 2004, p.361). This subgenre of games deals with subject matter that cannot be said to literally deal with issues of today's culture and society, because they are set in a post-apocalyptic world and the enemies are not other people but aliens. Historical allegory theory works well here because it examines content on a symbolic level within specific historical contexts.

While prior theoretical examinations of the contemporary culture of videogames have not used historical allegory as a framework, many do look at the way videogames address societal issues. Much has been written about recent games speaking to the issues of a post-9/11 society, and they make some important claims, but the subgenre dealt with in this analysis has moved past these issues and onto more long term cultural preoccupations of broader US relationships with the outside world. An example of the standard post-9/11-centric analysis is the idea that "game publishers shelved or delayed projects with images, plotlines or game-actions reminiscent of the events" and that the games released since then "have become a medium for responding to an environment of threat and uncertainty" (Lowood, 2008, p.78). These theorists deal mostly with games like *America's Army* (US Army, 2002) and the *SOCOM* series (2002 – present), with contemporary settings and events as their subject matter. These insights are important, but do not properly address the issues and themes that are prevalent in the alien invasion games analyzed here.

Though not dealing with the same subgenre, Nowell Marshall is helpful for this analysis because he develops a framework in the discussion of how videogames symbolically and allegorically deal with broader US attitudes towards the outside world. Marshall analyzes the game City of Heroes, and says that this game contains "rigid xenophobic borders against a variety of aberrant bodies" (2004, p.141). Marc Ouellette is even more direct in saying, "I want to analyze videogames which function allegorically (at the very least metaphorically) and pedagogically through their imbrication with the web of so-called 'post-9/11' narratives" (2008, par. 2). Building off of and expanding on this notion, this analysis will move past the issues society dealt with during and after the events of 9/11. It will look at how these particular videogames speak to the more long lasting, broader issues of US attitudes toward outsiders and the ways in which Western notions and ideals are the paramount lens with which the nation sees itself in relation to those culturally different.

It is one thing to simply state that the United States has a tenuous contemporary relationship and attitude towards other countries and regions around the world, but it is necessary to explain how these dynamics have originated and how they factor into the experience provided by these videogames. Significant historical events must be discussed and cultural theories, like Shohat and Stam's examination of Eurocentrism, must be explained to ground this videogame subgenre.

The set of games that deal with a post-apocalyptic world and the resistance against an opposing force that threatens humanity became prevalent and popular at a time when the US was in a negotiation with how they were perceived by the rest of the world. This is not to say that this time period, loosely defined as 2002 until the present, was the first time that videogames dealt with this subject matter. In fact, one could even make the argument that the underlying stories of early games like *Space Invaders* (Taito Corporation, 1978) and *Missile Command* (Atari Inc., 1980) were very similar. But the addition of historically contingent details, like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan not universally popular around the globe, created and enhanced some tenuous relationships with outside countries.

Possibly the most widely discussed tense relationship due to these events came about because France openly did not support the US decision to invade Iraq. The ensuing fallout from this tension resulted in the temporary push to change things like french fries to "freedom" fries (Loughlin, 2003). This is an example of a culture shifting to adapt to historical issues. Inevitably, pop culture begins to address these issues as well. An episode of *The Simpsons* from 2005 has Lisa traveling abroad and donning a Canadian patch on her backpack because "some people in Europe think that America has made some stupid choices for the past, oh, five years" (Groening & Brooks, 2005). This analysis will show how a similar kind of cultural referencing happens in post-apocalyptic videogames, only on a more symbolic allegorical level. This is not to say that these events and videogames are not intertwined with the post-9/11 dynamics discussed by other theorists; it is just that the kind of referencing going on is symptomatic of long term attitudinal change in the way the US views itself in relation to other countries. Like an overcompensation of sorts, these videogames address the idea that the United States is pushing other countries away because they feel unaccepted. In pop culture, the United States is going to take their metaphoric ball and go home, because they did not want to play with the other countries anyway.

Shohat and Stam posed some helpful ideas about this type of attitude in their influential book entitled *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (1994). Obviously, many of the tensions in these recent historical events involve US relationships with not only cultural "Others" like Iraq but also some countries in Europe itself, evident with the "freedom fries" example. So a more proper term for the purposes of this analysis might be the more widely known ethnocentrism. Shohat and Stam view ethnocentrism as seeing "the world through the lenses provided by its own culture" (1994, p.22), and specifically for these theorists, this attitude can lead to an "idealized notion" of one's own viewpoint (p.14). This refers to the static assumption that everything is how it has always been, and that things like "science and technology" as well as "all theory" come from one's own culture (p.14). Another related term that is helpful in this explanation of ethnocentrism is Said's "orientalism." Said discusses a devaluing of cultures different from one's own and says that comparing cultures "always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one's own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the 'other')" (1978, p.325). For the purposes of this analysis of the post-apocalyptic videogames, the terms ethnocentrism and orientalism will be used to explain the two related phenomenon of believing that one's own culture is inherently ideal, and that other cultures are inherently inferior and need to be violently subdued in these games.

Repelling the "Other"

The actual videogame texts themselves are rich in details to study, and there is no shortage of evidence to affirm their allegorical preoccupation with the concepts of ethnocentrism, orientalism, and the related US reputation overseas. This analysis will focus on the in-game story, characters, and environments, as well as the interactive gameplay perspectives, how the player controls the game, and the interfaces that the player encounters. These elements will be viewed through a semiotic lens to see how these different traits and characteristics of the narrative and ludic elements signify the dynamics of national identity discussed here. The signifiers in these videogames point to the struggles over land, freedom, survival, and the all-important "imulsion" (read oil) of the *Gears of War* series.

Beginning with the ways in which these games allegorically represent an ethnocentric viewpoint and the way they embody Said's orientalism, it is important to look at both the in-game traits of the "human" characters as opposed to the "aliens," as well as the perspective from which these games place their players in. There is a blurry distinction between the characteristics that make up each "species" and this lends to the idea that both are derived from the same foundational base. This is especially important when understanding the coding of the alien characters as cultural "Other" and the identification players feel with the protagonists of the game.

In the *Gears of War* series, for example, human beings have been attacked by creatures that have risen up out of the ground and destroyed most inhabited areas. These creatures walk on two legs, have the basic facial structure of human beings (eyes, mouth, nose), and speak in a form of garbled "English." These physical traits signify that they share a foundational genetic similarity with the humans themselves, and this opens up the possibility of reading them as signifying a different race than the protagonists. The skin color of the creatures, called Locust by the humans, as well as their uneven skin texture mark them as different and "Other." The protagonist characters in the *Gears of War* series would not all be considered White, with the main group including a man coded as Black and another coded as Latino, but with their English and their mannerisms they all signify American. The Locusts' speech, which can be understood to contain words like "Die Ground-Walker" as if it was spoken with a severe rasp, connotes that the language spoken by them is related to English but foreign at the same time. All of this points to the aliens being coded as human-like enough to understand, but as being racial and culturally different enough to repel. It is in their similarities that the connection can be made that these creatures do not simply denote a completely alien race attacking the humans, but instead they connote a race of humans that is strange and foreign to the protagonists. It should be noted that anthropomorphized alien creatures are not only common within the science fiction genre, but also make sense in shooter games for movement and aiming purposes. However, the addition of "garbled" English and features so closely resembling humans pushes this feature towards "Othering."

These same signifying dynamics are present in other videogames of the same subject matter. The *Resistance* series also depicts humanity under siege from an alien force that is threatening to take over all areas of the world. The creatures in this game, known as the Chimera, also walk on two legs and have the basic movements and characteristics of human beings. The connection between alien and human in

this series is even more direct because the Chimera are "created" by incubating human beings in pods to "convert" them. They emerge from these pods with eight eyes and different colored skin, signifying their connection with humanity along side their "Otherness." In *Resistance 2* (Insomniac Games, 2008), the protagonist Nathan Hale gets up close and personal with these pods as he encounters an infested small town where they hang from the very walls of idyllic small town homes. Not only does the presence of the pods containing half-formed Chimera in the homes of the humans signify the connection between the two species, but also when Hale breaks open the pods there is an unmistakable splash of blood that sprays. Blood is an important theme throughout these games because, as Michel Foucault states, blood signifies and is "*a reality with a symbolic function*" (1979, p.147). In this case, the red blood that breaks loose from the pod, along with the half-formed Chimera that falls out, signify the connection these creatures have to human beings. Some games are even more blatant about the connection between humans and the invading "alien" forces. The *Killzone* series depicts a post-apocalyptic world where a group of humans were forced to leave and live on the planet Helghast. These former humans, now known as Helghans, attack the remaining humans. The Helghans must wear respirator masks due to the Helghast atmosphere, but they are direct descendants of the human race.

All of these examples of narrative elements speaks to the connection of the alien forces to humanity and yet "Others" them so as to make them easily killable. This distinction between "Other" and normal, as a feature of media texts, is a process reminiscent of the seminal social psychological work of Henri Tafjel that discussed ingroup and outgroup dynamics. Tafjel states:

> in order for the members of an ingroup to be able to hate or dislike an outgroup, or to discriminate against it, they must first have acquired a sense of belonging to a group which is clearly distinct from the one they hate, dislike or discriminate against (1974, p. 66)

In these alien invasion videogames, the ingroup is established as the normal Western human beings and the outgroup established as the "Other" aliens, which stand in for the broader cultural "Other." This coding and the added element of symbolic violence serve to attack cultural "Others" without complicating gamers' identification with game protagonists. Blurring the lines between human and alien helps to reify cultural fears of those that are different through serial violence done to the alien "Others."

With this dynamic present, the focus turns to which side of the fight the player identifies with the most. In the interactive videogame medium, this identification is tied up with a game's specific interface perspective. Videogames in general have seen an influx of games designed with the label "shooter" attached. Shooters are defined as:

> three dimensional navigation in virtual environments in which the player interacts in single or multiplayer combat sequences by using a range of weaponry in order to complete a mission or objective (Nieborg, 2004,p.1)

The three dimensional aspect of the shooter is especially important for understanding how player identification is fostered through these games. Audiences identify with

these games because they have "enormous persuasive potential" by creating "immersion, intense engagement, identification, and interactivity" (Delwiche, 2007, p.92). Nacke and Lindley discuss the immersive aspects of shooters and describe how playing this type of game increases "imaginative immersion and that this feeling is related to spatial presence" (Nacke & Lindley, 2008, p. 86).

In the post-apocalyptic games examined here, identification is fostered directly by the three-dimensional nature of the genre and the perspective from which the player takes control. Most of these games are considered "first-person shooters" or FPS, which means that the player sees the game environment as if they were looking through the eyes of the protagonist. This gameplay element gives the player a literal viewpoint from which to see the events of the game unfold. Doris Rusch states, "the visceral joy of first-hand experiences is strongly related to the experience of agency" (2008, p.29), but this agency is also focused through the constraints of the game itself and so any meaning garnered from this environment will come through the protagonist's field of vision. When a player is controlling Nathan Hale, the main protagonist in the *Resistance* series to date, they are seeing only what he sees and understanding the world through him. *Killzone*, *Bioshock* and *Halo* are just a few of the examples of series that follow this perspective.

The *Gears of War* series is an exception to this FPS tendency, using a perspective called "third-person shooter." This is an important distinction, as *Gears of War* places its players over the shoulder of the protagonist Marcus Fenix. The third-person perspective does not give players the exact view of Marcus but does, however, not allow you to turn and see his face for most of the game. Because this third-person perspective is restrictive, it still has elements of identification with the main character and for the most part the player is still seeing what Marcus sees. Taking into account this variation on the tendency to use first-person perspective in these games, letting players only see through the eyes of the humans, the subject with whom they are given to identify with, is still a prevalent technique used to foster identification with the protagonists in the post-apocalyptic subgenre, thereby de-emphasizing any kind of identification possibilities with the "Other" characters.

The physical distinctions between humans and aliens, and the perspective that players control the game through, are not the only dynamics that foster a sense of ethnocentrism within these games. The gaming environments and architecture also play a big role in making the fight over survival and freedom in these games one that is fought over the "important" areas of the world. The settings of the post-apocalyptic alien shooter games and even the buildings themselves are a constant reminder to the player of what is important to save in the fight to rid humanity of the invading forces. This spatial element can be seen as a hybrid of a narrative and ludic concern of the videogame texts, because though the settings and buildings play a part in how the story is constructed, they also are part of the physical environment of the game itself. Juul echoes this sentiment when he states "space in games can work as a combination of rules and fiction" (2005, p.163). So not only is the player getting to experience a spectacle from the perspective of the shooter, but is also entering into a pact with the game by following the rules.

In many of the post-apocalyptic videogames being studied here, the tendency is to depict the world worth saving as one very familiar to Western or American areas.

There are not many videogames that come to mind set in sub-Saharan Africa, with the somewhat related game *Resident Evil 5* (Capcom, 2009) as a major exception. Instead, the contested over spaces of these apocalypses are depicted as areas that are either exact depictions of Western landmarks or areas that bear an iconic resemblance to familiar places. This element is important to look at in games due to its signifying practices, as well as the idea that videogames can be seen "as a spatial art with its roots in architecture" where "everything was put on the screen for a purpose" (Jenkins & Squire, 2002, p.64).

In *Resistance 2*, when the battle for humanity's survival is fought in the looming shadow of the Golden Gate Bridge and on the iconic streets of Chicago, there is a powerful signified message about the importance of these areas to be saved. The *Resistance* series discusses the worldwide nature of the fight against the Chimera, shown through animated maps that depict a black spread over large sections of the globe, but significantly the player does not fight these creatures in third world countries or the Middle East. This fight takes place in Britain and in the US. This geographically specific element even came under some scrutiny in the first game of the series, *Resistance: Fall of Man* (Insomniac Games, 2006), as the Manchester Church of England publicized their disapproval of the game's combat scene that took place in a digitized version of the church (Edidin, 2009). When digital representations of these areas and structures signify that the war over the freedom of humanity is to be fought in the West, they allegorically stand in as ethnocentric.

Even when the structures themselves are not digital representations of actual areas and buildings, these games still use architectural elements and historical tropes to index the Western world. These familiar environments help to reify the cultural Western values discussed here by creating a space that has a feel of value and verisimilitude. In the *Gears of War* series, it is important to note that the humans do not live on Earth, but instead have moved to the fictional planet Sera. The buildings and areas that exist in this gamespace cannot depict real world counterparts, but what they do is index Western architectural history and first world, upper-class structures. As players roam the streets of Sera in *Gears of War,* they encounter Gothic style churches with flying buttresses and buildings that resemble an early American Colonial style. The human beings of Sera did not have to follow along this progression of architectural styles that were present on Earth. Instead, it would have been fully logical to skip past these historically iconic styles, to whatever style was prevalent on Earth when human beings left to colonize Sera. These architectural choices signify that the battle between the Locust and humans is being fought in the West, even if it is on a different planet.

This dynamic is common in these post-apocalyptic games, with the planet Helghast in *Killzone 2* (Guerrilla Games, 2009) looking like any first world industrial planet at war and *Bioshock* (2K Games, 2007) looking like Chicago even though the game takes place under water. Even *Resistance 2*, which takes place among many recognizable places in the US, uses some of these more abstract iconic architectural signifiers. In the aforementioned level in which the player enters homes filled with pods of Chimera, the very ordinary nature of these homes and their white picket fences stands in for the Middle America ideal home. Peter Berger discusses how videogames create powerful signifiers when something within the games "mimic a believable element of the physical world" (2008, p.51). All of the contested spaces in

these videogames create powerful signifiers, and whether they are indexing real places or standing in as iconic, point allegorically to the ethnocentric viewpoint of what is worth saving in the apocalypse.

Another prevalent theme within this set of games related to the notion of an ethnocentric viewpoint is the sharp distinction between Insiders and Outsiders, one that is made all the more powerful by virtue of the interactive mode of identification with the protagonist hero. It is not surprising that this distinction would be made in a set of games that deal with war and with alien "invaders," but coupling this theme with the more insidious ethnocentrism makes the Insider/Outsider dynamic important to study. The distinction pushes into the realm of orientalism and manifests itself through three interrelated techniques in these games, the language used to describe the aliens, the attitude towards their presence and the origins of the creatures themselves. All of these elements reflect not only the borders between the Insider group and the Outsider group, but also how this symbolically serves as an historical allegory for societal attitudes towards cultural "Others."

The language used to describe the "invading" forces in these post-apocalyptic videogames is abrasive and vitriolic, even in the derogatory nicknames that are used. The language always reflects the explicit distinction between Insiders and Outsiders in these worlds. In the *Gears of War* series, the Locusts are nicknamed Grubs and the descriptive terms that accompany this name, like "disgusting" and "dirty," reflect the distance the humans want to put between themselves and a Locust. When players kill a Locust the main character, Marcus, will say one of a few different lines, such as "Get back in your hole!" and "Scratch one Grub" or the particularly abrasive "Eat shit and die!" This language sharply marks the Insider/Outsider distinction and what the humans really think of the creatures. These lexical "taglines" are reminiscent of 1980s masculine action films in which hyper-male characters "reacted" to masculinity challenges with "an especially vigorous re- assertion of heroic potency and virility" (Sparks, 1996, p. 355). It is not only what the *Gears* protagonists say about these creatures, though calling them "abhorrent foes" is quite rough, it is also the vigor and contempt signified in their tone of voice that is significant.

In *Killzone 2*, there is equal disdain and hatred for the opposing Helghans, but instead of derogatory nicknames this game resorts to using a vast amount of expletives, unrepeatable in most situations, to describe these foes. This linguistic feature is not only present in the way the humans and aliens are described, but also in the attitude taken towards their mere presence. The irony of the lexical choices in this dynamic will be more evident in the discussion about the creatures' origins in these games, but for the moment it is important to note how the presence of the invading forces is discussed with disdain. Examples include the aforementioned *Gears* quote about sending the Locust "back in your hole" and a human reaction to a speech made by the opposing Helghans in *Killzone 2* to which the human replies, "Listening to this shit makes me want to break something." Whether in the *Killzone* series, where the Helghans are considered "less than human," or in the *Halo* series, where the smaller creatures of "The Covenant" invaders are called "Grunts," the language used to describe the forces that must be repelled by the humans is reminiscent of cultural "Othering." It specifically marks them as Outsiders in comparison to the human Insiders. The leader of the humans in *Killzone 2* states,

"We have beaten back our foes, sent them running." In these games, this is language common in the Insider/Outsider distinction.

Perhaps most important in this Insider/Outsider discussion, is the origins of the creatures themselves. Throughout this examination of the post-apocalyptic videogames, it has been necessary at times to make qualifications about the nature of terms like "aliens" or "invaders." This is because the origins of the various creatures in these games are not as clear-cut as they seem on the outset. A somewhat unexpected trend in these games is to place the origin of the force that the humans are fighting as already having been present in the areas of conflict. The story of an invading force coming down to Earth that humans must fight is not the story told in these games. Instead, it is that these creatures were already present where the fighting occurs and in some cases it is the humans that would actually be considered the "invaders." This is an important distinction to make, especially when considering the broader claim that these games are allegorizing contemporary US attitudes and issues.

Finding an example in these post-apocalyptic videogames that signifies the origin of the "alien" forces as already present is not hard. In fact, it is finding one that does not have this dynamic that is difficult. *Gears of War*, for example, follows the colonization of a planet named Sera by humans. Though these humans had time to build up Gothic churches and massive mansions, the Locust inhabited Sera before the humans. The Locusts had been below "gathered under every major city" and "emerged" from the ground to attack the humans. This points both to the distinction between who is an Insider in this society and who is an Outsider, and makes the language used to describe disdain for the presence of the Locust all the more ironic and significant. The ignorance in one of the human soldier's statements, "Were they down here, like, forever?" speaks also to the ways in which these colonial-like relationships ignore the history and heritage of the colonized. So when the leader of the humans states that the Locusts are "inhuman, genocidal monsters," these creatures are really just defending their own homes and resources.

The Insider/Outsider distinction is even more of an issue in the *Resistance* series. The "invading" creatures, known as Chimera, share nearly the exact same relationship with the humans that the Locusts do in *Gears*. The Chimera were also "already present" here on Earth, an issue made clear when it is revealed that the giant "spire" structures that act as bases for the Chimera were not built but excavated. Again, this makes the fact that such a sharp distinction is made between the humans and "aliens" in this game all the more significant. There is also the added element, discussed in the comparison of human and alien signifying traits, that the Chimera are created by converting human beings. How is it possible to make a clear distinction between who is a human Insider and who is a Chimera Outsider? Even Nathan Hale is infected with the Chimera virus, which makes him more powerful and signifying a continuing Insider/Outsider issue.

Even when the "aliens" are not already present on Earth, or whatever area the humans occupy, there is still many times a tenuous relationship between "invaded"/"invader" and Insider/Outsider. Both the *Killzone* and the *Halo* series are about forces that "invade" the planet occupied by humans, but then as the series narrative progresses these humans take the fight to the planets of the original

invaders. In *Bioshock* (2K Games, 2007)*,* the plot takes place in an underwater city that never bothered any of the human inhabited areas above water. In fact, a plaque adorning the entrance to this city states, "In what country is there a place for people like me?" In these games, who is signified as allowed to occupy the space of the Insider and who is relegated to the status of Outsider is very important for contemporary historical allegories.

Stemming directly from these videogames' ethnocentric viewpoints and distinctions between Insiders and Outsiders is the third allegorical theme, the reputation and issues the US has with other countries. These games symbolically address attitudes and prevalent discourses that surround current historically contingent foreign relations, such as the justifications for war and contemporary versions of Said's orientalism. In these games, no matter how much the evidence is stacked against the humans that they should at the very least consider the possibility that they are not completely in the right, the humans continue to feel justified in their fight.

The opening cinematic when one turns on the game *Killzone 2* is emblematic of this theme's presence in the post-apocalyptic shooter games. The cinematic consists of a speech given by the leader of the "alien" Helghast forces, who are being invaded by humans and not the other way around. The Helghan leader states that the humans are attempting to "seize by force, what they cannot have by right" and that when this is all over "they will know, Helghan belongs to Helghast." It is not a stretch to understand the logic of this speech, as it makes sense that the planet Helghan does indeed belong to the Helghast, but the very next scene depicts human soldiers watching this speech still feeling justified in their fight. At least these soldiers might consider the hypocritical stance they occupy, but instead their actions signify their continued ethnocentrism.

The *Gears of War* series depicts an even more blatant version of allegorically speaking to contemporary reputations of the US overseas in their justifications of war. In this game, "imulsion" is a key resource on the human occupied planet of Sera. It is described as a highly potent and powerful fuel source that runs underground and is very valuable. The humans had been occupying Sera for quite some time and using this "imulsion" when the Locusts decided to fight back, in part, against this use of their resources. It is quite easy to make the connection of "imulsion" as standing in for oil and the entire narrative of *Gears* as speaking to the larger attitudes and reputations about the US overseas. When the leader of the humans, Richard Prescott, states in *Gears of War 2* (Epic Games, 2008) that they will take the fight to the Locusts and attack "where they live and where they breed, we will destroy them," this is said in the face of mounting evidence that it is the Locust who are justified in this fight, not the humans. These elements in the *Gears of War* series signify a lack of consideration of Other cultures' rights and justifications, as well as a whitewashing of the historical factors that led society to this point.

In contemporary US reputation and relations with other countries, tenuous discourses about the justifiability of war and the attitude taken to those who do not share their opinions has been common. Adding the theme of justified war to the other themes of an ethnocentric viewpoint and a preoccupation with who gets to be an Insider or Outsider, these videogame texts symbolize a set of long lasting ideological issues and attitudes prevalent in contemporary US history. By appearing again and again in

this contemporary game subgenre, these elements become allegorical for contemporary cultural preoccupations with battling threatening Otherness.

Conclusion

It signifies a great deal about a society when its cultural texts continually address the same subject matters and issues over a certain time frame. Ismail Xavier poses that in historically contingent situations, texts can speak to the concerns of a culture on an allegorical level and "can intervene in cultural and political debates" (2004, p.361). One such cultural preoccupation that allegorizes US contemporary culture is the set of videogames that depict a post-apocalyptic world overrun by "invaders," who are most times shown as an alien force. Jesper Juul states that "players undoubtedly also want to be able to identify with the fictional protagonist and the goal of the game in the fictional world" (2005, p. 161). So what does it say about culture when players are identifying with a set of games that have an ethnocentric, Othering point of view?

These games, taking the form of the shooter genre, are widely popular and are able to allegorically address concerns because of their symbolic nature. Theirs is a story of war, but not of a conventional war between humans. They instead deal with a war of human beings fighting for their survival against "invading" hordes. In these games, when viewing them through a semiotic/ textual analysis lens, there are significant themes that emerge time after time. Through their narrative and ludic elements these texts exhibit an ethnocentric viewpoint, made clear through comparisons of humans and aliens as well as the perspective the players take. They are also preoccupied with signifying who is an Insider in these worlds and who is an Outsider and what this means for areas of the world that "deserve" to be fought over. As Ouellette describes, this is a "save everyone like you; kill everyone else" mentality (2008, par. 15). Finally and related, these games possess the theme of justified war in the face of contrary evidence, manifesting itself because of the unexpected origins of the "invading" creatures. All of these themes are interrelated and intertwined signifying, through historical allegory, that this set of post-apocalyptic shooters are addressing some of the long-term contemporary issues and attitudes that the US is dealing with, especially when it comes to foreign relations and reputation. Call it "Imulsion" or call it oil, the allegorical significations for contemporary cultural attitudes remain the same.

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