Outside the Racist Nostalgia Box: Rethinking Afrikan tähti's Cultural Depictions

Sabine Harrer and Outi Laiti

Abstract

While in recent years many European businesses have taken steps to alter their previously racist product designs, some games, especially board games like the popular Finnish Afrikan tähti *(Star of Africa; Kuvataide, 1951), resist this trend. This raises two questions: First, what are the emotional mechanics which allow openly racist games like* Afrikan tähti *to remain unchanged and celebrated as 'classics' today? Secondly, what can our predominantly white board and role-playing game communities do to let go of emotional attachments to white supremacist games and become invested in a more respectful and welcoming games culture?*

In this paper, we develop answers to these questions in three steps. First, to provide context, we discuss Afrikan tähti*'s status in the Nordic countries alongside the dynamics of Finnish colonisation and white supremacist belonging. We look at how these historical dynamics relate to the 'ludic racism' through which* Afrikan tähti *promotes white supremacist values by repeating myths about Africa and European entitlement (Ylänen, 2017). We suggest that the game, like other racist media, is indicative of what Toni Morrison in a 1993 interview has termed the "profound neurosis" of white people (Oh, 2019) in that it frames white people's colonial activity as a playful adventure rather than a violent dehumanisation of Black lives.*

Secondly, considering the success Afrikan tähti *has had way across Finnish national borders, we make sense of the influence* Afrikan tähti *has had on the white European psyche by looking at its reviews. We do so by drawing together Collins and Jun's (2020) analogy of white ideology as a virus ("Whitefluenza") and the idea that overcoming this virus requires white people to move through a process of grief including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and eventually acceptance of the loss of white innocence (Crayton 2018; Wekker 2016). Following Crayton (2018) and Silvercloud (2022), we apply Elisabeth Kuebler-Ross's five stages of grief (1970) as a lens to analyse* Afrikan tähti*'s BoardGameGeek reviewer comments across 2010-2020 (BoardGameGeek, 2021).*

Finally, we speculate on ways to expedite collective grief to help players reach what we term the 'white acceptance stage'. We speculate that one useful design intervention to help rethink Afrikan tähti *might be to classify it as a PEGI 18 game with the descriptor 'discrimination'. Seen in this new light, the game might find a new purpose as a cultural educational item complementing lessons on Europe's colonial past and the self-image of (Northern) Europe for older children. This intervention is inspired by the recent introduction of sensitivity warnings by multinational entertainment corporations such as Disney and broadcasting agencies like* YLE *(Rytsä, 2007). We argue that adopting such labeling practices for popular board games like* Afrikan tähti *can be a first step towards confronting racist and colonial ludic heritage.*

Introduction

There is an increasing collective awareness that, in addition to providing entertainment, games are cultural media artifacts which communicate values to players through their mechanics and stories and therefore carry societal responsibilities (Flanagan, 2009; Pobuda, 2018). In response, many game designers and scholars have started to challenge the white cis-male dominated norm of gaming (cf. Fron et al., 2007) by developing strategies towards fostering inclusive games culture. In addition to empowering marginalized creators (Laiti 2021, Dealessandri, 2021), these strategies have included creators who addressed their biases by changing insensitive design elements. Examples include the character design of *Chuchel* (Amanita Design, 2018a; 2018b) and upcoming game *Little Devil Inside* (developed by Neostream) whose original designs were changed after accusations of perpetuating harmful racist imagery (Carpenter, 2020). Another example is the board game *Frosthaven* (Cephalofair

Author Biography

Sabine Harrer, Ph.D., is a postdoctoral researcher (FWF Hertha Firnberg grant) at University of Vienna, Austria. They are also a senior lecturer at the Game Design Department, Uppsala University, Sweden. Previously, they have been a postdoctoral Researcher at the Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies, University of Tampere (FI), and have taught games and culture at BTK Berlin and ITU Copenhagen. Their research focuses on critical game studies, HCI, and creation-based knowledge making. They are the author of Games and Bereavement (transcript 2018), and a co-designer of the environmental satire board game Kyoto (2020).

Outi Laiti, Ph.D. is a Sámi game researcher and designer. She is an Associate researcher at the University of Helsinki Indigenous studies. Her field of research is education and computer science with a focus on Sámi language and culture in digital games and programming. She is also active in designing and co-organizing Sami Game Jams and has been involved in several game development and educational projects in the past. Her doctoral thesis "Old Ways of Knowing, New Ways of Playing" published in January 2021, discusses the potential of collaborative game design to empower Indigenous Sámi. In 2020, gamesindustry.biz nominated her as one of the 100 Game Changers for her work on promoting e.g. Sámi gaming.

Games, 2022), whose narrative was changed to address criticism around compulsory colonisation mechanics and stereotypical character design (Childres, 2021). These changes demonstrate the range of possible interventions on the visual to the ludic level of game logic.

In this paper, we[1] investigate some challenges at the heart of fostering cultural change in the context of colonial board games. More specifically, we address the emotional discourse around the Finnish board game *Afrikan tähti* ('African Star') (Kuvataide, 1951) whose racially insensitive design has been widely criticised (Ylänen, 2017). Rather than an isolated case, *Afrikan tähti* is emblematic of a wider board game culture in Europe which centres European colonial activity as a gameplay theme in a way which glorifies, 'adventurises', abstracts or erases historical violence, trauma, and racism (Robinson, 2014; Foasberg, 2016; Borit, C., Borit, M. and Olsen, 2018). As part of this convention, *Afrikan tähti* stages the principles of an imperialist capitalist 'scramble for Africa' (Oyebade, 2002; Iweriebor, 2002) through luck-based looting mechanics and a distorted African map decorated with racist caricatures of Black people.

We contextualise the conversation around *Afrikan tähti* in European discourses of racist product design and rebranding, as well as the public pushback against change (Danbolt, 2017). One example which applies to our cultural contexts of Finland and Austria is a genre of chocolate covered foam cakes which were originally sold under racist names in Finland (Neenerisuukko), Austria, Germany, Switzerland (Negerküsse or Mohrenköpfe), Denmark (Negerboller), and Sweden (Negerbollar), among others. While in Germany, some product names were changed in the 1970s and 80s, the Finnish company Brunberg did so as late as 2001, while the Swiss company Dubler still uses 'Mohrenkopf' as an official product name at the time of writing. Besides official pushes for and against change, racist terminology remains in colloquial use by consumers who wish to 'protect' traditions from 'political correctness' (Danbolt, 2017). In a Dutch context, Gloria Wekker has also discussed this as a way to uphold the notion of "white innocence" via denial of racist legacies (Wekker, 2016, p. 2).

Within this cultural climate, it is no surprise that *Afrikan tähti* is still playable in its original board game design from 1951. However, given that 'traditional' design is not entirely resistant to change, we are compelled to ask two questions. First, what are the emotional mechanics which allow openly racist games like *Afrikan tähti* to remain unchanged and celebrated as 'classics' until today? Secondly, what can we do, as predominantly white board and role-playing game communities, to let go of emotional attachments to white supremacist games and become invested in a more respectful and welcoming games culture?

In this paper, we develop answers to these questions in three steps. First, to provide context, we discuss *Afrikan tähti*'s status in the Nordic countries alongside the dynamics of Finnish colonisation and white supremacist belonging. We look at how these historical dynamics relate to the 'ludic racism' through which *Afrikan tähti* promotes white supremacist values by repeating myths about Africa and European entitlement (Ylänen, 2017). We suggest that

the game, like other racist media, is indicative of what Toni Morrison in a 1993 interview has termed the "profound neurosis" of white people (Oh, 2019) in that it frames white people's colonial activity as a playful adventure rather than a violent dehumanization of Black lives.

Secondly, considering the success of *Afrikan tähti* beyond Finnish national borders, we make sense of the influence *Afrikan tähti* has had on the white European psyche by looking at its reviews. We do so by drawing together Christopher Collins and Alexander Jun's (2020) analogy of white ideology as a virus ("Whitefluenza") and the idea that overcoming this virus requires white people to go through several stages of personal development a non-racist white self (Crayton, 2018; Hardiman, 1982; Tatum, 1992; Wekker, 2016). Within the anti-racist blogosphere, this process has been likened to Elisabeth Kuebler-Ross's (2011 [1970]) five stages of grief model (see Crayton, 2018; Silvercloud, 2022). Whilst keeping in mind the shortcomings of both analogies, we deploy them as evocative lenses through which to help make sense of *Afrikan tähti*'s *BoardGameGeek* review comments from the last decade 2010-2020 (BoardGameGeek 2021).

Finally, we speculate on ways to expedite collective grief and help players reach the white acceptance stage. We suggest that, to really think outside of the racist box, *Afrikan tähti* should be classified as a PEGI 18 game with the descriptor 'discrimination'. Meanwhile, it should be protected as a cultural educational item to complement lessons on Europe's colonial past and the self-image of (Northern) Europe for older children. This intervention is inspired by similar measures like Disney's+ new sensitivity warnings for 'classic' animated films including stereotypical cultural depictions, and Finnish broadcasting channel YLE's management of 'protected' cultural materials, including insensitive Sámi caricatures (Rytsä, 2007).

Colonisation in a Finnish Context

As a simple children's game launched in 1951 and designed by then 19-year-old Finn Kari Mannerla, *Afrikan tähti* has been said to repeat several stereotypes about Africa developed during European colonialism (Löytty, 1997; Lindfors, 2015). This includes the gameplay premise, which is to take jewels from Africa "to a safer place" in the North (Lindfors, 2015, p. 27), and Africa's presentation as a 'savage' place full of wild animals and primitive peoples ready to be exploited by implicitly European players (Ylänen, 2017). This usage of popular images of Africa as a colonial 'other' begs the question how Finland culturally relates to European colonisation.

The ties binding Finnish national identity and *Afrikan tähti* can be explored, for example, in the National Museum of Finland and *The Story of Finland* exhibition where the original board game is on display like a national treasure. The *Afrikan tähti* museum plate highlights the importance of the game to national identity especially through its success globally: The game has sold several million copies internationally (BoardGameGeek, 2021). However, the Helinä Rautavaara Museum exhibition *Afrikan tähti: the Other Side of the Board* (*Afrikan täh-*

ti: pelilaudan kääntöpuoli) acknowledges that *Afrikan tähti* nurtures flat and harmful images of Africa and uses museum pedagogy to explore the real Africa through an additional leaflet aimed at school children (Uusihakala & Niinikangas, 2007; Talja, 2021). Even though this exhibition started its journey in 2007 and has travelled around Finland, a popular self-narrative in the country remains – that it is a young nation with no involvement in European colonialism (Rastas, 2012). Why then has Finland become invested in exporting a 'board game classic' which glorifies the white supremacist activities perpetrated by its neighbouring countries; activities which are documented to have significantly harmed the African continent (Oyebade, 2002; Iweriebor, 2002)?

Finnish colonisation is little known and rarely discussed (Hansen and Nielsen, 2006; Kuokkanen, 2017). According to Marja Tuominen (2011), silence can be seen as a lack of recognition, meaning that colonial structures cannot be dismantled if they are not seen, known or talked about in public. One reason for this might be that, unlike other Nordic countries, Finland never established any colonies in Africa, a fact distracting from colonisation happening elsewhere. Finnish colonisation can be divided into two categories: inner and outer colonialism. Inner colonialism has affected Sámi people living in Finland (Lehtola 2015) in a form of settler colonialism (Ranta & Kanninen, 2019; Wolfe, 2006). Settler colonialism aims for possession of the land and resources, making colonisation an ongoing but subtle state where popular images of colonisation as sword swinging or flagpoles do not apply. Thus, colonisation can be hard to recognize if it is seen as something belonging in the past. Outer colonialism can be seen as normalizing colonisation and benefitting from the effects of colonialism via nationalism and affiliation to racist ideologies (Rastas, 2012; Vuorela 2016).

In the history of Finland, the years of Swedization (Unger, 1986) and Russification (Thaden, 2014) before the declaration of independence in 1917 were followed by an intense period of Finnization (Allardt, 1985). Without getting any deeper in this oppression turn taking, it pressured Finland to 'prove itself' to its neighbours. When being subjected to racist stereotyping and assigned a lower racial rank by Russians and Swedes (cf. Mead, 1968), Finns responded not by debunking racial stereotyping but by conducting similar pseudoscientific studies to prove Finns' worth as 'White Europeans' (Rastas, 2004; Rastas, 2012). In the context of colonisation, this can be seen as what Frantz Fanon calls the "racial distribution of guilt" (Fanon, 1986 [1952], p. 77) an effect whereby inferiorised racial groups attempt to make up for their trauma by scapegoating other groups (c.f. Hook, 2004). The bullied becomes the bully and the bystander, so to speak, keeping the cycle of colonial violence going by repeating after 'big players' like Sweden and Denmark.

In this context, the portrayal and export of European colonial activity in *Afrikan tähti* makes sense, as it can be seen as a (succeeding) attempt at attaining Nordic belonging: What better way to prove one's belonging to white supremacy than through modeling white supremacy through play? Indicatively, the ex-colonial nations Sweden, Denmark, and Norway are among the countries where *Afrikan tähti* has been most culturally successful, becoming a 'manda-

tory' game for many players. Game companies like Alga, BRIO and Egmont have published versions of *Afrikan tähti* over the years for Nordic audiences. The Swedish and Norwegian versions were published soon after the original Finnish game: In Norway, *Den forsvunne diamanten* was published in 1956, and the Swedish version *Den försvunna diamanten* in 1958. Both names translate to *The Lost Diamond*, whereas the Danish version is called *Afrikas Stjerne* ('Star of Africa'). The publishing rights of these Nordic versions are copyrighted to Mannerla's heirs.

Afrikan tähti's Ludic Racism

Map making and cartography have been described as powerful tools of imperial control and a key component in the colonial construction of gaming spaces (McClintock, 2013; Mukherjee, 2018). European colonial maps of Africa have historically served not only to neutrally sketch 'discovered' territories, but to declare symbolic ownership over these territories from a Eurocentric perspective. In his satirical poem *On Poetry: A Rhapsody*, Jonathan Swift (2023) calls out this convention as early as 1733:

> So geographers, in Afric maps
> With savage pictures fill their gaps
> And o'er unhabitable downs
> Place elephants for want of towns. (Swift, 2023)

In Swift's parody, colonial cartography is presented as a tool to fill white European knowledge 'gaps' with images of 'savage' others, going back to the *Hic Sunt Dracones* ('Here Be Dragons') convention (cf. Ruitenberg, 2007). These images simultaneously establish a Eurocentric gaze on Africa while also being symptomatic of its imperial failure to control the territory absolutely. There is a need to cover up blank spots on the map with stereotypical illustrations which is, as Swift indicates, a reminder of Europe's embarrassment over its lack of local and geographic understanding. It needs to compensate by drawing the map reader's attention to the spectacle of the other (cf. Smith 1999; Hall 1997) in the shape of 'exotic' wildlife and 'savage' tribes.

Much of this is continued in the design of *Afrikan tähti*'s game board, which adopts the visual language of colonial-style cartography, including racist caricatures of Black tribes' people on the original map. While some more recent editions have been redesigned to remove all Black presence from Africa (see the Danish Brio AB/Alga 2020 edition, and the Finnish 'anniversary' edition from 2021), the 'original' game version is still sold and widely played with children by the time of writing in 2022.

Furthermore, while the removal of surface level racism is undoubtedly important, in the case of games, cosmetic changes like visual design do not challenge ideologies at the core of gameplay: Africa is still the continent from which resources are extracted by European-cod-

ed meeples. The players still receive funds from a dubious bank and compete to be the first ones to leave the continent after having successfully taken the 'African Star' diamond token (or found a 'visa'). Ideologically, the game repeats the dynamics of the 1884-85 Berlin-Congo Conference, where 13 European states, the United States of America and the Ottoman Empire put themselves in charge of dividing Africa among themselves without any African involvement. This partition of Africa (except for Liberia and Ethiopia) was done without any consideration for societal or geographical dynamics and caused irreparable long-term effects (Adogame, 2004):

> The 1884/5 Conference and its aftermath helped to legitimize the negative attitude towards Africans and to confirm a dented image of the continent and its people. The institutional dimension as exemplified in the degrading exhibitions of 'exotic peoples', the stance of European churches, the role of scholars, writers, painters, artists and the elite group in influencing and shaping public opinion, images and perceptions continues to make enduring impressions on the thinking of many Europeans about Africans and Africa. (Adogame, 2004, p. 188)

Rather than an isolated case, *Afrikan tähti* is a small piece in the larger white supremacist "degrading exhibition of 'exotic peoples'" which Adogame describes above. By putting a European player base in opposition with an African 'other', *Afrikan tähti* is one among a plethora of European board games (see the board game *Heart of Africa* (Mayfair Games, 2004) which use the 'elite' institution of mass entertainment to "influence and shape public opinion" both on the perception of Africa and Africans and on the white European implied self.

Whitefluenza and the Need for Grieving Racist Attachments

How can we make sense of the influence racist gaming has on the minds of white European players? "Influence", rather than a conscious act of individual wrongdoing, may be likened to an "influenza" in its casual, viral and invisible nature: Collins and Jun (2020, n.p.) have coined the term "Whitefluenza" to suggest that "racist ideas mutate and spread with profoundly real impacts", using humans as their "unwitting host", and requiring us to achieve "herd immunity" by investing in educational "vaccines" which raise our critical racial consciousness as a collective (Collins & Jun, 2020, n.p.).

There are several advantages and problems with mapping the image of a deadly virus to the notion of white supremacy. On the one hand it is a tangible image which acknowledges the non-selective nature of ideology as a 'condition' which can affect everyone, including white people. The notion of white supremacy as pathological resonates with Toni Morrison's image of racism as a neurosis of white people (Oh, 2019). Hook describes a neurosis as an emotional disorder "which stems from the conflict between a powerful (often instinctual) impulse or wish and the need to repress this instinct" (Hook, 2004, p. 116). In a climate of white supremacy, "those who practice racism are bereft. There is something distorted

about the psyche. It's a huge waste, and it's a corruption, and a distortion" (Oh, 2019, n.p.). Toni Morrison explains: "If you can only be tall if someone else is on their knees you have a serious problem". Mapped to gaming and other media this might read: 'If you can only have fun if someone else is caricatured you have a serious problem'. Overall, one advantage of the virus image is that it frames emotions around white supremacy and pride as the pathological starting point of colonial and racist harm.

Secondly, on a more hopeful note, the virus analogy comes with a suggestion that healing is possible if we reach a state of "herd immunity" against racist ideas. As Collins and Jun (2020) state, what can be done is attempt to tear down and dismantle white supremacy by collectively developing a "vaccine" through consciousness raising. This requires, as a first step, to recognise that there is a virus to begin with, a step which is impeded by the fact that part of the white neurosis is the refusal to see whiteness (Dyer, 1997). However, the metaphor accommodates strategic utopian hope for a world where reparation and healing from the past is possible.

Despite these advantages, there are serious downsides with comparing racism to a virus. Most importantly, unlike a virus, racist and colonial ideas have not spread randomly, and have not affected bodies equally throughout history. The virus metaphor fails to capture the systematic, intentional way colonial activities have affected the world, ranging from the deliberate invention of racist hierarchies to the systemic exploitation by the Global North. Whilst racist ideas circulate and mutate, they do not do so as randomly and uncontrollably as viruses do.

Moreover, while the notion of 'herd immunity' might inspire hope, it also comes with the claim of an 'end state' of racism and coloniality, which, unlike the state of herd immunity in virology, does not exist. Overall, there is a danger that the virus metaphor shuns blame and responsibility for systemic, well-organised wrongdoing in history by framing it as a factor outside of human control. Rather than a comprehensive model to explain all features of white supremacy and its consequences, the analogy of "Whitefluenza" can only highlight selective aspects, such as the aspects of harm and its contagiousness, and the process of intentional striving for healing.

The reason we consider it useful for our discussion here is because it highlights the pains of acknowledging the harm committed and spread by a default white worldview. The casual, if systemic, spreading of the "Whitefluenza" has cemented white supremacy as a norm. For this reason, acknowledging that racism is at the core of the white worldview might feel like a grief process (Crayton, 2018). Both Crayton (2018) and Silvercloud (2022) invoke Elisabeth Kuebler-Ross's (2011 [1970]) famous five-stage model of grief (Kuebler-Ross, 1970) to make sense of the process white people go through when receiving the shattering 'diagnosis' that they might be invested in racist ideas. These five stages include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally, acceptance.

We argue that the "five stages of white grief" may also be useful when studying players' discourses around games which have been called out as racist. While Kuebler-Ross's original five stages of grief model in *On Death and Dying* (1970) has been criticised for simplifying a complex process like grief, it is nevertheless a useful tool to think with, both because of its popularity and because of its proximity to the range of strong emotions observed in white people 'discovering' their own racism (Oluo, 2018). Denial, especially, is closely linked to what Wekker (2016, p. 2) has referred to as "white innocence", but anger has also been reported as a dominant reaction to beloved consumer products being publicly called out as racist (Danbolt, 2017).

Thirdly, applying a grief model to white sentiments acknowledges that healing from our 'white neurosis' is a long and emotionally challenging process. What we must grieve when working towards an acceptance state of white privilege is not only the loss of white innocence, but the fact that this innocence has been a lie which has pervaded our lives, relationships, and gaming experiences. Like a child that realises that Santa does not exist, we must work through the loss of a lie which has been designed to keep white people in an infantile state of happiness through the dehumanisation and exploitation of others. Coming off this lie and developing antibodies against the "Whitefluenza" can feel like a tragic loss. It takes time and energy to process. As Crayton recommends, white people need to move through the stages of grief at their own pace, ideally while "minimising the potential for harm your whiteness has on others, as you learn" (Crayton, 2018, n.p.).

"Finnish Childhood Nostalgia. Bad Game": *Afrikan tähti* on *BoardGameGeek*

How do players grieve the loss of white innocence in their reviews of *Afrikan tähti*? In what follows we look at the emotional bandwidth in comments on the game's international *BoardGameGeek* forum through the racial grief lens (Kuebler-Ross, 1970; Crayton, 2018; Silvercloud, 2022). By considering comments mainly made by Northern European users from the past decade (2010 – 2020) we discuss the current state of 'racial grief work' among players. We found that, unsurprisingly, the vast majority of reviews featured versions of denial, some containing traces of anger and bargaining. Hardly any traces of depressionand acceptancecould be found, suggesting that more work is needed on the collective striving towards racial consciousness (Collins & Jun, 2020). A more detailed discussion of the categories follows.

Denial: "Kids like it"

Denial is a first response to being called out: "I don't see color." "We don't have a problem with racism here." "I don't have a racist bone in my body!" (Silvercloud, 2022, n.p.). According to Crayton, most white people fall in this category. They are the ones "not yet ready to accept that their privilege, if they will even admit to having any, was gained as a result of oppressing and annihilating others" (Crayton 2018, n.p.).

As predicted by Crayton, most *Afrikan tähti* reviews fall in the category of racist denial. This is expressed mainly through the avoidance of the racism at the core of the game, and the centring of 'nostalgia', 'childhood memories', and 'Finnishness' instead. Among these discourses, the themes of childhood and child play are particularly pronounced. One important effect of this discourse is the construction of a consensus around the ideological innocence of the game (cf. Wekker 2016). If *Afrikan tähti* is a children's game, it cannot simultaneously be a game about European-led genocide, the dehumanisation of Black people, and extractionist economics. It is, instead, according to review 165 (hence R165) "more of a kids game" with "very nice artwork and you can learn geography from it". In this review, the discourse of innocence is combined with a pedagogical claim. While being entertained and building valuable childhood memories, children are thought to benefit from the geographical 'knowledge' taught by the game. This discourse can be found around other games made in the Nordic context, including the Danish video game *Playing History 2 – Slave Trade* (Serious Games Interactive, 2013) where middle school children are encouraged to 'step into the shoes' of an enslaved African boy, written and voiced by European game developers (cf. Harrer, 2018a). In both *Afrikan tähti* and *Slave Trade*, European game developers are accepted as pedagogical authorities on African geography and history.

There are reviews which mobilise the 'childhood' denial discourse in an almost self-deprecating manner. R20 writes: "*Pretty stupid* random dice rolling, but in my childhood I loved this. My children like this *for some reason*" (italics added). First, this comment opens and closes with what can be read as an apology for the 'shameful' emotional attachment to an 'infantile' game like *Afrikan tähti*. The conclusive "for some reason" indicates a wish to achieve distance from the childish joy of playing *Afrikan tähti*. Importantly, while the user negotiates their relationship to the game, racism is not mentioned as a factor, thus keeping denial alive.

A second denial discourse is on *Afrikan tähti* as a 'Finnish classic'. This emerges from reviews which assert that "most Finns know" (R17, R35), "like" (R68) or own (R147) the game. This discourse locates the 'responsibility' for being attached to the game somewhere else than the player. The status of 'classic' suggests that it is not a matter of personal deliberation or choice to play a racist game: If one wants to be part of the community of Finns, one must do it. A point in case is R10 who writes that *Afrikan tähti* is "the Finnish classic that most Finns like. I'm not an exception" (R10). In this review, the taste of the (implicitly white) in-group ('most Finns like [it]') is established first before affiliation to the group is declared ('I'm not an exception'). Liking the game is framed as so inescapably Finnish that anyone disagreeing with this sentiment would be marked as an exception. Secondly, Finnishness is something which has imposed a certain taste on the player who accepts their fate of 'liking' *Afrikan tähti* due to a collectivist, nationalist 'duty'. Either way, the racist core of the game is irrelevant. What counts is group cohesion, irrespective of contents.

The 'Finnishness' discourse on *BoardGameGeek* might also be linked to the commercial and cultural success of *Afrikan tähti* in Nordic countries which Finland has historically tried

to show cohesion with (cf. Browning and Lehti, 2007; Lander, 1991; Mäkinen, 2016). *Afrikan tähti* has sold over 4 million copies, half of them outside of Finland. In the reviews, the game's status as a 'classic' is affirmed both by Finnish users (see R119, R122, R131, R133, R136, and R160), but also by reviewers from 'colonially successful' nations such as Denmark (R137) and Norway (R79). Interestingly, none of the Swedish reviewers use the label 'classic' but use the 'childhood' discourse instead (R173, R187), indicating a sense of cultural superiority over Finnish 'children's' culture. Overall, most of the reviewers using the international *BoardGameGeek* website to classify *Afrikan tähti* as a 'Finnish classic' identify themselves as Finnish, indicating a desire to have this status accepted, nurtured and maintained by players from abroad.

Anger: "Horrible boring game"

Secondly, anger can show in various ways, be it by angrily trying to "protect" marginalised communities (Crayton, 2018) or by aggressively defending one's innocence. In this phase, any perceived infringement on white innocence will face the "wrath of the White Zeitgeist (or, *Whitegeist*). Because after all, if you are correct, and they are wrong, how can they be a "good person" if they allow all this racism to exist? "*What about dad? Mom? Grandad? Grandma? Are you telling me, my family — my bloodline — is evil?*" (Silvercloud, 2022, n.p.).

Due to the genre of review comments on *BoardGameGeek*, where users proactively share their thoughts on the game without being provoked or called out, angry comments are underrepresented. What is interesting is that those comments which can be read as angry mainly address the 'bad' mechanics of the game (for example R79: "Horrible boring game and a classic bad roll-to-move."). R163's review is a long complaint about how they remembered the game from their childhood but can no longer play it because, due to its 'simple' luck-based mechanics "it's quite bad". This is an instance where anger is used to support racist denial, through a focus on usability (cf. Harrer, 2018a). Centring 'bad gameplay' is a common strategy for white players to voice criticism by centring their own experience while avoiding looking at the game's dehumanising anti-Black message as a problem.

Bargaining: "You can be offended or have a lesson"

This takes us to the third stage in Kuebler-Ross's (1970) model; bargaining. In the context of racism, this refers to sentiments around centrism, including accusations like the "race card", as well as "conversation neutralization clichés and thought termination clichés, like "*well, let's agree to disagree*" (Silvercloud, 2022, n.p.). In this stage, white people try to come to terms with our feelings of guilt and ignorance by taking space and energy from marginalised people:

> [T]his is where you center yourself, often to the detriment of those communities who are actually in harm's way. You are so into your guilt for "not knowing" that instead of channeling your newfound understanding into learning and taking action, you po-

sition yourself as a martyr or, god forbid, an ally and every conversation is about you, how badly you feel for not being aware of white supremacy or even the level of your own privilege (Crayton, 2018, n.p.).

Among the reviews, bargaining voices are sparse, but one instance is given in R39; "the African continent is represented in a bit imperialistic manner. You can be offended by it, or you can use the opportunity to have a lesson on the changing nature of western worldview." This comment is approaching an understanding that racism might exist in *Afrikan tähti*, but does so in a way which minimises its harm (the game is only "a bit" imperialistic). It then resolves this conflict by suggesting two possible responses; "be offended" (not recommended) or "have a lesson" (recommended). As a result, white comfort is secured, centred and elevated via the devaluation of the experience of those who might be offended by the "bit" of imperialism which *Afrikan tähti* promotes. Paradoxically, the review suggests that the game will be able to teach players about "the changing nature of western worldviews", whilst also being imperialistic.

A similar bargaining discourse emerges from comments which claim that despite its 'classic' status, *Afrikan tähti* must be seen as a "product of its time" (R117) which must be conserved and protected from a current-day perspective. An important function of the "product of its time" argument is to diminish the relevance of new anti-racist critique. If no-one complained about the game back "in its time", why would anyone do so today? This type of argument ends in denial, bolstered by the paradoxical argument that the game's racism is merely a leftover from "its time", whilst the game remains a timeless 'classic'.

Depression: "Games like this are an embarrassment"

Following the bargaining is a stage of depression, fuelled by the fact that "working to dismantle a system of white supremacy seems like an impossible and overwhelming effort" (Crayton, 2018, n.p.). According to Silvercloud (2022), this is also the stage of white victimhood. A dominant question in this stage is 'why bother?', without having internalised the obvious answer: "because our lives depend on it" (Crayton, 2018, n.p.).

On the level of game reviews, this would include comments which openly name *Afrikan tähti*'s racism perhaps in cynical, self-deprecating and hopeless ways. We found no reviews which would match this category. One plausible explanation is that the collective of *BoardGameGeek* users have simply not reached this stage of grief yet. A complementary explanation is that users are not willing to share depression-related experiences on an international board game forum. This might be linked to the strong 'Finnishness' discourse, and the idea that "Finns are very proud of [*Afrikan tähti*]" (R98). Depressed comments on the deplorable state of white Finnish nationalism in board gaming might be avoided due to fears of being shunned and excluded from the community. Finally, there are a few commentators who state negative feelings about the game without giving reasons (R128: "Games like these

are an embarrassment"). This "embarrassment" might possibly be motivated by an acknowledgement of the racial dehumanisation aspects of the game but might as well be a case of a 'bad mechanics' denial discourse.

Acceptance: "Great if you want to problematise"

Both Crayton and Silvercloud agree that it is only when white people arrive at the acceptance, or 'enlightenment' stage that they become able to work towards dismantling white supremacy. It is the stage when "you are able to accept that as a white person, you have unfairly benefitted from the unearned privileges stolen from others", and to "actively engage by asking 'how can I help?', 'where do you need me?', 'who can I connect you to?', and 'how can I fund this?' to name a few." (Crayton, 2018, n.p.). Rather than thinking of such questions in terms of a cure or catharsis, we find it more useful to see them as possible starting points towards critical awareness and action.

Acceptance on the level of the reviews would suggest a willingness to address the white supremacy underlying *Afrikan tähti* in a way which imagines its critical playful dismantling. We found a single review which goes in this direction (R36): After giving some examples how the game "shows the colonial view on Africa", including the problematic imperative to exploit and leave Africa, the user recommends the game for critical educational purposes: "Great if you want to problematize on colonialism or show how 'we' viewed Africa in the 1950's, which can lead to a discussion about so many topics. So actually, it's a great game, not in itself but as a start for a discussion." Unlike many other reviews, this user contextualises the potential value of this game, importantly not as an object for play, but for European self-reflection and decolonial education.

Our discussion shows a tendency for reviews to be primarily located in the 'denial' stage of racist grief, in that they tend to avoid the game's colonial, white supremacist legacy and defend the emotional attachment to the game's 'innocence'. Given the 'Finnish classic' status of the game, it is worth remembering that in a Finnish national context, colonisation is still a fairly taboo term (Lehtola, 2015; Kuokkanen, 2017). In his discussion of Finnish historical discourse on colonialism in Northern Finland, Lehtola (2015) reports that in a Sámi context, some historians have refused to name colonial policies as such, since as a "product of its time" such policies "should not be criticised from the perspective of subsequent times, if they had not been criticised in their own time" (Vahtola, 1991, cited in Lehtola, 2015, p. 24). This is reminiscent of the bargaining comments about *Afrikan tähti* being "a product of its time". Rather than acknowledging that cultural values, including those embedded in 'classics' are due to change, white supremacist values are defended based on the wish that these values were okay "in their own time". This denial of cultural change also ignores recent demographic changes with a growing number of Finns of African descent (Rastas and Päivärinta, 2010) who have a right to respectful representation in Finnish board games.

Expediting White Grief: Stamping the Racist Nostalgia Box

Overall, this raises the question how our collective grief process as white European players, especially those of us who experience intimate attachments to racist games, can be expedited in a way which helps many of us reach a state of racial acceptance. As suggested, a constructive confrontation of white European colonial legacy in play can only take place once white players accept the loss of our white racial innocence. From a grief counselling perspective, a first step is to accept that a loss has occurred, and previously stable meanings around self and others have been shattered. A second step is sense-making through creative and linguistic expressions; eventually managing to reintegrate the lost object in ordinary life (cf. Thompson, 2003; Neimeyer et al., 2009; Rosenblatt and Bowman, 2013; Harrer, 2018b).

When manufacturers in Europe decide to change their products in response to anti-racist criticism, public outrage is a common reaction (Danbolt, 2017). This can be seen as a grieving process kick start that flares up violently but also tones down in a short span of time. More subtle examples can be found in digital archives such as the Finnish National Broadcasting Company YLE (Rytsä, 2007), which has recently started marking offensive online content. The Sámi parody series "*Hymyhuulet*" now contains a content warning on YLE's website reading text: "Note. The clips contain offensive content. The authors have intended to shake up prejudices as part of the social debate of the 1980s. However, the content has offended many. The sketches have been published in the *Living Archive* (*Elävä Arkisto*) as an example of 1980s television entertainment" (Rytsä, 2007, our translation). Another labelling example is Disney's recent decision to add on-screen content warnings to some of their 'classic' animation films on the Disney+ streaming service, including *The Jungle Book* (1967), *Peter Pan* (1953) and *Dumbo* (1941). While such content warnings are clearly not enough to address the harm done through systemic stereotyping and othering, they represent a visible step towards acknowledging such harm, thus inviting critical engagement with beloved old material.

When it comes to *Afrikan tähti*, we speculate that the confrontation of white and colonial innocence might be aided through a content warning on the box as well. An already available marker for this would be the PEGI 18 rating with the content descriptor "discrimination", which acknowledges the stereotyping nature of the game contents and logic (figure 1).

Figure 1: Design sketch of *Afrikan tähti* game box with PEGI 18 label

The PEGI (Pan European Game Information) rating board provides age ratings for digital contents, including video games, but there is no plausible argument against adopting it for analog games. In the case of *Afrikan tähti*, the content descriptor "discrimination" applies since "[t]he game contains depictions of ethnic, religious, nationalistic or other stereotypes likely to encourage hatred" (PEGI, 2021, n.p.). Among the benefits of applying this label to the game box (figure 1) would be to clearly mark the white supremacist exploitation of Africa as a subject which is no longer suitable for playful consumption by young children. One downside of this labelling might be a potential effect of stigmatisation which might foster avoidance rather than critical discourse. However, an important function of this label would be to "provide guidance to consumers, parents in particular, to help them decide whether or not to buy a particular product for a child" (PEGI, 2021, n.p.).

In a fictional scenario where such a label was adopted, a temporary wave of emotional outrage and public discourse sporting performative "retro racism" (Danbolt, 2017, p. 105) would be expected, followed by a slow acceptance of the 'new normal'. As grief research shows, even grievers experiencing severe and traumatic losses can find it helpful to apply creative strategies to find new meaning in a changed world. In the context of *Afrikan tähti*, the loss of the game's innocence offers the potential to develop new meanings for players. In a changed world, nostalgic childhood memories, intergenerational bonds, and a sense of national connection and pride might be fostered through the collective ability to leave racist objects behind. Like grievers who accept the loss of their loved ones whilst cherishing "inner representations" of the dead (Silverman & Klass, 1993), white European players can accept the loss of our innocence whilst cultivating fond memories of childhood play.

Endnotes

1   We write this as authors with different racial and cultural experiences (white Austrian living part-time in Sweden and Sámi living in Finland). In the paper we variously refer to white people as "us" and "them" to reflect our different lived experiences and our cultural positions regarding European colonial history in general, and the ongoing commodity racism discourse (see McClintock, 2013) which is being upheld in our respective national settings.

Acknowledgements

References

Adogame, A. (2004) The Berlin-Congo conference 1884: The partition of Africa and implications for Christian mission today. *Journal of Religion in Africa, 34*(1/2), 186-190. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1581486

Allardt, E. (1985). Bilingualism in Finland. The position of Swedish as a minority language. In W. Beer, J. Jacob (Eds.), *Language policy and national unity* Totowa.

Amanita Design. (2018a). *Chuchel*. Video game.

Amanita Design. (2018b). *Why we are changing Chuchel's appearance*. Steam. https://store.steampowered.com/news/app/711660/view/5156014950379449243

BoardGameGeek (2021). *Afrikan tähti*. BoardgameGeek. https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/5130/afrikan-tahti, last accessed 6 July 2021.

Borit, C., Borit, M. and Olsen, P. (2018). Representations of colonialism in three popular, modern board games: Puerto Rico, Struggle of Empires, and Archipelago. *Open Library of Humanities*, 4(1), 1-40. https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.211

Browning, C., & Lehti, M. (2007). Beyond East–West: Marginality and national dignity in Finnish identity construction. *Nationalities Papers, 35*(4), 691-716. doi:10.1080/00905990701475103

Carpenter, N. (2020). *Little Devil Inside developer apologises for 'racist stereotype' in a character design*. Polygon. https://www.polygon.com/2020/6/15/21291436/little-devil-inside-racist-stereotype-character-design-update-sony

Cephalofair Games. (2022). *Frosthaven*. Board game.

Childres, I. (2021). *Getting the narrative right*. Kickstarter. https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/frosthaven/frosthaven/posts/3185807?fbclid=IwAR1YOnU59vSLf_a4T3obedfUxnaS4j3zH6Yo7rHYxlGLxqABtkN6s213Bd8

Collins, C. and Jun, A. (2020). *White Evolution: The constant struggle for racial consciousness*. Peter Lang Inc.

Crayton, K. (2018). Dismantling White supremacy and the 5 stages of grief. Medium. https://kimcrayton1.medium.com/dismantling-white-supremacy-and-the-5-stages-of-grief-dc3ecee635f3

Danbolt, M. (2017). Retro racism: Colonial ignorance and racialized affective consumption in Danish public culture. N*ordic Journal of Migration Research, 7*(2), 105-113. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48711426

Dealessandri, M. (2021). *IGDA Foundation launches Diverse Game Developers Fund*. Games Industry. https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2021-02-16-igda-foundation-launches-diverse-game-developers-fund

Dyer, R. (1997). *White*. Routledge.

Fanon, F. (1986 [1952]) *Black Skin, White Masks*. Pluto Press.

Flanagan, M. (2009). *Critical play: Radical game design*. MIT Press.

Foasberg, N. (2016). The problematic pleasures of productivity and efficiency in Goa and Navegador. *Analog Game Studies, 3*(1). http://analoggamestudies.org/2016/01/the-problematic-pleasures-of-productivity-and-efficiency-in-goa-and-navegador/

Fron, J., Fullerton, T, Ford, M.J. and Celia, P. (2007, September 24-27). *The hegemony of play*. DiGRA – Proceedings of the 2007 DiGRA International Conference: Situated Play, The University of Tokyo. https://ict.usc.edu/pubs/The%20Hegemony%20of%20Play.pdf

Goldberg, D.T (2006). Racial europeanization. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 29*(2), 331-364. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870500465611

Hall, S. (1997). The spectacle of the other. In M. Wykes (Ed.) *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 1-46). SAGE.

Hardiman, R. (1982). White identity development: A process oriented model for describing the racial consciousness of White Americans. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 43,* 104A.

Harrer, S. (2018a). Casual empire: Video games as neocolonial praxis, *Open Library of Humanities 4*(1). https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.210

Harrer, S. (2018b). *Games and bereavement: How video games represent attachment loss and grief.* Bielefeld.

Hansen, F., & Nielsen, (2006). *Rethinking Nordic colonialism: A postcolonial exhibition project*

in five acts: Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Sápmi & Denmark/Finland/Norway/ Sweden march 24-november 25, 2006. NIFCA.

Hook, D. (2004). Fanon and the psychoanalysis of racism. In D. Hook (Ed.) *Critical Psychology* (pp. 114-137). Juta Academic Publishing.

Iweriebor, E. (1982). State systems in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Nigeria: An overview, *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 37*(4), 507-513. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40759619

Kuokkanen, R. (2017). *Syntymäpäivälahja suomelle.* Politiikasta.fi.

Kuvataide. (1951). *Afrikan tähti.* Board game.

Kuebler-Ross, E. (2011 [1970]). *On Death and Dying. What the dying have to teach doctors, nurses, clergy, and their own families. Kindle ed.* Simon and Schuster.

Laiti, O. (2021). *Old ways of knowing, new ways of playing—The potential of collaborative game design to empower Indigenous Sámi. Doctoral dissertation.* University of Lapland, Rovaniemi.

Lander, P. S. (1991). Finnish identity in a changing Europe, *Ethnos, 56*(3-4), 242-255. DOI: 10.1080/00141844.1991.9981439

Lehtola, V. P. (2015). Sámi histories, colonialism, and Finland. *Arctic Anthropology, 52*(2), 22-36. https://doi.org/10.3368/aa.52.2.22

Löytty, O. (1997). *Valkoinen pimeys – Afrikka kolonialistisessa kirjallisuudessa [White darkness: Africa in colonialist fiction].* University of Jyväskylä.

Mayfair Games. (2004). *The Heart of Africa.* Board game.

Mead, W.R. (1968). Finland. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc.—1989. Perceptions of Finland. In M. Engman & D. Kirby (Eds.) *Finland: People, Nation, State.* Hurst & Company.

Mäkinen R. (2016). Nordic or southern orientation? Finnish voluntary associations' foreign relations during the interwar period. *Альманах североевропейских и балтийских исследований. Выпуск, 1.* DOI: 10.15393/j103.art.2016.483

McClintock, A. (2013) *Imperial leather: Race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest. Kindle edition.* ACLS Humanities.

Mukherjee, S. (2018) Playing Subaltern: Video games and postcolonialism. *Games and Culture, 13*(5), 504-520. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015627258

Neimeyer, R. et al. (2009). Grief therapy and the reconstruction of meaning: From principles to practice, *Journal for Contemporary Psychotherapy, 40*(2), 73-83. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10879-009-9135-3

Oh, I. (2019). Watch Toni Morrison explain the "profound neurosis" of Racism. *Mother Jones.* https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2019/08/watch-toni-morrison-explain-the-profound-neurosis-of-racism/

Oluo, I. (2018). *So you want to talk about race.* Seal Press.

Oyebade, A. (2002). Colonial political systems. In T. Falola (Eds.), *Volume 3: Colonial Africa, 1885–1939.* Carolina Academic Press.

PEGI. (2021). *PEGI age ratings.* https://pegi.info/index.php/page/pegi-age-ratings, last accessed 15 July, 2021.

Pobuda T. (2018). *Assessing gender and racial representation in the board game industry. Analog Game Studies.* https://analoggamestudies.org/2018/12/assessing-gender-and-racial-representation-in-top-rated-boardgamegeek-games/

Ranta, K., & Kanninen, J. (2019). *Vastatuuleen: Saamen kansan pakkosuomalaistamisesta.* S&S Publishing.

Rastas, A. & Päivärinta. J (2010). Vastapuhetta afrikkalaisten diasporasta Suomessa. *Kulttuurintutkimus, 27* (4), 45-63.

Rastas, A. (2012). Reading history through Finnish exceptionalism. In K. Loftsdottir & L. Jensen (Eds.) *'Whiteness' and postcolonialism in the Nordic region* (pp. 89-103). Ashgate.

Robinson, W. (2014). *Orientalism and abstraction in Eurogames.* Analog Game Studies. analoggamestudies.org/2014/12/orientalism-and-abstraction-in-eurogames

Rosenblatt, P. and Bowman, T. (2013) Alternative approaches to conceptualising grief: A conversation, *Bereavement Care, 32*(2). https://doi.org/10.1080/02682621.2013.812826

Ruitenberg, C.W. (2007). Here be dragons: Exploring Cartography in Educational Theory and Research, *Complexity Science and Educational Research (CSER), 4*(1), 7-24.

https://doi.org/10.29173/cmplct8758

Serious Games Interactive. (2013). *Playing History 2 – Slave Trade*. Video game.

Silvercloud, J. (2022). *White people go through the 5 stages of grief*. Medium.
https://medium.com/afrosapiophile/5-stages-of-racial-grief-f5f8f4270d52

Smith, L.T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.

Swift, J. (2023). *On poetry: A rhapsody*. The Literature Network.
http://www.online-literature.com/swift/3515/

Thaden, E. C. (2014). *Russification in the Baltic provinces and Finland, 1855-1914 (Vol. 624)*.
Princeton University Press.

Talja, M. (2021). *Representations of power and power relations. Africa in Finnish museum exhibitions 2007–2015*. Master's Thesis. University of Turku.
https://www.utupub.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/151519/Talja_Maija_opinnayte.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, last accessed 14 February 2022.

Thompson, B. (2003). The expressive arts and the experience of loss, *The Forum, 29*(2), 1-3.

Tuominen, M. (2011). Where the world ends? The places and challenges of northern cultural history. In B. Johnson & H. Kiiskinen (Eds.), *They do things differently there – Essays on cultural history* (pp. 43-80). Cultural History.

Unger, J. B. (1986). Language conflict, nationalism, and ethnic separatism in Finland. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics (WPEL), 2*(2), 5.

Uusihakala, K., & Niinikangas, I. (2007). *Afrikan tähti: the other side of the board*. [*Afrikan tähti: pelilaudan kääntöpuoli*]. Helinä Rautavaara Museum.
https://issuu.com/rautavaarahelina/docs/afrikantahti_2010_naytto, last accessed 14 February 2022

Vuorela, U. (2016). Colonial complicity: The 'postcolonial' in a Nordic context. In S. Keskinen, S. Tuori, S. Irni & D. Mulinari (Eds.) *Complying with colonialism: Gender, race and ethnicity in the Nordic region* (pp. 31-46). Routledge.

Wekker, G. (2016). *White Innocence. Paradoxes of colonialism and race*. Duke University Press.

Wilson, D. (2015). *The Eurogame as heterotopia*. Analog Game Studies.
http://analoggamestudies.org/2015/11/the-eurogame-as-heterotopia/

Wolfe, P. (2006). Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native. *Journal of genocide research, 8*(4), 387-409. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240

Rytsä, P. (2007). *Hymyhuulet: Nunnuka-nunnuka-lai-lai*. YLE. https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2007/06/13/hymyhuulet-nunnuka-nunnuka-lai-lai, last accessed 7 February 2022.

Ylänen, H. (2017). Kansakunta pelissä. Nationalismi ja konfliktit 1900-luvun alun suomalai-sissa lautapeleissä. *Ennen ja Nyt, 2017*(1). https://journal.fi/ennenjanyt/article/view/108787/63784