



Nostalgia, colonial memory, and board games: representations of the Brazilian empire in Brazil: Imperial¹

Nostalgia, memória colonial e board games: representações do império brasileiro em Brazil: Imperial

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ABSTRACT: This article aimed to understand the role of Brazilian imperial nostalgia — expressed through conservative and wistful views of the colonial past —, as a shaping element in works depicting this period, specifically within the context of board game culture in Brazil. Our goal was to demonstrate how nostalgia frames the experience of Brazilian colonial history by glorifying historical elements encoded through game design, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for the naturalization of the violence inherent in the colonization process. To illustrate this, we examined the Brazilian board game *Brazil: Imperial*, published by MeepleBR in 2021, exploring how it represents themes of colonization and imperialism in Brazilian history. We argue that game elements reinforce Eurocentric and imperialist narratives while sidestepping the more problematic aspects of colonialism, such as slavery and the extermination of Indigenous peoples.



Keywords: *board games; nostalgia; memory; coloniality; Brazilian gamer culture.*

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RESUMO: Este artigo busca compreender o papel da nostalgia imperial brasileira, em seus traços conservadores e saudosos em relação ao passado colonial, como elemento conformador de obras que retratam esse período, especificamente no âmbito da cultura dos jogos de tabuleiro no Brasil. Nosso objetivo é demonstrar como a nostalgia molda a experiência da história colonial brasileira ao glorificar elementos históricos codificados por meio do *design* do jogo, além de estabelecer as bases para a naturalização da violência do processo colonizador. Para ilustrar isso, analisamos o jogo brasileiro de tabuleiro *Brazil: Imperial*, lançado em 2021, buscando entender como ele representa os temas da colonização e do imperialismo na história do Brasil. Argumentamos que elementos do jogo fortalecem narrativas eurocêntricas e imperialistas, enquanto evitam os efeitos mais problemáticos do colonialismo, como a escravidão e o extermínio dos povos indígenas.

Palavras-chave: *board games; nostalgia; memória; colonialidade; cultura gamer brasileira.*

Introduction

Games, like any other media phenomenon, do not exist independently of society but are intertwined with culture and everyday life. Culture and politics, in their diverse forms, are embedded in projects and practices, which are in turn structured by sets of rules and algorithms. Their signs and symbols are subject to an ongoing feedback loop of translations and prescriptions, carrying normative and power dimensions, as they inscribe action programs, delegate behaviors, and stabilize power arrangements in daily practice (AKRICH, 1992; LATOUR, 1992; VERBEEK, 2005). These dynamics, grounded in systems of rules and the governance of material order, are manifested in design choices within games. Such choices are further shaped by market constraints, regulation, and the production chain, reinforcing the notion that an “apolitical game” is unattainable in contemporary contexts (TRAMMELL, 2022). Recognizing that games are political does not reduce all games to propaganda; rather, it acknowledges that design mediates behavior, prescribes possibilities, and shapes both the experience and the type of subject the system summons, mobilizes, and, to some extent, co-produces.

The gaming industry in Brazil has experienced accelerated growth and increasing integration into the global production and consumption chain, with the country now occupying a strategic position as the largest market in Latin America (CARDOSO *et al.*, 2023). However, this development occurs amid a persistent tension between the adoption of hegemonic production and narrative models — often aligned with cultural patterns of the Global North — and efforts to incorporate local references. This tension reflects the influence of global and hegemonic socio-technical infrastructures that shape modes of production, circulation, and representation. Falcão *et al.* (2021) note that it is manifested in the appropriation of Brazilian historical, mythological, and socio-cultural elements as resources, functioning less as an expression of identity and more as strategic tools in the pursuit of visibility, legitimacy, and integration into the international market.

In this context, representations of the past, national mythologies, or historical themes become fertile sites for the inscription of action programs and the negotiation of worldviews, operating in conjunction with the technical and economic structures underlying these artifacts. When games depict the historical past as a glorious era, they generate a form of nostalgia that simplifies culture and history in favor of stylistic elements, diminishing critical engagement. This fabulation of the past contributes to the perpetuation of ideologies that, in turn, downplay or even erase the violence of colonization, normalizing dimensions of symbolic and physical oppression familiar to Brazilian culture and society. Simultaneously, it reinforces specific power arrangements by transforming historical events into playful elements perceived as neutral and devoid of political tension.

In this context, *Brazil: Imperial*, a game created by Zé Mendes and released in 2021 by the Brazilian publisher MeepleBR, serves as an exemplary case for analysis. First, it is a distinctive object because it both contributes to and emerges from nostalgia. The game combines visual and mechanical elements that produce and stabilize a nostalgic historical framework, portraying the period of the Brazilian Empire as a glorious era of social progress. Second, as a Brazilian game focused on the history of Brazil, it provides a valuable opportunity to examine how media typically represent this historical period and, more importantly, what this relationship — between games and history — conveys regarding cultural heritage, memory, and national identity. Finally, the game achieved critical success in Brazil¹, being the only Brazilian-themed title to appear on Ludopedia's Top 100 list (2025)². It was published by a nationally relevant company and received predominantly positive reviews and community feedback³. *Brazil: Imperial* is also among the few Brazilian games to reach international audiences, having been released

1 Proven success evidenced by the various awards received by the game, listed at <https://ludopedia.com.br/jogo/brazil-imperial>. Accessed on: Aug 5, 2025.

2 Brazilian online forum dedicated to board games.

3 As exemplified, for instance, by <https://covildosjogos.com.br/2021/04/18/papo-do-ladino-e-bloco-do-block-resenha-brazil-imperial> e <https://tabulaquadrada.com.br/brazil-imperial-overview-video-e-review-escrito>. Accessed on: Aug 21, 2025.

in more than six languages. This combination of factors places *Brazil: Imperial* in a privileged position: it is one of the few Brazilian history games recognized as both a commercial and critical success nationwide.

The game is situated at the intersection of contemporary entertainment in Brazil — particularly gamer culture — and extremist political discourses, within the context of a “Brazilian far-right neoliberal nationalism” (IAMAMOTO *et al.*, 2021), a scenario that has attracted and mobilized many members of gamer culture (FALCÃO *et al.*, 2021). It is hypothesized that this environment facilitates the inscription and stabilization of nationalist narratives regarding the colonial and imperial past by reconfiguring historical representations through technical artifacts that diminish or silence dimensions of violence and conflict. In this context, board games function as a socio-technical infrastructure capable of prescribing specific historical frameworks, advancing a conservative agenda by employing nostalgia not merely as a stylistic device but as a counter-revolutionary ideological instrument. This selective reconstruction of elements of Brazilian history reinforces myths that support nationalist rhetoric.

Aspects of nostalgia in brazilian gamer culture

The emergence of gamer culture in Brazil is closely linked to the country’s technological history and the stratification of social classes. During the 1980s and 1990s, games were particularly significant in the consumption landscape of children and adolescents from economically privileged backgrounds. From the 2000s onward, gaming became a widely recognized form of entertainment, especially following the proliferation of game rental stores — which decentralized consumption — and the reduction in the cost of computers and accessories. These material, social, political, and economic conditions were decisive in shaping the practices surrounding this medium. Understanding the development of gamer cultures in Brazil requires consideration of the medium itself, its codes of use and consumption, and its material, political, and social

contexts. Historical analysis of these arrangements reveals how ideologies and power relations are materialized and stabilized both in the artifacts and in the practices they prescribe.

In this context, it is important to distinguish between casual gamers and those who engage with games as a hobby. While much of board game consumption is casual and unsystematic, a niche of gamers integrates board games into their lifestyle, forming a distinct and highly specific culture (TRAMMELL *et al.*, 2014). This group exhibits behaviors comparable to those observed in digital gaming cultures, including tendencies toward elitism, exaggerated expressions of masculinity, and political extremism (BURRILL, 2008; GOULART; NARDI, 2017; STANG; TRAMMELL, 2019).

Thus, it is relevant to reconsider how playful artifacts participate in the production and circulation of conservative and nostalgic narratives about history — whether recent or more distant. Gamer culture frequently seeks to prescribe specific forms of engagement with the past, relying on devices and design conventions that cultivate nostalgic longing and reimagine history in an idealized and simplified manner (SALTER; BLODGETT, 2017). This phenomenon parallels the ways games engage with the Middle Ages and its associated tropes (YOUNG, 2015), reflecting what Fedriga (2021) describes as “the emotions that connect us with the way we receive the Middle Ages in modernity.” Nostalgia thus asserts itself as a potent cultural and emotional force, framing the past as an unattainable ideal in contrast to the realities of the present (COONTZ, 2000).

This understanding of nostalgia as a mode of reimagining the past is central to this work. The discussion follows Jameson (1992), who conceptualizes nostalgia as a powerful stylistic vector of contemporaneity. According to Jameson, nostalgia manifests less as a return to the historical or institutional dimensions of a bygone period and more as the reproduction of stylistic constructs. The past appears as a collection of images, scenarios, and sounds experienced through a purely aesthetic lens, devoid of implicit historicity. This perspective underpins Jameson’s (1992) notion of pastiche, a practice of stylistic imitation that, unlike parody, lacks

irony, satire, or critical engagement. Understanding pastiche is essential for developing a critique of contemporary cultural products, particularly given that the deployment of such elements results in a political emptying of memory, preventing the past from functioning as a foundation for contextualizing social transformations.

Naturally, this is not the only perspective to consider. In contrast to Jameson, Pickering and Keightley (2006) critique what they regard as a reductionism in prevailing accounts of nostalgia. They suggest that nostalgia can function as a response to what they term “social amnesia,” in which the reification of a construct serves to preserve its existence and continuity. According to these authors, nostalgia should be understood as a plural phenomenon capable of assuming multiple modalities, rather than merely as an aestheticization of the past. In this sense, nostalgia can serve as a resource for social critique, articulating losses, memories, and possibilities for transformation. While Jameson (1992) frames nostalgia as indicative of the political neutralization of memory, Pickering and Keightley present it as a means of reimagining the relationship among past, present, and future.

In the gaming context, this perspective translates into practices that extend beyond a mere return to the past: nostalgia mobilizes emotions and, through the material dimensions of the game, reimagines the relationships among past, present, and future. It simultaneously reconstructs an idealized past and acknowledges its ruptures and ambiguities, creating space for reinterpretation and reiteration from a comparative perspective. This understanding aligns with Boym (2017), who conceptualizes nostalgia as a historical and social emotion capable of being both creative and productive, rather than merely a symptom of loss or alienation. Within the gaming universe, this is evident in the ways stylistic elements frequently reference the past, activating emotional circulation and supporting communities that reinterpret the past in contemporary practices of consumption and belonging (Boym, 2017).

In this sense, nostalgia can be understood as both a strategy and a structure for affective capture, particularly in the ways that emotions

circulate within these products, attaching to signs and aligning bodies around shared repertoires (AHMED, 2004). As a result, certain enactments and performances of the past and memory “stick” within communities, directing attention, fostering belonging, and shaping action. In board games, this process is primarily materialized through design, as exemplified in the analysis of *Brazil: Imperial*. Through this mechanism, specific affective orientations can be produced, at times reenacting an “ideal” past by mobilizing emotions that structure and govern behavior (AHMED, 2004; MASSUMI, 2005).

This line of thought leads to two parallel avenues, which merit elaboration to clarify the objectives of this work. The first seeks to examine the phenomenon described above through the analysis of a specific material element — a board game. The second concerns how the game, as a socio-technical artifact, inscribes and stabilizes historical frameworks that intertwine nostalgia and nationalism, selectively reconstructing an imperial past while minimizing or erasing colonial violence. Through its components, the game prescribes particular modes of affective engagement with history, aligning with what has been described as “a certain nostalgia for the time of the Empire that seems to persist in the Brazilian historical imaginary” (SALLES, 2013, pos. 64).

Adopting the concept of nostalgia as an interpretative framework for *Brazil: Imperial* informs the analysis of the game and situates its production within the political instability that Brazil has experienced since the mid-2010s. While the primary aim is to construct an argument regarding the imperial nostalgia conceived as foundational to the formation of Brazilian society (SALLES, 2013), it is impossible to separate the game’s conception and production from the country’s contemporary conservative resurgence. This resurgence is strongly associated with a nostalgic, nationalist, and militaristic sentiment, reflecting a longing for the various authoritarian regimes that Brazil has experienced throughout its history.

Board game culture in Brazil

To understand how the mechanical and representational choices of the past are embedded within broader dynamics, it is necessary to situate *Brazil: Imperial* within the structure of the gaming industry in Brazil and Latin America⁴. The country's peripheral position in the global gaming ecosystem is not a recent development. During the 1980s, Brazil cultivated an ecosystem based on cloning and piracy practices, driven both by market reserves and the absence of international intellectual property agreements (FERREIRA, 2020). National companies relied on reverse engineering and unauthorized reproduction of foreign consoles and games to enable local participation, albeit under conditions of legal and technological informality. This context produced a gamer culture dependent on technologies, aesthetic references, and content from the Global North, while simultaneously generating hybrid forms of appropriation and circulation. In subsequent decades, as Ferreira (2025) observes, this asymmetry became entrenched, with the Brazilian industry remaining structurally peripheral, primarily a consumer of games produced abroad and facing economic, technological, and political barriers to the development of a robust domestic sector. This peripheral position is also reflected in the adoption of Eurocentric genres and repertoires, which have been established as hegemonic standards of cultural production.

It is within this context that the concept of coloniality, as proposed by Mignolo (1991), facilitates understanding the persistence of cultural and technological subordination, particularly under the logic of neoliberal capitalism. Mignolo (1991) contends that the implementation of the neoliberal system, alongside the promotion of free trade and globalization, has led to the displacement of indigenous communities and the erosion of traditional cultural practices, contributing to the emergence of a “coloniality”

4 Although it is not possible to establish direct causal relationships between video game and board game cultures in Brazil, both develop within the same sociotechnical environment, which shapes practices of use, circulation, and interaction. This environment shares normative logics that favor the reproduction of certain cultural and political frameworks, including conservative and nostalgic forms of engagement.

— a process by which the cultural and economic practices of the Global North are imposed upon the Global South. The Latin American gaming industry exemplifies this dynamic, as hegemonic patterns of production and representation are presented as universal and internalized, reinforcing historical dependencies. *Brazil: Imperial* emerges from this environment, mobilizing formal and discursive elements that reinscribe a nostalgic and glorified interpretation of the Brazilian imperial past, aligned with these global cultural logics and their accompanying erasures.

The peripheral structure of the industry and the neoliberal logic governing the circulation of cultural goods shape the modes of access, consumption, and formation of local gaming communities. In Brazil, this context is characterized by high prices and a limited number of suppliers. Board games gained popularity primarily from the 2010s onward, coinciding with the establishment of one of the country's largest companies dedicated exclusively to these games: *Galápagos Jogos* (TOLOTTI, 2022). Within the Brazilian market, a clear distinction exists between “traditional board games” and “modern board games,” with the latter preferred by the niche of hobbyist players over the former.

Within the enthusiast community, the term “modern board games” refers to contemporary games developed according to specific design principles — primarily derived from so-called eurogames. According to Woods (2012, pp. 16-17), modern board games — or hobby games — differ from traditional games in that they are manufactured commodities targeted at a specific market niche. These games possess characteristics that can foster cultural formations around their elements, “which reflect both the moment in which they are produced and the identity and recreational choices of the players” (WOODS, 2012, p. 17).

In Brazil, the distinction between traditional board games and hobby games is also linked to price. While classic games can still be purchased for less than R\$100, hobby games often cost two to ten times more⁵.

5 The game *Frosthaven*, by way of example, costs R\$ 2,149.10 on Mercado Livre at the time of writing this article.

This high-price scenario constitutes an important sociocultural marker, delineating those with the financial resources and time to engage with the hobby. Falcão *et al.* (2021), in their study of *Magic: The Gathering* communities, also observed correlations between political opinions within gamer communities and the high monetary cost of entry into the hobby. Although it cannot be definitively stated that the same phenomenon occurs within the board game community, it is evident that similar organizing elements and material conditions shape participation in both contexts.

Brazil: Imperial, at the time of its release, gained attention both for its graphic and material quality and for its focus on the Brazilian imperial period, a rarity in the commercial board game market. Initial reception included positive reviews of its design and production, while also prompting critical discussions regarding its representation of historical events⁶. These debates highlight the tension between appreciating the game as a cultural product and evaluating concerns related to its thematic approach.

Brazil: Imperial is not unique in engaging with complex historical themes in a problematic manner. The Eurogame genre has a longstanding relationship with colonialist themes (BORIT *et al.*, 2018), often reproducing historical episodes without critical reflection. The acclaimed Eurogame *Puerto Rico* (2002) serves as a classic example: players assume the roles of colonizers on the island, cultivating plantations and controlling buildings through the placement of pieces. Although the game manual refers to these pieces as “colonists,” historically they would more accurately be described as enslaved people, who constituted the primary labor force in that context (BORIT *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, the board game *Mombasa* (2016) has been criticized for its colonialist and racist themes (WINKIE, 2021). In this game, players manage companies

6 On the Ludopedia forum, the topic “Problemas na temática?” was created in April 2021 at https://ludopedia.com.br/topico/48806/problemas-na-tematica?id_post=356230, where criticisms of the representation of Indigenous and Black people appeared alongside comments dismissing these concerns.

responsible for the exploration and colonization of 19th-century Africa, constructing buildings and collecting resources to replicate mechanisms of historical colonization. The erasure of indigenous peoples' participation in this process aligns *Mombasa* with traditional colonial narratives, in which agency is largely reserved for the colonizers. Comparable portrayals of native populations and colonial processes are evident in *Brazil: Imperial*.

Colonialism, eurogames and brazil: imperial

The analysis proposed in this article is based on the premise that board games — like other cultural industry products — constitute complex cultural texts, composed of systems of rules, material elements, and representations that convey discourses about the world (BOOTH, 2021). These dimensions shape the player's experience and, in this sense, constitute the materiality of the game as a medium. To examine *Brazil: Imperial*, a ludo-textual approach is adopted, combining the reading of rules and material components with the interpretation of the narrative and mechanical meanings embedded in its structure. It is emphasized that the analysis focuses on the object itself, independent of its context of use, that is, outside the act of playing. The emphasis is on the meanings, modes of representation, simulation, and world operations embedded in the artifact, recognizing that technical objects incorporate action programs, prescriptions, and moralities (LATOURET, 1992; VERBEEK, 2005; 2011). In this framework, the aim is to “describe” the object in the sense proposed by Akrich (1992), making visible the inscriptions and delegations embedded in the artifact and the manner in which they are articulated within a nostalgic affective economy that mobilizes a particular conception of Brazil's imperial past.

The analysis was conducted along two main, interconnected axes. The first concerns historical representations, aiming to identify the characters, settings, and events depicted in the game, as well as notable absences, such as slavery and indigenous resistance. The second axis

focuses on mechanics and victory conditions, examining the possible actions within the game, the resources represented, and the progression logic guiding players, with particular attention to how these mechanics naturalize power relations. To operationalize these axes, the rulebook and game components were analyzed, alongside publicly available recordings of gameplay on video-sharing platforms, in order to understand the dynamics emerging from the interaction between players and the system. No ethnographic observations or interviews were conducted; the focus remains on the game as a technical and discursive artifact, rather than on player communities or practices.

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The analysis begins with the axis of historical representations, focusing on how the game constructs (and omits) certain characters, scenarios, and events, thereby articulating a specific vision of Brazil's imperial past. *Brazil: Imperial* can be played by up to four participants, including a solo mode, and is described as a "Euro X," representing a hybrid of eurogame mechanics and the 4X genre (LUDOPEDIA, 2025). In the game, each player assumes the role of a historical figure associated with the Brazilian Imperial Era, such as Dom Pedro I, Dom Pedro II, and even Napoleon Bonaparte. Each player has an individual board, a unique set of special abilities, and units that can be placed on the main board according to the chosen character. Players compete for territories to gather resources, expand and develop their individual empires, and accumulate victory points to achieve victory.

The game board depicts a map of a region in South America, composed of a hexagonal grid divided into several irregular modules, which can be rearranged to represent different areas, such as the Brazilian

Empire, the Amazon, or the former Cisplatine Province — all of which serve as possible scenarios in the game. During setup, certain hexagons on the map are covered by “exploration pieces.” By exploring the map, players uncover these locations by flipping the pieces to reveal their contents. These pieces can represent, among other things, unknown fauna to be collected or *quilombola* communities, which are removed from the game once explored and utilized for their corresponding bonuses.

By exploring the map without encountering any opposition, players traverse a land that exists in the game solely to be discovered, economically exploited, and conquered. This process involves minimal friction and almost no negative consequences for exploring the unknown and (ostensibly) uninhabited territory. The game offers virtually no depiction of historical resistance to the Brazilian Empire — reflecting the Eurogame tradition of largely avoiding the representation of conflict.

The sole indication of resistance occurs when players uncover a red flag piece on the map, labeled “expedition.” This piece requires players to employ military force to defeat it in exchange for victory points. The only other form of conflict present in the game occurs between the players themselves. This dynamic conveys an empire impervious to rebellions and political struggles, while indigenous peoples and other inhabitants of the land are neither represented as legitimate territorial actors nor depicted as a threat.

This mythology of the virgin, uninhabited land — which, in reality, is occupied by peoples who, according to nationalist ideology, would lack the right to exercise authority over it because they are not considered part of the “national” (ELGENIUS; RYDGREN, 2022) — is common in strategy game franchises such as *Civilization* (DOUGLAS, 2002). In *Brazil: Imperial*, the only potential threats to the establishment of a player’s empire are external, represented by other players; that is, competing empires.

Players actively explore and develop the conquered territory by extracting natural resources and placing building pieces on the map, such as

a Sawmill, Gold Foundry, Agricultural Fields, or Church. Collectible resources include Brazilwood (*pau-brasil*), sugarcane, cotton, and coffee — commodities historically produced throughout the country. Gold and science function as special resources, used to purchase units and construct specific building pieces.

These game mechanics simulate, albeit only partially accurately, the techniques and technologies involved in the historical process of colonization, while disregarding the social consequences of their use. For instance, the workers who cultivated the fields and constructed the buildings in this scenario would historically have been enslaved people. By entirely removing any representation of these laborers and their struggles, the game adopts an institutional perspective on history, rather than critically engaging with the processes and methods depicted. This focus on technical aspects at the expense of the social impacts of colonization is evident throughout the game and is characteristic of the Eurogame genre more broadly.

This erasure of the social and political dimensions of colonization can be understood, in a broader sense, as an effect of an ideological logic characteristic of contemporary neoliberalism, particularly in its cultural and political counter-revolutionary form. This logic reacts to the post-war promises of equality and solidarity, promoting a symbolic return to idealized pasts characterized by order, stability, and progress (BELLO, 2019). Such a strategy relocates historical conflict to the aesthetic realm, transforming memory into a commodity and the past into a moral refuge in response to the uncertainties of the present.

In *Brazil: Imperial*, this cultural counter-revolution is manifested in the nostalgic aestheticization of the Empire as a period of harmony and prosperity. By translating colonial violence into playful and technocratic abstractions, the game reproduces the neoliberal tendency to reenact history as a manageable scenario, where progress and efficiency replace dissent and critique. This operation aligns with the process described by Bello (2019), in which the past is politically neutralized through its transformation into a spectacle of administration and productivity.

Consequently, the imperial nostalgia staged in the game can be interpreted as part of an affective counter-revolution — a project that, under the guise of cultural celebration, reactivates colonial hierarchies and naturalizes the neoliberal framework of governing emotions and memories.

Next, attention is directed to the mechanics and victory conditions, analyzing how possible actions, progression logic, and scoring systems guide player behavior and naturalize particular power relations. During their turn, players may perform one action and move a unit to an adjacent location on the board. Actions include, among others:

- call up/deploy: pay a cost to place a military unit on the board;
- build/construct: pay a cost to place a building piece on the board, generating resources and expanding the player's empire boundaries;
- market: trade resources.

Taken together, these actions convey a narrative of the Brazilian Empire from an executive, institutional perspective. Most actions — such as Build, Renovate, Port, and Market — are related to resource management and territorial development for production. The most distinctive action, not directly tied to resource management, is the Painting action, in which players can acquire portraits of notable historical figures from the country's history. A review of the available characters shows that most — if not all — were supporters of the Empire in some capacity. By choosing to depict only individuals aligned with this stance, the game constructs a homogeneous fictional scenario in which opposition to the Empire and diverse political perspectives are absent. This synthetic *Pax Brasilis* contributes, through nostalgia, to a vision of the past as an ordered, ethnically cohesive period, calmer and less fractured by the complexities and sensitivities of contemporary politics.

Each game unfolds over three “Eras,” with each Era triggered by achieving objectives specified on Mission cards. During setup, players receive two of these cards, and the game concludes when the third Era is reached and victory points are tallied. Victory points are earned through

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activities such as exploring new territories, deploying military units, expanding borders, constructing cities, palaces, farms, and mines, and producing gold, science, and other resources. By structuring activities that generate victory points, the game signals to players which types of actions are deemed appropriate and desirable. It can be inferred that this gameplay reflects historical patterns of imperial behavior: expansion and assimilation, as well as a perception of the Brazilian Empire as an era of administrative efficiency and social development (SALLES, 2013). In practice, players manage the production and utilization of resources as efficiently as possible to foster the cultural, economic, and scientific development of their empire. This development is, in turn, represented by constructions that generate additional resources, bonuses, and victory points.

A central contradiction in the developmentalist discourse embedded in the game's actions is that *Brazil: Imperial* entirely omits any representation of workers, transforming resource production into an abstract process executed according to the orders of the empire's ruler. The game and its rulebook make no reference to enslaved people, slavery, or abolition. Even if the decision not to address these topics is intentional, it remains evident that, thematically and historically, players' actions would have been direct consequences of slavery. By suppressing this fundamental aspect, the game avoids any critique of the imperial period while activating a form of restorative nostalgia, in which aesthetics and mechanics stage a past characterized by order, efficiency, and progress. The "bodyless" flows (orders that "magically" become production, maps, and resources) function as an affective economy that aligns players with a homogeneous, silent, and consensual *Pax Brasilis*. Within this framework, the past appears cohesive and promising, while the present is framed as a loss of this ideal, reinforcing a sense of belonging and guiding behavior. Nostalgia thus operates as a mobilizing device (AHMED, 2004), sustaining a contemporary imaginary that portrays the Empire as unblemished.

Final considerations

The construction of a nostalgic past in *Brazil: Imperial* occurs through two simultaneous pathways. First, it downplays the most brutal social consequences of colonization by transforming them into matters of mechanics or the production and accumulation of resources. Historically formative processes in the country's development — such as the slave-owning system and the extermination of indigenous peoples — are represented in the game in an abstract or indirect manner, with emphasis shifted toward material and technological infrastructures, such as sawmills, farms, cities, and cannons. These elements are operationalized as seemingly neutral variables within the ludic system. Through this technical translation, the game prescribes a mode of reading the past that privileges material infrastructures and technologies while silencing the social conflicts that enabled them, thereby stabilizing a positive and depoliticized image of the imperial period. No unethical decisions exist in *Brazil: Imperial*, nor are there ethical choices for players to make. Moral deliberation is pre-inscribed in the artifact itself. As Verbeek (2005; 2011) argues, technologies embody moralities: rules, victory conditions, and cost-benefit structures prescribe behaviors and redistribute responsibilities. By defining “progress” as expansion and productivity without visible human cost, *Brazil: Imperial* shifts ethics from the level of player choice to the level of systemic framing. Within this framework, nearly every action appears acceptable, as the mechanics pacify dissent and render conflicts and victims invisible.

The second way in which the game constructs a nostalgic national past, after erasing some of its potential negatives, is by glorifying the aspects considered most positive, presenting them as the game's central features. This is evident in the playable characters, referred to as Monarchs, and in the portrait paintings, which highlight individuals depicted as heroes of the period. These ideals of nobility align Brazil's historical past with an imagined Medieval Europe, evoking tales of chivalry and thereby conferring an additional layer of legitimacy. Another example of

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this emphasis on perceived virtues is the portrayal of the territory now known as Brazil as a vast, uninhabited map, ready to be discovered and developed, rich in exploitable natural resources. Fauna and flora are presented as bonuses to be collected and utilized, reinforcing the representation of the land's abundant resources.

What reinforces the notion that *Brazil: Imperial* presents a reimagined history of the country is its occasionally anachronistic nature. The emphasis on the previously discussed abundance of land, represented by discoverable fauna and flora and the vastness of uncharted territory, suggests an environment more akin to 16th-century Colonial Brazil, further reinforced by the presence of cotton and sugarcane resources. This context contrasts with elements such as the monarchs, the painted letters, the text, and the coffee resource, which are associated with the 19th-century imperial period. This blending of historical references creates an anachronistic mosaic of Brazil's past, highlighting its appealing features while obscuring its more troubling realities.

Finally, it is worth revisiting certain aspects of how nostalgia operates in the construction of *Brazil: Imperial*. Earlier, we discussed some of the conditions from which this nostalgic principle emerges in the formation of Brazilian society. However, it is important to recognize that the game represents an instrumentalization of nostalgia, which does not follow a simple cause-and-effect trajectory. Beyond this more basic dimension of nostalgic perception, it is also evident, in engagement with the game, that its representation largely aligns with the same fascination that Eco (1986) critiques when analyzing the American perception of the Middle Ages.

The Italian linguist attributes Western culture's enduring fascination with the Middle Ages to the discovery of numerous technologies that, over time, led to Modernity. By analogy, the connection that Brazil maintains with its imperial period resembles the West's relationship with the Middle Ages. The attachment to the Brazilian Empire functions as an imagined return to a time when the nation appeared to be building a free, egalitarian, and fraternal society — provided, of course, that the foundations sustaining this structure are carefully ignored. Conceptualizing

the Empire as an idealized era represents a form of nostalgia rooted in nationalism, one that associates imperial symbols with order, grandeur, and moral cohesion.

This nostalgia activates affective economies (AHMED, 2004) that link pride, security, and the promise of “normality” to signs of the past, shaping how the present is experienced and the future imagined. These aligned affects narrow the horizon of possibility and predispose individuals to accept restorative projects: policies that promise to “rescue” the nation from perceived recent decline while erasing structural conflicts and historical violence. In this process, coloniality functions as a filter for the past, hierarchizing belonging and legitimizing exclusions. The political risk is evident, as this nostalgic fascination fuels conservative ultranationalist mobilizations that frame themselves as defenders of lost progress and past morality, while normalizing silences (regarding workers, racialized populations, and women), and transforming history into a decorative and performative backdrop for agendas opposed to social progress.

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