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Cover illustration: *Don Gravity* (2011) by Nightspade Studio, Bandung, Indonesia; Game Screenshot.

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

Amsterdam
University
Press

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Abstract

Transnational Play makes a case for approaching gameplay as a global industry and set of practices that also includes diverse participation from players and developers located within the global South, in nations outside of the First World. Such participation includes gameplay in cafés, games for regional and global causes like environmentalism, piracy and cheats, localization, urban playful art in Latin America, and the development of culturally unique mobile games. This book offers a reorientation of perspective on global play, while still acknowledging geographically distributed socioeconomic, racial, gender, and other inequities. Over the course of the inquiry, which includes a chapter dedicated to the cartography of the mobile augmented reality game Pokémon Go, I develop a theoretical line of argument critically informed by gender studies and intersectionality, post-colonialism, geopolitics, and game studies. This book looks at who develops, localizes, and consumes games, problematizing play as a diverse and contested transnational domain.

Keywords: globalized games, participatory gaming, post-colonialism, mobile games, global South, urban studies

Digital games are attracting new players. Yves Guillemot, French CEO of game publisher Ubisoft, told GamesBeat in an interview: 'It's a very interesting time for the industry, because the mobile is bringing in more and more casual people; Facebook brought new people too by using a new system to monetize' (Takahashi). Danish game researcher Jasper Juul, somewhat dramatically, dubbed this shift in player demographic: 'the casual revolution' (1). No longer the exclusive realm of a Personal Computer hardcore demographic of teenage boys versed in militant teamwork and digital combat, grandmothers, younger women, users of mobile phones and Facebook of any gender, are playing these shorter, more interruptible, and cartoonish games. Players navigate the uncertain outdoor terrain of augmented reality games

with their smartphones, collecting cartoon pocket monsters in parks and public plazas and deploying their creatures in digital turf wars. Although seldom included in North American, European, or Japanese studies, these trainers of Pokémon, overseers of digital farms on Facebook, virtual city builders, and argonauts of addictive puzzle challenges, are also located in the 'global South', in Latin America, in Africa, and in Southeast Asia.[1]

We are only recently beginning to account for games and gameplay as global industries and practices in recent digital game scholarship. For instance, the anthology *Video Games Around the World* consists of brief yet informative historical contributions on game development from authors originating from thirty-nine distinct nations. The editor of the anthology, Canadian game researcher Mark J.P. Wolf writes, 'Small video game companies are appearing all around the world, each hoping for a hit that will bring it international attention and fame, both of which can grow faster due to the Internet' (1). And in *Cultural Code: Videogames and Latin America*, North American scholar of Latin American gaming, Philip Penix-Tadsen writes 'Videogames are being converted into cultural currency for an ever-increasing array of purposes throughout Latin America and the globe' (26).

To a certain extent, a transnational account had already been formulated in the 1980s of the forces that helped establish a global game industry headquartered primarily in the United States and Japan, developments usually framed as a series of both tensions and collaboration along a geopolitical axis of East vs. West, as I will discuss in 'Chapter One: Tilting the Axis of Global Play from East/West to South/North'. Otherwise in most analysis of games, researchers tend to assume a North American and occasionally European or Japanese public, a 'Northern' audience of industry specialists, academics, and players. Especially players outside the First World, in both so-called emerging economies, and in poorer nations from the global South, have remained largely invisible to digital game studies.

One reason for the absence of diverse global players from otherwise thorough accounts such as Steven Kent's *The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokémon—The Story Behind the Craze That Touched Our Lives and Changed the World*, and Aphra Kerr's *The Business and Culture of Digital Games: Gamework and Gameplay,* seems to be that only recently

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1   I refer to the global South, despite important differences between regions and nations, as a unity which has in common such factors as a post-colonial legacy of global economic disadvantage, undeveloped infrastructures including limited access to the Internet, and a large portion of the population struggling with poverty and precarious living conditions.

have players or game 'users' come to carry comparable weight with the industry in reckonings of digital gaming. Even game scholarship written from a more critical, post-Marxist perspective on the business of 'global capitalism and video games', such as Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter's *Games of Empire*, has been largely dismissive of games as a global medium. The authors write: 'Most of the sales of this supposedly global media are in North America, Europe, and Japan, with the United States still the largest single market. Game culture is thus heavily concentrated in the developed, rich zones of advanced capitalism'(xvii). In their analysis, only players who live in the global North and legitimately purchase games count as participants of 'game culture'.[2]

Such a perspective presumes that due to widespread global poverty across the digital divide, the existence of Second and Third World developers and players is purely wishful thinking. For instance, while criticizing the application of Marshall McLuhan's concept of the global village to gaming, the authors of *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture and Marketing* write, 'It [the global village] skips over the divisions in wealth that separate young North American owners of PlayStation 2s and Xboxes, commanding what were once military levels of computing power from their homes, from the majority of the world's children who can never afford such gadgets' (Kline, Witheford, de Peuter 36). This well-intentioned critique of the hyperbole of the global village casts the entirety of the global South's children outside of North America in a sadly passive, gadget-less light. The authors are probably unaware that in many parts of Latin America and Southeast Asia, and increasingly in Africa, game consoles which do not necessarily require Internet access, are a relatively accessible form of digital gameplay. Even if unable to afford their own console, players can go to a neighborhood game and Internet café to play what are often pirated console and computer games. Addressing this blind spot regarding gaming in the global South, Penix-Tadsen criticizes the lack of scholarship across a too rigidly defined 'digital divide': 'Too frequently, we simply accept outdated characterizations of the global south as a massive technological backwater, strictly on the downside of the "digital divide" between hi-tech haves and have-nots, when the reality of technological acquisition and usage in Latin America tells a more nuanced tale' (44). Looking more carefully at the practices of the world's less privileged players is key for accounting for

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2   Dyer-Witheford and de Peuters premise in this book is that games are a 'paradigmatic media of Empire' composed of 'two pillars' of the 'military and market' evident in once popular American and European mainstream games like America's Army and Second Life.

1. Game café, Mumbai, India, by Cory Doctorow, ShareAlike 2, Creative Commons, 2008; Digital Photograph.

gaming culture's general, transnational tendencies, and well as cultivating awareness of unique, local practices.

In addition to renting play time at public game cafés, players overcome the infrastructural challenges of the global South with the more recently, accessible mobile phone platform. Even when lacking basic services like water and electricity in the home, both older and younger gamers are spending more hours playing casual games on their phones. North American game researcher Adrienne Shaw's fieldwork on gaming in India indicated that the increased accessibility of mobile phones led most of the industry representatives she interviewed 'to focus on developing mobile and social networking games accessible on phones' (188).[3] The first step toward ending an unwitting blindness toward the gameplay of the global South is a matter of knowing where to look, such as in small video game arcades and in Internet cafés, on consoles like Wii, Xbox, and PlayStation, for which pirated game copies can be purchased from mobile street vendors, and more recently on mobile phones, both older and newer ones. These localities and platforms for gameplay contrast with the home computers with high-speed Internet, or the latest smart phones and tablets, that are a staple of gameplay in more affluent nations.

3   The technical industry is also starting to take note of up and coming mobile users in the global South. For instance, Melinda Klayman, a User Experience designer based in Google's London offices, is conducting research on Indian women's usage of mobile phones, a population she refers to as India's 'Next Billion Users'.

Meanwhile, starting a few decades earlier, a neighboring field of media studies had taken note of game players in the global South. Information Communication Technology (I.C.T.) studies concerned with regional development and modernization have been some of the first research to observe digital gaming practices outside the First World. For instance, in the article 'Computer Games in the Developing World: The Value of Non-Instrumental Engagement with ICTs, or Taking Play Seriously,' Beth E. Kolko and Cynthia Putnam write of Central Asia: 'When schools are not wired and home access rates are low, game cafés are likely places for people's "first touch" with computers' (5). One shortcoming of such media literacy studies from a game researcher's perspective, is that they seldom directly analyze gaming culture, assuming that games merely serve as an entertaining entry point towards overall media literacy.

What can we learn from player practices in the global South? Must we assume that there is little to learn, that digital game developments flow only from one source outwards, exported from 'First World' industries situated in the technologically upscale North to the rest of the globe? Is gameplay in the global South therefore always a few steps behind digital game trends already surpassed in Internet wired, soon to be even faster 5G Northern nations like the United States and Canada, where for instance games are no longer played in venues like arcades and Internet cafés? On the contrary, I will make the case in this book that global game researchers would do well to query modernist assumptions about the First World, or what I refer to as the global North, inevitably steering progress and innovation in technical and digital fields such as gaming. In addition to following alternative paths to 'modernization', for instance bypassing home computers and adopting wide-spread mobile phone usage, the global South is taking the lead in other areas of game industry and ludic cultural development.

For example, for a game to be deserving of attention, it need not take the form of a three-dimensional photo-realistic world crafted through Triple A streamlined production processes that requires extensive, Hollywood-scale game production, including teams of modelers, animators, level designers, and artificial intelligence programmers. Elegant design and innovative playability can also be observed in the games of smaller, emerging developers in the global South who are especially active makers of short, casual mobile games with relatively simple, 2-Dimensional cartoon graphics. While independent developers in the North gather and demo their games at industry conventions like the annual Game Developer Conventions in California and Europe, and at the Indiecade Awards in Los Angeles and Boston, some international developers, like Vietnamese Dong Nguyen, the

2. *Unblock Me* (2009) by Kira Games; Game Screenshot.

designer of *Flappy Birds*, distribute their games through mobile phone online marketplaces like Apple's 'App Store' and Android's 'Play Store'.

Developers like Kira-games in Northern Thailand incorporate local cultural influences into their mobile game design, such as the traditional wooden puzzles that are converted into digital puzzles in the globally popular *Unblock Me*. Osja Studio paint Kmeer heritage temples and mythology across the mobile levels of *Asva the Monkey*, combining Cambodian cultural inspirations with puzzle game conventions. Indonesian developers like Elven Games populate their games with characters and settings drawn from both mythological and contemporary Indonesian sources. A broadened cultural palette for game design inspiration, more immediate online distribution channels, the accessible mobile platform, and also the smaller-scaled development cycles for these independent games, are some of the conditions favorable to game development outside the global North.

While casual games are becoming more international, in terms of their development and especially in their consumption, larger Triple A game studios are still headquartered well within the global North, in California and Texas, in Canada, the U.K, Europe, and in Asia in South Korea and Japan. Yet even Triple A games, although costly and perhaps only made in English, Korean, or Japanese, are also played in the global South. Cottage industries of unsanctioned localizers and pirates do the translation and localization work that Northern publishers leave undone for many international players. And in some nations like Vietnam and Thailand, above-the-board localization outfits legally translate and customize games from the United States, Japan, South Korea, and increasingly from China. A transnational

approach to game analysis accounts for such international, cross-border movements of game culture, what I have elsewhere referred to as 'play material' (Schleiner, *Player's Power to Change the Game* 51). If not only the industry but also players matter, as potential consumers with buying power, as untapped markets, or as co-producers, as localizers, and even as illegal pirate participants of gaming, digital game scholarship would benefit from acknowledging players from the greater population of the globe, not only those located in the world's most affluent nations.

Innovative, environmentally and socially conscious, playful work in the global South has also been imagined and prototyped outside of the game industry, for instance by artists active in the field of Latin American public art. My Fourth Chapter, 'Ludic Recycling in Latin American Art' is based on interviews with Latin American artists who have been exemplary in their ludic practice over the last few decades. Crafted with reused material and old electronics, their artworks include Cambalache Collective's toy-like, mobile hand carts pushed through marginal neighborhoods of Bogota, Arcangel Constantini's interactive artworks repurposed from hacked game consoles in Mexico City, and Rene C. Hayashi's playgrounds constructed of recycled material for children living in peripheral shanty towns in Buenos Aires. These are deliberately low-technology, but innovatively conceptualized, often urban, metropolitan approaches to playful art. Such socially and environmentally engaged work from Latin America offers an instructive counter-example to the wasteful, rapid cycles of obsolesce within the mainstream digital game industry, which relies on consumers frequently updating and discarding their digital hardware of computers, and also now phones. And as income disparity and job precarity rise even within the global North, there are lessons to be learned from the socially engaged ludic practice of artists who have been working creatively, ecologically, and playfully with less privileged publics from within their own cities and regions.

Recognizing multiple approaches to modernization, and accounting for innovation that emerges from the global South, including social and environmental innovation, that is either applicable elsewhere in the global South, or also is instructive for the global North, are arguments for discarding the implicit ranked elitism of the First, Second, and Third World tiers for differentiating global economic zones and conditions, while still acknowledging differing, inequitable conditions and challenges. Rather than strict adherence to the geographic boundaries of the Northern and Southern hemispheres, the opposition South vs. North is shaped by a view of economic world history that recognizes a global power imbalance since colonial powers laid claim to territories most of which have since become

3. *Paisajes Errantes* or Itinerant Landscapes in Managua, Nicaragua (2013), by Rene C. Hayashi in collaboration with Moisés Mora and Claudia Morales; Photograph.

'Second and Third World' nations. How game scholars and media researchers frame developments in a rapidly changing global industry influences where they see development. Geographic 'de-centering' work, undoing the cultural imperialism wrought by past and present 'empires' of the global North, from former European colonial powers, to later military and economic heavy-weights like the United States, is an ongoing process (Liboriussen and Martin).

Post-colonial scholars and transnational feminists have critiqued the lack of agency ascribed to inhabitants of the Third World by First World scholars and researchers, for example, a tendency among 'white feminists' to portray Third World women as powerless 'socio-economic victims' who lack the ability to make choices in their lives (Mohanty 23). As the humanities scholar Gayateri Spivak famously posed the question from a philosophical angle, in response to the work initiated by the historians of the Indian Subaltern Group, can the 'subaltern' speak for themselves (83)? Or should the more privileged attempt to speak for those they deem voiceless and lacking in agency, which could in this book be construed as a Northern academic writing of the concerns of game players outside the global North? I will grapple with these speaking agency issues in relation to other Northern 'speakers' over the course of this book, when I discuss Northern industry analysts who patronizingly counsel Southern nations to do more to combat game piracy, in the interest of protecting their own Northern Intellectual

Property, or when Northern Games for Change designers whom I discuss in Chapter Six, either characterize the inhabitants of the global South as powerless victims, or alternately invest them with superpowers.

I will pause for a self-reflexive moment to locate myself within the global South vs. North framework animating this analysis. I am a white, Northern (United States and European) educated media artist, game scholar, and designer. My early life experiences in California and ethnic privilege have shaped my views. But I also conducted much of this research later as an adult when I was living abroad in Latin America and Southeast Asia for over a decade. The experience of having inhabited both international academic game studies and public activist art circles, in diverse national and linguistic regions, is useful for bridge building across disciplines and regions. For instance, while exhibiting as an artist and teaching game design in Mexico, I learned of ludic art that is inspirational and lauded within a vibrant, urban public art scene in Latin America and internationally, but also could contribute more to fields such as game studies, urban geography, and environmental studies. And later while living in Southeast Asia, I encountered culturally inspired approaches to independent game development that could in turn serve as models for game making elsewhere in the global South.

In addition to being informed from my own experiences within the global South, my research method attempts to mitigate my Northern bias when I build my arguments based on listening to and citing what Southern players, developers, and artists have said in live conversations, digital forums, interviews. Although my analysis is in this sense empirically influenced, also including ethnographic fieldwork and a play tour at the border of the United States and Mexico, as a writer I am not without my own agenda. My argumentation and theoretical optics in this book are drawn from post-colonialism, critiques of First World hegemony captured in the opposition of global South vs. North, post-Marxist critiques of neoliberal globalization, game scholarship and ludology, feminism, and gender studies. My past exploration of activist, artist, and augmented reality games in my first book, *The Player's Power to Change the Game,* although differing in approach and informed primarily by political philosophy and media art activism, can be read as a prequel to this newer book. For instance in Chapters Three and Five of *Transnational Play*, I continue to explore questions of player power in Augmented Reality Games and Games for Change. In this book, I am more interested in the transnational implications of these rapidly evolving play genres (Schleiner 61).

Like casual games intended for 'casual' entertainment, more serious Games for Change and educational games also lend themselves to production

4. *Cucarachilandia or Cockroachville* (2011), a party-organizing math game by Caldera Estudio; Game Screenshot.

in smaller-scaled, independent studios, a relatively accessible means of game production for global designers located outside the global North. For example, Mexican game designers Yvonne Davalos Dunnig and Elisa Navarro Chinchilla's math learning game, *Cucarachilandia*, is based on the premise of the cockroaches trying to organize a party. *Cucarachilandia* has won national prizes and is played by schoolchildren in Mexico, but is relatively unknown outside Mexico. Their Mexico City based studio has produced and designed a number of such educational games and more recently produces 'rallies', referring to gamified learning competitions that incorporate mobile, augmented reality features. And a small Indonesian studio, Nightspade, raises awareness about the threatened status of local Indonesian lizards in their game for children, *Komodo Island: Newborn Wonders*. An increasing number of serious games are made for such educational and awareness raising, environmental and social causes around the globe, applying play to challenges and concerns beyond pure entertainment.

Despite such altruistic intentions, in the process of appealing for aid from affluent Northern players, some serious games designed in the North, especially those aiming to garner donations for non-governmental organizations and non-profits, disseminate patronizing and prejudicial 'white savior' perspectives on the sufferers of crisis'. As Dutch game researcher Joost Raessens and co-authors write critically of *Food Force*, a charity game on Facebook where the player is deployed as a United Nations unit, 'Such games are built on the metaphor of the West as the helping parent, on the premise that emergencies, conflicts, or local wars, all originate from within

while the conflict can only be defined or solved by external forces' ('Homo Ludens 2.0' 10). A game that relies on heroic foreigners to resolve what are characterized as local problems, reinforce stereotypes of incompetency and a lack of agency among the inhabitants of the global South.

On the other hand, the design of such Games for Change can also be overbalanced towards the locals' side in the attribution of agency. In Chapter Six, 'The Absence of the Oppressor' I discuss *Evoke*, a game designed to spur entrepreneurial solutions to problems in Africa like 'water scarcity' and 'food insecurity'. Similar in orientation to self-help problem-solving literature and workshops, the game attempts to motivate and empower local players to resolve 'their' problems on their own. The prolific Californian game designer of *Evoke*, Jane McGonigal, once ambitiously proposed that gamers could 'solve world hunger' in an online Ted video lecture. McGonigal's occasional Californian collaborator Ken Eklund, with similar aspirations for the transformative, altruistic potential of gaming, predicted that 'it's entirely possible that a serious alternate reality game is going to be one of those revolutionary moments' (Cook). Gamifying the world's crises as problems for players to 'solve' is in line with a turn toward social engineering and life improvement gaming, from alternative reality games about energy usage, to citizen-science hack-a-thons that explore data sets on air pollution, discussed in such venues as the Playful Citizen symposium at Utrecht University in the Netherlands in 2012.

These matches between behavioral modification, technical design, and worthy global causes are both inspirational and at times well-implemented and effective. For instance, in 2007, several years before governments and scientists openly started attempting to address carbon emissions and global climate change in agreements such as the 2016 Paris accord, Eklund, together with McGonigal, designed the forward-thinking *World Without Oil*, a crowd-sourced game which invited players around the globe to speculate on ways to improve on their energy consumption habits. The international players of *World Without Oil* noted direct improvements of their everyday energy consumption habits after participating in the game. Positive change in such a game occurs through modification of the player's own behavior. But such gamification must also be thought through, especially when games are problematized in the global South or target Southern player-publics, the populations who are most predicted to be most severely affected by climate change, militant conflicts, and continuing economic disparities between North and South (Fourth National Climate Assessment). How should designers attribute the root causes of problems when they gamify—as primarily local or global? Who acts with agency and who is cast as the victim of a crisis?

A decade before the emergence of motivational, life betterment, and wellness gamification, a more 'negative', oppositional Games for Change approach was theorized by a designer from the global South. In Chapter Six, I review Uruguayan game researcher and designer Gonzalo Frasca's proposal for 'the Videogames of the Oppressed', for resistant games that simulate and practice resistance, including against oppression at a smaller, family unit scale, such as a gay child coming out against homophobic parents. As I discuss further in that chapter, Frasca's model of Games for Change is directly indebted to other Latin American, resistant and counter-hegemonic, Marxist cultural and pedagogic work. These more oppositional, political approaches may again be a promising angle to explore for some applications of Games for Change, at times a better choice than motivational self-transformation, among other tactical approaches. Singaporean game designer Shao Han Tan adopts a similar critical approach to problem-solving via games, as I will discuss further in Chapter Seven's tour of gaming in Southeast Asia, in game mastered, table-top scenarios, such as a game where players rehearse standing up to an exploitive boss. As Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe proposes, 'it is only when division and antagonism are recognized as being ineradicable that it is possible to think in a properly political way' (15).[4] One possible avenue for playful change is through critical opposition.

At times this book is about outright tensions between South and North. Players in the global South are implementing creative tactics for overcoming economic and infrastructural obstacles to game literacy that are not always Northern sanctioned. For example, Vietnamese players of *Pokémon Go* intentionally falsely tagged densely urban neighborhoods of Ho Chi Min City on Google Maps as recreational park zones so that the game would generate more game characters in a Southeast Asian city with relatively few parks ('Vietnam's Pokémon Go Players Get Yellow Card'). And refusing to wait for the official release of the game in their nation, Malaysian *Pokémon Go* players figured out how to play an unofficial version of the game with localized characters with names like NasiLemakBungus and Maggi Goreng, influenced by regionally popular rice and noodle dishes (Lim).

Player-driven game labor, including cheats, piracy, game translations, customizations, and external-to-the game maps, turn the tables on who has a hand at shaping and experiencing digital game culture worldwide. Rather than dismissing such actions as merely the work of thieving pirates

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4   In her later work, Chantal Mouffe distinguishes between agonistics and antagonism, arguing that when tension is openly acknowledged and addressed (agonistics) this can mitigate the eruption of agonistics into antagonism, or violent conflict.

and uninvited cheaters, in 'Chapter Two: Game Cafés and Piracy as Platforms for Ludoliteracy', I will argue that such activities can also be understood as beneficial innovations in ludoliteracy or 'gaming competence' (Raessens et al. 15). Global players devise such participatory tactics for keeping apace with digital gaming idioms and also for crafting new, culturally meaningful gaming experiences, such as the social bond that forms between a local game pirate who responds to special requests from customers in the Philippines.

Although piracy has been a conduit to experiencing digital gaming in the global South for over a few decades, more recently accessible platforms like the mobile phone are more openly and legally exposing diverse populations to casual games like *Angry Birds* and *Candy Crush*. How empowering is this alleged casual game 'revolution' of diverse, transnational player publics? Freemium, or Free-to-play, is a monetization model for initially free games especially popular across Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the broader, global South. Free-to-play games are initially cost-less, and therefore much more accessible for mobile phone owners. But a few days into a game, Free-to-play players often find themselves tempted to purchase add-ons for advancement. And when the publishers of these addictive games are located in the global North, profits flow upwards in a Northern direction, comparable to the gains from other globalized, Northern owned 'addictive' industries, such as the sugared soda and tobacco brands marketed extensively in the global South.

Despite such inequitable vectors of globalization in the game industry, is it fair to portray players as exploited game addicts, only once more gender diverse and culturally diverse global publics are gaming? Meanwhile the Northern 'boy' players of prior, more hardcore game genres were afforded their fun and leisure time pursuits, practices that could also be characterized as addictive vices. This again is a question of agency, of how to frame the choices diverse players around the world make. As I will explore further in Chapter Three, past feminist media studies have already debated similar empowerment issues in relation to 'women's' television viewing genres like the global soap opera industry. Such gender attentive television analysis and research has also focused on girls and women's time management and practices of 'dailiness'. For example, in *Television No Time for Mother*, Elizabeth Nathanson emphasizes female viewership's priority of time management: 'The process of negotiating daily rhythms, patterns and schedules in the postfeminist context requires understanding, coming to terms with and learning to cope with how one spends one's time' (4). Casual games, easy to play in short intervals, hone players' time management skills with ludic multitasking challenges. Gendered entertainment consumption research

of older global media becomes newly relevant when accounting for the rise of transnational, gender-diverse casual game players.

Not only Northern game developers market casual and mobile games for consumption outside of their own nations. Even in nations with their own relatively recent local game development scenes like Indonesia, developers also deliberate which stance to adopt in their games vis-a-vis their own countrypersons and towards the rest of the world. For instance, Indonesian developers like Garuda Games balance making culturally specific game titles primarily targeted at their own populations, while also releasing more generic so-called bread and butter 'international style' games like the mobile game *Hot Dog Frenzy* aimed at a global market. Developers in Thailand and in Vietnam question whether it is appropriate to continue to import and translate American and Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese role-playing games, or whether to make more original games drawn from the cultural fabric and values of their own national players. In Chapter Seven, I conduct a tour of the Southeast Asian region's mobile, tablet, and role-playing game studios, contrasting differing market orientations and development paths among neighboring nations.

When casual mobile games incorporate local settings and geographic data into game mechanics, cultural and socioeconomic context directly shape the experience of play. Since the initial flash popularity of *Pokémon Go* in 2016, the free-to-play mobile game has attracted a steady stream of international players to this North American mobile, augmented iteration of a popular, Japanese game franchise. Transnational players of *Pokémon Go* have developed various tactics for coping with the game's environmental challenges. Dutch media researcher Sybille Lammes likens the players of such 'location-based games' to 'navigators at sea', 'always aware of the perilous and shifting connections between map and territory' ('The Map as Playground' 7). Whose bodies move through these augmented play terrains? Are augmented reality games played in public spaces safe for girls and women, for LGBQT players, for players of diverse ethnicities? How do players in poorer nations afford high wireless charges? Will small business owners rent Pokestops from the United States developer, Niantic, to attract more customers, or will only the big Northern franchises like McDonalds Japan and the United States coffee shop chain Starbucks, who have already benefited from formal alliances with *Pokémon Go's* United States developer Niantic, be able to afford to optimize this ludic real estate?

Augmented reality games elicit such geopolitical questions, even if they were initially only intended for fun and games. During the initial release of *Pokémon Go*, state officials in Vietnam allege that the game is a foreign

societal malady, as well as a traffic hazard for motorbike riders ('Vietnam's Pokémon Go Players Get Yellow Card'). And in Russia, legislators speculated that *Pokémon Go* was an American scheme for world domination undertaken by communication giant Google, and later counter the game's foreign influence by releasing *GettoKnowMoscow*, a nationalist, augmented reality game application containing Russian historical characters (Raspopina). The experience of playing such location-based map games shifts when crossing the border of one nation into another, especially when crossing a line from North to South at a border city. In Chapter Five, I discuss fieldwork I conducted when I followed a trail of Pokestops across the U.S./Mexican border and then met up with a Mexican member of 'Pokémon Go Tijuana's Facebook' group. This knowledgeable level 34 player led me on an insightful *Pokémon Go* tour of her tough and beautiful city and its augmented reality playscapes, from the downtown area to the beach.

I preface my discussion of this *Pokémon Go* play tour with a historical, geopolitical inquiry into cartography, empire building, and game mapping, informed by Sybille Lammes' careful mediatic analysis of mapping games, Souvik Mukherjee's post-colonial critique of game territory, and Gloria Anzaldúa's transnational feminist borderland metaphors for 'mestiza consciousness' (Anzaldúa 78). How does a cartographer of game maps, a developer like Niantic, draw up territory in foreign lands? And how are play maps navigated at border cities between nations of unequal means, across borders that anxious, racist Northerners wish to turn into 'walls'? Such questions about digital gaming surface at the tensions between local cultures and foreign entertainment, between regional, national economies, and the far-reaching forces of globalization. It is therefore insufficient to only speak of global gaming in terms of cultural difference and national diversity, as if the world were a level playing field with equal opportunity in each individual nation.

This in my view, is one of the shortcomings of the approach adopted in some recent literature on global gaming to date, such as the anthology *Video Games Around the World*. Although such work importantly foregrounds a multiplicity of diverse national perspectives and local histories, it lacks theorization of global play practices that are shared across national borders, including identification of transnational tactics for resisting and overcoming systemic power imbalance. At issue here, as articulated from a political theory perspective, is that: 'the pluralism of the advocates of new cosmopolitanism is also a case of 'pluralism without antagonism' (Mouffe, *Agonistics* 22). Global discussions of national or cultural plurality that are unaccompanied by critiques of power, in other words analyses that do not

recognize cultural hegemony in cultural sectors such as games, obscure inequity.

On the other hand, some scholars working in international game studies, while eschewing a framework of 'global' or 'transnational' game analysis as operating at a too general and large a scale, rather than focusing on individual nation states, have promoted a regional approach that captures broad, cross-national tendencies of shared cultural and economic zones. For instance, Bjarke Liboriussen and Paul Marten, two European game scholars conducting collaborative research in Asia, write: 'With 'regional' we want to direct attention to local places but also to how places connect with each other and with such higher-order structures'[...] These higher-order structures include the state as well as supra- and trans-national entities such as global markets, trade blocs, ethnolinguistic groups, academic networks and intergovernmental organizations'. These scholars argue that in comparison to post-colonial analysis which assumes 'fixed centers' like Europe, a regional scale better accommodates global shifts in 'power geometry' such as the rising influence of China (Liboriussen and Martin).

Many of my chapters are grounded in more regional focuses within Latin America and Southeast Asia, and I agree that situated game scholarship, whether at a regional scale, or even more narrowly focusing on local game developers, ludic artists, and player's individual perspectives, expressed in interviews and forums, is important ground work. Details and cultural context matter, and when possible I also play the games I analyze, conducting what could be described as 'close playing'.[5] But in this book my selection of the broad scale of the South vs. North opposition is tactical, and intentionally global in scale, with the aim of communicating and deliberating cross-border tactics and strategies for how to actively participate in and contribute to the shape of transnational game culture—across nations, South to South regions, and even continents.[6] In my view, such a transnational stance is not unnecessarily polemical. Whether acknowledged or not, scholarship and research always occupy a position within power.

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5   I was trained to cultivate this intimate familiarity with 'my object', whether a film, novel or in my case games, during my doctoral research at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis.
6   Tactically, my selection of the term transnational is also inspired in orientation by transnational feminism and this international movement's 'diversity in alliance' approach to diverse struggles in women's daily and public life around the world. Rather than subsuming such divergent struggles under one allegedly proper (and often Northern) style of feminist resistance against a universal 'Patriarchy', transnational feminists look at diverse tactics of resistance against varied patriarchies, or the ways that men gain the upper hand through means that are both deliberate and/or systemic in multiple cultures and nations (Mohanty 44).

Rather than advocating one 'proper' path to gameplay and development, I look at a variety of tactical approaches that player and developers have worked out for overcoming obstacles to gaming in the global South. Third World players, as one contributor to a game piracy forum cited in Chapter Two sums it up, sit on less comfortable chairs. Although often facing a number of pressing health and basic economic security issues that more privileged players of the North are less prone to suffer, players in the global South, younger and older, of diverse gender and class, have just as much a right to experience the evolving pleasures and idioms of play, what I in the conclusion refer to as play privilege, as their Northern counterparts—and have already been doing so already whether game scholars and researchers acknowledge them or not.

The risk of sweeping optics like South vs. North at a global or transnational scale is overgeneralization. The standpoint of the researcher in relation to their foreign persons can be inflated by generalities, by essentializing and stereotyping 'the other'. A Southern pirate gamer's illegal, pirated gaming contrasts to the Northern scholar's 'proper' purchasing habits, supporting how a Northern scholar might wish to be perceived, perhaps quite falsely, as belonging to a nation of a law-abiding citizens. For instance, in his ground-breaking post-colonial work, *Orientalism*, Palestinian Edward Said argues that when the Western scholar of Orientalism constructed an essentialized mysterious 'other' through generalities, he ended up confirming an imperial, self-congratulatory view of self as rational and superior—as fit to rule, writing: 'Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand' (7). Said argues that Oriental scholarship is infused with this imperial power dynamic because Westerners were writing of the East from a historical moment and position of 'ascendancy': 'And why should it have been otherwise, especially during the period of extraordinary European ascendancy from the late Renaissance to the present? The scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he could be there, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient's part' (7).

Similarly, after a few decades of ignoring the other side of a firmly imagined 'digital divide', a portion of the recent spike in Northern academic and industry interest in the global South, rather than ensuing from generous hopes for greater diversity, must assuredly be attributed to the newer 'imperial' and Capital impulses of neoliberal globalization, to a mercurial interest in emerging markets, including those located in the global South.

The epi-centers and corporate headquarters of rapidly globalizing industries, including the game industry, are on an 'ascending' arc in the global North. Said's two fears of 'distortion and inaccuracy' that he formulated in critique of Westerners writing of the East, can also be directed at the South/North axis of analysis (8). What after all do South Africa, Brazil, and Indonesia have in common, other than the potential of untapped markets? Vast geographic, linguistic, and cultural distances yawn between such nations, and ethnic, linguistic, and regional differences are rife even within many nation-states.

But diverse alliances can be advantageous. The growing acknowledgment of such a broad and culturally diverse territory as the global South identifies common economic challenges based on similar histories of colonialism and economic exploitation of labor and resources. Resistant tactics and divergent modernization agendas can be strategically shared between distant nations against Northern dominated globalization, building on preexisting resistance movements such as the global liberation movements against colonialism. This oppositional, counter-hegemonic formulation of the global South vs. North, while sometimes surfacing in more regional study of post-colonial nations such as Latin American studies, can also be traced to ongoing international struggles against the lasting effects of colonialism. As Turkish American historian Arif Dirlik writes in *Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism*: 'The global South has its roots in earlier third world visions of liberation, and those visions still have an important role to play in restoring human ends to development' (150).

Economic development itself is therefore openly promoted in such global South discourse, even if approached with an awareness of global inequity, and with increasing attention to environmentalism and sustainability. Some of the 'de-colonialists' who share this more development-friendly stance, maintain that post-colonial scholarship, often focused on cultural spheres, and critical of Capitalism, leaves the unfinished work of de-colonization and nation or region building undone, meaning unfinished economic development (Kumar 1). Meanwhile post-colonial scholars who hail from the Humanities, and who often eschew allegiance with any form of Capitalist development (at least in their scholarship), have been instrumental in formulating a critique of agency that could be applied more often to developmental economic discourse.

Additionally, intersectional gender analysis that applies a kaleidoscopic rubric of gender, class, ethnicity, ableism, and race to cultural analysis, looking at oppression from a variety of overlapping perspectives, is also of relevance for my analysis of the game industry, for instance when portraying how primarily white, male, heterosexual developers from the global North

localize casual games in the global South. As Afro-Surinamese Dutch cultural scholar Gloria Wekker writes of intersectionality, 'Existent categories for identity are strikingly not dealt with in separate or mutually exclusive terms, but are always referred to in relation to one another' (63). A developer or player belongs not to just one category of identity, but can be characterized as a dynamic combo of gender, race, class, and other demarcations. Such an intersectional approach has been applied sophisticatedly to North American games, with attention to the intersectional identity of characters who perform within a game's narrative, rules and play mechanics (Murray, Soraya). But what happens when culture is understood to extend beyond such literary scenarios, beyond the fictional sphere of the game, to the transnational players, developers, and publishers of games? My method in this book not only engages in interpretive analysis of internal game scenarios, but also directs attention outwards to geographies of gender, race, economics, nation, culture, and hemisphere.

To sum up the general layout of the book, the first few chapters belong to a section titled 'Reorienting Player Geographies'. The first chapter launches with a historical review of East vs. West tensions between the United States and Japan, as dramatized in past game studies literature on the evolution of the international game industry. I then reframe these game innovations within a North to South framework. In the second chapter, I review popular platforms and venues for gameplay in the global South like game cafés and mobile phones. I also conduct a digital ethnography of gaming forum posts, looking into how Southern players and game pirates defend their ethics. In the third chapter, I turn my attention to the popularity of casual mobile games in the global South in nations like Brazil, bringing feminist and intersectional critique to bear on an analysis of addictive, initially costless, 'free-to-play' games.

In the second section of the book titled 'Perspectives From South of the Border', when critiquing public ludic art in the fourth chapter, I foreground an ecological, ludic approach to crafting public ludic artworks, an 'aesthetics of ludic recycling' that repeatedly surfaces in interviews with prominent Latin American artists who design playful experiences. In the fifth chapter, after conducting an ethnographic cross-border play tour in the border city of Tijuana at the United States and Mexican border, I analyze the ludic cartography of the globally popular augmented reality game *Pokémon Go*, developing a theoretical line of argument critically informed by postcolonialism, geopolitics, and game studies.

In the last section of the book, 'From Global to Local Game Development', I investigate how Northern game designers imagine transformational life

improvement occurring through 'Games for Change' in continents far from their own such as Africa. Also in this last section, I contrast differing approaches to how developers both localize and globalize the cultural and market orientation of their games, conducting a regional tour of Southeast Asian game studios. This tour is primarily intended to serve as a potential source for South to South, as well as South to North, vectors of game innovation.

Players in the global South are active participants of a rapidly evolving cultural arena. In this book I will attempt to look around and behind games into the power of who makes, localizes, plays and consumes these cultural objects, in so doing problematizing play as a culturally rich, innovative, and contested field of transnational practices.

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