

Tic-Tac-Toe Antiwar 1 - “Colonialism” (v 1.0)

A game for two players, preferably played against the uninitiated for high stakes, such as the rights to all material wealth within your opponent's country.

Materials: Colonialism board, Cross and Mask counters

Setup:

Place the empty Colonialism board between the two players.

The more experienced player goes first. If each player is equally experienced, play a standard Tic-Tac-Toe game until one player wins. That player gets to go first.

The player to go first takes the Cross counters for Gold, God, and Glory.
The player to go second takes the Mask counters for indigenous diversity.

The player to go first may declare Colonialist or Boomstick Rules now or at any point during the game.

Game Play:

Each player can make only one mark per turn, unless you are playing Colonialist or Boomstick Rules. Your turn is ended after you have placed your mark/s.

The first player to get three marks in a row wins.

Additional Rules:

Colonialist Rules: If you are a “white guy” and your opponent is female or of other ethnic standing, make one extra mark during your turn. If you are Portuguese and your opponent is from the Canary Islands,* you may make two extra marks during your turn.

Boomstick Rules: If you have technological superiority over your opponent, instead of placing a mark, you may remove one of your opponent's marks during your turn and replace it with your own mark.

Commentary

Colonialist Tic-Tac-Toe developed out of a desire to study simple games, based on the hypothesis that such an approach is much easier because it allows the critic to examine a very simple system in which the relationships between all the game elements are very clear and the effects of small changes on the system can be easily and dramatically observed. Though I had focused my study of simple games

* The Canary Islanders were the first Non-European indigenous population to fall victim to Western Imperialism.

mostly on early videogames such as *Combat*, *Centipede*, *Space Invaders*, and *Pac-Man*, this study also included physical games such as Rock, Paper, Scissors and Tic-Tac-Toe.

The design of an antiwar Tic-Tac-Toe game originated from a desire to explore the underlying structures of games to find military themes hidden within the rule systems. I examined such rules and designs as the control of game space and the use of gridded maps as part of this study and discovered that even a simple game like Tic-Tac-Toe possesses elements that could be regarded as a military conflict for control of territory. The fact that Tic-Tac-Toe possesses such underlying military symbolism means that it can be subverted to demonstrate the game's somewhat sinister themes. Further, if a simple game such as Tic-Tac-Toe can be designed in such a fashion, then it should be possible to use similar approaches to modify more complex war games such as Chess.

Of course, Tic-Tac-Toe also has connections with war through the film *War Games* in which the game is used as a metaphor for nuclear war – when played against opponents familiar with its system, Tic-Tac-Toe will always result in a tie with no winner, just like a nuclear war. As a result, Tic-Tac-Toe has connotations not only with territorial control but also with unwinnable battles, a feature that could be used as a metaphor of the trench warfare of World War I for example.

Colonialism was chosen as the theme for this subversion of Tic-Tac-Toe because it has territorial control as a central component of its operation and also is a critical factor in the development of war, not only between imperialist powers and the indigenous population, but also through competition among imperialist powers to secure the best resources against their rivals.¹ The dark satirical communication of the rules underscores the brutal nature of colonialist rule and its oppression of subjugated peoples – particularly when we consider that it is suggested this game be played against the ill-experienced or the unprepared for high stakes.

New rules were added to emphasize fundamental qualities of colonialism. Colonialist rules illustrate how the colonialists can change the legal rules to further their own ends (such as through the creation and modification of unequal treaties) but also through race and gender roles, which illustrate traditional colonialist power positions. The key element of this rule, however, is that it extends to players' real-life identities, making them dramatically aware of these power relationships, some of which continue to exist today despite considerable efforts for civil rights and equality.

Boomstick rules illustrate the underlying system of technological superiority as identified in Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* that was so crucial to the success of the European colonial powers. These rules allow the player to eliminate an opposing piece and replace it with their own, symbolizing military conflict among the indigenous peoples. Often treated as a joke in film, the boomstick is only one of many powerful and deadly tools used by technological society to exercise power and control.

While the game's visual and narrative components place it specifically in Spanish imperial colonialism, a textbook example from the early colonialist period, the game could be modified as an example of colonialism in any part of the world and in any century, not simply New World expansion but also African, Asian, and Pacific imperial exploration – or to the imperial expansion of ancient empires such as the Roman Empire and the Egyptian Empire.

¹ I would also like to illustrate that the diverse culture of the studio, building off my previous coursework with Engineering, Technology, and Culture and anthropology contributed to this theme.

As an initial step into the creation of antiwar games through an investigation and critique of game rules and themes, Colonialist Tic-Tac-Toe served as a simple but effective example into the possibilities of this genre.