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Playing Oppression

The Legacy of Conquest and Empire in Colonialist Board Games

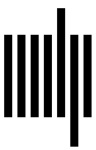
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Playing Oppression

The Legacy of Conquest and Empire in Colonialist Board Games

Mary Flanagan and Mikael Jakobsson

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

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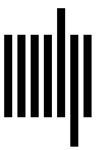
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Acknowledgments

Every community owes its existence and vitality to all the people from around the world who contributed their hopes, dreams, and energy to making the history that led to this moment. Some were brought here or removed against their will, some were drawn to leave their distant homes in the hope of a better life, and some have lived on this land for more generations than can be counted. We first wish to acknowledge Indigenous peoples as the traditional stewards of the land, and the enduring and continuing relationship that exists between them and their traditional territories. This book was written in part at Dartmouth College, which is situated on the ancestral and unceded lands of the Abenaki people. This book was also written at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on the traditional unceded territory of the Wampanoag Nation. This acknowledgment reminds us of the significance of place, the continued existence of Indigenous peoples, and our commitment to building respectful relationships with the Indigenous peoples who call these lands home today. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced occupation of these territories, and we honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples connected to this land on which we gather, research, and write.

Second, we have a lot of people to thank. A book of this scope and scale required many collaborators, friends, students, and colleagues who helped us in our mission, from playing games to digging through archives. Isotta Poggi at the Getty proved an excellent resource when Mary was a visiting researcher at the Getty Research Institute as a Museum Scholar in 2017. The seeds of the historical research started there. Julie-Anne Lambert at the Bodleian Library provided Mary inexhaustible knowledge and resources. Irving Finkel is, to Mary, a grand inspiration in the lifelong pursuit of game history. Andrew Topsfield must be thanked for his extensive, detailed work not only in research but also in singlehandedly salvaging the history of board games, particularly the game of the goose, along with the earlier work of Henry-René d'Allemagne.

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Thanks also go to Beste Grüße at the Stadtarchiv & Historische Museen, Stadtmuseum, Karlsruhe, for letting Mary play *Jungdeutschland's Schlachtenspiel*. A gracious thank you to Jeff Bowersox, who not only wrote the wonderful book *Raising Germans in the Age of Empire* but also granted permission for us to reprint one of his photos used in the book, taken by Joachim Zeller. Big thanks to Max Seidman, Spring Yu, Jazz Foster, and Sukdith Punjasthitkul, her game team extraordinaire at Resonym, who played countless games as well as used our critiques to improve their own designs; and to her research laboratory team at Tiltfactor, including a bunch of students taking classes over the years at Dartmouth and asking good, hard questions. Gratitude goes especially to Danielle Taylor, who helped organize research trips, tracked image permissions, and provided a gracious sounding board for wild ideas during these past years. Finishing this book during a global pandemic, when so many tabletop games were converted to online play, was both liberating and a huge challenge and, we hope, a once-in-a-lifetime experience. In this, Mary would like to thank her partner Joseph Havel for listening to more game history than he had ever bargained for.

A few hours south from Dartmouth at MIT in Cambridge, Mikael has amassed a sizable collection of colonialist board games and taken every possible opportunity to play them for critical analysis together with colleagues, students, visitors, and friends. We wish to especially thank Jon-Paul Dyson for giving us access to the collections at the Strong Museum of Play in Rochester, New York, and Geoff Engelstein for lending us games from his private collection, but also everyone in the board gaming community who has sold games to us. When it comes to playing the games, Richard Eberhardt stands out for his extraordinary efforts, which have earned him the honorary title of Mikael's board game husband. Claudia Lo and Kaelan-Doyle Myerscough also deserve a special mention. They came to the MIT Game Lab because of their deep interest in video games, only to spend much of their time in the lab playing board games they had never heard of, and they (almost) never complained. The same can perhaps not be said for Mikael's partner T. L. Taylor, who has nevertheless endured a seemingly endless stream of popular culture expressions of the colonialist mindset to play, watch, and discuss. Mikael also wants to thank his parents and family for their boundless support and everyone who participated in countercolonial classes, workshops, events, and design projects, especially the members of the game-making collective Popsicleta. These activities provided much-needed solace during a sometimes emotionally taxing project.

We would also like to thank Kaelan Doyle-Myerscough for reading and giving feedback on an early draft of the manuscript, and Laurel Carney for her enthusiasm and attention to detail in the face of last-minute editing of a later draft. Our editors at MIT Press, Doug Sery and Noah Springer, helped shepherd the book along and run our ideas

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through several rounds of peer review. The readers pushed us to augment the text, and for this we are grateful. Finally, we would like to thank the community members, reviewers, game designers, publishers, and friends who played games and shared their opinions with us on blogs, in articles, and in interviews. A community of practice in the board game space is speaking up for making the board gaming world better, even when doing so comes at a cost for them personally. It is our hope that this book contributes to that conversation.

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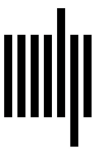
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1 Colonial Fantasies

Abandon all virtue ye who enter here.
—Giovanni Antonio de Paoli

In Media Europa

It is late October 2019. We are both in Essen, Germany, for the largest board game fair in the world: Spiel '19. Mary is there to demo and promote her latest game, *Mechanica* (2020), and Mikael is showing a prototype to publishers and meeting with industry people. But we have an ulterior motive. Mikael has brought a matryoshka doll of empty suitcases to bring home all the Western-colonialism-themed games he can find at the fair. Despite the preparation, it turns out that he must lean on his traveling companion for extra suitcase space and still does not have room for all the new releases that fit the criterion of directly referencing Western colonialism both thematically and mechanically.

We are both, in our separate experiences of the fair, taken aback by the continued prevalence of games glorifying the atrocious acts committed by Western historical figures and nations, the whitewashing and erasure taking place in games parading as representations of history, and the relentless exoticizing, stereotyping, othering, and dehumanizing of "Native" peoples—all without any critical discussion surrounding these deeply problematic elements or premises.

As board gamers, board game designers, and game studies scholars, we want, and feel a responsibility, to enact change within the board game community and industry. As White Americans with European ancestry, we blend right in with the visitors and exhibitors at the fair, although Mary has faced the inequity of the board game industry

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as a woman designer. These challenges in both the production and the play of board games with respect to gender are embedded in the same—even more encompassing—narratives related to perspective, play, and power.[1]

The trip to Germany marked the peak of the collection phase of this project. Since then, we have studied games in libraries and museums as well as in our research labs, where we have played hundreds of them. It is 2022 as we are putting the finishing touches on the manuscript of this book. We are at a cultural moment where it can feel a little trite to talk about something as seemingly simple and everyday as board games. That said, the deeper we have immersed ourselves in board game history, the more we have seen how the past and present are connected. We also sense the intimate ties between the seemingly trivial and mundane and the movements that change history. It is with urgency that we wish to share what we have learned, in the hopes of moving to better, more equitable times. Everything is connected, and this book is our contribution to what we hope can be a reckoning of colonial pasts, as well as a revitalization of the potential of board game culture.

The Golden Age of Board Gaming

According to the discourse in the board game hobby community, we are living in a golden age of board games. With thousands of new games released every year, the board game space is more energetic than ever (figure 1.1).[2] But board games are not just more plentiful now. Compared to the family games of yore, modern board games are widely considered to be of higher quality, both in their physical components and in the play experience they provide.

This development has led to an explosion of websites, YouTube channels, podcasts, and board game cafés around the world. Crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter and quickly expanding publishers like Asmodee have boosted a new wave of board game creators and players in the early twenty-first century. With a predicted annual growth of approximately 13 percent year over year, the global revenue of the board game market is expected to reach US$13 billion by 2026.[3]

Attendance at these conventions increases every year (at least apart from during pandemics). Toy industry professionals might attend Spielwarenmesse (Nuremberg International Toy Fair), the oldest (yearly since 1949) and largest international trade fair for toys. In the United States, Origins and Gen Con attract tens of thousands of game fans (Gen Con had about seventy thousand unique attendees in 2019).[4] The season culminates in late October with the largest convention in the world dedicated specifically to board games: Internationale Spieltage SPIEL, held in Essen, Germany. In

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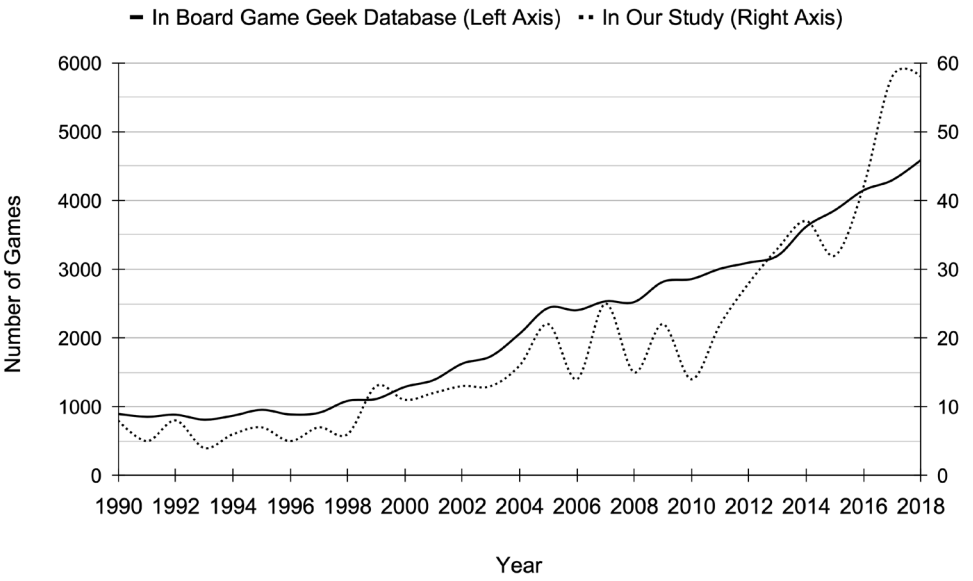


Figure 1.1
The number of board games released every year is quickly increasing, and so is the number of colonialist games.

2019, more than 209,000 attendees played the over eight hundred new games released there, making the convention the most influential event of its kind.[5]

Amid all this excitement, we should remember that board games have always been with us. Ask people around the world, and they have likely played some form of board or card game. In most cases, it will be a traditional board game like chess or a family game like *Monopoly* (1933).[6] These games were all created long before today's board game renaissance but remain extremely popular and still make up the majority of tabletop gaming.

Board games are often overshadowed by their much younger digital siblings. They do not carry the cultural cachet of video games, with vast production budgets and millions of players. They are not courted by billionaire investors, and they do not attract sensationalist press attention spouting fears about their negative impact on our youth. Nor do board games receive the same attention from the academic community as digital games. Game studies has evolved into an established academic field over the last twenty years, but it is somewhat telling that the largest organization for game studies scholars, and its eponymous international conference, is called the *Digital* Games Research Association (DiGRA).

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Board game studies has a long way to go compared to the study of other forms of media, where scholars critically explore issues of race, gender, diversity, and inclusion. While only a small segment of board game scholarship today applies critical perspectives, the trend points toward a quickly growing interest. We can see it in the discourse within the scholarly community, and also through the emergence of new academic outlets like the online journal *Analog Game Studies*.

Inspiration from Distant Shores

Anyone who plays modern board games will quickly notice the prevalence of "exotic" locations like *Goa* (2004), *Indonesia* (2005), *Macao* (2009), *Maracaibo* (2019), *Mombasa* (2015), and *Puerto Rico* (2002) used as settings (and, in these cases, titles) for games. What counts as exotic is, of course, related to vantage point. If we look at where these games originate, we find that central Europe in general, and Germany in particular, have dominating positions. A closer examination reveals that, beyond the choice of location, these and many hundreds of other games are all specifically about Western colonialism, and as shown in figure 1.1, more and more of them are coming out every year.

The majority of modern board games—usually called Eurogames, a common umbrella term for contemporary board games distinguished by complex resource management and opportunities for strategic play, thus appealing to an audience that plays games on a regular basis—tend to be designed by White men from Europe and North America, with Germany standing out as the incubator and a steadfast stronghold of the modern board game phenomenon. In fact, before these games became known as Eurogames in North America, they were known as German-style games.[7] There is, however, a trend towards a more global interest in playing and making board games that is not sufficiently acknowledged by using the term *Eurogames*, which is why we sometimes will use the more inclusive term *modern board games*.[8]

Our Vantage Point

We have chosen to put this cultural phenomenon under a critical lens to bring the complexities of the messaging embedded in these games to public discussion. Their art, narratives, player roles, mechanics, and goals all carry meaning, whether the designers intend them to or not. But our analysis is also influenced by our cultural vantage points.

Mary grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on a steady diet of classic twentieth-century American board games, from *The Game of Life* (1960) to *Monopoly* to *Trivial*

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Pursuit (1981) to dominoes. She and her family played most weekends and *always* during family gatherings. Her most prized possessions as a child were her Atari 2600 and the game *Dark Tower* (1981), which combined the magic of digital games and board games into one electronically driven package. When she attended her first Gen Con in the 1980s in Milwaukee, she was introduced to fellow Wisconsin-based *Dungeons & Dragons* players and the larger role-playing community, and as her druid character, a subclass of cleric, she adventured with friends throughout college. She took out an extra loan and went to Ireland for a term abroad, where she learned that most of her ancestors had either been starved and shipped out of Ireland or left to die of starvation by their colonial overlords, who had already stripped the hilly green island of its ancient forests to build the British naval fleet that was used to colonize many other places around the world. When Mary did her PhD in London, markers of difference in the "British Isles" were not yet subject to rethinking: forms asked her to tick one box: British, Irish, or Other, with Irish being considered, in the United Kingdom, not quite "White" White.[9]

To fuel its massive colonial enterprise, the British Empire stole from the closest people first. It took the Irish (and Scottish and Welsh) land, landscape, and customs in waves of colonial wars from 1536 onward. These cultures went from clan-based Gaelic structure to a centralized monarchy run out of London, and it is only in our lifetimes that these regions are coming out from under the colonial mists of poverty and depopulation. Colonial oppression is a phenomenon that dispossessed people around the world can see clearly and painfully. In 1847, after the Trail of Tears death march to Oklahoma, the Choctaw Nation sent a gift of five thousand US dollars in response to the Irish Potato Famine, recognizing that "nothing divides the Choctaw people from the Irish except for the ocean. Both the Choctaw Nation and Ireland were colonized by outside powers. Their ancient tongues almost became extinct and have been rescued from oblivion and made into working languages again through concerted effort and sophisticated approaches. Both peoples have successfully preserved their cultures and traditions."[10] Knowing that the Irish example was one drop in the horrendous bucket of global imperial colonialism promulgated by European powers, and seeing how socioeconomic mobility for Whites was easier and generationally faster in both Europe and the United States, galvanized Mary to investigate biases, discrimination, and power using playful methods, situations, and games.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, Mikael grew up in a small town in northern Sweden. While *Monopoly* was a popular game there as well—as in so many other places in the world—it had strong competition from *Den försvunna diamanten* (*African Star*, 1970), a game created in 1949 by a Finnish nineteen-year-old named Kari

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Mannerla under the name *Afrikan Tähti*.[11] In the game, players compete to be the first to find a diamond called "the African Star" and bring it "to safety" in Europe.

Many parts of Africa were still under the control of European nations when the game was made. The colonialist mindset is evident in dated and offensive location names on the board, such as one place in Western Africa called "Slavkusten" (the Slave Coast) (figure 1.2).

It might come as a surprise that a game in which Europeans go to Africa to find gems and bring them "to safety" could become such a popular family game in Finland and Sweden, but Mikael's childhood and cultural context was so deeply steeped in colonialist ideas and imagery that this concept was just as palatable as the predatory capitalism represented in the American game *Monopoly*.

Mikael grew up with a keen interest in sports, both as a participant and as a spectator. With winter taking up a great part of the year that close to the Arctic Circle, winter sports in general, and ice hockey in particular, dominated. The rival hockey team was

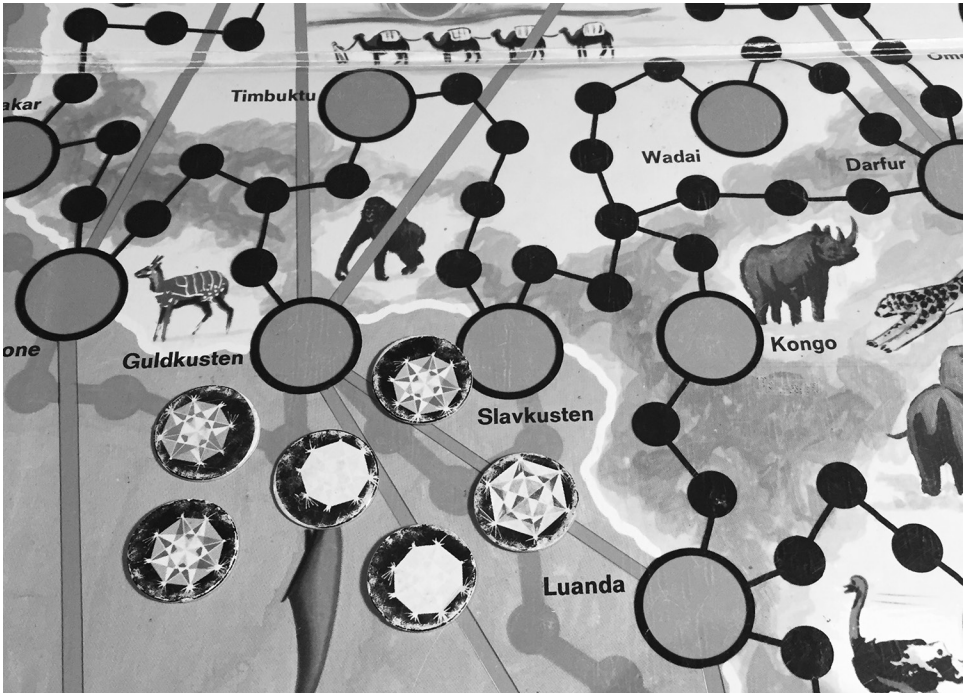


Figure 1.2
Detail of the game board for *Den försvunna diamanten* (*African Star*, 1970), showing a place on the board called "Slavkusten" (the Slave Coast). Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

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known as the "Negroes," a nickname it was probably given because many of the players worked for the coal company or the steelworks and would show up for practice covered with black dust. The term was obviously used as a slur, but Mikael did not directly connect the term with actual people. His hometown was a military hub with strict restrictions on where foreigners could go and where photography was allowed. The only Black people he knew were kids adopted by White parents. The culture can best be described as monochrome.

Mikael was also a ferocious consumer of popular culture. He read comic books like *The Adventures of Tintin* and watched movies like the *Indiana Jones* series, both constructed with colonialist tropes from the ground up. In school, the history textbooks were full of stories about "heroic" explorers like Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and James Cook "discovering" "new" continents. Even food packaging and candy wrappers depicted racist caricatures of people from Africa and Asia. The colonialist mindset was so commonplace as to be out of reach for reflection and discussion. In this regard, Mikael has a great deal in common with many of the designers of the games that we discuss in this book: middle-aged White men from Europe. Even if he wanted to assume some kind of moral high ground, he could not. The message he wants his peers to hear is instead: Now that we know better, we need to do better.

As westerners working at universities, and active participants and collaborators with the game design and development community, we have a privileged inside view of the object of study from multiple perspectives, which we believe makes us good candidates to approach this task. That said, we are White, educated college professors at elite research institutions, and no amount of theory can make up for our lack of lived experience of the systemic oppression grounded in the colonialism that exists all around us. In fact, the origins of Dartmouth College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are tightly connected to slavery and other exploitative practices. MIT is, for instance, a so-called land-grant university founded by a slave owner.[12] Dartmouth was founded to "educate" (read: indoctrinate, Christianize, Europeanize, etc.) Native Americans, also by a slave owner. These problematic pasts are in various stages of acknowledgment and reckoning.

This book cannot convey the experience of oppression historically and contemporarily connected to colonialism in games. The need for a wide range of voices to be heard will remain, but we hope that our book can play some small part in a process of change that leads in that direction. With the recognition of our limitations and our privileges, we want to use our voices for positive change. We acknowledge that this is not enough. This book, we hope, offers a stepping stone for a greater movement toward a better board gaming future.

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Eurogames and Beyond

Both of us were born in the same year and are of a substantial-enough age to have lived through the shift in board games from highly luck-dependent, simple pleasures to dry, abstract games, and finally toward intricate and sophisticated strategy games. Before the 1980s, popular board games in Europe and North America tended to follow a typical race- or track-style format that relied on the roll of the die; think *The Game of Life* or *Monopoly*. The modern board games revolution, spurred on by record-breaking sales of games like *Settlers of Catan* (1996), did away with the track format as a default model and instead focused on indirect player conflict, strategic use of resources, novel game mechanics, and multiple avenues to victory.[13] Starting in Germany in the late 1970s, these games began to be recognized through the Spiel des Jahres (game of the year) award. When Klaus Teuber released *Settlers of Catan* at the Essen game fair in 1995, it immediately sold out, winning the Spiel des Jahres as well as all other major prizes in German gaming.[14]

When the German games burst out of their national confinement and inspired game designers in other countries to follow suit, the terminology was broadened from German games to Eurogames. Eurogames tend to share some general characteristics. First, most games do not eliminate players before the end of the game but rather keep players engaged as the game progresses. Second, each game tends to offer novel game mechanics, as designers build on each other's ideas while also always aiming to innovate. Third, the game themes are somewhat arbitrary. While the mechanics might be based on aspects of a theme, the games are not intended to simulate any aspect of the thematic subject. Fourth, the games typically feature competition for resources rather than overt attacks on other players. Finally, the games tend to offer multiple avenues for strategizing victory, making them compelling to replay.

In the last decade or so, we have seen further developments that go beyond the traditional Eurogame formula. Perhaps most notable are the influences from American games, which often place more weight on the thematic content. We also see trends from Asia, such as Japanese microgames. These become mixed with European signature traits to create hybrid games best understood simply as modern board games.

Postcolonial Perspectives

As both avid gamers and game scholars, we sometimes notice recurring issues in different projects. Over a decade ago, in her book *Critical Play*, Mary included a short critique of *Settlers of Catan*, noting the ways in which the game was tied to problematic

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representations of both space and presumably "Native" peoples.[15] Her research lab Tiltfactor and her game company Resonym have been resolutely committed to pro-social, antibiased gaming. Mikael's recent work at the MIT Game Lab and with the design collective Popsicleta has focused on leveraging game design as a way of engaging practitioners in critical reflection, and giving voices to underprivileged creators. Together, after acquiring over nine hundred games, playing more than three hundred of them, attending conferences, and conducting research in international archives, from the Getty Museum, to the Bodleian at Oxford, to state museums in Germany and elsewhere, we offer you this book. It represents our effort to unpack exactly what we have discovered through our parallel inquiries into the possibilities of, and problems with, contemporary board games, problems specifically tied to ethnicity and race, notions of otherness, classism, the "exotic," and more.

We specifically want to look at the complex relationship of board games to *colonialism*. This book investigates the ways in which notions of empire and colonialism have operated in themes, images, components, logistics, rules, and game mechanics themselves, evolving over the past two hundred years. Our goal is to carefully examine the ways in which colonialism—one nation taking territory and dominating the people in this conquered territory—has influenced, and continues to operate in, board games.

This study has some limitations that readers should be aware of. First, so much historical material has been lost, and much of what we have is incomplete and scattered around the world. Most early board games were made from linen, parchment, easily degradable paper, or cardboard. Likely, many games just wore out or were thrown out; playthings were typically well used and undervalued when it came to archives and museum collections. It is difficult to estimate how many games have been lost—games that would have been contemporaries alongside our historical examples. That we have no comprehensive global archive of board games makes the examples that survived that much more important. And it means that the stories we tell, especially in the first four chapters, can be nothing but fragmented journeys.

The second limitation for this book is that we cannot provide an encyclopedic account of the complexities and the rich scholarship of colonial and postcolonial thought. Too much brilliant writing by experts exists for us to contain all the debates adequately—scholarship that provides a wealth of thought concerned with the social, political, economic, aesthetic, and psychic impact of colonization. Tracing back to the Négritude movement and the writings of the Senegalese poet, cultural theorist, politician, and first president of Senegal Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire, the poet, politician and scholar from Martinique, we look at historical situations involving colonial powers and the way these dynamics have inscribed Whiteness and colonial logics

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into games. Looking to the French West Indian psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon and his influential work on the deep and lasting impact of colonialism, we studied his work from the international decolonization movement to inform our critique. We lean heavily on the powerful voices of intellectuals such as Edward W. Said and Homi K. Bhabha, who investigate discourse, power, stereotyping, and othering. Indian scholar, literary theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's efforts to highlight the ways in which cultural expressions such as literature are fraught with the legacies of colonial dynamics and rhetoric have had significant sway on our reading of games. The founding of the Subaltern Studies Collective in India brought a wave of critical tools to investigate the role of the elite and their colonial control over the story of Indian national history. Co-opting deconstructionist strategies, Spivak further developed the existing concept of the *subaltern* in light of the capitalistic politics and unequal gender relations that undermine revolutionary voices. Once a stand-in for a kind of proletariat, Spivak's subaltern is caught in a web of disempowering forces. At the end of her highly charged 1988 essay, she declares that "the subaltern cannot speak" because oppressed groups are represented by dominant forces that usurp their voices, struggles, and stories of oppression.[16] These ideas permeate this book as we focus on examples that span hundreds of years.

More recently, contemporary scholars such as Vijay Mishra, Benita Parry, and Dipesh Chakrabarty continue this excavation work, as the whole discipline and process of historiography—the writing of history—is under intense scrutiny under the initial leadership of postcolonial studies scholars. In this book, we engage with the past in a multidimensional postcolonial historiography; we question the Western colonial narrative, we question and reframe the historical canon, and we question the traditional board game canon, since these narratives and trajectories have been authored from a myopic colonizer vantage point. We let the games speak by doing close readings of a great number of examples, but we do not let their claims stand unrefuted.

We fully recognize that the writing of any history is not transparent or simple. Recognizing that our own ideological knowledge frameworks reveal—or do not reveal—certain values, themes, and visibilities, we take guidance from decolonizing methodologies to avoid as many of the pitfalls around the imperialist tendencies of history as possible. Scholarship about postcolonial methodologies, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, is foundational to the development of this book[17]—as we are both White westerners trained in the West's academic institutions and writing this book in conjunction with an academic press, we must be vigilant about the fact that research itself brings a cultural orientation, a

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set of values, and differing fundamental understandings in areas such as time, space, knowledge, point of view, language, and power.[18] Edward Said's efforts identified and described the insistent Western differentiation from "the Other" through an accumulation of recurring stereotypes that both contain attractive and repulsive tendencies of the "unchanging" Orient that persists irrationally and thus needs to be colonized. Orientalism sets up, according to Said, a "pattern of imperial culture" that suggests the Arab-Muslim East, in his examples, necessitates intervention so that it can be remade to be more like European civilizations.[19] Stuart Hall pointed out in his influential essay "The West and the Rest" that "the West" is itself a construct, a way for Western institutional researchers to self-identify as they classify societies, represent them, create models for comparison, and eventually evaluate these "others."[20] Ultimately, the West can only appear superior in these narratives, as it defines its own criteria for victory, whereas identity could instead be understood as emerging from a multitude of experiences and locations.

Inscribing new spatial relations and technologies was key to the imperial project. The Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe writes that the fundamental way to understand colonization is to see who and how the notion of sovereignty is exercised—the control over mortality and the very definition of life in manifesting power.

> Each stage of imperialism also involved certain key technologies (the gunboat, quinine, steamship lines, submarine telegraph cables, and colonial railroads). Colonial occupation itself was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area—of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations. The writing of new spatial relations (territorialization) was, ultimately, tantamount to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the classification of people according to different categories; resource extraction; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries. These imaginaries gave meaning to the enactment of differential rights to differing categories of people for different purposes within the same space; in brief, the exercise of sovereignty. Space was therefore the raw material of sovereignty and the violence it carried with it. Sovereignty meant occupation, and occupation meant relegating the colonized into a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood.[21]

Thus, to Mbembe, space and sovereignty are inextricably entwined. Postcolonial scholars have paved the way for examining power relations in language, representation, knowledge, and also more concrete things like cultural artifacts. This vital scholarship deeply informs our book, and we have included highlights throughout the text as we focus on certain concepts and definitions that are essential to reading board games and their history. As we take the reader on a more or less chronological journey, each chapter will introduce new key terms that will be carried forward in the analysis. The fertile scholarship of postcolonial thinking enables and enlightens our critique.

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We have described a couple of limitations of our book. A third is that this book cannot take a complete inventory of colonialism in games. Once we started to actively look for examples—rather than coming across them more or less by happenstance—we realized that the colonialist mindset was nearly all-encompassing. Even with the narrowest of criteria for what constitutes a colonialist game, time and space constraints would limit us from including more than a few of the more significant examples. We have assembled an extensive catalog of games that can provide fodder for analysis in the years to come, but this book will only deal with the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

We want to include both critique of problematic games and positive examples and new directions, with the hope of instigating change in the design community. While it is true that this book offers a critical and historical examination of colonialism in games, we do believe that games have the power to strengthen underprivileged voices and be tools of positive transformation. In the final chapter, we turn our attention to these optimistic new directions. It might seem that the book details problem after problem, but we invite the reader to help us hope for—and, indeed, chart—a better future.

Before we move on, a note about game authorship and accountability. In digital games, the designers are often large teams, or if individuals, their names are known only by die-hard fans. In this book, we decided to note the designers alongside the game names in the ludography for a reason. In *Eurogames: The Design, Culture and Play of Modern European Board Games*, Stewart Woods noted that the designers of Eurogames wanted to be known not as part of the process of making games but as *authors*.[22] This became known as the Coaster Proclamation of 1988 (figure 1.3),[23] in which prominent (almost all male and European) designers made a pact at the Nuremberg toy fair to insist that the names of the designers be put on the game box or else they would refuse to work with the publisher.[24]

This move speaks to designers rightfully seeking acknowledgment for their role as the core creative force behind the making of a board game. It also, again rightfully, emphasizes the validity and importance of board games as cultural interlocutors. But as the design studies scholars Erik Stolterman and Jonas Löwgren point out, "This leaves us with a situation where the designer wields significant power, and with such power comes responsibility. It becomes important to ask questions about what is good and what is bad design, and about the goals to which an interaction designer should lend her skills."[25] We understand that board game designers often have limited control of the final game. They often sell the rights to a game with the condition that the publisher reserves the right to make changes, sometimes including a complete retheming of the game. A number of other significant actors also affect the board game discourse beyond any control by the designer, like community leaders, reviewers, and other influencers.

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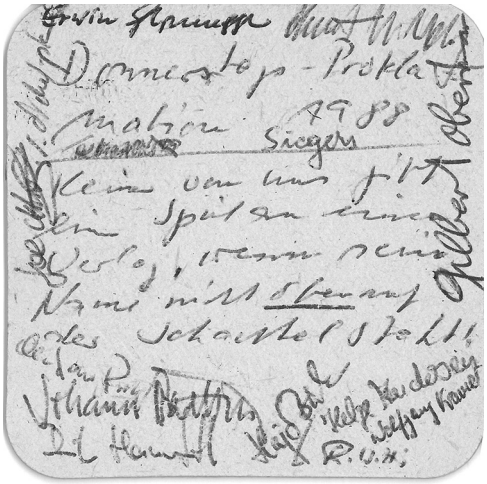


Figure 1.3
The Coaster Proclamation of 1988, signed by thirteen game designers who wished to take on author-level status in board games. Photo from the Game Designers Association (Spiele-Autoren-Zunft).

Our point here is that when a group of designers got together and made demands, they were able to effect change. As long as there is a will, we can do it again.

Colonialism

We must, of course, define what we mean when we use the terms *empire* and *colonialism*. Throughout much of human history, the world has been ruled by various empires—aggregated realms conquered under one rule by a sovereign state. The Persian Empire, the first known world empire, reached from India to the Middle East. China's boundaries have expanded and contracted over time. In the eighth to tenth centuries CE, contemporary with the Ottoman Empire in the East, Viking invasions and their colonization reached North Africa and the Caspian Sea, settling areas like Normandy in France and founding cities including Dublin in Ireland. China colonized Vietnam for eight hundred years, starting in 111 BCE.[26] The Roman Empire, the Maurya Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Songhai Empire—to name just a few—all rose and fell. Nations, empires, and sovereign states the world over have held colonies, including the Phoenicians, the ancient Greeks, the Egyptians, the Moors, and the Romans.

Over the last five hundred years, the imperialist quest for power and resources drove European nations to create global empires, and this quest was enabled by major

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advances in weaponry, mapping, and sailing technologies. The European expansion came at a great cost around the globe to people, their lands, and cultures as they were invaded, robbed, coerced, and killed to build Europe's empires. Imperialism often leads to settlement and colonialism, in which one group violently seizes another land, nation, or area, makes a claim to it, and often sends people from its own country to settle these conquered lands. In some cases, colonial powers control a second country's economy.

The wave of European colonialism that began in earnest in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was similar to earlier imperial practices. Even before this period, few places were untouched by colonialism in some way. Yet in other respects, the scope and scale of the European push toward colonialism were markedly different. European colonialism operated on a global scale and sought to dominate areas with more ambition than many significant colonial movements in the past. European colonization expanded astronomically due to technological advances such as fast sailing fleets, used to move large numbers of goods and people around the world; advances in cartography to generate world maps; and the widespread accessibility of increasingly accurate tools like the astrolabe to consistently move goods and colonizers to the same place. Firearms and newly developed weapons were used to kill and terrorize the local populations. By the nineteenth century, transcontinental railroads streamlined the extraction of local resources.

The scope and scale of colonizing efforts changed not only islands and coastal ports but also entire regions, nations, and continents. Colonizing actively suppressed cultures, languages, religions, and the rights of local people. Despite great geographic distances, those in power were able to control others from afar, subjugating countless peoples across the planet. As scholars have observed, one of the main tools of the colonizers was dehumanization. Frantz Fanon wrote with great insight that colonialism is not just about settling and taking; it involves the systematic denial of all attributes of humanity of the colonized people, a negation of the other person.[27]

It is crucial for the topic of the book to point out the way that colonial powers justified their practices. Starting with the Crusades, European Christian cultures used the rationale of religion as a reason to dominate others. The aim, to convert people around the world to their religion, was used to justify the invasion of "infidel" nations as a kind of "civilizing mission." This rhetoric was used in European conquests of North America as well (even in the problematic founding of the university where Mary teaches). For many, this was not mere rhetoric: Christians' belief that they are helping non-Christians aspire to heaven is still used today by missionaries on a global scale.

The drive to imperial power, and the resulting practice of colonialism, means the domination and subjugation of people. Imperialism and settler colonialism are based

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on economic exploitation and environmental degradation as powerful nations exert political, social, and economic control over others. Extremist monopoly capitalism (such as the creation of the British East India Company in 1600), overt nationalism and White supremacy (leading European citizens to believe in the superiority of their nations), and empire building leading to settler colonialism have committed untold injustices: irrevocable violence to individuals, families, livelihoods, spiritual systems, and community bonds, as well as environmental damage, the destruction of habitats, and forever altering local people's relationship to their environment.[28] As scholars have pointed out, "The question of genocide is never far from discussions of settler colonialism."[29]

Local areas were taken over, resources stolen. Populations were abused, enslaved, and murdered throughout the colonialist era and indeed even today: the United States still controls Guam, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, and American Samoa; France still controls New Caledonia, which is neither a region nor a collective. Scholars have continually demonstrated that the power imbalances formed around colonized places, race, and gender are inseparable from the way we understand citizenship, labor, and human rights.[30]

Studies of Colonialism in Games

In this book, we highlight games from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first that relate to colonial themes. Coalescing and solidifying contemporary popularity, Eurogames have borrowed heavily from the imagery, language, situations, and power dynamics of European colonialist thinking. Indeed, as the game designer Bruno Faidutti pointed out in his article about *Settlers of Catan*, the French title for the game included the word *colon*, which in French means both settlers and colonists.[31] Such disturbing links between colonialism (which subjugated mostly Brown and Black people, living in traditional cultures and communities) and board games (overlooked as benign toys, largely for children) remain fundamentally unexamined in the gaming community. We hope that contemporary game players who are unaware of the disturbing links between gaming and colonialism might begin to see the connections. For example, note the similarities in the language of the classic 4X genre of board and video games, where the *X*s stand for *explore*, *expand*, *exploit*, and *exterminate*. Without any remorse or apology for the connection to historical atrocities, the 4X subgenre of both board games, like *Empires: Age of Discovery* (2015) and *Twilight Imperium* (2017), and digital games, such as *Sid Meier's Civilization* (1991) and *Stellaris* (2016), celebrates the act of empire building and colonial thinking.[32]

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The ways in which *digital* games relate to themes of empire and colonialist practices, and the ways they position ethnicity, gender, and race more broadly, are an increasingly growing area of study. As one example, André Brock, Paul Martin, and other scholars examined representations of race in the Japanese-produced game *Resident Evil 5* (2009), set in a corporate, neocolonized Africa filled with African zombies. In the game, the White player character–hero Chris and his sidekick, the local fighter Sheva, attempt to fight an evil corporation and its CEO, Wesker. That the game was produced in Japan, with cutscenes filmed in Hollywood, and draws on images of colonialism requires deep unpacking by scholars.[33] That it features aspects unique to video game fandom *and* colonial fantasies (such as the Easter egg of unlocking Sheva's "tribal costume" in the game, where she is wearing animal skins and sexy heels) is even more problematic. Massively multiplayer online games such as *EverQuest* (2001), *World of Warcraft* (2004), and *The Lord of the Rings Online* (2007) have been examined in similar ways.[34] Strategy game series like *Civilization* (1991–2005) and *Age of Empires* (1997–2005) have been the subject of a number of scholarly studies.[35] We can point to a variety of other connections to colonial themes and the ways games both frame and construct the Other across spatial, temporal, gender, cultural, linguistic, and racial differences.[36] Computer games have had direct correlations to colonialism and the *tropicalization* of game spaces to *other* and *exoticize* local people.[37] Computer games have promoted American imperialist agendas as well through military games and, indeed, military training.[38]

It is easy to think that the digital games industry is the industry promulgating stereotypes and violence owing to its link with the male-dominated world of technology itself. Board games, from the outside, don't seem as though they could be implicated in the same way as digital "gamer" culture. Although digital game scholars have detailed the implications of these themes and representations, debates and analyses are slow in coming to the board game space. In this book, we aim to move forward the conversations happening about themes of empire and colonialism in board games, and to introduce postcolonial analysis to the games being produced recently. We also hope to interest board game players in postcolonial thinking overall, and to help them learn how to form their own nuanced critiques of their favorite games. For some, it is surprising to see that games made of cardboard—mere moving parts produced on paper—can produce problematic themes and structures just as well as any other media form.

While our research reaches hundreds of years back to explore historical examples, a surprising—indeed, shocking—number of the most insidious colonialist games were released in the last two decades. In fact, the number of colonial-themed board games released each year is increasing. As Souvik Mukherjee has noted, themes of colonialism remain prominent in popular culture narratives around the world; as in the video game

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Black & White (2001), where players literally *play god* over their people, to control a play colony—a group of people over which one has dominion—represents the ultimate god fantasy.[39] But colonial games are not "god fantasies" per se; in fact, they are far more complicated. Colonizers do not control the weather or possess supernatural powers; they are merely controlling the resources of the colony they are managing. This is the benign danger of the fantasy of colonialism; in Western narratives of colonialism, the colonists are the ones who face the hardships, struggling to survive far from home in "strange lands." Americans only have to look to Thanksgiving stories about pilgrims to know that the erasure of the Native American story is enormous and intentional. Colonizers in games are framed as righteous workers who earn their place through hard work in a fictional meritocracy.

Such a position is even more insidious than a god fantasy, for this narrative frame positions *colonizers* as oppressed, struggling people—quite the opposite from the lived experiences as seen from the view of the colonized. Indeed, Soraya Murray points out this form of "playing whiteness in crisis" in discussing the digital games *Resident Evil 5* and *The Last of Us* (2013), noting that this kind of positioning shows

> a set of concerns of a social grouping of heteronormative whiteness, particularly in relation to navigating a scenario of losing power and dominance. These are the "aesthetics of ambivalence" of which I speak, affective qualities that trade on notions of the white male normative hero, but which in fact betray a larger form of whiteness that is deeply in crisis, desperate and which strategically mobilizes itself as a form of otherness. It is a whiteness that appropriates the moral high ground of victimhood through its embattled status as a form of alterity, even while it trades on itself as normative.[40]

Histories are complicated and, even under the best of circumstances, likely have glaring inaccuracies owing to perspective bias. Challenging histories is uncomfortable and necessary. Histories are only models and, in most cases over the last few hundred years, are made by the people who have access to mythmaking tools and audiences. One of the reasons that historic events and games are often aligned is that games, too, are models. A vast majority of the games discussed in this book fail to take into account the people subjugated by colonial violence, their survival, and the survival of their Indigenous cultures, as well as the environmental and ecological harm caused by colonial violence. Indeed, connections from the player's perspective are typically based on identifying with the perpetrator of empire or colony and not with the colonized people. While it may be easier to work against such norms in a digital game than in a board game, where players can protest, discover bugs and hacks, or stage multiplayer social revolts, the perspective of the oppressed is rarely used as "a cathartic power fantasy" in commercially produced board games.[41]

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In this book, we spend the first half discussing the historical underpinnings of games, their purposes, the development of games alongside colonial themes in culture, and the impact of colonial mentalities on the very structures of board games themselves. The second part focuses on "the new golden age" of board games and its explosive proliferation of the board game hobby.

The history of board games is rich and global. Ancient examples of board games such as mancala and the royal game of Ur date back over five thousand years. Games, tabletop and board games in particular, have been played, migrated, changed due to new circumstances, and influenced each other for thousands of years.[42] A game like chess, for example, has a history steeped in the mists of time; it is believed to have been invented in India, migrated to the Middle East, then taken to Europe (likely during the Christian crusades, which invaded and attempted to capture the biblical Holy Land from practitioners of Islam). Like any cultural phenomenon, the game changed in significant ways as it spread to new locations. This kind of migration is nothing new. Games, like other artifacts, have always been part of a global network. Historians have documented the spread of trade around the Indian Ocean and the opening of the Silk Road in 130 BCE, which enabled goods to travel from Han dynasty China all the way to the West. This was the most important route of trade—and ideas—between the East and the West, and games can be traced along this same trajectory. For another example, the Hanseatic League, a network of German-driven port cities and fleets that monopolized trade around the Baltic and North Seas from Russia through Scandinavia to the United Kingdom and the Alps in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, also facilitated the spread of board games such as chess and tafl. Goods and ideas have flowed internationally and interculturally for centuries there and elsewhere. A trade network is one thing, but that's not what we're talking about in this book.

Given what we have seen in the course of writing this book, we firmly believe that things must change. A few writers, bloggers, and designers constitute a growing voice for change in the board game design community. We want to acknowledge the voices of Jon Bolding, Jarrod Carmichael, Jarrah Hodge, Jeremy Howard, Mandi Hutchinson, Jonathan McIntosh, Holly Nielsen, Suzanne Sheldon, and Dan Thurot; board game blogs such as Inside the Box, and Daily Worker Placement; and YouTube channels like Storyboard, No Pun Included and Shelf Stories. We sincerely apologize to those of you whom we did not mention but should have. A growing number of game studies academics are also addressing the issues around colonialist board games, and we will be in conversation with them and their work throughout the book. We are grateful

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for everyone in the community who has brought necessary critical thinking to the perennial and pernicious problem of colonialist games.

For the last thirty years, the counterargument from game designers responsible for problematic themes has been "These are games—playthings—nothing more." Mikael and Mary disagree with that. Games embody the values to which the surrounding society subscribes. Through games we learn to problem solve; we learn what is valuable. We are introduced to big-picture values like fairness and big-picture concepts like trade, war, resources, and territory. When these elements blend with ideologies of domination and seamlessly incorporate colonial histories and philosophies, games are no longer mere toys.

If fact, it may very well be that the messages that games convey affect our mindsets more freely than other, more performatively rhetorical channels. Since gaming is framed as a nice and relaxing pastime, we may let our guard down and take the elaborate conversation pieces placed between us on the table as a priori benign. Somewhere between the old proverb "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar" and the advertisement adage "The most effective advertisement is the one where the audience is unaware of anything being sold to them," we can catch a glimpse of the importance of popular culture in general, and board games in particular, in conserving and reinforcing ideologies.

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Playing Oppression

The Legacy of Conquest and Empire in Colonialist Board Games

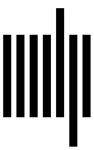
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Playing Oppression: The Legacy of Conquest and Empire in Colonialist Board Games
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2 Establishing Mindsets: Politics and Ideology in Early Board Games

> For many years the conviction has grown upon me that civilization arises and unfolds in and as play.
>
> —Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*

Games have long reproduced the ideals and conditions of the societies that spawn them.[1] Take the classic game of chess, for example. Chess was played in medieval courts, as it was considered quality entertainment as well as strategic practice. The design of chess prioritizes strategy and assigns different classes of characters specific abilities, mimicking the kinds of roles one might have in a hierarchical society. The game privileges "noble" conditions of conflict by its formal turn taking, assignment of power to the titled pieces, and goal of protecting the king. Social structures and class stratification from a thousand years ago are reflected by the strict division between pawns and nobles. Chess also teaches that certain people (the pawns) are expendable for larger initiatives or lives deemed more important (the royals). In fact, violent conflict itself is a value that goes unquestioned in gameplay. For example, nowhere in the standard game do we find opportunities for negotiation. Go, to take another example, prioritizes the possession of territory and the power of contiguous populations. The game supports a strategic, human-focused way of thinking and at its core represents a two-sided, antagonistic view of conflict, where the winner takes all. These time-tested classic games tell stories through their physical properties, such as their materials of construction—but they also communicate through the rules, objectives, mechanics, and overall ludic logics under which players operate.

We can learn much about a given society's values by looking at the games that emerge from those values, whether they are expressed in game mechanics, board layouts, or component design. Play scholars like Johan Huizinga even read the situation the other way around: culture itself emerges from play.[2] However one might consider

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play and culture, it is certain that the advent of image-based board games developed during the print era significantly influenced board games and their roles in everyday life. As games evolved, social values took on richer and more nuanced meaning as game spaces were turned into characters and scenes. Though many early board games were adorned with some sort of decoration, such as inlaid wood, and a number of ancient games likely featured pictorial spaces painted by hand, few picture-filled board game examples crafted before mass printing still exist. Globally, pictorial representations on game boards grew drastically in popularity after the rise of print technology, one of the Four Great Inventions of China that proliferated all the way to Japan by the sixteenth century. From the earliest existing evidence—game components, boards, depictions of play—games shared, created, and re-created culture. Games such as India's gyān caupar (the game of knowledge)[3] and the Japanese e-sugoroku (image-based roll-and-move games with highly detailed representation systems) offer the opportunity to observe cultural aspects and specificities through detailed scenes, characters, objects, and industries.

In Japan, e-sugoroku (or pictorial sugoroku) were a class of games played with dice. Early versions of e-sugoroku game boards, called jodo sugoroku, featured Buddhist teachings on the spaces. Board game scholars believe that e-sugoroku games date to the fifteenth century, but most existing examples are not that old, in part because they were large objects printed, like maps, on thin paper and then folded.[4] By the Edo period (1603–1868), games began depicting scenarios from upper-middle-class domestic life; seasonal events, such as the *Nezu Sendagi tsukuri kiku hitori annai* (Guide to the Chrysanthemum Exhibition at Nezu and Sendagi),1854;[5] and national marvels, such as games based on Utagawa Hiroshige's famous woodblocks celebrating the achievement of the Tokaido Road that had fifty-three resting points along the coastal route. Several extant copies of generations of games based on the fifty-three stations can be found in international collections. The games feature landmarks on the grand road between Kyoto and the Imperial Palace in Tokyo.

E-sugoroku games contained topics ranging from everyday affairs to grand national accomplishments and were illustrated by the same artists making the famous woodblock prints of the day. Many games featured classic artworks, from traditional poetry to important theater pieces. For example, *Kōkoku shiryaku sugoroku* (Brief history of Japan board game), 1897, an e-sugoroku by Yōsai Nobushige, features well-known stories, from epic family vendettas to Empress Jingu receiving a fateful sign that she should lead her dead husband's planned invasion.[6]

The game *Shojo omoide sugoroku* (Girl sugoroku, 1913), by Iwaya Sanazami, Koka Yamamura, and Koshi Bandai, and archived at Waseda University, depicts scenes from

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the everyday life of young girls, such as friends going to school, walking in the rain, and meeting to chat.[7] The growing influence of the West can be seen in games through the years, with games that depict nuclear families or businessmen in Western dress originating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries owing to the assimilation and absorption of the clothing style. Before that time, depictions of the contact between Europeans and Japanese people featured each group wearing more traditional garments.

The game *Kyōin sugoroku* (Teacher sugoroku, 1913), archived in Waseda University Library's extensive collection of pictorial e-sugoroku games, features various caricatured scenes by the famed manga and Nihonga artist Kitazawa Rakuten, the first cartoonist to use the term *manga* (figure 2.1). On the game board, one sees the cultural moment reflected in depictions of students, teachers, and families. A traditionally



Figure 2.1
Kyōin sugoroku (Teacher sugoroku, 1913), a game included as a magazine appendix. Note the mix of Western and traditional clothing and scenes. The art is by the famed manga and Nihonga artist Kitazawa Rakuten, who was known for political satire. Image from the former collection of Ichishima Harushiro, Waseda University Library.

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dressed woman and child walk with their pet dog and a possible father figure who is wearing what seems to be a British Sherlock Holmes–style outfit, complete with deerstalker cap (figure 2.2). Other scenes depict men in Western business attire toasting in front of international flags, a woman in traditional dress off to the side. The cultural melds and clashes are fascinating.

Pictorial games flourished in Japan, with vivid prints depicting everyday activities, sporting events, and cultural life. Spaces on the game boards were not representations of territorial control but windows for appreciation of cultural mastery. In hindsight, we can position these games as tools for an imagined nationhood in the process of emerging. These games were comparatively accessible, often being distributed in magazines and journals. The number of sugoroku games is astounding, and they communicated cultural values to a mass audience, culturally significant landscapes (such as well-known tourist sites), cultural knowledge (such as games featuring art and poetry), and the boundaries of these through humorous depictions and linguistic jokes.

Board games have long acted as a form of enculturation—the process by which people learn the traditional dynamics, behaviors, language, and values of a given culture

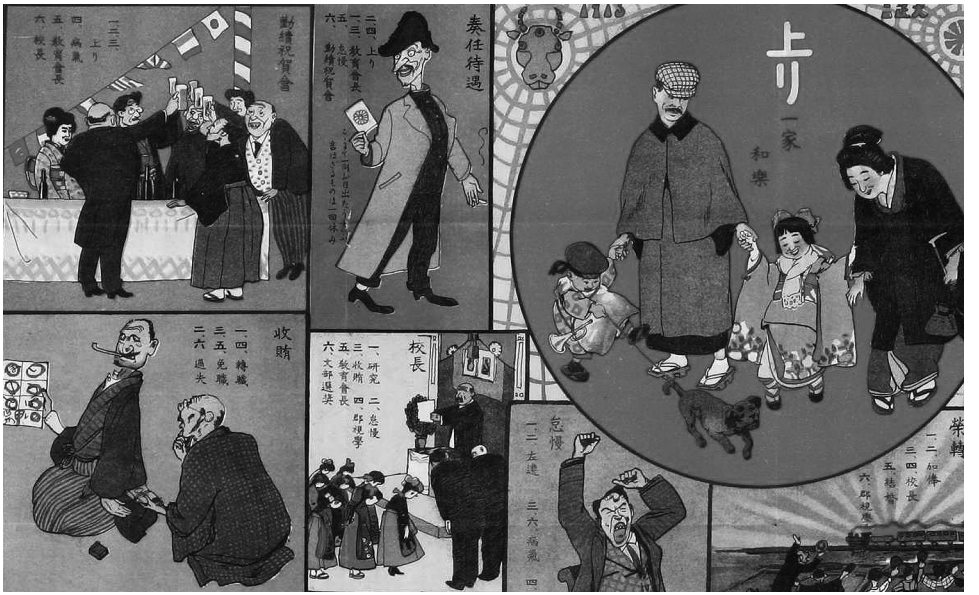


Figure 2.2
Detail from *Kyōin sugoroku* (Teacher sugoroku, 1913), showing the Western influences on men's clothing in particular. Image from the former collection of Ichishima Harushiro, Waseda University Library.

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and assimilate norms, worldviews, practices, and beliefs. It is an ancient worldwide practice to incorporate games into the way enculturation occurs. Take, for example, gyān caupar (also called gyanbazi), a game from the Indian subcontinent that likely appeared around the thirteenth century but could actually be much older, as it was painted on organic material (often cloth).[8] The game boards were hand-painted, depicting a series of squares intersected by snakes and ladders that formed the basis of the later-appropriated mass-market game. Local versions of the game were developed by Jain, Muslim, Hindu and Sufi followers in India, Persia, and Nepal. The games were intended to teach thinking about karma and moral lessons.[9] The surviving gyān caupar games from the Indian subcontinent are notable for several reasons, first being that this family of games provides early examples of pictorial, image-based games with beautiful iconography. Second, the game was intended to be deeply enmeshed with moral improvement and was seen as a tool for teaching youth. It had a philosophical and moral purpose to explore vices and virtues and thus demonstrate the principle of karma. The game is played on a grid (often nine by nine), with players moving up the typical eighty-four interior squares using some form of dice (figure 2.3). Dice playing has a long history in India, and ancient gaming pieces have been found made from stone, ivory, terra-cotta, and nutshells. In this roll-and-move game intended to model the progress of life, players start in the lower squares, named after "hellish states" and vices, and move toward the spaces at the top of the board, which represent more developed spiritual states and the heavens, crowned with a supreme deity or a pavilion representing the "field of liberation." Much like the icons in the modern appropriation of the game, the board is decorated with images of snakes that denote downfall, and ladders that denote progress upward. Here the player's piece either slides down to represent a quick fall from grace to vice or climbs up owing to one's rapid spiritual advancement. The roll of the die in this game corresponds to the "fates" as they might appear in life, and as players move across the board, their souls move through different worlds before attaining enlightenment at the top.[10]

The gyān caupar (or gyanbazi, meaning "game of knowledge") shown in figure 2.3 is said to have been popular with the Rajasthani courts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially with female players. Variations of the game had already been in play for centuries and were created in light of the multiple religions present on the subcontinent. The example we present here comes from the Victoria and Albert Museum, and this Jain board is well described in the record:

> The checkered board, representing the progress of one's life, is divided into eighty-four numbered squares, each with words pointing out the rules of conduct and the good and bad effects

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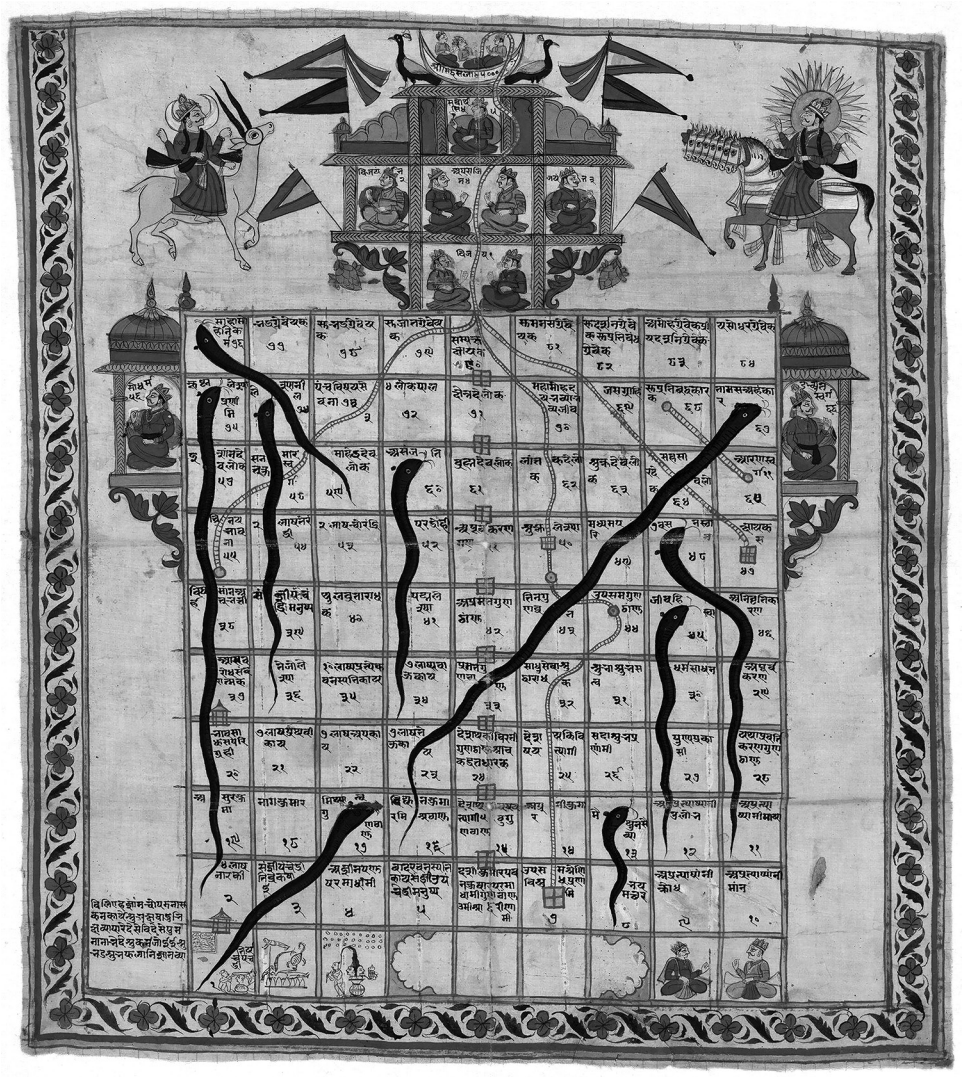


Figure 2.3
Late nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century Jain gyān caupar (gyanbazi) game painted on cloth and used as a didactic pastime. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

thereof. The game is played by throwing dice. The ladders denote good behaviour and virtues that elevate the player to a higher level. The snakes denote downfall: the player descends to the tail after landing on the head. The four-tiered pavilion at the top represents the heavens. Its summit, occupied by a crescent shaped siddhasaila flanked by peacocks, is where the liberated

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beings live. A good Jain should strive hard to reach this goal by avoiding misconduct and attaining knowledge. The pavilion is flanked by the sun god astride a seven-headed horse and the moon god riding an antelope.[11]

The Victoria and Albert Museum records also note, however, that "as a pastime the game became popular among Jain nuns and was regarded as an edifying religious pursuit. Subsequently it lost its seriousness and became a purely recreational activity."[12] That is only part of the story. During the British colonial rule of India, the game was appropriated—stolen—and its spiritual aspects removed, eventually being sold as *Snakes and Ladders* in England starting in 1892, at first using a circular board but then moving on to a near replica of earlier versions.[13]

Severing gyān caupar from its intended relationship with spirituality and instruction did not "just happen"—it happened with colonial intervention, stripping the game of its cultural history. Having succumbed to the erasure of its history by the British toy industry, the game was sold back in India as a commercial product. As Britain colonized India itself, it also colonized the spiritual play practices of the Indian people.

The deeply problematic play that seems to come, endlessly, from a White perspective needs constant attention in board games—both in old games and in contemporary games. As Achille Mbembe noted in his lecture about decolonizing knowledge and the question of the archive, "This is not because whiteness is the same as history. Human history, by definition, is history beyond whiteness. Human history is about the future. Whiteness is about entrapment. Whiteness is at its best when it turns into a myth. It is the most corrosive and the most lethal when it makes us believe that it is everywhere; that everything originates from it and it has no outside."[14] Most of the board games in Western archives are deeply embedded within this mythos. The development of games that used graphic depictions instead of more abstract shapes and concepts enhanced this perspective, and changed not only the meaning of games but also their social and political connotations. The impact of board games on culture should not be taken lightly, nor the impact of culture on games. What happens in one also happens in the other.

With the dawn of printing technologies during the Renaissance, image-based board games began to proliferate in Europe. This corresponded with other significant cultural events such as the mass printing of Martin Luther's ideas for the reformation of the Christian Church. Though based on centuries-old techniques, printed broadsheets grew in popularity throughout Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with topics ranging from natural philosophy and science to politics and religion, all printed and shared on a single sheet of mass-produced paper. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century board games were crafted in the same broadsheet format,

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incorporating not only text but also images. Board games of this era tended to be diagrammatic and maplike in nature and reflected the other forms of printed knowledge of the time. Popular across a spectrum of the public, board games were played equally by people in the higher classes involved in courtly leisure and the working classes who enjoyed games as entertainment.[15]

Seventeenth-century Europe saw a proliferation of what we now call news. Print technologies' mass production spread the news across readerships and professions. This, in turn, had a great impact on games. Mass-produced game prints were churned out alongside maps and news broadsheets, created in a changing economy and representing a wide variety of subjects, from fashion to flags of the world. Many early board games are now lost to us, as they have been overlooked in art history because of their perceived lack of significance.[16] These games were also poorly equipped to withstand the wear and tear of play. Though some libraries and museums feature impressive game collections, and there are some fervent private collectors out there, the definitive board game archive does not exist. Further, we encounter an authorship issue: either the authors of early print games were anonymous, or they were the printers themselves. Since most games relied on preexisting game mechanics, design changes were primarily decorative and thematic, and recording the game designer's or the illustrator's names as separate from the printer's was not customary. The games of this period were seemingly intended to be bought by the emerging middle-class bourgeois family, roughly the same audience as that of contemporary newspapers and journals.

The most influential game in Europe was the giochi dell'oca, or the game of the goose, in existence at least as early as the 1580s, when Francesco I de' Medici of Florence is said to have made it a gift to the king of Spain. A subset of the race game category, the game of the goose created its own genre that still feels familiar today. Hundreds of exemplar games are housed in private collections and public archives in many countries, as they are among the oldest and most popular mass-produced board games in Europe.[17] Goose games were accessible and dealt with themes of the day, both serious and silly. From games about Parisian fashion to games about current political events, such as the Dreyfus affair, the format provided a focus for educated conversations about taste: the fields of art, literature, and current events.[18]

Goose games follow a standardized format and are typically pictorial in nature, often featuring an overall theme. Players move along a circular track of image-based spaces, rolling the die or spinning a teetotum, until someone reaches the center. Classic games are typically created with sixty-three spaces, but the number varies. Spaces that are favorable to land on sometimes feature images of geese, while other spaces, typically in specific locations, represent hazards that slow the player's progression.

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Space fifty-eight is nearly always "Death." Since it is located near the end of the track, forcing the players who land there to start over, it is—as the name implies—an extremely punishing feature. Because the game was often intended to be a metaphor for the struggles of human life, such "make or break" spaces were thought to represent common aspects of the human struggle for survival. Other intriguing spaces on the board common to most goose games include "The Bridge" (space six), which transports players to space twelve, and "The Hotel" (space nineteen), where players lose a turn to mimic the act of staying the night. Along the route, if a player's piece lands on a square occupied by another player, the two pieces swap positions, and both would pay into the kitty, or the game's collective "bank." "The Well" (space thirty-one) and "The Prison" (space fifty-two) are most unfortunate spaces where players must wait until another player comes to their aid by landing on that space; the new arrival is then imprisoned or trapped in the well until another victim/rescuer arrives to take his or her place. The game is won by reaching the final space first. Even in early game exemplars, the game rules included betting, with funds put into a kitty for the winner.

In 1819, Lord Byron references the game in his epic poem *Don Juan*:

> For good society is but a game,
> "The royal game of Goose," as I may say,
> Where every body has some separate aim,
> An end to answer, or a plan to lay.[19]

Some of the many seventeenth-century themes from the goose game genre include important works such as *Le Jeu des Princes de l'Europe* (The Game of the Princes of Europe), 1662, created by the cartographer Pierre Du Val, geographer to the king of France, so that players might "gain some profit in geography." *El Juego Real de Cupido* (The Royal Game of Cupid, 1665), replaced the beneficial geese with cupids and made the quest one of love. The beautiful *Le jeu des fortifications* (The Game of Fortifications, 1697) detailed military fortifications from an engineering standpoint. *Le nouveau jeu des modes françaises* (The New Game of French Fashion, 1780), featured the latest in French dresses and hairstyles. The rules even introduce a performative mechanic, calling for player flirtation: for example, space fifty requires the player to stop and "talk to" a female depicted on the space until another comes along to release the player. These minor adaptations of the game's traditional rules were adjusted for a fashionable courtship context.[20] The abundance of goose games is documented in a specialized book by Henry-René d'Allemagne, *Le noble jeu de l'oie en France, de 1640 à 1950* (The noble game of the goose in France from 1640 to 1950), including goose game themes ranging from teachers to royalty, and even word puzzles. *The New Game of Human Life*, released in London in July 1790, represented a significant turn in the history of the game as the

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shift toward industrialization and the rise of the middle class created a market for leisure products as well as products for children. The London publishers packaged the game for children as a morality tale and a didactic tool.[21] Not incidentally, because the spaces on the board featured careers such as "The Poet," "The Geographer," and "The Glutton," the depictions show the career path of an educated White man.[22]

We have much to learn from these games. They open a window into people's lives at their time of release; they illustrate the zeitgeist of a given moment, albeit especially for an elite minority: the educated, literate populace. As time went on, game themes changed according to events. By the end of the eighteenth century, many European pictorial games began to function as a form of influence and messaging conveying cultural significance, and, in some cases, such as *The New Game of Human Life*, to disseminate ideals supported by the state. As these goose games show us, in addition to being playthings, tabletop games have a long history as didactic instruments. Some games billed themselves as "designed to familiarize youth" or "educate youth" or "furnish such a fund of geographical knowledge" to the "young people of both sexes."[23] The promotion of pedagogical qualities was an important way of convincing parents to spend money on entertainment for their children in a time when that was a novel concept.

A Deep Dive into Enculturation

One key game that clearly demonstrates the intersection of board games and ideology is the fascinating *Jeu de la révolution française* (Game of the French Revolution, 1791), a goose game variant (jeu de l'oie in French) featuring a detailed hand-colored etching of the events and results of the French Revolution.[24] This game was used as a tool not only to emphasize the massive cultural shift in France but also to *reinscribe* new understandings about society brought by the Revolution at a time of social upheaval. The game was thought to have been issued within months of the Festival of the Federation celebrated on July 14, 1790, the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille prison that symbolically started the French Revolution; the commemorative game was continually reprinted and replayed for over one hundred years. Per its title, the board (figure 2.4) depicts the events and tenets of the Revolution, from spaces depicting the storming of the Bastille to the establishment of rights and the formation of the National Assembly.[25]

As is typical for a goose game, the instructions for Game of the French Revolution are printed on the board. The goal of the game is to be the first player to arrive at space sixty-three—Palladium de la Liberté / National Assembly. But to get to this Palladium of Freedom, players must overcome a number of obstacles, and an exact roll is required to finish. As in other goose games, players have some financial incentive to reach the

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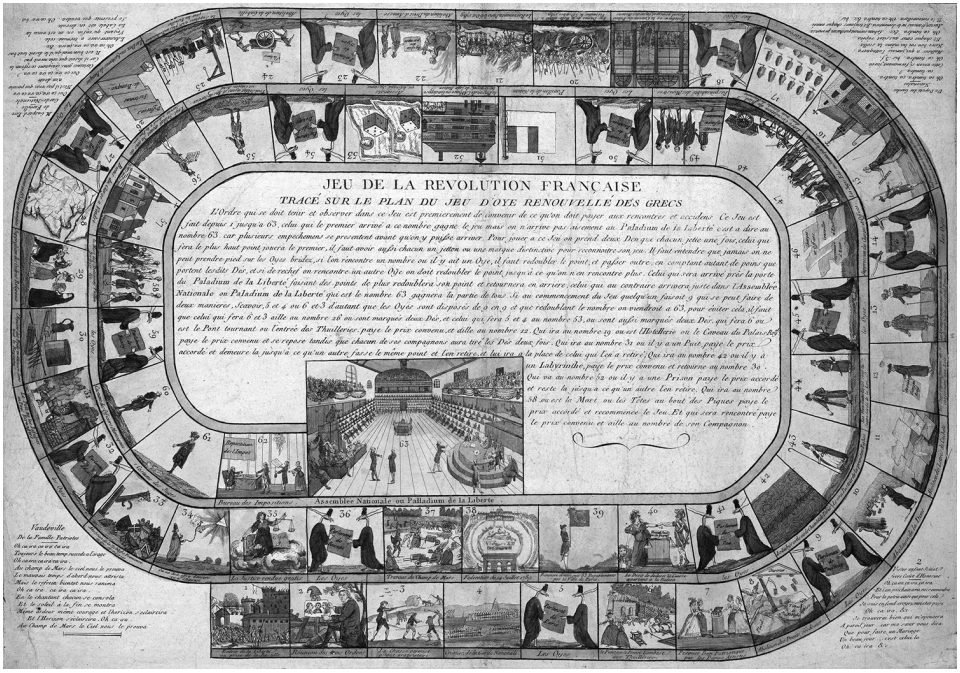


Figure 2.4
Jeu de la révolution française (Game of the French Revolution) (1790–1791), which details themes surrounding the political and social values of the French Revolution. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (acc. no. P980009*).

end. Players must agree on what stakes must be paid into the kitty for "meetings," and what fees are required if one is unlucky enough to land on unfortunate spaces, such as traps or accidents. After determining the financial stakes to be used for the kitty, each player starts the game by putting in one stake each, and then each player rolls two dice. On the first roll, the following conventions are indicated:

> If one's first throw is six and three, move to space twenty-six.
> If one's first throw is five and four, move to space fifty-three.

And for space fifty-eight, the rules printed on the board articulate this more charmingly than we can:

> Who will go to the number 58 or Death (or the Heads at the End of the Pikes) pays the agreed upon price and starts the Game again.

As in other goose games, players encounter spaces with depictions of geese along their route. Landing on a goose means that players move ahead by the same number

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of spaces again, thereby doubling their move on their turn (the rules state that "it must be understood that one can never remain on goose spaces"). In Game of the French revolution, these geese are clothed and wear equestrian-style bridles, a curious representation present only in a few games of the period. The game collector and historian Adrian Seville interprets the bridled geese as referring to Judge Bridoye, a character in a 1546 book by Rabelais. The Judge, whose name literally translates to "Bridle Goose," would have been a well-known character even two hundred years later. Judge Bridoye was characterized as a farcical fool, the opposite of Enlightenment Reason, and he judged trials with a roll of the dice. At the time, the name Bridoye took on the colloquial meaning of nincompoop, and this slang endured for hundreds of years. Therefore the space references contemporary, educated pop culture, and landing on it meant that the good Judge would roll you along again.

For our purposes, Game of the French Revolution has particular symbolic notions connected to the squares that denounce "the old ways" and celebrate the new. The scenes depicted in the game show the dramatic transfer of property and the shift to the rights of French citizens that still resonate and animate French intellectual thought today. One example is the "good riddance" of unnecessary taxes, such as "Abolition de la Dime" (space ten), which refers to a tax burden on peasants in the form of tithing to the landlord; or the "Abolition des Corvees" (space seventeen), an indentured servitude for public works; and "Abolition du droit d'aînesse" (space twenty-two), noble families' practice of allowing the eldest male to inherit the majority of the home and goods.

Some of the most fascinating spaces deal with issues that are highly relevant to our own time: for example, space thirteen shows two men wearing different styles of dress, with a heading that translates to "Foreigners, having acquired *biens nationaux* in accordance with the law, are believed to be French." Here *biens nationaux* refers to property of both the Catholic Church and the monarchy that was confiscated and redistributed. At the time, the Catholic Church in France faced resentment for its unprecedented wealth, equal only to that of royalty, as well as its ownership of 6 percent of the entirety of France, both of which made the church a visible marker of disparity. The church had been permitted to collect one-tenth of agricultural production as a tithe and paid no taxes. Philosophers also interpreted the lifetime commitment of clergy and nuns as a violation of individual freedoms. In late 1789, the new National Assembly claimed Catholic Church property as the property of the nation, soon selling monasteries and churches to stabilize the new nation's financial position. This act, and the resulting legal moves to force priests to swear loyalty to the constitution over loyalty to the pope, resulted in radical changes in religion, property, and even mundane things like the calendar and street names—in other words, the very fabric of everyday life—and reflected

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the new reality of France after the Revolution. This focus on religion and tax abolition is clearly represented on the board: many more spaces are devoted to these affairs than to other topics such as specific battles, for example, leading one to understand that the game is steeped in the cultural values of the Revolution rather than in the skirmishes and acts of war that might constitute a history lesson. The game offers a lesson in culture and ideology, rather than a catalog of historical events (figure 2.5).

In Game of the French Revolution, not only the game spaces carried messages of enculturation. Some versions of the board also feature verses from a revolutionary song printed at the four corners. The version shown in this book includes verses from "Ça ira" ("It'll be fine," or "There is hope"), the most popular song emerging from the era of the Revolution. The song is said to have appeared during preparations for the Fête de la Fédération of 1790, the event for which the game was created.[26]

> Ah! It'll be fine, It'll be fine, It'll be fine / At the Champ de Mars, the sky proved it to us / The storm first saddened us / But the refrain soon revives us / In singing each one consoled / And the sun at the end showed itself.[27]

While the lyrics are lofty and aspirational in character, this folk song has many additional, impromptu verses, including many versions from the political movement *sans-culottes* (which translates to "without breeches," referring to the short pants worn by aristocracy), whose songs were more explicitly vulgar and political, signifying solidarity with the common citizen. In this way, the French Revolution's credo to do away

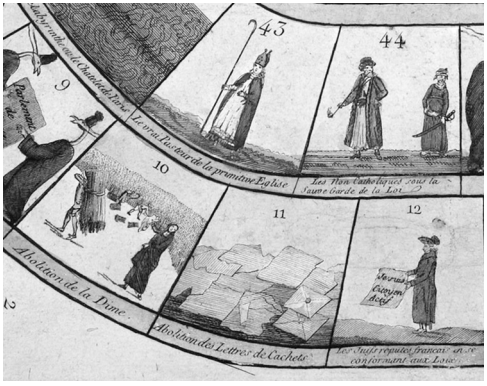


Figure 2.5
Detail from *Jeu de la révolution française* (Game of the French Revolution, 1790–1791) showing the "Abolition of the Dime," a tax, and the abolition of "Lettres de Cachet," royalty-sealed letters that were often used to skirt the law and detain people without trial. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (acc. no. P980009*).

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with class differences is implied by the inclusion of this more radical song.[28] Given the whimsical nature of the geese, and some of the gallows humor embedded in the game illustrations, the game balances a doctrinaire message with humorous release. The Revolution may have been a bloody, desperate act by the masses to survive against the social imbalance created by the aristocracy, but the game itself does not dwell there. It merely summarizes key points, glossing over the misery felt by most, and instead opts to focus on the communication—even the indoctrination—of the values of the republic.

Considered as a whole, Game of the French Revolution creates an interactive social platform in which to read and rehearse the values of the Revolution and of the new French republic for its citizens.[29] The board's compelling images and the familiar goose game mechanics create a new kind of logic, an *enacted* New Republic, comfortable in its familiarity. The new republic used this long-standing game model as a way to forge itself as an institution. The game's role in enculturation and its impact on the French public cannot be overestimated.

Mapping Mexico

Using games to spread ideas about nationhood and enculturate younger generations was not an exclusively European phenomenon. The notion of games for children was adapted in the nineteenth century in other places as well. A key example is *Los insurgentes: Juego historico para niños por Antonio García Cubas* (The insurgents: Historical game for children by Antonio García Cubas). *Los insurgentes*, published in Mexico in 1891, is a cartographic-based game that uses color-coded journeys around a map of Mexico to document the campaigns of various heroes from the country's efforts for independence, starting with the 1810 uprising of Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, who gathered an army of farmers and citizens to attack Spanish and creole elites for Mexican independence. The game traces the events of the Mexican War of Independence through the journeys of eight important insurgent leaders. With *Los insurgentes*, players follow these heroes' journeys, reading out snippets from the military campaigns from a booklet of historical facts at each stop. The game focuses on historical figures and battles, and it offers both a cultural lesson and a history lesson. The game was meant as a patriotic tool for children to learn about the historic quests for nationhood and the men who got them there; because of some of the heroes' links to the Catholic Church, these stories also strengthened the bond between religion and Mexican nationhood.

Rather than employing goose-game-style spaces, *Los insurgentes* was made to be played on a map and was created by a mapmaker, since the burgeoning print industry easily facilitated the mass production of mechanically printed board games as well. As

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publishers of early games were already producing maps, the eventual combination of cartography and games comes as no surprise. Indeed, *Los insurgentes* was set within the first "locally produced" map of Mexico, published by Antonio García y Cubas in 1861. Imperialism and expansionist colonialism are enabled by mastery over maps: surveying, cartography, and naming locations are key aspects of empire building. This game's underlying map was the country's first official map that was not created by European colonists. It was printed in Mexico and drawn from Mexican Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous-created land surveys. The map exists because of surveys conducted by the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística (Mexican Society for Geography and Statistics), the data office for the newly independent Mexican republic. The SMGE was established in part to map the country's own territories in its own way; a definitive Mexican map would be an important military tool and a symbol of Mexico's identity. This push to create a definitive map was important for several reasons. First, it was a move for Indigenous people to take conceptual control over their own territory. Second, it gave Mexico the opportunity to reinforce its authority next to an increasingly aggressive neighbor: the United States.

At the end of the Mexican-American War after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, the border between the United States and Mexico was established, and the need for a Mexican national map that could resolve cheating on territorial lines became greater still. Just two years after the treaty, Mexico lost more territory owing to a "mapping error," which was highly disappointing to the military. According to Raymond B. Craib in *Cartographic Mexico*, "Reflective of the increasing primacy of the visual in the nineteenth century, the image brought an expression of bitterness from General Santa Anna, who for the first time could actually envision the magnitude of territory Mexico had lost."[30]

Yet the master map was slow in coming. The process of crafting the official map was fraught with conflict in a financially stressed fledgling government. Though the SMGE was formed in 1833, the first mass-produced official map by Antonio García y Cubas, did not appear until 1863. He was known for creating a number of educational products for children as well as atlases and dictionaries featuring Mexican history.[31] The new national map, created in the political upheaval after the Mexican-American War, carefully attended to the international limits between Mexico and the United States. The mapmaker declared:

> We could say that our history is written to say that Mexico and the United States are neighbors. At least France and England are separated by the English Channel; between our nation and the neighbor there is no other boundary than a simple mathematical line. . . . . ; God save the Republic!!![32]

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The gameplay Antonio García y Cubas created for *Los insurgentes* relies first and foremost on this very important map (figure 2.6). Instead of moving in a spiral, as in an age-old roll-and-move goose game, players travel across the geographical map to get to know Mexico itself, the site of Mexican history. Players may have been on the other end of the country, but the game allows a kind of site-specific reenactment of these pivotal heroes' journeys: literally story lines across a landscape. While the rest of the gameplay relies on point-to-point movement, the map in *Los insurgentes* is the real story behind the game. Mapping something out and following a path across the landscape is a way of claiming a territory, a way of understanding place. Maps can provide sites for histories, as well as fantasies that trigger the imagination—in this case, the imagination of what nationhood might mean to a colonized country. And because this map was created by the people, the instillation of Mexican nationhood takes on even more significance.

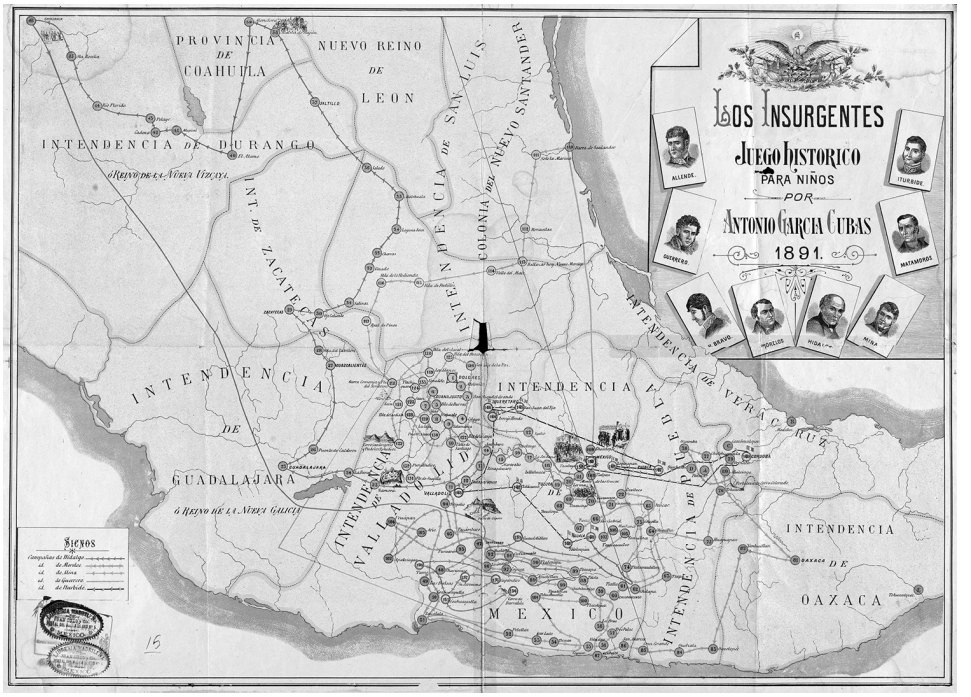


Figure 2.6
The game detailing heroes' journeys from the Mexican Revolution, *Los insurgentes: Juego historico para niños por Antonio García Cubas* (*The Insurgents: Historical Game for Children by Antonio García Cubas*) (1891). Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (acc. no. P840001).

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As we see from the story of Antonio García y Cubas and the Indigenous knowledges that mapped Mexico, maps, and games that use them, are a way of comprehending scale, place, and, most importantly, story. As the video game scholar Souvik Mukherjee has noted, many video games model empire, beginning with scouting "uncharted territory," moving troops and occupying, then redrawing the map and marking it with your nation's color.[33] Mukherjee also discusses how maps can provide the means by which to pose an alternative to the colonization narrative in an "empire-space." In essence, if empires themselves rely on notions of territory and mapping, then seizing the spatial imaginaries can also be the way forward into a "thirdspace," or a nonbinary space for marginal voices.[34] The combination of revolutionary and Indigenous knowledge creation informs the game, which in turn informs the player. Later in the book, we will return to the use of maps to enact this very process on colonies in other games.

Reflection

In this chapter, we have seen how centuries-old games like gyān caupar used gameplay as a form of reflection and spiritual exploration across several religions. We have discussed how Japan's pictorial e-sugoroku games celebrated scenes from everyday life as well as national treasures such as the fifty-three stations of the Tokaido. And we have explored the goose game genre, and map games in general, with the French Revolution and map-based *Los insurgentes* as specific examples.

The creators of both the *Jeu de la révolution française* and *Los insurgentes* used board games as part of cultural messaging at key moments in each nation's history. What does it mean for games to use patriotic scenes or maps and patriotic stories to frame player experiences? Certainly, the development of mass printing played a key role in both the proliferation of board games and the incorporation of images, enriching the board itself as a sense-making tool. There can be no denying that pictorial representations on board games held deep power as well as a direct link to enculturation. Both games provide sites for inscribing and reinscribing the norms of the new republics. As they both appeared in mass production so quickly after the actual events of their respective revolutions, the games also demonstrate that play has been long understood as a form of reinforcing social norms, nationhood, and the local cultural landscape. While their genre is straightforward and traditional, the iconography and content on the boards crosses into legal, religious, political, and social spheres. Indeed, using the *institution* of the goose game or a familiar map game instills *France* and *Mexico* as familiar institutions as well. This institutionalization works because of a few reasons we have mentioned thus far, which we now take a moment to reiterate. First, games are popular,

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approachable media that, at least on the surface, offer us an opportunity to explore everyday life differently and fantasize about the past, present and future. Second, to draw from definitions of games as discussed by scholars in game studies, games are voluntary to play—and in playing them, players enact an imagination of everyday citizenship. Third, games, with their promise of agency (even if only offered through rolls of the die), might very well be effective in engaging people in conversations precisely because players are curious as to the fate their die has cast. The suspense and engagement built into a game may very well have helped players engage in the ideologies presented to them. Later in the book, we will explore how problematic such agency is when games adopt an imagined position of colonialist powers.

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Playing Oppression

The Legacy of Conquest and Empire in Colonialist Board Games

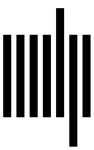
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3 World as Empire

> [He may] make a tour of the world in books, he may make himself master of the geography of the universe in the maps, atlasses and measurements of our mathematicians. He may travell by land with the historians, by sea with the navigators. He may go round the globe with Dampier and Rogers, and kno' a thousand times more doing it than all those illiterate sailors.
>
> —Daniel Defoe, *The Compleat English Gentleman*

The World as a Game

We have seen how board games developed as instruments of enculturation. In this chapter, we look more specifically at how games came to reflect changing European worldviews and intellectual life. We will explore how the depictions of the world—in the forms of maps, illustrations of cultural references and landmarks, and the depiction of people—in European games change radically over time. We will then show how fictional narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including games, took on perspectives of global tourism and eventually, empire building.

This chapter's journey begins with another early example of a goose game: the French game *Le jeu du monde* (The game of the world, 1645). The board features small line drawings of nations such as Brazil, Germany, Ceylon, Greece, and Russia, placed in graphic bubbles spiraling toward France in the center (figure 3.1).[1] The lithograph is fine lined, the titles of countries unembellished. To the modern eye, the game feels more like a stripped-down list of countries than it does a realistic map or an entertaining game. Compared to later European board games, *Le jeu du monde* does not attempt to depict the inhabitants of faraway lands; there are no exotic landscapes, no palm trees or pineapples, no depictions of the Other. Instead the game's graphics treated

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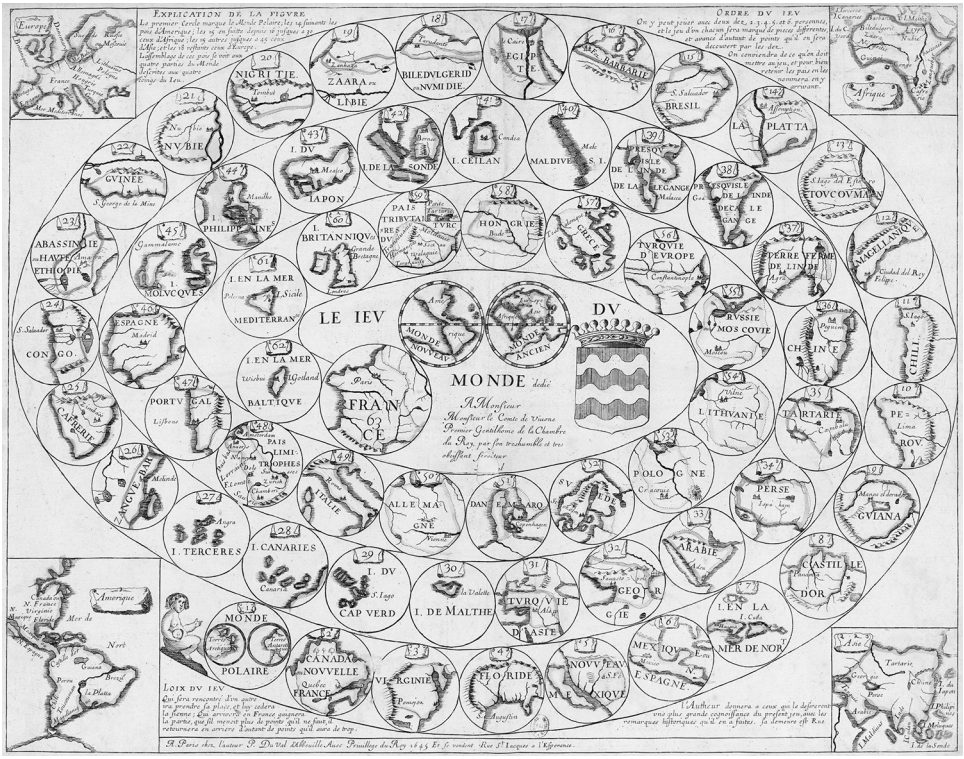


Figure 3.1

Le jeu du monde (The game of the world, 1645) board with its separated country depictions, created by Pierre Du Val (1619–1683), nephew of the geographer Nicolas Sanson (1600–1667), who rose to become France's "geographer to the king." In the 1660s and 1670s, Du Val published scores of map-related works and was the first in France to create geography-themed board games. Courtesy of the David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.

these faraway places as categories or containers. The players did not have to concern themselves with the contents of each container; its label and shape were enough in terms of educational value. But the foremost intended takeaway was that France stood at the center of it all.

At the time, it was customary for nations to put themselves at the center of maps; it was not until the International Meridian Conference in Washington, DC, in 1884 that the Greenwich meridian (and Greenwich Mean Time) was agreed on by the twenty-six countries represented at the conference, and the world (at least on paper) was stitched together into a continuous flow of space and time starting in the British Empire. *Le jeu*

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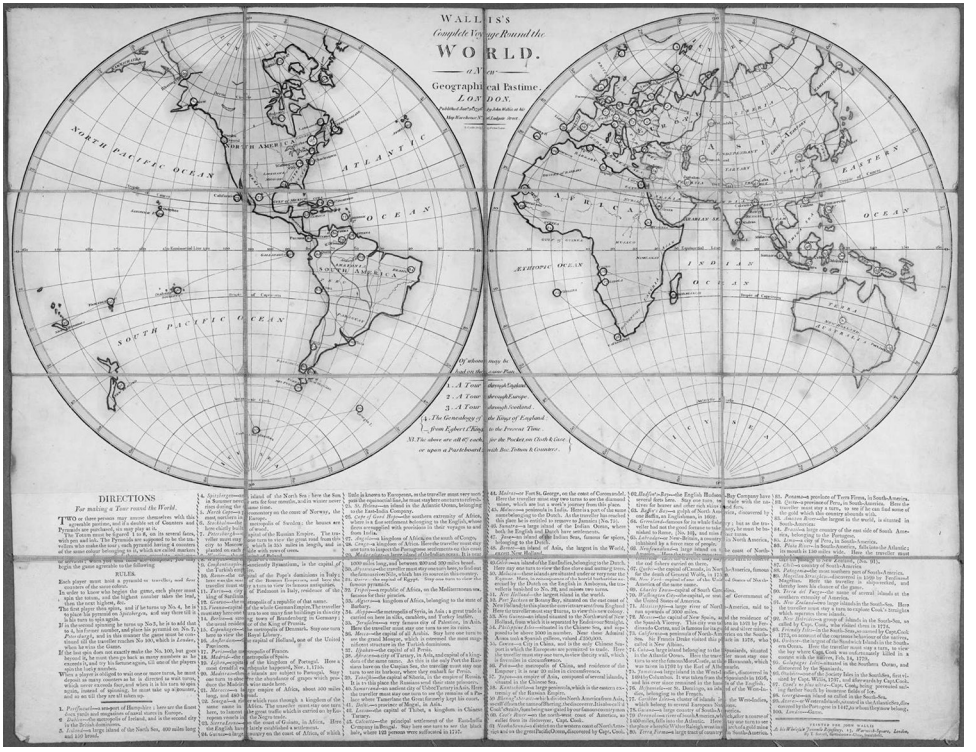


Figure 3.2
Wallis's Complete Voyage round the World: A New Geographical Pastime (1796) board showing the worlds hemispheres in a scientific mapping style.

du monde is one of many early geographical games in which a geographical experience is not re-created but rather listed for memorization, reinforcing the idea that countries were, like alphabets and grammar, things that educated people should know. In this regard, the game reflects the norms and values of the European Renaissance and worked to enculturate players with the idea that the world is knowable and can be cut up into easily digestible pieces of empirical data for players to consume. Most importantly, the game also serves as a reflection of public thought. Created in 1645, it is clearly one of the earlier goose games. It shows that—while still containing colonial presumptions about Eurocentrism as empirical frames—earlier games did not propagate the number of cultural stereotypes and negative images of colonial subjects as they would come to do in full force over the next centuries.

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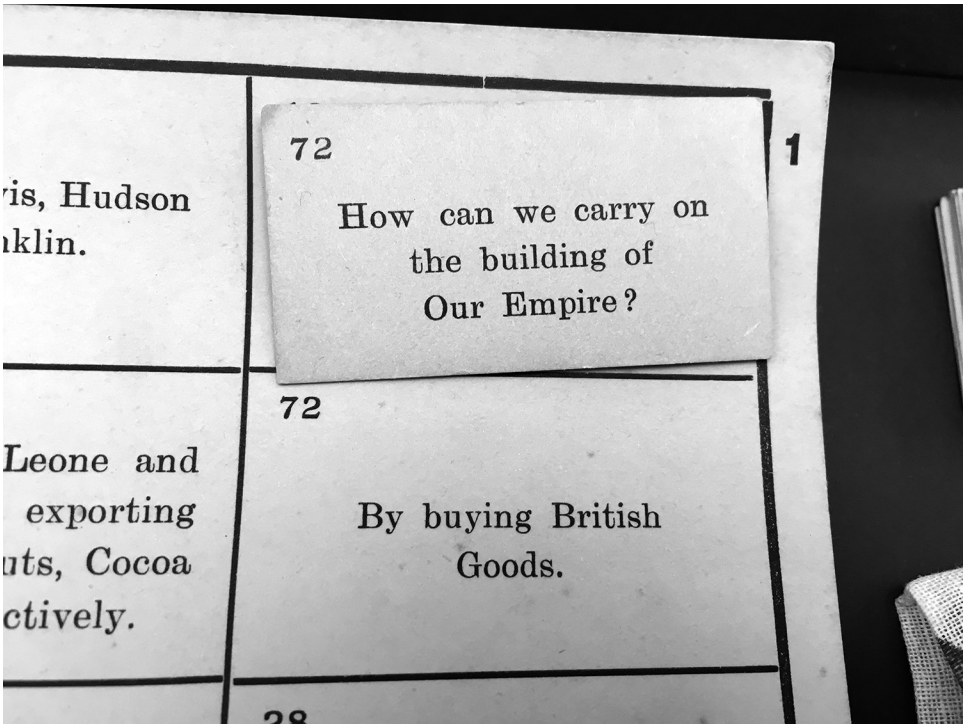


Figure 3.3
Questions and answers from *Bricks of the Empire* (1930) unabashedly espousing nationalistic propaganda of empire. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Ballam Collection: Games: Roberts (5). Photo by Mary Flanagan.

Toward the eighteenth century, map-based games began to shift scale in terms of place, with more local topics becoming subjects for exploration. *A New Royal Geographical Pastime for England and Wales* (1787), which features towns and villages as well as stately homes, cathedrals, churches, and geographical features, was intended to help familiarize British citizens with their own landmarks.[2] A great number of printed board games point out sights, with locations on the game board showcasing local attractions such as small drawn pictures of the Alps or famous highlights in England such as Stonehenge. *Walker's New Geographical Game Exhibiting a Tour Through Europe* (1810) showcased capitals, major cities, and major sea routes across Europe.[3] Still others concentrated on the science of mapping the world with games. *Wallis's Complete Voyage round the World: A New Geographical Pastime* (1796) features two global views and instructions to players to make a tour of the cartographic world (figure 3.2).

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Figure 3.4
William Darton's *The Noble Game of Elephant and Castle* (1822) is both a visually stunning and morally reprehensible cultural artifact.

Map games also began depicting the rest of the world in ways related to the development of European colonies. We will trace the change in representation of people, places, and geography as the chapter progresses.

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Playing Empire

It should come as no surprise that British board game design was infused with the philosophies of empire. After all, the British establishment proudly identified itself as *an empire*, and the rhetoric boasted superiority and world influence, which in turn spread throughout British popular culture, a trend that continued through the twentieth century.

In the eighteenth century, news broadsheets, maps, and games served as mass-produced communication tools that gave everyday Europeans a look at the world—their empire. Games provided a way to "rehearse" not only the names of countries but also the roles the players' particular nation played in global politics. This is especially true when colonists faced doubt in their efforts. For example, after losing one of its major colonies in the eighteenth century—what was to become the United States—Britain sought to reinforce the ideals of the empire to fund its colonial ventures and increase favorable public opinion. Even games up to the twentieth century, such as *Bricks of the Empire* (1930), show that the teaching tool of games proved to be a valuable instrument for persuasion (figure 3.3).

An earlier example is William Darton's *The Noble Game of Elephant and Castle, or Travelling in Asia, during Which the Sagacious Animal Introduces Us to Various and Instructive Scenes* from 1822. Darton, a seller of maps, toys, and games, published this aesthetically rich game, in which the spaces featuring world scenes are drawn within an illustration of an elephant's body. Pictures on the board depict a range of environments, from northern Siberia to southernmost India (figure 3.4). The game forcefully employs Orientalizing motifs, from its overall elephant form to the smaller images within.[4] *The Noble Game of Elephant and Castle* demonstrates that game design visuals had become an expression of fine art.

The game was released in the early nineteenth century, during the height of ongoing British colonization of the Indian subcontinent, offering children a performative playbook onto which they could enact Britain's imperial identity. The purpose of the game, as stated in its subtitle, was to combine "amusement with instruction for youth of both sexes." Although the board has only twenty-five spaces, the rule book contains eighty-four pages of information on customs, events, and persons from Asia, in a tour from the Arctic Ocean of northern Russia to India, China, and Japan. To play the game, players spin a teetotum and move white pieces, called travelers, across numbered images, reading the appropriate material from the rule book at each stop, very much like *Los insurgentes* (1891) and other didactic games produced later in the same century.

British colonialism in India started with the advances in shipbuilding and mapping to increase commerce, most significantly by massive trading companies such as the East India Company. The monopolistic company was formed in 1600 to trade with

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the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and China. From the mid-1700s to the early 1800s, the East India Company took in *half of the entire world's trade*; with its own 260,000-person private army, the company seized an entire subcontinent.[5] A reexamination of the East India Company's practices by William Dalrymple reveals its sinister side: "It was not the British government that seized India, but a dangerously unregulated private company run by an unstable sociopath."[6] *Trade* is a euphemism for the wholesale extraction of volumes of spices and tons of cotton, silk, and tea, as well as large-scale outright theft, raiding, and violence to suppress any possible resistance. The East India Company attempted to excuse its violence by arguing that torture was a traditional practice in India—and so the colonial system of government excused it as well when practiced by the colonizers against Indian and Bengali people.[7] One eighteenth-century parliamentary pamphlet decried British colonial habits: "Lacks and crowes of rupees, sacks of diamonds, Indians tortured to disclose their treasure; cities, towns and villages ransacked and destroyed, jaghires and provinces purloined."[8]

Brutal takeover, armed conflict, theft, and torture: Anupama Rao and Steven Pierce argue that these practices were not only well-documented but rationalized by those who otherwise believed in justice and civility owing to stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and the West's intolerance of difference. European violence was internally legitimized because the "illegibility of natives' intentions and their susceptibility to the unreasonable worlds of magic and superstition rendered them a target of consistent and violent disciplining; native unreason could only be addressed by the exercise of unreasonable violence."[9] These violent and depraved colonial practices were repeated port to port to "elaborate and demarcate the limits of worthy humanity."[10] The East India Company's massive scale and eventual corporate rule led to deals with Parliament and thus increased British government presence in the Indian subcontinent. A violent, armed British government takeover began with the British seizing Bengal in 1757, which officially brought the British military into the region. Repeated movements for independence were violently suppressed. Similar to slave-powered plantations in the southern United States, the East India Company indentured and enslaved workers. They set up plantations across the subcontinent, where British settlers were encouraged to adopt a lifestyle characterized by aristocratic leisure.[11] In essence, European governments allowed evil corporations to engage in unregulated profiteering, subjugation, and victimization of the rest of the world.

The game also relies on stereotypes of Indigenous peoples. Homi Bhabha emphasized how racial and cultural stereotypes are used as key strategic tools in the discourse of colonialism. The colonizer's reliance on the concept of *fixity* to construct the Other solidifies what is already known (or feared) through repetition that, in the end, needs

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no evidence, for the repetition of that which is feared or supposed has served as proof enough of its veracity. Any depiction of the colonized local is simplified, and this simplified representation becomes fact. Stereotypes make those on the perpetrating end feel superior, and as Isaac Newton pointed out, stereotypes garner their power by being instances of excess of what could be empirically proved or logically construed.[12] The othering function of exoticism effaces local identities. It also confounds complexity in social identity and eradicates individuality in favor of collective stereotypes. Stereotypical representations are steeped in colonial discourse: "The expression of the West's will and right to power, has turned out to be one of the most effective weapons of conquest and dominance."[13]

Jessica Langer has written at length about the ways in which both science fiction and digital games have used negative racist stereotypes as a kind of shorthand. Though focused on digital works, many of Langer's ideas translate to board games. In her work on depictions of Native and First Nations people,[14] Langer argues that the stereotyping effect is not merely a discursive act, a fictional foray, or a residual memory of colonial stories, living on in the form of books, television, and for our purposes, games. Rather, stereotypes form lived reality and have lived consequences for Indigenous peoples. Langer summarizes the function of stereotypes in games as *shortcuts* to achieve a mood, player reaction, or ambiance.[15] Although Langer notes that filmmakers, writers, and other cultural creators are uniquely positioned to participate in decolonizing acts by their creative works that break these stereotypes,[16] the trouble is, these stereotypes dangerously form the life of today, situating the knowledge structures, religions, and cultures of the colonized as always in the past, as places or ways of being with no future.[17] Thus, using stereotypes is a trap that reinforces the status quo.

Detailed images reflecting these nineteenth-century European status quo beliefs about Asia proliferate on the board of *The Noble Game of Elephant and Castle*. Take, for example, space nine, which features a terrifying image of local violence with a Christian praying next to a hanged man. Or space eleven, where dark figures listen raptly to a White politician or preacher. Space sixteen features a battle scene nobly won by the British. Small spaces along the edges of the board feature caricatured images of local populations.

Darton's game is probably one of several exemplars—the others now lost—that signify a change in representation in popular culture imagery used in products like board games. The game's beautiful illustration of the elephant combined with images of exoticized and stereotyped scenes and people, juxtaposed with depictions of militarism and might, points to a massive reinstantiation of Europeans' conceptualizations of their places in the world. To the art historian Romita Ray, Darton's game conjured up

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stereotypes of distant lands and the constant presence of Britain's military might. Ray points out that the game employed already-in-circulation exoticized imaginary within the body of the elephant, with a fantastical twist: the great beast is depicted as being so large that it can easily carry a castle, referencing also Elephant and Castle, the famous road juncture in London named after seventeenth-century ivory merchants.[18] *The Noble Game of Elephant and Castle* offers a "feast for the eyes" from a traveler's point of view. The scenes reinforced Britain's sense of might and dominance. Adopting this mindset, players were encouraged to appreciate faraway climes and "novel scenes" as rightfully theirs, because, as the game booklet notes, "home is home to all mankind"[19]—an idea that many people around the world would disagree with when power differentials such as empires and colonialist practices decide who has a right to a home and where.

Darton's board is beautiful, ornate, and stylized, a work of art in its own right. Yet within the overall composition, the start of a deeply disquieting nineteenth-century shift can be witnessed as colonial perspectives align with aesthetic experience. These aesthetics reinforce British taste, religion, clothing, and war machinery, so that the very act of looking becomes colonial. The game art aggregates "Asian" customs into a monolithic, ownable *elephant in the room* to be consumed as an educated person's aesthetic toy. Romita Ray's observation that the game also brought together geographical and cultural maps—a mix of art, science, and history—matched the rising fascination with science, data, and mapping in the nineteenth century. Game artifacts, like other elements of popular culture from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, merged the foreign, the exotic, the consumable, and the scientific into a unified perspective on the world.

Context for Nineteenth-Century Games

The intellectual life of nineteenth-century Europe sheds further light on the views reflected in board games of that time. Many educated Europeans subscribed to the notion of social Darwinism, or the belief that humans exist on a unidirectional development path from savagery to civilization—from primitive cave origins, developing through agriculture and farming, to attaining the heights of an industrialized, scientific culture. While Charles Darwin himself did not write about human beings and their struggle for survival in *On the Origin of Species*, his argument—that species change through natural selection in a given environment—was used to rationalize a host of problematic beliefs.[20] Adopting the thinking of Darwin, Herbert Spencer took Darwin's ideas but made further, human-based claims, showing how evolution and "natural laws" justified the slogan "might is right." Spencer coined the phrase "survival of the fittest," where only some can survive the struggle of life and those who do are "morally

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superior." In social Darwinism, there are always more people born than can come to maturity and propagate their kind. Those poorly adapted are eliminated, while others are "more perfectly adapted to survive."[21] Survivors transmit their qualities to descendants, and this struggle of variance, adaptation, and competing forms results in either extinction or "what we call progress."[22]

Models from biological evolution were used to support the underpinning of economic theory and social planning. Competition was seen as a *social good*; this way of thinking justified anything from colonialism to free-market capitalism. Charity was frowned on, as helping the weakest was framed as impeding evolutionary advances.

Researchers at the time even tried to classify humans into different species, which further justified colonial conflict: all the more reason for one species to dominate another, or so the thinking went. One of the "founding fathers" of mathematical statistics, Karl Pearson, went so far as to apply his version of social Darwinism to human ethnic groups and nations, arguing that if Indigenous peoples could not withstand the greater power of a colonizer, they should be pushed aside for more able competitors. Pearson was a key figure in eugenics, a term coined in 1883 by Francis Galton, who insisted on the biological basis of White superiority. Eugenics was a pseudoscience that sought to classify and prove the superiority of the "White race" through its physiological features and family lineages, and the ideas had many subscribers, such as Dartmouth Professor D. Colin Wells, who praised the thinking of social Darwinism in the relatively new *American Journal of Sociology*, the first US scholarly journal in its field. To these thinkers, capable races must guard against migration, yet could migrate themselves, for migrations were the natural means of "supplanting less capable races by the more capable."[23] Eugenics as a pseudoscience was not fully discredited until its association with the Nazis. Galton is also famous for the expression "nature versus nurture" to describe the question of genetic inheritance versus environment.[24]

Social Darwinism did not develop in a vacuum. It grew alongside the domination of the Christian religion, which was already engaged in a massive effort to expand its reach through missionary work around the world. To missionaries, religious colonialism was a divine mandate to enlighten and liberate others from evil and ignorance.[25] Along with religion, social Darwinism was yet another way for Europeans to see their civilization as superior and thus fulfill their perceived duty to cultivate Western ideals around the world. When we look at the premises, art, text, and, in more recent examples, game mechanics, it is clear that European board games possess ties to these sensibilities.

Alongside social Darwinism, the great European drive for classification contributed to the intellectual justification of difference, and therefore the need to colonize and

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Christianize people outside of Europe. The classification of people into discrete categories dominated Western thinking in the Victorian era: people were either civilized or savage, rich or poor, innocent or ruined, damned or saved. The obsession with separating, categorizing, sorting, and judging who was fit and unfit—who should survive—played out in all spheres, from domestic policies in North America and Europe, to international policies such as forming colonies, to religious missionary work, to conducting international trade. The Victorian-era categorizing craze led to other loaded problems, such as the reaffirmation of gender binaries, separating women's work from men's work and their allowed pastimes, as well as separating childhood from adulthood, rural from urban, animal from human, and civilized from primitive; these binary categorizations touched nearly every aspect of everyday life and created the structure for society at large.[26] These strict social norms were reflected in games like George Fox's *The Mansion of Happiness: An Instructive Moral and Entertaining Amusement* (1800), another goose-style game in which the spaces track various virtues and vices on the player's path to get to space sixty-seven, the Mansion of Happiness. On an American version of the game board from 1843, this space displays what looks like a White bourgeois family sitting in a garden and playing musical instruments. It is an image of a luxurious life, a happily ever after for wealthy families who benefited from colonial profits. The binary Victorian thinking reinforced by the game carried with it presumed ramifications for people who were not understood to fit this mold. The racial consequences of such binary thinking are manifold, but first and foremost is the unfair representation of Native and Indigenous people who were depicted and documented through this polarized lens.

The Grand Tour and Travel Narratives

European intellectual life in the nineteenth century required interfacing with the world. Travel "was an eighteenth-century construct that began with the Grand Tour that young men of the English aristocracy undertook as part of their education, a model of travel that was central to class and gender formation."[27] Grand Tour narratives were made famous by writers like Sir Francis Basset, who followed in the tradition of young upper-class British men traveling to the Continent and gaining cultural awareness and connections. A typical Grand Tour would take a young English man of letters, backed by a knowledge of Greek and Latin literature, to Paris, Venice, Rome, and Naples, and for the most financially endowed, Switzerland and Germany, all the while accompanied by their tutor. Such travels were expected by the eighteenth century, evolving as a rite of passage for the "upper crust" between international wars.[28] For example, while

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in France, a young man on the Grand Tour would be expected to pick up the manners of the bourgeois. Thus the journey represented a passage into a kind of European-focused notion of *worldliness*: fashion, manners, social hierarchies, and experience. These trends made their way into games as well, such as Roderick Roveabout's *The European Tourist: A New Game of Travel; or, A Journey through Europe* (1861). Printed by A. N. Meyers & Co., London, the colored lithograph features a race game of one hundred squares from around Europe and Eurasia (figure 3.5). It arrived packaged in a cloth-covered box that latched, and its components were extremely high quality, having been created at several different specialty print shops across Europe. The game came with a teetotum, as owners of such an expensive game would not associate themselves or their drawing rooms with dice throwing during this era. The rule book detailed each

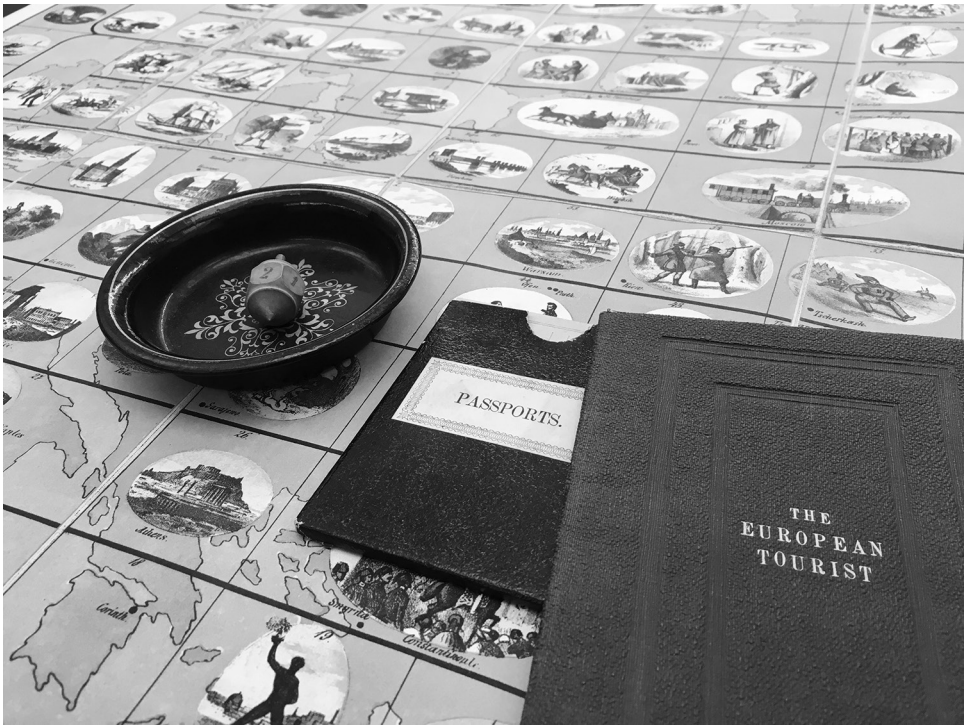


Figure 3.5
Roderick Roveabout's *The European Tourist: A New Game of Travel; or, A Journey through Europe* (1861). Packaged in a decorative cloth-covered box that closes with a brass hook, the game features a beautifully created passport, tickets, dish to spin the teetotum, and leather-bound rule book. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Ballam Collection: Games 1860s (11). Photo by Mary Flanagan.

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of the spaces depicted on the board, from Munich to Prussia to now-renamed places such as Circassia and Trebizond, a monarchy in the Byzantine Empire.

Gradually the Grand Tour became a common practice for eastern and northern Europeans, with routes farther and more fantastic. Artists such as Pomeo Batoni painted portraits of men on the tour, eventually developing a particular "tourist" style that typically depicted the subject with a walking cane and map in hand. This was the case in Batoni's portrait for Sir Francis Basset, a man from a wealthy Cornish family who undertook his tour during the War of the Bavarian Succession in the late 1770s, only to find himself in the middle of a bloody Bohemian battlefield.[29] Sarah Goldsmith argues that since wealthy aristocrats were also obliged to take on responsibilities in wartime, tourists often found themselves in conflict-ridden areas. In this light, the Grand Tour may evolved during an ambivalent mix of war, civilian travel, and colonial practices in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[30]

The Grand Tour gave the traveler the possibility for eyewitness observation, which led to authoritative narratives from those in elite high culture at the expense of Native cultures and emphasized the European explorer as an authority, savior, and saint over the global Other. Inderpal Grewal has shown that imperialist travel narratives of the nineteenth century, though promulgated by the upper classes in England, influenced *all* classes of society in both England and India, even affecting the Indian higher classes, as the stories were adopted, appropriated, and altered in India as well as Europe.[31] The binary rhetorical figures of Victorian culture were embedded in these travel narratives, as well as misrepresentations of local customs to feed dramatic Western hero tales centered on the traveler himself. The loaded distinction between Self and Other framed other elements such as nationalisms, gender, race, and class divides—concepts that still hold influence to this day.

Travel around the world was something of an obsession, from the Greek geographer Pausanias, who wrote about traveling around the known world in the second century AD, to the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan, who was the first to explicitly attempt to travel around the world in 1519 with a crew of around 270 men on five ships, dying en route in the Philippines. Although a few of Magellan's crew members completed the entire journey, historians have since concluded that the first person to complete the feat was a Malay slave named Enrique aboard the same ship. He had been taken from Malaysia to Portugal on one of Magellan's previous trips to the East Indies and was close to reaching his home from the western direction when Magellan was killed and Enrique escaped.[32]

It became something of a long-standing competition for European sailing expeditions to see who could circumnavigate the globe the quickest. The drive for a dandied

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traveler narrative, coupled with the prestige of circumnavigation, presumed race, wealth, and the privilege of time. Traveling was something that wealthy White Europeans did, and their expeditions were sometimes sponsored by states and businesses. In the race for circumnavigation, European explorers were doing more than idle racing. They were, in fact, engaged in the act of *claiming* parts of the world on behalf of the entity funding their voyages. Thus such races around the globe and the narrative of heroic exploration are tied to the building of empire as both a commercial and a state-sponsored action.

Tales of such travel were then shared back home, in drawing rooms, at dinners, and in the form of *travelogues*: illustrated travel lectures. Travelogues emerged by the eighteenth century, in part stimulated by the Grand Tour, but also by travelers returning to Europe from colonial expeditions. Travelogues were often accompanied by magic lantern shows in which painted illustrations (and later photographs) were projected onto the wall of a theater. Against the backdrop of these images, travelers would recount stories of their voyages to distant and exotic lands as a way of exhibiting status and social standing. Travelogues were the predominant form of magic lantern shows in the eighteenth century. By 1895, the Magic Lantern Society estimates that there were between 30,000 and 60,000 lantern performers in the United States alone, giving around 100,000 performances annually.[33] In the United States, impresarios like John L. Stoddard delivered upward of three thousand eloquent lectures, using photos from "around the world" that were primarily posed, such as a caricatured Japanese postman or the bejeweled foot of a princess in India.[34] That individual lecturers had such social clout may seem surprising before the dawn of recording technologies, but scholars note that Stoddard's lectures alone were heard by approximately four million people. "Even those who themselves had no expectation of taking a trip still enjoyed the illustrated travel talk because it allowed them to escape their routine life and journey vicariously," noted the archivist X. Theodore Barber.[35]

Tourism

While it was at first only the elite whose fascination with the world was narrated, eventually tourism flourished, as evidenced by the opening of the first worldwide travel agency in 1865: London's Thomas Cook. Thomas Cook was extremely effective as a travel agent for well over a hundred years, in part because the company was an early innovator in travel planning—for example, it was the first group to issue its own bank notes, a precursor to traveler's checks. Modernization in transport and a growing ability to travel felt like science-fiction-level advances to Europeans and Americans at

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the time. These popular inventions, however, also enabled Western global powers to profit even more from distant lands and peoples. The travel revolutions of steamships, canals, and trains marked a shift from an era whose Western stories about the world at large focused on exploration, and instigated a heightened, accelerated, wholesale value extraction from the world's peoples and lands. Fantastic stories of exotic lands emerged, as well as the eyewitness travelogue tales, and served as major forces in the instillation of geographical cultural curiosity, as well as an admiration for discoveries, voyages, and explorations.[36] Jules Verne, the prolific French novelist and pioneer in the science fiction genre, published *Around the World in Eighty Days* in 1873, initially appearing as a newspaper serial in *Le Temps* (a common practice in Victorian-era publishing).

In the story, the wealthy Londoner Phileas Fogg takes on a bet that he can circumnavigate the world in eighty days. Quick global travel in that epoch was nearly impossible, even for those on a Grand Tour; Phileas Fogg and his manservant meet all kinds of humorous mishaps that lead them to take various forms of unconventional transport to meet their goal. The book's events end on the very date of the last installment's publication, leading many readers to think that the voyage was happening in real time, thus creating a sense of liveness. The Fogg journey was the eleventh installment in Verne's enormous series *Extraordinary Voyages*, beginning in 1863 with the best seller *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, which allowed Verne to quit his job at the stock market to become a successful writer. His story was not a lone theme in literature, however; Jacques Arago wrote his nearly seven-hundred-page *Voyage round the World* travelogue before Verne was born.[37] Along with other books in the voyage genre, such as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), *Around the World in Eighty Days* set the scene for the development of a genre strongly influenced by colonialism, capital, myths, symbols, exotic elements, and other markers of "geographical elsewhere."[38]

The literary scholar John Rieder notes that these science fiction prototype stories emerged in the countries most heavily invested in fervid imperialist expansion in the late nineteenth century: England and France.[39] Gradually, such novels gained popularity in other countries—notably Germany, the United States, and Russia—as they too took on imperial missions.[40] The stories that emerged about adventure, romance, and global Others were inextricably linked to colonialist thinking. Edward Said pushed this idea further in his examination of works of art in their historical contexts, arguing that "the novel, as a cultural artefact of bourgeois society, and imperialism are unthinkable without each other."[41] Indeed, Said notes that the determining influence of modern Western culture is imperialism.[42]

The discourse surrounding exploration, the narrativizing of exoticism and difference, and the inculcating of Western perspectives as entitled and superior were the

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driving forces behind the ethnocentric overempowerment of everyday Europeans. This sense of superiority became a moral stance, a kind of mission that positioned European languages, races, religions, technologies, art, education, and social practices as grander and more noble than those of the colonized. In 1845, the term *manifest destiny* was coined in the United States by White thought leaders who believed it to be their divine mission to expand Christian law, democracy, and their values, including capitalism, across North America.[43] Such rhetoric was merely a variant of social Darwinism, placing the colonizer at the top of the pyramid to command the rest of the world and save the colonized from their "primitive ways," all while exploiting them and their lands. The postcolonial theorist Stuart Hall summarizes this approach with the saying "the West and the Rest,"[44] establishing the idea that the West is not a geographical construct but rather one that is *historical and conceptual*.

These extensions of empire were marketed and consumed through tourism. In 1872, Cook's tours offered an around-the-world tourist trip, offering (primarily) British people the first accessible travel to remote parts of the globe. The rest of the world thus served as the backdrop for the West's political, economic, geographic, and military domination on the one hand, and its conceptual domination on the other: the idea that the world is your oyster and lies waiting for collection was reinforced through countless narratives in novels and games. The fictionalized universes of the mid- to late nineteenth century helped enable Europeans to understand global places and spaces as extensions of privilege and empire,[45] and this newly invented *tourist gaze* shaped European perspectives on faraway lands.

The Victorian travel narrative reflects how self, society, and nation within European and colonies' (current and former) cultures were considered and comprehended. So how did these views influence games in the Victorian era and beyond? Here we will examine the very first game developed by the Ravensburger publishing house, the most influential publishing force in the European board game space.[46] Ravensburger was founded by Otto Maier in 1883 with the dual goals of entertainment and education. The publisher focused on how-to books and children's stories and, in 1884, released its first board game. The game's theme clearly falls in line with the theme of this chapter: *Reise um die Erde: Ein humoristisches geographisches Gesellschaftsspiel* (Journey around the world: A humorous geographical companionship game, 1884),[47] a board game interpretation of Jules Verne's previously mentioned novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* (figure 3.6).

The game's cover art features an "exotic" tropical port (figure 3.7). A pile of treasures supports a large map in the outdoor scene, and a European explorer points to a globe using a navigational tool. The explorer presents an air of authority, while a nearby

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Figure 3.6
Reise um die Erde: Ein humoristisches geographisches Gesellschaftsspiel (Journey around the world: A humorous geographical companionship game, 1884, reprinted 1983) positions players as various global characters racing each other around the world. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

German sailor in uniform, smoking a pipe, sits and listens. The presumably local Native person, a shirtless Indigenous man depicted with a spear, three feathers adorning his head, and a pipe, also listens attentively. In the background, a steam engine pulls a train filled with goods from behind (perhaps it is a mine?), showing the industrious extraction of materials from this far-off port city.

Curiously, a trickster figure from the commedia dell'arte, the Pulcinella, appears in the background of the scene. Pulcinella is typically portrayed as either an "upper" figure, a cunning and strategic schemer, or a "lower," coarser character, like a jester. This Pulcinella is certainly a clown, pointing at the map with a humorous expression, as though mocking the scene.[48] The character of Pulcinella is said to fear nothing: "He does not worry about consequences as he will be victorious no matter what. It is said that he is so wonderful to watch because he does what audience members would do were they not afraid of the consequences."[49] What does it mean to have this jester figure on the cover of this game? Is it simply to signal to would-be buyers that the game is fun? Or does the illustration serve as a commentary? If Pulcinella can get away with anything, does his inclusion by the cover artist imply that the colonizers felt the same way?

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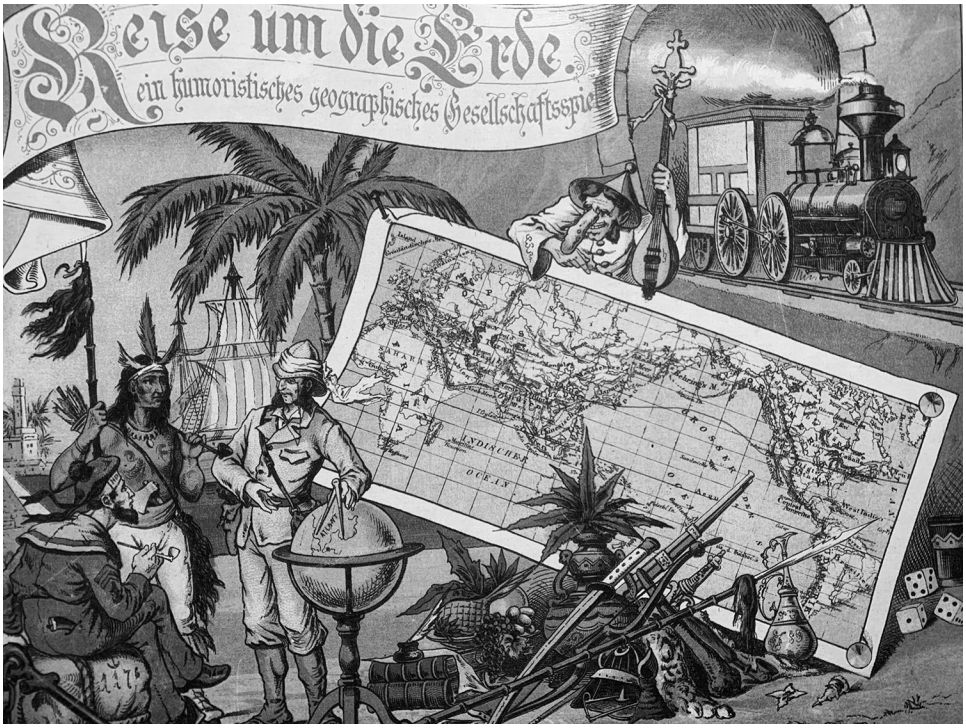


Figure 3.7
The cover of *Reise um die Erde*, featuring the Pulcinella figure. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

Ravensburger's *Reise um die Erde* board is composed of eighty spaces to match Phileas Fogg's fictional journey. At the center of the board lies a world map positioned on Asia and the Pacific. Some of the squares depict scenes of harbors, docks, and a ship calling at various ports. These seem to be images of the moment of Fogg's reception from local people and local leaders during his trip. The game box includes dice for movement around the board, coins, and player tokens. One old version of the game includes metal game tokens: painted lead figurines that depict European, African, and Native American figures, all portrayed with stereotypical representations.

Sixteen years after the English translation of Jules Verne's influential novel, an adventurous twenty-five-year-old American journalist, Elizabeth Cochrane, going by the name Nellie Bly, decided to try out Verne's eighty-day quest. In 1889 she set off on her own journey around the world to document it for the *New York World*. In a last-minute ploy for readership by a rival newspaper, Bly's journey became a race against Elizabeth Bisland, an American journalist sent to compete against Bly. On her itinerary,

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Bly stopped in Amiens, France, to meet Jules Verne at his home; her newspaper kept readers up to date with pictures and daily articles on Bly's encounters. In the end, Bly circumnavigated the globe in seventy-three days from start to finish, with days to spare to meet Jules Verne's eighty-day frame. Bly's rival, Bisland, arrived just two days later. Using ship, train, and other transportation innovations, the women beat the timing of the fictional Phileas Fogg.

The around-the-world craze was front-page news, and like Verne's story, Bly's journey also inspired a game. On January 26, 1890, the *New York World* published a commemorative board game on page 21: a goose-style spiral starting and finishing in New York. That same year, the design was published in color as a boxed board game by McLoughlin Brothers of New York, titled *Game of Round the World with Nellie Bly* (1890). Each space records Nellie's location: "28th Day: Go to Siam"; "58th Day: Golden Gate." Gamelike elements were added in typical goose game style, such as "53rd Day: Yokohama; Go Back 5 Days." In this way, the game substitutes board progress for the scale of time. Also that year, Bly's book *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days* became an American best seller.[50] The game was popular, the book was popular, and Bly became an internationally known feminist figure. The cultural impact of "around the world" narratives popularized by Jules Verne was unmistakable.

Contact Zones

How do board games mediate fictional narratives with the stereotypes with which they are bound up? The theme of around-the-world travel in game form fits in well with the travel literature, lecture circuit, and advent of Western mass tourism. This was facilitated by several global events: the first transcontinental railroad in the United States, and the opening of the Suez Canal (both in 1869), as well as the linking of the Indian railways across the subcontinent (1870). Games that promised to take players around the world provided middle-class Europeans with game enactments of the journeys found in adventure tales, travelogue lectures, and magic lantern shows.

Games themselves served as fictional points of contact between traveler and local, colonizer and colonized. Here the work of Mary Louise Pratt is useful to understand board games as sites for such an imagined mediation. Pratt uses the term *contact zones* to refer to the "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today."[51] Border cities, trading posts, ports, and other sites intensified by colonial activities create contact zones where one side has greater power, stability, or wealth than the

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other. Although such sites feel cosmopolitan on the surface, even worldly, they are unequal by their very existence.[52] The term *contact zone* may today conjure images of meeting aliens in Hollywood movies, but it is supposed to refer to first contact—such as the first contact of someone with a European mindset informed by eugenics and social Darwinism with "Native peoples." The idea of the contact zone is a key part of Western explorer narratives; descriptions of contact zones, however, tend to efface the effects that such contact might have in terms of violence, suppression, slavery, and genocide.

If we consider the tourist/traveler gaze made popular in nineteenth-century Europe, Ravensburger's *Reise um die Erde* was positioned to create an imaginary contact zone with the world at large. The mechanics were easy, the story based on one that was already popular in the literary world. *Reise um die Erde* was successful in creating a nonviolent play framework using a world-traveling tourist gaze that glossed over Western presence as a colonial presence. Scenes from Indigenous everyday lives are depicted as consumable stops on a virtual journey, and these depictions serve to intensify difference.

The French play theorist Roger Caillois detailed how new Western urban lifestyles in an increasingly globalized world were far different from those societies viewed by the megatourist of the nineteenth century, and because of this gap, including traditional global practices in a game would simply serve to intensify any differences and distances between Western urban experience and Indigenous cultures. Caillois argues that specific societies may not operate under the West's belief in systemized competition, personal attainment and mobility, persistence, and good luck. These are all Western values and characteristics that are exemplified in games like the game of the goose, where a combination of "merit and chance, *agôn* and *alea*, would rule."[53] Perhaps overessentializing, Caillois was determined to compare the West and its focus on personal ambition to other global societies where fate, family, or divinities might hold more sway in everyday life; in doing so, however, he used a European framework as the basis for analysis, rather than change the methods, scope and validities of knowledge making. This "imposed" style of thinking was laid out clearly in V. Y. Mudimbe's book *The Invention of Africa*, where he notes that until recently, "Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order."[54] Mudimbe goes on to question the validity of this unspoken process: "Does this mean that African Weltanschauungen [worldviews] and African traditional systems of thought are unthinkable and cannot be made explicit within the framework of their own rationality? My own claim is that thus far the ways in which they have been evaluated and the means used to explain them relate

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to theories and methods whose constraints, rules, and systems of operation suppose a non-African epistemological locus."[55]

Two sets of ideological trajectories thus play out in games like *Reise um die Erde*: one of the game embodying "progress" as players consume locations along a journey; the other of local lives that are imagined as unchanging, backward, primitive, and there to be consumed. The fact of a contact zone is not the issue; to thinkers like Aimé Césaire, it is the *how* of it: referring to the colonization of Africa, Césaire writes that the "great historical tragedy of Africa has been not so much that it was too late in making contact with the rest of the world, as the manner in which that contact was brought about; that Europe began to propagate at a time when it had fallen into the hands of the most unscrupulous financiers and captains of industry."[56] Contact was followed by a dismantling of the social order.

It is important to also note that difference is emphasized by frequent depictions of "savages" in the explorer narrative. V. Y. Mudimbe has suggested that expedition reports follow a familiar narrative, one that makes visible the line "separating savagery from civilization," something that has been highlighted, Mudimbe writes, since the Baroque period. He notes that the discourse about "savages" is one "in which an explicit political power presumes the authority of a scientific knowledge and vice-versa. Colonialism becomes its project and can be thought of as a duplication and a fulfillment of the power of Western discourses on human varieties."[57] As we will show in the next several chapters, the construction of the global Other still permeates both the narrative framing and the procedural logic of contemporary games.

Evolving the Tourist Gaze

The tourist gaze has done nothing but accelerate in the roughly 140 years since the publication of Verne's fictional travelogue and Ravensburger's game, including many return visits to Verne's story. The postwar interest in global tourism was in full force by 1956, when Verne's book was produced as a Hollywood blockbuster, which won five Academy Awards. Producer Michael Todd also created a US board game of the same name, *Around the World in 80 Days* (1957), published by Transogram for CBS. The game box featured photographs of the film's all-star cast, including David Niven, Cantinflas, Shirley MacLaine, and Robert Newton (with cameo appearances by Buster Keaton, Frank Sinatra, Peter Lorre, and Luis Miguel Dominguín). The film was arguably an exemplar of Hollywood global travelogue. With a running time exceeding three hours and a built-in intermission, the epic film was, like the game, one big movement

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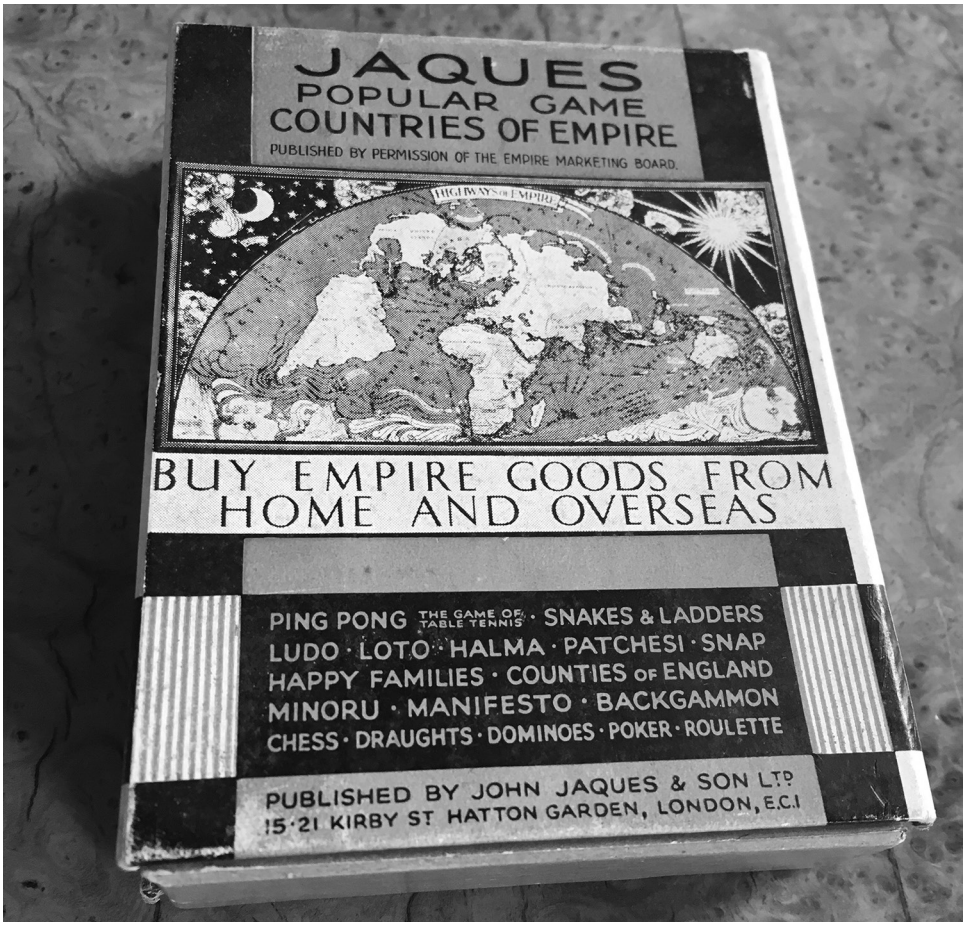


Figure 3.8
Countries of Empire (1930s) entreats players to be loyal citizens and buy goods from the empire. The game depicted British colonies for players to collect. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Card Games 6 (6) subsect. Twentieth Century Card Games and Ballam Collection: Games: Jaques (8). Photo by Mary Flanagan.

of enculturation, featuring footage from around the world made to look as though the scenes were set in the nineteenth century. The stereotypical images reinforced in this film are similar to the kinds of imagery used to promote the pursuit of "authentic experiences" in global tourism even today.

The tourist gaze is a tricky phenomenon: embodied by this 1956 film, and in the much earlier around-the-world games, visual motifs demonstrate how nations,

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Figure 3.9
Popular stereotypes are reinforced in the set collection game *Countries of Empire* (1930s). In this image, New Zealand is depicted as idyllic and empty, there for the settling; the Irish Free State is crowded, with farmers living closely among their animals. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Card Games 6 (6) subsect. Twentieth Century Card Games and Ballam Collection: Games: Jaques (8). Photo by Mary Flanagan.

non-Western cultures in particular, are represented with colonial iconography and generic notions of exoticism.

Many times, the tourist gaze and the colonial gaze were collapsed into one for the purpose of propaganda linked to mass entertainment. Take the game box for *Jaques Popular Game: Countries of Empire*, published by John Jaques and Son, London, in the 1930s. The box literally dictates that consumers should "buy empire goods from home

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and overseas," imploring consumers to actively participate in colonialism however they can and support empire goods. The game is deeply entwined with the aforementioned efforts of Britain's Empire Marketing Board from the 1920s, which created hundreds of films, radio shows, lectures, and even "empire shops," retail stores promoting trade and romanticizing the acquisition of goods from the empire's "exotic" locales. The film unit, led by the documentary filmmaker John Grierson, created films like *Song of Ceylon* and *Wheatfields of the Empire*—pieces crafted to play in cinemas as shorts. Because such a massive push affected all levels of society and was funded with over a million pounds a year, a number of commercial goods were made to promote similar messaging. One can find many board games created under the general theme of empire loyalty from this time period.

The cards in *Jaques Popular Game: Countries of Empire* deploy well-known images from promotional posters made by the Empire Marketing Board as card illustrations (figure 3.8). The cards are shuffled and dealt to three or more players, and the object of the game is to collect complete sets of a colony. A "key card" details the names of the cards in a set, and the rest are picture cards. For example, South Africa's set consists of "Orange Growing" and "Gold Mining." British West Africa features "Cocoa Growing," "Manganese Ore Mining," "Mahogany," and "Groundnuts." Players ask for the cards they are searching for, and other players, if they have those cards, must give them up. With this "guess and give" or "go fish" mechanic, the game sets up each player as a determined entity driven to collect (or master) all the resources useful to the empire from a particular colony. Thus a colony becomes a knowable and controllable collection of raw materials for industry, with "exotic" scenes and people thrown in for visual flavor. When a complete set is collected, it is saved on the table, and play continues. In some alternate rules provided in the rule book, "any player relating a fact, or describing scenery, manufactures, etc., connected with his card, receives an additional counter from the pool." Again, players rehearse the recasting of colonized places and landscapes as consumable resources.

The images are important to examine in depth, for they provide a snapshot of twentieth-century colonial depictions of the world. Some images, such as "Sugar Growing" (British West Indies set), show a nearly photographic image of an abundant grove of canes stretching as far as the eye can see. The colonies of Australia and New Zealand are represented, along with the Irish Free State (the name of Ireland from the end of the Irish War of Independence in 1921 until 1937). Every set of a region's images is problematic in a variety of ways: erasure of cultures, depictions of stereotypes, and a focus on consumables for the empire to possess are just a few of the issues in this card deck. The images from the Irish Free State cards, for example, depict crowded farms

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and people wearing rough clothing, reinforcing the stereotype that the Irish lived with animals in dirty shanties.[58] (See figure 3.9 for a comparison in depictions of the Irish Free State versus New Zealand.) The depiction of the Irish family in "Poultry Farming" is close to, if not entirely, drawn as Blackface, an association meant to deride the Irish with a racist stereotype that disparaged Black people and rose to popularity after the end of the American Civil War. Blackface was prevalent in the United States well into the twentieth century, but particularly in the United Kingdom.[59]

Exoticism and tokenism flourish in hundreds if not thousands of European and American board games, and as authors, we are frustrated not only by this fact but by the knowledge that this book will invariably leave out many important examples. Many of the games before 1950 took the form of goose games, but not all. One particularly ripe display of pre–World War II colonial expression is *Bricks of the Empire* (1930), a question-and-answer quiz-style game made during a time of increased pressure to strengthen support for the British colonies. The game is deeply entwined with the efforts of the Empire Marketing Board, whose initiatives were made unnecessary in 1932 when The British Empire Economic Conference created a system of trade protection across the empire. Nevertheless, the Empire Marketing Board was extremely active in creating films, radio shows, lectures, school tours, and retail outlets known as "empire shops." All of these promoted a "buy empire" mentality and romanticized the production of goods coming from exotic locales as being the born right of a British person. The cover art for *Bricks of the Empire* offers a racialized, essentialized hodgepodge of stereotypical imagery through various time periods of the empire. Framing the cover, a White 1930s British couple looms over a collection of people, presumably meant to represent the people of various continents, as though they are conjured by the couple's fantasy to travel across the empire (figure 3.10).

The cover is really bad. The contents of the game itself, however, are possibly worse in that they function to articulate enculturation, sometimes in subtle ways. The mechanics essentially constitute a matching game: one player draws a blue ticket containing a question and reads it aloud, and players scan their cardboard grid cards, bingo style, to see if they have an answer that might match (figure 3.11). The first player to get the answer right wins the matching ticket. A wrong answer means forfeiting a ticket that the player has already gained. The player with the most tickets after all questions have been called out is the winner.

An "empire bingo" game sounds rather bland, and it is. At first glance, one might think it is exclusively a fact-memorizing game. One answer, for example, is "London, with a population of about 7 1/2 million," and players would presumably match that to a question such as "What is the Capital of the United Kingdom?" Another answer

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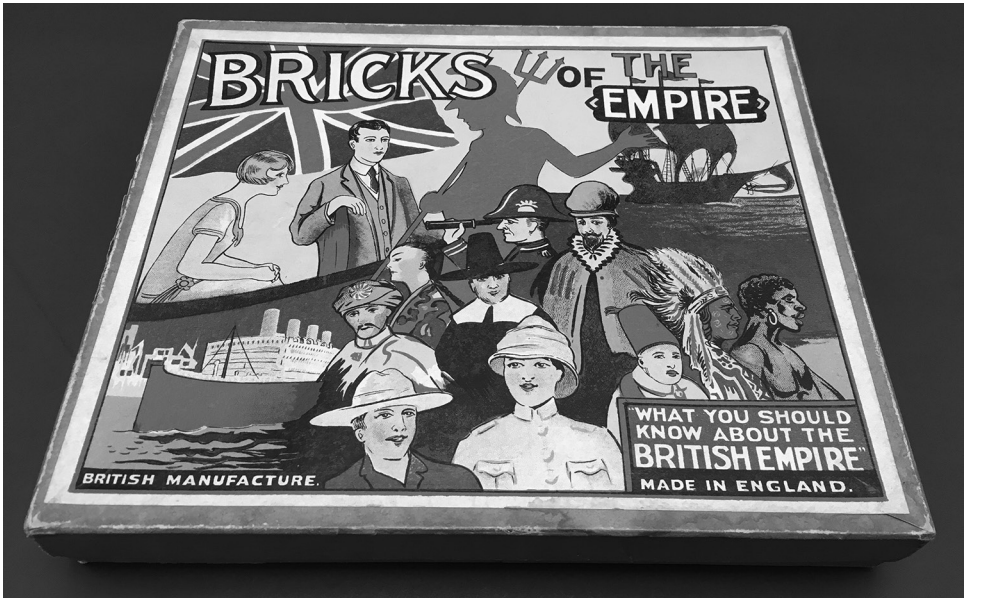


Figure 3.10
The problematic box cover for *Bricks of the Empire* (1930) caricatures global races; the game itself promotes insidious stereotypes using turns of language. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Ballam Collection: Games: Roberts (5). Photo by Mary Flanagan.

reads, "The Prairies are equal in size to France, Germany, Spain and Italy all together," and the question might have to do with North America. The game seems only to present dry facts—until one examines all the content on the board, where language is used to insidiously slip notions of White supremacy into the game. In discussing video games, Soraya Murray has noted that digital games "represent powerful invocations of the lived world in playable form, which offer insights into the core fears, fantasies, hopes and anxieties of a given culture in a specific cultural context."[60] We can consider board games through this lens as well: the cultural context of this game is White Britain reflecting on an empire that was, at the time, diminishing in size. Thus, in a way, the game expresses cultural anxiety regarding a potential loss of mastery, and the quiz game format makes the data about the Empire knowable and ownable.

Murray has asked deep questions of digital games that almost appear like one of the game's quiz cards:

> How can whiteness possess the ordinariness of universalism, while also assuming a traumatic narrative of alterity and disenfranchisement? This double-signification is connected to the effort to preserve whiteness from denaturing it to the point that it becomes specified (and

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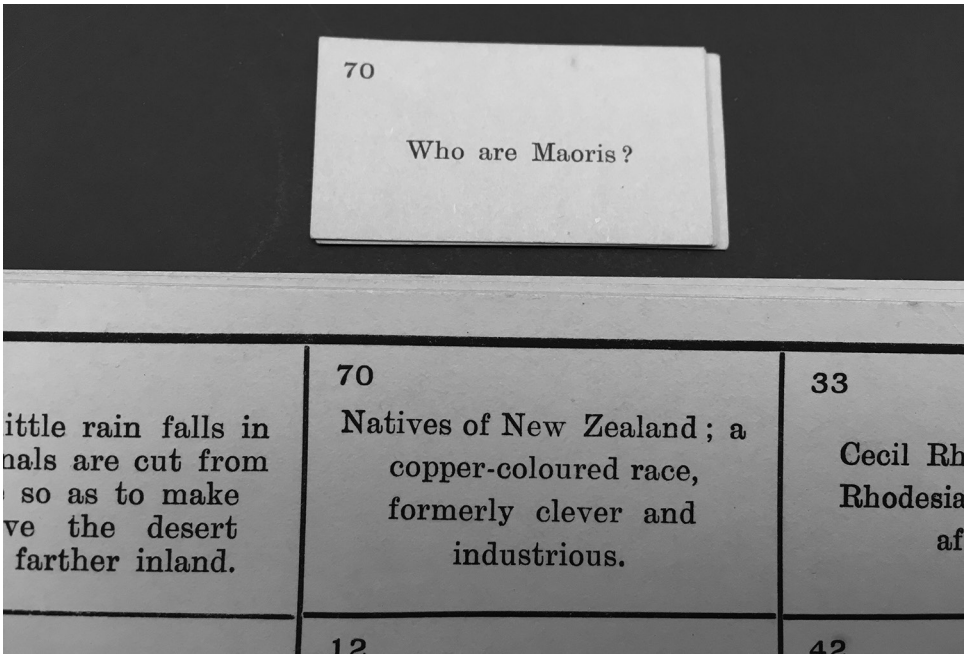


Figure 3.11
Bricks of the Empire (1930) trivia fosters insidious stereotypes supporting White supremacy by mixing facts (Māori people are from a place) with the Western name for their land, a description of skin color to highlight othering, and a condescending comment about the "formerly" clever and industrious colonial subject. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Ballam Collection: Games: Roberts (5). Photo by Mary Flanagan.

> therefore non-dominant) rather than universal. This is mobilized, at least in part, by a representational logic ordered around the normativity of whiteness, and a phobic response to difference. Presented again and again in games as cultural forms are expressions of whiteness as both normative and under duress, unremarkable and exalted, deserving of, and denied that which was deserved. That is to say, these games must be understood as the visual politics of dominant culture and therefore, at the time in which they were made, an expression of the totalizing logics of whiteness.[61]

Bricks of the Empire's combination of dry Eurocentric facts, editorial commentary intimating the colonizer's power, and cover art all work to "normalize whiteness," where players in the game "play whiteness" as well.[62] The connections drawn by the questions and answers are rehearsals of White power and colonized people's inferiority, and they result in a significant project of enculturation of British superiority at the expense of colonized people.

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Conclusion

Board games featuring global locations appear to bring the masses into the role of the explorer, adventurer, and hero in a faraway land, right at their dining room table. The player inhabits and represents the power of the empire by acting out travel narratives, imagining the game as a connection between a fictionalized story of elsewhere and places in the real world. Like Jules Verne's mix of the real world and fantasy, board games, too, provide a site for enacting new hero stories. The challenge is that these stories are anything but neutral or fairly representative. Board games create fictional, idealized contact zones that whitewash the acts involved with, and the consequences of, colonial logics. In their own way, nineteenth-century travel games served as propaganda tools for a way of thinking and being that benefited European sensibilities: being a colonial power was something to play with. In fact, board games can create a misleading sense of the Other, an imagined contact zone where player choices, movements, and chance interact with game themes, visual depictions, and mechanics to establish and reinforce a colonial tourist gaze on a consumable world.

In this chapter, we have examined how early European board games categorized and divided the world, evolving to reflect notions of empire. We touched on social Darwinism and missionary roles that were used to justify colonialist attitudes, and discussed the relationship between European Grand Tour travelogues and the colonial origins of tourism. We introduced the notion of contact zones and detailed the importance of the emerging literature of science fiction around the crossover novel-to-game *Around the World in Eighty Days*. And we stopped to unpack how stereotypes are formed, to prepare us for the next chapter, where stereotypes flourish in European board games.

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Playing Oppression

The Legacy of Conquest and Empire in Colonialist Board Games

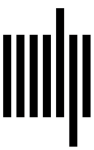
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4 Trading Excuses

> Colonialism hardly ever exploits the whole of a country. It contents itself with bringing to light the natural resources, which it extracts, and exports to meet the needs of the mother country's industries, thereby allowing certain sectors of the colony to become relatively rich. But the rest of the colony follows its path of underdevelopment and poverty, or at all events sinks into it more deeply.
>
> —Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

In the previous chapters, we looked at how board games reflect and reinforce the cultural discourse of the context they emerge in. We have seen how European colonial empires used board games to justify and glorify the colonial endeavor through education and enculturation. We have looked at the rise of the tourist gaze in games, and the burgeoning interest in colonial locales and colonialist ways of understanding them across European games from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century. We have looked at some of the intellectual currents that fed Eurocentric logics in science and in the understanding of space, and we have explored the idea of contact zones.

A significant number of the board games we have found in European and US libraries and archives could be called didactic and colonialist—or at least nationalistic—enculturating players with the dominant values of the time and place. Many of our earlier examples came from England and France; in this chapter, we focus on German games. While we know that similar games promoting colonialist ideals also existed in other European nations engaged in colonizing projects, Germany plays a singularly important role in the emergence of the new golden age of board games we live in today, and therefore insists on our attention.

In this chapter, we explore some emblematic German games as they shift the script in terms of intent, representation, and even mechanics at the turn of the twentieth century. As discussed in the last chapter, *Reise um die Erde* (Journey around the world,

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1884) signified the beginning of what would become the key European game publisher, Ravensburger. Germany had also established a strong tradition of wargaming as part of a militaristic culture, as well as a growing interest in colonies. Outside the game space, commercial advertising was filled with *Kolonialwaren*: images of exotic places and people appeared on packages of coffee, tea, chocolate, and shoe polish, growing increasingly racist in nature.[1] Simply put, *Kolonialwaren* helped normalize exoticism and racism throughout advertising, literature, and eventually cinema.[2] Popular novels depicted adventurous White heroes fighting "savage foes" in jungles or riding camels in the Sahara. *Völkerschauen*, human exhibits, brought people from around the world to perform everyday tasks in degrading carnival displays.[3] As horrific as these seem to us today, in her book *The German Discovery of the World: Renaissance Encounters with the Strange and Marvelous*, Christine Johnson argues that the accessible, sensationalist nature of these mass culture shows and events demonstrated that a wide audience was eager to comprehend, consume, and understand the faraway lands and people of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. She writes that German Renaissance scholars "chose to stress their ability to understand and control the overseas environment, not out of fear or anxiety about the unknown, but because it was intellectually and financially rewarding to do so," and therefore imagined the world as familiar, comprehensible spaces that could be susceptible to European control.[4] Shaping Germans' everyday conceptions of faraway people and places from childhood was instrumental in sustaining imperialist mentalities and Germanic claims to cultural superiority. It was common to use magazines and postcards to communicate these messages, but also games.[5] After all, Germans believed that children's leisure time should be directed toward a goal.[6]

Germany published its share of colonial-themed board games aimed at children. *Deutschland's Kolonien-Spiel* (Game of the German colonies) was one such example of a popular cultural artifact. The game, recorded as published in 1890, offers a fifty-three-space exploration of German colonies that mimics the German worldview of "bestowing 'civilization' on remote places. Colonialism—with its mix of geography, history, exotic peoples, and cultural superiority—was ripe for educational exploration."[7] Germany established colonies later than other European powers and, taking a cue from Britain, built a large navy to support its expansionist quest abroad. Games about German territories had an adventurous appeal that also served to support state interests; in fact, a colonial lobby in Germany generated pro-colonial fantasies in films and games for at least twenty years.[8] *Deutschland's Kolonien-Spiel* was created during the intense buildup of the German Empire, and the game's rule text suggests that the public was

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keen to participate in the colonial fervor. German expansion through encapsulating neighboring states is represented on the board's map.

The game first transports players from Germany to Togo, a region seized by Germany in 1884 that is now known as the republics of Ghana and Togo, and then to Cameroon, invaded that same year under Otto von Bismarck's German Empire. The imperial government started massive plantations and used forced local labor to build the railroad network in the region.

The journey continues to German Southwest Africa, Cape Town, German East Africa, Java (a Dutch island colony), and a part of New Guinea labeled Kaiser Wilh. Land (Kaiser-Wilhelmsland, then on to the Marshall Islands, and finally to the German-protected area of Shandong, China.[9] The game was clearly intended to arouse interest in nineteenth-century German colonies across the world, particularly among German youth. The instructions for the game state explicitly: "A journey through Germany's colonies: The lively interest with which German youth are attached to our colonies is shown anew every day. This game, in which we are going on a big colonial journey, will therefore be welcomed with joy. The number of participants is unlimited."

On closer inspection, the game is cut from the same cloth as Ravensburger's *Reise um Die Erde* (Journey around the world). On the board of *Reise um Die Erde*, a map occupies the center and is surrounded by twenty illustrated vignettes with fifty-three goose-style spaces for the track (figure 4.1).[10] Similar to *Reise um Die Erde*, *Deutschland's Kolonien-Spiel* includes dice for players to move around the board, coins, painted lead figurines, and rules that specify how to reach the finish. As in goose games, players give funds to the kitty. A director of the expedition is chosen from among the players, then given a medal as a symbol of the player's dignity and importance. Players choose their game tokens—in the version of the game housed at the Getty Research Institute, the figurines are all White European explorers, explicitly placing the player within the imagined player role of the Western colonist, pith helmet and all.[11]

The pictorial vignettes in *Deutschland's Kolonien-Spiel* depict German-claimed territories, from Europe to both coasts of Africa and across Southeast Asia. Some scenes portray fictional versions of *contact zones*, Mary Louise Pratt's term describing the social spaces where cultures encounter each other in situations of asymmetrical power, such as colonial relations.[12] In some scenes, European and Indigenous people are shown meeting; in others, groups of Indigenous people perform a range of everyday tasks: in Cameroon, for example, men row a longboat, with a presumably German man, wearing a top hat, standing under a sun umbrella in the middle of a boat. In Togo, a Western man is carried by Indigenous people in a shaded hammock. Three Nama Khoe men,

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Figure 4.1
In *Deutschland's Kolonien-Spiel* (Game of the German colonies, 1890), the box interior shows a map of German colonial interests, where player pieces are depicted as White explorers wearing pith helmets. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (acc. no. 2004.PR.67*).

from a region occupying today's Namibia and South Africa, are shown preparing food with a dead antelope nearby; one smokes a long pipe. Space twenty-nine depicts men holding spears and shields, with the text explaining that the "traveler is wounded by hostile crowds, and has to go back to 19."

A scene from the Solomon Islands (formerly the German "protectorate," today Papua New Guinea) displays an Indigenous group dancing around a prostrate person, with some of the dancers wearing masks (see the game detail in figure 4.2). This depiction is described in the rules near space thirty-nine as "Solomon Islands; war dance of the natives. The traveler donates two stamps." One should be highly skeptical of any description of a local practice, for invariably negative biases are present—the scene of dancers engaging in a "war dance" fits the stereotype, whether or not the description is accurate. The artist depicted local clothing and environments as exotic Other, and since the game was created amid a proliferation of racist imagery, one must regard all depictions as questionable.

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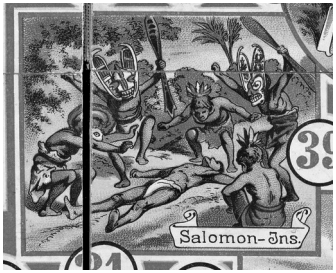


Figure 4.2
The Solomon Islands scene from *Deutschland's Kolonien-Spiel* (Game of the German colonies, 1930) very likely misrepresents a cultural practice to demonstrate how "dangerous" a Native population might be from a White perspective. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (acc. no. 2004.PR.67*).

Designers of a contemporary zine-based game, a Southeast Asian–themed fantasy and world-building project called *A Thousand Thousand Islands* (2017–), offer thoughts on misinterpreted depictions like this. Mun Kao and Zedeck Siew approached their game with anticolonial research and writing methods and note the questionable facts inherited by colonial subjects.

> We've ding-donged about this a lot: How do you portray a mythic history when your only sources are "objective" facts—colonial-era records or epigraphies? We read and consumed as much as we could, but also read with suspicion and with a sense of slyness. . . . The conception of objective history is a modern notion. Epic poems in Sanskrit are not actually historical texts; not in the sense of the Western "What happened?" That's why the use of the word "myth-history" is very useful to us. It does give us a kind of leeway to imagine. A very big reference for me when I write stories about the past in this region, is a very, very, very colonial text called Malay Magic, an ethnographic work by Walter William Skeat. It's the least woke colonial source. So it's a collection of stories about magic, or magical practices and magical folkloric practices, in the Malay Peninsula. Then he's a colonial administrator, so he rubs shoulders with the local princes of the various states, and the Malay gentry. He says, "Oh, so-and-so says that such-and-such person said that this was the story." You get the sense that he's looking at it all like, "What are all these strange and weird things that these savages believe?"[13]

Most disturbing of all the problems with *Deutschland's Kolonien-Spiel* is its extremely racist and degrading box cover (figure 4.3). The cover art exaggerates and caricatures Indigenous people as somehow looking for leadership, while depicting the White German sailor with cherubic pink cheeks, taking colonized people by the hand and leading the way "forward."

This game is far from the only example of a pro-colonial German game. Otto Maier also published *In die deutschen Kolonien: Reisespiel* (Journey to the German colonies:

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Figure 4.3
The racist and degrading cover of *Deutschland's Kolonien-Spiel* (Game of the German colonies, 1930) misrepresents the innocence of the German sailor. The sailor appears young, almost child-like, while the primitivized caricatures depict the Other as brutal and threatening yet seeking leadership. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (acc. no. 2004.PR.67*).

Travel game, before 1914), which follows in the same vein. *Durch Deutschlands Kolonien* (Through Germany's colonies, 1905) also took players on a tour of Germany's colonies, explaining their importance. *Durch die Kolonien* (Through the colonies, 1920) featured an island—vaguely reminiscent of *Die Siedlers von Catan* (*Settlers of Catan*, 1995)—to settle, depicting Native people producing goods.

In addition to these goose-style games, many other kinds of games used racist imagery and themes. *Deutschland braucht Kolonien* (Germany needs colonies, 1936–1937) was a trivia game, likely based on the picture book of the same name depicting the world's people and places. As we discussed in chapter 3, the quiz game format makes for a disturbing mode of enculturation as "correct" racist attitudes are reinforced. In

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Das Kamerun-Spiel oder King Bell und seine Leute (The Cameroon game or King Bell and his people), published for Christmas in 1885 by Moritz Ruhl in Leipzig, we find one of these quiz-style trivia games that was billed as a family experience.[14] The game featured sixteen "finely executed Negro portraits in color print on cardboard and just as many name and event cards" in the box.[15] Players are given one of these racist, caricatured portraits of Duala people, with the remaining cards *auctioned off* to the players who have money tokens. Players are either awarded or must pay penalties on the character's behavior described in the rules in relation to event cards. For example, one card reads, "John Prisso—Is sentenced to death for inciting the tribesmen to rebel against the Germans, but later pardoned for the banishment and payment of 10 tokens."[16] Another card details character actions, such as "performs a song in the Negro language and receives 2 stamps for the pleasure of the Europeans present," or a character "supported the German soldiers in the fight against the rebellious negroes in the most sincere way, which is recognized by the payment of 8 tokens." Through collecting the tokens as currency, German players rehearse a projection of the subjugated people that naturalizes binary reactions ("good Native versus bad Native," "German benevolence or justice," and so on) and rationalizes colonized peoples' expected subservient and obedient behavior.

This game is further saturated with racist attitudes toward the Native Cameroonians, the Duala, with its reward-and-punish game mechanics. The characters in the game are portrayed either as obedient subjects and supporters of the German occupiers or as dangerous outlaws and thieves. The Duala's ritual practices are also described in binaries: they are either amusing and thus the subject of ridicule, or dangerous examples of occultism and witchcraft.[17]

Before moving on, we wish to pause and acknowledge the frustration and disgust that the subject at hand may impose on you, the reader. Some of the games just discussed were especially atrocious.

Previously discussed concepts like the tourist gaze, putting the player in a colonizer role, and reinforcing racism are present in *Das Kamerun-Spiel* and *Deutschland's Kolonien-Spiel*. These two games also exemplify the concept of enculturation as young Germans rehearse statements about German superiority, military might, technological progress, and generosity. The key point to take away from these examples is that games like these were not bizarre one-offs or anomalies but rather part of a substrate of games produced in nineteenth-century Europe with content that promoted and celebrated empire, expansion, colonialism, and racism. These games provided fictional contact zones: pseudocolonial encounters for young Germans enculturated to look for the uncivilized in the non-European world.[18]

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The images and texts in these games are abhorrent. But one of our discoveries in interrogating game history is that racist or colonialist imagery, player tokens, and language are only part of a complex problem in unpacking the role of board games in promoting colonial thinking. Games are a unique medium that centrally relies on player actions. As the games we are analyzing are gradually becoming more complex, we have to bring the harder-to-spot, insidious game mechanics into focus to capture what happens when these cultural artifacts hit the table. Representation is only part of a much larger problematic logic at work.

We have described how game mechanics in trivia- or quiz-style games and track-based games have functioned as an important source of problematic messaging. We will continue to present cases where the roles of player interaction, mechanics, and the dynamics of play need to be explored as much as, if not more than, the other elements that constitute colonial games.

Nazi-Era German Games

What happens when the colonial gaze turns inward? Looking at what happens when the colonial mentality *returns home*, Aimé Césaire wrote passionately about "how colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism."[19] Frantz Fanon asked, "On the plane of human rights, what is fascism if not colonialism when rooted in a traditionally colonialist country?"[20] Fanon and other postcolonial theorists examined the psychological twists necessary to justify European colonialism and showed that the rise of European fascism was a direct result of the colonial mentality returning home and exacting its binary, dehumanizing rhetoric on local populations through policing and other institutional programs. In other words, colonial mindsets and fascism are one and the same.

During the rise of the Nazi Party (or its full name, the National Socialist German Worker's Party) in Germany, toys and games were used to promote a growing fascist ideology. German public messaging for pro-Hitler stances began in earnest in the 1930s, using a multipronged approach to appeal both to adults and to children as part of the Nazis' ideological machine. In the early twentieth century, Germany was the world leader in children's toy production, churning out toy soldiers, play weapons, cannons, airplanes, battleships, and board games up until World War II.[21] The production of games and toy soldiers in Germany peaked in the Nazi era, when record numbers of Elastolin figures (literally, three million little green army men) were produced. Germany excelled in the production of military-related amusements.

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Presenting a world with norms and values and generating player mindsets are things board games do very well, and they proved to be useful ways to enculturate youth through the Nazi propaganda machine. The Nazis controlled all media—newspapers, books, magazines, theater, radio, films, and toy production—and created a plethora of board games, most of which are now lost because they were destroyed after the war by law. Extant examples are either in museum collections or in the hands of private paper and ephemera collectors. Popular Nazi games included board games depicting the everyday life of soldiers, such as *Oh, welche Lust Soldat zu sein!* (Oh, what fun to be a soldier!, 1937), Hitler's program for constructing the autobahns *Die Reichsautobahnen* (The Reich's autobahn, 1938), *Volk ans Gewehr* (People at arms, 1938), and *Das Große Belagerungsspiel* (The great siege game, 1939); the war-themed board games often featured swastikas and nationalist imagery. *Flieger Alarm!* (Airmen alert!, 1942) featured scenes from both military and domestic life. A 1939 game, *Radio Sende Spiel* (Radio broadcast game), featured a radio network. *Mit "Prien" gegen England* (With "Prien" against England, 1940), an anti-England game framed around the infamous U-boat commander Günther Prien, featured players as submarines sinking Allied ships.[22] The Nazi production *Jagd auf Kohlenklau* (Hunt for coal theft, 1944) was part of a propaganda campaign launched in 1942 to use games to encourage tighter social control. In this case, players hunt down the thief among them who has hoarded wartime resources.

Nazi-era propaganda influenced children and the public against people of Jewish descent in insidious ways, promoting anti-Jewish sentiment and making it an everyday norm in books, films, and radio, and especially in toys and games. Compared to posters, postcards, or comics—all used to message to children—the time that players invest in games, the ability of games to engage the imagination and fantasy, and games' ability to set norms for groups playing together all played a part in the choice of board games as particularly apt Nazi propaganda tools. Alongside the government-sponsored propaganda, German manufacturers themselves used the national anti-Semitic atmosphere to promote game sales. The Günther & Company game *Juden Raus!* (Jews out!, 1936), for example, infamously depicted the discrimination against, and deportation of, Jewish people and is described by the game studies scholars Andrew Morris-Friedman and Ulrich Schädler as "history's most infamous board game."[23] It was, indeed, a commercial game that tasked players with moving Jewish members of a town out of the city limits and then sending Jews off on trains (presumably to camps).[24] Many other Nazi games depicting anti-Jewish activities and sentiments likely existed, which in turn influenced broader cultural discourses, further normalizing anti-Semitism.

In 1943, a law prohibiting the domestic production of toys for the German market owing to a crunch on resources was the first step in silencing the Nazi propaganda

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machine's toys and games efforts. The second step was the ban on the use of Nazi symbols after the war, and the mass German sense of collective shame (*Kollektivschuld*) about the atrocities of World War II, so named by the psychoanalyst Carl Jung in 1945. International anti-German sentiment, or Germanophobia, intensified, with twelve million Germans expelled from other countries at the end of the war, the largest shift of European people in modern history; this anti-German sentiment helped ruin the German toy industry.[25] It is clear from the examples of Nazi-influenced playthings that the politicians and policy makers understood that toys and games for children were useful to intentionally spread militaristic, colonial, and hateful ideologies to German youth, and to indoctrinate a generation into patriotism, militarism, racism, and self-sacrifice for the cause.[26] After World War II, many German board games and Nazi toys were destroyed, but a few of these games survived, perhaps because of a sentimental attachment to childhood games despite their despicable themes.[27] Without these game artifacts, it would be difficult to believe the level of hate-filled propaganda directed at children in the guise of *educational* toys.

Terrible examples of an internal nationalist use of games as tools to promote and normalize racism unfortunately exist outside of German history as well. Morris-Friedman and Schädler look to two American games with racist imagery against African Americans: *The Game of Ten Little N** (ca. 1895) and *Snake Eyes* (ca.1930).[28] These games use racist depictions, but the gameplay is less direct in relating the game mechanics to racism, unlike those of the game *Gunsmoke* (1958, by Lowell Toy, based on the American television program), which, in addition to racist imagery, uses mechanics to impose an inherent bias. The game rules in *Gunsmoke* promote the empowerment of the White Cowboy player role. Cowboys must move one of their Cowboy pieces from Fort Riley to Dodge City, while the player playing the Native American role must capture the fort with six of their pieces. The Cowboy pieces can be captured, remaining in play, but the Native American pieces can be killed and taken out of the game. The game designers opted for an unbalanced game to reinforce racist and colonialist attitudes through game mechanics. One might think that the blatant racist depictions in nineteenth-century games had vanished by the mid-twentieth century, but plenty of game artifacts prove the contrary is true.

Mechanical Inventions

Few of the commercially produced eighteenth- and nineteenth-century games that promoted empire were, at their core, strategy games; rather, most games relied on existing easy game mechanics of track movement and the rolling of dice or chance. For the most

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part, strategy games emerged from a specialized wargaming tradition that originated in Prussia in the early 1800s. They were not commercialized until the heyday of war toys hit Europe at the turn of the twentieth century, with Germany leading the way. This boom in war board game commercialization had several causes. The twentieth century witnessed the rise of mass-produced toys as children, childhood, and domestic domains became *markets*, and the rise of industrialization created a managerial class in Europe and the United States in which families were not directly engaged in business activities and had leisure time. Additionally, the rise of militarism across European countries influenced the development of war toys and playthings, as did Germany's scouting movement for youth. Since no universal collection of all board games exists, board game scholars can only assemble piecemeal histories, as the products themselves are ephemeral in nature: paper-based, handed-down, or thrown-out domestic artifacts, with records often lost in times of conflict. From the scant extant examples available, our conclusion is that strategic, spatial board gaming emerged in Germany as part of youth movements—essentially, Germany's version of the Boy Scouts, which instilled patriotism, a war mentality, and colonial thinking.

Early strategy board games were tied to the ideologies behind youth military education movements like the Bund Jungdeutschland (BJD) movement (Young Germany Federation), a group of civic youth organizations that focused on youth military education after the unification of German states under Germany's last emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II. Raising patriots was a priority for war-prone Germany, and various scout-style organizations were instrumental in maintaining Germany's military prowess. Parents were directed to raise their children with a warlike spirit and insist, from an early age, on the love for the fatherland—"unselfish love for the fatherland and German people, a belief in the justice of their cause, the unshakeable hope in victory," which likely involved sacrifice.[29] Journals, newspapers, handbooks, and yearbooks focused on boys' activities, and the concept of sharing through such publications an ideal German boy's life emerged. One such publication was *Der gute Kamerad* (The good comrade), a hardcover yearbook filled with drawings, activities, stories, and games that portrayed pro-war, patriotic attitudes.

The capture of land is the theme of the game *Die Kolonisten* (The colonists), included as a folded insert in *Der gute Kamerad* in 1910/1911 (figure 4.4). Players start where the colonizer begins, the harbor, and use strips of colored paper pinned to the board to outline and capture squares by surrounding a square in their own color. Some squares are more valuable than others to capture, the most valuable being goldfields, then farms, then transportation and commercial facilities. The game clearly promotes colonial attitudes, from its emphasis on capturing territory to its imagery featuring German

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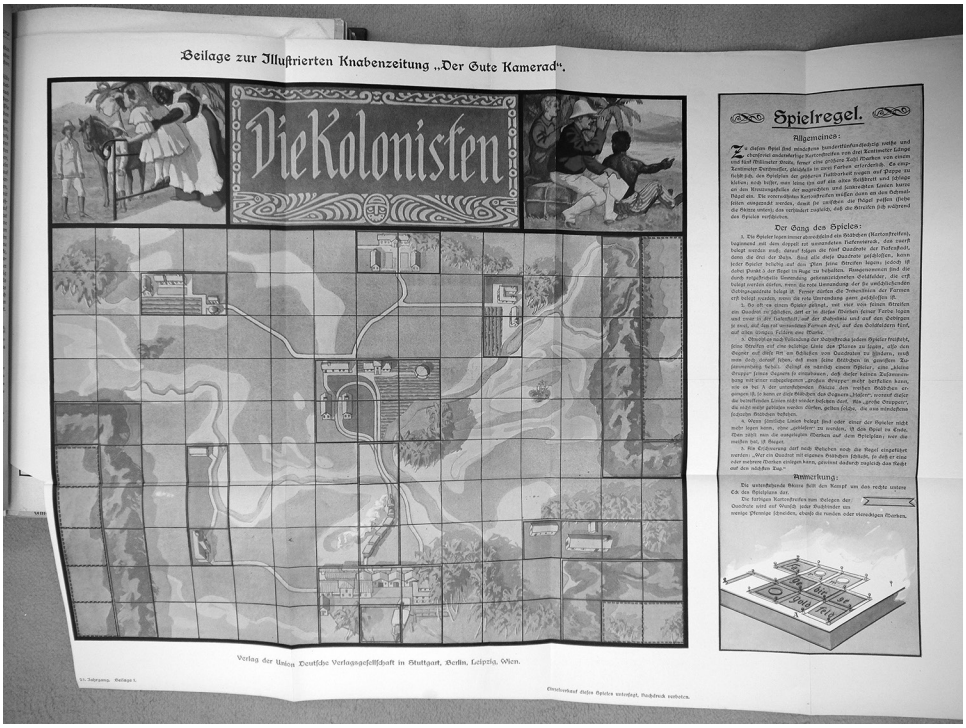


Figure 4.4
Die Kolonisten (The colonists) game was included as an insert in the German boys' annual publication *Der gute Kamerad*, no. 25 (1910/1911). Players begin in the harbor and work their way inland. Photo by Joachim Zeller.

imperial-era explorers wearing pith helmets among people of African descent; even its very name references colonialism. The game's link to wargames is unmistakable, as its familiar grid pattern would have been commonplace in the wargames played by the patriotic groups to whom the game was distributed. Thus games like *Die Kolonisten* put the players directly in the role of colonists landing in a faraway place and capturing territories; this game taught young Germans to see the world, as Jeff Bowersox puts it, through "a colonial lens."[30] By offering new game actions, it also, perhaps for the first time, changed the tourist gaze that had been established in earlier games—mechanics that involved seizing territory—both in a literal way, owing the game's map and name, and in a figurative way, by whitewashing the violence and genocide from the game's colonial context by giving players intellectual problems to solve in a strategy game.

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A similar game in terms of territory occupation can be found in *Jungdeutschland's Schlachtenspiel und Pfadfinderspiel* (Young Germany's battle game and scout game), which was published around 1912 by Otto and Max Hauser in Ludwigsburg, known for creating toy figures and board games (designed by Dr. F. Jorre and F. Hueg). The year after the game's release, the *German Toy Newspaper* noted that the game possesses "patriotic ideals," functioning to convey such ideals to "the hearts of youth," and that this product "enables young people who acquire the game to pursue field exercises and combat tactics when playing on cozy winter evenings at home."[31] The Karlsruhe City Museum noted that the game was intended to get German youth as well as former soldiers excited about war (figure 4.5). The game booklet suggests, "The dashing attack is the soul of the game; the attack rests the victory."



Figure 4.5
Jungdeutschland's Schlachtenspiel und Pfadfinderspiel (Young Germany's battle game and scout game, 1915), an early strategy game that blended wargaming, patriotism, and youth enculturation. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum Europäischer Kulturen / Christian Krug.

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Jungdeutschland's Schlachtenspiel is fascinating for our study for several reasons. First, it marks the shift in using not only toys but commercially produced board games to explicitly militarize and mobilize youth. Second, the game has core features familiar to Eurogame players today in terms of components and open movement; it contains around 250 game elements, including trees, houses, a church, a castle, entrenchment pieces, river pieces, and sixty characters. Although movement on the board consisted of hopping over and taking opponents to remove them from the playing field, similar to the nineteenth-century abstract strategy game halma (invented by an American surgeon in the 1880s; redesigned in the 1890s by a German and marketed as Chinese checkers), the planning of the territories and the reconfigurable obstructions added replayability and complexity. Further, the potential for reconfigurable movement on the board, and the fact that the instructions provided war history exercises, meant that players could reenact numerous battles, making the game a lesson in military studies. Finally, *Jungdeutschland's Schlachtenspiel* appears to have been among the earliest group of mass-produced, component-rich, and narratively situated strategy game published. This game, and other war-themed games of the time, such as *Neuestes Kriegsspiel* (Latest war game, 1910), demonstrated that a market existed for wargaming that had previously been the realm of homemade play components, scouting book insert games, or, conversely, the kind of game found among soldiers, men more officially engaged in formal military training. The game's many elements helped develop a vocabulary of component-based board game play, a marked shift over the previous track- or race-based board games of the nineteenth century. The popularity of such games was powerful and seductive, influencing an entire generation. This militarizing of German culture continued until World War I. After the war, these types of board games went out of style until the rise of the Nazi party remilitarized children's play.

Trading

Trade sounds like a somewhat neutral activity, at least in theory—but as we have seen, global trade was intertwined with colonial brutality. Games such as *The British Empire* (1920), *Conquest* (1936), *Shipping* (1947), and others continued the underlying game themes of global dominance and the exploitation of colonies, particularly through commerce and trade. The incorporation of trading mechanics and currencies was a vital part of the twentieth-century shift in games, as play could mirror increasingly complex global systems. Unfortunately, inventive new game models developed because of, and based on the acts enabled by, colonialism, serving to gloss over the brutality of the phenomenon.

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Jeu des échanges: France—colonies (Trading game: France—colonies, 1941) provides a curious example of trading mechanics. The game was published (probably as a mass-produced insert) by the Nazi-led Vichy government to explicitly promote national French interest in the French colonies. Though the game was made by a Nazi-occupied country, it does not bear the marks of official propaganda in its printing credits, as was the case with many goose-style propaganda games of the same era, such as *Jeu de l'Empire Français* (Game of the French empire, 1941/1942).[32] By the time of this game's publication, the puppet government established by Germany, whose national attempts at colonization were less successful than the initiatives of the French, controlled France's national communications. Because German propaganda board games were already being created back in Germany, it is no wonder that games were designed and disseminated to sway public interest and influence France, whether officially or independently. Germany hoped to promote and reinforce France's second wave of colonial expansion after it had already lost control of its many colonies in Africa during World War I. If Germany controlled France, then it gained control of its colonies.

As we have seen, games explicitly promoting colonies and trading had long been in circulation. *The Game of British Empire, or Trading with the Colonies* (1930) set the stage in the United Kingdom as a crossover game, where players took their steamship tokens across a world map. Their voyage begins in London, traveling along shipping lanes to ports to distribute manufactured articles from the United Kingdom and replace this cargo with goods from the colonies. In *Jeu des échanges: France—colonies*, the track-based map disappears completely, making it less of a pick-up-and-deliver game and more of an abstracted economic management game.

Aside from Mary's personal copy of *Jeu des échanges*, the game is included in a collection at the Getty Museum focusing on French colonialism and play. It is archived along with other types of ephemeral playthings, including paper doll kits and one version of the game that had even been printed for stereoscopic viewing (figure 4.6).[33] French propaganda before and during the Nazi occupation focused on highlighting goods from the colonies; the Ministère des Colonies and related bureaus produced flyers, paper dolls, and advertisements highlighting the process of creating chocolate, for example, which was deeply tied to twentieth-century French cuisine. The process of growing and harvesting cacao and the creation of chocolate became deeply linked with France as a major consumer.[34] Indeed, other games were created that highlighted colonial links between French cuisine and colonial notions of race, such as the game *Le riz d'Indochine* (The rice of Indochina, 1932), which included racist imagery of Vietnamese people on its goose-style board that helped normalize such representations in popular culture.[35]

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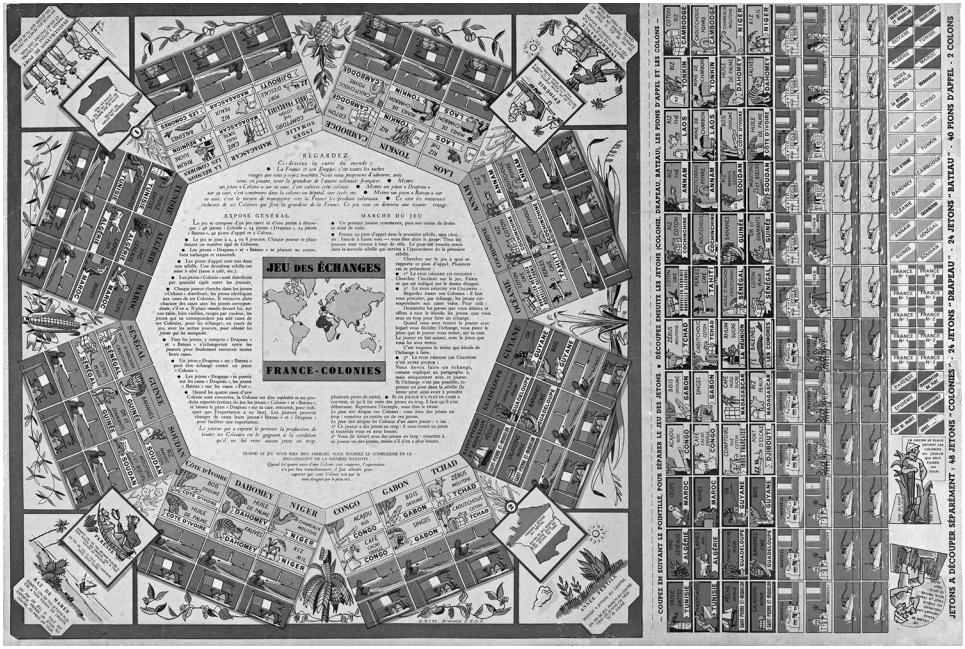


Figure 4.6
Jeu des échanges: France—colonies (Trading game: France—colonies), printed on newsprint with pieces meant to be cut out, highlighting the resources of colonies. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (acc. no. 970031).

To explicitly promote colonial thinking, *Jeu des échanges* rules begin by proclaiming, "Behold, below lies the map of the world!" France and its colonies of the era lie depicted on a tiny central map on the board, and the rules suggest, "We propose to admire, with you, while playing, all the greatness of the French colonial oeuvre." The goal of the game is to be the first player to export the production of randomly selected colonies and reach the condition where they have no remaining needs. Thus colonies need to be cultivated, investments need to be made, and goods must be transported back to France. As the rules note, "It is the immense riches of its Colonies which make the grandeur of France. This game will give you a *living image*."

The game fits alongside a few other shipping and trading games of the time, but it has a few unique features that set it apart as an important artifact in the history of play. First, the game emphasizes the rich resources abroad to promote the very idea of French colonies, educating players about the national benefits of colonial investments.

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Second, it situates players in the role of a colonizer, using cartoons in the corners to illustrate events and incidents, but the comic style makes these reminders humorous and playful. That the game was distributed on a single sheet of newsprint demonstrates the conservative use of materials during the war, and the game's accessibility across a wide range of audiences. *Jeu des échanges* and its pieces were printed on the same sheet, suggesting that the sheets were distributed en masse, most likely as a newspaper insert, and were intended to be cut out by the players. In a time when the press was heavily censored and many papers closed, the use of a game to communicate at the scale of a newspaper is a signal of its significance in messaging. And yet, for such a seemingly mass-produced artifact, very little is known about the game.

Finally, *Jeu des échanges* is the most mechanically complex of the games discussed here, and this alone makes it an important example of the genre. By the twentieth century, multiple components and interactions had already been normalized in games like *The Landlord's Game* (1904/1906) and *Monopoly* (1935). Swapping mechanics had appeared in commercially published games as early as *Pit* (1903) and *Gavitt's Stock Exchange* (1903). Across all these games, we see a clear connection of mechanics and message, specifically about power and capital. "Collecting all" of a commodity in *Pit* literally means "cornering the market," which matches the real-world practice promoted by *Jeu des échanges*.

The *Jeu des échanges* is played with two, four, or eight players. French colonies are equally distributed among players, so that players might control one, two, four, or eight colonized countries. The goal of the game, as stated in the rules, is for players to claim the French colonies as their own, have the colonies they control prosper, and ship the rich natural resources of the colony back to France. To this end, each player must collect colony tokens and fill a colony's six resource spaces, three achievement spaces called "flags," and three shipping spaces to "complete" the colony. The goal is for players to fill all the empty squares associated with their colonies (colony tokens, ships, etc.) and have no more tokens left in their hands.

The first player starts, then the player to the right, and so on. Players are dealt the shuffled colony tokens. Some of the colony tokens may match the players' colonies; if so, they may use their colony tokens to fill their spaces. If not, tokens are saved for trading with other players, or depositing into a central pool in the center of the board. Through trading, players must obtain the colony tokens matching their countries, exchanging when necessary. Trading is mandatory: a player offers a token in exchange for the one wanted, and the player who possesses the wanted token cannot refuse. Some tokens are referred to as "appeal tokens" and can come in the form of flag tokens (schools, hospitals, engineers, and other institutions labeled as "colonial

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achievements") and ship tokens, which are symbolically used to transport goods back to France. These are placed in the center of the board for collection. On their turn, each player draws an appeal token from the mix of tokens in a bowl on the table. The token drawn will either be a colony token, corresponding with country names and their resources, or events/incidents. For example, one colony token features Laos and shows that it provides rice and tea. Another Laos token provides carbon mines. When the token designates the name of one of the player's own colonies, the player collects it. Putting a colony token on a square is described in the rules as *cultivating* that colony. If another player's colony is drawn, trading will ensue. If the token is an incident, players look to the game board corners, where events such as epidemics and laziness are described, and players follow the associated instructions. The laziness description, for example, comes next to a cartoon illustration of a White colonist lying in a hammock, being fanned by local people. The message here is one cautioning the colonists (i.e., the players) to stay engaged and busy in making their colonies a success. Incidents involve giving neighbors various tokens, depositing extra tokens on the center of the board for others to find, or missing a turn.

Again, the goal of the game is to collect all the pieces needed to fulfill what the game creators thought made a successful colony: raw materials and products, institutions and advancements, and export capacity. The trading mechanic models a kind of diplomacy among the controllers of colonies. For example, as players draw tokens from the appeal token bowl on their turn, if a player is missing any colony tokens for their colony spaces, that player may ask for those tokens from an opponent who has them (figure 4.7). For each token a player takes, that player must give a colony token needed by the opposing player in return if they have one. If a missing colony token is in the center, players should take it and return any other token to the center. If players don't have any colony tokens that opponents need, they must draw another appeal token.



Figure 4.7
A close-up of the colony tokens from *Jeu des échanges: France—colonies* included on the game sheet, to be cut out and used in play. Each country is given two resources per token. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (acc. no. 970031).

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The effect of these trading mechanics is, compared to well-crafted games of today, wildly unbalanced. How much of the trading is to be accomplished on one turn is rather unclear from the rule set, as it does specify turn taking versus real-time trading but puts no limits on the number of tokens one needs to draw. And if mechanics are the core message of a game, then it is telling that the goods so carefully highlighted on the colony tokens are acquired without costs. Reaping a colony's resources is a random act, as is building up shipping or infrastructural capacities. The importance of these resource depictions on the board is great; as the curator Isotta Poggi writes, "Images on the game provide a vivid picture of the vast variety of resources, including animals, plants, and minerals that the colonies provided to France from all around the globe."[36] The focus on imagining resources encouraged French players to see places as essential goods, not as people or cultures, and the game's mechanics mirrored the mechanics of colonial trade and expansion.

Mechanical Problems

Given the sheer number of racist and colonial themes in the games discussed thus far, it is easy to fall into the trap of seeing the racist or colonialist *imagery* in games as the root of the problem with colonial games, for the number of colonial and racist images is overwhelming. But games are not only visual aesthetic objects; they rely on player interaction, mechanics, and the dynamics of play. In the case of *Jeu des échanges,* the game's very exchange model is the real messaging culprit. While playing this game, players accept the logic of its mechanics: that the world can be reduced to goods, without any consideration for how they are acquired. Players interact based on the logics of capital and exchange, and not the logics of empathy, interpersonal communication and dialogue, or respect for human rights. This was the case in so many board games of the past. The refusal to depict any of the suffering of, violence to, and subjugation of, colonized people, their cultures, and lands, in favor of seeing the world as a set of resources to be seized and used for the good of European industry, is inescapable. This is true even today as we begin to unpack contemporary games in future chapters. The values of capitalism, commercialization, exploitation, and dominance are perpetuated in play.

Games are models: abstractions of situations or phenomena.[37] Through their rules, player positioning, theme, components, overall representation, and rewards, games embed human values as well.[38] Games like *The Game of the Goose*, for example, are simple models of generic quests or even a life–death continuum but do not model specific life phenomena per se, with the exception of random encounters with luck or chance.

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The more complex games become, however, the more potential they have to become more interesting in their relationship to the phenomena they represent, and the more nuanced the models. *Jeu des échanges* paves the way for contemporary resource management games such as *Settlers of Catan* to take root. In fact, *Jeu des échanges* can be seen as a precursor to the genre. It does contain a collection of elements that became increasingly popular in later games. Although trading existed in games (think of the previously mentioned *Pit* by Edgar Cayce [1904]), the novel use of the trading mechanic that was inspired by—or even invented to serve—state messaging is an important story in the history of board game development. The mechanics developed in this time would go on to influence and shape the landscape of strategic games for years to come.

Ultimately, board game systems are built on familiar genres. Each game only innovates so much; games that invent too many new mechanics may be experienced by players as too unfamiliar or inaccessible. Even award-winning game innovations tend to fit into existing rule systems and scenarios.

As we have seen, wargames and trading games added significantly to new board game mechanics. These mechanical inventions merged concepts about global trade, colonization, and capitalism together into a playable logic and promoted these ideas through game mechanics. The influence of wargames and colonial logics on what were considered educational, family games cannot be discounted.

The Childhood of Empire

All games reposition players in the world, and many competitive game models fundamentally embody nonverbalized notions of power and domination over the other in a way other toys do not. Thus games are perfectly suited for normalizing and spreading ideologies that support nationalist, Eurocentric notions of empire.

Board games were a key element in providing opportunities for German and other European children to play empire, and the number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European games that enculturated players to racist and colonialist ideologies is staggering. The abhorrent and depersonalizing nature of these games under the guise of fun is even more disturbing when the targets of this enculturation were children who were taught that racist views were not only justified but expected, normal, and somehow morally right. These historical touchstones suggest that across different genres of games and board games through the centuries, some embodied or manifested—in fact, promoted—ideas about colonialism. Colonialist ideology in board games has existed for at least two hundred years. To push further into the idea, we must then ask: What is the relation of the ludic nature of the game, such as game mechanics, to colonialism?

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Could the very actions and ideas in board games have developed colonialist undertones that taint board games today? In other words, beyond images and representation, are there such things as colonialist game mechanics?

Roger Caillois wrote in *Man, Play and Games* that games always stand apart from the "diffuse and insidious laws of daily life" and "certainly cannot spread beyond the playing field (chess- or checkerboard, arena, racetrack, stadium, or stage) or time that is reserved for them."[39] Games, to Caillois, can have no effect on everyday life. The attitude of a game's "apartness" continues today, though in different forms. Contemporary game scholars like Miguel Sicart argue that players have full agency or choice to accept a game's values, writing that players can choose to play by their own moral stance: "Players reconfigure the meaning of the game using their own cultural, political, and ethical beliefs. Engaging with ethical gameplay does not require players to make choices or to adopt a particular moral stance that has been predetermined by a designer."[40]

We argue that games cannot be set aside as they have been by past scholars who have looked at the role of games in everyday life. The games discussed in this chapter defy any possible absolution based on the fact that the experience is "just a game." If the majority of players as well as the designers come from the same dominant group, playing in roles and with themes that promote their culture and facilitate a sense of superiority, then playing such a game normalizes worldviews and values through representation, game actions, and logics. Even players who did not agree with colonialist ideologies would have to, at least temporarily, *buy into the premises of these games* to play them. If games and their "magic circle" reinforce the rules of their surrounding cultures and bolster the already culturally dominant roles of the players, it is no wonder that games were prized instruments of propaganda. In other words, it would be extremely difficult *not* to play along.

It is important to read game studies itself with an anticolonial eye; the overall scholarship of play has been marked by colonial influence as well. From its anthropological origins, the study of global play has constituted for the most part White male academic authorities writing from positions of exterior values. Aimé Césaire, a poet, scholar, and activist from Martinique, wrote that Caillois, like other European intellectuals, was convinced "that the West invented science. That the West alone knows how to think; that at the borders of the Western world there begins the shadowy realm of primitive thinking, which dominated by the notion of participation, incapable of logic, is the very model of faulty thinking."[41] Further, Césaire calls out the prevailing notion that Europeans are worthy of studying and making narratives of other cultures, but other cultures are incapable of intelligently studying Europe. Césaire shows how White supremacist thought enabled Europeans to justify their colonialism, as well as

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how Europeans assumed control of the power dynamics of knowledge itself. He also shows how studies of play are framed by this cultural imperialism, which clouds how we understand games and their histories.

As we will show as the book progresses, forms of anticolonial and countercolonial play may very well emerge from within in the value system created by colonial games and the mindsets around them, but will only do so with a keen awareness of the complexity of the colonial problems in board games. As Michel Foucault notes, "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."[42] Most board games do not accommodate players being able to make choices contrary to the system designed. When there is player choice, and the choices do not allow alternative strategies or actions outside the system, the game reinscribes the norms it sets out. In effect, resistance within the existing value system might not be enough to topple that system.

Conclusion

This chapter has pursued ways that early twentieth-century games shifted to explicitly colonial themes and began to evolve mechanics that could *embody the logics* of colonial practices. The imagery in these games consistently configures Europeans as powerful, responsible, and in control, and people of color or ethnic minorities around the globe as servile and subjugated. Even games from the early twentieth century that were not explicitly about colonialism—such as shipping games or train games—relied on practices developed by colonialism. As Jeff Bowersox points out, the vast majority of books on German toys appear to have *colonial amnesia* about these problematic playthings. Board game aficionados have to reckon with games' colonial past; the colonial powers built railroads to facilitate further colonialism.

The Nazi game examples were clear tools of an internal hate propaganda machine that taught children to be proud of a colonial mindset and a militaristic ideology. The popularity of wargames in the early twentieth century and their merging into children's toys brought to the fore that conflict must become violent, and other people and places should be subjugated and used for one's own benefit.

The first part of this book explored much about game themes. This chapter begins to trouble game mechanics themselves. We argue that innovations in game mechanics started with integrating and facilitating colonial themes. As we have seen in this chapter, countless game themes, boards, game boxes, and rules set the scene for White supremacy—imagined superiority across distant locales and even within a particular country. The themes of imperial power, nationhood, and play lie inextricably

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intertwined across all the game examples discussed thus far. Yet beyond these themes, it is the *aesthetic of play itself* that moves board games to their most problematic position in pop culture. What we mean by the aesthetic of play is the way the ingredients of a game come together: the dynamic experience of a game while it is played, with its theme, content, rules, mechanics, emotion, and mood. When combined with propaganda messages about war, colonialism, and systemic discrimination and hate, such board games constitute a toxic force. German games shifted games fundamentally, formalizing intent toward propaganda, crossing into horrifically racist representation, and inventing novel mechanics tied directly to colonial, imperial ideologies. There is no doubt about it: colonial-themed games gave material form to stereotypes and out-and-out racism. Further, German militarism and the German toy industry's appeal to the public through such imagery provided a way for national interests to be emphasized by commercial products, a coordinated way of indoctrinating youth. Germany's games were powerful influencers that boosted colonial thinking—and it was this thinking, in the end, that changed board games themselves. Although not confined to Germany, this approach was centered there. In the history of board games over the last two hundred years, Europe's mindset of colonialism likely had the greatest influence.

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Playing Oppression

The Legacy of Conquest and Empire in Colonialist Board Games

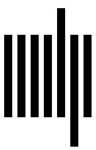
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5 Winners and Losers: Western Board Games in the Postwar Era

In the last chapter, we examined board games from the late-colonial era, with a special focus on Germany and the games developed under Germany's militarized empire-building period through to the rise of Nazi Germany and World War II. We explored the ways in which colonialist and militaristic mindsets saturated popular culture and playthings like board games. Games like *Die Kolonisten* (The colonists, 1910), *Jung-deutschland's Schlachtenspiel* (Young Germany's battle game, 1912–1917), and *Jeu des échanges: France—colonies* (Trading game: France—colonies, 1943) are noteworthy historical examples showing game mechanics being introduced to promote these ideas to the younger generation. Viewing these games through a critical lens, we note that resource management and trading can carry the same oppressive ideas as the out-and-out violence of wargames. We follow this vector as we enter the postwar era, when board games take on new forms and new audiences, and with that new expressions of the ever-present colonialist mindset.

Escapism

World War II had a tremendous impact on the evolution of Western board games. Although the losing nations in general, and Germany in particular, turned away from everything related to war, the situation was different in France. The film director Albert Lamorisse was celebrating international success with his short film *Le ballon rouge* (*The Red Balloon*, 1956)—which had won both an Oscar for best original screenplay and a Palme d'Or for short films at the Cannes Film Festival—when he came up with the game *La conquête du monde* (The conquest of the world, 1957) on a family vacation trip.[1] The game takes place on a world map divided into six continents and further into forty-two territories. All the territories are randomly distributed between the players, who place troops in their territories. From there the gameplay consists of players

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maneuvering and upgrading their troops before attacking the territories of other players until one player has conquered the world. Battles are resolved by the attacker and the defender rolling dice.

It can be a challenge to reconcile the poetic slice of magical realism that Lamorisse created in *The Red Balloon* with the power-thirsty, winner-takes-all vision of global conflict presented in *La conquête du monde*. Perhaps the link lies in the role of abstraction that both the game and the film employ. Roughly halfway through the short film, for example, a boy with the eponymous red balloon passes a girl with a blue balloon on the sidewalk. They both keep walking their separate ways, but the red balloon pulls away from the boy and drifts—as if pulled by a magnetic force—to the blue balloon. The same scenario then repeats in reverse. At the end of the film, balloons of all colors spontaneously come together and lift the boy to the sky.

Both the film and the game share a core of narrative through abstraction. In *La conquête du monde*, the players' armies are represented not by miniature soldiers but by colored, slightly elongated cubes, and somewhat larger pieces aptly called olives representing ten armies each (figure 5.1). The game logic drives the colored pieces toward one another, but the underlying message is no longer a poetic contemplation about the



Figure 5.1
A copy of *La conquête du monde* (The conquest of the world, 1957) on display. The cuboids in six different colors represent the players' armies, and the oblong olives in the center pocket represent ten armies each. In the top middle, we see the face of a joker card with silhouettes of Napoleonic military troops. Courtesy of the Strong, Rochester, New York.

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power of human connections but a pure representation of the social Darwinist slogan "might is right."

The game was a success for the French publisher Miro Company, which at the time mainly produced French-language versions of games from British Waddingtons and American Parker Brothers. Michel Habourdin, co-owner of Miro Company, suggested an English-language release to Parker Brothers in the summer of 1957, and two years later it was released with the name *Risk*.[2]

Parker Brothers did not just change the name to make the game more family friendly. The Parker Brothers version of the game board also featured images of dolphins and a whale wearing a Donald Duck–style sailor hat to further emphasize that it was a family game (figure 5.2). The board also included a full-rigged sailing ship, capitalizing on the most iconic image of the romanticized colonialist call to adventure.[3] Although all the core concepts are the same, its developers sped up the pacing of the game and changed the distribution of territories to make the luck of the roll in the initial stage less punishing. The rules and procedures were also streamlined to make gameplay flow more smoothly.[4]

Although players are assigned regions randomly at the beginning of the game, it is clear that players are representing colonial empires. The illustrations in *La conquête du monde*—which also appear in the Parker Brothers version—are based on military armies from the Napoleonic era (see figure 5.1). Players distribute armies between different regions of the world to defend controlled territories against attackers on the one hand, while attacking the opponent's weak spots on the other, a strategy that fit right in with the geopolitical situation for the imperial powers of the time. By making these connections, we can catch a glimpse of nations such as France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, the United States, and Japan behind the six sets of player pieces included in the game.

Although France ended up on the winning side of World War II, the country and its people had been humiliated and made to suffer during the German occupation. By looking back toward the days when the French Empire was the world's most feared military power, the game offered an ego boost for the war-torn country. In the United States, however, the game represented a view of a future where America would consider itself the guardian of the Western world. It was also an early step toward a new type of game aimed at a more mature audience.

Finland is often overlooked among the losing nations of World War II. After being invaded by the Soviet Union in 1939 and having to cede a significant part of its national territory and financial capacity in the Winter War, Finland joined the Axis powers and

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Figure 5.2
The *Risk* (1959) board with family-friendly illustrations, including an anthropomorphized whale presumably appealing to a younger audience, and a sailing ship signaling adventure and conquest. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

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attacked the Soviet Union in 1941 with financial and military support from Nazi Germany in the Continuation War. Finland again lost and was forced to expel all German troops from the country, which in turn led to the Lapland War against Germany. As a result of the Paris Peace Treaties in 1947, Finland was forced to pay war reparations to the Soviet Union and acknowledge that Finland had been a German ally. Finland suffered over ninety thousand casualties in the three wars combined.

After the war, the Finnish people lived in fear of the Soviet Union once again attacking them, believing that the goal of the Winter War always had been a complete invasion. It was in this context that Kari Mannerla made the game *Afrikan Tähti* (*African Star*, 1951) when he was nineteen years old (figure 5.3). His initial inspiration was the opening credits scene in the movie *Casablanca* (1942), showing a map of Africa with—to Mannerla—exotic country names.[5]

As we mentioned in chapter 1, *Afrikan Tähti* was one of Mikael's first board games; and as the language scholar Anne-Marie Lindfors points out, it was most Finnish and

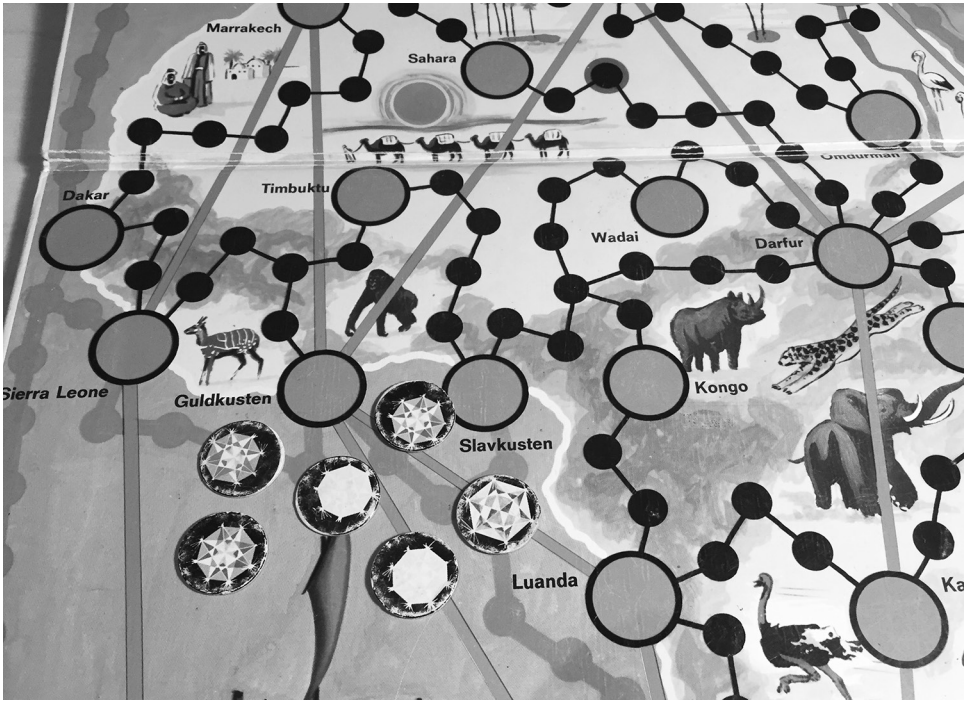


Figure 5.3
The Swedish version of *Afrikan Tähti* (*African Star*), published by Alga in the 1970s. The names of the locations in the Gulf of Guinea translate to "the Gold Coast" and "the Slave Coast." Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

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Swedish children's first contact with the African continent throughout the second half of the twentieth century. *Afrikan Tähti* is the most successful Finnish board game of all time, with almost four million copies sold and translations in sixteen languages.[6]

The player characters in *Afrikan Tähti* are not clearly described but can only be understood as Europeans, presumably treasure seekers, coming to Africa looking for the eponymous Star of Africa jewel. They travel from one of two starting cities in northern Africa and flip a tile every time they arrive at a new main node in a point-to-point network. The tiles can reveal gemstones, which are immediately cashed in for money, or robbers, who take all the player's funds. Money is important, since air travel is costly but gives a speed advantage in getting first to unturned tiles. Some main nodes have special rules attached to them. If a player flips a blank tile at "the Slave Coast," they have to wait three rounds before continuing their travels (figure 5.3). In later versions, the name has been changed to "Calabar," a historically important trade hub in Nigeria that played a significant role in the slave trade in the seventeenth century. One of the thirty tiles is the African Star. When a player finds it, they have to return to their starting city to win. If another player finds a visa[7] (a direct reference to the movie *Casablanca*) after the African Star has been found, they win if they get back to their starting city first.

On the lid of the game box, a historical sidebar tells the story of the real African Star jewel. It was found in the British Transvaal colony in 1905 and gifted by the Transvaal government to King Edward VII. After the jewel was cut into brilliants, the two largest ones were incorporated into the British crown jewels, where they still reside.[8]

Mannerla's Africa is based on a mix of fictional and historical Western sources. The game becomes an illustration of how popular culture bleeds into contemporary real-world understanding of distant places, and how this skewed model of reality gets circulated back into new cultural artifacts, further propagating myths and misconceptions. The game mixes and matches temporal references. The use of commercial plane travel implies that the game has a contemporary setting, but the Star of Africa was discovered a half century earlier, and the reference to a booming slave trade adds at least another half century.

In the end, it does not matter *when* the game takes place, because players are playing not in the real Africa but in a manifestation of *the idea* of Africa from the viewpoint of colonialist discourse. What is important is that the player understands that Africa presents opportunities for daring explorers, but also that it is dangerous, so that it can serve as the antipode to the safe Western home base.[9] The Finnish cultural historian Henna Ylänen points out that it is almost as if the game itself exists outside of time.[10] *African Star* is still sold with nearly the same illustrations and the same game logic as when it first came out. "At the same time as Black natives dressed in loincloths have

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left both the surfaces of the product packaging and the pages of schoolbooks, they continue the unchanging tribal dance elevated to the status of a national institution on the game board."[11]

Postwar Gaming in the United States

Diplomacy (1959) was released the same year as *Risk* in the United States. Designer Allan B. Calhamer had been rejected by several companies before he decided to self-publish the game.[12] The *Diplomacy* board centers on Europe before the outbreak of World War I, but similar to *Risk*, the goal is world domination. The rule book tells us that players represent the seven "Great Powers of Europe," which in turn control colonies around the world. Calhamer worked on the game during his studies at Harvard, where he studied the negotiations, pacts, and betrayals that eventually led to the Great War.[13]

Diplomacy uses no dice; instead conflicts are resolved simply by comparing the strength of the involved parties. The game's core lies in the negotiations between players that take place away from the table. Players discuss their plans and then prepare written orders privately, which will be resolved publicly at the end of each round.[14] By forming alliances and supporting each other's attacks, players can tip the scales in their own favor. The problem is that, just as in real-life diplomacy, there are no guarantees that a player will honor the agreements that have been made during the negotiations when they actually write down their orders. While television shows like *Survivor* have popularized this type of competitive drama, it was *Diplomacy* that introduced the concept of *backstabbing* as a core game mechanic.

Risk and *Diplomacy* both made a great impact on the burgeoning wargaming hobby in the United States in the 1960s.[15] The concept of fighting over territories on a map was a hit with a predominantly male demographic, where *Risk* served a younger segment, who might later graduate to *Diplomacy* as next in the line of complex wargaming. But it is important to note that while the wargames from this period were mostly designed for two players, the interaction pattern here is *multilateral action*.[16] Neither game fit easily into any of the standard categories of games at the time. Parker Brothers did all it could to make a family game out of *La conquête de monde*, but the size of the board and the numerous components drove the price point to be, just like the somewhat heavy subject matter, beyond what was the norm for a family game. And *Diplomacy* was too complex to get signed by any of the family game publishers. On the other hand, *Risk* is too luck dependent and weak in terms of simulation to fit the wargame genre, and while *Diplomacy* was eventually picked up by the wargame publisher Avalon Hill in 1976, it was not part of their genre-defining series of wargames but instead added to the series of bookcase

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games that the company had acquired from the 3M board game division. While *Diplomacy* is first and foremost remembered as a "mean game" that can ruin friendships, it is also often cited by designers in the latter half of the twentieth century as the point when they realized that the content of board game boxes was "not just for kids."

Let's take a minute to unpack the role of the 3M bookshelf games from the 1960s, as these served to popularize games as a collectible item in the United States. In 1962, Alex Randolph and Sid Sackson were hired to start a game division for the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company, better known as 3M. The company, mostly known for products like Scotch Tape and Post-it Notes, had decided to start making board games for an upper-middle-class audience.[17] To appeal to the target audience, which also seems to be decidedly male, given the box art and theme across the game collection, the game boxes were made to look like classic hardcover books ready for a living room bookcase. Titles such as *Acquire* (1962), *Stocks and Bonds* (1964), and *Point of Law* (1972) lent an air of, if not sophistication, at least drama. The boxes are lined on the outside with faux leather in discreet colors. One of the many board gamers who has helped us acquire the games for this study recalled that the games were sold in atypical locations, like haberdasheries.

Randolph was interested in ancient game history, and many of his designs were inspired by traditional games. *Oh-Wah-Ree* (1966) is a collection of mancala game variants from Africa and Asia. The name is a trademarkable take on oware, one of the most popular games in the mancala family and the national game of Ghana.[18] The game box is adorned with an Egyptian-styled woman playing the game with a Sphinx statue and a pyramid in the background (figure 5.4). The box front copy reads: "Ancient and absorbing game of strategy played by Afro-Asian peoples for some 3,500 years!" The artist is not credited, but the gouache and tempera painting has been attributed to the commercial artist Mayo Olmstead, who specialized in pinup paintings.[19]

Sackson's games also occasionally tended toward Middle Eastern and Asian themes. The game *Bazaar* (1968) is a trading game where players trade colored tokens in varying combinations to get the tokens needed to buy wares that give the player points. Rather than trade with each other, the players trade with the bank using *rate cards* that determine the exchange rate between different colored tokens. Once a player has the right combination of tokens, they can *purchase wares*, which reward the player with points used to win the game. *Bazaar* is mechanically a precursor to *Century: Spice Road* (2017), but without the *engine building* aspect,[20] and feels ahead of its time mechanically. Just as with *Oh-Wah-Ree*, we again see an Oriental woman on the box front, this time in a Middle Eastern bazaar (figure 5.4).

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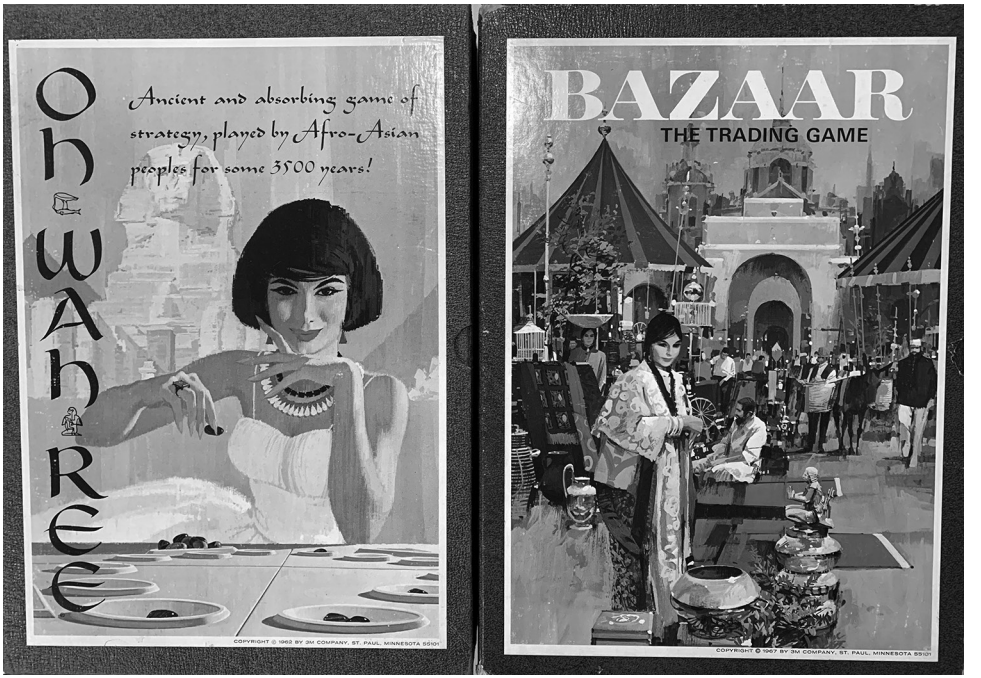


Figure 5.4
The front of the boxes for *Oh-Wah-Ree* (1966) and *Bazaar* (1968) from the 3M bookshelf game series. The focal points of both covers are Oriental women looking seductively at the observer. The product design is aimed at appealing to men with playboy ambitions or dreams. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

The choice of Oriental and vaguely sexualized cover art can be connected to a zeitgeist where masculine ideals were constructed through jet-setting, womanizing style icons like James Bond and Hugh Hefner. The Orientalism discussed earlier in the book had changed tone by the mid-twentieth century, from blunt, overtly racist caricatures to a marketing tool for the *Mad Men*–era advertising industry. Between the inspiration from Eastern traditional games and marketing to men who dreamed of exotic adventures, 3M had created an Orientalist formula for selling board games.

Crossing the Pond

3M—being a multinational conglomerate—had an existing network of marketing and distribution in Europe, which the company, in 1966, decided to bring the bookshelf series to Europe. A memo to public relations personnel in ten European countries

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informed them that they would begin test-marketing bookshelf games in their regions the following year. An accompanying press release explained that "although geared to adults," the games could be "enjoyed by the entire family."[21] While the 3M department of communications in Saint Paul, Minnesota, struggled a bit to describe the target group, the German public relations representative would already have a word that works for games that are not just for families: *Gesellschaftspiele*. It is not an easy word to translate into English. We have landed on *companionship game* as a reasonable approximation.[22] What is noteworthy about the term is how inclusive it is regarding who is playing, and under what circumstances. Perhaps this difference in categorizing and marketing games played a part in what was a success for 3M's product line of strategy games for the whole family in Germany.

The sales for the board game division of 3M waned in the 1970s, which led 3M to sell the division to the wargame publisher Avalon Hill in 1976. Alex Randolph—who had moved to Venice, Italy, in 1968—and Sid Sackson continued to publish games in Germany, where they became highly regarded and influential game authors.

Postwar Gaming in Germany

Germany has played a principal role in the emergence of the current golden age of board games. The board game scholar Stewart Woods points to the zeitgeist after World War II as a primary factor.[23] The postwar period saw a swing toward nonviolent games, despite a long history of wargaming in Germany. Postwar toys and board games were heavily influenced by the *Kriegsschuld*, the collective guilt experienced by the German people regarding the war. The historian Geoff Eley summarized Germany's post–World War II cultural shift: "Guilty remembrance of terrible hardships conjoins with an unevenly-grounded recognition of social responsibility to produce the present breadth of German aversion against war."[24] It is therefore unsurprising that most German-made games developed for the children of the war (known as *Kriegskinder*) and *Kriegsenkel* (grandchildren of the war, recognized as traumatized in books such as Sabine Bode's *The Forgotten Generation*)[25] would avoid combat-focused games such as the prewar German games, and contemporary games popular in other countries like the previously discussed *Risk* and the heavily *Risk*-inspired but more complex multiplayer wargame *Axis and Allies* (1981), which used World War II as its setting.

Legal regulations also prohibited insignia such as Nazi swastikas and Schutzstaffel (SS) symbols from appearing in games. The ban on Nazi symbols in video games was lifted in 2018, when the German government decided that games taking a clear stance

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against Nazis, such as the video game *Wolfenstein: Youngblood* (2019), could be sold uncensored.[26]

In chapters 3 and 4, we closely examined *Reise um die Erde* (Journey around the world, 1884)—the first game from Otto Maier, the founder of Ravensburger—which was made during the high point of German colonial expansion. The geography of exoticized locales was a strong theme in this and other games of the time. Ravensburger grew to be the largest German board game publisher in the twentieth century and played a significant role in shaping the emerging German board game industry. But Ravensburger lacked an evergreen moneymaker like American Parker Brothers' *Monopoly* (1933) or British Waddingtons' *Cluedo* (1949).[27] In fact, Ravensburger was not even the German distributor for these games. The board game historian Stuart Dagger identifies this as a reason for the emergence of board game design competitions like the Spiel des Jahres (game of the year), and the board-game-focused trade fair Internationale Spieltage SPIEL (Essen game fair). Ravensburger simply had a strong financial incentive to support initiatives to grow the domestic game design scene.[28] Woods notes that Ravensburger also expanded its internal design team to develop its own intellectual properties.[29]

The Spiel des Jahres was first awarded in 1979 to the best family board or card game published in Germany. The award is open to designers from any country, as long as their game has been published in Germany during the preceding year. The jury consists of judges from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The initial focus on family gamers is understandable, since that is what Ravensburger mostly published at the time. A separate category for children's games was added in 2001, and in 2011, a category called Kennerspiel des Jahres (expert game of the year) was added for games aimed at hobbyist board gamers. Before that, nonfamily games could receive a special award, which was not necessarily given out every year. The award has a significant impact on sales: nominated games can expect sales to increase by up to ten times compared to similar titles, and a winning game's sales can increase by up to a hundred times.

It is notable that five of the winning games for the first seven years (1979–1985) were designed by people from countries other than Germany, including Alex Randolph and Sid Sackson, whereas six of the seven winners in the following years (1986–1992) were Germans with recurring appearances by Reinhold Wittig and Wolfgang Kramer. The impact of this and other initiatives to build a domestic board game scene in Germany is evident. The friendly competition between designers accelerated the push to innovate on mechanics and to move beyond race games to new formats increasingly favoring more complexity and opportunities for strategy. Toward the end of the

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twentieth century, the contest for novel game mechanics was in full charge. *Hare & Tortoise* (1973), winner of the first Spiel des Jahres in 1979, by the esteemed British game authority David Parlett, serves as a good example. Its mechanical innovation consisted of matching cards of increasing value along the race path, a slight but significant advancement of the age-old race game formula.

Year by year, substantially more complex games were invented. For example, only four years after the first award, *Scotland Yard* (1983) took the prize; the game provides unusual asymmetrical play and hidden locations as one person takes on the role of the criminal and the rest of the players act as detectives. The children's game *Up the River* (1988) is mechanically interesting for two reasons: first, because it shares elements with later, more intricate games such as *Cartagena* (2000); second, because it exemplifies the sort of experimentation with mechanical innovations occurring in game design in the 1980s. While still being a race game in essence, relying on the familiar roll of the die, *Up the River*'s moving board pieces shift obstacles in a player's path, adding to the level of complexity. Player choices are further complicated by the use of a tiered point structure, rather than a simple winner-takes-all resolution. These small shifts allow for some meaningful strategy even in a beguilingly simple children's race game. The original release offers a serene nature tableau that apparently was seen as too weak from a marketing standpoint two decades later, because the 2002 reimplementation under the name *Marrakesh* transposed the race action to an Orientalized setting, and the 2012 reissue under the name *Race through Space* invites the players to participate in space colonization. The push for novel mechanics resulted in many important innovations across games, even children's games, a domain where taking risks may have been less costly.

Why the move from race games in the first place? Why privilege novel game mechanics over familiar paradigms? David Parlett, H. J. R. Murray, and other historians and scholars have rightly noted that the race format is one of the oldest defining characteristics of ancient games, from the early mancala games onward.[30] Race games existed for hundreds of years because they were familiar and easy, an activity alongside which groups could have conversations and social time. Like the centuries-old goose games, race games relied on familiar frameworks and mechanics: advancement through rolling the dice, fortune for securing a roll that lands the player token on a particular square, and a predictable visual track of player progress.[31] As games evolved, they added extra pieces and eventually new formats and maps. For the most part, however, printed board games up until the mid-twentieth century took the form of question-and-answer trivia games or, more commonly, race games.

In Germany, most board games are sold around Christmas, and many families look to the Spiel des Jahres competition for purchasing advice. The designers know that they

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must make family-friendly games to fit the criteria for the award, but they also know that parents typically make the purchasing decisions, and they will want games that can capture their attention as well as be fun for the children. Spiel des Jahres became a prestigious competition of game mechanics in which designers knew that they must bring something new into the mix to win the favor of the judges. While many other countries repeatedly sold the same game mechanics dressed in new themes, German games began battling for attention and sales through new and innovative mechanics.[32]

American Dreams

We have only briefly mentioned the emergence of the American wargaming hobby and Avalon Hill, the publisher that, in many ways, started it. In the 1950s, Charles S. Roberts founded the Avalon Game Company (which later became Avalon Hill) to publish his game *Tactics* (1954), followed by other commercial wargames, thus reviving the war board game genre established in Germany in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Some popular commercial games, such as *Risk*, did cross over into wargame audiences, but most games played by wargamers were niche games.

We have said even less about the British arm of the wargaming hobby, which typically favors the use of miniature models to represent troops rather than the American hex-and-counter system. This is by no means to say that these games are not also engulfed in a colonialist mindset (quite the contrary), but the expressions of this mindset are radically different and too complex for us to handle within the confines of this book. For now, we will simply note that wargaming grew in popularity, especially in the Allied countries; Pat Harrigan and Matthew Kirschenbaum's *Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming* offers a great starting point for further reading on the subject.[33] Likewise, we will not discuss the emergence of role-playing games and their unique mechanics, which developed out of a complex lineage of North American wargames and theatrical party games.[34] For an investigation of colonial appropriation in these games, see Aaron Trammell's "How *Dungeons and Dragons* Appropriated the Orient."[35]

Wargames were a fairly niche hobby with strong ties to the American Civil War reenactment community and focused on simulating war, leading to large-scale battlegrounds and thick and uninviting rule books detailing everything from supply lines to firing rates. In contrast, American mass-market games flourished. Popular family games published by Milton Bradley, Mattel, and Parker Brothers still held vestiges of war—think *Battleship* (1967)—but primarily offered party, trivia, and family games. Until the 1970s and 1980s, board game design was dominated by static maps, play areas, or tracks, invoking the simplicity of goose games. Think of *Sorry!* (1929), originally

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published by William Henry Storey in England, or *Candy Land* (1949), invented in the 1940s by the American schoolteacher Eleanor Abbott while recovering in a polio ward with children struck by the same disease. Mass-produced, best-selling board games either tended toward track- or race-based game models or fell into trivia themes, such as *Concentration* (1958).[36] Accessible, fast-paced games like *Uno* (1971), with purposefully abstract themes, emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Popular themes moved as far away from the political as they could.

While the choice of themes in European games can often be traced to the trauma of World War II, as in the historical escapism of *La conquête du monde*, the Orientalist escapism of adventures in a fictionalized Africa in *Afrikan Tähti*, or the complete cultural about-face of postwar Germany, Americans were instead looking to the stars, dreaming of an even greater future. This may be due to the Space Race between the Soviet Union and the United States. Further, American culture had (and has) a long-standing obsession with stories about outer space and future galaxies, starting with early fictional heroes like Northwest Smith, Buck Rogers, and Flash Gordon.[37] Outer space is particularly White, colonial, and American themed, drawing from conventions of the space Western—the science fiction subgenre that repurposed elements from American Western narratives in science fiction stories. Space Westerns often depicted an open frontier ripe for exploration, where the hero carries a handy ray gun to fight the peoples and beings of faraway planets. The link between American pop culture and space cowboys is deep, starting from its grounding in 1920s American science fiction and intensifying in the years of the Space Race. The cowboy image moved from comics and films to television shows such as *The Outer Limits* (1963–1965), *Star Trek* (1966–present), *Star Wars* (1977–present), and many other films. *Star Trek*'s original title sequence, with its iconic introductory speech by Captain Kirk (played by William Shatner), properly sums up the space cowboy mythos:

> Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship *Enterprise*. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life and new civilizations. To boldly go where no man has gone before!

From *Star Trek* to *Star Wars* to *Battlestar Galactica*, the peculiarly American preoccupation with creating a frontier-style outer-space mythos cannot be underestimated, and without a doubt, it influenced board games as well. In fact, the emergence of this mythos can be traced in the board game space, connecting strategy game elements and colonialist themes to the fantasy of space exploration. In short, instead of portraying (and repeating) European colonial history in gameplay, North American designers tended to colonize outer space.

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Stellar Conquest

Often touted as the first 4X game (explore, exploit, expand, exterminate), and one of the first space-empire-style games on the market, *Stellar Conquest* (1975) warrants a closer inspection here. Clearly rooted in notions of spatial domination, expansion, and colonization, *Stellar Conquest's* debt to wargames is apparent. It uses the hex-and-counter wargame genre standard of a game board depicting a map—which in this case covers a small part of the Milky Way galaxy—divided into a grid of hexagonal spaces. *Stellar Conquest* includes four hundred counters that the players use to represent their units on the map. Battle is resolved by rolling six-sided dice and looking to a fire effects table for the result. The hex-and-counter genre had at the time been established as the dominant type of wargame in the United States through games like *Tactics*, *Blitzkrieg* (1965), and *PanzerBlitz* (1970); all from Avalon Hill. An unsubstantiated but often repeated anecdote claims that Avalon Hill declined an offer to publish *Stellar Conquest* which led the designer Howard Thompson to start his own publishing company, Metagaming Concepts. But when Thompson left the gaming industry eight years later, Avalon Hill bought the rights to the game and published it in their bookcase game series.

The original manual describes the gameplay as exploration, technological research, industrial expansion, population movement, and space fleet combat on a society level. It emphasizes the simulative and scientific aspects of *Stellar Conquest* with such statements as: "No activities occur during play that violate the realistically portrayed physical and technological factors."[38] By contrast, the Avalon Hill game box features an exploding spaceship and calls the game an "intergalactic battle game," positioning it more as a wargame set in space.

The game works on a massive scale: for example, a population counter of one is equal to one million inhabitants, and the distance from one hex to the next is one-eighth of a light year. The basic goal is to explore the differently colored stars on the map. To explore, a player must send at least one spaceship to a star system. When contact is made, the player draws a card that describes the planets in terms of habitability and exploitable resources. If another player is present in the star system, the nature of their presence is revealed and the players can choose between hostile or passive courses of action. In some outcomes, one player assumes control of another player's planet population and can choose to exterminate or adopt a friendly approach upon entering the *contact zone* discussed in earlier chapters.

Conquered planets generate industrial units and the population in settled colonies grows. The industrial units are the currency of the game and can be used to buy ships or develop weapons systems and ship speed technology, or conduct technological

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research. The last option allows players to develop technologies. All development options are divided into tiers where at least one tier 1 alternative has to be purchased before tier 2 becomes available, and so on. There are also discounts on some developments if a predecessor has been acquired. This does not quite amount to a technology tree as we know them today. The 4X board game *Civilization* (1980) is generally considered to be the game that introduced this concept. But *Stellar Conquest* is definitely a close precursor.

The player record sheet is used to record the colonized planets' population increases, with barren planets being less fruitful than earth-like planets. Players work at a macro level, so that, in effect, they create a large-scale engine-as-infrastructure governed by resources. Without extra research, ship travel is limited so that players cannot travel more than eight hexes away from one of their planets. This rule is easily identified in later Eurogames; for example, twenty years later, *Die Siedler von Catan* (*Settlers of Catan*, 1995) applied a similar tethering device to settlements to slow down expansion.

The overall game lasts for forty turns (forty-four in the Avalon Hill version) with each turn representing one year. This takes anywhere from four to eight hours, or even more if at least one player is new to the game. The winner is the player who has the most colony points (essentially victory points), which are awarded for controlling habitable planets, at the end of the game.

No intelligent life exists on the *Stellar Conquest* planets, even the ones deemed inhabitable, except for the other colonists. This is explained in the rule book by the planets in this star cluster being too young for evolution of intelligent species to have occurred. Thus technically no "extermination" of existing civilizations takes place. Battles may occur when one player lands on another player's colonized planet, but the fourth X does not directly match the extermination of other civilizations during the European colonial era. But the underlying ethos of wargaming as a genre—that might makes right, and that war is an inevitable, never-ending enterprise—is front-and-center in both versions of the game.

Stellar Conquest is a noteworthy game for several reasons, not least of which is its introduction of the 4X genre of gaming in the 1970s. Although the game does not include an alien presence or suggest extermination of alien life, other games inspired by *Stellar Conquest* (such as *Space Empires: 4X*, 2011) do feature end-of-the-universe-style situations and alien enemies. Players explore outer space, exploit planets for their resources, and expand their populations by millions of inhabitants. The dynamic advances in power and resources over time only further this colonial association. These aspects create an ecology in the genre that normalizes colonial notions of outer space as empty and there for the taking, an extension of the frontier myth and the space

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cowboy trope. *Stellar Conquest* is a prime example of an early engine-building strategy game that sets the stage for several contemporary game conventions.

Scholarly works in both postcolonial studies and science studies have noted the ways in which discussions of outer space incorporate the language of empire. The various discourses in the United States about space adventure and uncharted territory, for example, create a "stabilization of elsewhere," removed from the globe, that has consistently referenced "the masculine adventure of earthly colonialism."[39] Indeed, the postcolonial scholar Peter Redfield notes that "advocates of space exploration constitute perhaps the last unabashed enthusiasts of imperialism, cheerfully describing conquest, settlement, and expansion, and hesitating not a whit before employing the term 'colony.'"[40]

Did fantasy game worlds set in outer space influence German board game design? As we have seen, some of the complex mechanics associated with Eurogaming were in fact an amalgam of international influences, and mechanics were shared between these seemingly distinct design evolution trails across continents. Colonial mentalities, space exploration—all the fantasies around uncharted territories fed into what was to become classic Eurogaming.

Settlers of Catan

Concurrently with the 1980s wave of German game designers like Reinhold Wittig and Wolfgang Kramer, the designer Klaus Teuber published his first game, *Barbarossa*, in 1988. As an avid reader, Teuber was inspired by the American author Patricia A. McKillip's *Riddle-Master* trilogy (1976–1979). Teuber has stated that "there are moments when you close a book really sad that it's over. After finishing the last page, you often feel like you've lost a friend—to be somewhat melodramatic. So I was looking for a way to keep the book alive a little longer. Creating a game seemed the perfect solution."[41] *Barbarossa* went on to win the Spiel des Jahres and established Teuber's career. As Teuber's main source of income as a dentist started to dwindle due to changes in the German health care system, he found himself focusing more on designing games, and by 1995 he had already published fifteen games and won the Spiel des Jahres three times.[42]

Vikings had been a childhood obsession for Teuber, and he has described the process of making *Die Siedler von Catan* (*Settlers of Catan*) (1995) as one of discovery rather than creation. The game took four years to make and went through a number of iterations. Among the changes were a switch from square to hexagonal tiles and the removal of the exploration mechanic of flipping tiles.[43] Both the square tiles and the exploration mechanic reemerged in *Entdecker* (1996), which feels like a game made from the *Catan*

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overflow, as Teuber stripped the game down based on feedback from his family, who thought the game was too complicated.[44]

After being turned down by two publishers, Teuber signed with Kosmos. The company demanded that the player count be reduced from six to four players to save on production costs. Kosmos did not have high expectations for the new title, since it was so strategic. But when *Catan* was released in 1995, it became an instant hit. The first printing of five thousand games sold out so quickly that not even Teuber has a copy. The next year, it sold four hundred thousand copies, and by 2019, the count had reached twenty-two million copies sold, with translations in over thirty languages.[45] *Catan* became a classic Eurogame that had the complexity for multiple strategies while being accessible to a wide range of players.

The game is set up to create an island by drawing a collection of nineteen hexagonal terrain tiles representing resources: hills produce brick, forests produce lumber, mountains produce ore, fields produce grain, pasture produces wool, and desert produces nothing. These pieces are laid out to build the island, with sea boundaries and harbors placed around the perimeter, and the pieces are reconfigurable from game to game. Then terrain tiles are dealt numbered chipboard markers, so that the roll of the die will affect a particular terrain type. The theming of the game is medieval European in nature; there are knight cards, castles, horse-riding armies bearing flags, and a romantic library depicted among other iconography.

The goal of the game is for players to settle and expand the island by setting up roads and settlements. Players receive resources from each terrain hex around their settlements. Building roads requires brick and lumber resources; building settlements requires brick, lumber, wool, and grain; and upgrading a settlement to a city requires three ore and two grain. Players can trade resources with other players and trade up their own resources, getting better trading rates at particular harbor points. They can also acquire victory points and purchase development cards that give victory points or abilities.

Then there is the robber: a roll of seven activates a robber character, represented by a brown or black game piece. That round, no one gathers resources, and instead players with more than seven resource cards must discard half of them. The robber is then moved to a terrain hex to block a neighbor's resource production, and finally the player steals a resource card from another player. Mary previously wrote about this infamous robber character in *Values at Play in Digital Games*,[46] noting that players had to wonder, as did the game designer Bruno Faidutti in his 2017 article, "Where are the natives" of this seemingly resource-rich island?[47] The mysterious robber character provides a negative possibility here; the fact that the robber pawn is either brown or black in the published game suggests that the robber could be read in light of now-familiar colonialist

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discourse rife in games as the Indigenous people of the land: unnamed, criminalized, seen as a nuisance at best. Beyond the robber character, the settler narrative coupled with the mechanics of expansion and exploitation is hard to read as anything other than a retelling of the settler colonialist myth, as game designer and media studies scholar Greg Loring-Albright has pointed out.[48]

As we have mentioned, tellers of the "Eurogame story" insist that Germany invented games about building things, rather than annihilating opponents, with "peaceful premises" and intricate rules.[49] *Catan* is often cited as the original model: "Settlers may be the Mona Lisa of the board game renaissance," *Wired* magazine's Andrew Curry asserted in 2009. It's true that the game presents a classic example of Eurogaming: the player experience is strategy focused; play is based on resource management and converting resources to other resources; "engine building," or the process of instantiating and upgrading infrastructures, leads to the production of more resources; the game is non-war themed, in that challenges between players are typically about space or resources and not about mass eradication or slaughter; and players must choose between short-term versus long-term benefits and costs, with longer-term investments. The interaction can tend toward solo play (building one's own capacities, with the exception of intraplayer resource swapping), another hallmark Eurogame element. Ultimately, the game, in many ways, acts as a catalog of contemporary game mechanics. Yet the pieces for such games came from many sources, such as the outer-space colonial game *Stellar Conquest* and, of course, the collection of board games discussed earlier in this book.

Conclusion

Until the twentieth century, board games tended to use rule systems built on familiar past play practices, at which point novel mechanics became a focus. After the Spiel des Jahres, each new game is expected to innovate in some way; while too much change might make a game inaccessible or unattractive due to unfamiliarity, it is clear that the game designers must find a balance. Even with novel mechanical twists, award-winning game innovations tend to involve other existing or familiar genres, rules, and scenarios, for games involve a *ludic language* that transcends each individual game and ties games together: beginning areas, end areas, roll, move, collect, win, lose, tie, and so on.[50]

The twentieth century, however, witnessed massive shifts in board games toward novel game mechanics. These led the way to the development and articulation of a game genre broadly known as Eurogames, and their subsequent impact of those games on today's board games on a global scale. In the end, both sides of the Atlantic

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influenced the development of this wide-scale resource management strategy genre through interpretations of colonial themes. Features such as multiple paths for strategy, several currencies (local currencies versus overall game victory points), upgrading and engine building, and other systems-level Euro mechanics seem to have emerged simultaneously, almost as the natural next step in the evolution of board games. But we urge rethinking this seemingly *natural* progression.

In the end, did wargames morph inextricably with trading, as discussed in the last chapter, with colonization as seen in multiple examples, and with games based on consumption and resource-based capitalism? That capital systems and systems of war were merged together is evident in space games, and in the use of mechanics from wargaming in seemingly *peaceful* games. Unpacking the link between consumption, industrialization, and the weight of colonialism is an important next step.

Again, problematic representations, themes, and biases exist not only in the history of board games but also in contemporary games, whether designers intend them to or not, for games are a product of the culture in which they are created. This does not excuse the continued problematic representations that designers might perpetuate, however. No designer wants their design to be labeled racist or to hear that their game is embedded with colonial values, but if left unexamined, these themes will naturally emerge due to the history of the development of contemporary board games.

We can pull together numerous threads from the stories of empire perpetuated by late-twentieth-century board game designs. As we have seen in earlier chapters, board games have their roots, as forms of enculturation, in both adult play and children's play, with different kinds of influences on each group. We have seen that the seeds of strategy from wargaming and board games' colonial focus on the seizing of territory and on the importation of goods to European nations influenced the development of Eurogaming. By the late twentieth century, we can see how closely some elements of popular culture are reflected in games, such as themes of the Space Race and the American desire for domination in outer space beginning earnestly in the 1960s and '70s. Finally, notions of exploration, exploitation, and conquest have been adapted to outer-space frameworks, in particular with America's space cowboy motif, and thus space games too thus carry this burden.

Was it the increased competition and globalization of product markets that created a more aggressive capitalist solution to gaming and drove the creation of Eurogames? In other words, were novel game mechanics invented for purely capitalistic purposes—to sell more games? Or is there an artistic side, an aesthetic that prevails from these mechanics apart from commercial concerns? Can we categorize the growth of some mechanics as related to foundational notions of colonialism itself? Or is the

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colonial logic so embedded in games that the games develop and manifest these values over and over again?

It is imperative that the community reexamine this history. Designers who find themselves in the midst of their own biased scenarios and interactions might see this revelation as a design challenge. How can we "provincialize" games so that they reflect specificities and perspectives that defy stereotypical, problematic representation? How do we represent the complexity of time, where the heterogeneity of "historic moments" is made more complex? Dipesh Chakrabarty argues in *Provincializing Europe* that the political conditions of a colonial and postcolonial India, for example, are marked by "time knots" in history: multiple experiences of time that constitute historical moments. Chakrabarty's idea manifests clearly in those instances when something from one time period emerges within another, such as the use of a traditional kitchen object in a modern kitchen. These noncohesive understandings of historical "moments" may help us understand incompatible experiences and incompatible times and thus begin to shift narratives and relocalize them.[51] At the end of the book, we will discuss new narratives and new directions for board games that use some of these ideas.

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Playing Oppression

The Legacy of Conquest and Empire in Colonialist Board Games

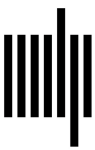
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6 Explorers and Exploiters

> You know full well we are exploiters. You know full well we have taken the gold and minerals and then oil from the "new continents," and shipped them back to the old metropolises. Not without excellent results in the shape of palaces, cathedrals, and centers of industry; and then when crisis loomed, the colonial markets were there to cushion the blow or divert it.
>
> —Jean-Paul Sartre, Preface, *The Wretched of the Earth*

In previous chapters, we have developed the argument that colonialist games and the development of game mechanics are inextricably intertwined. Now we unpack the roles that players assume in contemporary board gaming, which, in combination with the mechanics, determine aspects of agency, control, and representation as the game systems are set in motion by the players. As we shift our focus to the twenty-first century for this and the following chapter, we will also change our approach to presenting our analysis.

We ended the last chapter by examining *Die Siedler von Catan* (*Settlers of Catan*, 1995), which ushered in a period of explosive growth in the board game hobby and industry that is still ongoing. We can think of the history laid out in the previous chapters as the trunk of a tree that, at this point, is spreading its branches in all directions. In an attempt to capture an aspect of this period that we believe is essential to understanding colonialism in board games, we have treated our extensive archive of games as a mosaic that we have let crystallize into two common archetypes of player roles: *explorers* and *tomb raiders*,[1] roles that are vital to three of the four *X*s we discussed earlier in relation to the evolution of 4X board game mechanics: *exploration*, *expansion*, and *exploitation*; and occasionally, the fourth *X* of *extermination*. With over a thousand games recorded in our research materials from this period, we are aware that players can assume numerous roles in board games, such as traders, generals, pioneers, farmers,

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statesmen, pirates, and railroad barons. Nevertheless, the overwhelming presence of explorers and tomb raiders in Eurogaming deserves deep examination and discussion.

Explorers

Of all the roles players take on in European colonialism games, none is more glamorously mythologized than the explorer. To disentangle the relation between these board games and the actual explorers of the European colonial era, we might understand the board game characterizations as hagiographies, or idealized biographies of iconic figures.[2] These games do not necessarily present the explorers' deeds through an educational historical lens (and, as we have seen, even educational historical lenses can be misleading); rather, they present them through one of cultural self-aggrandizement.

While the aesthetic of religious hagiographies often relies on reverence—ancient texts read out loud in reverberant, stone-arched spaces with stained-glass windows depicting saints and martyrs—the aesthetic of board game hagiographies is one of playfulness and revelry. But the underlying formal elements still overlap in significant ways. Just as Catholic saints are often depicted with an item of symbolic importance to their deeds, so the board game representations of explorers also come with a set of items that we can read and interpret to establish the language of board game character hagiographies.

In the early 1990s, a slew of Columbus-themed board games were released to capitalize on the five-hundred-year anniversary of his arrival in the Americas. Among these games, the offerings from Ravensburger and Schmidt Spiele are very similar: both are called *Columbus* (with different taglines), both were released in 1991, both are family games with light mechanics, and both feature plastic ship miniatures representing the different players (figure 6.1).

Columbus: Das Spiel für mütige Seefahrer (Columbus: The game for courageous seafarers, 1991) stands out by virtue of being designed by Wolfgang Kramer. By this point, Kramer had already designed more than forty games and won the Spiel des Jahres twice. This game is clearly designed with young players in mind and has a simple goal and rules: race to be the first to sail to America and then back home to Europe. The rule book is full of historical tidbits about Columbus's first voyage across the Atlantic, and for those who want to learn more, there is an ad for educational books from Ravensburger, including one called *Die Welt hinter dem Horizont* (The world beyond the horizon).[3]

In Kramer's *Columbus* race game, the core mechanic is tile laying; players explore the sea and lay down sinking ship and hurricane tiles to delay each other. Each player

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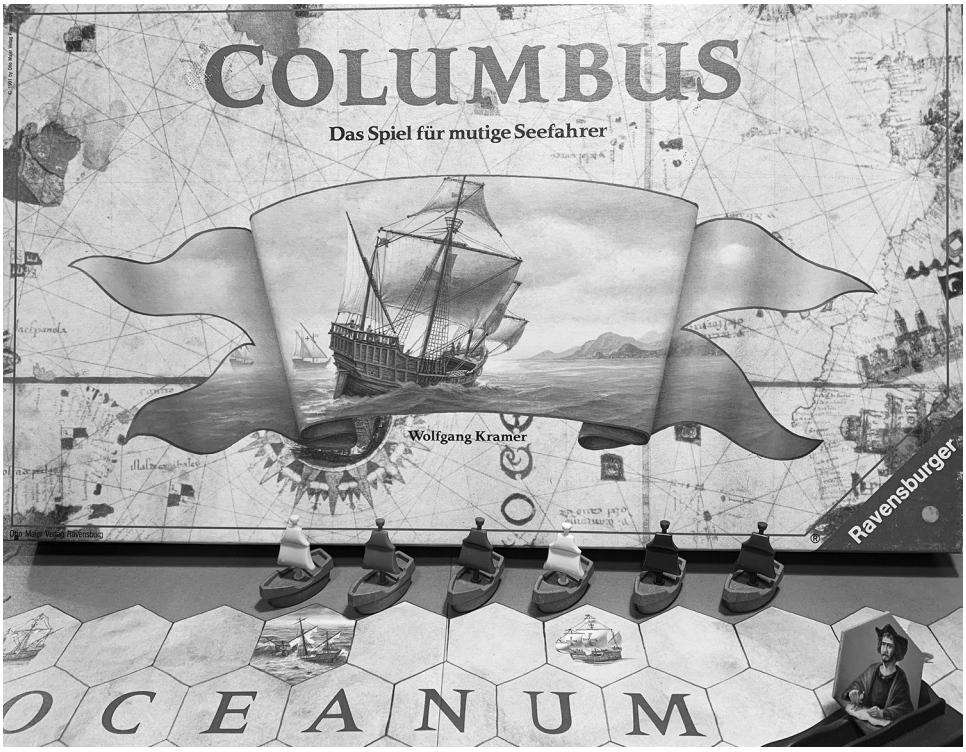


Figure 6.1
Wolfgang Kramer's *Columbus* (1991), released to take advantage of the quincentenary of Columbus's arrival in the Americas. Note the plastic ship player pieces. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

holds ten tiles in their hand, giving the game a card game feel; players place these in tile holders reminiscent of those used in *Scrabble* (1948), though these tiles are made out of chipboard and are significantly larger and octagonal. Columbus himself makes an appearance on a wild-card tile referred to as a joker, further adding to the card game feel.

The most memorable aspect of the game is neither the mechanics nor the nuggets of historical information but the player pieces: the ships. There is something exquisitely enticing in the act of sailing your moves compared to regular pawn movements. It is an invitation to play and fantasy that even jaded media studies scholars find hard to resist, and is a basic feature of the explorer / sailing ship genre.

When we debriefed playing *Francis Drake* (2013), for example, we noted that all players had upgraded their ships from frigates to galleons, not necessarily because it

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was the best strategic choice, but because we wanted the more impressive player pieces (figure 6.2).

The ship is the most powerful symbol in European colonial iconography. It symbolizes exploration and conquest, but also trade and travel. Most of all, it symbolizes adventure, seducing players through fanciful illustrations on the covers of game boxes and miniatures that represent the player on the board. Ships' power is evident in the way they constantly find their way into the box art of myriad Eurogames, even when the game involves no sailing. Publishers have picked up on the symbolic, and lucrative, potential of the image of the ship.

The box front of *Navegador* (2010) features Dom Henrique of Portugal, better known as Prince Henry the Navigator, studying a map (figure 6.3). Prince Henry, born in 1394 to King John I of Portugal, was a central figure in ushering in what is known as the Age of Exploration (fifteenth century to mid-seventeenth century). One motive for Prince Henry's devotion to exploration was finding the source of the West African gold trade, but he was also driven by the legend of Prester John, which tells of a Christian patriarch ruling a kingdom full of riches, marvels, and strange creatures. In the game, players represent wealthy trade dynasties. This information can be found in a booklet titled *Historical Figures of Portugal*, included with the game.

The German designer Mac Gerdts mentions in the designer notes in the rule book that he decided to make a game about the Portuguese golden age (1415–1578),[4] when attending a board game convention in Portugal. The following year, he went back and presented a prototype that was received enthusiastically.

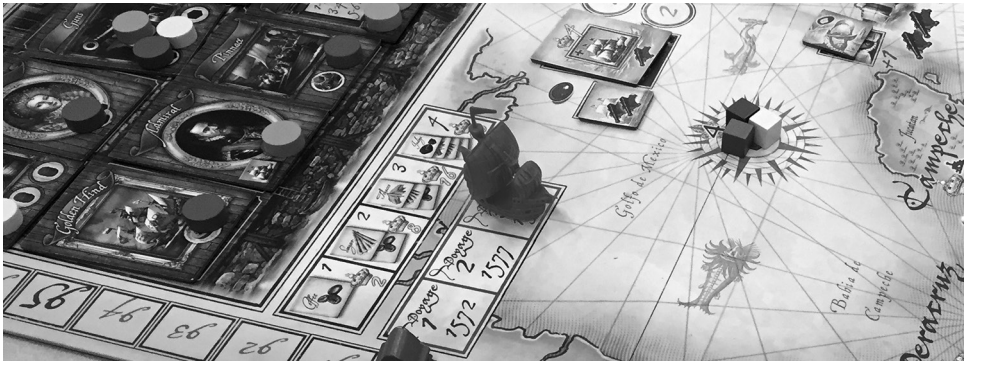


Figure 6.2
The game *Francis Drake* (2013) with a galleon ship in the center, exemplifying the tactile pleasures of modern board gaming, specifically the role that ship models play in the explorer fantasy. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

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Portugal was the first European nation to start building a colonial empire, establishing colonies in Africa, Asia, and America. The period is also known as the Portuguese Renaissance, producing an abundance of poets, historians, and theologians. By contrast, Portugal today is one of the financially weakest nations in the European Union. The country has been hit hard by financial crises and had to accept austerity measures in return for a bailout from the European Commission, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund. Although conditions are slowly improving, the nation still suffers from a weak economy and high unemployment rates. Given the socioeconomic context, the game can be seen as playing on nationalistic nostalgia. As long as you turn a blind eye to the injustices and suffering caused by the Portuguese colonial empire, it may be tempting for the Portuguese to set sail into the past.

The game revolves around exploration. Players have a subset of eight actions at their disposal each turn. Action selection is governed by a rondel,[5] a game mechanic that Gerdts is famous for. Each player has a piece in their color on the rondel. On their turn, they move their piece one to three steps clockwise and take the action they land on, which can be to move their ships between regions, for instance, or to found new colonies. Players can also choose to sacrifice one or more of their ships on the board to move extra steps in the rondel if the action they really want to take is otherwise out of reach.

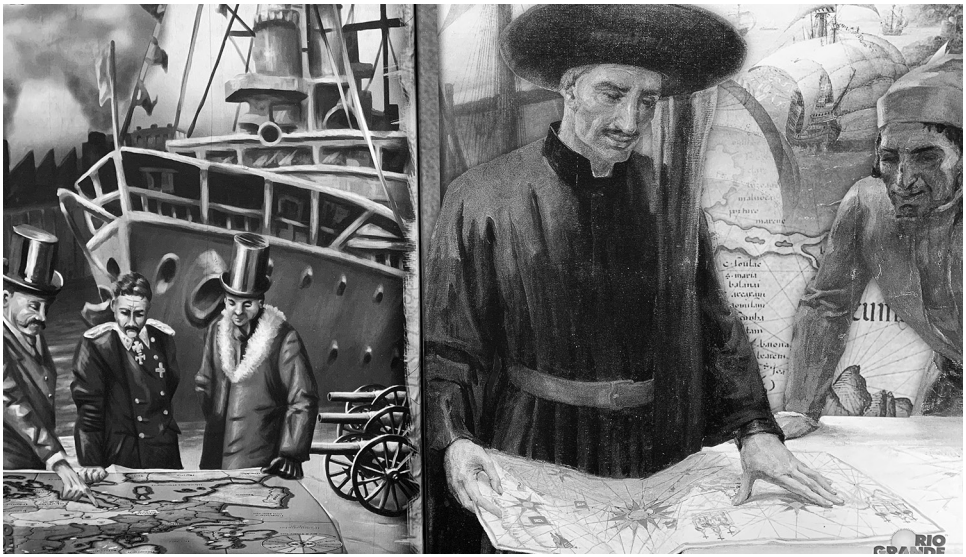


Figure 6.3
The box front illustrations of *Imperial* (2006) and *Navegador* (2010) highlight the map as a tool for European men of power in their colonial endeavors. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

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The rondel is a type of action selection mechanic. By giving players some choice of which action to perform on their turns, Eurogames have forged a middle ground between the daunting abundance of possible actions to consider in a game like chess, and the dulling constraints of roll-and-move games. Although some action selection mechanics, like action drafting or worker placement, involve blocking other players from taking the action they want to take, the rondel allows several players to take the same action. Thus the rondel focuses agency and the ability to forge a lucrative course of action, a privilege awarded to those in power.

The rondel in *Navegador* is stylized as a compass rose, an image that recurs throughout the game's iconography. The emphasis on exploration shows in the importance of charting unknown waters, which rewards the player victory points and resources. Mechanically, exploration is represented by moving ships to a previously unexplored area. The areas on the board are chosen to represent important conquests from Portugal's colonial history, such as Rio de Janeiro, Cabo da Boa Esperança (the Cape of Good Hope), Goa, and Macau.

As we have discussed in earlier chapters, the history of printed game boards and mapmaking is thoroughly intertwined. But in the case of maps in modern board games, the direct influence on the designers probably came from the wargames of the postwar era. In Gerdts's earlier game *Imperial* (2006), a game that wears its *Risk* (1959) influences on its sleeve, players fight for control over Europe. *Imperial* shares a few similarities with *Navegador*: they both use a rondel for action selection, place a strong focus on financial decisions, and include a booklet with historical information about the subject matter. But in *Navegador*, the map use is more or less inverted. Players navigate the sea areas of the map, and the board almost omits Europe altogether. The Iberian Peninsula peeks out from under a panel where players keep track of the number of workers they have recruited. Since the map, along with the gameplay taking place there, symbolizes adventure and opportunity, Europe becomes insignificant. As Edward Said observes in his reading of Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899), the colonial endeavor represented, among other things, a career opportunity for young European men. In this regard, representing famous explorers as the acts they perform becomes a particularly engaging way of selling the values of the Age of Exploration.[6]

In some games, the map is represented by a globe, imbuing the map with notes of progress, education, and modernity connected to the Renaissance. Through Galileo Galilei, the globe is also connected to the telescope. Consequently the globe and telescope often figure together in the board game iconography of explorers, such as on the cover of the game *Amerigo* (2014) (figure 6.4).

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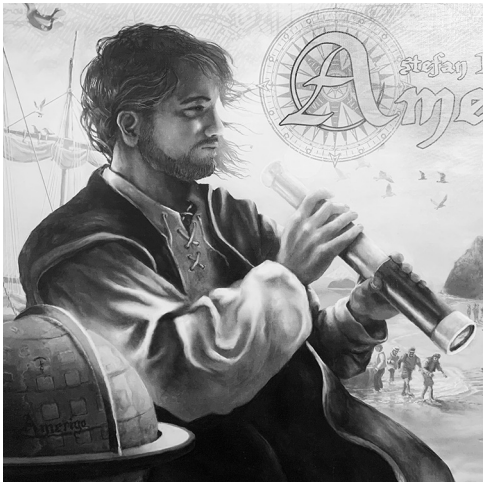


Figure 6.4
Amerigo (2014) box front illustration that links the globe, the telescope, the map (with the compass in the game logo), and the explorer. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

Amerigo Vespucci's real-life accomplishments are only loosely related to his legacy. The reason the Americas were named after him, and games are made about him, is that letters about his journeys were widely circulated in Europe during the early sixteenth century.[7] The first and most famous letter, *Mundus Novus*, has lent its name to a number of games in our study, such as *New World* (1990), *Mundus Novus* (2011), and *Nuevo Mundo* (2014).

What these games do not show is that as world maps were rewritten and globes depicting the earth started to appear, they were extremely inaccurate. Vespucci only referred to the main landmass of South America when he wrote about the New World, and left open—perhaps for political reasons—the possibility that Columbus had cleared this "new" continent to the north and actually made it to Asia (figure 6.5).

The application of a modern map to a sixteenth-century context could be seen as a choice to let ontology rule over epistemology. After all, the sixteenth-century world already looked the way it does on modern maps; it just was not known yet. But regardless of what motivated the design choice to use maps that did not yet exist, such as the player board, it tells us that the goal is not to immerse the player in a different place and time for the duration of the game. The objective is to tell a glorified narrative that makes Western players feel good about their cultural heritage.

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Figure 6.5
The da Vinci globe, dating from 1504, depicting the New World as a landmass not extending north of the equator, which illustrates how modern maps are retrofitted into the supposedly historical narratives of games like *Amerigo* (2014). © Steffan Missinne, 2018.

When players choose to explore a new area, they lose one of their ships. This can be seen as a representation of the cost of resources incurred by fighting and subjugating any resistance from the local population, but the rule book does not mention anything about battle or bloodshed. As the games scholar Will Robinson points out in his analysis of the game *Vasco da Gama* (2009), which portrays another prominent figure of the Portuguese golden age, "Tellingly, there is no mention of an 'other' who might have historically received the hidden end of the sword."[8] As Woods points out, leaving out battle and bloodshed is so common in Eurogames that it is seen as a defining trait of the genre.[9]

In the transition from direct-conflict area-control map games like *Risk* to games where players can coexist on the map, quietly returning units to the supply in lieu of performing combat, Eurogames took an already whitewashed historical representation and made it even more palatable for a broad Western audience. Such an approach hides what the cultural anthropologist and Islamic scholar Enseng Ho refers to as "a view of the imperial ship of state as seen from a smaller boat sailing the same seas."[10] Ho boils down the historical impact of the emergence of Western colonialism to "the new importance of state violence to markets,"[11] and echoing Achille Mbembe's claim that each stage of imperialism involved certain key technologies, starting with the gunboat,[12] Ho says that "the marriage of cannon to trading ship was the crucial, iconic innovation."[13]

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Only the trade side of this dyad is represented in *Navegador*. The reward for the exploration is money from the bank based on the value of whatever trade goods the exploration action made available in the colony. This represents opening up a new trade route but also makes the colony available to be claimed as Portuguese by paying a fee to the bank. We read this as the exploration act representing the subjugation of resistance, and the formal colonizing as a more administrative act.

In *Navegador*—as in most Eurogames—all players are successful. They all amass wealth and notoriety, even if only the one with the most victory points wins the game. Nancy Foasberg touches on an important aspect that is often overlooked in critical analysis of these games when she talks about the pleasures of *Navegador* and *Goa* (2004)—yet another Eurogame set during the Portuguese golden age, in India. She acknowledges the pleasures of the game's economic mechanics, the pleasures of efficient management and acquisition of wealth, and the pleasures of pushing oneself to master a complex system with just about as many moving parts as a player can handle.[14]

Navegador is an example of how a game is created with people from the depicted culture as part of the target audience. It is also a friendly nod from one former colonial metropole to another, using a cultural artifact that glorifies the past as an act of bonding. The German designer Mac Gerdts is not the only one who has paid tribute to the Portuguese golden age. The previously mentioned games *Goa* and *Vasco da Gama* (2009) are designed by Rudiger Dorn (German) and Paolo Mori (Italian) respectively. Add to these the games *Macao* (2009) by Stefan Feld (German), *Magellan* (2002) by Tom Lehmann (American), and *Magellan: Elcano* (2021) by Michael Schacht (German), and an image emerges of a group of White men standing in a ring, cheering for Portugal—or more specifically, the vintage version of Portugal that broke the barrier between power-hungry European proto-empires and an unsuspecting world that was about the be demolished. In the middle of the ring, we find the Portuguese designers Gil d'Orey (*Caravelas*, 2010; *Caravelas II*, 2013) and Nuno Bizarro Sentieiro and Paulo Soledade (*Madeira*, 2013) joining the celebrations. But outside the handholding club, the unintended effect of celebrating a glorious past that never was is an extension of the cultural distance between Westerners and everyone else.

Tomb Raiders

So far, we have only discussed seafaring explorers, but plenty of colonial-themed games involve land exploration as well. Many of these gravitate to a particular player role that we have decided to call the "tomb raider." Tomb raiders may be described as explorers, adventurers, or archaeologists, but they always do the same thing: take valuable

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artifacts from colonized countries and bring them back to the West, where they, the tomb raiders, come from.

Africa (2001) is remarkably similar to *Afrikan Tähti* (*African Star*, 1951) (figure 6.6). Both games use tiles that players flip as they move around a hexagonal grid. The racing objective has been replaced with collection of victory points, and the emphasis on strategy is much heavier, as players must weigh different scoring options while being careful about the opportunities left behind for other players to capitalize on. In this regard, the game bears a kinship with Reiner Knizia's tile-laying game trilogy from the 1990s: *Tigris & Euphrates* (1997), *Samurai* (1998), and *Through the Desert* (1998). It also repeats the formula of taking an abstract, vaguely Go-like logic puzzle and dressing it in a more or less arbitrary exoticized theme. The player roles are a close match with

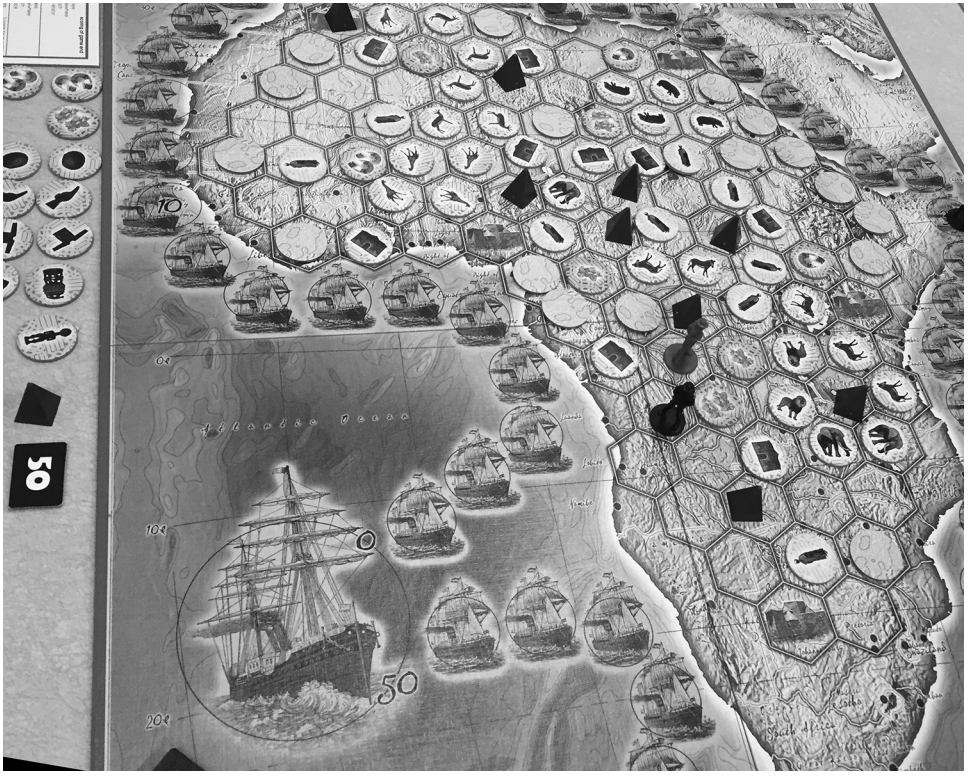


Figure 6.6
The board of *Africa* (2001) at the end of a game. Note the similarities of the board and components to *Afrikan Tähti* (1951). Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

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those from *Afrikan Tähti*. Both games are about collecting gems and other valuables in Africa before another European explorer beats you to it. A review on BoardGameGeek joyfully notes: "Notice that the theme is in fact not so much exploration, as exploration followed by exploitation—who says Knizia games don't have any theme? I think this one's brilliant." The reviewer goes on to note that gold and gems stay on the board when found, quipping: "I guess the points are for telling De Beers where you found them." This is a reference to the diamond mining and marketing company De Beers Group, which was founded in 1888 by the British mining magnate and politician Cecil Rhodes, who also served as prime minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896.

Knizia's most influential tomb raider game is *Lost Cities* (1999). It started out as part of a series of two-player games from the German publisher Kosmos. The front of the box shows two characters wearing fedoras at the gate of a city in ruins—an illustration clearly designed to capitalize on the enormous success of the *Indiana Jones* film franchise. The *Indiana Jones* movies are filled to the brim with colonialist tropes and racist stereotypes. These films feature "Indy" taking ancient artifacts from exotic locations and placing them in Western museums.[15]

In *Lost Cities*, the players play cards in piles that represent different expeditions. An expedition gives "exploration points" if the value of the cards in the pile exceeds the cost of the expedition; but if the goal is not met, the player receives negative points. At the beginning of an expedition, players can also play "wager" cards that double the outcome, whether negative or positive. In all its simplicity, the game captures the exploitative core of the tomb raider games. The cost represents the expenses that the expedition must pay to get to the exotic and remote location. The random draw of cards to play in the expedition piles represents the uncertainty of finding anything of value. Once the value of resources found on the expedition outweighs the costs, the difference is pure profit. There is never any sense of the stolen artifacts representing a loss for anyone else; the locations are detached from local context and culture. They exist only as a playground for White adventurers to seek personal fortunes without any negative consequences.

Conclusion

In the dedication for *Viceroys: Expansion Set 1: Columbus* (1992), the American designer Mark G. McLaughlin thanks not only his family but also Christopher Columbus, "without whose vision and courage five centuries ago none of us would be here." Setting aside the issue of how the designer equates *us* only to White people, the acknowledgment also hints at a connection between Anglo-American and European designers'

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desire to tell these hagiographic stories of the "great colonizers." Whether it is the Portuguese sea explorers in *Navegador*, the exploits of the Dutch East India Company in games like *VOC! Founding the Dutch East Indies Company* (2002), or the many games about Columbus from the early 1990s, there is an intimate connection between the modern form of most Western nations and their colonial pasts. The gameplay reenacts fanciful origin stories of nations and national identity. They serve both as justifications for the current state of the world and any privileges that come with it, and as signs of gratitude toward those who established the world we now live in.

The tomb raider narratives are also doing the labor of enculturation, but furthermore, they trade in a modern form of Orientalism in which the creators may be more careful than in the past not to propagate negative ethnic stereotypes. What is employed in its stead, however, is not culturally engaged representations of real places with real people. The games merely present colorful backdrops for the Western heroes to perform their dramatic acts for personal gain and without consequences. In line with the tourist gaze, the exotic locales are treated as playgrounds for Westerners in transit.

It is a chilling thought that we do not merely maneuver the forces of oppression when we play these games—we also enact the equivalent of a silent nod of justification to a deceitful ongoing enculturation. It is too late to ask our forebears to create a better history to reenact, but we can still take a look at ourselves and try to think through what is lost when we participate in the circulation of these enactments, and what can be gained from changing course.

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Playing Oppression

The Legacy of Conquest and Empire in Colonialist Board Games

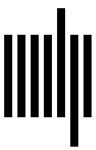
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7 Representations of the Other

> Stuffed with wealth, Europe granted humanity de jure to all its inhabitants: for us, a man means an accomplice, for we have all profited from colonial exploitation. . . . The only way the European could make himself man was by fabricating slaves and monsters.
>
> —Jean-Paul Sartre, Preface, *The Wretched of the Earth*

We have seen how board games have been used not just to educate but to enculturate players to historical points of view. We have examined the tourist gaze in games, and the obsession with colonial locales and colonialist ways of understanding them. We have explored stereotyping and the idea of contact zones as they appear in board games, "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today."[1] In chapter 6, we discussed how contemporary games recycle tropes of the colonial era to the degree that historical people and events are mythologized in a manner akin to religious hagiographies designed to serve a reactionary agenda. In our analysis of the roles players are given, we exclusively described White Western Christian characters. This is because all the player characters in nearly all the games we played were explicitly or implicitly understood as White, Western, and Christian, with some tokenized exceptions. There are few exceptions to this rule when looking at the major archetypes that we saw repeat from game to game, year after year. Furthermore, most of these roles have been cast as men. To find representations of non-White, non-Western people, particularly Indigenous characters or *local* people in colonialist games, we have to look outside the roles enacted by the players, to passive forms—visual, physical, and mechanical—of representation.

We will also unpack the notion of the *ideal player* and show how players who do not fit an imagined ideal player mold are forced—through a process we call *casting*—to accommodate the board game as a cultural actant or be excluded from play.

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Indigenous Peoples as Commodities

Indigenous inhabitants living in the various locales of colonial-themed games are represented in a range of ways, but one of the most common ways designers deal with them is to not represent them at all. As such, before we discuss representation, we must first consider the issue of erasure. In *Puerto Rico* (2002), players populate their fields and production facilities with workers to generate goods that can be shipped to their home country for victory points. In the rule book, these workers are confusingly referred to as *colonists*. The box cover depicts what appear to be European colonists loading a cargo ship (figure 7.1). The illustration by Franz Vohwinkel conveys an air of serenity with a backdrop of pastel-colored stone buildings: the Spanish-looking men in the foreground signal productivity but still seem relaxed and comfortable. The idea that the workers are European colonists is also supported by the mechanics of the game, where the supply of workers is restricted by ships bringing them to the island. All the roles that



Figure 7.1
Detail from the *Puerto Rico* (2002) box cover, showing what are most likely European workers loading a ship. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

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players take on in the game—prospector, captain, mayor, trader, settler, craftsman, and builder—are clearly also colonizers, which leaves us with the question: where are the Indigenous inhabitants of Puerto Rico?

To answer this question, we return to the foundational work of Edward Said, who pointed out that the key to the inception and continuation of imperialist attitudes is the idea of inferiority and difference. In imperialist discourse, the West is perceived to be rational, efficient, and superior, and the undeveloped Orient—Said's term that can be generalized to the non-Western Other—is positioned as inefficient, irrational, and underachieving, often needing guidance like a child.[2] This creates what he calls a *racialized knowledge divide* between the colonizer and the colonized, a binary that comes down to the separation between the self and the other, continuously constructing the other as dangerous, dark, and elusive.

When we ask, "Where are the Native inhabitants of Puerto Rico?" the answer is, of course, that the so-called colonists in the game actually are slaves, something that has been pointed out numerous times within the board gaming community, as well as in academic sources.[3] They are represented in the game by dark brown discs, visually evoking dark-skinned people (figure 7.2). The BoardGameGeek forum for *Puerto Rico* is full of discussion threads with subjects such as "Dark Side of Puerto Rico," "Slavery," "Colonizing in an ideal world," "The thorny issue of slavery," "PR isn't Offensive enough, or, making Slavery more offensive," "Racial overtones of PR and black gamers," "Isn't this game a little racist?," and "Racist?" The discussions in these threads often become heated, and several threads have been locked by the administrators. Some people argue that there is no proof that the colonist discs represent slaves, but most agree that this is the only reasonable assumption. People disagree, however, as to whether this is problematic.

The Indigenous name of Borinquen was replaced with Puerto Rico by Christopher Columbus over five hundred years ago, and ever since, Western exploiters have continued to colonize the land. The Arawak-speaking Taíno people who greeted Columbus relied on fishing and agriculture but were quickly overcome by colonizers. Native men, women, and children were forced to build buildings for the colonizers and dig for gold in search of the riches the Europeans sought. Within fifty years of Columbus's arrival, colonizers had nearly extinguished the Native populations through disease, murder, and enslavement.[4]

Reading the brown discs as slaves rather than colonists puts the labor distribution mechanic of the game in a new light. It makes sense that access to labor is regulated by the arrival of ships, since the Spanish colonizers of Puerto Rico created a labor demand that far surpassed the supply of the island's Indigenous inhabitants, the Taíno, to

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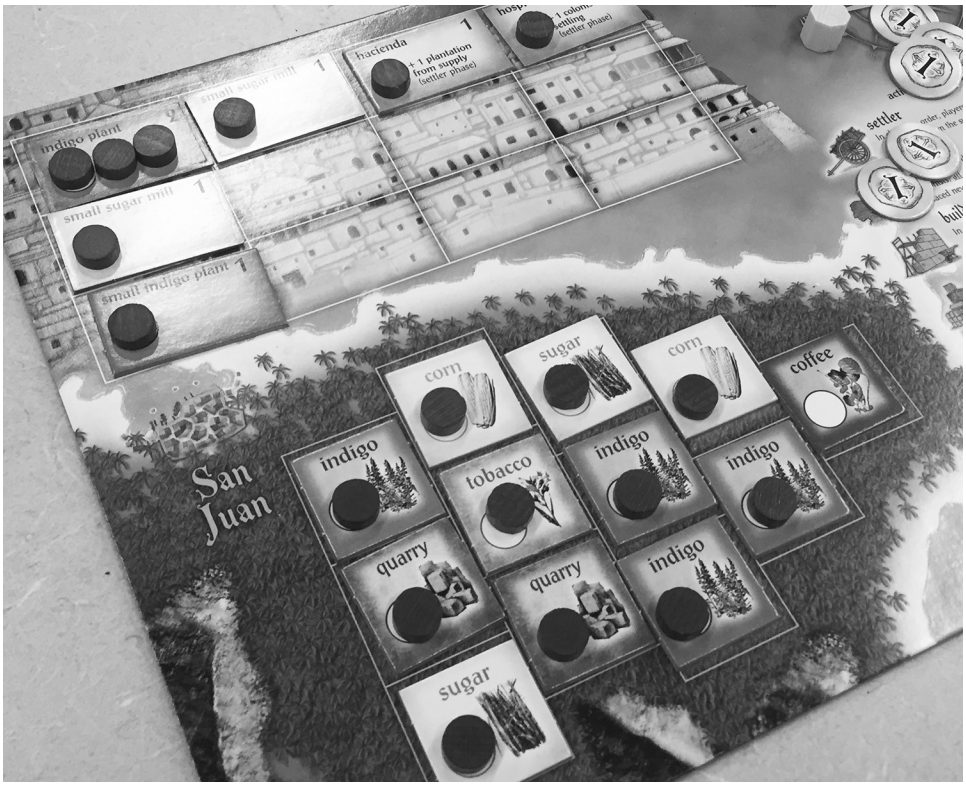


Figure 7.2
Dark brown discs placed in fields and factories to generate exploitable resources in *Puerto Rico* (2002); historically these tasks were performed by slaves. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

enslave. The Spanish therefore relied on slaves sent on ships from West Africa. Looking closer at the mayor's role in distributing workers, we see that every fifth worker or so that players receive comes directly from the supply, rather than from the ship. In other words, according to the logic of the game, some workers were already present on the island. Perhaps this is just a concession to making the narrative work as a play experience, but it is easy to imagine that the use of the terms *colonists* and *colonist ship* were last-minute substitutions to avoid controversy.

Accepting that the brown discs represent slaves, we can now analyze the way they are integrated in the game mechanics. The brown discs are interchangeable regardless of which tasks they are performing. During a round, players all take on one of seven roles, perform an action as that role, and then move on to the next role. Each time

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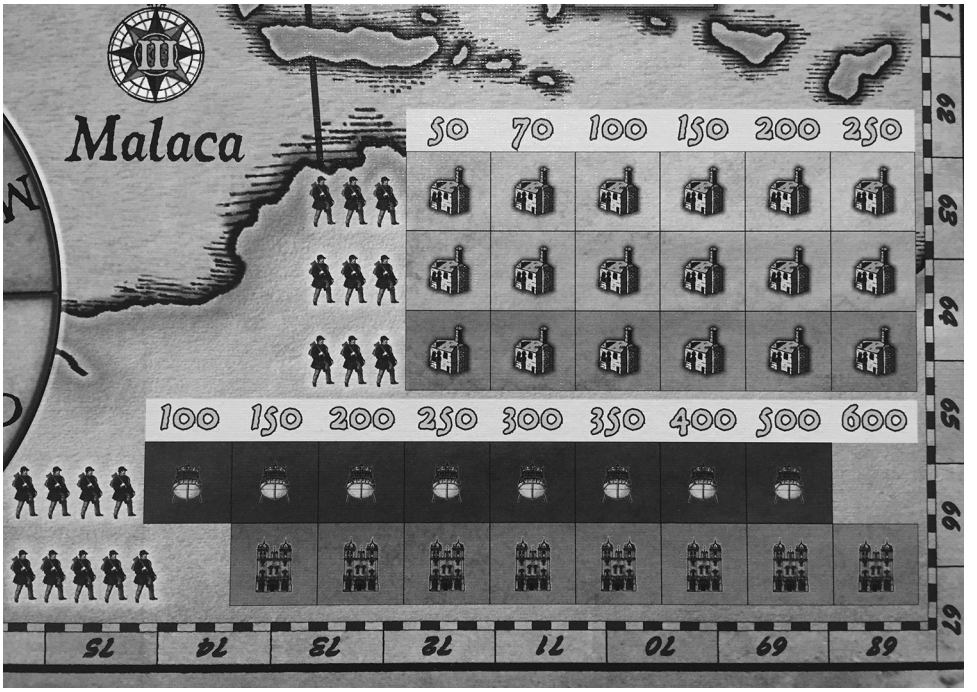


Figure 7.3
Table showing worker requirements in *Navegador* (2016). Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

players take on the mayor role, they can move the discs to any plantation, quarry, or building that they wish to activate. Although the discs cannot be sold, they function as commodities in that they are completely interchangeable.

We see a similar mechanics of erasure in *Navegador* (2016), a game about Portuguese colonialist endeavors in the fifteenth century. The number of workers owned by a player in *Navegador* is represented by a wooden figure in the player's color, placed on a numbered track to record how many workers the player has. The workers are depicted as Portuguese men in Lisbon waiting to be put to work. But the mechanics of the game tell a different story. Players acquire workers by building churches, implying that people from the local population become workers by converting to Christianity. These non-Christians would not be found in Lisbon, as it has been profoundly Christian since the twelfth century—Roman Catholic, to be precise. Thus, the non-Christians whom the player converts must come from the local populations in the colonies. Players pay a one-time sum to acquire a worker rather than a running salary. The worker can then be used to fulfill labor requirements in the colonies, a game logic that emulates slave labor (figure 7.3).

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In his book *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha noted that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence."[5] In these examples, there is an ambivalence about who is colonized and who is a colonist; in the process of creating this ambivalence, these games either erase or convert the Indigenous people. Thus the use of ambivalence and erasure of Indigenous peoples is one strategy used by designers to gloss over the deep violence embedded in the colonialist endeavor while reveling in the productivity of the very same machinations.

Ashis Nandy is basing his analysis on the British colonization of India when he writes: "Modern colonialism won its great victories not so much through its military and technological prowess as through its ability to create secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order."[6] But there are direct parallels to how the explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark attempted to change the social order of the Native Americans they encountered on their expedition. Lewis tried to introduce hierarchies by "making chiefs" through passing out medals, certificates, and uniforms to certain individuals in Native groups to intentionally destabilize traditional authority and make negotiation easier.[7]

The board game version of this well-documented journey, *Lewis & Clark: The Expedition* (2014), reveals none of its problematic history and instead introduces another example of commodification of the Other. The designer Cédrick Chaboussit has noted that the original design had the working title *Le village 1900* and was set in France until his first meeting with the publisher Ludonaute.[8] Mechanically, the game is a modern take on the race game genre, where the players each control their own instance of the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804 with the objective of reaching the Pacific coast first. To be successful, players must manage their resources carefully, balancing efforts to improve their expedition with the time invested in doing so.

Along the way, players recruit Native Americans (referred to as "Indians" in the rule book) to their expedition. By sending an interpreter to a powwow, players can "welcome" a number of Native Americans, who can then be used to perform different tasks. Unlike the White members of the expedition, who are illustrated with detailed portraits, most Native Americans in the game are nameless, featureless wooden tokens.[9] Although the rule book does not list them together with resources like wood, fur, food, and equipment, Native persons are "used" in a similar way to those resources and kept in "stock" until acquired. Given the way they are represented and how they figure into gameplay mechanics, it is dismaying, but not surprising, to see players referring to this act as "burning Indians" in the game's forum on the BoardGameGeek website.[10]

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Indigenous Peoples as Obstacles

Still under the umbrella of erasure, we will now turn to the ways Indigenous peoples and cultures are flattened into another type of working material for game designers: obstacles. *Colonial: Europe's Empires Overseas* (2012) is an area-control game with card-driven action selection. Each player has cards with twelve different characters that allow the players to perform different actions. The cards, like all parts of the game, use public domain images as illustrations. Out of the twelve characters, ten are White men; one, the financier, is a White woman; and one—the rebel—is a man of color: Cuauhtémoc, Aztec ruler from the sixteenth century.

Indigenous peoples are mainly visible in the game as silhouettes representing the "Native power" of different regions on the map board. Nine different silhouettes represent the different Indigenous peoples of the areas of the world that can be colonized. In figure 7.4, we see that the Levant, Persia, and Arabia have different silhouettes, while



Figure 7.4
Detail of the board from *Colonial: Europe's Empires Overseas* (2012) with silhouettes of Indigenous peoples indicating the "Native power" of the region. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

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Egypt has the same kind as Arabia. To "conquer a region" (the game's terminology for establishing a colony), the player must have as much influence in the region as the Native power. We can see that this would take two influence counters for Arabia and five for Egypt, for example. The counters start out as measures of wealth in a player's treasury. From there they can be converted into merchant fleets, which in turn can be turned into influence by placing them in territories on the board.

The game never describes *how* local populations resist colonization; the rule book simply states that "the Conqueror can found a colony . . . in a Territory where you have at least as many counters as the Native Power." The way the mechanics and terminology hide any hint of direct conflict gives a feeling that historically the process involved only cultural imperialism, rather than the bloodshed that actually occurred.

When players establish a colony, they may take several actions, including pillaging and repression, as their reward. Pillaging gives players a number of counters for their treasury equal to the Native power or, if the region has gold as one of its natural resources, double the Native power number. Taking this action gives the region an unrest marker. According to these game mechanics, it appears that the Indigenous peoples do not mind colonization itself so much as the exploitation that comes with it. The player can also use the repression action to get rid of the unrest marker, which in turn makes the player drop one position on the diplomacy track. Since imperial (i.e., player-controlled) nations only can wage war against nations lower on the diplomacy track, we can read this as the nation losing moral ground vis-à-vis the other European imperial powers for subjugating the Native people. If a player chooses to pillage but not repress, another player may use the aforementioned rebel card to cause a rebellion in the region. Here the Native power level comes into play again. Rebellions are resolved by rolling a number of six-sided dice equal to the Native power of the region. For each success symbol rolled (two of the six sides), the colonizer loses one influence marker.

The way the Indigenous peoples function mechanically in *Colonial: Europe's Empires Overseas* is as static obstacles for the players to overcome. While the players around the table enact their strategies through the colonizer cards (explorer, conqueror, trader, etc.), giving agency and impact to the European characters in the game, the actions of Indigenous people are prescribed by the rule system, and the consequences are determined by dice. As Fredric Jameson noted about colonial mindsets: "Different moments in historical or existential time are here simply filed in different places; the attempt to combine them even locally does not slide up and down a temporal scale (except to the degree that the spatial character of these figures here comes due and presents its bill) but jumps back and forth across a game board that we conceptualize in terms of distance."[11] In other words, according to colonial mindsets embedded in the design

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of this game and others like it, Indigenous peoples and contexts can be leaped over, filled in, and end up interchangeable, exoticized places and situations to be exploited.

The game *Archipelago* (2012) presents the player with a still more complex system. A full five-player game takes over four hours, and the game has an abundance of moving parts in terms of boards and components, as well as in terms of game mechanics and interactions. In *Archipelago*, the Indigenous people are sometimes referred to as workers and sometimes as citizens. They are used as resources by the players, in a similar manner to what we have seen previously in *Puerto Rico* and *Navegador*. Workers can turn into rebels, denoted by laying the pawn on its back. A rebel refuses to work (does not perform actions) and will not contribute any money when taxes are collected. On one of the many boards, a white pawn signifies the total colony population, and a black pawn represents the *rebellion level* among the Indigenous population (figure 7.5). If the black pawn ever moves past the white pawn on the stability track, the nameless archipelago claims its independence, and all players lose immediately.

The rebels thus become a shared obstacle to all players going beyond mechanics to affect the interaction pattern of the game, making it semicooperative. Several game reviewers and forum posters have lauded the designer for implementing such a complex mechanical representation of slavery, which punishes the players for exhausting colonial resources in their pursuit of becoming the most successful colonizer. Will



Figure 7.5
In *Archipelago* (2012), the colony stability board tracks the number of workers and rebels currently in the game. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

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Emigh and Will Robinson,[12] however, both contend that the design of the game system is so abstract that "it is hard to read a deeper cultural message than 'there were natives before colonialists arrived.'"[13] Our reading of the game falls closer to Dean Bowman's contention that the game ultimately reinforces our cultural memory of colonialism.[14] We contend that the game speaks volumes about the conditions of colonialism, and that the message is deeply environmentally deterministic and paternalistic. We can read the introductory flavor text of the rule book as a program statement of sorts:

> Each player portrays an explorer and his team commissioned by a European nation to discover, colonize, and exploit islands. The mission is intended to be one of peace: to meet the needs of the local population while providing commercial returns to the continent. The archipelago and its native inhabitants must be treated fairly or they will rebel, potentially leading to an all-out war of independence. A balance must be found between expansionism and humanism, between commercial goals and respect for local values, between knowledge sharing and unbridled industrialization. Such balance can only be achieved through each player's commitment to make the archipelago a happy and productive colony. If not, the reckless exploitation of the islands' resources and their inhabitants will ultimately lead to chaos and revolt.

As the text explicitly states, the system promotes the idea that expansionism was, if not beneficial to all, at least a historical inevitability. It also supports the myth of the happy colony instigated by Captain James Cook in his writing about Australia. The system fundamentally amounts to players exploiting the colonies as much as possible without crossing the line at which the colonized laborers revolt. We have an exceptionally difficult time seeing this as an interesting dynamic to explore, regardless of its complexities relative to other board games with colonialist themes.

In these examples, we see the use of Indigenous populations in colonized territories in the construction of a game experience that fulfills another basic need. Instead of being a limited resource that players have to make interesting choices about how to use, here Indigenous people are historical materials that the designers use to create obstacles for players to overcome.

Indigenous Peoples as Decoration

We will stay with the case of *Archipelago* as we move on to discuss representations of Indigenous peoples that are not part of the system of mechanics that drive the gameplay, but rather aesthetic elements such as illustrations on box covers and game boards and in rule books. This game proves an interesting example because the artwork is remarkably detailed and lavish. While Eurogames have long been criticized for having bland aesthetics that are weakly connected to their themes, *Archipelago*'s vivid art direction was praised for its delivery of the theme.

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Archipelago contains multiple problematic examples of the visual representation of Indigenous people. In similar games, men are usually represented as either subservient and Orientalized, content to do the bidding of White men, or as highly exoticized savage warriors. In *Archipelago* we have both: the rebels are represented with imagery strongly associated with the Maori haka (figure 7.5), including face tattoos and an angry, screaming expression; Indigenous workers are represented as pacified, nontattooed men wearing Western clothing. Women are almost always represented as peaceful, sensual, and connected or belonging to nature. Whether they are part of a welcoming committee or slaves in shackles, they tend to be scantily clad and vaguely sexualized (e.g., the woman on the far right in figure 7.6).

Eurogames continue to use these disconnected stereotypes from one game to the next; as Fredric Jameson has said about the prevalence of such stereotypes, "the movement from one generic classification to another is radically discontinuous, like



Figure 7.6
Detail of box cover and cards from *Archipelago* (2012), showcasing a range of Indigenous stereotypes. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

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switching channels on a cable television set,"[15] where Indigenous peoples have no voice and are stereotyped to extremes.

In *Cacao* (2016), "a game for 2–4 tribal chiefs, 8 years and up," players are not gods per se but are assigned the role of tribal chiefs who put tribe members to work growing, harvesting, and trading cacao. Described as a tile-laying game with worker placement, *Cacao* represents workers as red huts with additional red figures used on the board. In fact, the only human representation of the culture in question appears on the box, which depicts one central, feminized figure in elaborate ceremonial headgear holding out a split cacao bean toward the player (figure 7.7). Here too an Indigenous person is represented on the game box as decoration, or—using the terminology of the board gaming hobby—for *flavor*. The game is a colonialist fantasy, with Indigenous people represented as workers to be placed near the fields, by the well, or in the market. The fantasy is made powerful by positioning the role of organizer and oppressor to the

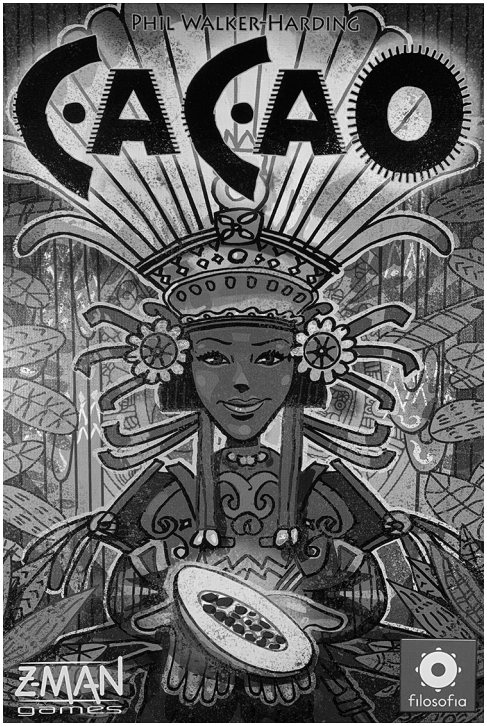


Figure 7.7
Box cover for the game *Cacao* (2015), showing the open cacao bean and references to Central and South American iconography. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

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game's premise as occurring within a tribe; players are supposed to be tribal chiefs themselves. This is not role playing in any responsible or reflective way. The game does not attempt to sensitize players to cultural practices or educate players about the spiritual side of the crop and the ritual of drinking chocolate.[16] Rather, the game preys on stereotypes and further colonizes any notions of Indigenous living with capitalistic ideas of progress, work, and hierarchy to an imagined geography devoid of spiritual or traditional attachment. This fantasy normalizes exploitation colonialism through extraction and commercial production by framing it as a boon for what could have been. It neglects the economic realities, organizational structures, and labor practices of Indigenous peoples in Central and South America.

Although much is unknown about precolonial cacao farming, by the colonial era in the 1500s, family households owned portions of larger cacao orchards. Many scholars have noted that the production of cacao for European chocolate introduced wealth inequities to various communities in the Americas.[17] As in chapter 4, where we briefly touched on the chocolate trade as a colonial priority, we again must take note of the colonial push for cacao to begin with, and the ways in which colonizers learned about cacao processing and uses, appropriating techniques and creating the global chocolate market.[18] Cacao production may be a traditional act, but the monocrop industry represented in the game likely bears little resemblance to traditional production. The production and consumption of cacao and its role in society are and were quite complex—too complex to adequately address in the game.

Before moving on, we need to note that in many, perhaps most, of these games, the Indigenous peoples of the areas that are being colonized are not represented at all. The act of *expansion* is reduced to a race to be the first person to plant their flag on a seemingly empty plot of land. Compared to the problematic representations we have highlighted, this may seem less egregious. However, erasing Indigenous peoples in the tradition of Teuber's *Catan* perpetuates the *terra nullius* myth discussed previously and positions Indigenous land as rightfully belonging to colonizers. The toxic act of erasure through abstraction always sides with power and is as old as colonialist board games themselves.

Cultural Simulacra

Thomas Pynchon sarcastically critiques the Western obsession with colonialism in a heated debate with an imagined Karl Marx in *Gravity's Rainbow*: "What's a colony without its dusky natives? Where's the fun if they're all going to die off? . . . Colonies are the outhouses of the European soul, where a fellow can let his pants down and relax,

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enjoy the smell of his own shit."[19] As offensive as the quote is, the idea that Europeans (and Americans; Pynchon is, after all, an American whose ancestors came to the Americas when the United States was a colony) can go elsewhere and enact atrocities is an existing and acknowledged idea, no matter how abhorrent.

Contemporary colonialist games differ from those of previous centuries in terms of mechanical sophistication and aesthetic expression. Today's crop of resource management colonialist games offers much richer arena for play. In some cases, the racism and othering practices are subtler than in games of the past. Designers and publishers are also increasingly attempting to appear conscious of the politics involved, but these attempts at conscious design frequently fail. Patterns of othering, dehumanizing, whitewashing,[20] exoticizing, Orientalism, and erasure persist.[21]

These games are cultural simulacra of the European colonial era.[22] Their expression of history is created specifically to fit the sensibilities of an imagined player with a similar cultural background and worldview as the creator, as opposed to using the opportunity of being afforded the privilege of artistic expression to send a message of acknowledgment and reconciliation to a more diverse and inclusive cast of potential players. These games are also heterotopias, in that they mirror a culture according to how it wishes to be seen.[23] In that regard, some things about European and Western culture become painfully clear when we use these games as a lens for reflecting on the dominant culture around us, and on ourselves as authors. Finally, much as Said criticized anthropology,[24] these games fetishize difference and otherness to position the person with the Western gaze as the one in control—an endeavor that currently seems to threaten the very foundation of Western civilization, owing to the negative aftereffects of the ongoing mindset of European colonialism.

Ideal Players

We have played over three hundred games—with over one hundred different players—for this study. Many of those games were played at MIT, which, in many ways, is a melting pot for people from all around the world. It is, however, not a very representative sample of the world population in any aspect of diversity. Research institutions with colonial roots will almost inevitably center people who are privileged in different ways. We have also consciously manufactured an environment for playing these games that is very different from most contexts of play, since we were explicitly playing them for analysis and critique, and under our safe-space guidelines, which—among other things—encourage players to step out of the game at any time if they do not feel comfortable continuing. For these reasons, we make no claims of having studied how these

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games are received in different contexts of play more broadly, or how they affect these contexts as *actants*.[25] We are, in fact, extremely eager to see more research in this area. We have, however, had the opportunity to play games with people from the places that the games are about. These occasions have been most illuminating.

We acknowledge that players engage differently based on the cultural context of play, who they are, and what they wish to get out of the game—but the role these games play in terms of enculturation reaches beyond any separate instance of defiance and encompasses all of us. The discourse of the colonialist mindset is so powerful as to be inescapable, whether we see through its conceited self-valorization or not. So how can we understand the role of players in colonial board games? We have discussed the *roles* that the games offer up for players to take on as they play the game. Here we want to touch on the specifics of flesh-and-blood cultural subjects encountering—and sometimes colliding with—these cultural artifacts.

In analyzing games, media studies scholars have used different theoretical players as models to discuss the actualization of the potential that an unplayed game represents. In her discussion of the application of reader reception theory to video games, Susana Tosca uses the *ideal player* or the *model player*,[26] based on Umberto Eco's concept of the *ideal reader*, to explore the way a game designer imagines the player.[27] The ideal player of a game is someone who fully realizes the potential of a game: they are sufficiently challenged on the *action level* of the game without too much frustration, and emotionally engaged by the *plot level* of the game. Players may engage with games differently and take away different things from their play experiences, but this does not mean that the decisions made by creators are arbitrary. Who creators imagine their ideal player to be, and what they imagine as the ideal experience of their game, exerts significant influence on a game's design. The concept of *open* and *closed* texts—once again from Eco—provides a useful vocabulary. For Eco, open texts are deliberately made to be more freely interpreted than closed texts, which we can think of as more instrumental in their approach,[28] and have the potential to be productively employed in games, especially games with social issues or activism at their core.[29]

Now let us set these theoretical concepts in motion and approach a player experience, or as Tosca might put it, a player response from our study.[30] The game *Puerto Rico* (2002) is thematically a closed text with a narrow vision of an ideal player. The only roles available to choose from are prospector, captain, mayor, trader, settler, craftsman, and builder; you cannot, for instance, play from the perspective of a Boricua.[31] The only way to win is to achieve the greatest prosperity and highest respect in these roles, which translates to optimized exploitation of slave labor and stolen natural resources.

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We have played the game *Puerto Rico* (2002, 2011) a number of times with different players as part of this project. One of these playthroughs was with a graduate student in the comparative media studies program at MIT. Aziria comes from Puerto Rico and has a degree in political science from the University of Puerto Rico, which was why we were particularly interested in her experience with the game (figure 7.8). On the one hand, as a young academic at a research institute, she fits the target group of an analytical person who welcomes the kind of optimization puzzle that *Puerto Rico* presents. She is also a highly social person who enjoys the joking and lighthearted teasing that typically accompanies the actual play actions.

On the other hand, she is a descendant of the Taíno people, who were almost completely exterminated by the Spanish colonizers in the sixteenth century. When



Figure 7.8
Aziria distributing "colonists" between her plantations and buildings in *Puerto Rico* (2002) at the MIT Game Lab. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

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Columbus first arrived, the island had around thirty thousand inhabitants; a few decades later, only around a thousand of them were left. Most died from diseases introduced by the Europeans, and the few who survived had to endure slavery and other forms of oppression for centuries.[32] Spain relinquished its sovereignty over Puerto Rico to the United States as a result of the Spanish-American War in 1898. Yet because the people of Puerto Rico do not have voting representation in the US Congress, and they are not allowed to vote in presidential elections, Puerto Rico is, for all intents and purposes, still a colony. In Aziria's words, "In Puerto Rico, colonialism never ended."[33]

Aziria has written about the role of humor in the political landscape and tends to approach even serious topics with irreverence and humor.[34] Mikael was still caught off guard when she joked about wanting more slaves to work for her while playing the game. When Mikael asked her about it, her response was that she found the way Puerto Rico is represented in the game to be so ridiculous—from its erasure of colonial violence to its minor but blatant inaccuracies—that she could not really take the game seriously on a thematic level. For example, she would describe the previously mentioned decision to call the plantation and factory workers *colonists* as "someone having a White guy moment," and see the absurd humor in it.

If we apply Tosca's approach for reading game texts on multiple levels, we can note that our empirical player fits well with the model player on the *action level* of the game.[35] She quickly grasped not only the rules but the fundamental strategy of avoiding actions that are very good for other players, especially the player to your left, even if they also are good for you. She also enjoyed the machine-building core mechanic. In Eco's terminology, she has the required repertoire to actualize the game.[36]

But thematically she could not be farther from the model player. To enjoy the game, she has to appropriate the theme into a joke about what White European men see when they think of Puerto Rico, and how that mindset is so sad to her that it becomes laughable. This, however, puts a heavy burden of accommodation on a player like Aziria. While she said that she would not mind bringing the game back to Puerto Rico to play it with her mother (although her mother would probably think it was too long), when Mikael asked her if she would like to play the game at a board game meetup with mostly White men in attendance, she said, "Probably not."

Influenced by critical film studies, we use the concept of *casting* to signify the process people go through as they enter the player role.[37] We might think of it as squeezing yourself into a preconstructed role created by everyone who contributed to the game before it arrived in front of you. Designers, developers, manufacturers, marketing people, store owners, critics, and many others all take part in shaping this role description. To some people, the role is an easy fit; others are uncomfortable accommodating this

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unspoken, invisible casting call.[38] Casting often places a heavy burden of accommodation on players who should be represented but are not: people who are already forced to fight for the right to be who they are without discrimination, like BIPOC, women, and LGBTQIA+ people.

As Aziria acknowledged, the thematic content of *Puerto Rico* creates a player role that she does not fit into comfortably. If it was just the game itself, she could overcome it, as we have when playing these games as part of our study. But when the cultural context of play also projects ideas about the player that Aziria does not fit into, then she ends up not sitting down at the table. In some cases, she might not even get invited.

The thematic content of *Puerto Rico* creates a player role into which many people cannot—and should not have to—comfortably fit. The casting call broadcast by influencers, reviewers, game night organizers, game owners, and other players often actively excludes people who, simply by existing, call into question the pleasures these games create. Board game audiences are diversifying, but they will never be truly diverse until games' rules, stories, and ideal players allow for diverse roles at the table.

During the five years we have spent on this study to create this book and engage deeply with board game culture, we have found many examples of how the board game community is dedicated to diversity and inclusivity. Most conventions have carefully designed codes of conduct. Many reviewers proclaim their engagement with, or support for, player and designer communities of color, LGBTQIA+ communities, and female-identifying designers. Scores of fund-raisers have helped raise profiles and capital for emerging designers of color, for example. Those are great advances, but we must still acknowledge that the problems we have outlined here run deeper and are tied to the very history of board games themselves as a medium of play. Play within a hegemony can function to reinforce that hegemony instead of resist it, if it is not approached consciously; reinforcement and replication will happen without proactive rethinking and resistance.

The casting call for the ideal player is a significant part of the problem. Mikael, in particular, has encountered a disturbing expression, one that keeps popping up in game reviews and recommendations: "Be careful who you play this game with." This is usually said by White male reviewers and others recommending games, who realize that a game will make some potential players uncomfortable, but choose to see excluding these people as a solution.[39]

Reviews of games rarely take on social contexts of play, political and social inequities, or environmental impact—which they need to do, and we all need to do, because such dialogues are crucial to having open conversations about the troubled past of board games as tools for enculturation, as well as creating proactive objectives for the

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future. We who are engaged in the board game community need to support fair and equitable games and a diverse designer pool. We need to combat the existing hegemony that has displaced some social groups, including women, to the margins of the community. Engrained habits and language use in the board game community have established a discourse that keeps the gates surrounding the hobby closed. "Be careful who you play this game with" is a mark of discrimination: "Don't play this game about colonialism with people from cultures that were subjected to colonialism." In this example, the casting call is broadcast by influential people to game night organizers, game store owners, and players in general, who, as a result, seek out others like themselves to spread the joy of gaming as a leisure pastime not welcoming to all. As Rebecca Y. Bayeck, a researcher at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, has noted, board games are growing in popularity and are increasingly being used globally for education in fields from social science to chemistry to history.[40] How do we reconcile the prevalence of problematic themes, structures, and communities built into board games with their enormous potential for good?

Conclusion

In this book, we have offered a range of examples, from broad-swath cultural analysis to close readings of specific artifacts, as we have plotted a trajectory of the ways that modern board games have enculturated players for hundreds of years. We have examined how enculturation operates in board games through representation, theme, mechanics, player positioning, and game goals. And we have introduced the analytical concept of casting to illuminate how disadvantaged players are burdened with the labor of accommodation to enjoy the gaming experience, or are outright excluded from it, even when the games are about their own culture.

Unfortunately, new board games with colonialist themes and problematic mechanics continue to be published. Rather than representing a fringe occurrence in the board game industry, these games constitute the mainstream of Euro-style board games, with significant sales levels and critical acclaim from players and reviewers alike. Modern colonialist games differ from those of previous centuries in terms of mechanical sophistication and aesthetic expression, and they also make more frequent attempts to address the politics involved. As we have noted, there is a growing awareness of colonialist themes and patterns in board games, as evidenced by discussions among fans, bloggers, and designers. But through a close critical examination of classic and emerging games, we have shown that patterns of othering, dehumanizing, whitewashing, exoticizing, and Orientalism persist.

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Do "ideal players" as imagined by designers perceive, and passively succumb to, colonialist values, or do they play critically, taking their own perspective? Is a game merely a pastime, or an instrument for enculturation and ideology? We return to the provocative stance that Miguel Sicart takes, a perspective that we put forward in chapter 4: "Players reconfigure the meaning of the game using their own cultural, political, and ethical beliefs. Engaging with ethical gameplay does not require players to make choices or to adopt a particular moral stance that has been predetermined by a designer."[41] In other words, a game is a game, and players can play ethically if they choose.

But this is only partly possible. As we have put forward in this book, the logic of colonialism is embedded in many aspects of Eurogames and gaming culture more broadly. The majority of Eurogame players do not play with a critical understanding of colonial history and postcolonial theory, and indeed, many of them are themselves White and European. The games they play serve to normalize a Eurocentric world through their themes, representations, game actions, and logics. Eurogame player communities largely accept these elements at face value, barring especially egregious examples like the dark brown "colonist" tokens in *Puerto Rico*. Eurogames have continued to rehearse and reenact problematic narratives of the past, and players continue to play out colonialist fantasies.

As game designers and active members of the game studies and board gaming communities, we have obviously been critical of the notion that "it's only a game." We have argued that games have always had a role in enculturation, and in shaping the lenses through which privileged White people have consumed the world, both literally in terms of colonialism and figuratively in terms of the tourist gaze. That said, part of our aim in this book is to think through these issues in generative terms. There *is* change afoot. In the next chapter, we showcase extraordinary examples of game designers who are changing the script on colonial games.

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Playing Oppression

The Legacy of Conquest and Empire in Colonialist Board Games

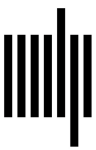
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8 Urgency and Hope: A Countercolonial Revolution

> The rhetoric of play as power is about the use of play as a representation of conflict and as a way to fortify the status of those who control the play or are its heroes.
>
> —Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*

We have dedicated a considerable share of this book to analyzing and critiquing the complex historical underpinnings of contemporary board games. In this chapter, we look to the future of board games. New models, new designers, and, indeed, new games need to be supported to subvert and disrupt the colonialist paradigm that encapsulates board game culture today. What could a decolonization process look like? What stories would get told if other voices were amplified?

An increasing number of new games are fighting back against the hierarchies of domination and oppression embedded in many game systems and dynamics. We dedicate this chapter to some of these vibrant, hope-instilling examples.

The Need for New Models

Instead of framing political power in terms of conflicts between monolithic nation-states, some games investigate more subversive relationships and more nuanced, quieter themes. The use of games as a critical lens is not new. As Mary detailed in her 2009 book *Critical Play*, many games have been used as critical tools, especially by artists. Even *Monopoly* (1935) was originally a critical educational tool designed by the left-wing feminist Elizabeth Magie called *The Landlord's Game* (1906), and although it was co-opted by Charles Darrow and mass-marketed as a Depression-era bonanza by Parker Brothers, the game was also returned to its philosophical roots when it was repurposed as *Anti-Monopoly* (1973).[1]

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Over the last century, games have criticized war, exploitation, environmental destruction, extinction, greed, and many other societal issues. To organize our survey of this emerging landscape, we will roughly structure things around the ways in which exemplar games are countering particular board game tropes. In previous chapters, we discussed the colonial roots of the 4X model of board games, which centers around four core play actions: explore, expand, exploit, and exterminate. Now we turn to forward-thinking examples with creative reworkings of such mechanics for anticolonial, decolonial, or countercolonial purposes.

Explore and Expand

The *explore* trope has led game designers to repeat insidious claims of land not being "discovered" until a White man has laid eyes on it. This paradigm appears in countless contemporary games. Some games, however, use exploration mechanics to noncolonial ends. One example is *Betrayal at House on the Hill* (2004), in which players explore a house and deepen the game experience at the same time by laying tiles in the spaces, creating the house as one plays. The feeling of exploring the unknown is leveraged not to serve a colonial power fantasy but to create an experience akin to works in the horror genre using other media such as books, film, and video games.

In *Ecosystem* (2020), players draft cards to build an ecosystem, placing cards on a grid to increase interdependence and earn points. Each animal has a different scoring system, so players must be attentive to the placement of their cards within the grid. In this case, exploring means learning about the power of each animal and environment as it relates to the others; points stand for habitat, livability, interdependence, and biodiversity. Rather than area control or domination, the game asks players to focus on creating networks of relationships and combinations between cards.

The legacy of wargames has left us with an abundance of games featuring large factions or world powers competing, but games are emerging that consider other models for understanding and expanding political power. For example, In *Feierabend* (*Finishing Time*, 2020) players take on the role of exploited workers trying to create a better work-life balance. When the game starts, employees work seventy-hour weeks. Players have to raise their income—and increase income for women—while reducing hours and incorporating vacation. Each turn, players go to after-work spaces for relaxation. They can instead choose to work second jobs, which will make them more stressed. This design cleverly invests in articulating workers' rights and devolving an oppressive labor system; the unpacking of labor rights can also help players explore links between workers' rights, Indigenous rights, and human rights in general by showing how a

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design can help undo, or unmake, a problematic situation. To this end, it is exciting to see games employ an engine model to imagine what is possible by building rules that support those who are oppressed to change the situation.

In some games, expansion themes move beyond taking over other nations or controlling commerce. Other thematic and mechanical variations use the theme of expansion but do so in a nonthreatening way, inspired by the natural world. In *Photosynthesis* (2017), for example, players aim to capture the most sunlight by placing small, medium, and large trees in a forest; players collect light points from a rotating sun board while attempting to block other players' trees from receiving light. Then players use light points to place more trees on the board, expand their tree species' presence (influence or placement on the board), grow trees taller, or plant seeds. The novel three-dimensional chipboard trees put the emphasis on growth and reinforce a focus on the natural world—a refreshing deviation from human subjugation of nature that often is part of the expansion mechanics in colonialist games. That said, we see room for even more growth (pardon the pun). The game's mechanics do still follow the "more is better" formula in the claiming of sunlight and reinforcing of hierarchies. Still, the game suggests sustainability and does model the behavior of some natural systems, as does the game *Renature* (2020), which has players transforming a polluted valley into a thriving ecosystem. By using a set of animal domino pieces, players replant the land to earn points. This game is designed by the experienced designers Wolfgang Kramer and Michael Kiesling, who have all too many colonialist-themed games in their track records but here show that they too can think in new and more exciting directions.

Exploit and Exterminate

Another problematic 4X trope is the exploitation of people and—often unending—resources for profit. While unlimited resources may make for a nice fantasy world on the surface, the way that this model for game resources grew to be standard practice in modern board games like *Puerto Rico* (2002) is troubling, given how it evokes the ways that real-world colonial powers exploited colonial environments without any regard for the consequences.

Some game designers have introduced a sense of reinvestment in the generation of renewable resources. Notable examples include the worker placement game *Agricola* (2008), wherein limited resources can be used at each turn, and time is needed for resources to multiply or grow, requiring patience within the gameplay logic. *Agricola*'s system also rewards a variety of approaches to land use, which lends a sustainable feel

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to the game. Players must house and feed additional family members, so expansion comes at a cost that must be sustained over time. Such details make the difference between a game that encourages responsible use of resources and one that models an exploitative relationship with land and work. We see the farming theme of *Agricola* also employed in games depicting settler colonialism such as *Die Kolonisten* (The colonists, 2016), but the impetus behind the mechanics in these cases is no longer sustained living but endless expansion. There is a subtle yet important difference in systems that follow a renewable model.

Harvest Island (2017) is an example from the rapidly growing board game scene in Taiwan. In this game, players grow seasonal fruit in a way that engages with the rich horticultural tradition of Taiwan. Each season has its own deck of fruit, with the backs reflecting seasonal colors. Players take one action per turn: cultivate or harvest. When cultivating, players can sow seeds by putting the card under one of the unused landscape cards, and plant by placing a fruit card on top of the landscape card that matches the seed underneath. Players can also fertilize or pick the fruit. If they harvest too early, players do not score as many points as they would if they waited for a larger collection. Players also draw weather cards, which bring either sun or rain. More than two weather cards of the same kind triggers a crop-decimating weather catastrophe.[2] Players gather victory points by harvesting their crops, similar to the German game *Bohnanza* (1997). The restricted number of fields to sow also brings *Bohnanza* to mind.

The small details in *Harvest Island* contribute to the nuances not only in gameplay but also in theme and cultural specificity. For example, fruits mature at different rates, mimicking different growing seasons for the plants. Players make decisions along these naturally developed rhythms, balancing between the risk of a weather catastrophe and the possibility of a greater harvest. The fruits chosen for the game—like wax apple and dragon fruit—are actually grown according to similar seasonal cycles in Taiwan. *Harvest Island* is typical of the wave of modern board games coming out of emerging markets. Such games are often influenced by Eurogame mechanics, but they add a cultural authenticity to the experience that so often is lacking in Western games made about other cultures.

These farming games exemplify engines for positive growth and resource use that are not focused on exploitation and extermination. Forward thinking and long-term strategies developed around sustaining natural systems are promising directions for designers to consider moving forward.

A growing number of games use resources on a micro level and thus do not conjure the specter of unsustainable exploitation found in larger systemic games. *Chai* (2019)

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by Connie and Dan Kazmaier and *Chai Garam* (2021) by Sidhant Chand both put the player in the role of a tea merchant—not an import–export mogul but a worker or manager of a tea shop selling different types of tea to customers who come to the shop.

The shift in scale helps alleviate the unending-resource problem that plagues many games, and humanizes the process. Although the propagation of tea in the West was a product of colonial expansion, the contemporary view taken by *Chai* shows tea as a global practice to be celebrated. Customers are depicted in their own spaces (not in the shop), and while the shift of spatial references can be jarring, the backgrounds provide context for the characters, effectively giving each of them a backstory: a grandmother in a recliner chair, a booklover on a library ladder, a pianist playing a grand piano, and a woman wearing a kimono setting out tea (figure 8.1). Each depiction seems to offer a global pastiche of customers and their contexts. The multicultural approach invites comparisons to the 1989 Spiel des Jahres winner *Café International*, but without the sometimes crude national caricatures featured in older editions of that game.



Figure 8.1
The *Chai* (2019) game with customers, ingredients, and charming teacups. Photo by Dans la Boîte, Belgium, 2020.

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Chai Garam is also set in the present day, but presents a very specific location. Everything from the terminology used in the rule book to the joyful illustrations by Aditi Desai oozes local flavor. In addition to different teas, the customers can also be served snacks typical for the region, such as rusk and bun maska. The terminology and regional references are so specific that even our player from another part of India sometimes had a hard time describing everything to us. But rather than seeing this as a problem, we delighted in the detailed cultural markers that offered us an experience so vivid that we almost could smell it.

Exterminate

The Eurogame genre has a tradition of hiding the bloody end of the sword.[3] Players are pitted against one another but rarely kill the other players' characters or eliminate players from the game before it is over. This does not mean that bloodshed is not there. The game designers have taken it upon themselves to whitewash the history they hold in such high regard, presumably to make sure that the games are suitable for players of all ages and no one gets upset.

But in a world full of injustice, not everyone enjoys the privilege of being satisfied with the status quo. To restore the part of our humanity that has been lost through centuries of oppression, unopposed by those who have had the power to do something about it, some designers have chosen to bring violence into play by depicting acts of rebellion against oppressive institutions. *This Guilty Land* (2018), by Amabel Holland, explores the political struggle over US slavery in the years leading up to the American Civil War. In this asymmetrical game, one player plays Justice, and another plays Oppression, while Compromise is a nonplayer faction that both helps and hinders the players while seeking to maintain the terrible status quo of slavery. Opponents react to events launched by the other side, with some bluffing along the way. Oppression is initially in control of the influence of the House of Representatives, meaning it can pass oppressive laws more easily and gain victory points. Justice tries to gain more influence by building organizations like the American Anti-Slavery Society, but also by playing cards representing violent events like Nat Turner's Revolt.

This Guilty Land is a balancing act, a game of push and pull between slave states and free states, with slave states seeking to gain or at least maintain their power while free states seek to bring an end to slavery. The gameplay thus models the maneuvering of power between the two sides and their attempts to control majority power. The end of the game signals the start of the American Civil War.

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While not a simulation, *This Guilty Land* is positioned to embed the player in the American political system and its decisions about slavery in the United States. Despite the historical theme, the game also makes an argument that directly relates to current-day events: the South was not going to give up slavery without a fight. This was the issue that led to the Civil War, and any claim that is made to the contrary is whitewashing propaganda.

The game follows a long tradition in military, political, and historical games of making players enact the different dissenting factions, not just the morally sound sides of a conflict. But that does not mean that *This Guilty Land* presents a neutral perspective. The argument that the game is posing is not relative to which side wins or loses; it is being made regardless of the game's outcome and is always a resounding call to arms against oppression, not just to those oppressed but to everyone.

Violent conflict in games does not always equate to war. *Bloc by Bloc: The Insurrection Game* (2016) is a semicooperative board game about a fictional protest-movement-turned-uprising. In this area-control game, a city map is divided into districts, such as a commercial district or a prison district. Players occupy districts with the goal of liberating them from a generic, oppressive, authoritarian police state. Players take on the roles of factions, such as prisoners, workers, and students. Players win the game by working together, but they also have individual objectives, such as occupying a certain number of specific districts depending on their faction. The players win the game if they manage to occupy targets in all districts before the military arrives. Like Matt Leacock's *Pandemic* (2008), the game has a deep capacity for strategy, and players must coordinate and plan together to succeed.

Designed with an anarchist spirit, *Bloc by Bloc* is intended to be subversive and act as both social commentary and a political statement, though the bad-versus-good gameplay model is disrupted by hidden roles that add nuance. Although some of the mechanics may not realistically match every protest (for example, if you fight the riot police, the police in this game become *less* aggressive), and market-friendly anarchists might not appreciate the destruction of commercial districts, this game assumes that action is necessary and commercial areas are inescapably exploitative. The game models a form of social change supporting violence, property destruction, and looting as necessary aspects of that change, which might conflict with the goals and practices of other social movements that do not support the use of violence to achieve political ends.

Both *This Guilty Land* and *Bloc by Bloc: The Insurrection Game* model power dynamics and hierarchies in ways that challenge the players from a number of angles. These

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games are breaking a long-standing rule of many board game groups and communities that urges players to "leave politics out of gaming." We understand the underlying desire to create a safe and relaxing space for everyone around the table; but knowing that what was put at the center of the table is a never-ending parade of games glorifying and whitewashing colonialism, we have to acknowledge that politics were always present, and it was just that the politics presented—colonialist hegemony—were not being questioned.

Alternate Models

Other important models exist outside these counter-4X categories. Party games such as Eric Slauson's *MonsDRAWsity* (2020) create an imaginative relationship between players. One player, called "the Witness," receives a card depicting a monster and has twenty seconds to verbally describe the monster to the other players, all of whom act as "sketch artists" who attempt to accurately draw what the Witness describes. This game is a frantic party game race to both communicate and digest extremely unusual descriptions. For example, the Witness might have a monster card and describe it as "a long purple monster shaped like a tadpole with a large mouth and humanlike hair and five eyes, wearing a dotted shirt and skirt." The results from a range of players, whatever their skill level in artistic rendering, are liberating because the drawings are meant to describe something that does not exist. Because the players have little to go on other than shape, color, number of eyes, et cetera, the game is possibly helping players subconsciously realize how we notice things about other people and therefore subtly call attention to biases and stereotypes—difficult to have present with these variously shaped nonhuman creatures. Nominated for several awards, Slauson specializes in party games, and both *MonsDRAWsity* and his earlier game *Tattoo Stories* (2019), in which players must draw tattoos from a set of card prompts, manage to capture imaginative play away from colonial-style mechanics.

Marcus Ross and Cara Heacock are Black board game designers (and cousins) who designed the fast-paced dice-rolling game *Beeeees!* (2017), a two-to-five-player game in which each player gets a stack of tiles and a handful of dice and must attempt to match their dice to the depictions on the tile stacks. In this real-time dice-and-hex game, players attempt to roll and create combos. The game is a departure from the Eurogame focus on resources and accumulation, instead focusing not only on an eco-friendly subject, the value of bees in the ecosystem, but also on the value of fun among players using party game mechanics. Party games have been a good gateway for diverse and emerging board game company founders; North Star Games' founder Satish Pillalamarri (now

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deceased) and his partner Dominic Crapuchettes launched their company with *Wits & Wagers* (2006) and *Say Anything* (2008).

Approaching Tough Subjects

There is no magic die roll that can undo hundreds of years of colonialist shaping of maps and mindsets. Thankfully, designers are creating counterimages that can begin to erode the walls built between East and West, North and South, rather than reinforcing them.

In the games we have discussed, slavery is often abstracted away or, worse, lied about through revisionist narratives as in *Puerto Rico* (2002). We have also examined many examples of slavery used as "Oriental spice" in games that are completely incapable of dealing with the subject matter in a reasonable way.[4] In the past decade, we have seen some more grounded and honest attempts at approaching the subject. We will highlight one example here and discuss the thorny challenges involved. In *Freedom: The Underground Railroad* (2012), all players cooperatively play as abolitionists helping enslaved people in the South to escape to Canada. The theme is historically well grounded with plenty of information about people and events represented by cards in the game. Over eight rounds, players move slaves (represented by tan wooden cubes) upward between spaces (representing stops on the Underground Railroad) on a map of the eastern United States, until the slaves reach Canada (figure 8.2). The game is fully cooperative, and players are encouraged to discuss their actions even if the decisions finally come down to the active player.

Slave catchers are nonplayer characters who automatically move toward slaves who enter a slave catcher's territory. If catchers land on a space with slaves, the slaves are caught and sent to the slave market, from where they may reenter the plantations in the South and once again begin their escape. The movement of slaves out of plantations toward freedom will, however, inevitably be outpaced by the slave market supply. When there is no more room for slaves that are up for sale, they will instead be *lost*, the game's euphemism for killed.

The players collectively win if they manage to free thirty slaves before a set number of slaves—depending on the number of players and difficulty level—are killed. In a normal-difficulty, four-player game, up to twenty slaves can be lost. It should be noted that players will face situations where they are forced to "sacrifice" (the rule book's term) some slaves to reach their objective. This has made some players decide to not play the game.

The game engine is fairly complex. Players have to manage their finances, control the flow of positive and negative events, and decide when to acquire and use special

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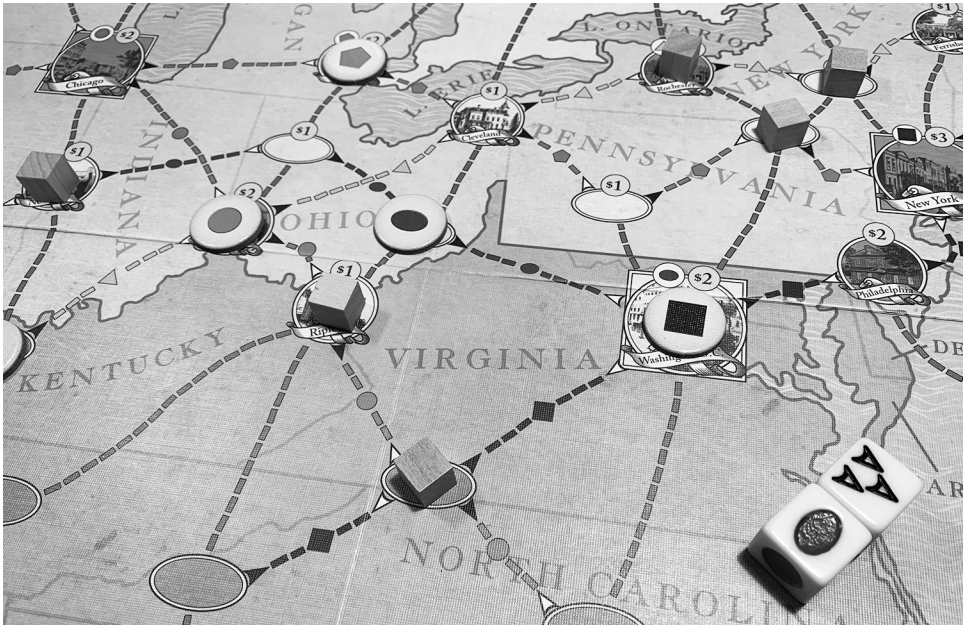


Figure 8.2
Slaves and slave catchers on the map board of *Freedom: The Underground Railroad* (2012). Players decide how to move the slaves along the gray lines; slave catchers are moved along the colored lines without player agency. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

abilities, as well as how to move slaves across the map to minimize losses. It is significant that the designer did not choose to have players play as slave traders or slave hunters and thus take on the role of a violent oppressor. One of the players will, however, have to roll dice at the beginning of each round to move a slave hunter, which may result in slaves getting captured. Despite this being completely outside of the players' control, we have again found that it is enough to make some players choose not to play the game.

In a review of *Freedom* at BoardGameGeek, the African American designer Scott Woods discusses what it is like to be a Black player of the game.[5] Woods argues that the game's use of engaging mechanics provides a way into the play experience without minimalizing or dwelling on the brutality of slavery. Some of the abolitionist characters that players can take on are Black, such as the role of the Conductor, but the majority (four out of six) are White. Could players think that this game has a White savior complex built into it? The game's tagline exhorts players to "join fellow abolitionists to emancipate slaves and lead them to freedom in Canada," positioning the player as

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a hero helper, not as, for example, a group of formerly enslaved people who must still negotiate the inhumane system they are fighting against. Moreover, the designers did not include plantation owners, slave sellers, or details about rape and violence, but these aspects must be faced when learning about the brutal history of slavery. It must be noted also that the players, as (mostly) White abolitionists, are given agency in the game, while the enslaved people themselves have none. In reviews, players report feeling empathy for the escaping slaves that they are trying to help. Still, as Scott Woods notes, "The game isn't racist, nor does it expose anyone to mistruths or derogatory imagery. I know a lot of people will see this game and be inclined to treat it like a racist Ouija board . . . 'Not in my house! Slavery is not a game!' And if this game had players acting on behalf of slavery—as plantation owners or hunters or slavers—I'd be knocking on the door of its designers."[6]

Yet William Garcia, working as an educator with Black and Latinx youth, noted that from seeing games such as "*Freedom*, *Mombasa*, and *Pow Wow* it was clear to me that many game designers (read: White) have created these games that focus on themes of colonization, exploitation, and commodification of our cultures."[7] Garcia lambastes these games and games like *Puerto Rico* because he argues that, in effect, they depoliticize the legacy of colonialism and slavery. While discussing *Freedom*, Garcia says that the "game is all about White abolitionists helping Black slaves in the south make it to the north of the United States. You may be wondering why this is so problematic. This is problematic because not only does it make freedom from slavery a game, it also emphasizes the White patriarchal savior trope. I'm not sure these game designers would create a Nat Turner game expansion."[8] Garcia uses games to foster critical dialogue and support students in creating their own games while emphasizing that players be mindful and "critical of the content they are including in it."[9]

The difference in response to the same game does not surprise us. We do, of course, *read* media differently based on individual differences. What we have found in our research is that board games can *add to* the disparity of experiences between different players. Going back to some players' issues related to moving the slave hunter pieces and the slave tokens, it was clear that the embodiment incorporated in moving pieces around on the board, rather than seeing them move on a screen—which would have been the case with nonplayer characters in a video game adaptation—mattered. Some players were repelled by the act itself, despite it being described as a purely administrative act, without agency or responsibility. We also had comments implying that the perspective matters. Moving pieces around a game board situates the player as a force hovering above the drama unfolding on the table. It is possible that White players in particular may feel uneasy in a position of making life-and-death decisions without

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any real skin in the game. This position—called a god's-eye view in a video game—inherently holds White savior connotations.

There is one point on which Woods and Garcia intersect but end up drawing opposite conclusions. Woods (a game designer) welcomes the idea of making a game about this very difficult topic. He lauds the engaging mechanics, implying that the game has the ability to tell this particular story in a way that no other medium can. Games create a particular form of engagement that Woods finds to be a useful quality in this particular case. Garcia also references the unique qualities of games as a medium but instead states that some topics should not be made into games. He finds the levity of games and play to be incompatible with subjects like the Underground Railroad.

Both of them make heartfelt and legitimate points. These issues have no easy answers. It is therefore of utmost importance to respect players' reactions to—and sometime revulsion at—a play experience. As we begin to build more diverse communities in board gaming, we have to be prepared for situations where paradigms, discourses, rhetorics, and cultures clash. And we have to find inclusive solutions that never take players' concerns lightly, even when we do not feel the same way ourselves.

Wargames specialize in dealing with difficult subjects. In our search for games that deal with anticolonial subjects, some wargames stand out by featuring the conflicts that led to the end of colonial occupations. Several of the more notable examples come from GMT's *Counterinsurgency* (COIN) game series, which focuses on conflicts where the different sides are heavily asymmetrical. In *Colonial Twilight: The French–Algerian War, 1954–62* (2017), one player represents the Algerian insurgents, and the other plays the French-controlled colonial government. The insurgents are, in many ways, weaker than their opponent, but they only have to endure long enough to turn the popular opinion of the French to a breaking point where the occupants have to give up control of the country. In *Gandhi: The Decolonization of British India, 1917–1947* (2019), more sides are represented, and the game can be played by up to four players. The game features major political factions during Gandhi's time in colonial India, including one faction aligned with the British Raj. One of the factions operates only through nonviolent means. Both games offer sophisticated representations of historical conflicts, and the colonized people are awarded agency through player control. But when we discussed the COIN series with students from some of the countries represented in these games, they pointed out that the games grant their countries visibility only through military conflicts. The designers are not experts on, or part of, these countries' respective cultures; they are experts on war, and that locks what they create into a colonial frame of redistribution of land and power.

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Akar Bharadvaj's *Tyranny of Blood: India's Caste System under British Colonialism, 1750–1947* was a winner of the 2021 Zenobia Award—a competition encouraging game submissions from people from marginalized groups that offers help and mentorship to develop a polished board game—and is at the time of this writing is still unpublished. The game takes place during Britain's long colonization of India, and players choose to play as one of four major caste groups: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or Shudra/Dalit. The British are represented as a nonplayable entity, and players must decide when to fight and when to cooperate with them in the hopes of securing their own group's interests over those of other players. Because the game is concerned with the disparate (and highly asymmetrical) amounts of power between factions, each caste group has its own goals and associated methods of earning the victory points necessary to achieve them. The tyranny lies both on the part of the colonizers and their unequal place in the social hierarchies, and within the social classes themselves. Thus the game attempts to interrogate the power dynamics and inequity embedded in social class systems, and to demonstrate how colonial acts can make this inequity worse.

Similarly, *Pax Pamir* (2019) has players play from the perspective of factions in a nineteenth-century Afghan context after the collapse of the Durrani Empire. While European forces are present, they are part of the problem: the game is positioned from an Afghani leadership point of view. This game further leverages the agency of the colonized by placing the colonial powers as nonplayer forces that the players try to manipulate and use for their own benefit. But we should note that although we do not consider this a wargame, it still falls into the frame of defining nations and people through their conflicts. The game also has a complicated history owing to the involvement of the game designer Phil Eklund, who infamously penned a designer note in the rule book of the first version with the title "A Defense of British Colonialism."

Progress and Perspective

Themes related to the natural world have been providing recent inspiration for designers as the climate crisis becomes, increasingly, a daily concern on a global scale. A war between the power of the city and the beauty of the forest comes to light in *Haven* (Alf Seegert, Red Raven Games, 2018), a two-player "tug-of-war" head-to-head battle that illustrates the struggle between the mastery of the forest and the freedom of the wild. Here players must negotiate the themes of environmental degradation and the needs of people. *PARKS* (2019) and *Wingspan* (2019) represent another significant shift in board games that highlight relationships with nature. In *Wingspan*, players take on the role of bird aficionados building the most effective wildlife preserve. Starting with limited

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resources, players slowly assemble their engine-building prowess and increase their bird population, their eggs, and their food. The American designer Elizabeth Hargrave is quoted in the *New York Times* as saying about her initial ideas for the game, "Wouldn't it be great if we had *Race for the Galaxy*"—another game that often hits her table, about building galactic civilizations—"but with birds?"[10] To play a bird card, a player must play food to place a bird on the player board. The boards depict multiple habitats, and different birds require specific types of foods. The cute "food dice" inside the 3D bird feeder indicate what food resources can be acquired, and delightful egg tokens complement the excellent components. How players gain points is quite flexible in the game; players can take the approach of having many birds, or they can collect eggs and food; birds' unique abilities allow for a wide variety of possibilities.

In *Wingspan*, players are trying to, on a thematic level, help birds prosper and, on a mechanical level, take a multipronged approach to how prosperity might be scientifically measured. Hargrave worked with scientific data to investigate each species, and her research shows. The game won the 2019 Kennerspiel des Jahres, perhaps signaling a change in the industry. Unfortunately, as a woman designer, Hargrave faced a lot of uncalled-for criticism, mostly from male reviewers, about anything that could be commented on in the game, such as bickering in reviews about its quality ("Is it really that good?")[11] to quibbles about the difficulty category ("Is it medium-weight? Hmm, debatable but it's more like light heavy for me at best").[12]

Winter Rabbit, a game designed by the Cherokee Nation member Will Thompson, was one of the finalists of the 2021 Zenobia Award competition. *Winter Rabbit* is a "hidden" worker placement game set in the world of Cherokee fables. In this universe, Rabbit is a trickster character disrupting the village as its members are preparing for winter. Villagers are drawn from a bag as tokens and distributed to resource-generating areas. Each villager token is two-sided, and all have hidden loyalties on the back: they could be aligned with the player, aligned with another player, or aligned with Rabbit. It takes several villagers to generate a resource, so the gameplay involves some working together as players wish to capitalize on their token's placements. Players also complete story cards that introduce new rules to the game and enhance the game's world.

Thompson says of his intentions, "I really tried to take something like a Eurogame and turn it into the opposite of a Eurogame, turn it into an indigenous game."[13] When asked about his motivation for creating this semicooperative game, Thompson noted, "There are a lot of colonial-themed board games out there, there's a lot of colonization stories in the board game space, and I wanted to do something that was different from that. I wanted to point out how pervasive those are by making a game that is not that.

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By making a game that is based around Indigenous values and Indigenous ideas and sort of take that in a different direction. I wanted to make sure that a different type of story was getting told in the board game space."[14]

Because the figure of the Rabbit is prominent in Cherokee tales, Thompson wanted to set a game within traditional animal stories, in part because they are playful and because they teach lessons and encourage connections to the world around us. Keeping the theme of the trickster Rabbit avoided the direct take on the serious circumstances of colonialism or war.[15] To this end, Thompson calls his game a *4C* game instead of a 4X game: *conservation*, *cultivation*, *continuation*, and *competition*. Thompson's approach directly challenges the colonial, imperial tropes in contemporary board games, how mechanics reflect the culture represented in a game, and even how histories are recorded and told. *Winter Rabbit*'s rule book clarifies:

> In the world we've come to call the West, history is seen as a linear thing: events happen, someone writes them down—we interpret those texts to learn of the history; however, occasionally those texts are reinterpreted. For the indigenous people of this continent, the telling of history takes a slightly different form. . . . Thus, we see the Cherokee interpretation of history (one shared by many indigenous cultures), where the details of a story might be a vehicle made of "fiction" that delivers a deeper truth. . . . The meaning emerges from the experience of the story.[16]

Another game that has made news in board game circles is *Spirit Island* (2017). In *Spirit Island*, players play the part of deities who fight on behalf of the Indigenous population, the Dahan, to protect their lands and ways. Players each assume the role of a different spirit of the island, which is reconfigurable with different regions of resources. Each spirit has a unique backstory, and much design space is dedicated to fleshing out the role of the spirit in the island's pantheon. The spirits must cooperatively fight back against invading settlements, which are not controlled by a player but automated. The spirits each have different playboards and abilities, and players work to place their presence and build up their own slow and fast powers. Each spirit starts with a special deck to activate innate powers, and cards can be drafted as well.

Thematically, the Dahan are represented by mushroom-shaped huts on the board. They are not depicted as individuals, whereas the invaders are more detailed—the first colonizing invaders are actually distorted-looking conquistadores (figure 8.3). The game publishers say that the spirits are "ambivalent" toward their Native populations, though they take care of the island.[17] R. Eric Reuss, the game's designer, intended the game to be anticolonial, noting that colonialism has been a pervasive, overly common theme that is "uncritical, portraying colonialism as broadly positive while ignoring or glossing over the immense harm that is caused and still continues to cause."[18]

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Figure 8.3
Mary playing *Spirit Island* (2017) and noting the skinny, scary design of the White invaders. Photo by Mary Flanagan.

The cultural theorist Rey Chow has argued that discussions of the Native need to avoid essentializing or limiting the notion of who is Native and how one might use—and falsely be known by—(primarily) visual technologies such as photography.[19] Chow questions the link between *modernity* and *Nativeness*. If, as Walter Benjamin suggested, technical advancement is inevitable, does that mean cultural displacement is as well?

On the surface, *Spirit Island* represents a change in the script of colonial games and offers a new narrative. The models embedded in the game, however, deserve closer scrutiny. For example, the Indigenous people in *Sprit Island* are only represented through hut game pieces, do not have their own agency, and only act when activated by a spirit's decisions. Invaders, on the other hand, have more complex factions and several different game pieces to represent them and their settlements. Therefore the mechanics still lean toward leaving the power of decision-making and complexity to gods and

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colonizers, not to Indigenous people themselves. And while the Dahan of *Spirit Island* have a more complex backstory, and a large amount of space is allotted to developing this story, the game's mechanical workings do not reinforce this, focusing more on the spirit's powers.

Perhaps this perspective partially developed due to the complexity of *playing as* Indigenous people. Who can and should play what characters? If players were indeed making choices on behalf of an Indigenous population, would that not also seem suspiciously like assuming a perspective that is not theirs to assume? While *Spirit Island* realistically demonstrates the speed at which aggressive colonial interests can invade a place and contaminate it, the one key problem with this complex, interesting game is that the Native people still have no agency. They are seen as masses, not individuals, and the rules give them nothing to do. We hope that future games will take on the challenge of representing oppressed people with more agency.

Léopold Sédar Senghor, the African socialist leader of Senegal and one of the prolific founders of the Négritude movement, provides an excellent framework for thinking about a world beyond colonization. Senghor argued for a new way of thinking out of such systems from the perspective of a colonized Africa. In seeking the emancipation of African peoples and the diaspora, he argued for a move to what he called "cultural independence":

> We are not in the same position as our ancestors. . . . It is now a matter of selecting, among European methods, the most effective ones for an exact analysis of our situation. It is a question of borrowing those of its institutions, values and techniques that are most likely to fecundate our traditional civilization. I say "our civilization," for we shall not be building from scratch. To do so would surely be to head for failure, for there is no tabula rasa. We shall retain whatever should be retained of our institutions, our techniques, our values, even our methods. From all this—African acquisitions and European contributions—we shall make a dynamic symbiosis to fit Africa and the twentieth century, but first of all to fit Man.[20]

Senghor's provocative thinking can be applied to the problem we face in this book: how to reinvent new models for play that eschew colonialist tropes, that reject narratives that whitewash history and romanticize trauma, without throwing out a beloved genre altogether. Instead, what we need is a dynamic symbiosis, something we have never seen, to fit the complexity of human experience.

New Games, New Communities

We have discussed many games in this book, but one common factor is that most of them have been authored by White men. We are more than aware that many of our

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examples are by White male designers, who have thus far dominated the board game design industry. We think that sexism, racism, Eurocentrism, and gender bias go hand in hand. The Canadian researcher Tanya Pobuda wanted to find the hard data on this, so she studied board game releases represented in the BoardGameGeek top two hundred game list, representing the ratings of more than a million users. Pobuda found that 93.5 percent of these games were created by White men, 2.4 percent by White women, and 4.1 percent by non-White men.[21] Assuming that this sample is representative, then nine out of ten board games are created by White men. This imbalance is even worse than in fields such as engineering.[22] Even factoring in possible miscategorizations owing to differing ways countries classify race or ethnicity, and the often inadequate ways that surveys of this kind address nonbinary or transgender representation, it is clear that board games have an equity problem. Kickstarter data are inaccessible, but one of us has been told that the number of women launching successful board game Kickstarter campaigns is under 8 percent. We have no data about the number of BIPOC game creators doing so, but we can assume that the percentage is small.

Through our engagement with the board game world, however, we also know that things are changing. Thankfully, a new generation of board games infused with non-Eurocentric culture by emerging designers, publishers, and communities is starting to change the field. The board game *Arranged!* (2017) situates players deeply within a specific cultural context—the box is filled to the brim with Pakistani culture. As the title implies, the game engages critically with the practice of arranged marriages. The designer Nashra Balagamwala grew up in Pakistan, and all the cards in the game are based on experiences from her youth. The subject matter is dealt with in a rich and engaging manner. Even the components and the game box convey details about the subject matter, since Balagamwala produced the game in the style of a wedding gift box. *Arranged!* offers a fascinating glimpse into a culture we know very little about.

The publisher GoIndia Games does the same when it comes to understanding the board game industry in India. They surveyed more than ten thousand Indian consumers to understand both broad trends and minute but significant details about the market. The designers also extensively tested all parts of their first game, *Bharata 600 BC* (2020), to tailor it to the Indian market. The findings are a real eye-opener to anyone who thinks that the Western model is easily replicated in a country like India. Take rule books, for example; the company found that Indian consumers often fail to understand basic Western game rules because of the unfamiliarity of the English syntax. Although Indians speak English, their syntax differs significantly from British and American English. Also, the order in which information is best presented and how it should be structured are different for the Indian market.

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Figure 8.4
Everything from the style of the artwork to the look and feel of the components in *Bharata 600 BC* (2020) is different from Western games with Indian themes. Photo by Mikael Jakobsson.

GoIndia further found that its player base already knew the historical content of the game better than the designers could summarize in a historical sheet—or the players did not care at all. Instead the designers focused on conveying historical details through the game and its components, such as the coins, which are an exact replica of Indian silver coins from the era. While American board games live and die by the opinions and exposure they get through YouTube, BoardGameGeek, podcasts, and so on, things are again very different in India. Fewer than 1 percent of GoIndia's customers have heard of BoardGameGeek, and sales are mostly connected to exposure on Twitter, LinkedIn, and high ratings on Amazon India. Production also looks very different. GoIndia owns its own assembly line and works with local artisans who handcraft all the wooden components. All the resources for the company's games are sourced locally. Although this might sound like a small mom-and-pop operation, GoIndia has so far produced thirty thousand copies of *Bharata 600 BC*.[23]

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The difference between playing *Bharata 600 BC* and a German game like *Rajas of the Ganges* (2017) is striking. Instead of engaging with Indian culture as an aesthetic trope, the game truly feels like a piece of culture in a box (figure 8.4).

Omari Akil's game *Rap Godz* (2018) puts players in the role of an up-and-coming hip-hop artist trying to earn street cred, mic skills, and money on the way to fame. The game consists of three album periods that give players goals for the round. Characters have their own unique abilities and skills, moving across a track to pass their opponents. *Rap Godz* creates engaging gameplay without colonial themes, territory settling, unending resources to exploit, or slavery. Through games like this, we can see what is possible.

Another game that breaks the mold is a dynamic terrain management game called *Nunami* (2020), by the Inuit designer Thomassie Mangiok. The game features hexagonal "pie" holding trays that are set up by the players in whatever form they wish (figure 8.5). First, cards are seeded across various trays facedown. Then, in an "area influence" model, players are dealt triangular cards and take turns placing cards on the hexagonal bases. The cards that are placed in the pie slots represent either human communities or nature communities, and the goal is to maintain a balance between people and nature.

Players can place the cards either facedown or faceup. Strength points in the corners of the triangle cards show which cards may be upgraded with other cards, and the cards have to be balanced on hexagons so as not to veer excessive or negative points toward one side or the other. Players win *Nunami* by being the first to earn four points. And, interestingly, merely building one's own balancing act is not the way to win, because players also need to attend to the strategies and moves of the others playing. Small thematic points that communicate cultural aspects such as figures from lore and the limited resources reflect the balance between humans and nature. The designer, Thomassie Mangiok, lives in Ivujivik in northern Quebec and prototyped the game using cereal box pieces. *Nunami* means "out on the land," and Mangiok explicitly aimed to promote traditional Inuit values and the Inuktitut language. His mother and daughter also worked on the game illustrations.[24]

The tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) community is moving fast to develop and distribute anticolonial games. *Coyote & Crow* (Kickstarted in 2021) is a speculative TTRPG in which Europeans never colonized the Americas. The game is created by a team of Native Americans representing more than a dozen tribes and is led by Connor Alexander, a GWY/Cherokee board game designer.[25] The designers promise both Native and non-Native players alike "The World That Could Be." The game starts with a different path that began seven hundred years ago after an extreme climate event, called the Awis, created a long winter and ice age. During this new chapter, the ice eventually

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Figure 8.5
Nunami, showing the triangular cards and the bases in which they are placed. Photo by Mary Flanagan.

retreated, and wars reduced, but after years of survival and gradual healing, the population noticed a purple mark appearing on people, plants, and animals.

The team carefully envisioned what the world might be like without colonialism. In an interview with the game reviewer Manny Ortiz, Alexander noted that, for example, horses, wheat, and cows would not exist in North America, for they were brought by Europeans.[26] There is a currency, but the game focuses more on a trade-based economy. When young people come of age, they choose a culture path and are exposed to "the Adahnehdi," a process that gives a superhuman ability in the path of an animal, such as the Path of the Eagle. Although combat can occur, the game does not center on it. The developers also imagined different possibilities for the development of technology in an uncolonized world. Skipping fossil fuels and wheels, power comes from elemental sources like solar, wind, and magnetic power. The game rules have specific instructions for Native players and non-Native players, and the hope is that tables would ideally mix Native and non-Native players so that non-Native players could see how Native players might bring elements of their culture into the game.[27] The design process was

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deeply involved in an interrogation of values, something that writers like Mary Flanagan and Helen Nissenbaum have pushed for across design communities.[28] Analog gaming only gets richer and more interesting as it embraces difference. These emerging games offer exciting directions for inclusive play with diverse players.

End Game

> Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.
>
> —Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

The purpose of this book is to move board game design in a positive direction—to help point out how colonial thinking has engulfed games in a surprisingly durable way, and to help designers resist falling into old, offensive tropes and instead create new possibilities through inventive design. Our plan for the book was to share this history and offer a different framing from the few standard textbook board game histories.

Ultimately, we hope we have revealed two important consequences of this sordid history. First, we aimed to show how the logic of European colonialism has insidiously entered a global twenty-first-century hobby and industry on the macro level. Second, we wanted to show how this history continues to affect individual play experiences on the micro level. We hope this book sheds much-needed light on the Eurogame genre's past as we look to the future of modern board games. As cultural shifts today may lead to even greater interest in pastimes like board gaming in the future, we must commit, as a community, to ensuring that board games answer the call for justice and fairness that cultures, peoples, and societies around the world deserve.

In this final chapter, we have celebrated the various ways that the board game community is diversifying and striving to create exemplar games that *flip the script* on the tight ties between complex contemporary board games and colonial thinking. But we are only at the beginning. As we wrap up this book, we are excited to see what new game models continue to arise, and what new anticolonial games emerge from the community.

Anticolonial movements are continuous processes and, fundamentally, fight against unequal power relations and privileges, facilitating interconnection, interdependence, and autonomy. We hope readers take from this book the inspiration to interrogate old habits, try something new, and help build the future of board games with

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a values-centric approach. We also want to point out that we are both engaged in designing counter- and anticolonialist games: Mikael at the MIT Game Lab and with the design collective Popsicleta; and Mary at her research lab Tiltfactor and her board game company Resonym. Every effort helps advance the field toward the goal of more equitable and inclusive games.

Thank you for coming on this journey with us. The last five years have been spent playing and documenting colonial-themed games, as well as visiting museums and archives across multiple countries. This has been an emotional project, because there is no way one could help but feel dismay and often disgust at every terrible new example we unearthed. The only antidote to the negativity we could find is to actively discover new games that break these long-standing molds and engage in designing such games ourselves.

We know there is so much more material out there to talk about: games left out of the book because of length constraints, or games that have emerged too recently, as this book has to go to print long before it finds its way into your hands. There are many games we have not yet found, and of course there are all the board games that, due to their ephemeral nature, are completely lost to history. There will likely be new twists and turns as board games and game artifacts become an increasingly legitimate phenomenon to study. This book is only one step.

It is a pressing time for rethinking the old and imagining the new by way of the speculative futures that games can create, because "true decolonization . . . necessarily centers on 'the destiny of humankind' and not of one race, color or ethnos."[29] Being part of the Anthropocene necessitates that we "rethink the human not from the perspective of its mastery of the Creation as we used to, but from the perspective of its finitude and its possible extinction."[30] We need an entirely new perspective on humanity and the nonhuman world; games offer possible worlds in which we play out new kinds of goals, realities, and fantasies. Designers need to take these directions into account and help in the rethinking of dualities: nature versus culture, self versus other, animal versus human, and so forth, and instead share agency among subjects that have lost their autonomy. "We therefore have to shift away from the dreams of mastery," says Mbembe.[31]

After reflecting on the global colonial past, and considering the still-lingering colonial present, we hope readers are inspired to change things from the ground up. We need to take old binaries of "us versus them" out of our games and move beyond using games as models of simplistic binary conflict, as just one example.[32] Mary wrote in the afterword to the book *Feminist War Games*, "Perhaps the world has always been a very messy place, with the mass simplification of politicians and warmongers boiling

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complexity down to two clear sides and one definitive notion of victory to simplify the truth, to funnel energy. But in doing so in our play systems, our games therefore teach a kind of one-sidedness, a binary sickness, an us-versus-them mentality, a position that engages the mind's deepest primordial biases and whose distillation continues to be useful to the status quo, to capitalism, to greed, and war-mongering; it fosters virulent gender-based discrimination, racism, and behaviors such as interpersonal violence, hate speech, and more."[33] The tools of colonial thinking must be unpacked, which is no easy feat. Patricia Hill Collins noted the difficulty as she claims, "To maintain their power, dominant groups create and maintain a popular system of 'commonsense' ideas that support their right to rule. . . . Hegemonic ideologies concerning race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation are often so pervasive that it is difficult to conceptualize alternatives to them, let alone ways of resisting the social practices that they justify."[34] It is time to conceptualize altogether new visions for the games we play.

We hope that game fans and designers are particularly inspired to invent and to play new games: games that bring unusual power dynamics, inventive interactions with counter- and anticolonial mechanics, games designed by a new crop of designers whose voices are not yet heard in a much-loved medium. Most of all, we hope that the people reading this book will try something new. There is so much skill, experience, and creativity in the board game creation community of practice.

It is time for a significant step forward—away from our dark colonial past—as we, as a community, reflect on, and implement, the fresh values we wish to see play out.

It is a time of hope.

Thanks for joining us on this journey.

—Mary Flanagan and Mikael Jakobsson

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Playing Oppression

The Legacy of Conquest and Empire in Colonialist Board Games

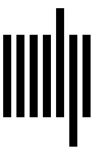
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Glossary

4X

A subgenre of digital and analog strategy games that emphasize building empires and focus on the four *X*s of exploring, expanding, exploiting, and exterminating.

Casting
Mikael's term for the idea of who the player is that a game projects onto the actual players. We can think of casting as the sum of all inscriptions embedded in the game by the designer, illustrator, developer, publisher, retailer, marketer, reviewer, organizer, and so on. Unlike concepts such as the ideal player, casting centers a critical perspective on the labor that players who do not fit these casting calls particularly well have to do to be able to play and enjoy the game.

Colonialist mechanics
When players enact the *verbs* of colonialism. These are typically covered by the components of the 4X genre (explore, expand, exploit, exterminate), although the acts of colonialism in reality include many more. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514, for instance, also mentions subjugation and domination.

Eurogames
Also called "German-style" board games. Typically the term refers to a genre of tabletop games that feature abstraction, multiple strategies, resource management, and indirect player conflicts instead of outright war.

Hagiography
Adulatory and idealizing writing about another person, originally referring to texts glorifying religious persons to instill awe and adulation in the reader.

Hex-and-counter
In its most typical form, a hex-and-counter wargame has a map with a hexagonal grid imposed over it. Units are represented by cardboard counters.

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Interaction pattern
The interaction pattern of a game determines the answer to the questions of who wins and loses together. Examples of interaction patterns include fully cooperative, semicooperative, all versus all, one versus all, and team versus team.

Kitty
The "bank," cash box, caisse, or any number of words describing the collective input of the players, the sum or pool of money that the players contributed. The term dates from the nineteenth century and was probably developed in poker.

Ludic logic
Mary's term for when games have elements both coincidental with, and distinct from, other art forms such as cinema. Some are directly related to other arts (narrative premise and setting, characters, story, visual aesthetics, sound), and some are not (actions, resources and tools, player options and agency, relationships formed by rules for interacting with other players or nonplayer characters, scoring, and the permitted game strategies). These combine in a particular mix that distinguishes games from other media forms. Games use such elements and encode them on their own terms, functioning on the level of the symbolic and ideological, and now pervade culture from basic communication to mass media. Ludic codes—on this level as well as the fundamental operationalization of the symbolic in computer code—are learned rules for linking ludic signs to their meanings. Games tell their stories in many different ways: by their very mechanics-based nature, by their context, by their rules and patterns, and ultimately by us, the players.

Mechanic
Game mechanics are the rules, capacities, and feedback that govern and guide how players interact with a game. They can often be decoupled from their narrative function in a particular game. Allowing players to buy squares on a Monopoly track, for instance, can be described on a mechanical level as letting players set traps for each other.

Metropole
The homeland or central territory of a colonial empire.

Modern board games
We use the term *modern board games* to foreground the latest phase of board gaming where we see many new designers, publishers, and players from all over the world—notably outside of Europe and Anglo-America—who are broadening the ideas of what board games should be and can be in terms of everything from the development process, via form factor, mechanics, aesthetics, and subject matter, to ideas of players and player contexts.

Négritude
A consciousness or awareness that expresses the value of Black or African culture and heritage. Négritude began as a literary movement among French-speaking African and Caribbean writers and takes a stand against historical oppression. The term emerged from the work of Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire, and Léon Damas, among others who were rethinking the historical considerations around French colonialist rule.

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Standee
A cardboard or paper cutout in the shape of a figure attached to a plastic base, typically used as a player token. The term comes from the advertisement industry; for example, human-sized standees are popular in movie theater lobbies.

Teetotum
A spinning top with numbers or letters on the geometrically shaped sides used in gambling games. In the crackdown against vice in the Victorian era, teetotums were packaged in board games to replace the use of dice. A contemporary version is the dreidel, a four-sided spinning top used in the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.

Western colonial era (1420–1960)
Historians rarely reach consensus about exactly when a given age or era began and ended. When we refer to the Western or European colonial era, we have the years 1420–1960 in mind. Similarly, when we refer to an age or era within that timespan, we mean the years indicated as follows:

1420–1650 Age of Discovery or Age of Exploration

1571–1862 Age of Sail

1760–1914 Age of Imperialism

1799–1815 Napoleonic era

1920–1960 Late-colonial era

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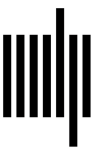
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Notes

Chapter 1

1. See Tanya Pobuda, "Assessing Gender and Racial Representation in the Board Game Industry," *Analog Game Studies* 5, no. 4 (2018), https://analoggamestudies.org/2018/12/assessing-gender-and-racial-representation-in-top-rated-boardgamegeek-games/, for the latest hard-to-find data, showing that designers and illustrators of board games on the BoardGameGeek top 200 list are overwhelmingly White and male. Player data are collected only by specific publishers; while incomplete, the data suggest that only 8 to 24 percent of board gamers are women, with only around 6 percent players of color.

2. Data collected from the American community site BoardGameGeek.com.

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14. Andrew Curry, "Monopoly Killer: Perfect German Board Game Redefines Genre," *Wired*, March 23, 2009, https://www.wired.com/2009/03/mf-settlers/.

15. Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

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24. Woods, *Eurogames*, 52–53, 222, 235; see also "Historical Retrospect."

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28. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (January 2015); Kyle Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," *Environment and Society* 9, no. 1 (2018).

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14. From Mbembe's 2015 lecture "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive." Although it was written as a spoken text, a transcript is available online at https://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf.

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24. The full title of the game is, in English, "The Game of the French Revolution, modeled after the Greek Game of the Goose." Why the Game of the Goose was noted to be a Greek game, when nearly all records point to the game emerging in Italy, is something of a mystery and may have to do with other references to Greek culture.

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Chapter 3

1. The game board also shows the earth from the four cardinal directions, a direct link to the iconography of maps. These illustrations do not serve any gameplay purposes but frame the rest of the board within a scientific paradigm at a time when astronomers still debated heliocentrism and Newton had yet to explain the concept of gravity (which coincidentally would show that the earth is not a perfect sphere, as depicted in this game, but rather an oblate spheroid).

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16. Langer, *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction*, 5.

17. Langer, 129–131.

18. Romita Ray, "The Beast in a Box: Playing with Empire in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Visual Resources* 22, no. 1 (2006): 9.

19. Darton, quoted in Ray, "The Beast in a Box," 10.

20. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 150th anniversary ed. (New York: Signet, 2003).

21. D. Collin Wells, "Social Darwinism," *American Journal of Sociology* 12, no. 5 (March 1907): 696.

22. Wells, "Social Darwinism."

23. D. Collin Wells, quoting Flinders Petrie, the controversial British founder of the field of archaeology and one of the many supporters of eugenics, in "Social Darwinism."

24. Another concurrent practice was the use of the cephalic index in racial anthropology. The cephalic index was introduced by the Swedish professor of anatomy Anders Retzius (1796–1860). It is used to divide skulls into three categories: long-, tall-, and broad-headed individuals. While its relevance for racial classification has been heavily questioned and criticized by the scientific community, the index is still referenced in sources like the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. For more information, see John P. Jackson, Jr. "Whatever Happened to the Cephalic Index? The Reality of Race and the Burden of Proof." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 40, no. 5 (2010):438–458.

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25. The topic of missionary work and colonialism is too broad to address here, but for starters, see Norman Etherington, ed., *Missions and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Chelsea Horton and Justin Tolly Bradford, *Mixed Blessings: Indigenous Encounters with Christianity in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016); Walter S. Lim, *The Arts of Empire: The Poetics of Colonialism from Raleigh to Milton* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Andrew Wilcox, *Orientalism and Imperialism: From Nineteenth-Century Missionary Imaginings to the Contemporary Middle East* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

26. John Glendening, *The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels: An Entangled Bank* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

27. Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nature, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 1.

28. Kathleen Burk, "Lecture of the Grand Tour of Europe," lecture at Gresham College, April 6, 2005.

29. Sarah Goldsmith, *Masculinity and Danger on the Eighteenth-Century Grand Tour* (London: University of London Press, Institute of Historical Research, 2020).

30. Jeremy Black, *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

31. Grewal, *Home and Harem*.

32. Martin Torodash, "Magellan Historiography," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 51, no. 2 (1971).

33. Magic Lantern Society, "Shows and Showmen," https://www.magiclanternsociety.org/about-magic-lanterns/shows-and-showmen/.

34. X. Theodore Barber, "The Roots of Travel Cinema: John L. Stoddard, E. Burton Holmes and the Nineteenth-Century Illustrated Travel Lecture," *Film History* 5, no. 1 (March 1993): 74–75.

35. Barber, "The Roots of Travel Cinema," 68–69.

36. Lionel Dupuy, "Jules Verne's Extraordinary Voyages, or The Geographical Novel of the 19th Century," trans. JPD Systems, *Annales de Géographie* 690, no. 2 (2013): 131–150.

37. Jacques Arago, *Narrative of a Voyage round the World* (London: Treuttel and Wurtz, Treuttel, Jun. and Richter, 1823).

38. Dupuy, "Jules Verne's Extraordinary Voyages."

39. Other even earlier proto-science-fiction voyager tales include Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Cyrano de Bergerac's *Comical History of the States and Empires of the Moon and the Sun* (1656), and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

40. John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 3.

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41. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 70–71.

42. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 60.

43. H. M. Chittenden, "Manifest Destiny in America," *The Atlantic*, January 1916, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1916/01/manifest-destiny-in-america/528369/.

44. Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power (1992)." *In Race and Racialization: Essential Readings*, 2nd ed., ed. Tania Das Gupta et al., 185–227. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2007), 221.

45. Charlotte Mathieson, "'The distance is quite imaginary': Travelling beyond Europe," in *Mobility in the Victorian Novel*, Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

46. The game was created in 1884 by Otto Maier, who went on to found Otto Maier Verlagsbuchhandlung, which became Ravensburger Spiele in 1900.

47. We will return to the issues involved in translating the German term *Gesellschaftspiel*, and the consequences of these issues in chapter 5.

48. The depiction of the Pulcinella as shown on this box is linked to anti-Semitic representation that began in the twelfth century CE. See Don Harrán, "The Jewish Nose in Early Modern Art and Music." *Renaissance Studies* 28, no. 1 (February 2014): 50–57.

49. Barry Grantham, *Playing Commedia* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2000), 208.

50. Margaret K. Hofer, *The Games We Played: The Golden Age of Board and Table Games* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003).

51. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 33.

52. Janet Conway, "Cosmopolitan or Colonial? The World Social Forum as 'Contact Zone,'" *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (March 2011).

53. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 128. It should be noted that Caillois, despite making some well-founded comparative cultural observations, does not manage to break out of a Eurocentric and occasionally Othering perspective.

54. V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 2.

55. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*.

56. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 23. Originally published as *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris: Editions Presence Africaine, 1955).

57. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 26.

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58. William R. Linneman, "Immigrant Stereotypes: 1880–1900," *Studies in American Humor* 1, no. 1 (April 1974): 29.

59. There is so much to write about the racist practice of Blackface that we almost don't know where to begin. Some accounts have the history starting in the 1830s in the United States, but Britain had a long-standing practice of racist "minstrel" acting. One abhorrent highlight of this history was the BBC's *The Black and White Minstrel Show*, which ran from 1958 to 1978 and had audiences of 16 *million* viewers. See David Hendy, "*The Black and White Minstrel Show*," British Broadcasting Company, https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/100-voices/people-nation-empire/make-yourself-at-home/the-black-and-white-minstrel-show.

60. Soraya Murray, *On Video Games: The Visual Politics of Race, Gender, and Space* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2018), 2.

61. Soraya Murray, "Playing Whiteness in Crisis in *The Last of Us* and *Tomb Raider*," *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association* 4, no. 3 (June 2019): 140.

62. Murray, "Playing Whiteness in Crisis."

Chapter 4

1. Jeff Bowersox, *Raising Germans in the Age of Empire: Youth and Colonial Culture, 1871–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

2. While we focus here on *Kolonialwaren*, the theme of empire ran rampant in imagery produced in British, German, Italian, Danish, Dutch, Belgian, French, and, as Mikael has already pointed out, Scandinavian popular culture, confounding patriotism with imperialism and a sense of White supremacism.

3. For an exposé on the subject of human zoos, see Popular Resistance Staff, "Deep Racism: The Forgotten History of Human Zoos," *Popular Resistance*, February 18, 2014, https://popularresistance.org/deep-racism-the-forgotten-history-of-human-zoos/. (Beware of horrifying imagery.)

4. Christine R. Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World: Renaissance Encounters with the Strange and Marvelous* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 3.

5. Erik Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire: Globalization and the German Quest for World Status, 1875–1919* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

6. Bowersox, *Raising Germans in the Age of Empire*, 36.

7. Sarah Zabrodski, "19th-Century Board Game Offers a Tour of the German Colonies," *Getty Iris*, July 5, 2016, https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/19th-century-board-game-offers-a-tour-of-the-german-colonies/.

8. Dirk van Laak, "Deutschland in Afrika: Der Kolonialismus und sein Nachwirkungen," BPB: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, January 17, 2005, https://www.bpb.de/apuz/29265/deutschland-in-afrika-der-kolonialismus-und-seine-nachwirkungen?p=1.

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9. Jiaozhou Bay was leased from China by the German Empire in 1897.

10. For *Reise um die Erde* (Journey around the world), see fig. 3.6.

11. Later reproductions instead come with paper standees depicting a variety of Indigenous peoples for player tokens. The artwork is, however, clearly not contemporary with the other the illustrations in the game.

12. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 33. See chap. 3 for an extended discussion of the term.

13. Mun Kao and Zedeck Siew, "Mun Kao and Sedeck Siew: Art and Writing Is Game Design," interview by Alex Westfall, *Killscreen*, February 25, 2021, https://killscreen.com/mun-kao-and-zedeck-siew/, para. 29–30.

14. Nada Badenberg, "Spiel um Kamerun," in *Mit Deutschland um die Welt*, ed. Alexander Honold and Klaus R. Scherpe (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2004), 87.

15. Author's translation.

16. Badenberg, "Spiel um Kamerun."

17. Hans Helmut Hillrichs, "Waldaffen, »Nickneger«, schwarze Perlen—und ewig leben die (Zerr-)bilder," in *Deutsche Kolonien—Traum und Trauma*, 2nd ed., ed. Gisela Graichen and Horst Gründer (Ullstein Buchverlag, 2005), 455–461.

18. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1971).

19. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 35.

20. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 89.

21. William Labov, Ray Broadus Browne, and Pat Browne, *The Guide to United States Popular Culture* (New York: Popular Press, 2001), 850.

22. These many German game examples can be found with their collector: Patrick Van der Vegt, "German Board Games," Atlas Repro Paperwork, https://www.atlas-repropaperwork.com/german-board-games/.

23. Andrew Morris-Friedman and Ulrich Schädler, "'Juden Raus!' (Jews Out!)—History's Most Infamous Board Game," *Board Games Studies Journal* 6 (2003).

24. Wiener Holocaust Library, "Juden Raus! Board Game," 2017, https://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/Juden-Raus.

25. Arie Marcelo Kacowicz and Pawel Lutomski, *Population Resettlement in International Conflicts: A Comparative Study* (Lexington Books, 2007).

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26. Bowersox, *Raising Germans in the Age of Empire*; "Shaping the Future: Indoctrinating Youth," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/indoctrinating-youth.

27. Constance Dittrich and Kerstin Merkel, *Spiel mit dem Reich—Nationalsozialistisches Gedankengut in Spielzeug und Kinderbüchern* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011).

28. Morris-Friedman and Schädler, "Juden Raus!," 129.

29. Konrad H. Jarausch, "German Students in the First World War," *Central European History* 17, no. 4 (December 1984): 310.

30. Bowersox, *Raising Germans in the Age of Empire*, 52.

31. H. Schwarz, "Jung-Deutschland's Pfadfinderspiel," in *Aufbruch der Jugend Deutsche Jugendbewegung zwischen Selbstbestimmung und Verführung* (Nürnberg: Verlag des Germanischen Nationalmuseums, 2013), 239; Heike Hoffmann, "Education for Modernity: An Industry Portrait of the Toy Industry in the Emerging Mass Consumer Society" (PhD diss., Tübingen, 2000), 154–178.

32. See Luigi Ciompi and Adrian Seville's website, Giochi dell'Oca e di percorso, http://www.giochidelloca.it/scheda.php?id=825.

33. The example in the collection at the Getty Museum is a color lithograph on linen printed at the OPIM (Office de publicité et d'impression) in 1941. The right half of the print constitutes game pieces to be cut up for use in play.

34. Elizabeth Heath, "Apprendre l'Empire, un jeu d'enfants?" *Clio: Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 40 (November 21, 2017):243–260, accessed November 11 2021, https://journals.openedition.org/clio/12114.

35. Elizabeth M. Collins, "'Le riz d'Indochine' at the French Table: Representations of Food, Race and the Vietnamese in a Colonial-Era Board Game," *Modern and Contemporary France* 29, no. 3 (2021): 243–260, https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2020.1814713.

36. Isotta Poggi, "Colorful Board Game Turns the French Colonies into Child's Play," *Getty Iris Blog*, February 24, 2014, http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/colorful-board-game-turns-the-french-colonies-into-childs-play/.

37. *Jeu des échanges: France—colonies* is reminiscent of another game from the same period: the French filmmaker Albert Lamorisse's *La conquête du monde* (The conquest of the world), which later became known as *Risk*. *Risk* was released by the mainstream publisher Parker Brothers in the United States in 1959, nearly twenty years after *Jeu des échanges: France—colonies* began circulating, though *Risk* offers several avenues for choice such as negotiation and attack/move interactions on the way to territory building.

38. Mary Flanagan and Helen Nissenbaum, *Values at Play in Digital Games* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).

39. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (1961; Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 43.

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40. Miguel Sicart, *Beyond Choices: The Design of Ethical Gameplay* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 80.

41. Césaire, "Discourse on Colonialism," 19.

42. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 9.

Chapter 5

1. Philip E. Orbanes, *Tortured Cardboard: How Great Board Games Arise from Chaos, Survive by Chance, Impart Wisdom, and Gain Immortality* (New York: Permuted Press, 2019).

2. From the rule book of *Risk 40th Anniversary Collector's Edition*, Albert Lamorisse, Hasbro, 1959.

3. See chap. 6 for further discussion of this topic.

4. Ben Harsh, "Harsh Rules: Let's Learn to Play the Father of Risk 'La Conquete Du Monde,'" YouTube, December 19, 2015, video, 15:14, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGrRzJ2gXQo.

5. "100 Finnish Games," Finnish Museum of Games, 2016, http://vapriikki.fi/en/pelimuseo/pelit/. Regarding the reference to *Casablanca*, the film is set in French-ruled Morocco, but in typical colonial fashion, the film only uses the place as a backdrop for Europeans and Americans. In fact, the premise relies on the audience being at once utterly invested in ending the German occupation of Paris and completely fine with the continued French occupation of Casablanca.

6. Anne-Marie Lindfors, "West African Novels in Finnish Translation: Strategies for Africanised English" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2015).

7. In some versions of the game, players instead have to find a lucky horseshoe.

8. "The Cullinard Diamond," Royal Collection Trust, https://www.rct.uk/collection/themes/trails/the-crown-jewels/the-cullinan-diamond.

9. V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

10. Henna Ylänen, "Kansakunta pelissä: Nationalismi ja konfliktit 1900-luvun alun suomalaisissa lautapeleissä," *Ennen ja nyt* 17, no. 1 (2017): 3, https://journal.fi/ennenjanyt/article/view/108787.

11. Ylänen, "Kansakunta pelissä," 3, author's translation.

12. The first seed of the game was planted already in childhood when Calhamer was looking through an old geography book. He was fascinated by exotic-sounding names like the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. His childhood friend Gordon Leavitt recalls: "Allan picked up that book, and something just grabbed his imagination. Before long he was drawing his own maps and creating his own board games." Joan Giangrasse Kates, "Allan B. Calhamer, 1931–2013," *Chicago Tribune*, March 3, 2013.

13. Calhamer settled on the theme as he took a class in nineteenth-century European history under Professor Sidney B. Fay, author of *The Origins of the World War*, where Calhamer learned

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about what Fay calls the "system of secret alliances" between nations and the role that negotiations, pacts, and betrayals played in the developments that eventually led to the Great War. See Allan Calhamer, "The Invention of *Diplomacy*," *Games and Puzzles*, no. 21 (January 1974).

14. During his time at Harvard, Calhamer also studied contract law, which came in handy when figuring out what to do with erroneous, ambiguous, and incomplete written orders. See Calhamer, "The Invention of *Diplomacy*."

15. For a more detailed but still concise account, see Jon Peterson, "A Game Out of All Proportions: How a Hobby Miniaturized War," in *Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming*, ed. Pat Harrigan and Matthew G. Kirschenbaum (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

16. Elliott M. Avedon, "The Structural Elements of Games," in *The Study of Games*, ed. Elliott M. Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith (New York: J. Wiley, 1971), 425.

17. Bruce Whitehill, "Alex Randolph—a Life of Games," *Big Game Hunter* (blog), accessed November 14, 2021, https://thebiggamehunter.com/inventors/game-designers/alex-randolph/.

18. The game oware and the meaning of its name are discussed further in Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 64.

19. Jim Hughes, "Oh-Wah-Ree: The 3M Bookshelf Games," *Codex 99* (blog), December 22, 2010, http://codex99.com/design/oh-wah-ree.html.

20. *Engine building* is a somewhat nebulous term. Without claims of offering a formal definition, Geoffrey Engelstein and Isaac Shalev, in *Building Blocks of Tabletop Game Design: An Encyclopedia of Mechanisms* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2020), 438, describe it as "getting together a few elements that create a virtuous cycle of increasing productivity."

21. Bruce Whitehill, "The 3M Company," *Big Game Hunter* (blog), accessed December 6, 2021. https://thebiggamehunter.com/company-histories/3m/.

22. Used in this context, *Gesellschaft* overlaps with another untranslatable German word: *Gemütlichkeit*. *Cosy* captures an element of it but crucially lacks the sense of friendliness and belonging.

23. Stewart Woods, *Eurogames: The Design, Culture and Play of Modern European Board Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 56–58.

24. Geoff Eley, *The Twentieth Century, 1914–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 75.

25. Sabine Bode, *The Forgotten Generation* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004).

26. Woods, *Eurogames*; see also Andreas Lober, "A Short History of Banned Games in Germany," *Games Industry Biz*, March 17, 2020, https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2020-03-17-a-short-history-of-banned-games-in-germany.

27. Published in the United States as *Clue* by Parker Brothers in 1949.

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28. Stuart Dagger, "Es War Einmal," *Games Journal*, March 2003, http://www.thegamesjournal.com/articles/GermanHistory.shtml.

29. Woods, *Eurogames*, 49.

30. David Parlett, *Oxford History of Board Games* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Board Games Other than Chess* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

31. Exemplar games dating as far back as the royal game of Ur have used different mechanics from pure race. That said, until the twentieth century, only a few strategy games used different formats and piece movements, like chess, backgammon, forms of checkers, and tafl.

32. Woods, *Eurogames*.

33. Matthew G. Kirschenbaum and Pat Harrigan, eds., *Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

34. Jon Peterson, *Playing at the World: A History of Simulating Wars, People and Fantastic Adventures, from Chess to Role-Playing Games* (San Diego, CA: Unreason Press, 2012).

35. Aaron Trammell, "How *Dungeons and Dragons* Appropriated the Orient," in *Analog Game Studies*, vol. 3, ed. Emma Leigh Waldron, Aaron Trammell, and Evan Torner (Pittsburgh: ETC Press, 2019).

36. This form of the game is linked to the NBC TV quiz show of the same name, which was based on the traditional children's game known as *memory* in many European countries including Germany and Sweden, which in turn has ties all the way back to the sixteenth-century Japanese game *awase*, which is discussed further in Flanagan, *Critical Play*, 34.

37. Northwest Smith, a space smuggler, was featured in a series of 1930s short stories by C. L. Moore; Buck Rogers, first created in a short story by Philip Francis Nowlan, first appeared in *Amazing Stories* in 1929; Flash Gordon, the protagonist of a space opera adventure comic strip, was created by Alex Raymond in 1934 to compete with Buck Rogers comic strips.

38. From the rule book of *Stellar Conquest*, Howard Thompson, Metagaming Concepts, 1975, 1.

39. Peter Redfield, "The Half-Life of Empire in Outer Space," *Social Studies of Science* 32, nos. 5–6 (October 2002): 795–796.

40. Redfield, "Half-Life of Empire," 797.

41. Matt Sall, "Board Games Retro: Designer of Catan's First Board Game—'Barbarossa,'" *Bell of Lost Souls*, June 3, 2020, https://www.belloflostsouls.net/2020/06/board-games-retro-designer-of-catans-first-board-game-barbarossa.html.

42. Scott Rogers, "GameTek Classic 164: Catan," *Ludology*, podcast, 2017.

43. Rogers, "GameTek Classic 164: Catan."

44. Rogers.

45. Rogers.

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46. Mary Flanagan and Helen Nissenbaum, *Values at Play in Digital Games* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 152–153.

47. See Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); and Bruno Faidutti, "Postcolonial Catan," in *Analog Game Studies*, vol. 2, ed. Evan Torner, Emma Leigh Waldron, and Aaron Trammell (Pittsburgh: ETC Press, 2017), 3–34.

48. Greg Loring-Albright, "The First Nations of *Catan*: Practices in Critical Modification." in *Analog Game Studies*, vol. 2, ed. Evan Torner, Emma Leigh Waldron, and Aaron Trammell (Pittsburgh: ETC Press, 2017), 35–42.

49. Jonathan Kay, "The Invasion of the German Board Games," *The Atlantic*, January 21, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2018/01/german-board-games-catan/550826/.

50. Mary Flanagan, "Playful Aesthetics: Toward a Ludic Language," in *Gameful World*, ed. S. Walz and Sebastian Deterding (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 249–271.

51. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Chapter 6

1. We are using tomb raiders as an analytical concept covering numerous roles inhabited by White people collecting valuable items in exotic settings as established in Phillip Penix-Tadsen, "Latin American Ludology: Why We Should Take Video Games Seriously (and When We Shouldn't)," *Latin American Research Review* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 174–190.

2. Stemming from theology and biographies of saints, a hagiography is an adulatory and idealized biography of an iconized figure.

3. Bernard Planche, *Die Welt hinter dem Horizont: Die grossen Entdeckungsfahrten* (Ravensburger, 1988).

4. Known in Portuguese as the Século de Ouro (literally, the "golden century").

5. A rondel is an action selection mechanic where the available actions are represented as wedges in a circle. On a player's turn, they may move their token around the rondel and perform the action indicated by the wedge where they stop. It is typically costlier to move farther around the rondel (Engelstein and Shalev, *Building Blocks of Tabletop Game Design*).

6. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1993).

7. Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415–1580* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 456–459. According to these authors, the widely circulated versions of the letters were most likely not written by Vespucci himself. It is also uncertain if he participated in all the journeys recounted in the letters.

8. Will Robinson, "Orientalism and Abstraction in Eurogames," *Analog Game Studies* 1, no. 5 (December 2014), http://analoggamestudies.org/2014/12/orientalism-and-abstraction-in-eurogames/.

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9. Stewart Woods, *Eurogames: The Design, Culture and Play of Modern European Board Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012).

10. Engseng Ho, "Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat," *Comparative Studies in Society and History: An International Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2004): 213.

11. Ho, "Empire through Diasporic Eyes," 218.

12. From Mbembe's 2015 lecture "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive."

13. Ho, "Empire through Diasporic Eyes," 218.

14. Nancy Foasberg, "The Problematic Pleasures of Productivity and Efficiency in *Goa* and *Navegador*," *Analog Game Studies* 3, no. 1 (January 2016), http://analoggamestudies.org/2016/01/the-problematic-pleasures-of-productivity-and-efficiency-in-goa-and-navegador/.

15. Debaditya Mukhopadhyay, "The Temple of Orientalism," in *Excavating Indiana Jones: Essays on the Films and Franchise*, ed. Randy Laist (Jefferson, NC: McFarland), 76–77.

Chapter 7

1. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 33.

2. Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Representations of the Orient* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

3. Cornel Borit, Melania Borit, and Petter Olsen, "Representations of Colonialism in Three Popular, Modern Board Games: *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires*, and *Archipelago*," *Open Library of Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1–40, https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.211.

4. Piri Thomas and Suzie Dod, "Puerto Rico—500 Years of Oppression," *Social Justice* 19, no. 2 (1992): 73.

5. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 85.

6. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), ix

7. Library of Congress, "Rivers, Edens, Empires: Lewis & Clark and the Revealing of America," online exhibition catalog, 2003, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/lewisandclark/lewis-landc.html.

8. See Matt Saunders, "Lewis & Clark—Interview with Cédrick Chaboussit," *Yellow Parable* (blog), February 12, 2017, https://yellowparable.com/lewis-clark-interview-with-cedrick-chaboussit/.

9. When the Native Americans are given a short biography, the information gives a false sense of companionship and equality. Sacagawea's bio says, "She joins the expedition with her husband Toussaint Charbonneau," without mentioning that she was sold into a nonconsensual marriage to him at age thirteen.

10. Hanibal Sonderegger (@hanibalicious), reply to "FAQ available," BoardGameGeek forum, January 7, 2014, https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/1099616/article/14461580#14461580.

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11. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 373.

12. Will Emigh, "Strategies for Publishing Transformative Board Games," *Analog Game Studies* 1, no. 2 (September 2014), http://analoggamestudies.org/2014/09/strategies-for-publishing-transformative-board-games; Will Robinson, "Orientalism and Abstraction in Eurogames," *Analog Game Studies* 1, no. 5 (December 2014), http://analoggamestudies.org/2014/12/orientalism-and-abstraction-in-eurogames/.

13. Emigh, "Strategies for Publishing Transformative Board Games."

14. Dean Bowman, "Guilt Trips for the Cardboard Colonialists: The Function of Procedural Rhetoric and the Contact Zone in Archipelago," in *Rerolling Boardgames: Essays on Themes, Systems, Experiences and Ideologies*, edited by Douglas Brown and Esther MacCallum-Stewart (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2020), 144–160.

15. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 373.

16. The incredibly rich Mayan Popol Vuh, or the "Book of Counsel," details the creation of humans by gods using cacao as one of the ingredients. Many translations exist; Allen J. Christenson has created a line-by-line literal translation of this sacred book of the K'iche' Maya people.

17. Janine Gasco, "Cacao and Economic Inequality in Colonial Soconusco, Chiapas, Mexico," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 52, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 385–409.

18. See chap. 3 in Kathryn E. Sampeck and Jonathan Thayn, *Substance and Seduction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), which charts a cartography of chocolate colonialism.

19. Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Penguin, 1973), 317.

20. Robinson, "Orientalism and Abstraction in Eurogames."

21. Nancy Foasberg, "The Problematic Pleasures of Productivity and Efficiency in *Goa* and *Navegador*," *Analog Game Studies* 3, no. 1 (January 2016), http://analoggamestudies.org/2016/01/the-problematic-pleasures-of-productivity-and-efficiency-in-goa-and-navegador/.

22. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

23. Devin Wilson, "The Eurogame as Heterotopia," *Analog Game Studies* 2, no. 7 (November 2015), http://analoggamestudies.org/2015/11/the-eurogame-as-heterotopia/.

24. Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (1989): 205–225.

25. We use the term as understood in actor-network theory, rather than narrative theory, that is, as something that makes a unique contribution to the properties of an actor network. Bruno Latour, *The Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 75.

26. Susana Pajares Tosca, "Reading Resident Evil: Code Veronica X," *FineArt Forum* 17, no. 8 (2003): 206–216, 206–216.

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27. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

28. Eco's conceptualization of these terms evolved over the years; this is a summary. For more, see William Hendricks, "Open and Closed Texts," *Semiotica* 35, no. 3 (1981): 361–379.

29. Mary Flanagan and Anna Lotko, "Anxiety, Openness and Activist Games: A Case Study for Critical Play," in *Proceedings of the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA)*, Uxbridge, August 31–September 4, 2009.

30. Tosca, "Reading *Resident Evil: Code Veronica X*."

31. A Boricua is a person from Puerto Rico by birth or descent.

32. Yale University Genocide Studies Program, "Puerto Rico," 2021, https://gsp.yale.edu/case-studies/colonial-genocides-project/puerto-rico.

33. The official nomenclature designated Puerto Rico as an unincorporated US territory.

34. Aziria D. Rodríguez, "Seizing the Memes of Production" (MA thesis, Department of Humanities, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2018), https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/117895.

35. Tosca, "Reading *Resident Evil: Code Veronica X*."

36. Eco would probably say "macro-speech act" instead of "game."

37. Katrina Lacey, "Authoring the Other: Regarding Race and Gender in a Multicultural Adaptation of the Classic Fairytale 'Cinderella'" (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2008).

38. Kaelan Doyle Myerscough, Richard Eberhardt, Mikael Jakobsson, and Claudia Lo, "Jamming for Allies: Finding a Formula for Inclusive Design Exploration Collaborations," in *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Game Jams, Hackathons, and Game Creation Events*, (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2017), 26–32.

39. Mary has heard less of this particular formulation, which makes us wonder if it is a dog whistle that is mainly reserved for the company of White men.

40. Rebecca Yvonne Bayeck, "Examining Board Gameplay and Learning: A Multidisciplinary Review of Recent Research," *Simulation and Gaming*, April 16, 2020.

41. Miguel Sicart, *Beyond Choices: The Design of Ethical Gameplay* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 80.

Chapter 8

1. Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 87.

2. This is similar to Mary's 2015 game *Monarch*, in which Moon cards represent boons or challenging events for the players related to natural systems such as drought and floods. Negative Moons can cause a loss of food or financial resources.

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3. William Robinson, "Orientalism and Abstraction in Eurogames," *Analog Game Studies* 1, no. 5 (2014), http://analoggamestudies.org/2014/12/orientalism-and-abstraction-in-eurogames/.

4. Although we do not have the space to present a full analysis, the games *Five Tribes* (2014) and *Imperial Settlers* (2019) are good examples here.

5. Scott Woods, "A Black Player on *Freedom*," BoardGameGeek, April 14, 2014, https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/1155831/black-player-freedom.

6. Woods, "A Black Player on *Freedom*," para. 2.

7. William Garcia, "A Seat at the Table: Board Gaming Is for Us Too," *My Reflection Matters*, June 22, 2017, para. 11, http://www.myreflectionmatters.org/a-seat-at-the-table-board-gaming-is-for-us-too/.

8. Garcia, "A Seat at the Table."

9. Garcia, para. 13.

10. Siobhan Roberts, "She Invented a Board Game with Scientific Integrity. It's Taking Off," *New York Times*, March 11, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/11/science/wingspan-board-game-elizabeth-hargrave.html. Recall the mechanical link to *Race for the Galaxy*, discussed more fully in chap. 5.

11. The harassment of, and lack of support for, women board game designers is another pervasive issue in the board game industry, but unpacking this problem would take a whole other book.

12. Sceptic [pseud.] (@samlms), "There Is Something Wrong with *Wingspan*," user review, Board GameGeek, July 23, 2019, https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/2242537/there-something-wrong-wingspan.

13. Will Thompson, "Will Thompson on *Winter Rabbit*: Zenobia Finalists 2021," interview by Liz Davidson and Mitch Reed, Beyond Solitaire, YouTube, October 8, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQ__kxDdawQ, at 2:38.

14. Thompson interview, at 3:28.

15. Thompson interview, at 5:28.

16. "Zenobia Award," Zenobia Award, https://zenobiaaward.org/winners/.

17. W. Eric Martin, "Interview with Mara Johannes-Graham and Chris Kirkman, Greater Than Games," BoardGameGeek, July 17, 2017, https://boardgamegeek.com/video/142861/spirit-island/spirit-island-game-preview-origins-game-fair-2017.

18. Tara Yarlagadda, "12 Board Games That Fix the Biggest Problem with *Settlers of Catan*," *Inverse*, April 21, 2021, https://www.inverse.com/science/12-board-games-for-earth-day.

19. Rey Chow, "Where Have All the Natives Gone," in *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*, ed. Angelika Bammer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 125–151.

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20. Léopold Sédar Senghor, *On African Socialism*, trans. Mercer Cook (New York: Praeger, 1964), 9.

21. Tanya Pobuda, "Assessing Gender and Racial Representation in the Board Game Industry," *Analog Game Studies* 5, no. 4 (December 2018), https://analoggamestudies.org/2018/12/assessing-gender-and-racial-representation-in-top-rated-boardgamegeek-games/.

22. As cited in Javier A. Treviño, *Investigating Social Problems* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2021).

23. Christina Maiorescu, personal correspondence, October 7, 2021.

24. Franca G. Mignacca, "Nunavik Board Game Aims to Showcase the Importance of Nature," Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, April 8, 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/nunami-inuit-board-game-1.5977114.

25. The letters *GWY* are romanized versions of letters from the Cherokee language and are pronounced *tsa-la-gi*, meaning "Cherokee."

26. Connor Alexander, "*Coyote and Crow*: First Nations Alternate Future RPG—Interview with Connor Alexander," interview by Manny Ortiz, *Really Dicey*, March 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDY1f3YC7Aw.

27. Alexander, "*Coyote and Crow*."

28. Mary Flanagan and Helen Nissenbaum, *Values at Play in Digital Games* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).

29. W. E. B. Du Bois, quoted by Achille Mbembe on page 18 of his 2015 lecture "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive."

30. Du Bois, quoted in Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive," 25.

31. Du Bois, quoted in Mbembe, 26.

32. Mary Flanagan, "Taking Binaries off the Table," in *Feminist War Games? Mechanisms of War, Feminist Values, and Interventional Games*, ed. Jon Saklofske, Alyssa Arbuckle, and Jon Bath (London: Routledge, 2019), 195–201.

33. Flanagan, "Taking Binaries off the Table," 199.

34. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 284.

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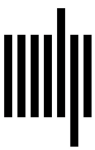
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Playing Oppression

The Legacy of Conquest and Empire in Colonialist Board Games

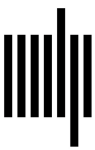
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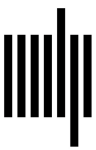
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