



# Whiteness in Spheres and Spaces

**IN THE GERMAN CONTEXT**

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# Public (In)Sensitivity for Whiteness in Germany

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## George Floyd Protests in Berlin



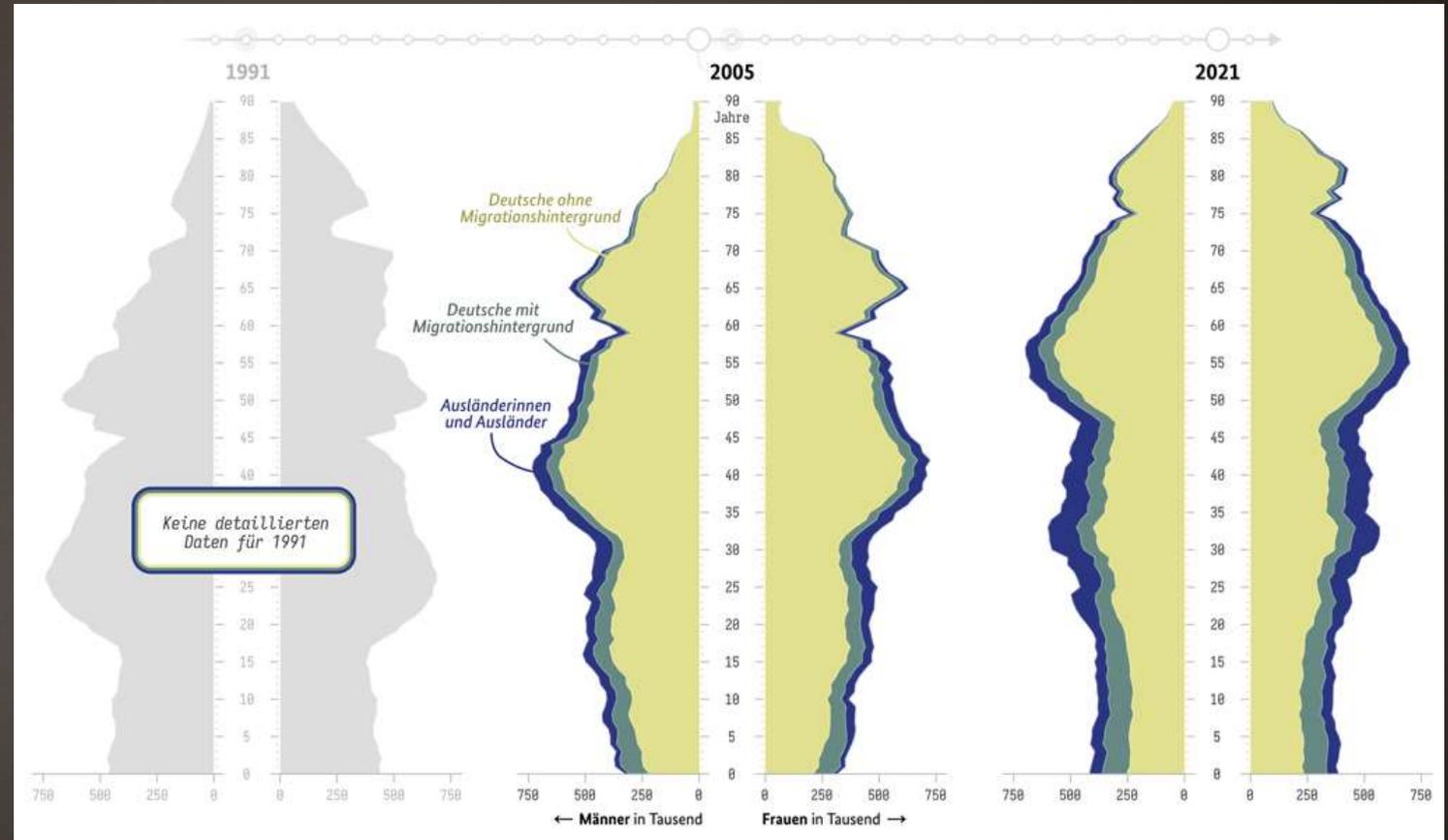
## “Black-facing” as culturally appropriate?



T. Gottschalk: At a costume party, Black-faced as Jimi Hendrix, he said, “**I felt how it is to be Black.**” (30.11.2020)

## Germany's Population: Migration background and Age

22 Mio.  
people of  
Germany's  
population  
have a  
foreign-born  
background



[https://www.bib.bund.de/DE/Presse/Konferenzen/Bilder/2022-07-11-Demografischen-Wandel-neu-entdecken-Abb5.png;jsessionid=A25632EFCB2B6A4D5CA0D150797248A4.intranet231?\\_\\_blob=normal&v=3](https://www.bib.bund.de/DE/Presse/Konferenzen/Bilder/2022-07-11-Demografischen-Wandel-neu-entdecken-Abb5.png;jsessionid=A25632EFCB2B6A4D5CA0D150797248A4.intranet231?__blob=normal&v=3)

# Outline

1. White Spheres – What could that be?
  1. Approaches to Whiteness
  2. Spheres and Spaces
  3. Doing Whiteness
2. Ludology und Geography
  1. Board Games as Relational Spaces
  2. Game and Gamers Relations
3. Characteristics of Euro Games
4. Explorer Adventures
  1. Narratives in Colonial Settings
  2. Irritations in the Field of Board Games
5. Conclusion

# 1. White Spheres

WHAT COULD THAT BE?

# 1.1 Approaches to Whiteness

# Transatlantic Transfer of Anti-Racism Concepts

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- ❖ White people hardly think of possessing a racial identity. (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006)
- ❖ Whiteness as a social construct of being considered white of European decent
- ❖ Defines and justifies systems of oppression and exclusion
- ❖ Inscribed in habitus
- ❖ In 'Germany, increased use of US-American concepts of "People of Color", "BIPoC", "Whiteness", "White Privilege", "Becoming Ally"

## 1.2 Spheres and Spaces

# Living in a Bubble

- ❖ Spatial expression of social exclusion: glass ceilings, living in bubbles (Butler 2011, Fechter 2011)
  - ❖ Being with people of your own
  - ❖ Producing and negotiating boundaries
- ❖ Phenomenology of Whiteness (Ahmed 2006)
  - ❖ Race as a social orientation of bodies
  - ❖ Spaces with high social motility
  - ❖ Familiarity with social processes (Schütz and Luckman 1974)
  - ❖ Motility can be irritated

Butler, Tim (2003): Living in the Bubble. Gentrification and its 'Others' in North London. In: *Urban Studies* 40 (12), S. 2469–2486.

Fechter, Meike (2011): Living in a Bubble: Expatriates's Transnational Spaces. In: Vered Amit (Hg.): *Going first class? New approaches to privileged travel and movement*. New York: Berghahn Books, S. 33–51.

Ahmed, Sara (2007): A phenomenology of whiteness. In: *Feminist Theory* 8 (2), S. 149–168.

Schütz, Alfred; Luckmann, Thomas (1974): *The Structures of the Life-World*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.

## 1.3 Doing Whiteness

# Making Whiteness

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- ❖ Production of white spheres through practices, regulations and cultural values (Hale 1999)
- ❖ Normativizing force

# Becoming *White*

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- ❖ Assimilation process of immigrant communities
- ❖ Ascribing whiteness to non-white communities
- ❖ Concept of communities to put homogeneity, shared understanding and a sense of belonging into mind of main stream society
- ❖ Enlightens perspectives of white thinking (Thuram 2022)

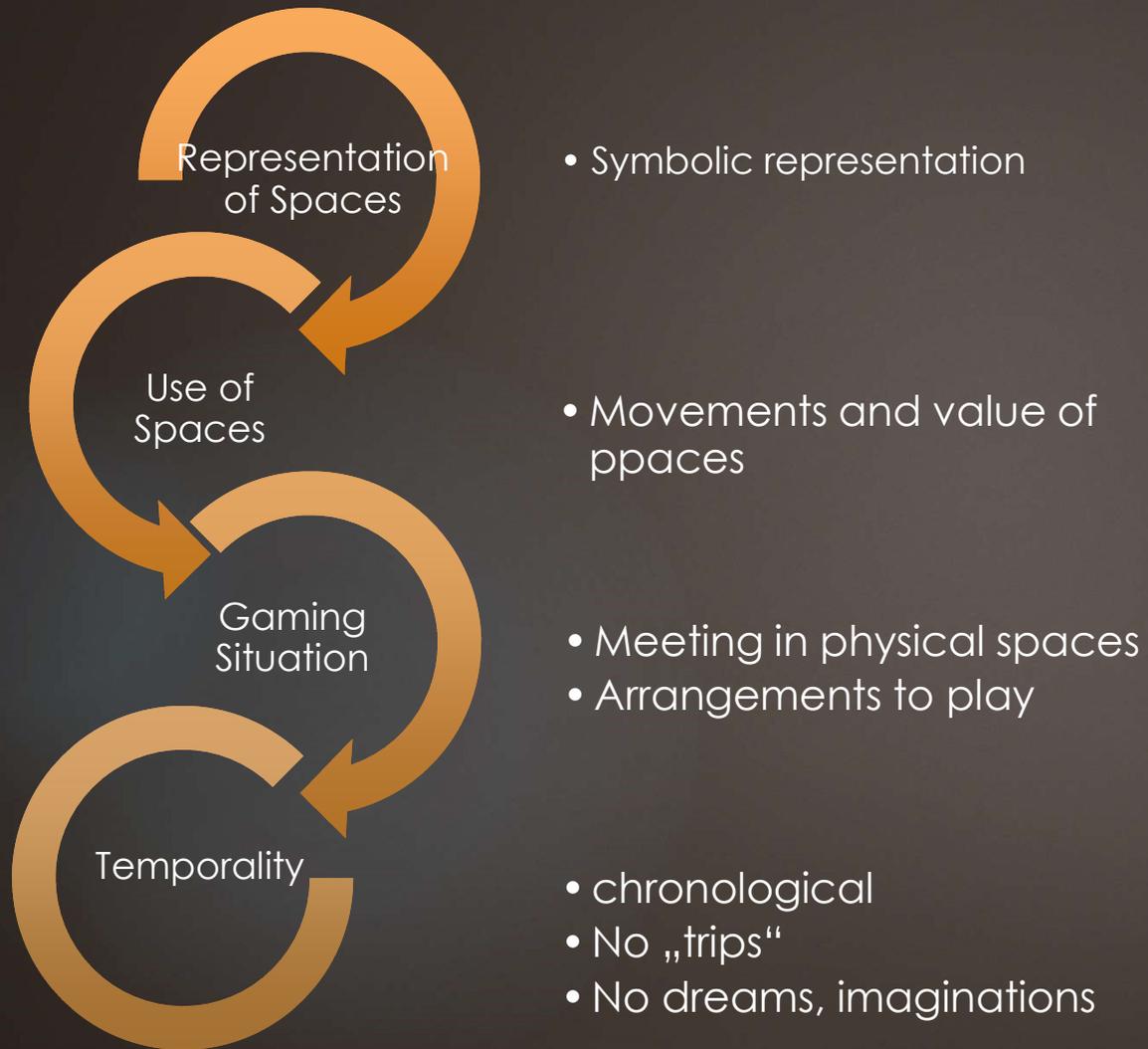
# Walking in *White Spheres*

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- ❖ White Spheres are produced (making)
- ❖ Sense of whiteness is ascribed to people in that sphere
- ❖ Further analysis necessary

## 2. Ludology and Geography

## 2.1 Board Games as Relational Spaces

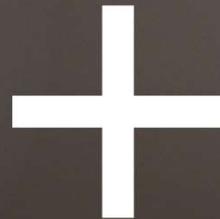




Figuren

Internet  
presenceGeographical placement  
und temporal relationsGame  
mechanics

## Narratives in Board Games



... and more



Rules

## 2.2 Game and Gamers Relations

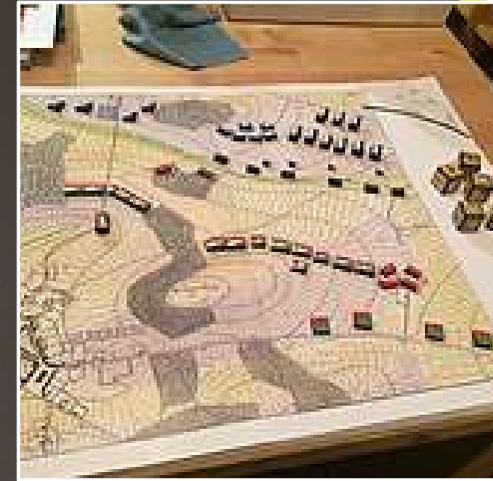
# “Identity Tourism“

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- ❖ Identification of the players with a character
  - ❖ Central focus on personal agency
  - ❖ Forms the access point to the world of the game
  - ❖ Requires emotional connection between the role and the player
- ❖ Characters have goals and strategies
  - ❖ Strategies of the player reflect strategies of the characters
  - ❖ Character traits are desirable, aspirational, appealing
- ❖ Are visually represented and physically marked in the game

### 3. Characteristics of Euro Games

- ❖ Prussian war games
  - ❖ Goal: Learning strategical thinking and conduct of war
- ❖ Post-war: “Germany’s tabletop exceptionalism” (Donovan 2018:275)
  - ❖ Learning while playing
  - ❖ Togetherness and wholesomeness
  - ❖ Censorship on war-related games
- ❖ Since 1978 “Spiel des Jahres”
- ❖ “Spiel”-convention largest in the world



# Settlers of Catan at "Spiel" in Essen, 2015

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[https://www.catan.de/sites/default/files/2021-05/Catan\\_Big\\_Game\\_Spiel\\_2015\\_1\\_big.jpg](https://www.catan.de/sites/default/files/2021-05/Catan_Big_Game_Spiel_2015_1_big.jpg)

# Characteristics of German Games

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- ❖ “German Game” was used in the US (1980s)
- ❖ Strategical Games:
  - ❖ Limited rounds
  - ❖ Focus on gamer’s decision rather than fate
  - ❖ No players’ elimination
  - ❖ Players’ interaction, rather than competition
  - ❖ Multiple strategies possible, planning of following rounds.
- ❖ German Game authors, game designers and publishers

# Gamer-Stereotypes

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## Nerd Culture

- ❖ Playing men seem to be “odd”
- ❖ Male dominated field (authors, reviewers, gamers, designers etc.)
- ❖ Female board gamer: “It is tricky to be in a field that is associated with nerds” (field note may 2022)
- ❖ People with high cultural background and with middle-class backgrounds (White breads)

## 4. Explorer Adventures in Euro Games

- ❖ Best-sellers at the market
- ❖ Award winners
- ❖ Numerous reviews about high complexity of game mechanics
- ❖ Exceedingly positive reviews at [Boardgamesgeek.com](http://Boardgamesgeek.com)

## 4.1 Narratives in the Board Games

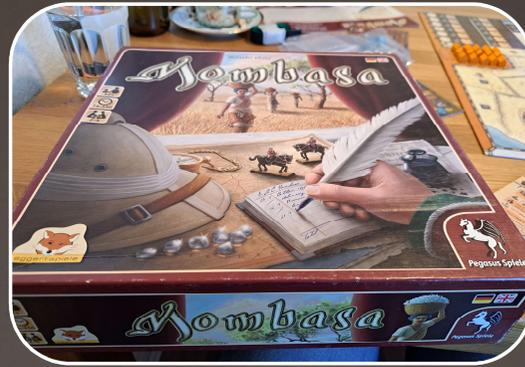
# The Narratives “Explorer Adventures”

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- ▶ Genre: explorer adventures in “empty spaces”
- ▶ Perspectives:
  - ▶ European traders, representatives of the royal elite, high social position, masculine, white privilege
  - ▶ Missing representation of local populations
- ▶ Temporality:
  - ▶ Beginning of colonialism

# The Narrative in “Mombasa”

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## Game and History

In *Mombasa*, players acquire shares of chartered companies based in Mombasa, Cape Town, Saint-Louis and Cairo and spread their trading posts throughout the African continent in order to earn the most money.

Chartered companies were associations formed for the purpose of exploration, trade and colonization, which links them inextricably to a very dark chapter in human history: global colonialism. This period lasted roughly from the 15th century to the middle of the 20th century and is associated with exploitation and slavery.

Although *Mombasa* is loosely set within this time frame, it is not a historical simulation. It is a strategy game with an economic focus that roughly refers to historical categories and places them in a fictional setting. The exploitation of the African continent and its people is not explicitly depicted within the game play.

If you want to learn more about the underlying history, we recommend the following read:

*History of Modern Africa: 1800 to the Present* by Richard J. Reid. (Blackwell Concise History of the Modern World). Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.

# Euro Centrism in “Santa Maria”

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Monks in tepees



Imagination of a “spanish” city



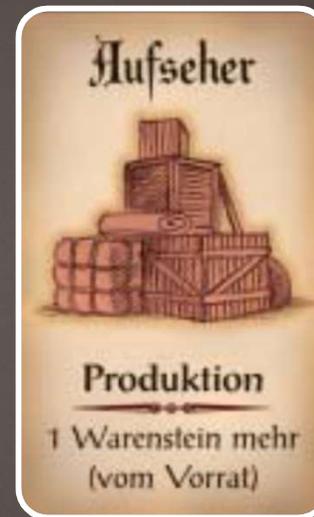
Goal: “Happy colonists”

Sedelmeier, Timo; Baum, Linda (2022): The Controversy About Colonialism in Board Games— Illustrated by the Example of Santa Maria. In: Dennis Edler, Olaf Kühne und Corinna Jenal (Hg.): The Social Construction of Landscapes in Games. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH (RaumFragen: Stadt - Region - Landschaft Ser), S. 91–107.

# Power Relations in “Puerto Rico”

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- ❖ Colonists (masculine) with power over social entities (workers, army, etc.)
- ❖ “workers” at plantations, controlled by “head-workman”, recruited in a recruitment center work at plantations or plants



## 4.2 Irritations in the Board Game Community

# Discussions in Forums

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Mombasa: Alexander Pfister (Autor)

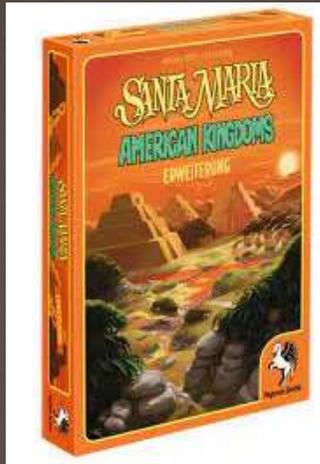
„Nein, die Länder werden definitiv nicht geplündert, sondern es werden Handelsposten errichtet. Das bestimme ich so als Autor :-) [...] Aber ich werde Sie wohl nicht davon überzeugen können, deshalb bringt die Diskussion nichts und ich will das einfach mal so stehen lassen.“

## 4.3 Consequences



## Mombasa

Now: Sky Mines (2022)



## Santa Maria

Expansions „American Kingdoms“



## Puerto Rico

3rd edition with less references

## 4. Conclusion

# Conclusion

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- ❖ Board games contribute to making whiteness spheres
- ❖ Processes of „becoming“ have to be analyzed more in detail, but is not bound to board games communities.
- ❖ Walking in white spheres: Discussion on games demonstrate handling of complaints about accusations of racism. □ Phenomenon of a bubble.
- ❖ Decolonializing the „Nerd“?

Thank you very much!

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