Postcolonial Perspectives in Game Studies

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POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES IN GAME STUDIES

Representations of Colonialism in Three Popular, Modern Board Games: *Puerto Rico, Struggle of Empires*, and *Archipelago*

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With all its intricate processes, colonialism, both as an ideology and a historical period, has been a rich source of inspiration for contemporary popular culture, whether in the form of movies, novels, digital games, or analogue games. This article presents a critical analysis of colonial representations in three examples of the latter: *Puerto Rico* (2002), *Struggle of Empires* (2004), and *Archipelago* (2012). These three games are simulation, strategy type Eurogames, with rules designed to emulate and reproduce two time periods: first-wave European colonialism (*Puerto Rico*; *Archipelago*) and 18th-century European colonial expansion (*Struggle of Empires*). On BoardGameGeek.com, where users have ranked more than 87,000 board games and extensions, these three are in the top three-hundred overall, with more than 3,000 votes each. Building on John McLeod's definition of colonialism and interpretation of colonial economies, Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, and Gayatri Spivak's theory of subalternity, this comparative study examines representations of: a) the otherness of colonial subjects in relation to colonisers; b) indigenous peoples' agency and subaltern voice; c) expressions of the indigenous culture; and d) Eurocentrism. The analysis investigates the denotative and connotative meanings of game rules, game mechanics, artwork, and tiles, critically assessing how these might influence the player's cultural, social, and aesthetic experience of the ideological and historical context. In so doing, the article attempts to raise awareness about how these games (mis)represent colonial realities and relations.

Introduction

With all its intricate processes, colonialism, both as an ideology and a historical period, has been a rich source of inspiration for contemporary popular culture, whether in the form of movies, novels, digital games, or analogue games. The popularity of digital games has triggered considerable academic effort into analysing how these popular culture artefacts touch upon issues that are related directly or indirectly to colonial themes and the ways in which these games construct various conceptions of space, race, identity, political systems, ethics, and society through historical re-enactment and representations (Brock, 2011; Chapman, 2016; Hammar, 2017; Higgin, 2008; Lammes, 2010; Langer, 2008; Magnet, 2006; Martin, 2016; Mukherjee, 2016; Poor, 2012; Vrtacic, 2014; Young, 2016). However, despite several publications in outlets such as the open-access journal *Analog Game Studies*, this popular trend has yet to be matched by academic literature in the board games (tabletop or analogue games) domain (Wilson, 2015); something that is all the more important given the growing size of this segment of the market (Jolin, 2016). This article aims to contribute to the endeavour of addressing this gap in scholarly literature on board games and critically analyses colonial representations in three simulation Eurogames of the strategy type: *Puerto Rico* (2002) (**Figure 1**), *Struggle of Empires* (2004) (**Figure 2**), and *Archipelago* (2012) (**Figure 3**). On BoardGameGeek.com, where users have ranked more than 87,000 board games and extensions, these

Figure 1: Instance of playing *Puerto Rico*. Source: Flickr.com.

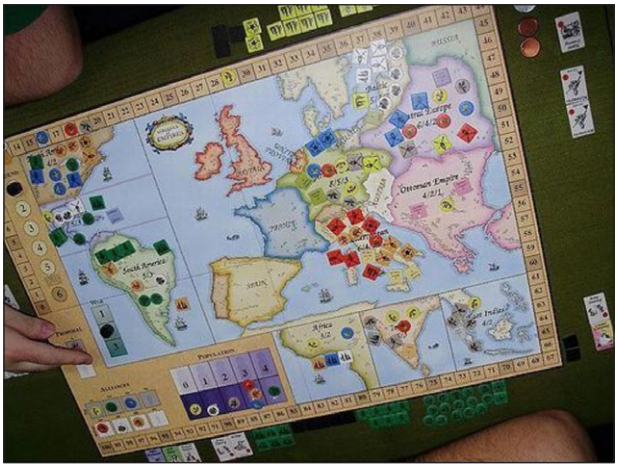

Figure 2: Instance of playing *Struggle of Empires*. Source: Flickr.com.

Figure 3: Instance of playing *Archipelago*. Source: Vimeo.com.

three games are in top three-hundred overall, with more than 3,000 votes each (date of visit: 25.04.2017). Our comparative analysis investigates the denotative and connotative meanings of game rules, game mechanics, artwork, and tiles. Players assimilate the mechanics, physical elements, and narratives that games employ to construct believable characters and worlds; and thus they willingly believe in the interactive fictions presented to them during gameplay (Brock, 2011), opening up a realm of personal meaning (Wilson, 2015). Therefore, it is important to critically assess to what extent these board games are instrumental in preserving, perpetuating, and disseminating the colonial mind-set and power structures among a contemporary audience. Building on John McLeod's definition of colonialism and interpretation of

colonial economies (McLeod, 2010), Edward Said's theory of Orientalism (Said, 2003), and Gayatri Spivak's theory of subalternity (Spivak, 1996), this article comparatively explores how these three games construct representations of: otherness of colonial subjects in relation with the colonisers; indigenous peoples' agency and subaltern voice; expressions of the indigenous culture; and Eurocentrism. If indeed games are places of informal daily experience, 'sites for identity formation and meaning-making as well as complex problem solving' (Steinkuehler, 2005: Page 12.), then what kind of identity is the player forming when solving problems raised while playing these three games, and what kind of meaning making?

While most articles of this type analyse one game only, we have chosen to look at and compare three different games. In our view, this is the optimal number of games, which enables us to produce a rich comparative analysis without overloading the reader with too many examples to follow through the analysis. The main reasons for this choice are as follows:

- One of our aims is to investigate if there might be commonalities between these games, and this is easier to accomplish if we describe and analyse several games simultaneously, using the same framework and methodology.
- Another aim is to investigate if there might be trends or systematic differences between the games. To identify trends we need to examine games released over a substantial period of time. Ten years have passed since the release of *Puerto Rico* to the more recent release of *Archipelago*, and much has happened in the board gaming world in those years; both with respect to the number and type of games released, the artwork, and production value of these games, and the underlying mechanics of the games.
- Since 2005, more than 1,000 new board games have been added annually to the BoardGameGeek database. With the advent of crowd-funding and progressively lower costs required to achieve high production values, this number is ever increasing and there are now more than 87,000 games in the database. If we want to subject the realm of board gaming to a literary analysis, it seems desirable to look at a few games at a time so that we can

increase the representativeness and the fraction of games studied, while still keeping the amount of detail within comprehensible limits.

The games chosen were selected based on the arguments indicated above. We wanted games that offer a strong colonial theme, which could be studied as representative of colonial-themed games in general, were released over a substantial period of time, were popular, and of course available (and fun to play). Most board gamers would probably consider *Puerto Rico* (Seyfarth, 2002) to be the classic colonial game (with its fair share of political incorrectness), and it was therefore the first game that we selected. *Archipelago* (Boelinger, 2012) is a newer game and was the second game selected for this study. *Puerto Rico* and *Archipelago* are both resource management/economic optimisation games, which encourage players to develop and manage a system of production, distribution, trade, and/or consumption of goods. If we wanted to represent colonial-themed board games, we clearly needed an area control game (in which players have to establish their authority over a territory in the game) and/or a direct conflict game (in which players are encouraged to engage their game characters in battles). *Struggle of Empires* (Wallace, 2004) was chosen to represent both these large sub-sets of colonial-themed games; partly because it satisfied all the criteria indicated above, and partly because the game also contains mechanics specific to a colonial setting (including the East Indies Company, government reform, slave revolt etc.) that can be compared with the other two games.

The Games: Objectives and Main Elements

To understand the relationship between colonialism, Orientalism, and subalternity; and the three board games we chose for analysis, it is necessary first to describe these games and familiarise the reader with their settings and main elements. *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires*, and *Archipelago* are Eurogames (i.e. they emphasise strategy over luck and conflict [Woods, 2012]) with rules designed to emulate and reproduce two time periods: first-wave European colonialism (*Puerto Rico*; *Archipelago*) and 18th-century European colonial expansion (*Struggle of Empires*). A summary of the main aspects of these games is provided in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Summary of the main aspects of the board games *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires,* and *Archipelago*. Score, rank overall, and ratings are reported from www.boardgamegeek.com, the 25th of April, 2017.

	Puerto Rico	**Struggle of Empires**	**Archipelago**
Release year	2002	2004	2012
Number of players	2–5	2–7	1–5
Playing time (minutes)	90–150	180–240	30–240
Age	12+	13+	14+
Score	8.1	7.5	7.4
Rank overall	12	270	247
Ratings	47,701	3,404	5,094
Game type	Competition	Semi-cooperative	Semi-cooperative
Game focus	Resource management and optimisation	Area control	Exploration and resource management and optimisation
Historical time	Around 1550	The 18th century	Sometime during the period 1492–1797

(contd.)

	Puerto Rico	Struggle of Empires	Archipelago
Space	Puerto Rico, Greater Antilles, the Caribbean Sea	'Europe and six colonial areas' (Game rules (Wallace, 2004))	An archipelago implied to be situated in the Caribbean Sea
Player perspective	Spanish colonist	European colonist	European colonist
Player role(s)	– Builder – Captain – Craftsman – Mayor – Prospector – Settler – Trader	– Major European powers: Britain, France, Spain, Russia, Austria, Prussia, United Provinces	– Explorer
Player gender (as implied by text or art work)	Male	Not applicable	Male

(contd.)

	Puerto Rico	Struggle of Empires	Archipelago
Player main actions	– Start plantation – Bring new colonists – Build – Trade – Produce goods – Ship goods	– Buy – Build – Move – Attack – Colonise or Enslave	– Resource harvest – Construction – Transaction – Migration – Exploration – Recruitment of workers – Taxes – Reproduction
Main non-player characters (NPCs)	– Colonists	– Generic companies providing resources in various areas (e.g. gold in South America, slaves in Africa) – Allies (populations, e.g. Native Americans in North America; or countries, e.g. Denmark)	– Surplus workers (native or immigrants) – Rebels (native)

(contd.)

	Puerto Rico	Struggle of Empires	Archipelago
Other NPCs	None	– Army (colonists) – Mercenaries (males) – Pressgangs (males) – Trained natives (males) – Militia (males) – Pirates (males) – Reserve (army)	– Clergy (males) – Barbarian (male, native) – Exporter/Merchant (male) – Head-hunter (male) – Researcher (male) – Pirate (male) – Recruiter (male) – Thief (female) – Assassin (female) – False prophet (male) – Ministries (males) – Scout (male, native) – King (male) – Queen (female) – Spy (male) – Financial advisor (male) – Admiral (male)

(contd.)

	Puerto Rico	Struggle of Empires	Archipelago
Resources	Explicit:	Implied in tiles that one can buy:	Explicit:
	– Indigo	– Gold	– Exotic fruit
	– Sugar	– Wood	– Cattle
	– Tobacco	– Tobacco	– Fish
	– Coffee	– Sugar	– Wood
		– Spices (implied by art work)	– Stone
		– Textiles (implied by art work)	– Iron
		– Slaves	
Markets	– External	External	– External
	– To trading house		– Domestic

(contd.)

	Puerto Rico	Struggle of Empires	Archipelago
Constructions	– Production buildings	– War office	– Amphitheatre
	– Markets		– Cathedral
	– Warehouses		– Colossus
	– Hospice		– Great Lighthouse
	– Hacienda		– Pyramid
	– Office		– Ship
	– Factory		– Town
	– University		– Port
	– Harbour		– Market
	– Wharf		– Temple (in fact, Church)
	– Guild hall		
	– Residence		
	– Fortress		
	– Customs house		
	– City hall		

(contd.)

	Puerto Rico	Struggle of Empires	Archipelago
Various mechanisms not integrated in the main action of player	– Miscellaneous mechanisms integrated as functions of various buildings	– Naval training – Logistics – Banking – Navigation – Diplomatic service – Improved agriculture – Government reform – Industry – Slave revolt – Fighting withdrawal – Surprise attack – Blockade – Income – Maintenance	– Rebellion (of natives) – Emigration/Immigration – Gifts from clergy (to natives) – Roads – Expansionism – Slavery – Dictatorship – Peace and prosperity – Education

It is worth noting that, as for many other play artefacts such as, for example, jigsaw puzzles, colonisation is a common theme and setting for modern board games (Norcia, 2009). The games recorded in BoardgameGeek.com can be searched thematically, and a search for 'Colonial Theme' yields fourty-four games, however it should be noted that there are far more games than this if we include colonialism in terms of games' fictional or futuristic settings. A relevant question to ask at this stage is whether the three board games chosen for analysis in this study are actually *about* colonialism, or whether the game mechanic (i.e. methods invoked by agents, designed for interaction with the game state; for example, turn taking or tile-laying [Sicart, 2008]) is the main focus in the game, the theme being more or less arbitrary and added late in the process (it could have been basically anything that fit the mechanic). In other words, the question is whether the main objective of the game designer was to build a game featuring a specific mechanic (e.g. tile-laying), regardless of the theme (e.g. alien invasion, detectives, zombies) or to feature a theme (e.g. alien invasion) regardless of the mechanic (e.g. tile-laying, dice, turns). There are two ways of investigating this – either by trusting the judgement of experienced board gamers who have played literally hundreds of games of different types, or by asking the designer. Out of the dozens of games we could have chosen from for our analysis, one selection criterion used to identify these three games was the subjective feeling of a 'strong' theme, where the mechanics in the game seemed subservient to the theme. It is often possible to identify games where parts of the game mechanic obviously have no real-life counterpart in the game setting; this is not the case for any of these three games. All the actions and options in all these games seem to match a real-life situation or action, relevant in a colonial setting.

We do not have access to the thoughts of the designers for all these games, but for *Puerto Rico*, the highest ranked among the three games under discussion, there are interviews with the designer Andreas Seyfarth that shed some light on this matter. He says the following:

> *Andreas:* [I released] Puerto Rico in 2001. This game had a developing time of about 15 years (from the first ideas until production).

> *Question:* When first designing a game, do you start with the theme or the mechanics?
> *Andreas:* I always start with the theme.
> *Andreas:* For Puerto Rico lots of development chains merged. One of them was the idea to do something in the new world and build up an economy. (Vasel, 2005)

Simulating simplified mechanisms of colonial reality, the three games chosen for analysis in this study have clear objectives to be fulfilled by the players. In all these games, the player has the same perspective, that of a colonist, and has to choose among performing similar activities across the games, activities that seem to be common to Eurogames featuring a colonial theme: harvest natural resources, manage populations, build, trade, expand, and conquer. Nevertheless, it is important to note that both fictional cultural expressions, such as board games, and allegedly factual ones, such as historiographic documentaries, offer only representations of the past and do not reflect historical realities as such (Hammar, 2017). That said, we have to add that, at least in a digital context, there are games with a colonial theme that cast the player in the role of the colonised (Hammar, 2017). As a side note, following Elizabeth LaPensée's refreshing approach to game design, which advocates for 'culturally responsive gameplay, meaning gameplay that is drawn from and that uplifts the cultures involved', it would be interesting to see board games on the theme of colonialism with different mechanics than the ones mentioned above, possibly mechanics such as 'collaboration, stewardship, generosity, and gratitude' (LaPensée, 2016: n. pag.).

In *Puerto Rico* (2002), the player's aim is to collect victory points by producing goods that can be traded or shipped to Europe, or by constructing buildings. Thus, *Puerto Rico* is a simplistic, resource management and optimisation game. The player takes a card indicating a leader role each round (Prospector, Captain, Mayor, Trader, Settler, Craftsman, or Builder). To activate and own farms or own buildings the player needs a number of the small black discs that come into the game each round. In the game rules, these are referred to as 'colonists', but in practice and from

the historical background, it is clear that these discs represent slaves, and this aspect has been heavily criticised by the international community of board gamers (Hodge, 2011; Larson, 2012) (the persons represented by the discs have minor, supporting roles, the player/leader decides where they go, and they do the actual work in buildings or farms). In addition, there are no mechanisms in the game for slowing down growth or penalties for extracting resources too quickly, or using 'colonists' too intensively. There are numerous exchanges in various discussion forums pointing out how politically incorrect the game is, and some players feel uncomfortable with the game for this reason. However, this game is one of the most popular board games, being ranked in the top fifteen games worldwide (see **Table 1**).

Struggle of Empires (2004) focuses more on war as a phenomenon associated with colonialism. As the presentation on the box of the game describes, the game recreates:

> the various wars fought between European powers as they attempt to become the dominant force in Europe and the rest of the world during the eighteenth century. Build armies and fleets, make alliances, establish colonies, improve your economy, and ultimately wage war to expand your empire. Be careful, though, as a profligate country can end up being consumed by revolution. (Game box presentation [Wallace, 2004])

Struggle of Empires is thus an area control game with a fairly strong colonial theme. While it is certainly Eurocentric, the areas over which the players fight for domination are in Europe as well as various colonial regions around the world. In contrast with the other two games, there are no explicit resources (except money) – victory points are generated by controlling the various European countries and colonies. The game mechanic is more advanced than we find, for instance, in *Puerto Rico* and there are trade-offs to consider. If the player sends colony ships out to sea the population in the player's home country decreases, with a potentially adverse effect on national unrest, which it is important to keep at a relatively low level. In addition to population loss in the home country, colonisation is risky in that ships can be lost on the way,

or the player can suffer 'Pirates', 'Slave revolt' or 'Blockade'; these are negative game effects that other players can inflict on each other, and they only apply in colonies. Compared with *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires* is not a simplistic optimisation game with nothing to limit the player's growth. Unpopular decisions will increase the player's unrest level, so each player has to weigh options and risk carefully.

In *Archipelago* (2012), the game rules are described as follows:

> 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 natives must be treated fairly or they will rebel […] A balance must be found between expansionism and humanism, between commercial goals and respect for local values, between knowledge sharing and unbridled industrialization. Such a balance can only be achieved through each player's commitment to make the archipelago a happy and productive colony. (Game rules [Boelinger, 2012])

Archipelago is the most advanced of these three games, both in game mechanics and as a simulation of colonisation in general. The whole game takes place in the colonies, and while the player starts the game with two 'citizens' on his/her own ship, he/she gradually incorporates the people he/she meets on various islands, and there is no difference between the original (European) citizens and the new inhabitants. An important mechanic is that of 'Rebellion level': unpopular actions by any player (e.g. levelling taxation on citizens) increases this value. If the level of rebellion gets too high the island population revolts, the game ends immediately, and everyone loses (except if the 'Separatist' is in play; see below). Another major difference between *Archipelago* and the other two games is that all the players here have different goals, drawn randomly at the start of the gameplay, and kept secret. 'Pacifist' is one possible goal: if a player draws this card then his/her goal is to have a large total population on the islands and to keep them happy, with a very low

rebellion level. 'Separatist' is another goal: in this instance, the player must secretly side with the rebels in the native population and not cooperate in the other (colonial) players' measures to keep the native population happy. If the revolt happens, the player secretly playing as a Separatist immediately wins the game. There are also more standard secret goals relating to money or resources, so it is important to pay attention to what fellow players are doing. This, in addition to fairly advanced mechanisms for modelling population developments, unemployment level, and variable price in local and export markets, means that *Archipelago* comes closer to simulating actual colonisation, in that these processes historically existed and had to be taken into consideration by colonial administrations when making key decisions concerning governance.

Playing the Colonist

As Emil Hammar explains, and in line with historical theory (White, 1984), 'narrative and discourse serve as constitutive elements of history and it is through these that individuals and collectives form their understanding of the past' (Hammar, 2017: 373). Game players are both receivers and users of the discourse employed by the game. As Hall points out:

> Anyone deploying a discourse must position themselves *as if* they were the subject of the discourse. For example, we may not ourselves believe in the natural superiority of the West. But if we use the discourse of "the West and the Rest" we will necessarily find ourselves speaking from a position that holds that the West is a superior civilization. (Hall, 2007: 202)

The question that any player of *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires*, or *Archipelago* might ask himself or herself is: what position is he or she speaking from while playing these games; therefore, what kind of discourse do these games employ?

Western modernity is often linked with the territorial and cultural expansion of European powers in the 'newly discovered' overseas territories, even though such 'acts of discovery only differed accidentally from other voyages and were expressions of an imperial design' (Carter, 2010: Page xviii.). The European colonial project is described

in relation to two key concepts: imperialism and capitalism (Young, 2001; McLeod, 2010). On the one hand, even though colonialism is sometimes used interchangeably with imperialism, McLeod suggests that there is a clear distinction between these concepts, with colonialism being '*one form of practice, one modality of control,* which results from the ideology of imperialism, and it specifically concerns the *settlement* of people in a new location' (McLeod, 2010: 9; our emphasis). On the other hand, Young explains that colonialism functioned as an activity on the periphery of the empire, economically driven, and sometimes hard to control, from the perspective of the home government, whereas imperialism 'operated from the centre as a policy of state, driven by the grandiose projects of power' (Young, 2001: 17). Thus, colonialism implies more than just a historical periodisation and a territorial delineation.

The complexity of the phenomenon is comprehensively captured in the definition provided by Elleke Boehmer in her influential book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995), which describes colonialism as 'the settlement of territory, the exploitation and development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands often by force' (Boehmer, 2005: 2). This threefold depiction of colonialism casts the focus on the social-political dimension of colonisation as a process of settlement and implementation of an administrative system based on unequal relations of power between the coloniser and the indigenous peoples, and equally emphasises its economic component, which was the spread of capitalism. In *Empire: The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present* (1997), Denis Judd similarly foregrounds the economic foundation of colonialism: '[n]o one can doubt that the desire for profitable trade, plunder and enrichment was the primary force that led to the establishment of the imperial structure' (Judd, 1996: 3). Seizing foreign territories, populating them with colonists, and developing an administrative apparatus were actions motivated by the desire to establish new markets; and to exploit natural resources and the labour force at the lowest possible cost for the European powers. In this context, it is relevant to add Robert Young's distinction between the two main forms of colonisation: one motivated by the desire for living space, one by the extraction of riches (Young, 2001). Thus, Young distinguishes between two distinct kinds of colonies: the settled and the exploited, which would be

treated very differently. The former kind led ultimately to self-governing dominions, such as South Africa, Australia, or New Zealand, whereas the latter 'tended to develop into the exploitative situation of domination colonies' (Young, 2001: 19).

As Miguel Sicart suggests, game mechanics facilitate and encourage players to explore and modify environments (2008: n. pag.). These mechanics function also as cultural mechanisms, allowing the players of games – such as the three games under discussion here – to probe, transform, and push the limits of colonial spatial transformations (Lammes, 2010). *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires*, and *Archipelago* are clearly re-enacting manifestations of colonialism. Through their mechanics, these games engage the players in the three basic activities specific to this phenomenon, as described by Boehmer (2005): settling territories (for example, the Greater Antilles in the Caribbean Sea; the entire world; and an archipelago that the game implies is located in the Caribbean Sea, respectively); exploiting and developing the local resources (raw materials and agricultural production in all three games, including slaves in *Struggle of Empires*, and the local population in *Archipelago*); attempting to govern the settled territories (all three games) and the local population (in *Struggle of Empires* and *Archipelago*). As such, these three games do not distinguish between the two kinds of colonies identified by Young, and the colonies depicted in them are both settled and exploited. In all these three games, players' empathy and engagement are constantly directed towards exclusive identification with the coloniser and never with the colonised (even though this latter option could have engaged the players in a 'potentially cathartic power fantasy within a historical struggle', as explained by Hammar [2017]). Re-enactment of colonial values is facilitated by granting access to familiar assets (e.g. plantations, raw materials, ports, missionary churches) and instruments (e.g. markets, diplomatic service, colonial administration) that contribute to achievement of colonial objectives, while incentives can be economical and political, thus motivating the player to achieve goals that are familiar to the Eurocentric mind-set.

The coloniser's main goal in each game is to gain political, economic, and cultural dominance in the colonies. To justify the coloniser's venture, colonisation is depicted as a necessary intervention to save the colonies from their economic and cultural

backwardness. If economic underdevelopment is implied in the gameplay of all three games by the systematic exploitation of raw materials and of agriculture, as well as the introduction of incipient industrial facilities (e.g. the sugar mill in *Puerto Rico*) and incorporation of the colony into the circuit of global trade (e.g. companies all over the world in *Struggle of Empires*), actual cultural backwardness is only deployed in *Archipelago*. In this game the player can build amphitheatres, where locals are depicted mainly as performers, with the consequence of reducing the level of rebellion among the natives and increasing cultural values. The player can also build cathedrals, with the same consequence of reducing the level of rebellion. By contrast, the discovery of a pyramid (which represents the epitome of authentic local culture and is, ironically enough, the only such symbol in the entire game), costs the player stone resources. This implies that these natural, physical resources belonged *a priori* to the colonisers rather than the indigenous inhabitants, and has the consequence of substantially increasing the level of rebellion among the natives.

Meeting *the Other*

For the purpose of saving the colonies from their own 'backwardness', the coloniser creates through discourse a convenient image about the colony, an image that entails the superiority of the 'West over the Rest', to use Stuart Hall's parlance (Hall, 2007: 221). In order to scrutinise these three games' presentations of colonial reality, we are grounding our analysis of *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires*, and *Archipelago* in Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, formulated in the book of the same name in 1978 (Said, 2003). Despite been criticised by scholars such as Aijaz Ahmad in *Orientalism and After* (1992), Sadik Jalal al-Azm in *Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse* (1980), and, more recently, Ibn Warraq in *Defending the West* (2009), Said's theory has been consistently employed in analysing board games in specialist literature on game studies (Faidutti, 2017; Foasberg, 2016; Trammell, 2016). Said's approach to theorising Orientalism supports the binary opposition between what he has termed as 'the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")' (Said, 2003: 44). According to this conceptualisation, the West has developed a self-defining identification mechanism that builds on the perpetual

antithesis between the Orient, as being everything the West is not: 'its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience' (Said, 2003: 2), its *alter ego*, and, ultimately, an epitome of *the Other*. For Said, the West needed to build such an image of the Orient, which 'in a sense created and then served the two worlds thus conceived' (Said, 2003: 43), in order to justify its position of superiority within the power structures that colonialism endorsed. Orientalism is therefore, according to Said's perspective, 'a set of discursive practices, the forms of power-knowledge that Western cultures used to produce (and hence control) a region of the globe known as the Orient' (Klages, 2006: 153).

This convenient image of the colony being an antithesis of the world the player represents is conveyed in the three games through similar methods. For example, presenting the colonised world as an empty space (as in *Puerto Rico*, which recalls *The Settlers of Catan* [Teuber, 1995], another very popular board game [Loring-Albright, 2015]) or *terra nullius* 'with not a native or a slave to be seen' (Foasberg, 2016: n. pag.); or as a scarcely populated territory (as in *Archipelago*), waiting to be discovered ('as if a country which has not been named or brought into cultural circulation can, in any sense, be said to have been discovered' [Carter, 2010: xviii]), exploited, and managed by the expanding European powers. Similarly, the local production of raw materials and goods; and the local governance structure are depicted as primitive compared with the technology and structures introduced by the colonists; the local culture has opposite effects on the locals than the culture of the colonist has on them (e.g. in *Archipelago*, a pyramid, the symbol of the local culture, increases rebellion level, while a cathedral, the symbol of the colonist culture, decreases it). Another strategy of colonial world-building employed by each game establishes the colonists as educated and in possession of highly qualified jobs (e.g. explorers, clergy or merchants in *Archipelago*; military officers and experts in *Struggle of Empire*), whereas the colonised populations work in more menial and less qualified occupations (e.g. primary production and the extraction of raw materials). Thus, through the process of hegemony, i.e. the 'production of meaning as a key instrument for the stabilization of power relations' (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 32), the colonised populations are discursively constructed as a marginalised

group; either left out of mass-cultural depictions of the past (as in *Puerto Rico*) or relegated to banal representations of their own culture and identity (as in *Struggle of Empire* and *Archipelago*), and thus excluded from attaining any form of recognition within these games' processes of cultural memory (Hammar, 2017). This practice of problematic representation of European expansionism, in which the indigenous other is marginalised, exploited, and silenced, has been noticed also in other Eurogames (Robinson, 2014).

The history of colonialism is a history of discourses about colonised territories. Said claims that the discursive creation of the colonised *Other* also serves to silence the colonised culture by obstructing communication between the ruler and the subaltern, thus rejecting the latter's right to 'talk back' (Said, 2003: 95). In the colonial system, the coloniser solely assumes the privilege of 'speaking', or employing discourse in order to establish the logic of a binary opposition between self and other, hence between self and subaltern. Originally introduced by the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, the concept of the subaltern was transferred in the 1980s into the field of colonial and postcolonial studies by a group of prominent Indian scholars, known as the Subaltern Studies Group. In the essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a member of this group, scrutinises the possibility of bilateral employment of discourse and concludes that in any relation of power, and implicitly 'in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak' (Spivak, 1996: 41). Spivak attaches particular significance to the term *speak*, which implies an ambivalent transaction of meaning from a speaker to a receiver: 'By "speaking" I was obviously talking about a transaction between the speaker and the listener' (Spivak, 1996: 293). This act of communication is distorted in the colonial context, since the colonist is not willing to listen to what the subaltern might have to say. The social disparity that informs colonial society negates the possibility of the subaltern 'talk[ing] back'. The subaltern, concludes Spivak, has no voice and the only valid discourse available to use is that of the coloniser.

Radhika Gajjala proposes a definition of the subaltern as a colonial subject that is in line with Spivak's critique. She depicts the subaltern as an 'individual who does

not have the tools or the agency to actively and freely participate in a social order [and] the subaltern is also deemed as not to have the voice to speak for her/himself' (Gajjala, 2013: 29). Gajiala's definition is contextualised in a digital context and, as Souvik Mukherjee suggests, 'how far this definition applies to postcolonial elements in game cultures is a moot question' (Mukherjee, 2015: 10). However, we consider Gajiala's definition of the subaltern to be an accurate depiction of the colonial subaltern represented in the board games under analysis in this study: as a subject denied the possibility of talking about her/himself and forced to communicate in a language that is discursively loaded in favour of the coloniser, the subaltern populations in *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires,* and *Archipelago* are therefore cast into a binary opposition that condemns them to be *silent* and *powerless*, which colonial discourse promotes in order to ensure its own ideological reproduction.

Even though the privilege of speaking and the voice of the subaltern are depicted differently in the three games included in this study, it seems that in Spivak's terms the subaltern is suppressed within the game's rules – something that we find in other games, including within a digital context (see, for example, Ford, 2016; Mukherjee, 2016). In *Puerto Rico*, the indigenous population is completely absent. The world is populated only by colonists who arrive from the metropolitan centres by ship and settle into the new world with the support of the administrator (i.e. the Mayor), fitting into the freshly colonised society in accordance with labour force needs. Thus, the subaltern, who, from a historical point of view, had inhabited the Greater Antilles prior to colonisation, is excluded from the re-enactment of this colonial reality. To use Spivak's critical parlance, it has no voice within the simulated historical world of the game.

The situation is slightly different in *Struggle of Empires*, where the colonised subaltern is physically represented through non-player characters and in the artwork. The African colonies are exclusively portrayed as a source of slaves, whereas the other colonies (e.g. East Indies, Caribbean, South America) are depicted as a source of natural resources (e.g. gold in South America), trade partners (e.g. East Indies Company), allies (e.g. the Native Americans in North America or Indian Nawab in India) or military-trained natives. The agency of the subaltern is therefore

implicit in the game mechanics of *Struggle of Empires*. The colonised subjects in this game can function as allies and help the player fight other players. At certain points in the game's development (e.g. loss of army units, money shortage) unrest levels may increase, but it is not clear if the unrest is manifest among the colonised population or among the colonists. Levels of unrest can be decreased by playing the Government Reform tile or the Industry tile. The equivocal character of the unrest can be interpreted as a form of voicing the subaltern if we assume that the colonised populations are rebelling against the colonial administration. A clearer form of voicing the colonised subaltern is represented by the possibility of slaves carrying out a rebellion against the colonial administration. This possibility is facilitated by the Slave Revolt tile. However, we would argue that this represents a form of false agency since the player himself/herself, and not a slave non-player-character, enacts the slave revolt by choosing to buy the tile and deploying it against fellow players.

A more straightforward mode of subaltern agency is included in *Archipelago*, where the natives' rebellion emerges through gameplay and has a decisive effect on the game's outcome (i.e. the archipelago claims its independence and the game ends, with all players losing the game). Thus, rebellion level (i.e. the level of discontent and frustration on the islands) rises with an increase in the number of surplus workers; the discovery of a pyramid; or playing the Barbarian, Thief, Assassin, Pirate or Dictatorship cards. The rebellion level decreases by building churches or amphitheatres, or playing the cards Gifts from the Clergy, Bishop, Archbishop, Cathedral, Peace & Prosperity.

Overall, the delineation of natives' agency in these three games suggests the enduring power of a colonial and Eurocentric perspective in which the Other is 'only allowed visibility in very specific and calculated moments that enact the desires of the dominant audience and fit into their cultural imaginary' (Higgin, 2008: 7). The two games that do actually include representations of the colonised population (*Struggle of Empires* and *Archipelago*) contain scarce depictions of indigenous culture. *Struggle of Empires* uses stereotypical illustrations of clothes and occupations through artwork (see the box cover, for example, which is, available at https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/9625/struggle-empires). The same technique is employed in *Archipelago,*

but this is supplemented by images of native residences, sanctuaries, adornments, totems, and ritual body paintings in the game rules booklet, for example.

The considerations mentioned above reflect upon the topic of the subaltern's voice *within* each of the game(s) under discussion. In future research it would be interesting to analyse whether the subaltern has a voice *outside* these game(s), i.e. to critically consider who is producing the game, who is being given a platform to speak by making this game, and who is involved in formalising the game mechanics and themes.

Who is *the Other?*

According to Stuart Hall, there are two key features of the discourse of 'the Other' (Hall, 2007: 205). The first is stereotyping; i.e. several characteristics are collapsed into one simplified figure that stands for or represents the *essence* of the people; for example, all the colonists are enterprising, capitalist agents that can achieve prosperity in *Puerto Rico*, whilst all the Africans are slaves in *Struggle of Empires*, or all the indigenous people can be tamed by the Christian Church in *Archipelago*. The second feature describes how the discursive formation of the Other divides the stereotype into two halves – its 'good' and 'bad' sides; this is referred to as 'splitting' or *dualism*. The reductionist representation of the colonised is one major artifice that is connected to the colonial discourse, its purpose being that of pinning down the identity of the colonised in the form of stereotypes. In so doing, the colonial discourse produces the colonised as 'a social reality which is at once "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible' (Bhabha, 2004: 70). In colonial discourse, the process of constructing stereotypes establishes a unilateral depiction of reality, a form of power imposed through discourse that excludes the colonial subject from negotiating his or her own identity. In other words, the colonised subject is a voiceless subaltern within the asymmetrical power structure of colonialism, inextricably projected in the simplified binaries that this structure promotes. In Hall's perspective:

> 'the world is first divided, symbolically, into good-bad, us-them, attractive-disgusting, civilised-uncivilised, the West-the Rest. All the other, many differences between and within these two halves are collapsed, simplified – i.e. stereotyped' (Hall, 2007: 216).

He continues his critique of the colonial gaze over colonial subjects by asserting that:

> The question of how the natives and nations of the New World should be treated in the evolving colonial system was directly linked to the question of what sort of people and societies they were – which in turn depended on the West's knowledge of them, on how they were represented. Where did the Indians stand in the order of the Creation? Where were their nations placed in the order of civilized societies? Were they "true men" [sic]? Were they made in God's image? (Hall, 2007: 216)

Following this line of reasoning, as Brock explains, 'race stands in for cultural evil' (Brock, 2011: Page 442.), with colonised subjects depicted as wild, strange, primitive and unfamiliar; and triggering discomfort and distress on the part of the coloniser. Giroux (1996) notes that 'whiteness represents itself as a universal marker for being civilised and in doing so posits the Other within the language of pathology, fear, madness, and degeneration' (Giroux, 1996: 75). This is visible in the artwork of *Archipelago*, in which the rebellious natives are portrayed as savage and barbarian, with violent facial expressions and fearsome body painting: a performative display of their indigenous power designed to express dissatisfaction in the direction of the colonial administrator. By contrast, the coloniser is illustrated through the familiar countenance and attitude of a European, i.e. a white man who exhibits restraint, a composed comportment and supposedly 'civilised' countenance. The game, nevertheless, introduces several white non-player characters that display traces of degeneration, such as the Thief and the Assassin.

Players of *Archipelago* are invariably invited to identify with the white race, as the roles the player can take (see **Table 1**) are inspired by a typical proto-European geography. This is part of the colonial ideological project to create a European mythology meant to justify colonisation. In the world depicted in the three games we are analysing, such mythology is perpetuated within the contemporary Western ethos, rather than inviting the player to engage in a critical reflexive conceptualisation of the colonial history being portrayed in this world. Control – over the self and the

spirit, over women's bodies (e.g. reproduction of natives in *Archipelago*), over land (e.g. expansion of crops in *Puerto Rico*), and over others (e.g. taming of rebels through government reform in *Struggle of Empires* or through church in *Archipelago*) – is a hallmark of white identity (Dyer, 1997); standing in sharp antithesis to the games' depiction of natives' lack of control – over self (e.g. irascibility, which is reflected in the 'unrest level' in *Struggle of Empires*), women's bodies (e.g. they do not decide themselves when to reproduce in *Archipelago*), and land (all three games). This ideologically constructed, and yet naturalised, representation of European coloniser and indigenous colonial subject is an important point to raise in considering how games such as the ones we analyse here enact control, or lack of it, as an integral part of the gaming experience.

Stereotypes are not entirely produced through text or representation, but are also suggested via the selective presence or absence of ethnicities (Higgin, 2008). The omission of native characters from the discourse in *Puerto Rico*, for example, thus diminishes the potential of the game to provide balanced racial experience because it reinforces dominant notions of colonised subjects as negligible agents in the colonising process.

'Stereotypes', as Jessica Langer notes, 'have the effect of creating a narrative or aesthetic shortcut to the desired player reaction' (Langer, 2008: 91), which is in line with Homi Bhabha's assertion that stereotyping is a method of making otherness 'safe' and comfortable for the coloniser (Bhabha, 2004: 116): in our case, the player who inhabits and represents the colonial mind-set. Of course, stereotypes are a widely employed method in designating people and groups as separate from each other (in our case, the colonists versus the colonised); the problem, however, occurs when the real-world depiction, the historical process of colonisation is so simplified that it may trigger a generalised and simplified view of entire cultures as encountered in the game by the player. As Souvik Mukherjee notes:

> Portrayal of the colonies is often simplistic and contains inaccuracies that are immediately obvious to players from these regions […] The stereotypes and simplification are instrumental in reinforcing the player's reduced

> and distorted image about the colonies. The purpose of this strategy is to facilitate the player's connectedness to the game's mechanism by immersion into a familiar milieu. (Mukherjee, 2016: 7)

A summary of colonial representations in the three games included in this study is given in **Table 2**.

When scrutinising the three games included in our study, it is interesting to note that the newer the game is, the more complex and comprehensive the depiction of colonial reality. For instance, in the oldest game, *Puerto Rico* (released in 2002), there are no representations at all of colonised populations and their indigenous culture. This is slightly changed in *Struggle of Empires* (released in 2004), where colonised populations are present in the game elements and artwork. Out of the three games, the newest one, *Archipelago* (released in 2012), gives natives the most important role, as the emergent behaviour of these figures has the potential to end the game and result in all the players losing the game. Thus, there is a clear progression in realism and in political correctness in the three games analysed: from *Puerto Rico* through to *Struggle of Empires* and, finally, *Archipelago*.

A deeper examination of the factors underpinning this progression would require the analysis of a much larger range of games, which is beyond the scope of this study, but at least two theories can be put forward here. The first is that older games may be more simplistic, and newer games may be more realistic in the portrayal of colonisation. This reading would suggest that *Puerto Rico* is a fairly straightforward, introductory Eurogame in which beginners can quickly learn to play and, given this level of accessibility, advanced mechanisms for unrest or rebellion level or similar could not be realistically incorporated into the game without sacrificing its appealing simplicity. Although there are many examples of games that do not adhere to this principle, as uncovered through discussions with very experienced board gamers,[1] overall it seems that this theory might have some merit. The second explanation

[1] These discussions were collected as part of personal communication during EuropeMasters, the open European Championship Boardgames, at which Petter Olsen has been a member of the Norwegian team several times.

Table 2: Summary of colonial representations in *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires*, and *Archipelago*.

	Puerto Rico	***Struggle of Empires***	***Archipelago***
'Discovered' colony is represented as an antithesis of the metropolis	– Empty space (*terra nullius)* – Need of governance and technology	– Need of governance and technology – Need of military training – Antithetic labour division	– Scarcely populated – Need of governance and technology – Native culture has opposite effect on indigenous people than the colonist culture
The Other	– Space	– Space – Humans	– Space – Humans
Subaltern voice	– Not represented	– Partial	– Partial
Agency of the colonised	– Not represented	– False agency	– Emergent agency
Native cultures	– Not represented	– Clothing – Occupations	– Adornments – Clothing – Occupation – Residences – Ritual body paintings – Sanctuaries – Totems
Stereotypes	– The colonist – The environment	– The colonist – The colonised – The environment	– The colonist – The colonised – The environment
Eurocentrism	Yes	Yes	Yes

is related to the increasing complexity of board games, which have progressively increased the sophistication of their game mechanics, and are therefore not so easy for beginners to grasp. This second reading would be supported by the fact that

the most recently released game of the three under consideration, *Archipelago*, has substantially more complicated game mechanics than the earlier games *Puerto Rico* and *Struggle of Empires*.

Moulding the Player's Perception of Colonial Times and Ideology

As critics in game studies argue, the player is not the controlling subject of the game. Rather, the game plays the player (Gadamer, 2004). The player becomes an implied player, or what Espen Aarseth calls 'a role made for the player by the game, a set of expectations that the player must fulfil for the game to "exercise its effect"' (Aarseth, 2007: 132). This approach leads us to ask: is the player of *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires,* or *Archipelago* actually playing the colonist, or is the game itself forcing the player inevitably into the stereotyped role of the colonist, something that is necessary for the game to unfold in the proper way, as pre-determined by its designers?

In all the three games, the implication of the player is manipulated to adhere to the colonialist's perspective – the game narrative, physical elements, and mechanics ineluctably cast the player in a position that allows him/her to vicariously participate in the game's simulation of colonisation and to imagine being on the side of the typical coloniser. The player is invited to customise and personalise his/her behaviour in such a way as to perpetually adopt the perspective of the European coloniser. The player is therefore offered limited options in developing the diegetic sphere of the game since he/she is confined to the framework delineated by the game's formal and discursive backdrop. Trapped into playing the stereotyped colonist, the player can never experience the world through the eyes of the Other, nor as a non-typical colonist. We wonder whether the virtual experience of participating in the colonial history that such games produce could possibly encourage players to exhibit the behaviour and attitude of colonisers; a re-enactment that could potentially migrate into the outside world beyond the diegetic framework of the game and become instrumental in reinforcing the neo-colonial ideology that (still) claims the political, economic, and cultural supremacy of the West. That said, it is interesting to note that a similar critique was levelled against these three games by some players who,

as in the case of *Archipelago*, observed 'that they do not enjoy reinforcing a power dynamic that still exists and is problematic today' (Nasella, 2012).

Other players of the same game defend it by describing ways in which players could, if they wanted, play in a more 'anti-colonialist' manner by 'keeping a look at the needs of the local population and the rate of unemployment in the colony' (Nasella, 2012). At first glance, this practice might be seen as the strategy of building counter-narratives that players can exhibit through a counterplay action, in what Tom Apperley calls the sense of 'the player producing results that were otherwise unanticipated during the design process' through forms of play that are 'experimental, innovative, risky, unintended, and unruly' (Apperley, 2010: 132). However, as noted by players who are critical of these games, this kind of play would only convey the message that 'it is OK to colonize a population as long as you consider their needs' (Nasella, 2012) and, thus, it is not really enacting a different kind of historical narrative. Nor does such play produce unanticipated results for that matter, as the 'good' coloniser game play is built into the game as an option; through, for example, the secret objective of the separatist when a player wins and all the others lose if a rebellion starts in the archipelago. Thus, as is the case with similar games in the digital domain (Hammar, 2017), the board games we have considered in this study refuse to offer a counterfactual narrative of colonisation: that is to say, players are not able, through any gaming strategy, to rewrite history from an anti-colonial perspective. In this context, and following Warraq's critique of Said's theory (Warraq, 2007), an interesting question could be to examine whether the depiction in these kinds of strategy-based simulation games of some of the more positive outcomes of Western colonialism in certain regions of the world could make these Eurogames less problematic.

If we consider the fact that playing historical games can influence processes of cultural memory related to one's identity (Hammar, 2017), it is crucial to reflect upon what kind of symbolic heritage is embodied in the games *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires,* and *Archipelago*; and whether such heritage acts as a trigger for cultural memory, initiating meanings associated with what has happened in the past. The cultural aspects of colonial ideology are defined by Said in *Orientalism* as

establishing 'a discourse that through journalism, literature, academia and politics, encouraged, legitimized and even enabled or produced the British domination of great portions of the East' (Höglund, 2008: n. pag.). Modern board games can be seen as variants of such cultural productions, and, through the formal and generic characteristics that we have discussed in previous sections, *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires,* and *Archipelago* contribute to a lesser or greater degree to the perpetuation of stereotypical colonist perspectives. From this point of view, these three games seem to reinforce Said's perspective that Orientalism has always been somehow part of the cognitive mind-set of the West, from the ancient Greeks to modern times. We would suggest that the games exhibit a lesser correlation with the perspective of Said's most prominent critiques, notably Ahmad and Al-Azm (Ahmad, 1992; Al-Azm, 1981), who place Orientalism among the consequences of colonialism and do not see it as an expression of a deeper ontological divide between East and West. The game designers and game producers of the 21st century now have access to a multitude of inspirational sources when creating their gameworlds: not only official recorded history but also non-mainstream historical theories, and counterfactual history. Despite the rich resources available to designers in researching their simulated historical worlds, games such *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires,* and *Archipelago*, which perpetuate Eurocentric prejudices and fail to interrogate the European colonial project, keep appearing on the market. In this context, what remains to be answered is the question of whether and how contemporary board games could become more progressive in their depiction of colonial themes and colonial history, and how more progressive games might point towards Ahmad's and Al-Azm's perspective, as described above.

The virtual worlds of these modern board games are powerful because they make it possible to develop what scholars call 'situated' understanding (Shaffer, Squire, Halverson, & Gee, 2005). A situated understanding of a concept implies the ability to understand the concept in ways that are customisable to different situations of use. Thus, this approach stresses the experiential foundation of knowledge acquisition, suggesting that learning is tied to activity and experience in the world, before it is learned in the form of facts and information (Olson & Torrance, 2009: 319). As we

have demonstrated in this article, the importance of experiential learning means that the simulated experience of colonial history experienced by players of *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires,* and *Archipelago* unfortunately serves to reinforce a colonial perspective: ultimately, players learn what it means to behave like a colonist, even if a stereotyped one.

Conclusion

This study contributes to filling in the gap of research that explores how board games touch upon issues that are related directly or indirectly to colonial themes; and the ways in which they construct various conceptions of race, identity, and society through historical re-enactment and representations. We have focused our analysis on three games that have been rated among the top three-hundred board games in the world: *Puerto Rico* (2002), *Struggle of Empires* (2004), and *Archipelago* (2012). Building on McLeod's definition of colonialism and interpretation of colonial economies (McLeod, 2010), Said's theory of Orientalism (Said, 2003), and Spivak's theory of subalternity (Spivak, 1996), this study has comparatively explored how these three games construct representations of: otherness of colonial subjects in relation with the colonisers; indigenous peoples' agency and subaltern voice; expressions of the indigenous culture; and Eurocentrism.

Our analysis suggests that the three games encourage the Eurocentric depiction of colonial subjects. The image of such subjects that players of these games receive is created through Western forms of discourse that focus on biased visual representations, which stereotype how native populations look (e.g. the black slaves in *Struggle of Empires*); and a limited and clichéd representation of their possible sphere of activity or labour (e.g. gathering the harvest, reproducing more colonial subjects, and rebelling, as demonstrated in *Archipelago*). Thus, these three games reveal a selective approach to historical representation in which only some of the historical functions of colonialism and European capitalist production are depicted, whilst others, such as the cultural enrichment of the colonist at the expense of the colonised subject, or ethnic and cultural complexities and diversity, are overlooked. Through game mechanics, game rules, and graphic representations, the three games

thus work to humanise the colonist while de-humanising the colonial subject, sometimes though the latter's invisibility or its lack of agency, detail, and complex characterisation. However, even though there are many common themes to be found across these three games, there are, as demonstrated above, particularities that differentiate them and make *Archipelago* the most accurate representation of colonialism among the three games.

There are three main components that categorise board games as such: the artefact, the practices associated with the artefact, and the values that are intrinsic to both the material and operational dimension. The risk that many players are exposed to when playing the three games analysed in this study implies a value-free perception of the gaming activity. Constructing the graphic execution, game mechanics, and narrative dynamics primarily to ensure the games are entertaining could possibly distract players' focus from critically assessing the moral aspects that the games imply. As Higgins underlines, 'game companies must understand the importance of tearing fantasy from its Eurocentric and colonial roots as well as destroying the connotation of humanity with whiteness' (Higgin, 2008: 21). Thus, as a medium games provide an informal entry point for the idea that the West needs to intervene in the East, 'which largely go[es] un-noticed and unchallenged' (Chakraborti, 2015: 183); consequently, this study has attempted to raise awareness about the ways in which *Puerto Rico*, *Struggle of Empires,* and *Archipelago* (mis)represent images of the realities of colonial history and its vastly exploitative relations. By inviting players to engage in an incomplete re-enactment of a morally questionable past through the eyes of the stereotyped colonist, these games might therefore influence the player's cultural, social, and aesthetic experience of those ideological and historical phenomena connected to colonialism. As Chapman puts it, 'games tend to tell us more about the present self than the collective past' (Chapman, 2016: 203).

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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