

EUROPEAN HISTORICAL GAME STUDIES

Volume 1/2026

Issue 1

UKRAINIAN GAMES OF WAR

GDAŃSK UNIVERSITY PRESS

GDAŃSK 2026

Table of Contents

Michał Mochocki, Yaraslau I. Kot	
Editorial: EHGS and Ukrainian Games of War	[5]
Aliaksandr Razhkou	
Features of the Use of Religious Symbols in Ukrainian Games of War	[9]
Jagoda Kościelniak	
The Semiotics of Wartime Kharkiv in Ukrainian Video Games	[29]
Emilia Mazur, Kacper Karwacki	
The Spectacle of the Absurd: Parody in Video Games as a Tool of Political Satire Relating to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine	[50]
Anna Sroka, Igor Kwasigroch	
Chinese-Speaking Steam Communities in the Face of Russian Aggression: The Case of the <i>Ukraine War Stories</i> Game	[84]
Michał Palmąka	
Preserving Wartime Video Games: Criteria and Methods in the Context of the War in Ukraine	[110]
Yaraslau I. Kot	
Ukrainian Games of War: Born in the Flames of Invasion	[128]

Aliaksandr Razhkov

[University of Warsaw, Poland]

Features of the Use of Religious Symbols in Ukrainian Games of War

[<https://doi.org/10.26881/ehgs.2026.1.01>]

[Abstract]: Major historical events, including wars, can influence people's world-views, including their religious ones. For example, in the context of the armed confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, the level of trust in the Ukraine Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) among Ukrainians fell to 8%, which cannot be attributed solely to the general trend of Ukrainians' disappointment in Christian institutions (since 2021, the level of trust in them has fallen from 63.5 to 60%). Cultural texts, including video games, can serve as markers of changes in public sentiment toward certain institutions. Video games often use religious symbols as a tool for meaning-making and self-promotion. This article, based on an analysis of 187 Ukrainian war video games, attempts to identify how often and in what way religious symbols are used in them, as well as whether the representations of religious institutions in these video games correlate with public sentiment among Ukrainians.

[Keywords]: Ukrainian war games, religious symbols, Russian Orthodox Church, public mood, representation of religion

1. Introduction

Wars, armed confrontations of relatively large human associations, quite often influence the understanding of surrounding reality by these groups of people. Thus, wars, being part of collective historical memory, become elements of private mythologies, which include national myths and national

theologies. For example, during the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, individual philosophers and theologians on the Russian side (for example, the well-known philosopher Aleksandr Dugin, whose ideas began to be officially broadcast by the Russian Orthodox Church [ROC] through the World Russian People's Council [WRPC] [Рожков, А.О. 2024]) are trying to create their own theology of war, which would metaphysically justify Russia's military actions in this war. In this context, the official structures of the ROC begin to act as the main ideological mouthpieces of such a theology.

All this, in theory, should cause a reaction of rejection among Ukrainians toward the structures of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP). Such rejection should be reflected in cultural texts, which are both a form of reflection and a form of emotional release in the conditions of war. Cultural texts can be seen as a catalyst for a rapid process of self-awareness. One of such a type of text are video games, the popularity of which in the modern world (including in Ukraine) is an indisputable fact. It can be assumed that within video games, which create an escapist space as well as a space of psychological compensation, the mood of Ukrainians finds materialization, on the basis of which it is possible to draw a conclusion about any change in the understanding of the role of individual religious organizations and institutions in Ukraine during the war.

To test this hypothesis, I decided to analyze how religious elements are used in Ukrainian games relating to war created between 2014 and 2024, and to determine whether the representations of religious institutions in these games correlate with Ukrainian public opinion. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to:

1. conduct an analysis of current literature on religious studies of video games to illustrate how religion can be present in the space of video games;
2. use the method of participant observation to analyze Ukrainian games of war (a list of which was compiled and provided by Yaraslau I. Kot [2024]) in order to identify religious phenomena in them;
3. systematize and formalize the information obtained in order to conduct a hermeneutic content analysis of religious content in order to determine both the features of the use of religious symbols in Ukrainian

games of war and to identify ideological images in the construction of which religious phenomena are used.

In conclusion, I note that within in this article, video games are considered to be a cultural phenomenon formed within a certain socio-cultural and socio-historical context, which determines its content. This makes it necessary to turn to the methods of various disciplines, such as, religious studies and cultural studies, etc.

2. Peculiarities of the representation of religion in video games

Before proceeding directly to a content analysis of Ukrainian games of war, it is necessary to say a few words about the features of the representation of religion in video games. Since the study of how religion functions in video games began relatively recently, it is natural that not all the features of this phenomenon of human social life have been studied. The same applies to the question of how a person interacts with religion in the space of a video game.

First, it should be noted that religion itself in video games can be represented as a religious object, religious meaning, religious belief, and religious action.

A religious object, which is represented in the game space at the levels of narration, mechanics, and procedure, is a commodified definitive representation by the developer of some religious phenomenon, or a phenomenon that is somehow connected with religion in the broad sense (Рожков, О.О. 2024). I discuss five levels of narration: theological-metaphysical, ontological, institutional-factional, practical, and personal. I present the level of mechanics as: a means of changing the essential characteristics of characters and objects; a means of gaining access to special opportunities; and a behavioral determinant of the acting forces. Procedure is understood as: the immersiveness of religious plots (by which I mean the process of transforming a religious narrative into an environment within which the player non-trivially comprehends the religious plot from the inside); illustration of

the religious experience of the authors; explanation of game conventions; personification of the acting forces; and a significant historical variable.

Religious meaning is meaning that is formed around a religious object during the player's interaction with the religious object. Religious meanings can be modified during player interactions both inside and outside the game (within the game community), as well as during player communication with cultural actors not involved in game practices.

Religious belief is a set of attitudes formed in a person (during the play process and during out-play activity), which can sometimes determine the style of gaming practices, which can take the form of religious actions.

Religious action is an action of video game actors (players and non-player characters [NPC]) that is filled with religious content. It can be determined both by religious beliefs, thereby manifesting them, and by the logic of the video game itself.

Based on the characteristics of the categories religious meaning and belief, the context in which a video game was created and in which it is consumed will be important for understanding religious aspects of a video game. This forces one to take into account the complex frame structure of "life worlds" (Schütz and Luckmann 2003) both within the game itself and around the game, since the boundaries of these worlds are porous and interpenetrating.

These factors complicate the process of analyzing video games as social phenomena. For example, the following can be used to study them: critical analysis of the discourse in which video games are formed and its reflection in video game spaces; episodic interviews regarding individual episodes of video game experience; video game and net ethnographies; in-depth auto-ethnography; development of special video game software (for example, special modifications for conducting in-depth observations and experiments); the phenomenological hermeneutics of content; empirical triangulation; visualization and formalization (including with the help of Petri nets, that is, objects-circuits necessary for modeling discrete systems); in-depth interviews; quantitative analysis of resources associated with game activity; and deciphering and codifying content produced by players, etc. (Šisler et al. 2018). At the same time, an analysis of the existing literature on the topic of religion in video games, conducted by Gianmarco Gabriele (2023), shows that taking into account the broader context of the formation

of religious concepts in video games and their perception has become possible only since the early 2010s and is interdisciplinary in nature (although the study of religion in video games itself obviously began earlier), which is associated with the gradual development of other related disciplines (for example, digital anthropology and digital sociology, etc.). To this day, the division of methods into “actor-oriented” methods (focused on studying the player and his/her perception of the game world, including religion in it) and “immanent” methods (focused on understanding the context of the game world and the phenomena in it, including religion) of understanding video games remains relevant. However, overcoming this division has been considered a promising task that will allow one to understand how spirituality develops in the space of video games (Gianmarco 2023).

Here, it is necessary to say a few words about the way in which religious phenomena are represented in games and how these representations are perceived by players. In general, during the development of both AAA and indie video games, the original religious ideas of the scriptwriters (which may be the result of a personal crisis of faith) are subject to commodification, during which the ideas take the form of a religion for everyone (not always, but in most cases) that is close to the beliefs of the mass consumer of video games (representatives of the urban middle class). Such a presentation of religion is marked by: playing on occult nostalgia; playing with familiar religious symbolism; non-institutionalization (institutional forms of religion in video games most often have a negative connotation); bricolage (a composition of random, unanalyzed elements of the religious environment of society); the idea of the perennialism (based on a single, unshakable foundation) and the holism (universality) of all religious traditions, which is a distinctive feature of New Age religiosity (Aupers and Houtman 2010); demonstrativity; and folklore, i.e. which can be presented as a result of non-systemic folklorizing in an era of the dominance of deinstitutionalized religiosity (de Wildt 2023). At the same time, commodification can make the original idea lose the character of a social statement with the aim of satisfying the spiritual and aesthetic needs of the majority audience (Aupers and de Wildt 2021). Religious ideas begin to act as a simulacrum, or, as Gianmarco (2023) puts it, a new form of religiosity that, according to

William Sims Bainbridge (2013), enters into active confrontation with traditional institutionalized forms of religion.

However, the process of consuming a video game and its religious content, being presented in the form of a “prosumption” (a consumption of content, during which the process of the non-authorial formation of secondary social data takes place [Silk et al. 2016]), is characterized by the revival of commodified ideas. Video games, having an influence on the gaming audience’s perception of the phenomenon of religion (the greatest influence is exerted on young people of school or student age who have “de-enchanted” and “flexible” models of religious identity [Ражкоў 2024]), contribute to the fact that this very audience enters into active communication, the subject of which is the religious ideas embedded in the ludo-narration of the game. For example, although players almost never take on faith in these ideas (if there is a conversion, it is most often indirect), they can, nevertheless, actively argue with these ideas, rationalize them, try to justify and defend them, and re-evaluate and rethink them (with the subsequent expression of new ideas. Various types of players (skeptics, interpreters, and reflectors), in one way or another, note that video games give them the opportunity to feel the experience of another religious identity and, thus, to understand religion as a category of personal gaming experience, in isolation from institutions and their strict prescriptions (de Wildt 2023). In the absence of a single symbol of faith, the consolidating factor is the video game space itself and the religious gaming experience it presents, which is characterized by a short-term acceptance of religious identity, with the possibility of “playing with identities” (de Wildt and Aupers 2019).

Thus, video games become more of a tool for “experiencing spirituality” than for “religious education” (Raffety and Insa-Iglesias 2023). It is also important that video games encourage people to philosophical reflection and confirm their views in practice (Egerton 2023), which is an important nuance when analyzing video games as means of forming religious identity, including in the form of civil religion, by which I mean quasi-religious concepts that endow the phenomena of social and public life, such as the nation, the state, etc., with the quality of the numinous.

Thus, video games, being the most progressive form of art (which is achieved through their ability not to represent information, but to create

an environment for its perception), really re-enchant the world. However, they achieve this not by restoring religious feelings in their premodern understanding, but by affirming them in a postmodern understanding, where, due to “secularization as the liberation of imagination from institutions,” religious feeling itself loses a number of characteristics, acquiring new ones, turning faith from a constant into a variable, which concerns both the object of faith and the “space of faith” (Bainbridge 2013). The player, being an actor of the video game (but not a subject, since he/she is a game character into which Dasein enters [Leibovitz 2013]), uses it as an “instrument of game faith,” which “experimentally expands spiritual experience as a remedy for boredom,” and, therefore, as a specific instrument of knowledge of God (ritual-game process [Bosman 2019]) or the development of “self-sanctity.”

In all this, it is important to note that representations and game “retextualizations” of religion (Myers 2013) always depend on the social environment in which the games are produced and consumed. Therefore, in the context of this study, the question arises: how are religious elements used to rethink the military conflict in Ukraine? How often do game developers turn to religious themes to illustrate the realities of the current war? Within the framework of my article, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of 187 video games (Kot 2024) produced by Ukrainian developers in the period from 2014 (the beginning of the hybrid war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine) to 2024 (that is, two years of open confrontation between the two states are covered). I attempt to answer the above questions.

3. Ukrainian games of war and religion

The games were selected, through inclusive content analysis, in which I attempted to identify the presence of the entire possible set of religious elements (or those related to religious discourse) in the video games, the list of which was compiled by Kot (2024), based on two criteria: the dedication of video games to the theme of the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine in modern history; the year of development within the

2014–2024 period, that is, the period during which the Russian Federation carried out aggressive actions in one way or another toward the Ukrainian state. It should be noted that I was interested in the entire possible set of religious phenomena (or phenomena referring to religious discourse), even if they did not function as religious phenomena and could not be identified by potential players as religious. Based on this, there is a possibility that another researcher with broader knowledge in the field of religious symbolism could select different data when studying the array of games presented.

As regards religious elements in the space of Ukrainian war games, I note that they are present in twenty-nine titles out of 187 (that is, in 15.5% of cases). Most of these games are low-budget mobile games. Some include indie projects implemented via Steam for PC. The projects are mainly aimed at a Ukrainian audience, as they contain symbols, memes, etc., understandable to a Ukrainian or a person interested in the modern cultural space of Eastern Europe (although these games also have an English localization, which indicates the desire of the authors to demonstrate them to a wider audience than the domestic Ukrainian market). However, in these video games not all religious elements function with equal significance (for example, not all phenomena play a significant function in the game's narrative). At a minimum, I can highlight the following series of functions that religious symbols and ideas play in the space of these games, while I emphasize that the same game can use religious elements with different functionality:

- > context reproduction tool – 13 games;
- > personalization tool – 8 games;
- > play with national/folk symbols – 5 games;
- > dehumanization of opponents – 3 games;
- > narrative storytelling tool – 4 games;
- > ridicule of opponents – 1 game (1 game ridicules the Ukrainian side);
- > pop-cultural commodifications, with the aim of increasing recognition – 8 games.

A few things need to be clarified here. First, the categories listed above can overlap and be used in the same video game at the same time, as will be seen from the data in the table below. For example, the functions of contextualization and personalization very often go hand in hand. It will also

be obvious that the function of personification and dehumanization of the opponent also quite often go together. But, at the same time, it is interesting to observe that ridicule and dehumanization do not go together.

Second, there is a need to clarify what is meant by these categories:

- > context reproduction tool – religious phenomena are used to introduce a person into the socio-historical context of the events in which the video game takes place;
- > personalization tool – religious phenomena are used as a means of representing characters, groups of characters, factions, in a word, active forces, in the space of a video game;
- > play with national/folk symbols – the use of national or folk religious phenomena within a video game in order to attract the audience's attention by arousing a sense of mythological belonging;
- > dehumanization of opponents – the use of religious phenomena as a means of depriving an opponent of his/her human qualities and, as a consequence, justifying violent means against that opponent;
- > narrative storytelling tool – religious phenomena and concepts are used as major elements driving the plot, or are the essence of the content of a video game;
- > ridicule of opponents – religious phenomena are used as humorous attributes, showing the comic nature of the characters in the space of a video game;
- > pop-cultural commodifications, with the aim of increasing recognition – religious phenomena are used as a tool to evoke a response from a mass audience, thereby promoting the video game as a commodity within that audience.

Based on the preceding, it can be noted that religious elements in the space of Ukrainian video games of war more often perform the function of an introduction to the reality of the represented conflict (by restoring the context, as well as creating associations of two opposing sides through their use of characteristic religious symbols), thereby contributing to the establishment of a stronger connection between the representation and the image of this representation, which, as a result, enhances a person's immersion in the game itself. At the same time, it can also be shown that developers quite often play with Ukrainian folklore and universal religious

symbols, commodifying these symbols by using them as a tool that increases the relevance of the game in the eyes of the video game audience, whether this is a matter of simply flirting with national re-enchantment or using religious symbols in meanings familiar to gamers. The use of religious symbols as a tool for showing an ideological opponent in a bad light is also encountered, but less often than they do for the purposes described earlier. The use of religious ideas as a tool for narrating the authors' ideas is also uncommon.

In order to more clearly illustrate what kind of religious symbols are used, for what purpose and in what context, I offer a short table that containing information about religious symbols in each of the games under consideration (see Table 1).

[Table 1]: Religious symbols in Ukrainian games of war

Name of the video game	Religious phenomenon	Function
<i>Grand Theft Tractor: Ukraine</i> (PGM Studio 2022)	The Patriarch of Moscow, Kirill (Gundyaev), is mentioned in a satirical context. The image of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow is used.	ridiculing opponents, contextualization, personification
<i>Birds Attack 2022</i> (Novachvatsky and Charchenko 2022)	The image of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow is used.	contextualization, personalization
<i>Javelin Point – Bravery Game</i> (NovaApps Limited 2022)	Using a Muslim skin as a game character.	commodification
<i>Pixel World: Orcs Attack</i> (Demon Dezard 2022)	Demonstration of Russian Army servicemen as evil spirits. Optional skin of game character as demon.	dehumanization of opponents, personalization
<i>Catch Crazy Dictator</i> (Suspense Studio 2022)	Identification of the Russian Federation with Hell.	dehumanization of opponents

Name of the video game	Religious phenomenon	Function
<i>Kremlin 3D</i> (Kary 2022)	The image of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow is used. Universal religious symbols are used as a tool to improve the characteristics of the character.	contextualization, personification, commodification
<i>Ukraine Defense Force Tactics</i> (Spacewalkers 2022)	The image of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow is used.	contextualization, personification
<i>A Community Garden Outside of Kyiv</i> (Maynihan 2022)	Kyiv church architecture is used.	contextualization
<i>Zero Losses</i> (Mareva Collective 2022)	Icons are used as an expression of the protagonist's religiosity. The expression used is: «Да захлебнётся кровью тот, кто усомниться в нашем миролюбии, ибо милосердие наше будет беспощадным!» [“Let those who doubt our peacefulness choke on their blood, for our mercy will be merciless;” erroneously attributed to Jean-Paul Sartre; also found in the book <i>Проклятое Везение. Таурин</i> by Elena Petrova.]	narrative storytelling
<i>The Point of No Return</i> (Treehouse Dreams 2020)	The use of religious attributes (rosary beads, religious inscriptions on the Ukrainian flag) to express the religious feelings of Ukrainians. Religious vision of the protagonist's father in a dream. Religious (Slavic-pagan) call sign of the protagonist.	narrative storytelling, play with national and folklore symbols
<i>Ukraine Defender</i> (Devrifter 2022)	The image of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow is used.	contextualization, personification

[Table 1]: con.

Name of the video game	Religious phenomenon	Function
<i>Protect Ukraine</i> (Battle Sim 2022)	Using Ukrainian church architecture as symbols on the map of Ukraine.	contextualization, personification
<i>Hentai Mission Ukraine</i> (Who We Are Games 2022)	The use of Orthodox church architecture in Ukraine.	contextualization
<i>Beautiful Ukraine</i> (QubicGames 2022)	The use of Orthodox church architecture in Ukraine.	contextualization
<i>Ukrainien Agent</i> (UkrainianArmy 2022)	The image of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow is used.	contextualization, personification
<i>Army Clicker</i> (Voxel Game 2022)	Presentation of gameplay in the form of religious events (Easter and Christmas).	commodification
<i>Bavovna Board Game</i> (Ushan 2023)	The card "Konotop Witches" is presented.	play on national and folklore symbols
<i>Nenka Ukraine</i> (3x0nGames 2024)	Satirical representation of Volodymyr Zelensky in religious Jewish attire.	self-ridicule
<i>Deputinization</i> (Myttsi Zabav 2023)	Mention of the expression "Welcome to Hell" at the entrance to the city of Izyum (this was displayed during the First Chechen War at the entrance to the city of Grozny).	commodification
<i>Hollow Home</i> (Twigames Inc. 2023)	Use of holos on individual ability cards.	commodification
<i>Brights</i> ["Брайти"] (Live Animations 2023)	Active use of representatives of Ukrainian national folklore as game characters.	play on national and folklore symbols

Name of the video game	Religious phenomenon	Function
<i>The City of Mary, Which Does Not Exist</i> (Elfstann et al. 2022)	An icon is used as an expression of the game character's religious feelings.	narrative storytelling
<i>Renlandia</i> (Bychkovskiy 2022)	The characters in the sketches are depicted with halos stylized to reflect national character.	commodification, playing with national and folklore symbols
<i>Defender of Ukraine</i> (Plinio fontes 2022)	The use of a cross on a grave as a symbol of death.	commodification
<i>Welcome to Hell</i> (2022)	The protagonist fights against "hellish forces."	dehumanization of opponents
<i>Ukrainian Revenge</i> (Futuma Games 2023)	The use of Orthodox church architecture in Ukraine.	contextualization
<i>The Most Russophobic Game Clicker Kill Russians Orks</i> (Neos Gaming 2023)	The image of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow is used.	contextualization, personification
<i>Threads of War</i> (KoS 2025)	The use of Orthodox church architecture in Ukraine as a symbol of liberated territories.	contextualization, personification
<i>Twenty-Second: Stories of Underground Kharkiv</i> (Brenntkopf Studio Kharkiv 2024)	Images of Christian saints and folklore myths are used.	narrative storytelling, play with national and folklore symbols

[Source]: own elaboration based on: (Kot 2024).

Several observations can be made based on the data provided in the table. First, it can be noted that the topic of Russian Orthodoxy as such is not discussed in Ukrainian war games. Only once is the person of Patriarch Kirill (Gundyaev) ridiculed (PGM Studio 2022), while otherwise the only symbol of the ROC – St. Basil's Cathedral – is more of a symbol of Moscow as the opponent's capital, thus representing rather an image that contextualizes

the gameplay and defines Moscow as an ideological rival (PGM Studio 2022; Novochvatsky and Charchenko 2022; Kary 2022; Devrifter 2022; Spacewalkers 2022; UkrainianArmy 2022; Neos Gaming 2023). Criticism of the ROC or the UOC-MP as institutions is absent in the video games analyzed.

Second, the authors of the works under consideration most often turn to Orthodox church architecture as a means of contextualization and personification. For example, in addition to the example of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, Ukrainian Orthodox church architecture is quite often represented in the games under discussion. The contexts of its use show that it is shown to be a value for which (or for the restoration of which) a struggle is being waged, one in which the player takes an active part (Moynihan 2022; Battle Sim 2022; QubicGames 2022; Futuma Games 2023; KoS 2025).

Third, the use of other religious symbols that are somehow connected with Orthodoxy (most often icons) is an indirect demonstration that the protagonists (or subjects friendly to Ukraine) are Orthodox believers. In this way, Ukrainians are shown as a nation that adheres to certain ethical ideals, which they defend during armed conflict (Marevo Collective 2022; Elfstann et al. 2022). Such a demonstration enhances the effect that is also created by the use of Ukrainian Orthodox architecture. However, how successful such a technique is in the context of the gradual decline of traditional institutional religion is a debatable issue.

Given this observation, it is not surprising that in the video games analyzed there are appeals to folklore motifs and a play on national religious feelings. Such use is in harmony with the ideology of nationalism, which, in itself, is a form of desacralized mythology of the people, and, therefore, can be partially re-enchanted using elements of religious folklore of the twenty-first century. However, such appeals are not frequent, and in terms of content they do not have the necessary level of depth; so they are only signs that can help strengthen the target audience (Treehouse Dreams 2020; Ushan 2023; Live Animations 2023; Bychkovskyi 2022). This equates their use with other commodifications of the religious that are more universal in nature.

Fourth, the dehumanization of the Russian Federation and its military personnel in a game occurs not by presenting Russian religious institutions in a bad light, but by demonstrating Russian opponents as demonic forces (Demon Dezard 2022; Neos Gaming 2023). Russia itself is identified with hell

as the place where evil forces originate. The peaceful narratives of Ukraine's opponents are inverted, revealing their inhuman and anti-divine character.

Thus, the video games presented, if considered not separately but as a whole, as part of a single discourse, present the following narrative. Ukraine is a Christian state, but one marked by religious diversity, as is illustrated by showing Jews and Muslims (NovaApps Limited 2022) and pagans. Ukraine's population shares Christian ethical ideals, although they can profess elements of the folk religion, which illustrates that Christianity in this narrative is not an intellectual doctrine, but rather a civilization-al marker. The war is shown as a defensive one, in which the opponent is a demonic horde, whose center lies in Moscow, the religious architecture of which is not positioned as religious.

This allows me to say that the religious factor in the video games under consideration is used, above all, as a factor that strengthens national identity by supporting the national myth through the use of religious simulacra. However, how these video game religious symbols are perceived by their main audience remains a question, the resolution of which requires thorough sociological study in the future.

Similar observations are observed in a number of third-party games that were developed during the period under review, but were not included in the list analyzed, since the games were not noted by Kot. For example, in the game *Лисиця, яка (не) хоче бути людиною* ["The Fox Who (Doesn't) Want To Be Human"] (Dreamy Wings 2022), the main character, who is presented as a fox-werewolf, illustrates in folklorized categories (that is, phenomena of religious discourse that have lost their former meaning and have become elements of the popular literary tradition) the moment of the beginning of the war and its perception by the Ukrainian population. The project *Watch Out* (It's Ukraine – Not a Game 2023) gives 3D models of Ukrainian cities before and after the war, showing the destruction that the war has brought, placing special emphasis on the destruction of religious buildings. The game *Chess for Ukraine* (Camden.Cook65 2023) is a *re-skin* of regular chess, but it is interesting that traditional Ukrainian Easter eggs with a Christian cross are used to show the pawns. In these three examples there is a flirtation with popular motifs, which Bainbridge (2023) characterizes as repoganization as a metaphor for the disentangling of institutionalized religion into

an individual myth (in this case, I believe, a multiple national myth), and, thus, characterized as a return to freedom. There is also an identification of Christianity with civilization.

4. Conclusions

Summarizing the results of this study, I argue that the set of video games discussed does not reflect radical changes in the attitude of Ukrainians toward individual religious institutions (whether the UOC-MP or the ROC). In general, the topic of institutionalized religion is not touched upon in these video games, which can be explained both by their technical simplicity of execution in most cases, and by their main goal, which is to reflect the realities of war in a recreational form. It can also be explained by their target audience, that is, the mass of the Ukrainian population, who, being still mostly positively disposed towards Christianity, might perceive criticism of institutions as criticism of religion in general.

However, video games illustrate the perception of religion and the religious by Ukrainians. I have observed that in addition to the processes of actualization of the folk religion and the gradual separation of religion from institutions, religion in these games is positioned as part of a civilized and, in some cases, European identity. Thus, there are no open attacks on religion as such in these games. Nevertheless, it is not possible to say that these games allow a player to play a religious identity. It is true to say that they are trying to represent the worldview of the average Ukrainian and to provide an opportunity to play Ukrainian identity in the context of war, thereby strengthening Ukrainian national identity in the context of the current confrontation. This also explains the fact that Ukrainian war games address religious themes in a rather limited way.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to EU4Belarus for funding my research work, as part of which this article was written. I would also like to thank Yaroslau I. Kot for providing information on Ukrainian military games for the

period 2014–2024. My special thanks go to Lisavieta Awdziejewa, who played a direct part in the content analysis of the video games discussed in my article.

References

- Aupers, Stef, and Dick Houtman. 2010. *Religions of Modernity: Relocating the Sacred to the Self and the Digital*. Leiden: Brill.
- Aupers, Stef, and Lars de Wildt. 2021. "Digital Religion." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sociology and Digital Media*, edited by Deana A. Rohlinger and Sarah Sobieraj, 159–177. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bainbridge, William Sims. 2013. *eGods: Faith Versus Fantasy in Computer Gaming*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bainbridge, William Sims. 2023. "The Virtual Rebirth of Paganism." *Journal for Religion, Film, Media*, vol. 9, no. 1: 45–68.
- Bosman, Frank G. 2019. *Gaming and the Divine: A New Systematic Theology of Video Games*. London: Routledge.
- Egerton, Karl. 2023. "A Case Study of Teaching Complex Skills in Philosophy through Games: Are You Flourishing?" *gamevironments*, no. 19: 19–51.
- Gianmarco, Gabriele. 2023. "Religion and Digital Games: Past, Present, and Future Studies – An Overview." *Annali di studi religiosi*, vol. 24: 203–234.
- Kot, Yaraslau I. 2024. "Games of War: Presentation." Unpublished conference material [personal copy from the author] presented at the "International Academic Conference 'Games of War,'" University of Gdańsk, February 24, 2024.
- Leibovitz, Liel. 2013. *God in the Machine: Video Games as Spiritual Pursuit*. West Conshohocken: Templeton Press.
- Myers, David. 2013. *Play Redux: The Form of Computer Games*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Raffety, Elizabeth, and Marina Insa-Iglesias. 2023. "Re-Imagining Christian Education through Neurodivergent Fellowship, Play, and Leadership in Online Video-gaming." *gamevironments*, no. 19: 80–114.
- Schütz, Alfred, and Thomas Luckmann. 2003. *Strukturen der Lebenswelt*. Konstanz: UVK Verlag.
- Silk, Michael, Bradley Millington, Emma Rich, and Emily Bush. 2016. "(Re-)Thinking Digital Leisure." *Leisure Studies*, vol. 35, no. 6: 1–12.
- Šisler, Vit, Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, and Xenia Zeiler, eds. 2018. *Methods for Studying Video Games and Religion*. New York: Routledge.
- Wildt, Lars de, and Stef Aupers. 2019. "Playing the Other: Role-Playing Religion in Videogames." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 22, no. 5–6: 867–884.

Wildt, Lars de. 2023. *The Pop Theology of Videogames: Producing and Playing with Religion*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Ражкоў, А.А. 2024. «Відэагульні як сродак самаразвіцця, фармуючы культурна-рэлігійную ідэнтычнасць» [“Video Games as a Means of Self-Development, Forming Cultural and Religious Identity.”] In *Хрысціанство і нравственыя вызовы сучаснасці: XXIX Міжнародныя Кирилло-Медыевскія чытання*, ред. С.А. Юшкевіч, 101–104. Хрысціанскі адукацыйны цэнтр імя святых Мефодыя і Кірыла. Мінск: Інстытут тэалогіі БГУ.

Рожков, А.О. 2024. «Всемирный русский народный собор и гражданская религия» [“The World Russian People’s Council and Civil Religion.”] *Хрысціане супраць вайны*. Accessed August 6, 2025. <https://shaltnotkill.info/vsemirnyj-russkij-narodnyj-sobor-i-grazhdanskaya-religiya>.

Рожков, О.О. 2024. «Процедурне та наративне сенсоутворення у відеоіграх на прикладі категорії “Духовність”» [“Procedural and Narrative Sensemaking in Video Games Using the Example of the “Spirituality” Category.”] In *Місія Церкви в післявоєнній перспективі України*, ред. прот. В. Вакін, 286–296. Луцьк: Дух і Літера.

Ludography

3x0nGames. 2024. *Ненька Україна* [“Nenka Ukraine.”] 3x0nGames. Android. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ThreeX0NGames.Chornobaevka>.

Battle Sim. 2022. *Protect Ukraine*. Battle Sim. PC, Android.

BITOMIX (Stryzhak Vladyslav), and Gojo (Kozlov Georgiy). 2022. *Welcome to HELL*. Indie Cup profile. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://indiecup.net/europe/participants/welcome-to-hell>.

Brenntkopf Studio Kharkiv. 2024. *Twenty-Second: Stories of Underground Kharkiv*. Brenntkopf Publishing. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. https://store.steampowered.com/app/2789300/Twentysecond_Stories_of_Underground_Kharkiv/.

Bychkovskyi, Andriy. 2022. *Renlandia*. Browser game. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://andriy-bychkovskyi.itch.io/renlandia>.

Camden.Cook65. 2022. *Chess for Ukraine*. PC, Android. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://camdencook65.itch.io/chess-for-ukraine>.

Demon Dezard. 2022. *Pixel World: Orcs Attack*. Android. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.demondezard.pixelworld&hl=en-US>.

Devrifter. 2022. *Ukraine Defender*. Devrifter. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. https://store.steampowered.com/app/1973090/Ukraine_Defender/.

Dreamy Wings. 2022. *Лисиця, яка (не) хоче бути людиною* ["The Fox Who (Doesn't) Want to Be Human."] Dreamy Wings. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://dreamywings.itch.io/fox-that-does-not-want-to-be-human>.

Elfstann, unlugir, and Zedway. 2022. *The City of Mary, Which Does Not Exist*. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://elfstann.itch.io/the-city-of-mary-which-does-not-exist>.

Futuma Games. 2023. *Ukrainian Revenge*. Futuma Games. Browser game. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://futumagames.itch.io/ukrainian-revenge>.

It's Ukraine – Not a Game. 2023. *Watch Out*. Browser game. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://ukrainenotagame.com/>.

Kary. 2022. *Kremlin 3D*. Mod for *Wolfenstein 3D*. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://www.moddb.com/mods/kremlin-3d>.

KoS. 2025. *Threads of War*. KoS. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. https://store.steampowered.com/app/2917630/Threads_of_War/.

Live Animations. 2023. *Брайми* ["Brights."] Live Animations. Android. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.atb.brights&hl=en>.

Marevo Collective. 2022. *Zero Losses*. Marevo Collective. PC. Accessed March 3, 2022. https://store.steampowered.com/app/1485920/Zero_Losses/.

Moynihan, Dean. 2022. *A Community Garden Outside of Kyiv*. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://awkwardsilencegames.itch.io/community-garden>.

Myttsi Zabav. 2023. *Deputinization*. Myttsi Zabav. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://store.steampowered.com/app/2146770/Deputinization/>.

Neos Gaming. 2023. *The Most Russophobic Game Clicker: Kill Russians Orks*. Neos Gaming. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://neos-gaming.itch.io/clicker-kill-ruorks>.

NovaApps Limited. 2022. *Javelin Paint – Bravery Game*. NovaApps Limited. Android. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.Avirise.JavelinPaint>.

Novochvatsky, and Charchenko. 2022. *Birds Attack 2022*. Browser game. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://birds-attack.web.app/>.

PGM Studio. 2022. *Grand Theft Tractor: Ukraine*. PGM Studio. Browser game. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://pgmstudio.itch.io/grand-theft-tractor>.

Plinio fontes. 2022. *Defender of Ukraine*. Browser game. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://plinio-fontes.itch.io/defender-of-ukraine>.

QubicGames. 2022. *Beautiful Ukraine*. Qubic Games. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. https://store.steampowered.com/app/1991010/Beautiful_Ukraine/.

Spacewalkers. 2022. *Ukraine Defense Force Tactics*. Spacewalkers. PC. Accessed March 13, 2025. https://store.steampowered.com/app/2005660/Ukraine_Defense_Force_Tactics/.

Suspense Studio. 2022. *Catch Crazy Dictator*. Suspense Studio. Android, iOS.

Treehouse Dreams. 2020. *The Point of No Return*. Treehouse Dreams. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://treehouse-dreams.itch.io/the-point-of-no-return>.

Twigames Inc. 2024. *Hollow Home Demo*. Twigames Inc. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. https://store.steampowered.com/app/2362070/Hollow_Home/.

UkrainianArmy. 2022. *Ukrainien Agent*. UkrainianArmy. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. https://store.steampowered.com/app/1957040/Ukrainien_Agent/.

Ushan, Oleksandr. 2023. *Bavovna Board Game*. Games7days. Board game.

Who We Are Games. 2022. *Hentai Mission Ukraine*. Who We Are Games. PC. Accessed March 3, 2026. https://store.steampowered.com/app/1929420/Hentai_Mission_Ukraine/.

Voxel Game. 2022. *Army Clicker*. Voxel Game. Android. Accessed March 3, 2026. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.voxelgame.armyclicker&hl=en>.