# Dartmouth professor turns online harassment over Assassin’s Creed into dialogue



Sachi Schmidt-Hori, an associate professor of Japanese literature and culture at Dartmouth College, has recently found herself at the centre of a controversy linked to the popular Ubisoft video game franchise, *Assassin’s Creed*. Although she had never played the game prior to her involvement, Schmidt-Hori served as a narrative consultant for its latest installment, which was released on March 20, 2024. Following the release of a promotional trailer in May, she faced a wave of online harassment primarily directed at her involvement in the game's historical narrative.

The game, set in 16th-century Japan, features characters such as Naoe, a female assassin, and Yasuke, a Black African samurai, sparking heated debates among fans. Critics accused Ubisoft of indulging in "wokeness," leading to a backlash that targeted Schmidt-Hori extensively. Gamers directed vitriolic comments at her through various online forums, posted unfounded reviews of her academic work, and inundated her inbox with abusive messages. Some individuals even made disparaging comments about her husband.

Reflecting on her experience, Schmidt-Hori revealed, “Once I realised that I was by myself — nobody was defending me — I just decided to do what I knew would work. It’s very difficult to hate someone up close.” As the harassment intensified, she felt forced into the role of a scapegoat. “I became the face of this backlash,” she remarked, emphasising the challenges of being singled out for criticism in an online environment.

In response to the barrage of hateful commentary, Ubisoft advised Schmidt-Hori to ignore the harassment. However, inspired by the late civil rights leader John Lewis, she chose a different approach: to confront negativity with kindness. Schmidt-Hori began replying to some of the angry emails she received, expressing curiosity about the anger directed towards her and inviting the senders to discuss their concerns via Zoom. One encounter was with a prominent influencer known for opposing diversity, who had contributed to the negative dialogue surrounding Schmidt-Hori.

The influencer did not respond directly but did retract the unfavourable article about her, while others reached out with apologies for their prior comments. Anik Talukder, a 28-year-old South Asian man in the UK, was one of many who expressed regret after engaging with Schmidt-Hori. Initially voicing his discontent with Yasuke’s portrayal, he later recognised the broader implications of his actions and ultimately sought her perspective.

“I learned a massive lesson,” Talukder shared, reflecting on his interactions with Schmidt-Hori. “I shouldn’t have made this person a target for no reason whatsoever.”

Ubisoft, while refraining from commenting directly on the criticism or harassment that Schmidt-Hori endured, issued a statement asserting its commitment to historical accuracy and collaboration with experts. The company maintained that its games are works of fiction and noted it does not condone harassment in any form. They commend Schmidt-Hori for her proactive engagement with the backlash.

Kate Mays, an assistant professor of public communication at the University of Vermont, commented on the nature of online harassment, suggesting that anonymity and algorithmic amplification of aggressive content create an environment ripe for toxicity. “The intervention that she did was pretty brilliant,” Mays noted, highlighting how Schmidt-Hori's approach effectively challenged hostile online behaviour and fostered a more humanised dialogue.

As Schmidt-Hori continues to navigate the complexities of her role in promoting diverse narratives within the gaming industry, her experience reflects the challenges faced by individuals at the confluence of cultural representation and online activism.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://apnews.com/article/4b68890b7ed9ead8dbe3ad09dbee9859> - This article details the online harassment faced by Sachi Schmidt-Hori after serving as a narrative consultant for Ubisoft's 'Assassin's Creed Shadows,' highlighting the backlash over the inclusion of Yasuke, a Black African samurai, and the character Naoe, a female assassin, in the game's 16th-century Japan setting.
* <https://www.pushsquare.com/news/2024/07/ubisoft-responds-to-assassins-creed-shadows-criticism-apologises-to-japanese-players> - Ubisoft's official response to criticism of 'Assassin's Creed Shadows,' including an apology to Japanese players and an explanation of their creative choices, such as the inclusion of Yasuke as a central character.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassin%27s_Creed_Shadows> - The Wikipedia page for 'Assassin's Creed Shadows' provides comprehensive information on the game's development, controversies, and the inclusion of Yasuke as a Black African samurai, which sparked debates among fans and critics.
* <https://www.gaminghubhq.com/2024/07/30k-sign-petition-assassins-creed-shadows.html> - An article discussing a petition with over 30,000 signatures against 'Assassin's Creed Shadows,' criticizing the game's historical accuracy and cultural representation, particularly the portrayal of samurai and Japanese culture.
* <https://time.news/ubisoft-delays-assassins-creed-shadows-again-chooses-controversial-release-date/> - An article reporting on Ubisoft's decision to delay the release of 'Assassin's Creed Shadows' to March 20, 2025, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of the Tokyo subway sarin gas attacks, raising concerns about the timing's insensitivity.
* <https://www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/new-assassin-s-creed-game-criticised-in-japan-parliament-101742371134561.html> - A report on Japanese lawmakers criticizing 'Assassin's Creed Shadows' in parliament, particularly focusing on a gameplay video showing a character destroying a traditional drum and altar inside a Shinto shrine, leading to concerns about cultural respect.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ubisoft-hanover-japanese-asian-dartmouth-college-b2744177.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data