Tobias Winnerling

The Blanking of History? Why Video Games eschew the Changes of 1815

In 1815, a phenomenon of global importance finally ended. The last Manila Galleon sat sail at Acapulco.[1] "The Link That Kept the Philippines Spanish"[2] was broken – although they were to stay with Spain for another 80 years to come – the sun finally began to set upon the remains of the already battered Spanish Empire. An image fitting the decline of an 'old' mode of colonial domination and economic extraction and the rise of a new but hardly any 'better' (if understood in the sense of more humane) system foreshadowed not only by a lonely little fleet in the midst of the Pacific but also by the treaties negotiated to an end in the same year at Vienna.

And as I am speaking of images of the Congress of Vienna and the world-wide changes it either facilitated, hindered or may be taken to symbolize, precisely why these images are largely absent from one of the most powerful imaginative systems of our time – video games – is the question I am about to ponder in the following. In this I will restrict myself largely to the period from 1815 to roughly 1830 with one eye on the developments from the last quarter of the 18th century onwards. I will also focus especially on political and economic structures and developments, for the perhaps almost obvious reason that these have a large tradition in being represented in historical garb in video games, mostly in strategy games and management simulations. And while there are quite a few such titles dedicated to the 18th century,[3] and the Napoleonic Wars,[4] the early 19th century made it into few of them, and the Congress of Vienna as such into, at least to my knowledge, none. Even the title programmatically and thematically most close to it, Frog City Software's 1997 "Imperialism"[5] was mainly played on a fictive globe and started its historical campaigns in 1820 only. Yet a weak connection remained: A Foreign Minister looking very much like the younger Metternich greets the player in random

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[1] Tilman Frasch: Autonomie im Griff des Kolonialismus. Südostasien, in: Michael Mann (ed.): Die Welt im 19. Jahrhundert (Peter Feldbauer/Bernd Hausberger/Jean-Paul Lehners (eds.): Globalgeschichte. Die Welt von 1000–2000, Vol. 8), Wien: Mandelbaum 2009, pp. 155-188; p. 164.

[2] Katherine Bjork: "The Link That Kept the Philippines Spanish". Mexican Merchant Interests and the Manila Trade, 1751-1815, in: Journal of World History, 9, 1/2009, pp. 25-50.

[3] Some major titles (no mods included; no full list!): Age of Empires III (Ensemble Studios/Microsoft) (2005); Anno 1701 (Related Designs/Sunflowers/Koch Media) (2006); Assassin's Creed III (Ubisoft) (2012); Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag (Ubisoft) (2013); East India Company (NitroSoft/Paradox Entertainment) (2009); Empire: Total War (Creative Assembly/Sega) (2009); Sid Meier's Colonization (Microprose) (1994); Sid Meier's Civilization IV: Colonization (2008) (Firaxis/2K Games).

[4] (Cf. FN 3: no full list!) Age of Sail II (Akella/TalonSoft) (2001); Battles of Napoleon (Strategic Simulations, Inc.) (1988); Cossacks II: The Napoleonic Wars (GSC Gameworld/CDV Software) (2005); Fields of Glory (Microprose) (1993); Imperial Glory (Pyro Studios/Robosoft Technologies/Eidos Interactive/Feral Interactive) (2005); Napoleon: Total War (Creative Assembly/Sega) (2010); Waterloo (PSS/SSI/Mirrorsoft) (1989/1990).

[5] Imperialism (Frog City Software/Mindscape) (1997).

map mode (which starts in spring, 1815), saying "Greetings, Your Excellency. As the ruler of a burgeoning empire you enjoy vast powers over political, military, and economic affairs."[6] The relatively recent Paradox titles "Victoria II" (2010), and its predecessor "Victoria: An Empire under the Sun", both took 1836 as the earliest date to begin the game[7], while the same company's "Europa Universalis IV" in turn ended in 1821,[8] as its predecessor "Europa Universalis III"[9] and similar to "Europa Universalis II" that terminated in 1820.[10] While the "Europa Universalis" titles do feature something called "Congress of Vienna", there are players voicing the opinion that even in EU IV this event is not quite "tangible".[11]

The restrictions imposed upon myself will also mean that I will have to focus on a rather unlikely combination as foreshadowed by my initial miniature: the Congress of Vienna on the one hand and the high seas on the other. That the Congress itself was seen by the contemporaries as a truly global phenomenon may perhaps be illustrated by the reaction of the Argentinian revolutionaries to it: when the news of the reunion of the Congress after the 100 days of Napoleon reached Buenos Aires three months after the actual events in February 1815, the public discussion depicted it already as an instrument in orchestrating the counter-revolution.[12] The way this news was carried to South America may be taken as a point towards the importance of naval issues. As I am dealing with a situation before the invention of the telegraph in 1839 all intercontinental communication as well as trade and warfare had necessarily to go by sea. And although maritime issues figured with little prominence in the Congress's treaties,[13] only by taking those into account a wider view may be sustained; and some more hidden similarities may perhaps be revealed in the course of the paper.

In 1815, Europe had been racked by nearly three decades of political turmoil and crisis when the Congress of Vienna attempted to finally settle the issues involved. But as European

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[6] Ibid, Help from your Foreign Minister. Introductory Message.

[7] Victoria: An Empire under the Sun (Paradox Interactive) (2003), Victoria II (Paradox Development Studio/Paradox Interactive) (2010).

[8] Europa Universalis IV (Paradox Development Studio/Paradox Interactive) (2013).

[9] Europa Universalis III (Paradox Development Studio/Paradox Interactive) (2007). In fact, EU III ended originally in 1789 but was continued to 1821 with the expansion Napoleon's Ambition (Paradox Interactive 2007).

[10] Europa Universalis II (Paradox Development Studio/Strategy First/Mac Play/Typhoon Games) (2001).

[11] Tabbel: [Forum Post: 10/11/2013], on: http://steamcommunity.com, URL: http://steamcommunity.com/app/236850/discussions/0/810938082122120295/?l=polish (accessed 08/10/2014). On the same forum page, others users complained about simplified diplomacy in the game (Cf. RainbowSparkle91: [Forum Post: 10/11/2013], Xara [Forum Post: 10/11/2013], both same URL and last access.)

[12] Geneviève Verdo: Los patriotas rioplatenses frente a la Europa de Viena: entre cálculos estratégicos y filosofía de la historia, in: Historia y Política, 19, 1/2008, pp. 75-102; p. 77.

[13] Cf. Heinz Duchhardt: Der Wiener Kongress. Die Neugestaltung Europas 1814/15, München: Beck 2013, p. 78–9, 94–6.

presence was a global phenomenon, so were Europe's problems. The link that kept the Philippines Spanish for instance was, in fact, not in the galleons themselves but in the silver they carried. Silver from the mines of México was shipped to the Philippines so that Chinese merchants would be attracted to bring their goods for barter trade to Manila from where they could be taken back to Acapulco by Mexican merchants only to be sold off to Europe in the end.[14] This influx of American silver may have been a major stimulus for the development of a monetary domestic market economy in Qing China, leading to a prolonged period of internal growth.[15] This was only one part of the global trading system that had been spun around the world by Europeans ever tighter and that from the end of the 18th onwards became increasingly necessary to Europe. So necessary that many of its conductors decidedly embraced the concept of neutrality of commerce in the form of 'free ships, free goods', foremost the US and Netherlands.[16] Yet at least from the American Revolution of 1776 onwards, Europe's colonial systems had also been subject to upheavals, and these upheavals frequently disrupted trade. In 1791 the slaves of Saint-Domingue, today's Haiti, rose against the French, what made the volume of French transatlantic trade decline abruptly, down to 36% of pre-revolutionary volume in 1797.[17] Such political crises spread through the channels provided by trade and affected other territories. In 1793 Cartagena was confronted with the events in North America and France, and moreover those in Saint-Domingue, for there were revolutionary pamphlets and people trafficking through all of the Americas; a free people of colour-conspiracy for a catholic, egalitarian republic developed.[18] The British authorities had to fight rebellious or runaway slaves and blacks on the Caribbean islands of St. Vincent in 1795, Grenada from 1795 to 1797, Jamaica from 1795 to 1796, St. Lucia from 1796 to 1797, and Dominica in 1802.[19] But these impacts of events were in themselves interconnected and no one-way roads: the end of slavery in one place might provide the basis for its growth in another.

> "The impact of the Haitian Revolution hastened and accentuated a process of
> differentiation within the Atlantic world, dividing it more neatly into slave and non-slave
> zones. It helped to weaken slavery in areas where it was already weak, vulnerable or

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[14] Cf. Bjork: "The Link That Kept the Philippines Spanish", p. 31.

[15] Rainer Hoffmann/Hu Qiuhua: China. Seine Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zum Ende der Kaiserzeit, Freiburg i.Br./Berlin/Vienna: Rombach 2007, p. 444.

[16] Maartje Maria Abbenhuis: A Most Useful Tool for Diplomacy and Statecraft: Neutrality and Europe in the 'Long' Nineteenth Century, 1815–1914, in: The International History Review, 35, 1/2013, pp. 1-22, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2012.737350; p. 4.

[17] Henning Hillmann, Christina Gathmann: Overseas Trade and the Decline of Privateering, in: The Journal of Economic History, 71, 3/2011, pp. 730–761; p. 749.

[18] Alejandro E. Gomez: Las independecias de Caracas y Cartagena de Indias a la luz de Saint-Domingue, 1788-1815, in: Rivista Storica Italiana, 122, 2/2010, pp. 708-734; p. 718-9.

[19] Cf. Finlay McKichan: Lord Seaforth: Highland Proprietor, Caribbean Governor and Slave Owner, in: The Scottish Historical Review, 90, 2/2011, pp. 204–35, DOI: 10.3366/shr.2011.0034; p. 210–1.

marginal, while it alerted and galvanized planters who were more advantageously placed.“[20]

The crisis of the Spanish colonial system up to 1810 was furthered by those developments as much as by the French occupation of Spain and erupted in the revolutions in Nueva España, Nueva Granada and Peru. The trade declined following the same pattern; the figures for Argentina show a reduction of trade by around 70% from 1810 to 1812, due to the Spanish blockade, recovering slowly only around 1814. The American silver production fell by 50% from 1810 to 1820, with global repercussions[21] – one of which was that the Manila galleon no longer sailed. But, as in all the examples above, the economical and the political blurred into an un-shapely one: part of the reason was as well that because of the revolution the Philippines, which had informally been a sub-colony of the Vice-royalty of Nueva España for about 250 years, lost much of their attraction to the Mexican government when they stayed a formal Spanish colony which it was no longer willing to finance by the former bullion *situado* any longer.[22] Financial issues thus were always bound up with those of political dominance: After their independence, the newly established states of Spanish America most of all needed liquid money which they could only acquire on the international credit markets, which in turn were heavily dominated by British capital. The debt incurred by such loans was something the American states struggled to manage, and each failure to meet liabilities could lead to neo-colonial infringements on their sovereignty.[23] On the side of the creditor the profits from the emerging Latin American states lead to the question if and if, how much these de jure colonies should be encouraged to break with their motherland.[24] And of course, both sectors merged into one in the context of another, much more prominent phenomenon between 1792 and 1815: War. In the Napoleonic Wars, both Britain and France captured neutral shipping at will,[25] and ships from French-occupied territories such as the Netherlands were considered enemy vessels by the British government.[26] The various rebellions and potential flashing over of wholesale slave revolution from Saint-Domingue in the Caribbean where crucial issues to Great Britain for "the credit on which Britain was fighting Napoleon depended to a significant extent on the

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[20] Robin Blackburn: The Force of Example, in: David P. Geggus (ed.): The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic word, Columbia (SC): University of South Carolina Press 2001, pp. 15–20; p. 18.

[21] Kevin O'Rourke: The worldwide economic impact of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815, in: Journal of Global History, 1, 2006, pp 123–149, DOI: 10.1017/S1740022806000076; p. 129-30.

[22] Bjork: "The Link That Kept the Philippines Spanish", p. 50.

[23] Barbara Potthast: Alte und neue Abhängigkeiten. Lateinamerika, in: Mann (ed.): Die Welt im 19. Jahrhundert, pp. 338–66; p. 345.

[24] Bruce Collins: The Limits of British Power: Intervention in Portugal, 1820–30, in: The International History Review, 35, 4/2013, pp. 744–65, DOI: 10.1080/07075332.2013.813567; p. 745.

[25] Abbenhuis: A Most Useful Tool for Diplomacy and Statecraft, p. 4.

[26] Danelle van Zyl-Hermann: "Gij kent genoegt mijn gevoelig hart". Emotional Life at the Occupied Cape of Good Hope, 1798-1803, in: Itinerario, 35, 2/2011, pp. 63–80, DOI: 10.1017/S0165115311000295; p. 64.

sugar cargoes from the West Indies and thus on the planters there."[27] When Britain occupied Heligoland in 1807 to deny the French and their Allies access to a strategically valid maritime stronghold in the North Sea, soon afterwards it was turned by merchants from the adjacent countries into a key point for smuggling to circumvent the Napoleonic Continental System.[28] Of course, this does not only hold for negative effects; especially the military strength of the Royal Navy made it a key factor in protecting, and thus promoting, certain trades. The formal alliance treaty of Portugal and Britain 1810 in the wake of the temporary transfer of the Portuguese court to Brazil allowed Portuguese merchants to transfer slaves between Brazil and Angola, and other points of Western Africa, provided they used Portuguese ships, and put this shipping under explicit British protection.[29] But slavery, apart from being a key issue in all the American economic and political upheavals of the time, was a contested practice all the time: British ships continued to seize Portuguese slave vessels off the African Coast,[30] sparking diplomatic troubles each time. Trade issues did not only cause diplomatic troubles but sometimes lead to direct confrontation: in 1801 and 1807 Great Britain intervened militarily in the Baltic to save her trade in naval stores as plank timber, tar, masts, spars and hemp from the embargos of the League of Armed Neutrality.[31] A trade that was, ironically, crucial to uphold the strength of the same Royal Navy that just provided the means to intervene. Even where free trade was not only relatively safe but also enforced and protected by the respective powers that were, it needed not only to be beneficial to all its participants. The imposition of free trade upon British dependencies such as Ireland and India lead in both cases to "old agro-industrial provinces of Eurasia (…) which were quite rapidly, if only partially deindustrialised at the beginning of the nineteenth century"[32], to the net benefit of the imperial metropolis. The Spanish slave trade had only been freed by the Spanish government from its century-old licence restrictions in 1789 under British pressure (and plantation lobbying), causing a rush of Spanish subjects to take advantage of this new economic opportunity.[33]

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[27] McKichan: Lord Seaforth, p. 211.

[28] Jan Rüger: Sovereignty and Empire in the North Sea, 1807–1918, in: The American Historical Review, 119, 2/2014, pp. 313–338; p. 317.

[29] Patrick Harries: Negotiating Abolition: Cape Town and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, in: Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies, 34, 4/2013, pp. 579–97, DOI: 10.1080/0144039X2012.759672; p. 581.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Cf. James Davey: Securing the Sinews of Sea Power: British Intervention in the Baltic 1780–1815, in: The International History Review, 33, 2/2011, pp. 161–84, DOI: 10.1080/07075332.2011.555384; p. 164–5.

[32] Christopher A. Bayly: Ireland, India and the Empire: 1780-1914, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Sixth Series, 10, 2000, pp. 377-397; p. 378.

[33] Christopher Schmidt-Nowara: Spanish Antislavery and Africa, 1808–1898, in: Republics of Letters: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts, 3, 1/2012, pp. 1–6, http://rofl.stanford.edu/node/104; p. 1.

As not to keep the focus too tightly on Europe, the Asian end of the old world also had its crises in the beginning of the 19th century: The economic and territorial growth of the Chinese Empire under the Qing dynasty had resulted in population growth, and the growing population exercised pressure on the agrarian sector – China found itself in increasingly dire straits to feed its people. While the area of cultivated land was doubled during the 18th century, population tripled; until 1820 the food prices soared, and soil exhaustion, erosion and ecological mismanagement led to frequent catastrophes in the provinces.[34] This was by no means a unique phenomenon: both Ireland and India suffered much the same fate in the years before 1840, and for similar reasons, although here the poverty of much of the people exacerbated the situation once food prices started to rise.[35] In the cases of India and Ireland this was due to the fact that both of them were dependencies of Great Britain, a fact that points to a development hinted at but not sufficiently elaborated on in this article until now: the emergence of British supremacy on the globe. Being the only clear winner of the 23 years of war spanning 1792–1815, though at great costs,[36] Britannia set out to rule the globe, and did so by attempting first to make clear that she actually ruled the seas.

In 1795 the Prince of Orange proclaimed in his capacity as director of the VOC a British protectorate over all VOC establishments to avoid their capture by the French that had just defeated the Dutch Republic.[37] The Dutch at the Cape did not rejoice in this but rather longed for a return of the colony to Dutch control[38] – a hope in vain for Great Britain made it a clear purpose of the negotiations in Vienna to keep control of key strategic locations and to return only those occupied territories not deemed very important.[39] The annexation of Cape and Ceylon was part of a long-term plan to secure the route to India that was carried out when it became possible, and not to be undone anymore.[40] Given this pre-eminence of sea power and the possibilities to use it as a tool of power projection into other territories, the Japanese tightening of the country's *sakoku* (closure) policies seems to be quite an adequate reaction to the global political situation. In 1825 the *bakufu* ordered that every non-Japanese vessel nearing the Japanese shores was to be destroyed, and anyone of its crew who reached the shore to be killed or imprisoned.[41]

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[34] Cf. Hoffmann/Qiuhua: China, p. 440–2.

[35] Cf. Bayly: Ireland, India and the Empire, p. 380.

[36] Dierk Walter: Britischer Imperialismus um 1800? Imperialismusforschung, Empire-Historiographie und das „Schwarze Loch" 1783 – 1815, in: Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft, 43, 11/1995, pp. 965–88; p. 965–6.

[37] van Zyl-Hermann: "Gij kent genoegt mijn gevoelig hart", p. 63.

[38] Ibid, p. 71.

[39] Cf. Frasch: Autonomie im Griff des Kolonialismus, p. 159.

[40] Walter: Britischer Imperialismus um 1800?, p. 967.

[41] Rudolf Hartmann: Geschichte des modernen Japan. Von Meiji bis Heisei, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1996, p. 21.

Such an era of transformation and change, of the downfall and rise of empires would make prime video game material, one should think. Here, players could turn the really big wheels, and shape the world. Yet games using this period as setting or material are comparatively rare. The question therefore remains, why should this be so?

If I may be excused for a short thought experiment to make clear what type of historicizing video game I am thinking of here as having not been realized,[42] there might be some titles imagined that could have quite easily been candidates: Age of Empires IV, as here the series-specific need for a zero hour setting from which the quest for world domination may attempted anew could have been satisfied very well with starting the game off in 1815 just after the Vienna treaties were signed;[43] a follow-up to the already mentioned Imperialism series,[44] Imperialism III,[45] concentrating in its historical campaigns precisely on the time between, say, 1803 and 1833, with the Congress situated in the middle of the very game as something to be shaped according to the player's needs and uses; Europa Universalis V, taking 1815 as its vantage point in much the same way as my hypothetical Age of Empires IV; Assassin's Creed Unity: Congress of Vienna, in line with AC IV: Black Flag and its add-on Freedom Cry set 15 years later;[46] Anno 1800, as a successor both thematically and chronologically to Anno 1701 and facing the player with the economic as well as political challenges of abolishing slavery and refitting the plantation systems, to name but a few. All of these games would continue well-received and to the most part well-selling games' series. Yet they all are not there, and some are explicitly counterfactual. Instead of my AoE IV there was Age of Empires Online,[47] instead of Anno 1800 Ubisoft produced Anno 2070,[48] and the follow-up to AC V: Unity will most likely be AC VI: Rogue, to be set in the Seven Year's War.[49]

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[42] Cf. Holocaust II: Survivor in: Claudio Fogu: Digitalizing Historical Consciousness, in: History and Theory, Theme Issue 47, 2009, pp. 103-121; p. 103–4.

[43] Cf. Simon M. Hassemer: Does History Play the Role of Storyline? Historiographical Periodization as Theme in Video Game Series, in: Florian Kerschbaumer/Tobias Winnerling (eds.): Early Modernity and Video Games, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pubblishing, pp. 64–75; p. 68–70.

[44] Imperialism (1997) and Imperialism II: Age of Exploration (Frog City Software/SSI) (1999).

[45] Interestingly, such a game would be perfectly possible still as Ubisoft is said to have bought the Imperialism trademark in 2001, cf. Anon: Imperialism II: Age of Exploration, on: http://www.en.wikipedia.org, URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperialism_II:_Age_of_Exploration, par. 1 (accessed 08/12/2014).

[46] As Assassin's Creed V: Unity (Ubisoft) (announced for 2015) will be featuring the French Revolution as historical background, the fit would be almost too good to be true; cf. Anon.: Arno Meisterassassine CGI Trailer (28. 07. 2014), on: www.ubisoft.com, URL: http://assassinscreed.ubi.com/de-DE/news/news_detail.aspx?c=tcm:156-160677-16&ct=tcm:148-76770-32 (accessed 08/12/2014).

[47] Age of Empires Online (Gas Powered Games/Robot Entertainment/Microsoft) (2011) [shut down in 2014].

[48] Anno 2070 (Related Designs/Blue Byte/Ubisoft) (2011).

[49] Cf. Anon: Assassin's Creed Rogue - Trailer d'Annonce (05.08.14), on: http://www.ubisoft.com, URL: http://assassinscreed.ubi.com/de-DE/news/news_detail.aspx?c=tcm:153-162894-16&ct=tcm:148-76770-32&ncid=22-4610-None-16-1-pdsc-6-11-AnnouncementACRogue--4-1-1-

This may not be a real surprise although. Walters wrote on the years from 1783 – 1815 as being a "black hole" of Imperialism research in 1995,[50] only two years before the appearance of "Imperialism". This is not necessarily connected to a neglect of the same subject in video games in any way as there has been ample proof that game studios are very well able to work independently from historical research in designing historicizing titles. But from a supply and demand perspective of media generated images of history as consumed by society at large, be it movies, books, academic research, pictures, music, TV productions or video games, it may point to a similar reason for both lacunas, in research and games: maybe just no one out there is interested. Historicizing video games quite literally sell certain representations of the past to a society, and their producers will not invest in productions that are not likely to sell. In a similar fashion academic research reacts to broader trends in issues that figure prominently in collective consciousness, sometimes even building up feedback loops to such issues by producing representations in the same vein. This, for instance, may be said to hold for one of the fields that I have concentrated upon so far: naval history, or to be precise, British naval history. Up until 1988, when the National Marine Museum, Greenwich, closed the respective sections, the 19th century was little by little blanked out in maritime history which was cut short in the end with the year 1805 as "an unremarkable catalogue of gunboat diplomacy; tedious technology and dull books that separated Nelson from the next world conflict."[51] A factor in this with special regard to the period focused on here may also be that the era did not look very much different from the years of the Napoleonic Wars. Even in Great Britain, the wholesale transformation of economy and society into an industrialized state only happened around 1830,[52] and only then the key 'trademarks' of the 19th century as commonly imagined were established – steam ships with steel hulls,[53] railways, gas light, mechanization and standardization of whole sectors of production. The Royal Navy opted in favour of an all-steam fleet only in 1852, and even then the older ships-of-the-line stayed in use well into the 1860s.[54] As video games rely on creating a readily recognisable rendition of their main story

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[50] Walter: Britischer Imperialismus um 1800?, p. 970.

[51] Andrew D. Lambert: The Construction of Naval History 1815-1914, in: The Mariner's Mirror 97, 1/2011, pp 207–24; p. 207.

[52] Cf. Jürgen Osterhammel/Niels P. Petersson: Geschichte der Globalisierung. Dimensionen – Prozesse – Epochen, München: Beck 2003, p. 52–4.

[53] Lambert: The Construction of Naval History 1815-1914, p. 215.

[54] Andrew D. Lambert: Preparing for the Long Peace: The Reconstruction of the Royal Navy, 1815 – 1830, in: The Mariner's Mirror, 82, 1/1996, pp 41-54; p. 54.

background to facilitate player acceptance and immersion (like all audio-visual media), this is difficult if the background in question has no features immediately suited to this.

If I may turn to my second field in a somewhat uncouth manner: not even the global financial crisis of the last decade has been able to popularize economic history, and although there are many economic management simulations around, I do think that by and large they testify to the non-necessity of the connection of academic and game history. Last but not least, the little public recognition of a figure as Metternich (the person) may well be due to the implications the Congress has come to carry; even movies with it as backstory are comparatively rare.[55] In the case of Spain the discussion about the character of Napoleon Bonaparte, his occupation of the country, and the handling of the 'Spanish Question' by the great powers afterwards began already in the 1820s but continued as a foil for interpreting various conflicts and how Spain should react to them right up to 1914 when the Francophiles among Spanish intellectuals denounced Germany as having inherited the purported vices of Napoleonic France.[56]

Such problems of interpreting and presenting the 'true' or 'valid' message of a given set of historical events would beset any Congress of Vienna or early 19th century game from the very start, I think. For the global entanglements of economics and politics sketched above are reproduced in the local entanglements of slavery and colonialism, and on both levels players would, somehow, have to manage these complex issues. The outcomes may well be morally ambiguous, as a few brief sketches of comparable developments in the interaction of both levels and patterns on local levels may serve to illustrate.

A plantation society of a social mix similar to the revolting slave island of Saint-Domingue was also to be found in the Asian sphere of European colonialism, on Banda. Though much smaller in absolute numbers, in 1794 the populace of the islands was made up of approximately 75% slaves, a large share of free people of colour, and the Dutch and creole colonial masters.[57] Interestingly, the processes of culture creation by creolisation and mestization on the one and European regulation on the other side that in the Caribbean culminated in the violent eruption of racialized revolution were by and large peaceful in the Banda islands, likely due to the lesser alienation of the slave population and its greater ethnical and cultural homogeneity.[58] Colonial

[55] Cf. Wolfram Siemann: Metternich. Staatsmann zwischen Restauration und Moderne, München: Beck 2010, p. 6–7.

[56] Cf. Alberto G. Novales: Napoléon, Anti-Napoléon en Espagne, à partir de 1815, in: Annales historiques de la Révolution francaise, 2/2006, pp. 185–97; 194–5.

[57] Philipp Winn: Slavery and cultural creativity in the Banda Islands, in: Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 41, 3/2010, pp. 365–389; p. 371.

[58] Cf. Ibid, p. 383–5.

rule pertained on Banda up until the 20th century. Compare to this in turn the case of Barbados, with a very similar population structure of some 78% slaves, 2.7% free people of colour, and 19.3% whites, almost all of them creoles, in 1801.[59] The island was a sugar plantation colony in the Caribbean where the possible dangers of a slave revolt were deeply felt and feared during the Napoleonic Wars,[60] and where subsequent legislation lead to an amelioration of the slave's situation with the purpose of pacifying Barbados – with success. The island stayed quiet, and British, and full of slaves, well after 1815. What would be the lessons of all this to the player of a given video game set in this period? If you but manage your slave plantations carefully and properly, everything is fine, and you are on the highway to high score? Well, this is at least what history tells us whether we like it or not: the history of slavery does not point to the fact that it declined necessarily because of it being intrinsically wrong or outdated, it merely points to the fact that obviously there are better ways to organize a slave society than others, and that the less effective did not prevail. Quite on the contrary to any moral reading the British abolitionists had to recognize in the late 1830s that British-owned mining companies operating in South America were in no way backward but excessively profitable neo-colonial ventures made possible by the structures imposed on both the British economy and the South American political sphere by the changes from 1815 on[61] – and heavily relied on forced labour. Maltreatment of forced labourers was, by the way, no part of their calculation. "This might simply be seen as good business practice. As J. R. Ward has pointed out, measures of amelioration such as better feeding and clothing and care by doctors were profitable."[62] History has no intrinsic morality, no built-in happy ending. It has to be interpreted under moral considerations of course; but these considerations rest on theories not to be found in the historical processes, but outside them in the Historians/viewers. And that is precisely where the problem lies: Games do have a built-in ending at least, a happy one if the player may win (remember that there are video games, mostly early ones like Space Invaders or Tetris, where winning is not possible, only scoring). And by interpretation this may easily be turned into a built-in moral of the story on the recipient's side, no matter if intended by the producer or not. This should pose not that much of a problem in the end, it might be contended, for any conflicts arising like that might be solved quite easily with producing a game focusing on abolition. Players could boldly und upright go through that game to release human beings from cruel

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⁵⁹ McKichan: Lord Seaforth, p. 220.
⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 211.
⁶¹ Cf. Chris Evans: Brazilian Gold, Cuban Copper and the Final Frontier of British Anti-Slavery, in: Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies, 34, 1/2013, pp. 118-34, DOI: 10.1080/0144039X2012.709039; p. 119–20.
⁶² McKichan: Lord Seaforth, p. 216.

bondage, fulfilling a mission morally thoroughly good. This would but depend crucially on the structure of the game mechanics involved, as a reviewer of Assassin's Creed IV: Freedom Cry[63], a game set in the late 18th century Caribbean precisely at around the outbreak of the Saint-Domingue revolution where the player is put into the role of a former slave, now pirate and explicitly performing liberation feats, pointed out:

> "But there are reasons to raise an eyebrow, as well. Rescuing slaves is one of the key gameplay additions in Freedom Cry, and you're constantly reminded of ways you can help. (…) This makes sense, and (…) this gives the player regular, meaningful actions to participate in while getting to the next mission. What's questionable is Ubisoft's decision to turn the slaves into a form of in-game currency, a cruelly ironic twist. The more slaves the player frees, the more upgrades available from vendors that support Adéwalé. This generates a horrific disconnect from the very human tragedy the upgrade system pulls from. It's an especially gross feeling to be running around a town square, waiting for slaves to spawn on the map because you're only a few away from unlocking that really sweet machete."[64]

In converting liberation into a power-up lies the danger inherent in any gamified representation of abolition that operates with rewards; a mechanistic, utilitarian interpretation of the processes depicted can under such circumstances never be ruled out, as player's interpretations of game elements cannot be directed by the games' producers.[65]

And even in a more indirect way the issue of abolition is tangled up with other parts of the contemporary political and economic contexts that make it complicated to be represented in such a way. The question of abrogating slavery – by law – was also a question of who wielded the power to make and enforce such law, the metropolis or the colony, the state or its citizens. In the end, if imperial law made by the metropolis prevailed, the grip of the centre on the peripheries actually got stronger, not weaker.[66] Clearing its colonies from slavery for the metropolis might mean to clear a way to get more colonies in the end. As colonialism nowadays is of a dubious reputation, at least the centralized colonialism of the late 19th century, if the abolition of slavery helped pave a way to that, no wonder it falls under the same shadow. It gets even more complicated if Flaig's thesis is included that it was precisely the separation of

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[63] Assassin's Creed IV: Freedom Cry (Ubisoft) (2014).

[64] Patrick Klepek: Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry Review (02/2014), on: www.giantbomb.com, URL: http://www.giantbomb.com/reviews/assassin-s-creed-iv-freedom-cry-review/1900-626/ (accessed 08/11/2014), par. 7.

[65] Cf. for more detail and theoretical background: Tobias Winnerling: The eternal recurrence of all bits, in: eludamos. Journal for Computer Game Culture, Special Issue: Digital Seriality, 2014.

[66] Cf. Lisa Ford: Anti-Slavery and the Reconstitution of Empire, in: Australian Historical Studies, 45, 1/2014, pp. 71–86; p. 72–3.

territories ruled by one power into different areas of law that made those parts of the state where states of law still prevailed that would have been morally unthinkable to be enforced in the rest colonies rather than provinces. This separation into unequal provinces of law is in the given context perhaps best illustrated by a European example: In 1844 the British governor of Heligoland directly forbade the printing of a newspaper on the island, arguing that although the freedom of the press was a principle of the British constitution this would not apply to his territory as is was subject to Britain, but governed by continental laws. Thus a German Heligoland press operating as an organ of German dissidents and liberals outside the censure restrictions the Congress system imposed on the rest of Germany could effectively be avoided.[67] Of course, this state of affairs is perfectly exemplified in the state of law that allowed human beings to be put into the same state as dead property, slavery.[68] As it was strictly illegal in France and more or less consequently outlawed in Britain, the German states and Northern Europe, to be allowed to use slave labour those territories of the respective states had to become colonies in the first place.[69] Forced labour in the form of slavery became interesting for purely economic reasons in the first place: plantation economies needed lots of labour to be performed under very hard conditions to be efficient, so that the Portuguese sugar plantations on the Atlantic islands set the precedent for what was to come. Plantations needed slavery needed colonialism.[70] This in turn created zones of special law in which the economically active parts of the local population became quite independent of the metropolis that tried to cope with this and to enlarge its own power by transforming the laws, and thus, colonialism as such.

What, then, should a game placed in this context represent as the 'right' kind of historicized action? Should players be rewarded for bolstering and fostering a slave economy to enlarge their position? Or should they proceed to suppress slavery to strengthen their dominion over the territory already assembled, and then scramble for more? Both positions might easily lead to sale-reducing public criticisms and to mixed feeling in the player communities, and the individual players themselves. But if these ways are rough, perhaps a third option could be to base the game on the existing revolutionary movements in the colonies that both denied the political control through a European, far off metropolis and the juridical inequality created by slavery – on Haiti as well as in Spanish America the revolutionaries outlawed slavery after

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[67] Cf. Rüger: Sovereignty and Empire in the North Sea, 1807–1918, p. 319–20.
[68] Cf. Fiona Vernal: ‚No Such Thing as a Mulatto Slave': Legal Pluralism, Racial Descent and the Nuances of Slave Women's Sexual Vulnerability in the Legal Odyssey of Steyntje van de Kaap, c.1815–1822, in: Slavery and Abolition, 29, 1/2008, pp. 23–47; p. 27–8.
[69] Cf. Egon Flaig: Weltgeschichte der Sklaverei, 2nd. ed. München: Beck 2011, p. 184–5.
[70] Ibid., p. 160.

shaking off colonial domination.[71] Yet in Haiti the state the ex-slaves built quickly turned into a dictatorial regime committing its people, though now all legally free, to forced labour by law[72] and that disposed of the rest of its former French ruling class in 1804 by ethnic cleansing.[73]

The Congress of Vienna did, although it dealt with the problems involved, little to clarify these issues contemporaneously. "After the peace congress (…) Britain, which had occupied Martinique and Guadeloupe again after the resumption of the war in 1803, returned them to the French, with their systems of slavery intact, and all the European powers recognized France's continuing claim to Saint-Domingue and its right to use force to recover it."[74] Perhaps it now comes as no surprise that these issues are left out of the few existing games featuring it. To come back to "Imperialism" once more, this particular game featured workers of different sorts to be appointed to various tasks necessary for the build-up of an economy capable of shouldering the mounting financial burden of empire, but all its "workers", "labor" and "transport capacities" remained firmly abstract generalisations of manpower.[75] Forced labour was not part of the plan, whether at home in the player's imperial motherland or abroad in her dependencies, a clearly ahistorical reading of the early 19th century.

If the Congress of Vienna pacified Europe but installed censure and autocracy, and if it opened up avenues for colonialism, does that make it a bad thing? And for worse, if it voted in favour of abolition but, to follow Flaig once just for the sake of argument in his thesis that a real and effective abolition was at least in Africa possible only by its imposition through large-scale Western colonial dominance,[76] does that make either the congress or colonialism a good thing? And in recreating any of these controversial developments in playing them electronically in a video game, are you as a player allowed to derive pleasure from recreating them? Many of the answers already given to the last question in other contexts are decidedly negative: things morally wrong are not deemed suitable for providing pleasure in being re-experienced, even if it is just a game. This pattern of thought applies in the case of the Congress of Vienna and the issues bundled up with it, too, at least in regard to video games. The – probably mostly unconscious – blanking of history that occurs in omitting them from video game discourses mirrors a moral reading of history in which not only the Congress of Vienna but the whole global order it prefigured are seen as deeply unsettling phenomena. Perhaps individual players

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[71] Gomez: Las independecias de Caracas y Cartagena de Indias a la luz de Saint-Domingue, p. 709.

[72] Jeremy D. Popkin: A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution, Malden (MA)/Oxford/Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2012, p. 110–1.

[73] Ibid., p. 137.

[74] Ibid., p. 148.

[75] Cf. Imperialism (1997), Help from your Interior Minister. Production Dialogues; Help from your Interior Minister. Transport Ledger Briefing.

[76] Cf. Flaig: Weltgeschichte der Sklaverei, p. 216–7.

and modding groups will help to close that gap: the fan-based non-company project "Imperialism: Remake" is determined to set the starting point of its version of "Imperialism" precisely in 1814.[77]

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[77] Thread „IX. Basic Scenario: Europe 1814" (2013), on: Imperialism Remake Community, URL: http://remake.twelvepm.de/forum/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=1039&start=10 (accessed 08/09/2014).