# Mapping Far Cry 2

What makes the landscape of Far Cry 2 appear so African?



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**Fig 1** The retail version of Far Cry 2, with the contents of the box spread out (source: own photo)

# 1 Introduction

Video games are big business. (Nieborg & Hermes, 2008) Sales records in the United States in 2008 are estimated around 22 billion dollars. (USA Today, 2008) Nowadays many children's thought processes are highly influenced by video games. (Pargman & Jakobsson, 2008) Yet because of the short history of this business very little research is done on video games. This research is an effort to gain more understanding of the impact of a video game on players in the cultural geographical discourse.

The game of Far Cry 2, made by the French company Ubisoft and released in October 2008, is highly suitable for this. This game takes place in an African country, which is in state of civil war. Which country this is or where it is located is not mentioned. However, the game exudes an African[1] atmosphere. That makes the question arise why we recognize the landscape, among other things, as African, while the landscape itself is in fact fictive.

Far Cry 2 is a first-person shooter, meaning the game is played in a three-dimensional world in which the player can move freely. The player sees this world directly from the eyes of the character he plays, with the hand-held gun in front of him, so that he can imagine for as much as possible to be that character, rather than to be out of the game and control the character from a distance, for example like in platform games such as Donkey Kong or Mario Bros., where the character is move around over the screen in a two-dimensional environment.

According to a survey by S. Kline and A. Arlidge (2003) "24.8% of males strongly like 'fighting/shooting' games offline and 46.3% online, while only 4.2% of women rate fighting/shooting games that well regardless of whether they are played online or offline." Additionally, in a survey among American teenagers of 12 to 17 years old, 79% of the M-rated ("mature", for the ages 17+) and A/O-rated ("adults only", for the ages 18+) game players are boys and 21% are girls. (Lenhart, 2008) Therefore it is safe to presume that also those who play Far Cry 2, which is rated for the ages 16+ to 18+ according to various systems, are predominantly male.

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[1] Whenever "Africa" is mentioned, all of Africa except what is north of the Sahara is meant. The frequently used term "sub-Saharan Africa" is insufficient since desert is abundant in the game and the Sahara itself should be taken into account as well.

**Fig 2** Screenshot of Wolfenstein 3D, face to face with a Nazi soldier
(source: own screenshot)



**Fig 3** Screenshot of Doom, in an encounter with demonic creatures
(source: http://nullsoldier.com/Website/history.htm
retrieved Aug 2010)

## 1.1 History of the first-person shooter

It is hard to say what can be considered the first video game. In 1952 Alexander S. Douglas created the game Tic-Tac-Toe for a computer, where it was possible first time to play a game against a computer (who, by the way, would never lose). In the seventies the first video game cabinets and arcades appeared: Pong was the very first game playable for the general public and soon after followed Space Invaders and Pac Man. Pac Man was the first to reach an iconic status, reaching out of the arcades, appearing on lunch boxes, T-shirts, etc. (Mäyrä, 2008)

The first game for the personal computer is even harder to define, since the definition of a personal computer is not fixed. But the first first-person shooter for the pc is (not actually but) generally considered to be Wolfenstein 3D (1991) (Fig 2), where the goal was to escape out of an immense fictive maze-like Nazi prison castle, killing many Nazi soldiers and officers in the process. Earlier first-person shooters did exist, but had little success.

The true milestone in this genre is Doom (1993) (Fig 3). The game was a must-have for all action-loving gamers. Also because of its excellent programming it became a standard or a so-called 'benchmark' for the remainder of the MS-DOS era (i.e. until the emergence of Windows 95), meaning that Doom was used to test hardware, like a sound card or joystick; if Doom did not get it to work, that meant the hardware was not working properly. The term "first-person shooter" was hardly used until many other developers started creating similar games following the huge success of Doom. In fact, even years after the release of Doom reviewers still referred to these games as "Doom clones" rather than "first-person shooters". Both Wolfenstein 3D and Doom were developed by id Software and in particular by the now well-known John Carmack and John Romero, who may be regarded as the first celebrities among game developers. (Mäyrä, 2008)

After Doom, the first-person shooter genre really kicked off and the first-persoon shooter games appeared in many different settings and contexts. Wolfenstein 3D was set in fictive Nazi-Germany castles and Doom's setting was a base on Mars. Other settings are demonic/evil worlds, high-tech futuristic worlds, war fronts and (anti-)terrorist activity sites, among many others.
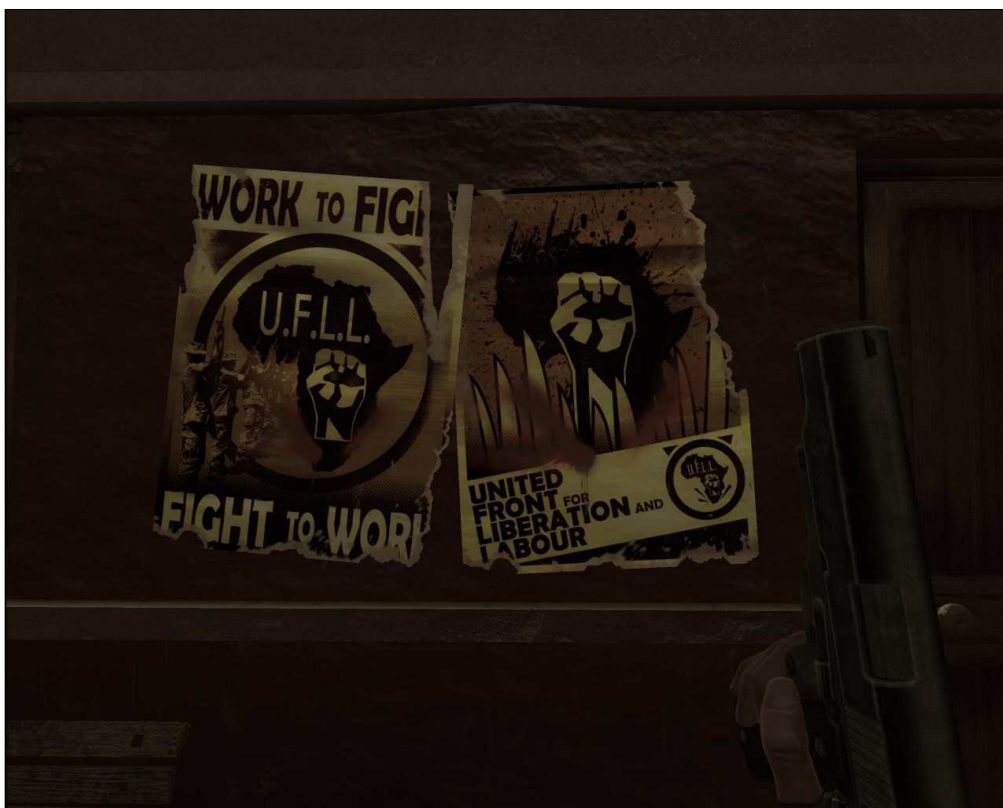
**Fig 4** Posters of the UFLL
(all screenshots from here on are homemade, unless stated otherwise)



**Fig 5** Wall painting of the APR

Doom was also the first first-person shooter that could be played with other people, either cooperatively or against each other, a style of play called 'multiplayer'. However, Doom was created just a few years before the advent of the Internet in private houses and Doom was only playable through (null-)modem or Local Area Networks (LAN), with four players at maximum. With the emergence of the Internet the emphasis of the subsequent first-person shooters was put more and more on multiplaying. Around the turn of the millennium this was centered around the dual competition between the Quake series by id Software and the Unreal (Tournament) series by Epic Games. (Bryce & Rutter, 2002)

The latest first-person shooters are more often based on real life situations, like one of the two World Wars, Vietnam or Cambodia, and single player mode has received renewed attention, because not everyone prefers to play online and more specifically not against other people.

In most first-person shooters the story line is thin. The main point of the game is after all agility and tactics. Yet a story is nevertheless of importance, because it gives the player a sense of purpose and also provides a setting in which the player can project himself. Most video games are as such also a simulation, like being a soldier or a mercenary. The genre first-person shooter (FPS) is therefore often combined with the role-playing game (RPG) genre.

## 1.2 The story of Far Cry 2

Far Cry 2 is set in an unspecified country in Africa. The country is in civil war with two factions fighting over power, the United Front for Liberation and Labour (UFLL) and the Alliance for Popular Resistance (APR). The player is a mercenary set out to eliminate the Jackal, the arms dealer that sells weapons to both factions. In the introduction a taxi driver brings the player to a hotel in the central village Pala. On arrival the player appears to suffer from malaria and faints. When he wakes up the Jackal sits in the room and reads out the player's mission. Since the player is suffering from malaria and the mission is failed the Jackal no longer sees him as a threat and lets him live. The player falls asleep again and wakes up by a blast into the hotel: the two factions have started an open war.

**Fig 6** The front of the church of Pala



**Fig 7** Inside the church of Pala

The player then has to escape the village. This is the first time the player has to use the controls and learns how to do so through a tutorial. Either the player does not succeed and falls down upon near death, or the player does succeed but faints due to malaria outside the village. Either way, when the player wakes up, it appears a local leader has rescued the player and in return wants him to take over two locations. The first location is a safehouse[2]. On the second location a future buddy[1] awaits rescue. Once this is accomplished the buddy tells the player to meet him in the expat bar, where he will find another buddy, but also a journalist, who intends to write a story about "this mess", the civil war, to reveal "the lot", casually mentioning involvement of NGO's as well. The journalist asks the player to deliver a tape with sensitive information to the priest in Pala in return for medicine against malaria. The priest runs an underground organization, interested in the well being of the civilians (even though there are none to be found).

## 1.3 The game of Far Cry 2

After this the player is left on his own and the game is afoot. From this point on the player has a few options for next assignments:

1. A weapons shop. If this is done, an extra set of weapons will be available for purchase.
2. The priest, in case the player runs out of medicine.
3. Either one of the factions. The faction will pay the player in diamonds, the currency of the game, with which the player can buy new weapons.
4. On occasion a buddy will offer a job of his own.
5. The player can search for suitcases with diamonds scattered over the territory himself.

Options 2, 3 and 4 will make the player progress through the story line, still in search of the Jackal. As such the story line is not entirely linear as there is almost always a choice of who to take an assignment from. But eventually there are always key events in which the player ends up.

Some jobs, such as the very first one, make the player rescue someone who then becomes a buddy. There are two types of buddies. One will rescue the player when he is about to die. The other type will offer the player an alternative and easier way to execute a job given by one of the factions. On occasion that buddy will have jobs of his own in offer.

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[2] What a safehouse and a buddy exactly is in terms of this game will be explained later on.

**Fig 8** Inside the expat bar of Leboa-Sako, with two buddies standing and the journalist sitting at his desk



**Fig 9** The weapons shop across the expat bar. In the left building the weapons (or other accessories) can be bought. In the right building the player can pick them up.

The game is played in two fictive regions. The first part of the game takes place in Leboa-Sako, the second part in Bowa-Seko. There are a number of recurring elements to be found in both regions:

1. Guard posts. The people stationed here will shoot at the player as soon as they notice him.
2. Safehouses. Two men guard these. Once they are eliminated the safehouse is secured, so that the player can take a rest here, patch up and re-arm himself.
3. Suitcases with diamonds (but these are not shown on the map, until the player finds them).
4. Special locations, which have their own detailed map. Almost all mission destinations are on such locations. There are more men stationed here than in guard posts and they are harder to overcome.

For every assignment the player usually has to travel quite a distance, one that would take a tedious time if covered by foot. But there are cars scattered all over the entire region and if the player would decide to walk, cars drive by every now and then. Those in it always attempt to kill the player, which means that the player can use the car once the previous owners have been eliminated. The player also has the option of taking a boat and sail over the waterways.

In any case, guard posts are located along the roads as well as the waterways, are thus usually unavoidable and will have to be overpowered before the player can continue and carry out his primary objective.

There are <u>no</u> civilians! The reason for their absence is uncertain. One reason could be that they would have to be given a plausible set of behaviors, requiring many more hours of work from the programmers. But even so, if civilians would have been present, the player would be confronted with their fate as victims of the civil war. That could conflict with the player's main purpose of playing the game: entertainment. And so, for marketing purposes, it is very well possible that the civilians are left out on purpose.

**Fig 10** Natural landscape: savannah with desert in the background



**Fig 11** Built environment: the village of Pala

# 2 Theory

In the cultural geographical discourse all places are considered to be socially constructed, reproduced and represented. All representations are partial, selective and distorted. (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001)

Far Cry 2 is in that sense a representation of an African country in civil war. Several African countries have been in civil war following their independencies and news reports were made about them in the Western media. The vast majority of the potential market for the game Far Cry 2 lies in the Western society. Therefore the representation of Africa in Far Cry 2 can be expected to be aimed to fit the image people in the Western society have on African countries in civil war.

Because Far Cry 2 takes place in a fictive environment and is nevertheless supposed to be located somewhere in Africa, a simulacrum is a plausible outcome of this research. A simulacrum is a representation of a place that does not really exist as such (Barker, 2004). This term is invented by Jean Baudrillard in his book *Simulacres et simulation* (1981). According to Baudrillard, reality and fiction are getting more and more entwined, especially because of tv, creating a 'hyperreality'. That means that the images we observe seems 'more real than real', comparable to supernormal stimuli.

A notorious example of this is Main Street USA in Disney World. Many people have a romantisized image in their mind of what a regular street in the United States looks like, such as how Disney represents it. "In this copy of city life USA there are no guns, no homeless people, no drugs and no fear, which is thus a far cry from the streets of New York City." (Barker, 2004, p. 184). Another good and famous example of this is the Western view of Eastern cultures as described in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978).

In case of this research, if there is a simulacrum, the fictive African country in civil war would be an intensification of real African civil wars. Or might not even look like any real African country that has been in civil war, but could be a product of general misconceptions.

Baudrillard mostly had the tv in his mind when creating the concept of simulacrum. Barker: "For Baudrillard, television is the heart of a culture marked by an all-encompassing flow of fascinating simulations and facsimiles". (p. 184)

**Fig 12** Desert scenery at dusk



**Fig 13** A native settlement at the special location "Outpost"

This flow can be expected to be much overwhelming and influencial in a video game and a first-person shooter in particular, because in such a game one can actively and consciously imagine himself to be in the representation and has the liberty to move around and look around freely, rather than absorb the information passively. This freedom of action and scope makes it much easier for a player to create <u>sense of place</u>, (Cresswell, 2004) meaning that the player will have much more ease imagining what it is like to actually be there and form an emotional tie with certain places.

It should be noted though that in Ubisoft's effort to make the landscape of Far Cry 2 representative for Africa, the development team was sent off to Kenya:

> "The interesting thing is, we'd been working on this game for a year and a half and we created this North American version of Africa, but it wasn't quite right. So we went to Kenya last year for two weeks, we slept in the middle of the savannah, we didn't do the lodge tour, we had a cook with us, we had a guide, we actually had a biologist with us who explained the wildlife and surroundings, and we were like 'oh man, we got it so wrong!' So we came back and within a month we were able to turn things around and make the game feel like you were really there."

(Stuart, 2008)

Since this is partly a game study, the difference between what makes a game 'real' and 'realistic' should be noted. When a game is considered to be 'realistic', it means the laws of physics as we know them in the real world are simulated adequately and the behavior and looks of common items and elements in the game are also in accord with reality. However, what makes a game 'real' is whether the story and environment corresponds with real life events. (Höglund, 2008)

Far Cry 2 is already not entirely 'real' for the fact that the story and the country in question are fictive on themselves. However, the game does intend to tell a story about African civil wars in general. But does it tell the right story? Were or are African civil wars *real*ly like that? This is not exactly what this research is about, because the focus here is more on the landscapes. Are the landscapes real?

**Fig 14** The cinematic lighting and reflexion in the water as an example of the innovative effects of the Dunia engine



**Fig 15** The gamer gaze: "What scenery? I just want this guy dead!"

Regarding the realistic aspect of Far Cry 2, the game has received high ratings when it comes to graphics. For example, the renowned game review site GameSpot has given the game a rating of 8.5/Great (McInnis, 2008). Far Cry 2 was the first video game to use the, at that point, newest game engine[3] *Dunia*.

The number of people for whom Far Cry 2 is the first first-person shooter they ever played is probably negligible, but even they will realize that every first-person shooter is limited by technology. Even though Far Cry 2 has a very large map by first-person shooter standards, the game is still played in a bounded 'arena'. If the player stands in the desert at the border of the map and walks outwards, the character will start to feel dizzy and eventually faint to wake up at the border of the desert. You cannot get out.

When considering how the players would perceive the landscapes of Far Cry 2 one has to consider what is hereby called the gamer gaze. In the end, for the players it is just a game, which they seek to win, and the scenery is just for appetite. A common process among gamers is to be appealed by the setting and the story at first and start playing the game because of that. But while playing the player will gradually lose an eye for the scenery and will only take the gameplay[4] into account. (Pargman & Jakobsson, 2008) Thus one can consider the perception of the sceneries in Far Cry 2 as a passive one. The player absorbs the information while the real focus of the player is directed at the gameplay rather than the scenery.

Nevertheless, passive perception is also perception and when Far Cry 2 is played till the end, the player will know the game through and through. The impressions acquired by the game will be imprinted on his mind. Those impressions can still be much stronger than impressions acquired by films or watching the news. Firstly because the player has spent many more hours on the game than when watching a film, and secondly, but this is merely a hypothesis and has not been tested in this research, because gaming is an active activity, contrary to watching a film or the news, and an active mind might absorb more information.

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[3] A game engine is a software system that functions as a backbone of a video game. The game engine can be regarded as the digital laws of physics on which a fictive world can be created. By separating a game engine from the development of a game itself, developers do not have to reinvent the wheel, as a figure of speech, every time they make a new game. In case of first-person shooters, the game engine's biggest significance is defining the three-dimensional environment.
[4] Gameplay means the interaction between the player and the video game. Or in other words how the game is played and what its rules are, regardless of the graphics or audio.
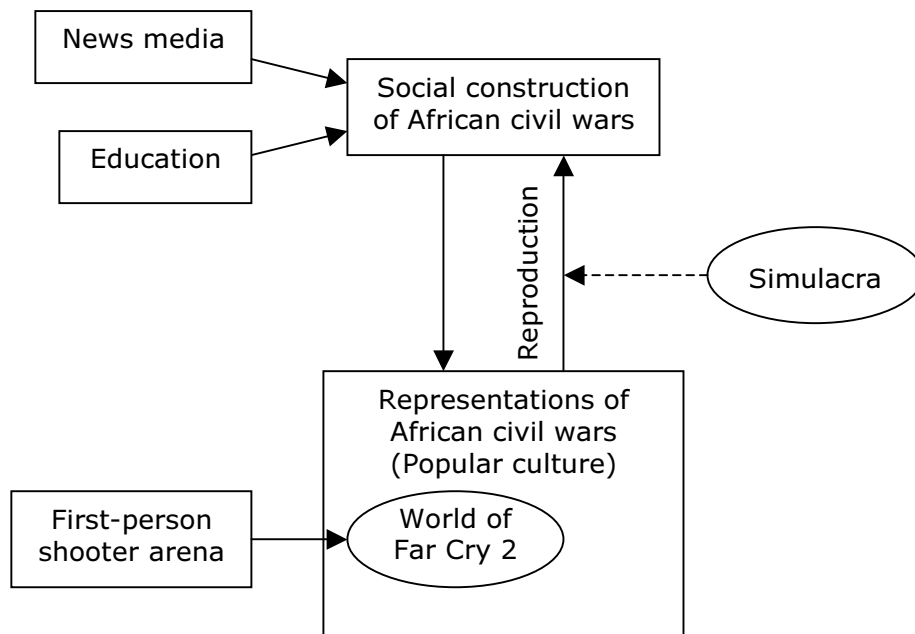
**Fig 16** Broken infrastructure



**Fig 17** Debree is abundant

## 2.1 Conceptual model

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│  News media  │─────┐
└──────────────┘     │      ┌──────────────────────┐
                     └─────▶│  Social construction  │
┌──────────────┐     ┌─────▶│  of African civil wars│◀┄┄┄┄┄┐
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When mentioning "civil war in Africa", most people can make a depiction of that in their mind. This is the [social construction of African civil wars]. This is formed by a couple of things. Firstly by how they are reported by newscasts and other media [news media], secondly by what people have been taught through [education] and thirdly, and most importantly for this research, by how Africa and African civil wars are represented in popular culture [representations of (...)]. The last mentioned is where already present imaginations of a place are reproduced, and where simulacra come in place. There are many debates about how independent and objective media and education is, or ever can be, but this is subject to this research. What matters here is how representations of Africa and African civil wars, and the one of Far Cry 2 in particular, influence the social construction of it.

At the same time, whenever a film, comic book, video game or the like is set in Africa, this has to correspond with the common image people already have about Africa, in order to appeal to the audience. Hence, the relation between the social construction and the representation is vice versa.

**Fig 18** The desert on the left is literally the end of the world



**Fig 19** The marina in Leboa-Sako, where the expat bar is.

The subject of this research is the world in which the game of Far Cry 2 takes place [world of Far Cry 2]. Far Cry 2 is only *a* representation of an African civil war and therefore part of that box. Because Far Cry 2 is a video game, the world of Far Cry 2 is bound to certain limitations [first-person shooter arena]. In geography all places are considered to be interdependent. This is not the case for first-person shooters. All first-person shooters take place in a confined area and nothing exists outside the arena. Even if an area would be made huge, it would hardly have any content or a lot of repetition. Firstly because of the cost of labour, since literally everything in a game has to be designed, secondly because of the limited number of bytes a game can consist of. Producers usually want an installation to fit on one DVD, which is about 8.4GB by default. The more unique number of items a landscape consists of and the more detailed they are, the more data that entails.

Because of this limitation and the absolute boundaries of the map, one can speak of the 'world' of Far Cry 2 rather than the region in which Far Cry 2 takes place. After all, this 'world' is complete and is not part of another whole.

**Fig 20** Jungle at daytime



**Fig 21** Jungle at sunset

# 2 Research goal

The aim of this research is to combine Cultural Geography with a Game Study approach. A recurring theme for cultural geographers is to assess how a certain place is represented and why as such, but this is perhaps never done for a video game. In general, video games are a relatively new subject of study. (Mäyrä, 2008) Here lies a great potential, because video games is a billion dollar business, have an exceeding range especially over children and can have a major psychological impact. (Pargman & Jakobsson, 2008) This is even amplified by the effects of simulacra as described by Baudrillard.

Another interesting aspect of this research is that the world of Far Cry 2 is entirely fictive, contrary to for example a film. In a video game, the environment has been drawn and designed entirely, up to its finest detail.

# 2 Research question

The main research question of this thesis is:

*(1) What makes the world of Far Cry 2 look so African?*

The first step in this quest is a description of this world:

*(2) How is the natural environment in Far Cry 2 depicted?*

*(3) What does the built environment in Far Cry 2 look like?*

*(4) What do the people in Far Cry 2 look like?*

The 'built environment' is a container concept for every physical manifestation of human activities. Since the landscape is fictive the developers and designers of the game thought it all up. So instead of wondering how it got there, one should wonder why they put it there and made it look as such?

One may wonder whether people are part of the landscape, but regardless of that the people present in a landscape do co-shape the construction of a place. For example, a city square could be a happy and positive place if filled with tourists or with people going out and having a great time, while the same city square could also depict a police state if there is a military parade going on.

**Fig 22** A waterfall in the jungle



**Fig 23** Savannah with a waterfall and a weapons shop

The questions 2, 3 and 4 are descriptive. The question that arises after that is:
*(5) Could the area in which Far Cry 2 takes place exist somewhere in Africa?*

This could be answered by a simple 'no', merely for the fact that the age of exploration is over and all of Africa has been discovered. But what is meant by this question, in layman's terms, is: does it make any sense, geographically?

Finally, an important matter to consider with this research is how much influence a game such as Far Cry 2 has on the players, which leads to the final question:
*(6) To what extend do players pay attention to the veracity of the landscape?*

A more direct question, such as how much players their social construction of Africa and African civil wars are affected by playing this game, would require a completely different approach and is a more general question by nature anyway, which could be asked for many more video games. It could be a very appropriate question for a follow-up study though.

**Fig 24** The massive iron bridge at the special location "Rail Xing"


**Fig 25** A crashed plane in Bowa-Seko at "Crash Site"

# 4 Methodology

The primary methodology that is used to answer the questions 2, 3 and 4 is a content analysis on the landscape. Various screenshots have been made while driving through Leboa-Sako and Bowa-Seko in the game, comparable to a photo-documentation, such as is described by Gillian Rose in *Visual Methodologies* (2001). In essence this fictive landscape is treated no differently than a real landscape. Instead of shooting photos, screenshots are taken.

Taking into account again that all representations of places are partial, selective and distorted one has to realize this goes two ways. The game itself is a representation of an African country in civil war, but by making screenshots the researcher decides what screenshots to show, analyze and make conclusions on. That choice of what to take a screenshot of is also a representation of the world of Far Cry 2 and therefore automatically partial and selective. (Not so much distorted, because a screenshot is a direct copy of what a player observes, contrary to a mental image of a place.)

As a counterweight it is not just the screenshots on which the analysis will be made. The game has been played till the end by the researcher so that he is thoroughly familiar with the world of Far Cry 2. The choice of screenshots is a result of that. It was not just a search for typical African elements or something else specifically, but a choice of what is typical for the world of Far Cry 2. That is not to say that partiality and selectiveness is excluded, but they are reduced compared to when someone who has not played the game would seek to find an answer to the main research question.

Contrary to the description of a content analysis in Rose's *Visual Methodologies*, this content analysis is qualitative/descriptive rather than quantitative. The collection of screenshots is deliberately selective in order to capture the divergent landscapes, but does not contain more jungle screenshots than desert screenshots if the world of Far Cry 2 would contain more jungle than desert. Therefore a count is inapplicable.

*Far Cry 2* has been released for several platforms: Windows, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. For this research only the Windows version is used to make the screenshots, because it was the only platform at the researcher's disposal, but the differences in the looks of the environment between the platforms is minimal.

**Fig 26** A vineyard or field of olive trees



**Fig 27** Human activities are manifested abundantly, although sometimes it is unclear what the supposed purpose of certain constructions are or should have been

The graphical performance of the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 are usually higher, which make the landscapes look prettier and more realistic.

Additionally, to assess whether Leboa-Sako and Bowa-Seko as regions themselves might actually exist in Africa (research question 5), not only the landscapes, but also the maps of Leboa-Sako and Bowa-Seko were subject to a content analysis.

But the main route to answering research question 5 is an online survey. For this survey people who have been in Africa are asked to take a look at sixty screenshots and comment on whether they recognize anything in them from the places in Africa where they have been. This URL of this survey is http://straland.com/survey/ and it can be browsed by just clicking on the button "Continue (...)" or "Next page".

To answer research question 6, a forum topic has been made on six Internet fora that are (partially) devoted to Far Cry 2 as a form of questionnaire. The advantage of using an Internet forum is that people might respond to other replies, thus forming sort of a focus group discussion.

The questions plus answers can be read in Appendix B. The URL's of these topics are:
- *Far Cry 2 game*, a fan site for Far Cry 2:
  o http://www.farcry2game.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=3666
- *In Far Cry*, a fan site for the Far Cry-series:
  o http://infarcry.com/forums/viewtopic.php?id=2975
- *GameSpot*, a site for video game reviewers:
  o http://www.gamespot.com/pc/action/farcry2/show_msgs.php?topic_id=m-1-55409991
- Official site of *Ubisoft*:
  o http://forums.ubi.com/eve/forums/a/tpc/f/836109392/m/6881042078
- *FileFront*, a site for reviews of video games and downloads related to them:
  o http://forums.filefront.com/farcry-2-general-discussion/425490-how-realistic-game.html
- Official site of *Xbox*:
  o http://forums.xbox.com/33192107/ShowPost.aspx

**Fig 28** The railroad at the northern border of Leboa-Sako



**Fig 29** Dogon Village from above at sunrise

The questionnaire already mentions some fallacies of the game: the fact that the various biomes (jungle, savannah, desert) are very close to each other and that the water is stagnant everywhere and has no spring or destination. The disadvantage of this is that it is harder to ascertain whether this occurred to the respondents themselves when they mention this as critics. Also they might be given a suggestion what to criticize on. But the advantage is that the respondents are triggered to think more deeply on the matter and not do not limit their response to one or two lines. After all, contrary to an interview, the questioner cannot pursue a question in greater depth. The respondent is not guaranteed to reply again. Replies would remain very brief.

**Fig 30** Savannah



**Fig 31** A burnt up car

# 5 Results and analyses

## 5.1 Content analyses

### 5.1.1 The natural environment

Of the three biomes that are featured in the game, jungle, savannah and desert, the desert seems to be a simulacrum.

The jungle features palm trees, lianas and ferns, but many other plants as well. (Fig 20, 21) The flora there seems to be diverse. The flora of the savannah is not so diverse. (Fig 10, 23, 28, 30) There is high yellow grass with sporadic plants and trees, mostly acacias and baobab trees. The desert seems to be rather extreme. (Fig 42) Sand dunes are everywhere, but there are a few plants present, clinging on to life, as it seems. This is a notorious stereotype: only a small portion of the Sahara, Namib or Somali desert look like this.

Overall, all landscapes are very rocky. It is also a factor of the gameplay: some places are hard to reach, which forces the player to take detours. But it can also add to the beauty of the landscape.

There are probably not that many places in the world, if they exist at all, where the climate varies so much in such a small area. Yet the transition between jungle and savannah is rather inconspicuous and does not come over as too abrupt. The boundary between savannah and desert is sharp however. (Fig 18) On one side there is the distinctive yellow grass of the savannah, on the other side there is no grass at all, but sand dunes straight away.

### 5.1.2 The built environment

The first thing that catches one's attention is that everything is dilapidated. It gives the impression that the civil war made the whole country decay severely and it could make one wonder what the factions actually are fighting for.

Firstly, the entire region is imbued with debris, such as burnt up cars, ramshackle fences (of which one can wonder why they were ever put there), barrels, loose sheets of corrugated material and the like. (Fig 17, 31)

The villages are entirely militarized, with many blockades of sand bags. (Fig 11) Pala is therefore not accessible by car and one has to enter the village on foot. There are machine guns positioned behind the sand bags as defense. It is a cease

**Fig 32** A guard post



**Fig 33** A safehouse, with on the foreground the two eliminated guards

fire zone, but there are many soldiers walking around with a rifle on their shoulders. Here and there are posters and wall paintings defending either the UFLL or the APR (Fig 3, 4), especially around the factions' headquarters. Such overt displays of partisanship are common practice in other, real, landscapes that are contested by balanced powers. (Winchester a.o., 2003)

The buildings in the villages are mostly made out of slate and bricks, but some are made of corrugated material or wood. The guard posts consist mainly of shelters knocked together with planks or corrugated material, empty barrels, crates, cheap plastic chairs, car wrecks and other junk. (Fig 32) In general it is a mess. Yet sometimes there is a watchtower, which actually looks more solid and complete. This is perhaps because they are unbreakable. One of the biggest violations on reality in all first-person shooters is that not everything can be destroyed, no matter how big the explosions are. Walls, ceilings and floors aren't really there. They are just borders, merely blocking everything on its path. If it should be possible to destroy a wall, that wall has to be created. Yet another interactable object costs the programmers more work though and requires higher system demands from the player's pc or other platform. As such, a watch tower in Far Cry 2 has a shape, but is technically hollow and not an object. Therefore fire or a bazooka cannot destroy it. So perhaps to make this as credible as possible, the towers at least have been made to *look* solid.

Safehouses are plain secluded rectangular buildings made out of slate or bricks. They are of course meant to look safe, so they are not run-down, but do not stand out in beauty either. (Fig 33)

The special locations do stand out in appearance because of their beauty, in whatever manner. They are very diverse. This is a categorized list of all special locations:
- Native African settlements
  - Leboa-Sako: Mokuba
  - Bowa-Seko: Outpost
  - Bowa-Seko: Dental Clinic
  - Bowa-Seko: Weelegol Village
  - Bowa-Seko: Dokon Village
  - Bowa-Seko: Sediko
  - Bowa-Seko: Post Office
- Colonial villas
  - Leboa-Sako: "Private Property"
  - Bowa-Seko: Bowaseko Brewing Co.
- Fortresses
  - Leboa-Sako: Fort
  - Bowa-Seko: Prison

**Fig 34** The native village of Sediko



**Fig 35** The University of Sankore (source: http://forum.chatdd.com/
photo-gallery-wallpapers-world/61860-sankore-mosque-timbuktu.html
retrieved: 1 Sep 2010)

-

- Airfields
- Workshops, such as a factory or mine
  - Leboa-Sako: PetroSahel      - Leboa-Sako: Cattle Xing
  - Leboa-Sako: North Railyard      - Leboa-Sako: Slaughter House
  - Leboa-Sako: OGC (Occidental Growers Company)
  - Leboa-Sako: Claes Products (Chemical Corporation)
  - Bowa-Seko: Polytechnic      - Bowa-Seko: TaeCoMo Mine
  - Bowa-Seko: M-S Pipeline
- Well set-up and smarter looking guard posts
  - Leboa-Sako: Shwasana      - Leboa-Sako: Goka Falls
  - Leboa-Sako: Fresh Fish      - Leboa-Sako: Police Station
  - Bowa-Seko: Ranger Station
- Large guard post
  - Leboa-Sako: Fresh Fish      - Leboa-Sako: Cock-Fights
  - Leboa-Sako: Lumber      - Bowa-Seko: Sepoko
  - Bowa-Seko: Rail Xing      - Bowa-Seko: Sehlakalase
- Other
  - Leboa-Sako: Scrap Salvage (debris)
  - Leboa-Sako (2x): Oasis
  - Bowa-Seko: Crash Site
  - Bowa-Seko: Mertens-Segolo Pipeline Company

Some native African settlements have a building style which bears resemblance with The University of Sankoré in Timbuktu, because of the sandstone houses with wooden trunks sticking out the side. (Fig 34, 35) Wood and sandstone are also almost the only two materials used in these villages. Other villages, such as 'Outpost' have round reed huts. The total absence of civilians and omnipresence of soldiers might seem extra odd in those villages, but this depends much on whether the player is used to the practice of the game and the recurrence of this fact. More on that in paragraph 5.3: Questionnaire.

The colonial sites have white slate or brick buildings (Fig 36) with stylishly shaped walls around the property. The interiors of the villas are a mess however, with what little worn-out furniture there is left: faded glory. (Fig 37)

The workshops are naturally out of order as there are no civilians in the game to work there. They look rather unsettling and malignant; one would not want to

**Fig 36** The colonial building at Bowaseko Brewing Co.



**Fig 37** Inside the colonial building

work here. The secluded location and the fact that it looks like being built all at once give the impression it is set-up there by some external power or foreign company rather than it being a result of local enterprise. (Fig 38, 39)

Leboa-Sako has one large fort in the north, which is ostensibly impossible to overcome by just one person. The reason that this is possible nonetheless is that the gate is open, the guards don't pay attention well enough and the player is not dead even after a shot from a sniper rifle (although that depends on the difficulty level the player chose to play on). The airfields, or airstrips rather, include hangars and planes (that are inoperable by the player). (Fig 40)

### 5.1.3 The people

Far Cry 2 knows two types of people: characters, who are part of the story line and can be 'talked' with (even though that only means you can either assent to their proposition or reject it), and hostiles, with whom the only interaction is fighting.

In other words, wherever you go, if you see someone, shoot him. Characters that are part of the story cannot be shot, because wherever you meet them is always inside a building, where you cannot use your weapons. The exception on this is your buddies, who occasionally help you out in combat.

All people, with the exception of one buddy, are male. The apparent ages of the characters vary from 25 to 50, but most seem to be around 30 to 35 years old. Most people are black, there is one Chinese and one Indian buddy and quite some white people. One of the faction leaders, Hector Voorhees, is Belgian. The Jackal is white too.

The clothes the people wear have dull colours and therefore look to be worn-out.

All in all there is not a big difference in black/white ratio or looks in general between characters and hostiles. There are evidently relatively less black people in the game (approximately 60%) than in Africa.

Everything that is part of the story is said in English, but the hostiles also speak other African languages while fighting (like calling for help or browbeating). Afrikaans is one of them and a South-African member of the GameSpot forum recognized Xhosa, which is also spoken in South Africa.

**Fig 38** The entrance of Polytechnic



**Fig 39** The courtyard of Polytechnic. A sharp eye might spot the hostiles hanging about, still unaware of the presence of the player, because of the darkness

### 5.1.4 The map

*The maps are shown in appendix A.*

The maps of both Leboa-Sako and Bowa-Seko have a symmetric shape in general terms. Both maps are square, covering 25 km$^2$ according to the manual of the game. The centre of the map has a jungle climate. Around the jungle there is savannah and at the edges of the map there is desert.

Every first-person shooter takes place in a confined area that cannot be left by the player. Since most first-person shooters represent a real life situation, where there is always an outside, the way to get out has to be concealed in some manner. This is usually done by simply showing doors or fences that cannot be opened, or by cliffs/edges from which you fall into the abyss.

Therefore the map of Far Cry 2 also has an absolute border. The desert is the way of the game designers to quench a player's attempt to leave the world of Far Cry 2. When the player enters the desert too far the image will become blurred, which suggests the player becomes dizzy. When going further the player will faint and wake up a few meters back. (Fig  18)

Leboa-Sako has waterways that come together in the centre. But the water has no current; there is no source or destination. If one sails from the centre outwards, the river sometimes ends up in a waterfall (which does imply a spring) but mostly in a bay. In Bowa-Seko there is a large lake in the southern part of the map, but the general principle is the same as in Leboa-Sako.

The areas have relief in the local scale, but overall the map is flat. There is no slope from west to east or north to south.

To summarize, the map has:
- An absolute border
- A tropical climate in the centre, gradually more arid outwards
- Waterways without current
- No relief (except on local scale)

As such it is safe to say that there are many physiographical errors in layout of the world of Far Cry 2.

Regarding the built environment, both Leboa-Sako and Bowa-Seko have a village exactly in the centre of the map: Pala and Mosate Selao, respectively. In addition,

**Fig 40** The airfield of Bowa-Seko



**Fig 41** Mertens-Segolo Pipeline Company

Bowa-Seko has an even smaller village in the northwest: Sefapane. The central villages also play a central part in the game. It is where both factions' headquarters are located and where you can take on missions from them. All three villages are cease fire zones, which means that the people there do not shoot the player, unless he starts the shooting himself, in which case an infinite number of enemies will keep on spawning until the player leaves the area (or dies). Pala also has a church from where the priest runs the underground movement. (Fig 6, 7)

No matter for which faction the player is working, the people of all guards posts are hostile and all will shoot the player. There is no regional division between the two factions. Both appear to fight out a guerilla war against each other.

There is a dense network of roads, more than is necessary to connect all the special locations together. Guard posts are located on such places that they are often unavoidable when the player needs to go somewhere and takes the road or waterway. Safehouses on the other hand are mostly located on blind spots.

A run-down unused railroad is the only thing that is suggested to go beyond the world of Far Cry 2, northwards from Leboa-Sako. There is also a pipeline in the southern part of Bowa-Seko, of which both ends go underground.

And so also in a cultural geographical point of view, no history can be read and no logic can be found in the layout of the built environment in Far Cry 2. Things are merely there for gaming purposes.

## 5.2 Survey

The online survey has received only four replies. All four are students at the same faculty as the researcher. Because of the limited number, the analysis is descriptive/qualitative rather than quantitative. A count on how often which screenshots are said to have elements of recognition would be statistically meaningless.

Respondent A has lived in Cameroon.

Respondent B has lived in Kenya.

Respondent C has been in Ghana.

Respondent D has lived in Uganda.

Respondent B did not answer for any image though and said not to recognize anything from her home country, which is remarkable since the designers of Far

**Fig 42** Desert



**Fig 43** A boabab tree, just outside of Pala

Cry 2 have been on a safari tour notably in Kenya. Respondent C was frugal with remarks.

Although the respondents were only asked to note those places that they recognize, they often comment on when they think something deviates from their own observations, which is only convenient for this research. When nothing is filled in this can be regarded as not recognized or mentioned previously. When it is not recognized one should take into account that that either means it is a representation of a non-existent place, therefore possibly a simulacrum, or the four respondents have not been on a location where a similar landscape exists.

Regarding images of the jungle it seems to be rather accurate except for the fact that it is too thin. Respondent A: "too green, yet not dense enough for the tropical rainforest". Respondent D also seems to miss vegetation on many screenshots, perhaps because it is too rocky.

The savannah has received almost no critics at all. The yellow grass inaccurately seems to look like grain according to respondent D and respondent A also does not seem to recognize the grass. The looks and scarcity of the trees are familiar to both respondent A and D.

The desert seems to miss the mark. Respondent A does not recognize it because it is "too desertlike" and respondent D said not to have seen "sand desert" in Uganda, but did see cacti. Other screenshots of the desert did not receive replies, even though respondent A has indicated to have lived in the arid northern part of Cameroon.

Screenshots that were taken on water at dawn are recognized by respondents A and D, yet without further explanation.

The villages are recognized by all three respondents A, B and D. The unpaved roads, which according to respondent D could've had a bit more ditches, the painted slate buildings, corrugated iron and telephone poles are all recognized by at least two of the three respondents. Also the cheap furniture and junk along the road are recognizable. According to respondent D it is all not even decrepit enough!

**Fig 44** A shelter at a guard house



**Fig 45** Round houses at "Outpost"

Screenshots of a guard post do not trigger a memory of any of the respondents, but that is to be expected since one can expect a site like that only in war zones.

Images of native settlements are not recognized. Respondent A does acknowledge that those houses can be round, but not with wooden poles sticking out.

Finally, respondents A and D missed the people in the landscapes, especially in the villages.

## 5.3 Questionnaire

The six Internet fora on which the questionnaire is submitted have received ten replies in total. Only on the forum of GameSpot, which received four replies, did people refer to previously made statements, but it can hardly be called a focus group discussion. All six (sub)fora are rather small, with much less activity than for example Internet fora for the game series/franchises Civilization (turn-based strategy), Warcraft (real time strategy) or Wing Commander (space combat simulation). It is likely that there is less interest in talking about first-person shooters and people merely like to play them.

That would already explain the general observation of the replies that the players do not seem to pay much thought to the veracity of both the story and the landscapes. They either take it for granted, or are simply not interested in the matter. But there are certainly some good and bad critics to be discerned.

Ten replies is enough to code them for which elements in the landscape they comment on and whether that is positive or negative. Because of the limited amount this was done by hand. Yet just as with the survey, ten replies is also not enough to make a meaningful statistical analysis.

In general the responses were mostly positive. The storyline is considered to be in accordance with reality. Unaware of the distinction between the real and realistic aspects of games, two responses were positive about the game because of its realistic quality. On the other hand two respondents also defended the developers for the technical limitations they are faced with.

But with regard to the natural landscapes in the game there is little criticism anyway. In the questionnaire it was already mentioned that there is no water

**Fig 46** A road through the savannah at sunset



**Fig 47** Screenshot from Far Cry 1 (source: http://www.gamespot.com/ forums/show_msgs.php?topic_id=25463698 retrieved: 6 September 2010)

current, but only one said that the stagnant water "felt weird", while three said not to mind it. That same respondent also criticized the jungle for not being dense enough. The respondents do not mention savannah and desert. (Silence lends consent.) The criticism was on the natural environment is the lack of wildlife, noted by two respondents. There are only herbivores and domestic animals to be found in the game, but no fierce animals, let alone those part of the infamous Big Five. Also, one respondent said the biomes were too close to each other.

One respondent made an interesting remark on the sunset:

> "Watching the Sun set in game is extremely captivating and rivitng for the fact of how real it looks. The lighting is very reflective of Africa and you do indeed feel that you are watching the sun set in Africa."

The respondent added an image to his remark, as can be seen in appendix B. The air in image is orange-brown, similar to the picture on the front page of this thesis. The orange-brown hue in these two images is in sharp contrast with the bright green and blue hues in Far Cry 1. (Fig 47) Far Cry 1 (officlally just *Far Cry*) is set in South-east Asia. This could lead to the hypothesis that perhaps different global areas or continents in the world are associated with different colours. For example, in the boardgame of Risk, Africa is brown and Asia is green. Are the colours in Risk totally random? Or are the colours based on these subconscious colour associations and/or do we have these associations because of Risk? That does fit the theory of social reproduction of places.

Most critiques were given on the non-environmental aspects of the game. First of all it occurred to three respondents that there are only hostiles and no civilians at all present in the game, which they found inaccurate. One respondent approved the appearance of the villages, but another thought they were too small. (But that is not contradictory.)

Similarly, three respondents thought that there were too many guard posts, even though one of them emphasized that the looks of them were okay. The reason for this might also be the function of these guard posts in the game. They present an additional challenge, but are not the main challenge. When taking on a mission, it makes sense the player has to eliminate all the hostiles at the site of the objective, but because a guard post in between is not the main objective it can be considered a nuisance. In effect, when a player experiences such a nuisance, he wants the guard posts not to be there and thus there are too many.

**Fig 48** "Outpost"



**Fig 49** The desert road between Leboa-Sako and Bowa-Seko, with a burnt down bus and a piece of fence (which is rather redundant at that loocation)

On the other hand, they also gave arguments with it, such as that is would be a waste of resources" for having so many, and that the hostiles respawn[5] too quickly.

Lastly, two respondents also noted the fact that there is no regional political divide between the two factions and that it looked weird having the two headquarters of the rivaling factions in the same, small, village.

One of the respondents said to have worked in disputed areas: the West bank, Iraq and Afghanistan. In his point of view the game is a farce when it comes to representing conflict areas. The lack of civilians is totally unrealistic, just as the cease-fire zone, because soldiers are often on the edge of committing violence, and their allegiance hangs by a thread. Although this respondent has not been in Africa, his comment can be weighed heavily because of his personal experience in conflict areas. Therefore the critique on the absense of civilians weighs even stronger.

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[5] This is common terminology for video games: Far Cry 2 is only one of many games in which enemies reappear on the same location, even though the player cleared that location earlier. It would look weird if the map would be free of hostiles after playing the game for a while. That would give the impression that the player is able to win the war all by himself, Rambo-style. Also, the respawning suggests that Leboa-Sako and Bowa-Seko do not make up the entire country. In a sense, by respawning hostiles in the guard posts, the regions are continuously being recycled.

**Fig 50** Sepoko



**Fig 51** On a boat in the lake of Bowa-Seko

# 6 Conclusions

Both the survey and the questionnaire have a limited number of respondents (4 and 10 each, respectively), which means conclusions can only be drawn with care and in approximations.

The world of Far Cry 2 consists of two regions: Leboa-Sako and Bowa-Seko. When looking at the maps of those two regions, it is safe to say there are many physiogeographical impossibilities and human geographical improbabilities in the design:

- The central part is jungle and the closer to the border of the square maps the more arid the climate, with sand desert at the borders.
- Water does not have a source and does not stream into any direction.
- There is no relief, except on a local scale.
- In the exact centre of both regions there is a village. The villages themselves are cease-fire zones in which the headquarters of both factions are located.
- There is no political division over the regions between the factions.
- The road network is profuse.
- There is no apparent interdependency between the regions and whatever is off the map, except for a railroad disappearing into the north.

But players do not dispute most of this. Some have only noted the stagnant water and lack of political division. The most likely reason for this is that most players judge a game mainly on it's gameplay and how realistic it looks rather than how real it is. Many players did state that there are too many guard posts, and those do have a significant role in the gameplay.

The people in the game are all male with one exception, ostensibly around 35 years of age with little variance and mostly black, but less than one would expect in an African country.

With regard to the natural environment, Africa is represented broadly. Jungle, savannah and desert are all represented in the game, even though the area in which the game takes place consists only of two times 25 km$^2$. There is no reason to question the accuracy of the appearance of the jungle and the savannah, although the jungle is probably too thinly wooded. The desert is clearly too sandy though and can therefore be regarded a simulacrum.

Judging on the positive responses on screenshots of the villages in Far Cry 2, the game seems to give an adequate representation of villages in Africa, though

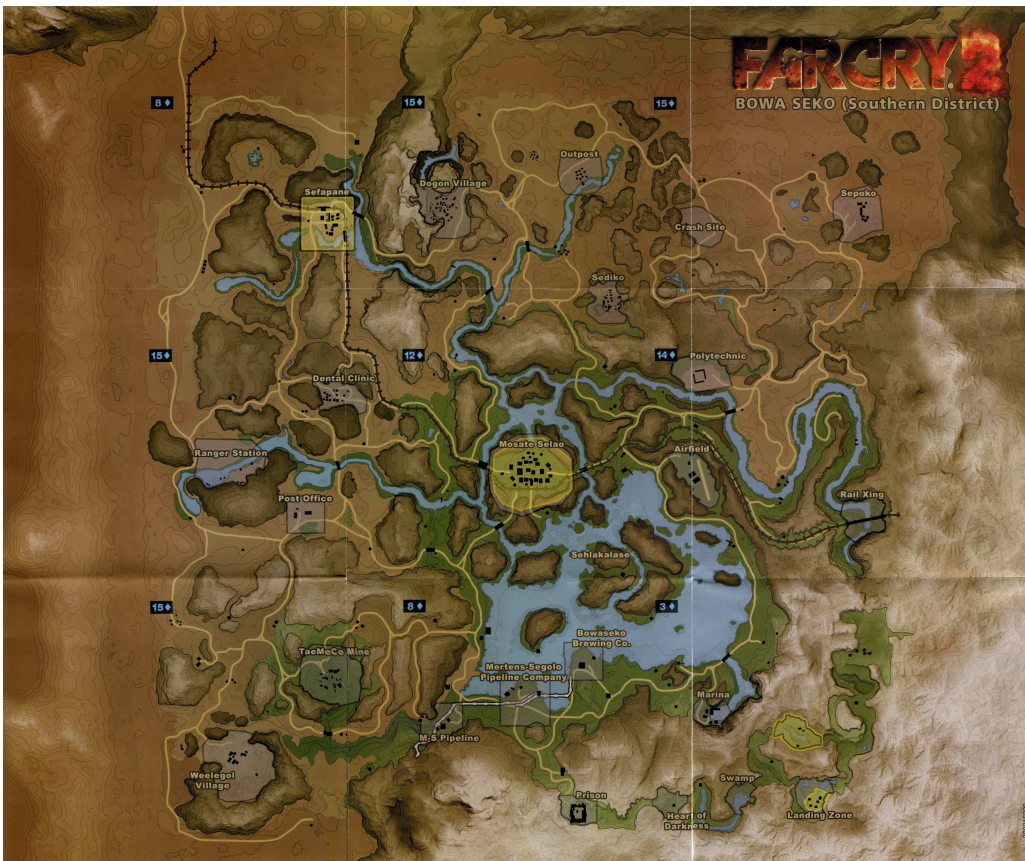**Fig 52** The terrace of the expat bar in Leboa-Sako

without being able to pinpoint where in Africa exactly. But the major flaw is the complete lack of civilians. The hustle and bustle are a major characteristic of those villages. This is noted both in the survey and the questionnaire, most notably by a respondent of the questionnaire who has lived in conflict areas, albeit outside of Africa. One can only guess on the reason for the absense of civilians. But their absense does make sure that the player will be drastically less confronted by the inhumanities and empathetic dramas of the civil war, thus allowing the player to play unconstrained, without being plagued by grim thoughts and impressions. The considerations of the developers might also have been to avoid controversy over the game.

Finally, in respect to what players of Far Cry 2 take in of the landscape when playing the game, there are two effects at work. Firstly there is the enhanced effect of the simulacrum. Because Far Cry 2 is a first-person shooter a player is able to move around freely in the landscape, making it much easier to take the landscape in and form a sense of place. On the other hand there is the effect of the gamer gaze. A player will start to play a game because of its story and setting, but will graduately get used to the graphics, lose eye for the landscape and will think more and more about the gameplay and what it takes to win the game.

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# Appendix A

FARCRY 2
LEBOA-SAKO (Northern District)

FARCRY 2
BOWA SEKO (Southern District)
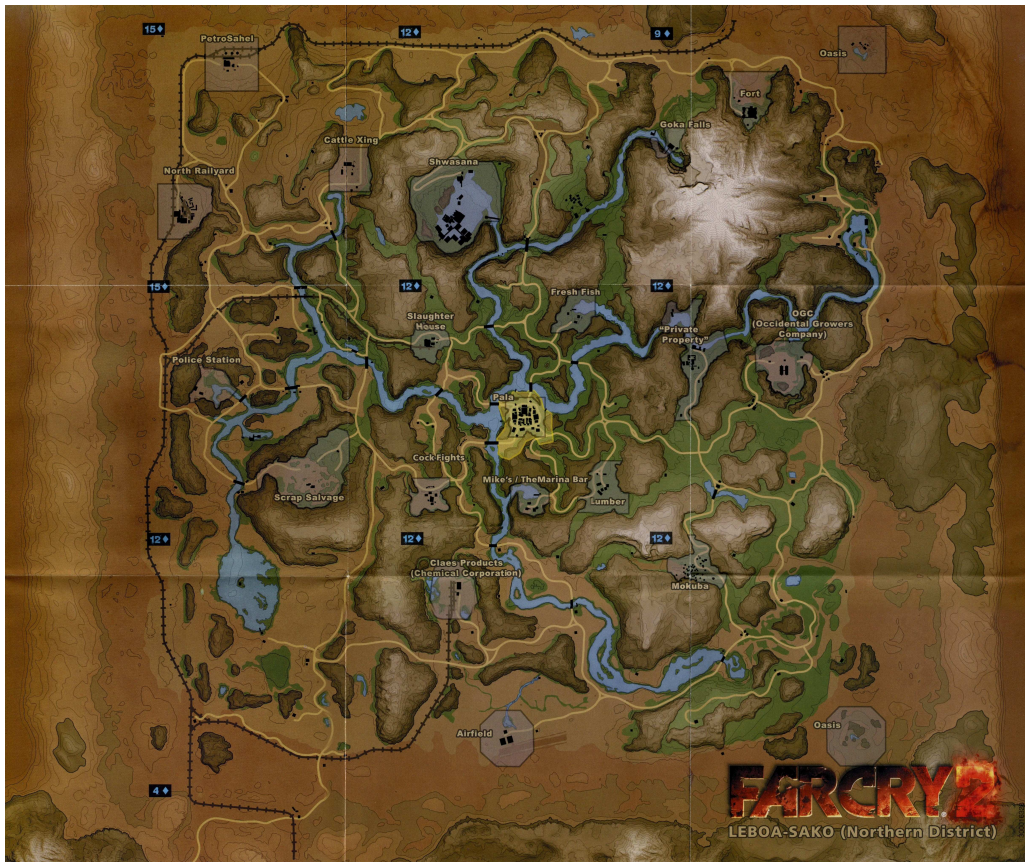
# Appendix B

*First post of the threads:*

Dear Far Cry (2) lovers,

As a master student in Cultural Geography I'm writing my thesis about the representation of Africa in Far Cry 2. I am in particular interested in whether the landscape is thustworthy and realistic. Of course a game cannot simulate a real life situation 100%, but where the game is discordant with reality, do you think it is acceptable (because it's just a game) or do you think the truth is bent?

In general: **Do you think the landscape of Far Cry 2 is realistic and/or representative for Africa?**

The centre of the map is mostly jungle. Around that is savannah and the edges of the map is desert. Did you notice this? And did you notice while playing that you entered a different climate?

Water (rivers) always flows from a higher location to a lower one. In Far Cry 2 the water has no current. Did you notice this at all? If so, did it bother you that this is not the case?

Do you think the towns Pala, Sefapane and Mosate-Selao are representative for African villages?

Regarding the guard posts, do you think there are too many or too few? Do you think there were blockades like that during civil wars in Africa? Did you give that any thought at all?

Any other thoughts?

This is a very open questionnaire. It's all about *your* perception of the landscape, so feel free to deviate from my questions if you feel like it, as long as it's relevant to my main question. But please stay on topic and keep it serious.

## farcry2game.com
**26-06-2010 12:28** *Knoxy*
I see it as being some what realistic on the landscape in certain areas, but I don't think every 25 square km is surrounded by a high wall of sand dunes lol. Also, i'm not too sure if in Africa it goes from thick jungle to desert so quick, I think it has massive Savannah plains stretching for ages before baron desert. But in terms of the sections of map style i think its a good representation of Africa's vast environment, with dense tropical Jungles, Savannah plains and of course, desert.

The towns I also see as fairly realistic in terms of buildings, but they need civilians, not just mercenaries with guns. There may also be lots of checkpoints, but only in hostile areas i guess, it would be a waste of resources and time having them everywhere. I never really payed much attention to the water, other than the fact, its murky and doesn't look to appealing to drink form let alone swim in.

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## infarcry.com
**11-07-2010 09:06** *xVxD3ATHPR00F*
I dont thin the villages are what would be in africa but i dont think there meant to be entirely real. and the water doesnt have a current but that does not matter i think and the people didint do it because it would be more programing

thats my opinoin and im 13

**14-07-2010 17:36** *m4k4r0v*
From past experience of playing this awesome game and traveling the land scape. I have come to relize that the country in the game is supposed to have every bit of Africa in it. The Safari, the deserts, and the country side. You must take into account how the developers had to spend large amounts of time into making this game as real as possible. Although in Far Cry 2 there is no current with the water. I do not mind it. I believe the fact of how many other things that are amazing in the game make up for the water.

Because of the Civil War in the game you must compare and contrast the two sides. One side (APR) is more people based and more local while the other side (UFLL) is based on a more organized millatary based side. The towns are based off of different parts of Africa. I felt that they were indeed realistic enough but should have been bigger.

Watching the Sun set in game is extremely captivating and rivitng for the fact of how real it looks. The lighting is very reflective of Africa and you do indeed feel that you are watching the sun set in Africa. To show this, take a look at this image from Gamespot.com:

Very realalistic indeed.

I was extremely suprised by how real the fire acted and  moved around the field I ignited with a molitov I tossed. It burned fast and spread to the buildings roofs, and the trees around them. I indeed ingulfed some people with the blaze and a car exploded with ease in the flames surrounding it.

On the topic of the A.I. and the two sides. You feel that you are re-innacting a real life conflict in a real life country in Africa. The radio stations are either for the APR or the UFLL and are always talking bad about the other team! The teams always insult  the enemy when giving you the mission orders/objectives. Just like any country today we talk smack about our enemys as they do to us. Even in Soccer (Futbol as you call it I believe) we talk smack. HOLLAND IS BETTER! NO SPAIN IS YOU PIGS! Etc. Etc. (I have no opinion on FIFA or the World Cup 2010, just an example 😃) Not only this, the A.I. can get scared, angry, and many other emotions. For example, I was in a field at night stalking a patrol of 3 soldiers for the APR with my Machete. I took the one in the back out silently and the other 2 didn't know where he was. They then started shooting there AK-47's at my dirrection believing someone was there. It was a very eye opening experience at how real this game is.

In conclusion Far Cry 2 is a very life like and a life like game that simulates a country in Africa very well.


I hope my opinion is usefull for you studies Matrix, have a nice day. 😊

**02-08-2010 22:49** *exocet*
sometimes having a game realistic and having a game fun are two separate targets for the developers. Doom 2 is still one of my favourite games but do you see anyone question whiether it is realistic or not?
i think this game is awesome not because of it's realistic tryhard attitude because in a LOT of cases this game is almost as realistic as doom 2, but that doesn't make it budget the grafics and playability determine how many play (and purchace) this game. That INCLUDES far cry one hurrraaaaahhhhhh

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## gamespot.com
**01-07-2010 16:57** *DraugenCP*
I don't know if I'll be able to answer all of your questions but here goes:

This game's aim for realism has succeeded in some places, but completely failed in others. While. as you say, there can be no 100% realism in gaming, there are some really incomprehensible design choices that dampen the immersion.

But to start with the landscape, I think it represents southern Africa, or at least what I'd expect from it (as I've never even been outside of Europe). When I play Far Cry 2 I can really feel the burning heat of the sun in the desert areas, and the moist of the jungle areas. As for the water currents: no, I didn't notice that, but I didn't explore the game 'till such an extent that I'd be able to notice it.

The guard posts are a big problem in this game, though. Yes, there are bound to be some blockades in African civil wars, but I'd imagine them to be more like the one in the opening sequence, where they simply intimidate people into paying some sort of toll. But the first problem with the guard posts is that it isn't very clear who they are. They are always hostile towards the player and will shoot you on sight. They even seem tocooperate (when the occasion arises)with the personal guards of important individuals (such as police chiefs) and random road bandits in trying to kill the player. I'd imagine that, seeing as it's obvious in most cases that the protagonist is a foreigner, it would at least be interesting for them to see if they could try and see what the protagonist's business is, and if he has any money on him.

But the most annoying problems regarding guard posts are a) their quantity: you seriouslycannot drive 3 minutes without having to get out of your car and shoot some more screaming idiots, and b) they respawn more quickly than necessary both from a realistic point of view as gameplay-wise. It is really unrealistic to wipe out a guard post and then see it fully manned again after drivinga lap. It's also just really disruptive. I've even had instances in which I loaded a game in a cleaned out guard post, with the guards all alive again. Seeing as this is a sandbox game and thus involves a lot of travelling, it kind of kills the entire vibe. I don't even care about realism when I say that this game would have been better off without guard posts altogether. But even then you have incomprehensible stuff like a weapon convoy you have to destroy conveniently driving around in circles on an open terrain.

But enough about guard posts. One thing I noticed about the landscape is that there seems to be a severe lack of wildlife. I only occasionally run into some animals and even then they're mostly domesticised such as chickens etc. I doubt that you could actually swim through rivers and walk through jungles in Africa without there being great natural threats such as poisonous animals. Other than that, though, it looks pretty solid. The towns are pretty believable as well, even if it's weird that 2 competing factions have their headquarters right next door to eachother. I know there's this 'ceasefire zone', but in most civil conflicts you see certain areas being controlled by one faction and certain areas by the other. But yeah, details.

**02-07-2010 21:57** *KeNNeYg*
The story is pretty realistic. It is somewhat relevant to the conflicts that really happen in Africa.

**03-08-2010 08:10** *Ein1*
Here's an excerpt from the wikipedia on game programming---
A game's physics programmer is dedicated to developing the physics a game will employ.[5] Typically, a game will only simulate a few aspects of real-world physics. For example, a space game may need simulated gravity, but would not have any need for simulating water viscosity.
Since processing cycles are always at a premium, physics programmers may employ "shortcuts" that are computationally inexpensive, but look and act "good enough" for the game in question. Sometimes, a specific subset of situations is specified and the physical outcome of such situations are stored in a record of some sort and are never computed at runtime at all.

As you say a game can't be 100% accurate but in fact the only real reason it can't is because it doesn't need to be! Why bother deeply researching every detail of a foreign country and dedicating that large a portion of your budget into something that will probably not help your sales and have a minimal affect on the satisfaction of the buyer? The game developmental world is cut throat and you can't get hung up on too many details as your way to the market.

This of course is a purely opinionated post and probably won't have any effect on what your doing per se but it is an interesting set of ideas to ponder right there. Like what could have been should it have been in greater demand

**15-08-2010 20:17** *FlankerDFMax*
A couple of pretty good comments.............and as late as my response is, I assume you've already written your paper.

Regardless...........besides the points already made I"d observe the terrain and villages are likely pretty accurate as they were supposedly developed off an ungodly number of pictures taken by the developers of actual locations in Africa. The rest of the game is largely BS.

Where the heck are all the villagers, tradespeople (run the hotels/inns/bars) etc, shop keepers and such? Yea there's a civil war on but life doesn't evacuate.I've worked in the W. Bank (near the Jordanian border) and it was heavily factionalised. Violent deaths for all reasons, kidnappings, unsafe travel zones etc. Very active everyday life in virutally every location depite the Palestinian/Israeli thing, and Palestinian infighting though Lot's of check points [never had to wipe any out to get through though! ] I've also worked Iraq and Afghanistan..........outright war zones, and daily life went on all over both places. The Devs really missed the immersion boat on this one.

The lack of any factional fighting in this game is totally unbelieveable. Even if there were cease fires enforced in villages, lack of obeying central orders or policy by faction members is epidemic (something I've experienced dozens of times in the aforementioned vaction hotspots). A lot of faction members are just thugs with thebarest of allegiance to their group, and they'll carry out personal vendettas at the drop of a hat, engage in self enriching criminal behavior at every opportunity, so on and so forth. I could go on, but you get the drift.

The lack of any dangerous wild llife has already been noted, and I fully agree. Then there's the omnipresent monkey sounds, but there are no monkeys in the game at all. Just plain stupid and detracts from immersion.

The game mechanic of having all of your "buddies" turn on you traiterously at the end of the game is assinine, and the waste of a golden plot enriching opportunity. One or two, or a few turn coat cut throats would have been great, but the likely

hood of all of 'em being murderous turn coats (as well as the arms dealer) is just totally adolescent.

And any decisions or choices you make in game have very little story branching effect, as is universally the norm in the real world. Story and mission progression are far too canned to maintain immersion.

In short a beautiful realistic game world that is cursed with an amatuerish storyline, and unbelieveable plot mechanisms that mostly kill immersion in the game or involvement by the player. This game deserved a lot better, and with just a few very feasable additions or changes; could have been the Mass Effect 2 of current timeline shooters.

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## ubi.com
**02-07-2010 15:41** *razorfinnish*
It's realistic except for the rivers, yes, and the floating rocks. The jungle should have been more dense at some places, it was too easy to move in there. Otherwise it was great and realistic. Also it felt weird, that the water seemed to stay still. I'd have loved some strong flows that make one-direction waterways.

**11-08-2010 18:15** *djrodw777*
I don't know how big the land area in the game is, but maybe 7 to 8 scale miles from one side to another... and I am sure that a savannah can be anywhere from 10 to 1000 miles across... my opinion is, the landscape in FC2 isn't as realistic as it could have been. I don't think you would find an area in africa where there is jungle surrounded by Savannah, surrounded by desert on such a small scale. but I do believe that they got small details spot on that create an atmosphere that closely follows what an african setting would be like in certain areas.
the rivers do not flow in game which might have been done better but the illusion there is you are in higher elevations for the most part and it all goes down hill to the desert.

I would think the towns are accurate to a degree, as it is more of a third world african setting, fairly run down, shanty towns... kinda depressing actually cuz you know there are people who are forced to live in such places..

the guard posts are overdone I think, there are way too many of them but as far as an individual post, yes those are highly probable in real African countries, as the one thing that I know FC2 got right is the violence. All too real are the motives of all the characters, and checkpoints such as these fit right in.

all in all to me it is a good representation of the real africa with some changes made to make it a game and make it playable and enjoyable to players. The biggest thing tho is the diamonds... there are people getting killed for those things every day still in Africa

good luck with that thesis