

2018

The Gerudo Problem: The Ideology of The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

Byron J. Kimball

Western Oregon University, bkimball16@mail.wou.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/pure>



Part of the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kimball, Byron J. (2018) "The Gerudo Problem: The Ideology of The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time," *PURE Insights*: Vol. 7 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/pure/vol7/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Digital Commons@WOU. It has been accepted for inclusion in PURE Insights by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@WOU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@wou.edu, kundas@mail.wou.edu, bakersc@mail.wou.edu.

The Gerudo Problem: The Ideology of The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

Abstract

This paper largely considers the ideological constructs of the 1998 Nintendo video game *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, wherein the various ideologies and beliefs, assumptions, and values expressed and espoused by the game through dialogue, gameplay, and setting/character construction, are discovered and analyzed by identifying presented and suggested elements. Through an ideological critique, I argue that through the game's portrayal of a Western European-stylized colonist power as a benign imperial influence and of other cultures as impotent and/or evil others, Western colonialism is idealized as an acceptable norm. The use of racial stereotyping through fantasy race-based societies serves to designate acceptable and unacceptable others especially in regards to Eastern/Orient-stereotyped cultures.

Keywords

zelda, ocarina of time, the legend of zelda, ideological criticism, hegemony, race-based society, orientalism, otherness

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Cover Page Footnote

The author thanks his faculty sponsor, Dr. Emily Plec, for this opportunity and for their feedback and guidance.

The Gerudo Problem: The Ideology of *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

Byron J. Kimball, Western Oregon University

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Emily Plec

This paper considers the ideological constructs of the 1998 Nintendo video game *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, wherein the various ideologies and beliefs, assumptions, and values expressed and espoused by the game through dialogue, gameplay, and setting/character construction, are discovered and analyzed by identifying presented and suggested elements. Through an ideological critique, I argue that through the game's portrayal of a Western European-stylized colonist power as a benign imperial influence and of other cultures as impotent and/or evil others, Western colonialism is idealized as an acceptable norm. The use of racial stereotyping through fantasy race-based societies serves to designate acceptable and unacceptable others especially in regards to Eastern/Orient-stereotyped cultures.

Keywords: zelda, ocarina of time, the legend of zelda, ideological criticism, hegemony, race-based society, orientalism, otherness

Introduction

It would be an understatement to say that *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, Nintendo's 1998 Nintendo 64 title, was well received upon release. Months before the game hit shelves in the United States and in Japan, expectations were high for the title. Half a million consumers in America pre-ordered the title before its November 23rd release, though the title would be released just days earlier in Japan, on November 21st (The Free Library, 2014). Over the course of the game's life, millions of copies would be sold internationally (Nichols, 2014). To this day, critical and consumer acclaim for the title remains high.

All of this, of course, is to emphasize the level of impact *Ocarina of Time* had among players, many of whom may have very well been children around the time of the game's initial release. Despite the game's success, little has been written about the game's impact upon audiences nor what messages players, especially children, may internalize from spending hours with the game. This, perhaps, may have much to do with perceptions of video games, as "toys for kids, rather than sophisticated vehicles inhabiting and disseminating racial, gender, or national meaning" (Leonard, 2003, p. 1).

It is *Ocarina's* perceived status as a childhood toy, however, that provides precisely the best motivation for examining its ideological constructs in further detail. Of interest is how *Ocarina*, a Japanese-produced title marketed heavily towards Western audiences, expresses various ideas concerning race, culture, and colonialism.

In this essay, I offer an ideological critique of *Ocarina of Time*. Through using *Ocarina* as an artifact for analysis, I argue that through its portrayal of Western colonialism as an accepted, idealized norm, *Ocarina of Time* furthers a colonialist hegemony wherein Western European culture is privileged and idealized at the expense of colonized cultures.

Literature Review

Though little has been written specifically about the *Legend of Zelda* franchise, the ideologies espoused by video games has been of some interest to scholars since video games first entered the public conscious. A literature review reveals a growing history of examining the ideologies presented and reproduced by video games across academia. As early as the 1980s, when the majority of video games were simplistic and often crudely rendered offerings on arcade machines or early home console systems, scholars considered their ideological impacts. Early research was often concerned less with racial and cultural themes present in games and moreso with whether video games could influence a child or player's aggressive ideation. Graybill, Kirsch, and Esselman (1985) concluded that children may, at least in the short-term, adopt more aggressive ideation after playing video games with violent themes. Other scholars, such as Kaplan (1983) and Kiesler, Sproull, and Eccles (1983) concluded that depictions of female characters and female players in media and in games themselves often positioned women as "second class" citizens,

which one can identify as reproducing a hegemony that prioritizes the agency and societal power of men.

Examinations of the specific ideologies of video games, alongside the growing technical refinement of video games as a medium, expanded further in the 1990s. Much of this, perhaps, can be attributed to the growing sophistication of video games and of the improvements in home console technology that allowed for such leaps in complexity. As the 1990s continued, video games grew beyond their initial origins of 8-bit arcade games and simplistic renderings: video games with more colorful and advanced graphics, more nuanced characters, broader and more complex storylines, sophisticated soundtracks, and so on were beginning to emerge. By the end of the 1990s, around *Ocarina of Time's* 1998 release, most popular video games featured three-dimensional, polygon graphics that allowed for more realistic renderings of people, animals, and settings. Scholars began to further consider video games as a site for reproducing ideologies, including Gottschalk (1995), who accused many video games of reproducing “decidedly violent, paranoid, individualistic, racist, sexist, militarized, and oversaturated” ideologies where players “brutally enforce a ‘zero-tolerance’ policy towards drug-smugglers and a great variety of others, while keeping women ‘in their place’” (p. 14).

Modern ideological criticism of video games often considers a variety of ideological implications, including perceptions of race and culture, the effects of violent imagery, and gender/sexuality. Monson (2012), when considering depictions of race and culture in the popular role-playing game *World of Warcraft*, concludes that *Warcraft*, along with many other fantasy games, perpetuates problematic ideologies of race as biological essentialism where “alliances, language, intellect, temperament, occupation, strength, and technological aptitude” and culture are influenced by the race of characters within the game, whether controlled by players or not. This, of course, is not a phenomenon exclusive to games such as *World of Warcraft*. As Leonard noted video games, regardless of genre, often feature troubling gender and race stereotypes. “Such stereotypes do not merely reflect ignorance or the flattening of characters through stock racial ideas but dominant ideas of race, thereby contributing to our commonsense ideas about race, acting as a compass for both daily and institutional relations” (pp. 85).

Little has been specifically written about the specific ideologies or racial/gender stereotypes present within *Ocarina of Time* or other entries in the *Legend of Zelda* franchise, despite the popularity of the series.

Mallindine (2015) proposes that *Ocarina of Time*, through favoring masculine styles of interacting with a landscape, such as through combat or exploration, and through favoring the agency of male characters such as the game’s protagonist, Link, devalues feminine styles of interacting or doing, such as through relating to others, and portrays such gameplay styles as less important and female characters as less able to express their own agency without the intervention of a male. Previous literature has, for the most part, ignored the ideological implications of the *Legend of Zelda* franchise and of *Ocarina of Time*, leaving unexplored space to consider such implications.

Method

Ideological criticism concerns itself primarily with the concept of an ideology or “a system of ideas or a pattern of beliefs that determines a group’s interpretations of some aspects of the world” (Foss, 2018, p. 237). By adopting a theoretical lens that seeks to “look beyond the surface structure of an artifact to discover the beliefs, values, and assumptions it suggests” (Foss, 2018, p. 237), one can further consider what ideology the author(s) of a media artifact reproduce or perpetuate, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Ideological criticism, as a practice, concerns a variety of elements, including the formation of hegemonies, defined as ideologies so deeply embedded into the general cultural makeup of social groups or societies that such ideologies are “privileged over others,” resulting in a “dominant way of seeing the world” (Foss, 2018, p. 239). For instance, in mainstream American culture, one such hegemony may be the concept of individualism or self-reliance, as opposed to a hegemony that values collectivism. Hegemonies can become so deeply ingrained that they are normalized among the people of a particular culture or social group, to the extent where a member of such a group may perpetuate or uphold the ideas behind a particular hegemony without questioning such values. Such questions may be seen as abnormal or even offensive to others in the culture. For instance, members of society that favors a patriarchal hegemony may view someone who questions such a system or who suggests a more gender egalitarian structure in a highly negative or dismissive light.

Ideological criticism, as a theoretical lens, has its roots in a variety of critical methods, including semiotics, or the study of signs and symbols. Though studying semiotics may not lead one to necessarily focus specifically on the hegemonies or ideas put forth or perpetuated by a media

artifact, analyzing symbols and signs, which may include examining the use of color, references to other works, and other such elements of a work and what such elements are meant to inspire in the minds of readers (Berger, 2012), involves a deeper level of consideration that lends itself well to considering how such symbols may speak to a particular ideology or hegemony.

To begin to analyze or uncover the ideologies reproduced by a particular medium, scholars may draw upon a number of theoretical lenses, including that of Marxist analysis, where the social, political, and economic arrangements of a society and ideas perpetuated by the ruling class of such a society (often concerning such arrangements in a capitalistic society) that a given media artifact was produced in are considered through examining the values, attitudes, and culture perpetuated by the examined media artifact (Berger, 1982). The concept of “unmasking” ideas and ideologies reproduced by a media artifact is by no means unique to Marxism. Feminist theory, which often emphasizes a focus on gender roles and upon the nature of oppression in various media artifacts, can be said to be a very specific form of ideological criticism (Foss, 2018). While it is not necessary to draw upon either Marxist theory or feminist theory or other such lenses when performing an ideological analysis, such existing theoretical lenses speak to the potency of examining hegemonies and ideologies.

When we consider video games, a more than cursory examination belies stereotypes of video games being a mere toy. This is not to say that toys offer few avenues for ideological criticism. Quite the opposite. Toys may function to reinforce social norms through child’s play, including norms related to culture or economic class (Lima, 2012). Like toys, video games are rich in material with which to consider what values, beliefs, and ideas they communicate to players, whether subconsciously or overtly (Bogost, 2006). Through music, visuals, game mechanics, characters, and setting, one can examine the ideologies perpetuated through video games and their impact upon the worldviews and values expressed and internalized by players, many of whom, like a number of players who encountered *Ocarina of Time* back when it was first realized, may be young children who accept such ideologies in a more passive manner than, say, an adult player.

To perform an ideological critique, whether of a video game or of another media artifact, one conducts a number of steps to successfully unearth the ideologies buried within the artifact’s construction. First, after an artifact has been selected, a researcher must begin to

examine the presented elements in a text, which may give hints as to what ideologies the media artifact adopts and presents. Such presented elements can take a number of forms, including allusions to other artifacts in the work, dialogue, characters, or particular, notable terms (Foss, 2018). After identifying the work’s presented elements, a researcher then further examines these presented elements to determine the artifact’s suggested elements, or what “references, themes, allusions, or concepts...are suggested by the presented elements” (Foss, 2018, p. 245). For instance, if a game requires that a male protagonist must save a princess who is unable to save herself, a researcher may determine that the artifact is suggesting that men are more competent than woman and that women require a savior. After uncovering an artifact’s suggested elements, a researcher would then formulate a “coherent framework that constitutes the ideology [they] suggest is implicit in the artifact” (Foss, 2018, p. 245).

To identify the suggested and presented elements and to formulate an ideology present in *Ocarina of Time*, the author conducted multiple play-throughs of the game. Other titles in the *Zelda* series were excluded, with only *Ocarina of Time* considered. Through playing the game, notes and observations were taken, identifying presented elements in the title including dialogue, characters, various settings players have the ability to encounter in the game. Optional side-quests and interactions with side or non-playable characters were considered as well. Once present elements were identified through an extensive list, suggest elements were generated and proposed for each presented element. These suggested elements were then grouped into two broad categories: elements concerning race/culture and elements that considered societal structures. Examining these two broad categories allowed for formulating ideas and a broader ideology present in the identified suggested elements.

To introduce my personal motivations for pursuing this research, I had grown up playing *Ocarina of Time* regularly as a child. It remained a favorite video game among myself, my older sister, and various childhood friends for years after the game’s release, like many fans of the game. Such an early exposure to the title from a young age provided much interest to perform a detailed ideological criticism. My research considers how the ideas presented in the title might influence ideas and approaches to race and culture held by players who played *Ocarina* as children or who resonated with the game. It is not to say that such research is meant to accuse *Ocarina* of potentially encouraging problematic

ideas, rather that we may realize the ideologies often perpetuated unconsciously by a game beloved by people who accepted such ideas with little overt notice.

The Ideology of *Ocarina of Time*

Ocarina of Time, like other entries in the *Legend of Zelda* franchise, features protagonist Link, a young elf-like boy tasked with saving the magical land of Hyrule and the ever-periled Princess Zelda from Ganondorf, the villainous king of a desert tribe. Though most entries in the series feature Link, Zelda, Ganondorf, and Hyrule, little continuity is established between games in the series. Link is often merely just a reincarnation in a long line of Links, as are Zelda and Ganondorf reincarnations of their own respective lines (Stars, 2007).

As is typical, however, for most *Zelda* titles, Link (and the player) must conquer dungeons, battle monsters, and interact with various NPCs, or non-player characters, in order to advance through the game's story. In *Ocarina*, Link is called upon to save the medieval-esque land of Hyrule after learning that the evil Ganondorf seeks a magical relic, the Triforce, that will allow Ganondorf to rule the Hyrule should he get his hands on the item and, thanks to the guidance of a prophecy, Link is the only thing that stands between Ganondorf's rule of the land. Despite players' attempts to stop him, Ganondorf obtains the Triforce and usurps the Hyrulian throne halfway through the game. Link then must battle Ganondorf with the aid of an array of magical items and through awakening the powers of six magically-gifted allies known as the Sages. Throughout, Link continually time-travels between the past and future with the use of a magical sword, in order to shift between the form of a child and of a young man (Bainbridge, 2013).

Within the first moments of the game, wherein Link finds himself called upon to save Hyrule, the player is centered upon Hyrule and the ruling family who reigns over the collected provinces of the land. Like many fantasy settings in media, Hyrule, *Ocarina's* setting, emulates a Western European-style kingdom. Store fronts and homes in two of the game's main areas, Kakariko Village and the aptly named Castle Town, feature Germanic style façades and thatched roofs. Hyrule Castle is the very picture of a stereotypical medieval castle, complete with turrets and a draw bridge. Though Kakariko Village and Castle Town are far from the only areas in the game, they are among the few regions of Hyrule in which players must return to frequently in order to advance the plot and interact with important side-characters. Link must even continue

revisiting Castle Town in order to access the Temple of Time, where he is able to travel between time. The Temple of Time, for that matter, even bears a strong resemblance towards a Gothic-style Catholic Church, with high steeples, sharply pointed spires, and ribbed vaults. As the main political hubs of Hyrule, it is Castle Town and Kakariko that players are meant to focus their attention upon saving. One may, of course, argue, that the game cannot truly emulate Western ideals due to having been produced in Japan and by a predominately Japanese production team. Japanese culture, of course is not immune to the effects of Westernization. A long history of adopting and adapting Western ideals, since the Meiji period of the late 19th century, has existed in Japan (Wachutka, 2016). One cannot also discount the possibility of Nintendo tailoring the title for Western audiences.

Castle Town and Kakariko Village are, of course, the only areas of the game featuring distinct character models for each NPC, all of whom appear to be white-passing. Players do not encounter their first human character of color, not counting members of nonhuman races or the verdant-skinned Ganondorf, until they reach an area of the game known as the Gerudo Valley, where they meet the members of the predominantly female Gerudo tribe, over whom the villainous Ganondorf rules. Many players do not encounter the Gerudo until the end of the game. Only three character models are used for the entire Gerudo tribe, aligning the Gerudo more with Hyrule's non-human fantasy races, including the rock-like Gorons and the mermaid-esque Zoras, who are, for the most part, nearly identical to other members of their own race. Despite the other races existing within Hyrule and under the jurisdiction of the Hyrulian royal family, only the elven and white townspeople of Kakariko and Castle Town are referred to throughout the game as Hyrulian. Through aligning Castle Town and Kakariko with the "real" Hyrule and aligning the aforementioned areas with Western Europe, Western European culture is cast as the superior culture in *Ocarina of Time*.

It is, of course, the imperial rule of Hyrule, portrayed as benign, and even beneficial to subordinate cultures, that players are asked to assist in enforcing. One must note the very name of the land Link is asked to save: Hyrule, which denotes a "higher rule" and connotes superiority, righteousness, and justice. A hegemonic structure is implied through both the name of Hyrule and through the very stratification of Hyrulian society in itself. Castle Town is ruled solely by the king and the royal family, with only the provincial townsfolk and an array of castle and town guards underneath them. There is no

nobility to shoulder the weight of carrying the upper echelons of Hyrulian society. Other areas in the game, including the lands in which the fantasy races of the Gorons, Zoras, and the Gerudo dwell, echo this hegemonic structure, with a single king/chief heading the clan and a crowd of underlings below, though each race remains under the thumb of the Hyrulian royal family. Each of these races, whom we will consider further, feature an arrangement of simplistic character traits, shared by all members of each race: the Gorons are a pacifistic cavern and mountain-dwelling people who resemble large, orange ogres; the Zoras, who exhibit humanoid and fish-like traits, prefer rivers and springs as their abode; while the pre-dominantly female Gerudo tribe dwells in Hyrule's western desert. Like games such as *World of Warcraft*, race becomes synonymous with culture. We may consider the races of Hyrule to exist within race-based societies, where "race is central to the organization of their social structure" (Monson, 2012, p. 49). Though one can easily perceive the term "race" as being interchangeable with "species" when the races of Hyrule are considered, "the very use of the word race (rather than species) is significant as it simultaneously draws upon and reinforces the preconceived notions of a race-based society" (Monson, 2012, p. 53). Though it should be said that the races/species present within Hyrule, with the exception of the European-esque Hyrulians and the Gerudo, are fantastical and clearly intended to not be perceived as human races or species, note that such depictions are rooted in ideas of contemporary racial politics and ideologies and that the game's use of the word race cannot allow such ideas to be ignored or dismissed.

Halfway through the game, protagonist, Link, learns of a war that forced his mother into hiding in the Kokiri Forest, where a soon-to-be orphaned Link would be raised. Players never see the events of the war. A side character informs Link that "Some time ago, before the King of Hyrule unified this country, there was a fierce war in our world." The player learns nothing further about the history of Hyrule or of the war within *Ocarina of Time* but can, however, infer that this war resulted in the colonization of the other races and cultures existing within Hyrule, including the Gorons and the Zoras. The respective leaders of the Gorons and Zoras claim to have sworn fealty to the Hyrulian King. In the world of *Ocarina of Time*, their colonial subjugation is largely depicted as a necessary and positive concession to create a united Hyrule. Only through conceding to the hegemonic structure that compromises Hyrule do either race find peace. The other races are seemingly protected from

outside threats. One may even miss that each race is under rule from a colonialist power- for the most part, the larger Hyrulian government seems to leave each territory alone, with minimal physical intrusion. But players are notably able to gain access to hidden areas, including the private chambers of one political leader, through demonstrating connections to the Hyrule Royal Family, often through playing a special song or by displaying a letter from a member of the family- in one instance, one area in the Goron's city is denied to even members of the Goron race, though players are able to easily bypass the barrier through their connections to the Royal Family. In this sense, the claim of colonial power supersedes even the claim colonized regions once had to areas and resources created and inhabited by the colonized.

Both the Gorons and Zoras are depicted as impotent in the face of to resolving internal or external pressures threatening the safety of their cities and territories without outside intervention: Link's first encounter with the Gorons involves needing to save them from monsters who have infested a cavern through which the Gorons typically harvest their main food supply: rocks, though the Gorons live in a mountainous region and series of caverns surrounded and built of stone. For this, players are made to understand that the Gorons simply "prefer" the higher-quality rocks present in the infested cavern and their own perceived laziness and/or snobbery prevents them from considering other options. The Zoras are nearly as impotent: Link must save their princess from the belly of a monstrous giant fish, which happens to be the Zoras' deity, Lord Jabbu-Jabbu. Later in the game, after Link has traveled into the future in order to become an adult and fight Ganondorf directly, he finds that the entire Zora tribe has been placed under a sheet of ice, unable to save themselves.

In coming to the rescue of the Gorons and Zoras and, later, the Gerudo race, Link becomes something of a white savior, utilizing modern weaponry and savvy in order to save what the game paints as primitive tribes. Buescher and Ono (1996) describe how intertwined colonialist ideologies may become through Western media: "The ideology of colonialism was rewoven into the social fabric through popular cultural products such as movies, television, novels, radio, and consumer goods" (p. 130). *Ocarina of Time* participates in this colonialist social fabric through its depictions of settings but also, as suggested previously, through the representation of the characters.

Link/the player can later, through an optional side-quest, obtain masks that allow him to adopt the faces of the other races: the Goron, the Zora, and the

Gerudo. In the case of the latter, reception to his disguise is often profoundly negative, with characters often reacting in either fear or disgust at the idea of encountering a Gerudo thief. That Link can pretend to be a woman of color, not to mention the implications of wearing the faces of other races beyond the Gerudo, and use her face as a feat of play-acting is a troubling notion in itself. There is no corresponding Hyrulian mask, for instance. The Gerudo, along with other races, become something that can be carnivalized and adopted as costume.

Link is aligned with the very land of Hyrule itself. Though he, as a child, was raised by the Kokiri tribe, a race of child-like forest people, he learns later that he truly holds Hyrulian parentage. Alignment with the forest, foretold both by his childhood spent within its boundaries and his penchant for wearing green, connects him with the natural landscape of Hyrule. Thus, only a true representative of Hyrule is capable of saving it. His heritage as a Hyrulian legitimizes both his quest and his destiny.

The Gerudo, described as an all-female race (excluding their patriarch, Ganondorf) of horse thieves, exist apart from the rest of Hyrule, though they appear to exist under the larger banner of Hyrule with minimal interference from outsiders. For this, the Gerudo are not received kindly by Hyrule at-large. Residents of Kakariko and Castle Town express, through dialogue, that the Gerudo are to be hated and feared. Stories are recounted of the Gerudo tribe riding through town and stealing away men, to serve as “boyfriends” to tribe members. Their sexuality, in this sense, becomes a weapon, through which the rest of Hyrule, and players by extension, are meant to reject and fear them for. The Gerudos, unlike the Hyrulians, seem to be visually associated with the Middle East. Their clothing suggests stereotypes of Arabian women, complete with veils and curled toe shoes. Though little is said about the culture of the Gerudo, other than their penchant for thieving and their society being comprised mostly of women (Ganondorf is the sole Gerudo male), their iconography aligns them with the Middle East as well. The Gerudo symbol appears frequently throughout *Ocarina of Time*, often appearing on blocks, hazards, and certain items in the game, including a special shield Link must obtain to advance through the game. This serves to distance the Gerudo from players and mark them as “Other.” In early editions of the game, before the symbol was updated in subsequent remakes, the Gerudo symbol was even a mirrored-image copy of the traditional Islamic crescent moon and star (Lee, 2014).

This was not the only change to iconography in *Ocarina*, as it relates to the use of Islamic/Arabic imagery. As well as updating the Gerudo symbol/insignia, Nintendo even removed Arabic chanting from one temple’s soundtrack (GameTrailers, 2012). A problem, of course, had been recognized and addressed. However, the Gerudo to this day, across *Ocarina of Time* rereleases and remakes, remain visually marked as Middle Eastern and Other in terms of dress and symbolism, and, in this sense, “foreign”.

The use of such iconography as quick, visual shorthand for the concept of ‘foreignness’ or to allude to a real-world culture, much like the use of Western European imagery and architecture as a visual shorthand for Hyrule and fantasy, would not be particularly notable, were it not for the use of such imagery to signify peril and evil. Players are soon meant to identify against such cultural trappings and against Ganondorf. The association of the very idea of foreignness, and of evil, with stereotypes of Middle Eastern and/or Islamic culture suggests something deeply problematic. The depiction of the Gerudo and of Ganondorf, who we will further consider, harkens back to traditions of Orientalism, or the appropriation of Middle Eastern and Asian cultural iconography (often through the continual use of stereotypes) by Western cultures.

One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media’s resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds...standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the...imaginative demonology of ‘the mysterious Orient.’ (Said, 1978, p. 26)

Ganondorf serves an agent of the mysterious Orient, representing Western colonialist fears of non-White, “uncivilized” men harming women, both white and non-white, both of whom are depicted as in need of the interference of a white savior male; Link not only must save Princess Zelda from Ganondorf’s grasp but he is also tasked with, in one instance, rescuing a scantily-dressed Gerudo woman who has been imprisoned and enslaved by Ganondorf and his minions. This is achieved through foregrounding not only Ganondorf’s identity as an evil king but through his associations with the untamed Gerudo desert and the Gerudo tribe. It is Link, the white Westerner, who must ultimately conquer Ganondorf and maintain Hyrule and

its Western ideals. And it is players who are asked to align themselves with these Euro-Christian values to identify themselves implicitly with the character of Link and with the land of Hyrule.

Discussion

Is all this to say that *Ocarina of Time* is a racist or problematic game? To venture such a statement would be far too simplistic. When discussing hegemonies and ideology, one may assume that a researcher operates under the assumption that there exists an intentional, clandestine effort to perpetuate racist/problematic ideas to young players. Instead, one must consider that the developers and producers of videogames are occupants of the same hegemonic structures that the games they produce are influenced by and, whether consciously or not, may reproduce the ideologies behind such hegemonic structures in media artifacts that they have a hand in creating.

This, of course, implies another question. Though Nintendo is an international company with a significant reach in North America, the company originated in and maintains headquarters in Japan. Thus, we cannot critique or analyze the ideology of *Ocarina* through a purely Western perspective. In this, I admit a shortcoming: as *Ocarina* may be influenced by the ideologies of the surrounding cultures that the game was produced in, so my own views are influenced by the culture I was raised in. Though I have done my best to account for my limited experience and cultural lens, it remains important to consider such shortcomings. Racial/racist ideologies are certainly not a phenomenon that is, of course, unique to American culture. Whether the ideology perpetuated by *Ocarina* is a reflection moreso of Japanese culture or an attempt to emulate Western American culture and appeal to perceived international tastes is another question. That the setting in *Ocarina* is intended as one that emulates and references medieval European culture would imply that the perceived cultural constructs of such a culture were heavily drawn upon. The idea that the player character is asked to save and restore Hyrule takes such an idea one step further: Hyrule, as a Western European colonist power, is presented as an ideal within *Ocarina*.

Further ideological research could identify whether Nintendo has taken steps to address its depiction of race-based societies in post-*Ocarina* titles and whether depictions of characters such as the villainous Ganondorf are depicted in ways that avoid the same dependence of Middle Eastern or Orientalist iconography

to designate non-European cultures as evil “Others”. With dozens of *Zelda* games released in the years since *Ocarina* premiered, one can only hope.

Video games prove especially ripe for ideological discussion, both due to the idea that gamers often spend hours absorbed in one particular game and due to the intricacy of the games in question. Though *Ocarina* itself, despite being over twenty-years-old, is a fairly sophisticated game for its age, it is my hope that further research will continue to explore the ideological constructs and hegemonies of video games as mass media artifacts through a variety of theoretical lenses.

Conclusion

The ideology of *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* presents a number of troubling notions concerning the alignment of Western culture with civility and goodness and the alignment of non-Western, especially those stereotyped as Orient, cultures as impotent at best and evil at worst. This ideology serves not only to utilize non-Western and Orient cultures as a visual shorthand for evilness or Otherness but to position Western European culture as that of a civilized savior, acting to perpetuate its own interests and ideologies.

It is the nature of *Ocarina* as a video game that raises a number of questions concerning the ideological perceptions of players. Players must explicitly assume the role of Link, the savior of Hyrule. Doing so, they align themselves with *Ocarina*'s colonialist ideology, perpetuating it both within and possibly outside of the confines of the game. Scholar Simon Gottschalk (1995) writes that through utilizing white heroes and seemingly foreign villains, videogames like *Ocarina* “[imply] that whatever is not-self...is most probably hostile, dangerous, and involved in unacceptable activities” (p. 14). Video games, far from passive media, may impart worldviews that are often accepted unconsciously and unquestioningly by players, begging the question: with what ideologies are players asked to identify with or against? “As stimulating machines, video-games enable active participation...as socializing agents, they might offer more pleasure than television watching and might thus displace it as a site/practice of ideological communication” (Gottschalk, 1995, p. 15). Games such as *Ocarina* are certainly no exception. The ideas that players accept or are asked to identify against, unquestioned, from *Ocarina*, are worth consideration in the face of hegemonic structures endorsed by players, often unconsciously, later in life.

References

- Andrade Lima, T. (2012). The Dark Side of Toys in Nineteenth Century Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *Historical Archaeology*, 46(3), 63-78.
- Bainbridge, W. S. (2013). *eGods: Faith versus Fantasy in Computer Gaming*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Berger, A. (1982). *Media Analysis Techniques*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Berger, A. (2012). *Media and Society: A Critical Perspective*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bogost, I. (2006). Videogames and Ideological Frames. *Popular Communication*, 4(3), 165-183.
- Buescher, D. T., & Ono, K. A. (1996). Civilized Colonialism: Pocahontas as Neocolonial Rhetoric. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 19(2), 127-153.
- Foss, S. (2018). *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*. Long Grove: Waveland Press.
- GameTrailers. (2012, August 1). *Season 1: Episode 9: The Fire Temple Chants*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOmOzWdHzHU&start_radio=1&list=RDQMNX5gj4gz_l&ab_channel=epicflames64
- Gerudo Symbol*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Zelda Wiki: https://zelda.gamepedia.com/Gerudo_Symbol
- Gottschalk, S. (1995). Video-Games as Postmodern Sites/Sights of Ideologies. *Symbolic Interaction*, 18(1), 1-18.
- Graybill, D., Kirsch, J., Esselman, E. E. (1985). Effect of playing violent versus nonviolent video games on the aggressive ideation of aggressive and nonaggressive children. *Child Study Journal*, 15(3), 199-205.
- Kaplan, S. J. (1983). The Image of Amusement Arcades and Differences in Male and Female Video Game Playing. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 16, 93-98.
- Kiesler, S., Sproull, L. & Eccles, J. S. (1983). Second Class Citizens. *Psychology Today*, 17(3), 41-48.
- Lee, B. (2014, June 27). *The Legend of Zelda: Cultural Impact, Controversy & Oddities, and Legacy*. Retrieved from The Coalition: <https://thekoalition.com/2014/the-legend-ofzelda-cultural-impact-controversy-oddities-and-legacy>
- Leonard, D. (2003). Live in your World, Play in Ours: Race, Video Games, and Consuming the Other. *Studies in Media & Information Education*, 3(4).
- Leonard, D. (2006). Not a Hater, Just Keepin' It Real: The Importance of Race- and Gender Based Game Studies. *Games and Culture*, 1(1).
- Mallindine, J.D. (2015). *Reorienting Representation: Gender and Space in Ocarina of Time*. (Master's Thesis). Retrieved from: <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/32209/MALLINDINE-MASTERSREPORT-2015.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Monson, M. J. (2012). Race-Based Fantasy Realm: Essentialism in the World of Warcraft. *Games and Culture*, 7(1), 48-71.
- Nichols, M. (2014, June). *Zelda: Sales Numbers in Context*. Retrieved from Zelda Data: http://zeldadata.com/zeldadata_SalesInContext2014.html
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House.
- Stars, I. (2007, November 27). *The Many Looks of Link*. Retrieved from IGN: <http://www.ign.com/articles/2007/11/28/the-many-looks-of-link>
- Wachutka, M. (2016). Technological Innovation and Nationalistic Discourse in Late Nineteenth Century Japan: The Incandescent Lamp and Perceived Challenges to Ethnic-National Identity. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 16(1), 63-82.