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‘Scaping the Border: On Black Migrant Geographic Agency in Gamescapes

Abstract

Biometric technologies deployed at the border virtualise this space in such a manner that frontiers and their “boundaries of access” are inscribed onto bodies of migrants (Amoore 2006, p.348). This disappearance of the border as a geographic zone, as addressed in critical border studies, has incited multiple theories. Among these is the theory of borderscapes in which, the prefix ‘-scape,’ meaning ‘to shape,’ accounts for the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes of building national frontiers (Brambilla 2015). This paper addresses gamescapes (Magnet 2006)—the designed virtual environment of video games— as a zone in which migrants can perform artistic interventions and enact their mobility within borders. The author positions her walking simulator game *Dreams of Disguise: Errantry* (2018) as one of such gamescapes. Through the analysis of the game, this paper addresses the implications of purposeful movement through the border for black migrants.

Keywords: biometric borders, geography, race, gamescapes, borderscapes

'Scaping' the Border: On Black Migrant Geographic Agency in Gamescapes

During the autumn of 2018, I was working on a 6-minute animated video on biometric surveillance at the border called, *Dreams of Disguise (DOD)*. The looping video is loosely based on events that occurred during my visa application for a trip to Canada and the returning trip to the UK. It sees my avatar floating into biometric devices that teleport her into various places—data centres, airplanes, visa application centres, and passport control queues. A character I had modelled after an African man I saw at the UK border confronted me. Based on the event I witnessed at the UK Border, I had animated a scene where an armed guard escorted the man. I found this symbolic of the disproportionate surveillance and policing of migrants of colour. Even in my attempt to disrupt the virtual border in *DOD*, I had created a person who—like me—could not escape the unending loop of border policing. His mobility was limited to the three-dimensional world I had designed. The more I worked on the project, the more the man haunted me. At this time, I had started playing video games to help with the despondency I felt as a Nigerian migrant in the UK. Although I played mostly hack and slash, adventure-fantasy AAA games with white male leads, I relished the freedom and beauty packed in these polygonal environments. Again, even in virtual worlds, the fact that black people's—black women's—spatial freedom was rare, tinged the freedom I felt. As a media artist, I decided to create a game. It would be a walking simulator in which the black woman migrant from *DOD* would return to the border to help the African man escape the border. I called it *Dreams of Disguise: Errantry (DOD: Errantry)*. Following the Martinican poet, Édouard Glissant's (1997) philosophical notion, errantry is movement with a "sense of sacred motivation" (p. 211)—"wandering without becoming lost" (p. 203). Errantry is wandering with a higher purpose. Glissant compares errantry to the struggle to assert one's identity as "the search for a freedom within particular surroundings" (p. 20). In this paper, I connect the search for freedom—the purposeful wandering of migrants in virtual worlds—to the geographic possibilities and agency of black migrants as presented in *DOD: Errantry*.

Consisting of four short levels, *DOD: Errantry* expands on the experience of the UK Border shown in *DOD*. Movement—walking, teleportation and exploration—and interaction are the core mechanics of the game. Players walk around a given level, exploring for marked items that might teleport them to the next stage. The first level of the game is expositional. Here the player is in the living room of their apartment. They cannot leave the room until they have completed certain actions. The marked items in this stage are a laptop placed on a coffee table and a zoetrope on top a record player. Playing the zoetrope initiates a sound recording of the player's border interview. This sound of the player's interview at the border introduces their background as a migrant student. The animation shown through the slits of the zoetrope are two figures dancing in the UK Border. When the sequence and sound are done, the player is left to interact with a laptop. This sets off a message thread with their friend Boma (the avatar of the aforementioned African man), who informs them that he is being held at the border. After the messaging is done, the Heads-Up Display (HUD) alerts the player of their main objective to help Boma leave the border. At this point, the player would have interacted with the laptop and zoetrope. This means that the door to the room is unlocked and the player can now leave the room. At the exit door of the room, the player is met with a portal that teleports them to the next level—the data centre. In this second stage, the player interacts with another laptop to perform a data exploit that disrupts the biometric cameras and data servers. The exploit makes them unrecognizable to the biometric cameras—thus, they can now teleport via the portal in the room to the third level.

The third level is the UK Border, resembling the port of entry one would experience at Gatwick or Heathrow airport. It has officers, biometric cameras resembling those in the data centre, e-Passport machines and stanchion-sectioned queues. Due to the exploit in the

data centre, the player can walk around the frontier zone as they please. This level is larger than the other levels in the game, as it is the place where the player is required to explore the area for Boma. To find Boma, thus teleporting to the final stage and beating *DOD: Errantry*, players must unlearn the spatial practices they would execute at the real frontier. Joining the queue to speak to an agent will have the player character trapped in the border. This move will require the player to wait endlessly until they restart or reset the game. As players must explore the level to find where Boma is held, traditional modes of traversing through the border are counterproductive. To aid the player’s movement through the level, trickster tokens—the in-game location and point system that mark the actionable items—are littered across the space. These tokens act as way-finders, tracing a mapped-out trajectory that the player must follow to complete the mission. As I will explain in the final section of this article, by veering beyond the marked trajectory, players found ways to finish the game that further enacted their agency in the virtual world. Through their alternative routes, the players not only defied the rules of the virtual border but also created new spatial protocols of traversing the frontier. As the game designer, I was elated to see players sharing their alternative routes with others. I found it symbolic of the ways through which migrants share their knowledge of moving across and escaping frontier zones with other migrants. The border crossing styles and the symbolic solidarity amongst the players highlights Galloway’s (2006, p.15) statement that “play is a symbolic action for larger issues in the culture.” The play of wandering in *DOD: Errantry* is symbolic of black migrant movements through national borders and their resistance to the racialised policing of these borders with biometric technology. This underscores my intention in gamifying border crossings—engendering solidarity amongst migrants and creating spaces in which we migrants can all plot our escape from biometric borders and enact ‘dark sousveillance’ (Browne 2015) against colonial surveillance technologies.

Having stated my intentions in making *DOD: Errantry*, it is important that I address the tension in locating the physical border. The mentioned pieces were a portion of my doctoral dissertation on race, borders, and the colonial project of biometric surveillance. While working on the pieces, I attempted to map out the national frontiers I had examined in my dissertation. I ran into the problem of correctly naming borders—as in, knowing where to place the Nigerian, UK, or Canadian border. Are borders spaces, passages or edges? Am I in the UK border when I am boarding a plane to London from the Toronto Pearson Airport? Am I in the Canadian border when I attend a biometric interview for my visa? I find myself, to paraphrase De Certeau (1984, p.127), with a theoretical and practical inquiry instead of an answer—to whom does this border belong? Foucault (1986) addresses these hard to categorise spaces as ‘heterotopias’—“counter-sites, sites that [...] are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about” (p.24). Salter (2007) illustrates this point in his analysis of airports as heterotopic zones. The airport is a collection of places such as the mall, the national border, and the detention centre. It both functions as a detention centre, mall, and so on. Yet, it differs from these individual zones by upholding a set of rituals that deviate from them. Salter highlights that the airport is simultaneously a zone of mobility and containment, granting travellers access to other countries while restricting national others through biometric checks, detention, and deportation. It is under the same principle of paradoxical mobility and containment that the border is a heterotopic space. The border is both inside and outside of national space. It restricts migrant others and grants mobility to the selected few preferred travellers. It is the state of the border being inside/outside that causes the replication of national frontiers outside of the nation. These replications occur in such a way that no matter how removed a Nigerian, Canadian, or British person is from their country—no matter how long they physically have stayed away—they

are always connected to their national border. The state of always being connected to the border is a condition of restriction enacted through violent practices of border policing. It is this state the *DOD: Errantry* aims to disrupt. While this article addresses the themes of margins, edges, frontiers and such, it does so with an acknowledgement that the tension in categorising these heterotopic spaces is beyond resolution.

In addition, the virtualisation of borders with biometric technology further complicates the problem of geography, as digital borders are placed on the bodies of migrants. In this sense, through the policing of national frontiers with biometric technology, the border is digitised and corporealised. Amoore (2006) creates a term for the confluence of the biological and digital border— ‘biometric borders.’ With the enforcement of migration laws with biometrics, the bodies of migrants become “the carriers of the national border” (Amoore 2006, p.348). Therefore, the border moves from spaces, passages, and edges controlled by governments to quotidian zones such as the bank, the home, school and office. Any place that can confirm the identity of a migrant using biometric scanners and documents becomes a border zone. With the accessibility of biometric technologies in consumer electronics, borders are everywhere. However, the virtual state of the border—both in the imagined nature (Anderson 1991) of the lines that demarcate nations and the network of digital technologies that constitute the biometric border—does not minimise its physicality. In fact, the virtual state of the border re/enforces its physicality and vice-versa. Scholars within the field of critical border studies attempt to deal with the troubling interplay of the virtual and the physical. They try to find the seams of the convergence of the virtual and geographical border. Critical border studies scholars have also written on the theory of ‘borderless’ nations that gained popularity in the 1990s. This theory, in response to the globalisation and the deterritorialisation of borders, claimed that the world was borderless, and geography had ended (O’Brien 1992; Ohmae 1999). More recently, scholars have debunked the fatally optimistic notion of borderless nations, stating that borders and ‘b/ordering’ practices (Houtum, Kramsch, and Zierhofer 2005) have taken on complex forms, seeping into more unprecedented areas than ever before.

‘Borderscapes,’ have consequently become an essential concept within critical border studies (Brambilla 2015; Perera 2007; dell’Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015), aptly making way for the b/ordering practices that account for the complex nature of national frontiers. This article expands on conceptualisations of borderscapes. It lays out the debates and circumstances that necessitated the formulation of the theory. Borderscapes, here, are the “making and remaking of different forms of border space” (Perera 2007, p.206). They consist of a duality of common hegemonic practices of making and enforcing the border on the one hand. On the other hand, borderscapes also include countering acts of resistance. Policy, laws, and law enforcement are in a standoff against activism, protests and artistic inventions, pushing and pulling the edges of the national frontier. In this sense, borderscapes include the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic zones of and practices that make up the national frontier. As a theory, borderscapes moves beyond the attempt to locate borders spatially to address the production of national frontiers. They interrogate the ‘scapes’ (Appadurai 1990) that constitute the spaces, edges, and passages of the nation. In this sense, borderscapes also interrogates the production of these zones by the precarious bodies that inhabit them. Following Appadurai’s (1990, p. 296) theory of scapes, borderscapes are “deeply perspectival constructs inflected very much by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as subnational groupings and movements.” In the notion of ‘scapes,’ borderscapes are “fluid, irregular [...] landscapes” (Appadurai 1990, p.297) in constant production by state and individual agents. This article lays out these production practices of borderscaping through

art and gamic interventions, exploring the potential of these cultural products to build counter-hegemonic spaces of migration.

Organised through three ‘scapes’—borderscapes, gamescapes, and landscapes—this article first explains Appadurai’s theory (1990). Within the first section I will explain the theory of borderscapes. After which, I address games as escapes or flights into virtual worlds far removed from the reality of their players. Gamescapes then become borderscapes through which those who inhabit the boundaries of the nation can produce, shape and rearrange the frontier. In the movement into the worlds of games, this article problematises the notion of gamescaping as a process of colonial conquest. The framing of spatial exploration in games as colonisation is inadequate for addressing the complex experiences in virtual worlds and the decolonial possibilities that arise. Placed within their appropriate social contexts, gamescapes can be ‘postcolonial playgrounds’ (Lammes 2010) for those with limited agency over their geographies even in virtual worlds. Following the thread of ‘scaping’ I will progress to the third ‘scape’—landscape—as conceptualised by scholars within the fields of black studies and postcolonial studies. I will focus on the landscaping of blackness into and out of space and place as posited by McKittrick (2006). The final section will delineate Glissant’s (1996) poetics of landscape, as positioned by McKittrick. Here, poetics of landscape is black geographic expression—such as errantry or wandering with purpose—that reclaims the right to space and place. Following McKittrick, this paper moves beyond the territorial trap of attempting to place the geography of borders to centre the production of the border by black migrants. Thus, this paper explores *DOD: Errantry* as a walking simulator and spatial intervention of the biometric border.

Vectors of Borderscapes: Looking Beyond the Lines

Modelling global cultural flows, Appadurai (1990) devises a system of scapes that typify global movements and their disjunctures. Constituting these are the five dimensions of ethnoscaping, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes. Ethnoscapes are the interconnected global flows of people. This is exemplified by the increasing number of local workers looking beyond the closest metropolis in their countries to larger global cities such as London, Paris, and New York. Technologies migrate, alongside the circulation of people in the global landscape in an “odd distribution” (Appadurai 1990, p.297), with large centers of production that draw interests from other countries. A contemporary example of this is digital technologies, mostly designed in Silicon Valley, California and distributed worldwide. Inextricably, these technoscapes are linked to financescapes—the movement of the global capital. Disjunctures and unpredictability characterize these first three landscapes of global culture, which can independently oscillate. Mediascapes and ideoscapes—“the landscapes of images” (p.298)—are more closely linked. Mediascapes involve communication technologies and their content (news, music, film, video games, live streams, and so on). Within mediascapes, narratives are distributed, and meaning is produced. Ideoscapes, on the other hand, move deeper into meaning, circulating ideologies. An example of ideoscapes is the rise of populism in global politics that eschews humanitarian concerns for majoritarian interests (Roth 2017). Pertinent to this article is the overarching theory of scapes, as suggested by Appadurai, that cement these flows and disjunctures within global culture. ‘Scapes’ as the suffix of the word ‘landscape’ highlights the subjectivity—the “deeply perspectival constructs” (Appadurai 1990, p.296)—of the cultural, technological, financial, and ideological landscapes within global flows. It considers the contextual nature, fluidity, and the irregularities of these landscapes. Sharing this pattern of fluidity and irregularity, borders can also be brought into Appadurai’s five-dimensional scapes. As noted in the introduction to this article, national borders are increasingly difficult to differentiate, especially due to biometric technologies at arbitrary checkpoints that de- and re-territorialize these spaces.

With borders being relational and constantly shifting, their explorations are often consolidated into an inquiry of ‘the border’—a singular representation that highlights the relationality of national demarcations. The idea of borderscapes then becomes a necessary concept for interrogating these frontier zones. In this section, I lay out the alternative theories of borders to highlight the significance of the theory of borderscapes.

The globalisation of capital that took place in the 1990s led to several theorists claiming the end of borders. One of the scholars often highlighted in critical border studies (Brambilla 2015; Houtum et al. 2005) — the Japanese organisational management consultant — Ohmae (1999) claimed “even nations themselves cannot dodge the threat of obsolescence” of borders (p.xiv). Ohmae’s framing of the border must be placed within the rapid trend towards a global marketplace in the 1980s to 1990s to be fully comprehended. The organisational theorist purports a borderless world in the context of a hyper-competitive global marketplace and increasingly networked economy. For the former Chief Economist of American Express, O’Brien (1992), the global market and the statement of a borderless world was a consequence of communications technologies that deterritorialised spaces like the New York Stock Exchange. These technologies announced, “the end of geography,” according to O’Brien (1992) as location and place were now obsolete. The auspicious declaration of the end of borders and its counterpoint of the persistence of geography have been admonished by scholars in critical border studies such as Houtum et al. (2005) as counterproductive. Given the urgency for productive theories of frontiers, these theories of borderless worlds are a type of fatal optimism that promote fantasies of borderlessness while these demarcations spread into unprecedented realms. These locative and dis-locative analyses fall into the ‘territorial trap’ or the assumption of nation-states as fixed geographic “containers of society” (Agnew 1994, p.59), thus obscuring the process of nation-building that marks the boundaries of the state. “Territorialist imperatives” and their counterpoints of borderlessness, as noted by Brambilla (2015, p.18) conceal the violent spatializing practices that are performed in the continuous marking of the edges of the nation and its boundary maintenance. Simply focusing on the ‘where of the border’ in a traditional sense overshadows the shifting of the border and the production of new geographies of borderlands.

Houtum and Naerssen (2002), chart the progression of theories of the border from those that frame the border as a territorial object bound to national geographies to theories that focus on the spatial practices of ordering people and places into pre-designated spaces. This spatial practice is what Houtum and Naerssen define as ‘b/ordering’—it moves the analysis of national boundaries towards an understanding of the border as produced space. B/ordering is defined as the “exclusionary consequences of the securing and governing of the ‘own’ economic welfare and identity” (Houtum and Naerssen 2002, p.125). De Certeau (1984, p.127) notes that the “theoretical and practical problem of the frontier [is] to whom does it belong?” Following this line of inquiry, Houtum and Naerssen (2002) also formulate b/ordering as an assertion of ownership. To b/order a nation is to engage in an “ongoing strategic effort to make a difference in space among the movements of people, money or products” (Houtum and Naerssen 2002, p.126). B/ordering involves the act of categorising mobilities that relies on the capturing, tagging and surveillance of movements in and out of the state (Amoore 2006). This organisation of movement requires an ascription of mobility to certain identities included within the body of the state and an assertion of immobility to those that are excluded. Houtum and Naerssen delineate b/ordering practices into assigning of access, mobility and fixation, and sorting of migrants into several classifications such as business travellers, economic migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Coterminous to this practice b/ordering is that of othering and ordering—including and excluding populations from the nation. Houtum et al. (2005) also frame b/ordering as a form of landscaping, that designates “the lie of the land” (p.3), the self-image of the nation, or

the signified idea of a given national border. For instance, Canadian scholars of colour such as Bannerji (2000), Walcott (2001), McKittrick (2006) and Browne (2010) have written extensively on the landscaping of the Canadian nation as white (Anglophone and Francophone) through racist and classist immigration policies even as the country promotes the image of Canadian multiculturalism, hospitality, and openness of borders. It is pertinent when Houtum and Naerssen (2002) state that b/ordering practices must be “understood as an act of purification”—“the cleansing of the other that lives inside an imagined community” (p.126). B/ordering practices transcend the territorial boundaries of nation-states, regulating life within its zones of violence.

While the notion of b/ordering space (Houtum et al. 2005) has served a useful purpose by introducing the spatializing practice of the border production to critical border studies, Brambilla (2015) takes this deconstruction of producing borders even further. If b/ordering practice is the securing and governing of the state’s ‘own,’ then, as Brambilla (2015) notes, this theorisation must address the “shifting and changing location” (p.19) of borders that transcend the state and its property. With biometric technologies moving borders into the most private of places—the body—the work of securing and governing the state moves into the bodies of migrants. As bodies move through, homes, offices, schools, churches, mosques and hospitals, the scholars must step back from reading the border simply from the hegemonic position of state property to address the annexation of and objectification of migrant bodies. Here, the notion of ‘borderscapes’ becomes invaluable as it makes space for the bodies that have become “carriers of the national border” (Amoore 2006, p.348), accentuating what these bodies do in these borderlands and how their actions reshape the frontier. To address the borderscape is to address multiple spatializing practices that produce the border.

According to dell’Agnese and Amilhat Szary (2015), the notion of borderscapes has become de rigueur in art and academia. Tracking three common deployments of the term, dell’Agnese and Amilhat Szary highlight the multiple conceptualisations of borderscapes. The first formulation of borderscapes is that of the physical geography of borders. Within the stated notion, borderscapes are synonymous to the geographic landscape that mark national boundaries. These include the landmarks, rivers or seas, and the topographic character of the border. The second theorisation of borderscapes focuses on border landscapes. In this iteration, borderscapes are an aesthetic practice of image-making. This is derived from the positioning of landscape as a signifying or representational space. Here the word ‘landscape’ takes its literal form as in to landscape a garden or city park. The image of the geographic border is its main point of focus. It stresses the look of the border over all other topics. These first two conceptualisations are analogous to the territorial understanding of the border. As discussed above, while the geographic nature of the border holds relevance, it becomes a curmudgeon when scholars do not analyse beyond the ‘where’ of the border.

The third formulation of borderscapes is the closest understanding adopted in this article, as it centres migrants’ agency in defining the border. In this formulation, the border is a cultural artefact shaped by migrants through their activism, art practices and lived experiences in the frontier. The border is constructed through the push and pull of the national edges by migrants. dell’Agnese and Amilhat Szary (2015) state the art practice of Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes (1999) as an example of this third formulation of borderscapes. Within the work of the artists, borderscapes are theoretical inasmuch as they are practical—most importantly, borderscapes are performed by those who inhabit these zones. Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes (1999) create borderscapes in their performance art as a dissolution of boundaries across countries, cultures, languages, and genders. Under the collective name La Pocha Nostra, the artists facilitate interactive live performances that mix religious themes such as confessions with a host of political, sexual, technological, and animist subjects to

create a tableau of border creatures. As this performance is continuously staged and developed, no single La Pocha Nostra tableau is the same. The borderscape within this work is re-produced in each tableau, expressing the fluidity of these heterotopic zones. More relevant in this article is the centralisation of border creatures with agency in the artists’ work (La Pocha Nostra 2012). It is in the shaping of the frontier lands by those who inhabit them that the theory of borderscapes has value. As addressed earlier, discussions of borders centralise state actions, while overlooking the various ways in which the people who reside in borderlands shape this space.

Brambilla (2015) and Houtum, Velde, and Jacobs (2010) both emphasise the meaning of the suffix ‘-scape’ as ‘to shape.’ As Brambilla contextualises it, the “landscape is ‘the land ‘scaped,’ or ‘shaped’” (Brambilla 2015, p.23). Therefore, the border scaped is the border shaped. Taking this argument to its logical conclusion then, the border is pliable to acts of reshaping and re-scaping. For Brambilla borderscapes can be hegemonic sites, that enact the border as legal fact based on national policies, or counter-hegemonic sites that resist the dominant production of the national frontier. Extrapolating her theorisation, Brambilla emphasises that borderscapes foster “a new ‘multi-sited’ organization of border knowledge” (Brambilla 2015, p.24). This epistemology of the border includes traditional methods of knowing (archival research and textual analysis) as well as art practices, experiences and representations that humanise the border as a space shaped, inhabited and interpreted by border creatures (p.27). In this sense, borders are multifaceted ever-shifting spaces. Approaching them at their points of cohesion and paradox—at their point of location and dislocation—facilitates a better understanding of their functions and effects, and the various means through which they can be subverted and changed. Consequently, the ‘where’ of the border transforms to the ‘how’ of the border. How borders can be produced, shaped and shifted will be addressed in the following section, focusing on the creation of worlds through participation and action in video games. This discussion of agency in and the production of gamescapes will then be expounded to interrogate who is excluded from shaping the land.

Problematics of Gamescapes: New World Discovery in Postcolonial Playgrounds

Videogames provide an ideal environment to study the production of space. Produced by “space makers” (Holtzman 1994, p.210) of virtual worlds, they are then inhabited by avatars that signify some aspect of the identity of their players (Nakamura 2008). The relationships between videogames and spatiality are multitudinous. For instance, a template provided on Unreal Engine 4—the gaming engine I used in creating *DOD: Errantry* (2018)—offers architectural visualisations in virtual reality often used in interior design. Crucial to the creation of a game in Unreal Engine 4 is the creation of maps using the landscape editor. In 3D game design, the map is the surface over which characters can walk. Without setting the map in Unreal Engine 4, characters plummet through the never-ending sky of the engine. The map literally keeps the game characters grounded. In this sense, Fuller and Jenkins (1995) highlight, video games are not necessarily played for the narratives within them, but for the virtual worlds they immerse the player into. As Mario swims through water levels, jumps through flame-rigged dungeons, hops across beautiful, puffy clouds, the player is too preoccupied with survival to bother about why a plumber’s life is so magical or how much psychological support a post-traumatic Princess Peach, when she is finally (if ever) rescued, would need.

Aarseth (2000, p.154) claims that the “defining element in computer games is spatiality,” as computer games focus on the representations and negotiations of space. Narratives, for Aarseth, are supplementary to gameplay. Computer games, for Aarseth (2000), are divided into two spatial representations, that of “open landscapes” that offer freedom to explore the environment, and that of “closed labyrinths” that linearise mobility

throughout the game by placing invisible walls in strategic zones (p.159). They are outdoor games and indoor games. For Jenkins (2006), game design is narrative architecture or telling stories through space. Jenkins notes four ways game designers build game worlds that immerse the player into the ludic narrative. The processes are the creation of evocative spaces that invite narrative associations; provision of worlds in which players can enact stories; the insertion of information into the *mise-én-scène* of a game in ways that embed narratives into the world; and the provision of unpredictable resources that might make narratives emerge from interacting in the world (Jenkins 2006, p.123). Game designer’s processes of world-building causes Jenkins (2006, p. 129) to “think of [them] less as storytellers than as narrative architects.”

Understanding spatiality in games in terms of level design, world-building or narrative structure is a formalist approach, according to Murray (2018a). Aarseth (2000) and Jenkins (2006) aforementioned writings are examples of spatial formalism for Murray. In addition to these two game theorists, Murray addresses the “five main conceptual planes for the analysis of game spaces” postulated by Nitsche (2009). The conceptual planes are rule-based space, mediated space, fictional space, play space and social space (Nitsche 2009, pp. 15-16). They respectively address the computational algorithms of the game that make up the physics, AI, and so on; the presentation of the game on a particular medium—screens, mobile phones, or Virtual Reality headsets; the fictional world imagined by the player as they interact with the game; the physical connection between the player and the game’s hardware; and player’s interactions with one another (Nitsche 2009). For the sake of brevity, I will focus on the final plane—the social space—as it the concept most problematized by Murray (2018a). The social space, for Nitsche makes up the culture of the game. This is the community of fans and players that dictate the game’s culture. ‘Culture’ has a different meaning for Murray (2018a). Moving beyond formalist criticism of games to socio-political analyses of the ludic, Murray places game spaces as cultural expressions of a given society’s politics (p.159). Game worlds are imbued with meaning. Consider the common representation of Middle Eastern countries as wildernesses or war zones in “need of intervention” (Murray 2018a, p. 177) or the difficulty of attempting to colonize European land as an African country in empire-building games (Mukherjee 2017). As Murray writes, “games that render land make claims about space, place and landscape” (p. 180). The ability to render land is a manifestation of power. When the land rendered is a real inhabited place, this power becomes imperial. As worlds that are entirely contrived from the minds of designers, the landscapes in games are rife with ideology. Once again, this article addresses another form of scaping—this time in a virtual world of videogames. To scape or shape the land in videogames, as I have underscored through Murray (2018a) is to exert power. In the following sections, I will explore power to scape and move through worlds in videogames and the postcolonial and anti-racist reclamations of virtual worlds.

‘Scaping’ comes into play more directly in Magnet’s (2006) conception of a gamescape as “an imagined landscape for cooped-up children, an escapist landscape for bored adults, and, all too frequently, a landscape of colonization for players who would be kings” (p.142). Gamescapes are a matter of interpretation. For a person who is denied mobility in the physical world, gamescapes become imagined landscapes where they can roam as freely as they choose. For a person who has freedom of mobility in the physical world but for any given reason, is unsatisfied with the shortcomings of this physical world they have the agency to explore, gamescapes become an escape from reality. For those who wish to move beyond imaginative exploration and escape from reality, gamescapes are vast lands to be appropriated and shaped. This latter interpretation of gamescapes is similar to the argument made by Fuller and Jenkins (1995) that videogames repeat the tropes of New World discovery rampant in colonial narratives. The influence of Fuller and Jenkins (1995) is

notable in game studies as other scholars such as Friedman (1999) and Newman (2004) echo their positioning of video games as spatial stories. Borrowed from De Certeau (1984), videogames as spatial stories link back to the use of maps and tours as geographic narratives in gaming. Video games such as *Sid Meier’s Civilization II* (Meier and MicroProse Software 1996) and *SimCity* (Maxis 1989) as addressed in Friedman (1999), *Tropico* (PopTop Software and Gathering of Developers 2001) as examined by Magnet (2006), and *Empire: Total War* (Creative Assembly 2009), a “colonize space” (De Certeau 1984, p.121) through their acts of mapping and their visualising practices of gazing from a god’s eye view. For Magnet (2006) this colonisation through mapping is inextricable from the violence of landscaping that occurs in these geographic strategy games. In addition to the theme of agency in gamescapes as a form of colonisation, is that of imperialist capitalism (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2009) typified by the game *Grand Theft Auto V (GTA V)* (Rockstar Games 2013). This game, set in fictional versions of American cities such as Miami and Los Angeles, focuses on the story of achieving the American Dream, using the rags-to-riches trope prevalent in Hood films characterised by the filmography of the American director, John Singleton. *GTA*, a game created by white British men, focuses on the stories of black characters and migrants as they master their landscapes and become successful criminals. In accordance with De Certeau’s (1984) distinction between the map and tour, the personalised nature of *GTA* offers a tour, in contrast to the abstract nature of strategy games such as *Tropico* that occur on the level of a large-scale map. This tour of the life of a black American or life as a migrant in America is set in the gamescape of imperialist capitalism. It is a tour that is commonly experienced, paraphrasing Nakamura (2002, p.57), non-reflexively as a form of identity tourism.

Games are not exclusively performances of colonial and imperial appropriations of space. Responding to writers such as Friedman (1999), who interpret gaming as colonial conquest, Lammes (2010) formulates gaming as “postcolonial playgrounds par excellence” (p.1), as the writer claims that even in games such as *Sid Meier’s Civilization*, the act of colonisation is interrupted by the fact that the player’s appropriation of land occurs in an alternate (albeit virtual) reality. For Lammes (2010), the temporality and social context of colonisation in gaming—its positioning after the fact of colonisation—revises colonial legacies. Mukherjee (2017) develops on the works of Magnet (2006) and Lammes (2010) to form key theories for postcolonial game studies. Expanding on games with colonial legacies, such as cricket in India, Mukherjee stresses that though games may be created in contexts that exert colonial power, “the empire plays back [... and in certain cases] it does so with its own rules of play” (p.7). In his book on videogames and postcolonialism, Mukherjee states several imbrications of colonial legacy and gameplay. He accounts for the ways to the coloniser plays in the cartographic practices of mapping and naming countries in imperial conquest games. He also accounts for the ways the empire might play back in the play style “reverse-colonization” (p. 39). Reverse colonialism, as I exemplified in the earlier paragraph on the ideology of space in game worlds via Murray (2018a), involves playing empire-building games as the colonised who then attempt to dominate their former rulers. In re-playing history in such a manner, Mukherjee notes that neocolonialism is underway. While it is important to warn against repeating history, postcolonial game criticism must acknowledge the inner working of imperial power. As Mukherjee notes in the concluding chapter of his book, “[t]he colonizer also plays back” (104). If the coloniser also plays back, with the vast power and resources of established empires, ‘reverse-colonization’ is an impossibility. Games and gameplay styles that attempt to switch the roles of the colonised and coloniser can then be seen a subversive performances of the impossible. This is where Murray’s (2018b) contribution to postcolonial game studies stands out—moving beyond the categorisation of good/bad game(play) to position postcolonial game studies as an “intervention into public

debates as a counter-discourse to the prevailing narrative, which is ethically anemic” (p. 19). In this sense, postcolonial games and playgrounds can also be construed as interventions to the sparse representation of anti-colonial agency and unbalanced scaping of game worlds to maintain and exert colonial power and ideology.

These postcolonial playgrounds are illustrated in games such as *The Night of Bush Capturing: A Virtual Jihadi* (Bilal 2008), a game set in Iraq and developed by the Iraqi-born artist, Wafaa Bilal. Such games set in postcolonial playgrounds frequently position gameplay from the standpoint of the subaltern. In Bilal’s game, the player character is a Muslim fighter, as opposed to the all-American super soldier commonly embodied in AAA games. In line with Galloway’s (2006, p.84) statement, addressing postcolonial playgrounds reflects that “videogames absolutely cannot be excised from the social contexts in which they are played.” Within postcolonial playgrounds or gamescapes, the “hybridisation of spatial relations” take effect as the legacy of colonial conquest is simultaneously re-lived, resisted, subverted, and transformed (Lammes 2010, p.4). Therefore, for every act of digital gentrification and spatial appropriation that occurs in virtual zones are possibilities of the reclamation of gamescapes by those with limited agency and mobility in the physical world. If interpreting a game, as Galloway (2006, p.91) writes, is understanding its algorithms and parallel allegories, then inhabiting and transforming a colonial gamescape is understanding the algorithms of colonisation and its parallels.

An inspiration for *DOD: Errantry*, Ubisoft’s (2016) *WATCH_DOGS 2*, offers an apt example of the production of parallel, postcolonial gamescapes. This open-world adventure game immerses players into the life of the black hacker, Marcus Holloway as he attempts to topple the private technology giant, Blume. In this world where Blume has colonised the digital lives of city dwellers, Marcus’ actions are postcolonial practices of resistance. In the gamescape of *WATCH_DOGS 2* Marcus plays a double role. First as an “ordinary practitioner of the city” (De Certeau 1984, p.93), that explores and resides in the urban landscape turned smart city. Secondly, Marcus plays the role of the “voyeur-god” (De Certeau 1984, p.93) who sees and controls aspects of life in the game from a distance. Marcus’ role of the voyeur-god underscores the imperial power of the private technology company as he only gains this status through his appropriation of Blume’s smart city (ctOS) servers. With this access—and a tap on his phone or laptop—Marcus can explode manholes, hack into ATMs, steal or give money to unsuspecting victims, read the private messages on any given mobile phone in San Francisco and change the criminal profile of anyone, including himself (Ubisoft 2016). Although race is not directly addressed, several features of the game support the reading of Marcus’ spatializing practices as those of postcolonial gamescaping through ‘dark sousveillance’ (Browne 2015) instead of colonisation and imperialist capitalism. If sousveillance is “watching from below” (Mann, Nolan, and Wellman 2003, p.332), dark sousveillance is the appropriation and repurposing of anti-black surveillance technologies for survival and freedom (Browne 2015, p.21). The introductory mission of *WATCH_DOGS 2* best illustrates the postcolonial spatializing practice of dark sousveillance as Marcus breaks into the ctOS database to find that he had a high threat probability of 82% even though his criminal record only included two arrests on loitering with intent and breaking and entering, with some suspicious web activity and purchases. This moment is also one of a few when Marcus’ race is evidently acknowledged. On the screen where he is designated as high risk for criminal activity, his race is stated as “African-American/Black.” Marcus deletes the criminal and biometric records in his ctOS profile enacting his escape from the smart city surveillance system.

Figure 1. A screenshot of Marcus watching himself from a street surveillance camera. To hack into surveillance cameras and networked machines, Marcus sits on pavements, in parks, and sometimes on large cranes. This absurd game mechanic becomes a reclamation of the city as a hackerspace.

Figure 2. A screenshot of Marcus sitting at a street intersection. Built into the game are ‘ScoutX’ virtual tours of the city that encourage players to explore Ubisoft’s interpretation of San Francisco. This image is taken in the virtualised gay village, the Castro District in San Francisco.

More pertinent to escaping from surveillance is Marcus’ spatializing practice. As the surveillance cameras fail to recognise his face, due to the deletion of his profile and the mask he wears, he has increased mobility. Often his mobility reaches a level of absurdity as is wont of open-world games as shown in Figures 1 and 2. However, as a black man in America

whose *erratic* movement would most likely be met with state-sanctioned violence (Cervenak 2014) Marcus’ appropriation of his landscape—his errantry—is a subversive practice of reclaiming colonised space. Marcus’ wandering through the fictional version of San Francisco would be a form of “dangerous dancing”, to use Cervenak’s (2014, p. 23) term. The writer creates this phrase using information from Stomer and Bernstein’s (1984) legal analysis of *Kolender v. Lawson* 1983. In this case, the police had stopped a black San Franciscan business consultant who enjoyed taking walks at night, Edward Lawson, fifteen times between 1975 to 1977 in San Diego. These stops were conducted under the California Penal Code section 647(e) that penalised wandering without any clear reason and refusing to provide identification. As Stomer and Bernstein (1984, p.105) note, an officer said of Lawson’s wandering: ““dancing around” might lead to someone’s injury.” Such framing of the black body in motion as injurious feeds the state’s criminalisation of black mobility. As Cervenak (2014) highlights, black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be stopped and searched in the United States. The criminalisation of black mobility dates back to laws restricting the movement of slaves to the contemporary stop-and-frisk laws. Stop-and-frisk laws can be traced even further to vagrancy laws from the mid 1300s in England, according to Stomer and Bernstein. Vagrancy laws have an astonishing legacy of limiting black mobility in the UK, where even the government notes that, as of 2018 black people were 9.5 times more likely to be stopped than white people (Government Digital Services 2019). Considering the histories of black mobility, Cervenak (2014) positions black wandering as: “a mode of resistance, wandering is a philosophical performance that becomes itself outside of surveillance, outside the four-block restrictions of others’ visions and fears of “dangerous dancing”” (p. 172).

In addition, the technological exploit that aids Marcus’ ‘dangerous dancing’ can also be read as the failure of the facial recognition camera to identify the face of a black biometric subject. These systems are prone to misidentify or fail to recognise black people with dark skin tones (Buolamwini 2016). A similar mechanic is repeated in *DOD: Errantry* as players are tasked with the objective of returning to the biometric database, which they are corporeally linked to. At the biometric database, they perform exploits that disrupt their biometric identification, thus performing an escape from the biometric border (see Figures 3 and 4). This equips them with absurd mobility, similar to Marcus, where they can transform the border to a hackerspace and retrieve their friend, Boma. Just as Marcus Holloway repurposes the *errors* (Glissant 1997) of biometric technology for the purpose of black escape and survival, so does *DOD: Errantry*. From the design of the game map to the very act of exploration and walking that define the game mechanics, *DOD: Errantry* encourages black mobility through dark sousveillance. Players are not asked to empathise with Boma or investigate why he has been held at the border. They are essentially asked to perform their resistance within border through their errantry in the space.

Figure 3. A screenshot of the laptop at the biometric checkpoint in *DOD: Errantry*. The image shows the facial recognition camera's output, "Found 0 faces!" The data shown on the laptop is extracted from my actual attempts to use OpenCV (Patil 2017) for face tracking. This application failed to consistently track my face. While there might have been a bug in the code I sourced from Patil (2017), or the room might have been poorly lit, there is also a possibility that I might have encountered the problem of facial recognition algorithms poorly trained for dark-skinned people (Buolamwini 2016).

Figure 4. A screenshot of the third level of *DOD: Errantry*. When the player finds Boma, they sit in front of the glass door where he is held and deploy a biometric exploit that assists his escape from the border.

Figure 5. A screengrab of the final level of *DOD: Errantry*.

Reminiscent of Nigerian bukkas, communal spaces that serve as pubs, pool house, and diner, this space in the gameworld is re-imagined out of the Nigerian geography into a virtualised borderspace.

Poetics of Landscape: Black Geographies of Resistance

In her groundbreaking body of work on black geography, McKittrick (2006) analyses the territorialisation of black womanhood from the poetry of Marlene Nourbese Phillip, to rhetoric of geography in black feminist thought, and to the life of a Portuguese-born slave, Marie-Joseph Angélique. Black women's bodies, according to McKittrick, are territorialised as New Worlds, open for discovery. This territorialisation is racial-sexual as the violence of colonial conquest, following Philips (1997) in her book *A Genealogy of Resistance: And Other Essays*, takes place in the space between the legs. The space between the legs—black women's sexuality—is a space of colonial conquest. According to McKittrick (2006, p.44) geographies of transatlantic slavery, "such as the slave ship, the auction block, slave coffles, and the plantation are just some sites that spatialized domination under bondage." As the black body, paraphrasing McKittrick (2006), is commoditised as quantifiable sites of wealth, and black women's bodies are reduced to facilities of reproduction, the spatializing practices of chattel slavery and colonial conquest, shows "how bodily geography can be" (p.44). The 'where' of these sites of domination are reproduced in borderscapes where black women are abused in detention centres such as Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre (Fenton 2016), in airport boarding zones where the opacity of black women's bodies is undone with routine hair searches (Browne 2015), and within biometric capture rooms where private agents impel black bodies to re-enact the violent choreography of the police state, as illustrated in *DOD*. Black feminist thought for McKittrick also spatializes black femininity. However, this relation to space places black femininity outside of the margins. McKittrick urges against the spatialisation of black femininity in the academic discourses of margins and outsiders. The writer states (McKittrick 2006, p.58):

The margin is therefore not a legitimate area of deep social or geographic inquiry—it is a site of dispossession, it is an ungeographic space, it is all too often a fleeting

academic utterance and therefore easy to empty out, ignore, and add on in times of multicultural crises.

The politics of citation and sitation of black femininity in the margins spatialise it outside of geography, obscuring the practices of black women as geographic subjects who reorganise the plantation, the slave ship, the home, the landscape, the nation and other zones where blackness resides. McKittrick gives an account of Marie-Joseph Angélique, a Portuguese-born slave sold to settlers of New France (Canada). Tracing Marie-Joseph Angélique’s life leads to a history of black slavery in Canada. McKittrick highlights the reduction of black bodies to landscape—as a ‘sight’ or an image of a black slave on the premises to signify wealth in Montreal. Marie-Joseph Angélique’s life problematises Canadian history and national discourse that places the country as a haven for black slaves fleeing America. Marie-Joseph was rumoured to have set fire to the house of her mistress alongside some other homes in Montreal. The life (and death by hanging) of this black woman re-sites Canada as a space of black domination, thus re-mapping “the “who” and “where” and “how” of race” in the country (McKittrick 2006, p.119). For this reason, McKittrick states that Marie-Joseph Angélique, through her captivity and alleged arson, “participated in the production of space” (p.115). In this sense, the life of Marie-Joseph Angélique exemplifies of the poetics of landscape that exerts black geographic subjecthood through expressive acts of spatial production.

The poetics of landscape underscores that black subjects are removed from their geography in multiple spatializing practices. Glissant (1996) highlights this, stating that the Caribbean landscape due to the presence of colonisers had made the indigenous populations strangers to each other and their land. This is one of the ways people are alienated from their land, and their landscape becomes endangered. Glissant states that landscape must be elevated from simple decorative imagery. The landscape must be traced by knowing its history—“Landscape is a character in this process [of creating history]. Its deepest meanings need to be understood” (Glissant 1996, p.106). Glissant’s (1996) prioritisation of the landscape links back to De Certeau’s (1984, p.93) “ordinary practitioner,” as these people are the walkers, drifters, and flâneurs with indispensable spatial knowledge. These geographic subjects link the inhabitants of the landscape to their environments. Within the virtual worlds presented in *DOD: Errantry*, wandering through the border then becomes a re-spatializing practice—a dangerous dance—that links black migrants as producers and geographic agents within borderscapes. As Cervenak (2014, p. 23) writes, “[f]ree black worlds become possible in wandering.” It is this possibility of freedom through wandering that I hope to encourage in *DOD: Errantry*. As one player communicated to me, “I just walked right through the border!”

Through wandering, to paraphrase Cervenak (2014, p.15) we can make new terrains. The gameplay styles of *DOD: Errantry* underscores this message. To ensure that gameplay does not recreate the hegemonic spatializing practices, *DOD: Errantry* offers alternatives for movement through the border by way of the e-Passport machines. As in airports such as Heathrow, these e-Passport gates are not accessible to all travellers. Moving through the zone signals a warning that the player is leaving their objective or heading into a dead-zone. *DOD: Errantry*’s dead-zone is an empty space in the border, with no guards and only a few non-player characters moving around. It is designed without trickster tokens as there are only two options—back the way you came from or forward into the unknown. Using this route, quite slow and tedious, directs the player to the place where Boma is being held, which takes them to the final stage shown in Figure 5. The empty route, mapped out by wandering players, highlights the power of mobility in shaping a space and making new terrains. As players found ways to beat the level without using the defined trajectories set out for them with wayfinders, they had devised a way to beat the level by setting off the invisible triggers

hidden in the dead-zone that advanced the game to the next level. I had not foreseen the alternative spatializing practice. My first thought was to fix the obvious bug, but after much contemplation, I realised that the re-spatialisation of the border in *DOD: Errantry* was symbolic of the ways through which migrants chart novel movements through the border outside of the imperialist gaze of state surveillance. In these moments, players were truly shaping the gamescape and borderscape from their own unique positionality as geographic subjects within this virtual world. Their knowledge of the world through their mobility in the game space created ways through which they could transcend the rules written into this zone and thus transcend the virtual frontier. The shared knowledge became grounds on which players built solidarity, as those who had beat the game would show others the backchannel. Thereby, in returning to the border, triggering moments of biometric failure, and charting new routes through the border, the gamescape within *DOD: Errantry* offers a testing ground in which migrants formulate their escape from biometric surveillance and the constrictions of the biometric border.

In the introduction of this article, I described my motivations for creating *DOD: Errantry*. I believed it was necessary to return to the virtual border I had created in an attempt to break the loop of the detention for Boma. It was necessary to provide myself and other migrants the opportunity to ‘dance dangerously’ through the border, while taking ownership of the our roles as people who inhabit and shape national frontiers. Too often, migrants are positioned as objects in the border, with no agency to control the this zone. This attempt, though cathartic for me, symbolises the larger political power of the production of the border by migrants. Just as “[f]ree black worlds become possible in wandering ” (Cervenak, 2014, p. 23) so do free worlds for migrants become possible through errantry. Also, as Murray (2018a) states, “[p]layable representations matter. They are affective fictions critical for our imaginative capacities to envision potential geopolitical eventualities” (p. 228). If the play in *DOD: Errantry* is a “symbolic action for larger issues in the culture,” (Galloway 2006, p.15) it is symbolic of the black migrant dream for freedom from surveillance, racialised border policing, and—most importantly—freedom of movement. In designing a virtual border that welcomes exploratory wandering and exploration, I intend to construct virtual worlds in which migrants can all exclaim, “I just walk right through the border!” As most of the people, who have played *DOD: Errantry* so far have been black, queer, migrants (because I have actively attempted to offer this work to people who have a stake in the issue) I must quote Audre Lorde’s (1988, p.130) statement as a closing sentence: “If one Black [person...] gains hope and strength from my story, then it has been worth the difficulty of telling.” If one migrant of colour feels as though they have gained something from their errantry in the border/gamescape, then it has been worth every second of designing the border for dangerous dancing.

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