

Neocolonialism in Video Games: the Social Discourse of *Call of Duty* 4: *Modern Warfare* (2007)

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between video games and neocolonialism narratives, focusing on *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007) as a case study. The Iraq War, initiated by the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, serves as a backdrop for examining how media, particularly video games, contribute to the legitimization of neocolonial interventions in the Middle East. While traditional media often rationalizes such interventions, we argue that video games like *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* play a significant role in perpetuating militarism and violence, framing the U.S. as a global peacekeeper while depicting the Middle East as chaotic and threatening. Using Oliver Perez Latorre's (2015) methodology based on rhetorical analysis of game, we analyze the ludic design of character/player, game world, and game play activities, tracing how these elements construct the "other" in Middle Eastern factions and reinforce the binary of "us" versus "them." The game's depiction of Western protagonists as heroic defenders of global stability reinforces colonial ideologies and justifies military interventions. The game's narrative simplifies complex geopolitical conflicts into a clear dichotomy, positioning the West as morally superior and justified in its interventions. This paper argues that video games, while providing immersive and engaging game play experiences, also can serve as vehicles for reproducing colonial power dynamics and contributing to the ongoing legitimization of military interventionism in neocolonial contexts. By analyzing these representations, we demonstrate the significant role that video games play in shaping contemporary geopolitical ideologies and how they continue to reflect and perpetuate colonial ideologies.

Keywords

call of duty, neocolonialism, postcolonialism, video games, shooter games, militarism, geopolitical narratives

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INTRODUCTION

Neocolonial conflicts frequently emerge from the artificial borders and divisions imposed by colonial powers, which often disregarded existing ethnic, religious, and cultural contexts. One of the prominent neocolonial conflicts is the Iraq War, particularly following the U.S.-led military intervention of in 2003. The intervention and subsequent dismantling of Iraq's political structures created a power vacuum that intensified tensions among various ethnic groups (Erkmen, 2012, 146). The United States' numerous violent interventions in the Middle East during the neocolonial era have significantly influenced the political climate of the region and exacerbated pre-existing tensions. These interventions have regularly caused severe human suffering and long-term destabilization, even though they are frequently justified under the discourse of advancing democracy, fighting terrorism, or maintaining regional stability.

Iraq was the scene of one of the biggest U.S. interventions in the Middle East in 2003. The intervention ultimately resulted in the overthrow of the Iraqi government and was based on the assumption that Saddam Hussein's regime had weapons of mass destruction and was a threat to international security (Richelson, 2004). But the following breakdown of governmental institutions left a power vacuum that stoked insurgency and unleashed sectarian slaughter. Millions of people were displaced and hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed as a result of fueled an increase in violence.

While traditional media often adopts a perspective that rationalizes the U.S. intervention to Iraq, we directed our attention towards video games, hypothesizing that the militarism and violence depicted in video games contribute to legitimizing the U.S.'s neocolonial interventions in the Middle East. To explore this, we selected *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, a game whose narrative closely align with neocolonial interventions in the region. Following the game analysis methodology of Oliver Perez Latorre (2015), we analyzed *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* to trace the presence of neocolonial justifications within its gameplay and storyline. By analyzing the ludic design of character/player, game world, and gameplay activities, we traced how these parameters construct the Middle Eastern “Other” in the game and how the narrative of “us” versus “them” is articulated within the game.

This paper begins by establishing a theoretical framework grounded in neocolonial theory, exploring its relevance and application within the field of game studies. In this way, we underscore the significance of narrative—a concept often contested within game studies— it as a pivotal element in broader cultural and political discourses. The subsequent section undertakes a comprehensive and critical analysis of the narrative in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 4* (2007), while also addressing the interplay between its gameplay and mechanics. This approach aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how the game constructs and communicates its geopolitical and militaristic themes.

NEOCOLONIALISM AND ITS COVERT IMPLICATIONS

In its formative years, postcolonial studies were predominantly concerned with deconstructing imperial histories and amplifying the subaltern voices systematically silenced by the hegemonic frameworks of colonial power. Scholars like Edward Said, with his seminal work *Orientalism*, critiqued Western representations of the “Orient” and their role in sustaining colonial ideologies. Edward Said, who introduced the

concept of orientalism to described the West's patronizing representations of "the East" (Said, 1978), and Frantz Fanon, whose *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) examined the psychological and social consequences of colonial domination, postcolonial theory addressed how colonial power relations persist after formal independence. Over time, the field expanded to encompass a broader examination of how colonialism shapes identities, languages, and power dynamics, even in postindependence contexts. For instance, Bahri and Vasudeva (1991) defined postcolonialism as "a study of the cultural interaction between colonizing powers and the societies they colonized, and the traces that this interaction left on the literature, arts, and human sciences of both societies."

In the middle to late 20th century, postcolonial theory became popular as newly independent countries looked to examine and combat the legacy of colonial control. Scholars realized by the late 20th and early 21st centuries, however, that many postcolonial governments were still subject to economic reliance, political influence, and cultural dominance by former colonial powers and international organizations even after gaining official independence. Postcolonialism concentrated on restoring identity and opposing colonial myths, whereas neo-colonial theory emphasized how former colonial powers employed cultural domination, political clout, and economic reliance rather than direct rule to retain control.

Neocolonialism in the Middle East represents a continuation of foreign intervention and dominance in the region, despite the formal end of colonial rule. Scholars argue that these interventions are driven by strategic interests, particularly access to oil and geopolitical control. Gilbert Achcar (2004) highlights how Western powers maintain influence through economic dependencies, military interventions, and support for authoritarian regimes that align with their interests, perpetuating a cycle of underdevelopment and instability. Similarly, Timothy Mitchell, in *Carbon Democracy* (2011), examines how control over oil resources has been a primary tool of neocolonial domination, shaping the political economies of Middle Eastern states to serve global capitalist interests.

Contemporary analyses by scholars like Rashid Khalidi (2020) reveal how the United States and other Western powers use economic leverage, arms deals, and diplomatic pressure to influence policies and suppress dissent in the region. Khalidi particularly critiques how interventions in Iraq, Syria, and Libya have destabilized these nations, creating power vacuums that further entrench external influence.

The continuation of colonial practices by former colonial powers through more subtle mechanisms—such as diplomacy, international institutions, and development aid, which foster economic dependency—renders the identification and critique of neocolonialism increasingly challenging. Accordingly, detecting neocolonialism in the media, particularly in video games, is increasingly challenging due to the subtlety with which it operates and the immersive, often entertaining, nature of the medium. Video games, as a form of entertainment and mass communication, often present narratives, environments, and ideologies that reinforce global power imbalances without explicit political commentary. These games can perpetuate neocolonial tropes by portraying certain cultures or nations as exotic, backward, or in need of Western intervention, often without overtly acknowledging these dynamics. In the subsequent section, we will delve into the application of neocolonial theory to the field of game studies, uncovering its nuanced implications and insights.

APPLYING THE NEOCOLONIAL THEORY TO GAME STUDIES

As the scope of neocolonialism broadened and evolved, it increasingly intersected with various academic subfields, notably drawing significant attention from scholars in media studies. Initially, media studies scholars highlighted how colonial stereotypes and biases persisted in Western media portrayals of non-Western societies, often framing these cultures through an exoticized or victimized lens. Influential theorists like Stuart Hall (1997) explored how race and identity are constructed through media, arguing that Western media often reinforces colonial ideas by depicting certain groups as “the other.” Over time, the focus expanded beyond traditional forms of media, such as film and television, to encompass the rapidly evolving digital landscape. This shift marked a critical transition as scholars began examining how digital platforms not only replicate but also transform colonial power dynamics by amplifying certain voices while marginalizing others. Neocolonial media scholars analyze not only traditional forms of media but also digital platforms, questioning how global media companies influence cultural representation and control narratives in previously colonized regions and video game studies has emerged as a field in which the traces of neocolonialism can be critically examined.

Applying neocolonial theory to video game studies allows for a critical examination of how video games often reflect and perpetuate colonial ideologies through narratives, character portrayals, and world-building. Many mainstream games are produced within Western contexts, frequently presenting non-Western settings and characters through an “exotic” or “othered” lens, which can reduce complex cultures to stereotypical tropes or hostile landscapes. Neocolonial analysis in video games studies interrogates these portrayals, exploring how game design choices—such as the roles of protagonists, the depiction of “foreign” lands, and the dynamics of conquest and conflict—can mirror colonial power dynamics and reinforce cultural hierarchy.

As Soraya Murray (2018, 28) put it:

the presence of identity politics and its impact on art history as a discipline has particularly been much debated. In the wake of this comes the inevitable conclusion that indeed all image production is linked to identity politics, regardless of the status of cultural normativity or alterity represented by its makers.

In this respect, the inevitability of identity politics in image production prompts inquiries that allow us to problematize neocolonial representations in digital games. Specifically, we posit that the stimuli encountered in first-person games—where the self-other dichotomy is easily established—may position individuals to a priori justify the game’s narrative.

Thus, it is observed that while game scenarios justify the status quo, they simultaneously undergo a transformation alongside it. Until the late 1990s, video games largely portrayed geopolitical relations through a binary framework, often pitting the USA against countries like China, Iran, or Russia, as seen in titles such as *Balance of Power* (1985) and *Command & Conquer: Red Alert* (1996). The emergence of postfascism and the collapse of liberalism have highlighted a societal shift toward the reinstatement of more overtly authoritarian power structures, aimed at safeguarding unstable capitalism and its colonial legacy. Western colonialism is often viewed as both objectively beneficial and subjectively legitimate in many regions,

based on practical evaluations. Countries that embraced their colonial inheritance generally performed better than those that rejected it. Today, weak and fragile states could potentially revive colonialism in three ways: by reintroducing colonial governance models, recolonizing certain areas, or creating entirely new Western colonies. This viewpoint provides a compelling justification for creating video games that celebrate colonialism and the establishment of “new Western colonies.” (Mukherjee & Hammer, 2018, 4).

This shift in portrayal reflects a broader transformation in game narratives, where older geopolitical dichotomies are being replaced or complicated by new, more contemporary adversaries. More recent games have introduced a third faction: Islamic terrorism. For example, in the 2003 strategy game *Command and Conquer: Generals*, the USA and China are depicted as allies, joining forces to combat a terror group resembling al-Qaeda that is portrayed as “barbaric.” (Nardone, 2017, 47). Similarly, in *Battlefield 3*, a U.S. Marine named Sgt. Henry “Nick” K. Mendoza, who is sent to the Middle East to investigate a series of terrorist attacks. The game’s narrative revolves around the escalating conflict between Western forces and radical terrorist groups. In this game, the United States invades Iran, which has turned into a military dictatorship through a coup. It can be observed that there are three key points in video games that address neocolonial interventions in the Middle East:

- The Middle Eastern factions in video games are depicted as barbaric, evil in a pejorative manner. Thus, the “otherness” in the video game is reinforced through the good vs. evil dichotomy.
- In video games depicting the global competition during the Cold War, countries positioned against the West are allied with Middle Eastern factions. For example, in *Battlefield 3*, the Russians and Iranians operate together.
- Neocolonial interventions always come with a legitimate reason. For example, in *Medal of Honor* (2010), the reason for the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan was the Taliban’s support for al-Qaeda.

In conclusion, applying neocolonial theory to video game studies provides valuable insight into the ways video games reproduce and reinforce colonial ideologies through their narratives, character depictions, and world-building. As seen in many mainstream games, particularly those set in non-Western contexts, there is a tendency to frame these settings through a lens of “otherness,” presenting them as hostile or barbaric. This binary framing not only reflects historical colonial power dynamics but also perpetuates them, often with subtle justifications for neocolonial interventions and violence.

CASE-STUDY: THE SOCIAL DISCOURSE OF *CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE*

The *Call of Duty* series stands out as one of the most popular and controversial examples of war-themed narratives in the world of video games, however, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* is considered a turning point, due to its highest review score by the players (Abdullayeva, 201, 35) since the *Call of Duty* series left the theme of World War II until *Call of Duty: World at War* (2008).

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, provides critical insights into the ways modern warfare and global power dynamics are constructed, reflecting and shaping prevailing narratives about military intervention, geopolitical conflict, and the portrayal of international relations. When analyzed in a neocolonial context, the game's story, locations and characters carry a distinct problematic in the representation of geographies and cultures that are seen as "other" and dominated by a Western-centric perspective.

As Andrew Potter (2014: 91) put it:

videogames are an efficient means for perpetuating militarism because the medium is readily available, highly interactive, and operate under the guise of entertainment. However, as the analyses prove, entertainment becomes visceral experiences of killing digital representations of the Middle Eastern "Other" as indoctrination of militarism upon the player.

Modern Warfare serves as a significant cultural artifact that mirrors contemporary global politics and military strategies. However, this representation is frequently structured around a narrative that privileges Western values and interests, often exoticizing or demonizing other nations and cultures as threats. In this light, the game warrants critical examination, not only as a form of entertainment but also as a tool that reinforces and perpetuates the narrative of Western global hegemony, shaping perceptions of international power relations and conflict.

This research aims to discuss how *Modern Warfare* constructs a discourse on the modern world order by evaluating the game's character designs, game world and gameplay dynamics from a neocolonial perspective. In particular, it analyses how the distinction between "us" and "them" in the game's narrative is constructed and what messages this distinction conveys about the global balance of power.

Methodology

The social discourse around video games has evolved significantly, touching on themes of community, identity, ethics, and societal impact. Once seen primarily as entertainment, video games are now recognized as complex cultural artifacts that influence and reflect societal values. Issues such as race stereotypes and the justification of political violence in games often spark intense conversations. For instance, some studies focus on racial representation and stereotypes in video games (Burgess et al. 2011; Cicchirillo & Appiah, 2014; Dietrich, 2013; Oakley, 2019; Smith & Thakore, 2023). This article aims to critically examine how, as a consequence of the USA's neocolonial interventions and the intensification of USA-Middle East tensions that peaked with 9/11, video games have incorporated a new dimension of Middle Eastern enemies into race-based representations, thereby constructing a "new other" that serves to justify political violence within the medium.

Franchises like *Call of Duty*, *Battlefield*, and Tom Clancy-branded titles capitalize on the battles in the Middle East each year by offering players immersive experiences in historic and futuristic battles, effectively turning contemporary conflicts into playable scenarios. Following 9/11, these games reframed a national crisis as thrilling, profitable adventures (Payne, 2016). These video games promote the idea that a threatening and hostile environment confronts the USA, thus justified in using force in response (Robinson, 2014).

Thus, we observe that video game producers find scenarios targeting the “new other” profitable in the aftermath of an event that traumatized the American public. We also understand that players, influenced by the impact of 9/11 and by finding games centered on recent history (and potential futures) more relevant, are drawn to these games and are inclined to buy into the legitimization of violence used in neocolonial interventions.

In this regard, we selected *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* (2007) as a case study, as it updates the context of earlier titles in the series (*Call of Duty Classic* 2003; *Call of Duty 2*, 2005; *Call of Duty 3*, 2006), which focused on World War II conflicts, by reframing the “new other” as contemporary Middle Eastern enemies. To avoid approaches that confront narrative and ludic design in games and treat them as a dichotomy, we attempted to analyze the justification of neocolonial violence in *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007) by examining the social discourse of video games with the model developed by Oliver Perez Latorre (2015). Latorre (2015) splits facets of the video games discourse into three sections and considers ludic design in each of them: (1) the representation of the character/player, (2) the game world, and (3) the game play activities that are tailored to analyze each facet. Our analysis also includes playing the game. Playing a game to be analyzed by the researcher is considered one of the important methods in game studies (Aarseth, 2007). Therefore, we should remark that we played the game approximately 17 hours and 3 times in total.

We chose this methodology for our analysis to provide a comprehensive examination of how neocolonial violence is justified in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* (2007). By utilizing the model developed by Oliver Perez Latorre (2015), which dissects the social discourse of video games into three key sections—representation of the character-player, the game world, and gameplay activities—we were able to avoid reducing the analysis to a simplistic narrative vs. ludic design dichotomy. This approach allowed us to explore the multifaceted ways in which the game reinforces neocolonial ideologies. Furthermore, we incorporated gameplay itself as an integral part of our research, aligning with established methods in game studies (Aarseth, 2007), with the game being played over 17 hours and three separate sessions to gain a nuanced understanding of its mechanisms.

The Ludic Design of Character-Player: Representation of Western And “Others”

The main characters in *Modern Warfare* are members of the armies of the UK and the USA, which underscores the game's focus on Western perspectives in the depiction of modern conflict. These characters are portrayed as high-tech, well-educated and ethically responsible individuals. The game's emphasis on heroism reproduces a colonial narrative in which the West positions itself as the “guardian of civilization”. In this representation, the player becomes involved in a heroic story and possibly internalizes Western values. This reinforces the legitimacy of Western intervention by portraying “other” societies as passive or threatening.

One of the most prominent and playable characters is Sergeant John “Soap” MacTavish. Soap is one of the main playable protagonists and is a new recruit to the British Special Air Service (SAS). Throughout the game, players experience Soap's growth from an inexperienced soldier to a hardened veteran. Soap's character is quiet, allowing players to project their own thoughts and reactions onto him, but he has a strong sense of loyalty and dedication to duty. His presence in *Modern Warfare*

set the stage for his role as a fan-favorite character in future titles. The game's use of a silent protagonist in Soap allows players to immerse themselves further, experiencing the harsh realities of warfare without a guiding moral voice to tell them what's right or wrong.

Another prominent character is Captain John Price, a key figure in the narrative, serving more as a narrative driver and mentor figure within the storyline. Captain Price, a SAS officer and Soap's commanding officer, is a seasoned soldier with a gruff personality and a complex moral compass. His strong leadership, bravery, and tactical skills are indispensable to the SAS missions. Price's presence throughout the game conveys the weight of experience and the sacrifices soldiers make. His dedication to the mission and his country often leads him to make morally ambiguous decisions, highlighting the difficult choices soldiers face in the field. Price's long-standing rivalry with Zakhaev adds personal stakes to the conflict, embodying the psychological toll that long-term military conflict can exert on individuals.

In the missions "All Ghillied Up" and "One Shot, One Kill," player assumes the role of Lieutenant Price during the year 1996, operating under the command of Captain MacMillan. These missions focus on a pivotal operation in which Price attempts to eliminate Imran Zakhaev, the game's primary antagonist, therefore we learn how the antagonism between Zakhaev and Captain Price started. In the climactic final mission, Price sustains severe injuries during a confrontation with Zakhaev; however, the antagonist is ultimately neutralized by Soap, ensuring the mission's success. Here, we observe how pivotal the emotions of hatred and vengeance are in militarism. The frequent emphasis on the apprentice-mentor relationship as well as the fraternity between peers of equal rank, fosters a strong sense of in-group favoritism within the game. This dynamic contributes to the escalation of hostility toward the out-group, reinforcing adversarial perceptions and deepening the divide between the opposing sides.

The other playable character is Sergeant Paul Jackson. Jackson is a U.S. marine who experiences the brutal consequences of interventionism firsthand. His missions in the Middle East serve as a commentary on the sacrifices and costs of modern warfare. Sergeant Paul Jackson and the 1st Force Recon of the United States Marine Corps (USMC) were deployed to the Middle East with the objective of locating Khaled Al-Asad. They entered the region via multiple Black Hawk helicopters. Jackson's character represents the human aspect of the military—the everyday soldier caught in geopolitical schemes.

Sergeant Paul Jackson is K.I.A during the mission "Shock and Awe." While attempting to rescue a downed helicopter pilot Pelayo in a Middle Eastern city, Jackson and his squad are caught in the detonation of a nuclear device set off by enemy forces. The nuclear explosion devastates the area, destroying the city and killing tens of thousands, including Jackson, his squad, and the rescue team. Jackson's tragic death during a nuclear explosion underscores the indiscriminate and devastating nature of war, making him a poignant symbol of the sacrifices endured by those on the frontlines.

The enemy characters are often identified with Muslim, Middle Eastern or Russian identities. Here, we observe the integration of Russia, the enduring adversary from the Cold War, alongside more recent antagonistic Middle Eastern characters, collectively positioned as enemies of the West. These characters are presented as an

extremely violent, irrational or organized threat. This form of representation serves to demonize the “other” and reinforce the superiority of the West. In accordance with the common perception of neocolonial perception, the West is glorified as a force of order and peace, whereas, the East is presented as an irrational and dangerous world.

The main characters from the “other” side are Imran Zakhaev and Khaled Al-Asad. Zakhaev, the primary antagonist, is a Russian ultra-nationalist leader who seeks to restore Russia’s former power and influence. Driven by ideological extremism, Zakhaev represents a larger-than-life villain who sees violence and destabilization as justifiable means to achieve his vision. The character reflects real-world concerns about nationalism and radicalism, offering a chilling reminder of the potential consequences when ideological fervor goes unchecked. Zakhaev’s motivations are presented with a degree of ambiguity, which leaves players questioning the roots of his extremism and the role of Western intervention in exacerbating these tensions.

Al-Asad, the leader of the Middle Eastern coup, serves as a secondary antagonist and an ally of Zakhaev. His ruthless tactics and anti-Western ideology reflect real-world fears surrounding terrorism and authoritarianism. Al-Asad’s motivations are rooted in his desire to overthrow Western-backed “goodie” regimes, and his alliance with Zakhaev underscores the complex web of political alliances that can emerge from mutual interests. His capture and subsequent execution by the SAS exemplify the game’s exploration of retributive justice in a military context.

By portraying Western protagonists as heroic, technologically advanced, and ethically driven, the game positions the West as a stabilizing force, while the “other” is depicted as irrational, dangerous, and antagonistic. This narrative not only mirrors neocolonial attitudes but also invites players to internalize these perspectives through immersive storytelling and morally ambiguous scenarios. While characters like Soap, Price, and Jackson emphasize personal growth, loyalty, and sacrifice, antagonists such as Zakhaev and Al-Asad are designed to embody ideological extremism and existential threats. This juxtaposition, while effective for engaging gameplay, perpetuates a simplified view of global conflict, where complex realities are reduced to binary oppositions.

As far as the performance rules are concerned, the character controlled by the player is particularly endowed with physical skills and military capabilities. The design gives the character-player competencies in running, using weapons, overcoming obstacles and killing enemies. All of these are actually geared towards survival in war. The game's performance rules shape the character as a hyper-military individual, and the player's success is measured by how well they use these militarized skills. In this way, the nature of war is linked to individual skills and contributing to the normalization of militaristic values and practices. Moreover, the actions of Western characters controlled by the player are often presented as a necessary defense reflex. This underscores the legitimization of Western interventionist policies, framed within the discourse of defense and the protection of human rights. At this point, the character-player acts with the mission of doing the “right” thing.

With respect to operation rules, the use of weapons, interaction with the environment and the execution of tactical commands are directly linked to the player's control mechanisms. In sniping missions, for example, the player must hold down the button to simulate breath control. This mechanic emphasizes military professionalism and discipline and can make it easier for the player to empathize with the character. It is

intended to give the player a sense of the complexity of warfare, at the same time as this sense supports a more heroic narrative.

States rules in *Call of Duty Modern Warfare 4*, are most often evaluated in terms of the player character's health level, ammunition status, and mission success. For example, the risk of character death in the game is often mitigated by the "respawn" mechanism. This reduces the lethal nature of the war, and turns the battlefield into a kind of "sporting arena". This leads to a damage in the realistic portrayal of war in the game. Thus, the real impact and damage of war is concealed.

Regarding rules for inducing behaviors, missions given to the player are usually supported by rewards. This can be exemplified by the destruction of an enemy base or a hostage rescue, because in these cases new weapons are given to the character.

There is no doubt that the game is known for its fast-paced marksmanship mechanics. The player must constantly utilize their reflexes and strategic thinking skills. This allows the player to develop an emotional connection with the character, reinforcing the myth of the "heroic soldier." Furthermore, the mentioned mechanic forces the player to focus solely on mission success, ignoring the human and ethical dimensions of war.

The Ludic Design of Game World: Representation of West and Middle East

Looking at the spatiotemporal design, we can see easily the various geographical locations where modern warfare takes place, such as cities, deserts, forests. The game, also, presents an intensely paced timeline that takes place in these locations. On the one hand, the design of the locations makes the player feel that war is a global phenomenon and that the West is in danger in almost every part of the world, while on the other hand there is conflict. On the other hand, the rapid passage of time reinforces the perception that war is a chaotic and constant struggle. In this context, the game world makes a sharp distinction between modern, organized and Western cities and chaotic and dangerous non-Western spaces. Middle Eastern war zones are frequently depicted through imagery of collapsed buildings, deteriorated infrastructure, and civilian chaos, in contrast to the portrayal of Western spaces as organized and stable. This dichotomy perpetuates colonial narratives, positioning the West as "advanced" and the East as "primitive," thereby reinforcing hierarchical power dynamics rooted in neocolonial ideologies. The spatial design of the play contributes to the perception of the West as an orderly and civilized world outside of chaos. In war zones in the Middle East, cultural symbols such as mosques, bazaars and the living spaces of the local population are presented as destroyed or abandoned. These representations reinforce the perception of the East as a region of constant "crisis" and "chaos." The placement of cultural heritage in a threatening environment implies its trivialization or the necessity of Western intervention.

Regarding rules for blocking/unblocking areas and states of the game world, the player cannot access new areas of the game world without completing certain tasks. For example, clearing an enemy base opens the passage to the next areas. These rules imply to the player that war is a strategic and hierarchical structure.

Nonplayer characters are usually categorized as enemy soldiers, civilians or allies. Patterns of those are usually programmed to be mechanically threatening and hostile,

but civilians are passive and vulnerable. This distinction supports the perception that “good” and “bad” sides in war are clearly defined.

Western soldiers are depicted as equipped with advanced weaponry and high-tech vehicles, whereas their adversaries are often portrayed with outdated and inferior equipment. This technological superiority serves as a symbolic representation of Western dominance and power. In addition, a high-tech drone represents the high-tech dimension of warfare. Technological objects emphasize the power and technological superiority of modern warfare, but in the process may allow the human cost of war to be overlooked. Rules of objects of the game world presents the technological superiority of the West as an indicator of modernity. At the same time, it reinforces the perception that the West is able to control wars and maintain order through technology.

The Ludic Design of Game Play Activities: Legitimization of Western Intervention

Patterns of action regarding final objectives in *Call of Duty Modern Warfare 4* are generally centered on the Western “war on terror” strategy. Missions are usually based on destroying enemies, capturing strategic areas or defending an objective. The player's mission appears to be to prevent civilian casualties and maintain order, but these missions are always accomplished through violence and warfare. In the neocolonial context, these missions feed the perception that the West is the “rightful” leader to solve global problems. The motivations of antagonistic characters are often reduced to radical ideologies. This erases the complexity and diversity of non-Western societies, creating an image of a homogenous and threatening enemy. This image is a means of legitimizing Western superiority. Finally, civilian casualties are presented either as “mistakes” or as the inevitable cost of war.

As far as the winning and losing conditions are concerned, failure in the game usually results in death or failure to complete the mission. However, these losses are compensated by a quick restart mechanism. This mechanism minimizes the severe repercussions of warfare, thereby encouraging the player to engage in risk-taking behavior. As a result, it contributes to the gamification of war, where the complexities and human costs of conflict are reduced to a series of manageable challenges and rewards.

Missions usually follow a chain of predetermined actions. For example, infiltrating a base, clearing enemies and then capturing information. These chains allow the war to be presented as a “story.”

Strategic/tactical dilemmas allow the player to make tactical decisions about how to approach conflicts. For example, infiltration is one option, while direct attack is another. While these dilemmas give the player a sense of freedom, they also support the perception that war is an inevitable reality.

Paul Jackson's death as a result of a nuclear attack parallels the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, which was justified on the grounds that Iraq possessed nuclear and weapons of mass destruction that posed a significant threat to the security of coalition nations and the broader international community. Similarly, both *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 4* and the Iraq War of 2003 feature a Western faction composed primarily of

British and American forces, highlighting a thematic alignment between the game's narrative and real-world geopolitical events.

In conclusion, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 4* presents a narrative and gameplay structure that reinforces the Western-centric view of military intervention, particularly within the context of the “war on terror.” The game's missions, while framed as efforts to prevent civilian harm and restore order, are consistently achieved through violence, underscoring the central role of warfare in resolving global conflicts. This portrayal feeds into a neocolonial narrative where the West is positioned as the rightful authority in addressing global crises, while non-Western societies are often reduced to simplistic depictions of radical ideologies, further perpetuating the myth of a homogeneous and threatening enemy. In doing so, the game legitimizes Western military superiority and interventionism, presenting it as the only viable solution to complex geopolitical problems. The representation of civilian casualties as either “mistakes” or an inevitable cost of war further desensitizes the player to the real-world consequences of conflict, reinforcing a distorted view of the morality of military intervention. Additionally, the game’s mechanics, including quick restarts after failure, mitigate the severity of the consequences of war, turning it into a manageable and risk-free experience. This not only contributes to the gamification of war, where the human cost is minimized, but also encourages a reckless, risk-taking attitude towards combat.

CONCLUSION

The application of neocolonial theory to video game studies reveals the complex ways in which video games continue to reproduce and reinforce colonial ideologies. By analyzing how these games portray non-Western settings and characters through the lens of “otherness,” we see that they not only reflect historical power imbalances but also contribute to their perpetuation. The depiction of Middle Eastern factions as barbaric or evil, the alignment of these factions with rival powers, and the justification for neocolonial interventions all echo colonial narratives that have long been embedded in Western media. These portrayals, often framed through simplistic binaries of good versus evil, may serve to legitimize violence and military action in these regions, creating a narrative that normalizes and even celebrates Western neocolonialism.

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare offers a compelling example of how video games can be used to perpetuate certain geopolitical narratives and ideologies, particularly through the lens of neocolonial theory. By presenting a narrative that emphasizes the dichotomy between the “us” (the West) and the “them” (non-Western “Others”), the game constructs a world where Western powers are positioned as the defenders of global stability, while Middle Eastern nations are often depicted as chaotic and threatening.

The game's representation of both protagonists and antagonists serves to perpetuate a broader narrative concerning Western military superiority and interventionism. The central focus is on Western characters—such as Sergeant John “Soap” MacTavish, Captain John Price, and Sergeant Paul Jackson—who are depicted as highly skilled, morally driven individuals engaged in complex military operations. These characters embody virtues such as loyalty, bravery, and personal sacrifice, positioning the West as a force for good. The game portrays these figures as intervening in conflict zones with the intention of restoring peace or neutralizing extremist threats.

In contrast, the game's antagonists, including the Russian ultra-nationalist Imran Zakhaev and the Middle Eastern leader Khaled Al-Asad, are framed as ideological extremists with violent, destabilizing agendas. Zakhaev's ultra-nationalism and Al-Asad's anti-Western terrorism reflect real-world anxieties about radicalism and terrorism. However, the game often simplifies these figures' motivations, reducing the complex geopolitical dynamics to a binary opposition. The West is portrayed as inherently justified in confronting these figures, reinforcing the dichotomy between the heroic, morally righteous West and the dangerous "other." This stark contrast forms the crux of the game's narrative structure.

Furthermore, the game underscores the centrality of individual military skill and survival in the context of modern warfare. Players control soldiers equipped with advanced military technology, and their success is contingent upon their ability to execute combat strategies, utilize weaponry, and overcome environmental obstacles. This emphasis on military competency cultivates the notion of the player as a hyper-militarized individual, skilled in the tools of warfare. The game's mechanics—ranging from weapon usage to breath control in sniping missions and tactical decision-making—serve to depict warfare as a highly structured, professional endeavor. These design choices shape the player's experience, fostering empathy for the character's actions and reinforcing a narrative that celebrates heroism through militarized means.

However, the game's mechanics, such as the respawn feature, which allows players to re-enter the action without facing permanent consequences, mitigate the perceived gravity of warfare. While these features enhance player engagement, they simultaneously downplay the destructive and irreversible nature of war, reducing its moral and emotional weight. As a result, the game's portrayal of conflict risks transforming warfare into a more manageable, less ethically challenging experience.

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