'The Playing Fields of Empire': Empire and Space in Videogames

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'The world is nearly all parcelled out, and what there is left of it is being divided up, conquered and colonised. To think of these stars that you see overhead at night, these vast worlds which we can never reach. I would annex the planets if I could; I often think of that. It makes me sad to see them so clear and yet so far.'

– attributed to Cecil Rhodes (1853 – 1902), British mining magnate and politician

Capture and hold 23 regions by the end of the year 1750 including Hindustan, Florida, Gibraltar, Iceland, New France, Leeward Islands.

– Victory conditions for winning the grand campaign as Great Britain in *Empire: Total War*

Empire, Space, Videogames: A Review

Cecil Rhodes, the British businessman-imperialist extraordinaire who funded the Rhodes scholarships, is said to have cried because Britain could not colonise outer space. In comparison, although the victory conditions of *Empire: Total War* (*ETW* hereonwards) may seem tame, in both cases, the very logic of Empire is tied up with how it reconceives spatiality. The mechanism of empire is based on a geopolitics through which it lays claim to an established order of spatiality and ironically, further expansion. Similarly, the RTS (real-time strategy) genre in videogames almost always concerns itself with empire-building, whether it is the early *Age of Empire* games or the more recent *Rise of Nations* and *Rome: Total War 2*. In the present scenario, when there is hardly any place for Rhodes and such overt apologists for Empire, the clear popularity of empire-building games is one that deserves critical attention. How does one explain the relevance of Empire even today in one

of the newest media of culture and storytelling? Through a study of RTS games, such as mainly *ETW*, this analysis explores deeper questions of empire and its relation to space.

Game Studies scholarship related to empire and videogame spaces has so far either concerned itself with geopolitics in general (Guenzel 2007, Nohr 2010) or gone on to 'locate virtual games within a larger analysis of, and controversy about actual global Empire' (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2009: xix). Here, a more direct approach to Empire is taken by relating questions of imperial spatiality to videogame space although much is owed to previous research mentioned. To start with, one needs to unpack the significance of the two terms, empire and geopolitics. According Jan Neederven Pieterse, 'an imperial state is one that determines the foreign and domestic policies of another political entity, […] a second broad-brush definition is a state that practices expansionist geopolitics [and] a third loose meaning of empire, pertains to ideology'(Pieterse 2007: 18). All of these descriptions are connected and as is evident from a basic definition of geopolitics: 'the term geopolitics refers to the use of politics in controlling territories, where certain geographical positions are more strategic than others, for resources, historical and socio-political reasons' (Walberg 2011: 19).

The imperial machinery of expansionist geopolitics functions through cartography and surveying. Sir George Everest, as the surveyor-general of India and the head of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of 1931, was instrumental in computing the height of Mount Everest to which he lent his name. Not surprisingly, the name of the Indian mathematician, Radhanath Sikdar, who, as part of the survey made the actual calculation, is virtually unknown to the world. Cartography itself was not only about map-making as it would have been in the pre-Empire days:

> The cartographic partition of Africa inextricably linked mapmaking and empire building. Yet the act of drawing lines on maps is only one example of how cartography furthered imperialism. Maps were used in various ways to extend European hegemony over foreign and often unknown territory. (Bassett 1994: 316-35).

Like the naming of Mount Everest, the act of naming is significant for the expansionist agenda of Empire. In *The Mutiny on H.M.S Bounty*, Captain William Bligh spots an uncharted island and immediately proceeds to name it 'Bligh's Cap' almost as if the naming itself was a mark of possession. Colonial expansion also meant changes to the geography that went beyond lines on maps and names. In *Flora's Empire* (2011), Eugenia Herbert describes

how the British colonialists in India strove to change the landscape with their gardens and often imported foliage. There were also playing fields created out of scrubland to facilitate games of golf and cricket. With cartography and naming, there was the imperial flag to mark out territory. As the British stand-up comedian, Eddie Izzard, brilliantly laughs at Empire in his piece 'Do You Have a Flag?':

> We stole countries with the cunning use of flags! Yeah, just sail around the world and stick a flag in. - I claim India for Britain!
>
> They go, You can't claim us, we live here! 500 million of us!
>
> - Do you have a flag?
>
> - We don't need a bloody flag! It's our country, you bastards!
>
> - No flag, no country, you can't have one! That's the rules that I've just made up, and I'm backing it up with this gun that was lent from the National Rifle Association. (Izzard 1999)

It would be instructive now to compare how this compares to empire-spaces in videogames.

Most gamers will be familiar with the concepts of 'line of sight' and the 'fog of war' in RTS games. The basic aim of the game is to see what is hidden in the dark areas. Send a spy or a diplomat (or a priest, as the case may be) into uncharted territory or even better, send your ships and your armies to take possession, often after giving battle. Once a region is occupied, the map is redrawn and carries your nation's colour. For example, see the map of British India from a gameplay instance of *ETW*. Compare this to the actual maps of the East India Company from the time and a similar logic of expansion is reflected in the cartography. Surveying, so made famously adventurous in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, is an analogue of the RTS game's line of sight. Kim, playing the Great Game of spying, is much like the agent that one sends into unknown or hostile territory in *ETW*. Once surveyed, occupied and mapped (not always in that order), the game requires the player to have a significant military presence. *Age of Empires* does not have a problem with leaving one's conquests ungarrisoned but in *ETW* and other *Total War* games, doing so is to invite rebellion. Naturally, one can check the public order in a region from the game menu and sometimes, lowering taxes is what Victoria, your AI advisor, recommends. Religion can be a sore point in many cities and so can political opinion. In *Napoleon: Total War*, the Peninsular campaign requires one to use

agents provocateur to convert the public loyalty to pro-French or pro-Spanish, as the case may be. In *ETW*, trade and taxes are key means of financing a nation. The in-game Empire, therefore, risks bankruptcy if there are too many armies to feed and too little money. Looting cities is an option always but incurring the hostility of every other nation would be suicidal to the player's campaign plan. Diplomacy, which includes trade agreements, alliances, joining wars, exchanging technologies and money, is another key factor. As far as buildings and physical space is concerned, the imperial power can very soon replace the old buildings with its own. For example, a church school or an ashram might be replaced by a classical university - in real life, a walk around downtown Calcutta reflects this well as one gets a quick lesson in British architecture, thousands of miles away from the United Kingdom.

Speaking of geopolitical discourses in RTS games, Rolf Nohr identifies clear links between these games and classical geopolitics from the 1920s to the 60s. He states that 'expansion as an act, however, does not only aim at space as the moment of politics, but can also be financed by or out of space' (Nohr 2010). Nohr points out the Clausewitzian interpretation of politics in these empire-building games that depicts war as a form of politics or a struggle for the resources on the space of the campaign map. For him, this is in keeping with the conception of space as *lebensraum* (German: living space), a concept formulated by German geographer, Friedrich Ratzel, in his 1901 essay. According to Woodruff Smith, 'Ratzel defined Lebensraum as the geographical surface area required to support a living species at its current population size and mode of existence. [...] Lebensraum seemed to place Darwinian natural selection in a spatial and environmental dimension' (Smith 1980: 51-68). Lebensraum is also associated with the expansionist policies of the fascist regime in Germany from the 1920s to 1945. The struggle for Lebensraum then becomes equated with the struggle for resources. Resource gathering is an important aspect of RTS games: to have a production-based capitalist economy (summed up earlier as 'trade and taxes') is to win the game. Such a resource-hungry geopolitics also creates the binarism of centre and its peripheries. For Walberg, such a binarism aims 'to expropriate the wealth—surplus—of weaker countries—the periphery, their incorporation into the economy of the empire—the center—in a subordinate and profitable way, and to ensure that other competing imperial powers are kept at a disadvantage' (Walberg 2011: 24). Nohr sees a parallel in games such as *Civilisation V* where a hierarchy of capitals and colonies is constructed and soon one sees the sprouting of peripheral structures such as ports, storage and supply posts and settlements as

the game forces the player to create such hierarchical and concentric arrangements of the capital and the colonies. Naturally, the peripheral spaces exist to supply the centre.

Nohr relates RTS games to Samuel Huntington's argument that human beings pursue policies that bring about conflict within spatiality. Indeed, the association of games with the military and empire has a long history. Wellington's probably apocryphal quote that Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton is symbolic. The Iron Duke, however, learnt much on the playing fields of empire and declared as much of his experience against the Maratha soldiers while fighting in India. German *Kriegsspiel*, used for military training is a more direct example. The clearest association of imperial expansion and games is to be found in the Great Game or the geopolitical struggle between Russia and the British Empire for the possession of Central Asia. In Kipling's novel *Kim* (2000), the eponymous protagonist is a child who joins the Great Game of secretly surveying beyond the northern borders of British India. Not surprisingly, key political figures of British India such as the Viceroy Lord Curzon portray the imperial expansionist plans as part of a game:

> Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia— to many these names breathe only a sense of utter remoteness or a memory of strange vicissitudes and of moribund romance. To me, I confess, they are the pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the dominion of the world. (Walberg 2011: 13)

Serious expansionist geopolitics is represented as being playful, even fun. Although not quite a surveyor and adventurer like Kim, Curzon is well known for another aspect of geopolitics: deciding the fate of the Indian province of Bengal by drawing a dividing line on a map.

Fig: Map of Poland with the infamous line showing how it was to be divided up in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, 1939

Writing about this aspect of geopolitics, Guenzel mentions how the map precedes the territory in real-life geopolitics as well as in games. The historical example he provides is that of the infamous line drawn across the map of Poland by Ribbentrop and Molotov: the consequences are only too well-known. The videogame example that he provides is from *Ghost Recon* where the player can switch to map-mode from the FPS mode and where 'the map thus precedes the territory: strategic planning is done in the realm of the map and instantly has an effect on the virtual space of experience' (Guenzel 2007: 446). He also examines the geopolitical scenario of the game as the space for alternative history. Set in the (then) near future, where Eastern Europe is on the brink of war in 2008, *Ghost Recon* makes a geopolitical statement about a possible world. Arguably, this compares well with RTS games such as *ETW*. The positioning of armies on the map can have immediate consequences and force the player to take to the battlefield. The map of *ETW* is a map but also a world where the player and the AI agents are constantly moving and their movement in space determines the action on the political level. Is one to assume, therefore, that the gameplay of RTS games primarily follows the expansionist logic of empire and its Great Games?

As Guenzel points out, the deterministic geopolitical schema of Ratzel's was challenged by cultural geographers who 'used the category of frame of space to rethink culture from a non-deterministic point of view' (Guenzel 2012: 9) rather than see it as a struggle for existence, expansion and resources. At this point, it will be useful to introduce the 'spatial turn' in theory initiated by Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre (1991) is of key interest here and he views space as perceived space (*percu*), conceived space (*concu*) and lived space (*vecu*). The first type is the material space as physically negotiated through movement, the second type is the mediated space of maps and the third or 'lived' space is the experienced and imagined space that operates as a simultaneous trialectic (in the sense that it is spatially copresent rather than following on as a temporal sequence) to the other two types. In terms of videogames, such a conception of spatiality works out as follows:

> Videogame spaces today are mostly a presentation of perceptual space in the way Lefebvre addresses the individual experience of space or what he also calls 'spatial practice'. In contrast, representations of space differ from this phenomenal experience of space as they are in real-life contexts, videogame maps are essential for orientation, especially in games played from the first-person perspective, for in those games, one needs not only see what one is aiming at, but also where one is located within the entire setting of the game. For this reason, maps in videogames are either fully

displayed and function as representations of the whole 'playground' […] or they are reduced to a visual element within the display. (Guenzel, 2007: 444)

The third or the 'lived' space is imagined by the player in the zone of becoming and identity formation where the first and second spaces overlap with each other in various degrees. In *ETW,* the perceived space is itself perceived on the 'playground' of the conceived space or the map, especially when one considers the movement of units across the world map; it is possible to go into a deeper level of perceived space in the real-time battle scenarios where the player as the god-like commander of massed military units inhabits all of these units as and when required by giving orders to move and attack and then depending on the AI to carry out the actions. The battle scenarios themselves are perceived spaces that are enacted over the conceived space of the battlefield map (most clearly perceivable when the player gets the opportunity to deploy the army within a limited section of the battlefield although the camera is allowed to pan and zoom across the entire battlefield). Given the very obvious overlap of the perceived and conceived spaces here, one needs to think through the implications of the Lefebvrian spatial turn in empire-based games carefully. What happens also to the lived space? Is the notion applicable at all in these games?

The Creative Assembly History of India: How Developers and Players Remap History in *ETW*

So far the RTS game has been discussed in terms of generic features as pointed out by other commentators; it will be useful to focus now on the spatiality of *ETW* specifically. *ETW* has the advantage of combining the turn-based element of RTS games with real-time battles using massed armies. It also (rather boldly) addresses Empire directly in its title and content. The analysis of the game will be twofold: involving the way in which the developer, Creative Assembly, addresses the notion of empire and portrays the history of nations and the ways in which players (re)write this history and many alternative histories.

The history of India is a case in point. One of the more difficult theatres of empire to master in the early part of the campaign, India is under the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1700 when the game begins. The Mughal empire is threatened by the up and coming Marathas under their able queen Tara Bai who has taken over the reign after the demise of her husband, the son of the redoubtable Maratha hero, Shivaji. John Keay's account of the period is not too different:

> Under Aurangzeb (1658-1707) the Moghul Empire passed slowly through its zenith. Even as it achieved its greatest geographical extent it was assailed by enemies from within, foremost of whom were the Marathas, a warrior caste from the mountains just east of Bombay. Under the leadership of the great Sivaji, Maratha cavalry raided deep into the Deccan and Maratha fleets ranged along the west coast. In 1664 these 'Seevagees', as the English called them, swooped on the rich province of Gujarat and made for the great port of Surat. (Keay 1994: 159)

Some differences remain, however. Although Portugal (in Goa) and the United Provinces (in Ceylon) already have their bases in the game, the British East India Company is conspicuous by its absence although the British had started trading with the Mughal empire as early as the mid-1500s. In *ETW,* the English, however, are expected to be entrants in the game of building the Indian empire as part of the British campaign: the victory conditions for Britain require the player to 'capture and hold 23 regions by the end of the year 1750 *including Hindustan*, Florida, Gibraltar, Iceland, New France, Leeward Islands' (Creative Assembly 2009, italics mine). Of the East India Company, the historian Burton Stein says, 'It was considered strange, even at the time, that a trading company should acquire an empire, and many attempts at explanation have been made in the intervening years' (Stein 2010: 196). In the videogame's terms, the distinction between the Crown and the Company is not clear although the capitalistic aims of the Company could be compared to race for resources and territory in the game. Also, for some reason, the Mughal empire is not a playable faction in the retail version of the game (one can obviously use mods to remedy that). The playable Indian faction is the Maratha empire and the game describes it thus:

> Unlike the Mughals the Maratha rulers are Indian princes and kings. They know the value of the Indian way of doing things, of the age-old strength of their lands. Their armies may look old fashioned possibly quaint to foreign eyes, but that makes them no less effective. The empire exists solely because it has the military strength to withstand the Mughal threat. (Creative Assembly 2009)

Historically speaking, this is somewhat simplistic as it was the Mughals who had been the military masters of India for almost two centuries when the game begins and phrases such as the 'Indian way of doing things' ignore the diversity of cultures in India. Moreover, despite the seeming accuracy of the cartographical presentation of early- eighteenth century India, there are many discrepancies. Tea plantations are shown a century ahead of the British

discovery of tea in Assam in 1824. Indigo plantations, later the reason for popular outcry, are nowhere to be seen. Despite the initial expanse of the Mughals, there are no Islamic religious centres on the map. Benaras, the holy city of the Hindus, is one of the 'great ashrams' – nothing like this existed and the ashrams are historically very different institutions. The army types are based on sweeping generalisations that often conflate characteristics of people of very disparate regions and assume that they are present all over the subcontinent. Finally, a few years down the line, the Marathas start using the Indian tricolor as their flag whereas, historically the first use of this is much later and the present form was only used as late as 1947, after Indian independence. One wonders whether this is a conscious piece of alternative history by the developers. Whatever be the case, the Creative Assembly version of Indian history, although broadly reflecting the historical geopolitics of the region, is nevertheless happy to simplify the diversity of the region and adapt the map to reflect a comfortably imperialist (and to use Edward Said's concept, 'orientalist') set of places, resources and societies.

 In response to Creative Assembly's initial set playing field of empire, there have been player reactions aplenty. What the map of India looks like is effectively the outcome of player action. The 'Total War Forum' is full of after-action reports on gameplay instances in *ETW*. After-action reports (or AARs as they are called) are retrospective analyses of goal-oriented actions; these are quite popular among military commanders (Julius Caesar's commentaries on the Gallic wars are sometimes described as an after-action report) and recently, among strategy game players. Often, these AARs describe events that go counter to historical accounts and create their own alternative histories. Alternative History has long been a popular literary genre and *ETW* players add to the genre in their own distinct way. For example, playing as the Maratha empire, it is possible to undermine the historical success of the mighty British Empire and thereby, the entire geopolitics of India. The popular gaming blog, 'Rock, Paper, Shotgun' recently featured an after-action report of the Maratha army facing an unexpected challenge from nearby Mysore:

> My thoughts on Empire: Total War are still a bit jumbled. While I unjumble them (in readiness for a Wot I Think) I thought I'd share a short battle narrative with you. The following heavily illustrated After Action Report is a True and Accurate Account of the Bloody Battle of Bangalore, 1714, the latest scrap from my current grand campaign. The glorious Maratha Confederacy (that's me) has been distracted from its subjugation of the northern Mughals by an unprovoked attack by the cowardly

Mysorians. A couple of territories were lost before I was able to assemble a scratch expeditionary force in Hyderabad and march out to meet the new foe. Just outside Bangalore my general-less rabble faced their first test… (Stone 2009)

Historically, the Maratha army fought the armies of Tipu Sultan much later during the 1780s and won back their fortresses from Mysore. The following AAR taken from 'The After Action Reporter' shows counter-history at its extreme:

Empire: Total War is fun, but playing as England, Prussia, France or Spain is a bit easy really. So many provinces, so many troops to build, so much money! So instead of going easy, and to provide an interesting AAR, I unlocked the minor nations and decided to play the Barbary States. Why this rag-tag bunch of North African pirates? For two reasons:

1. I want to play as pirates! Duh!

2. I want to convert Europe to Islam!

…And I also thought it would be quite funny if I could pull it off. Sure enough, it has been amusing, but also really hard. (Tyson 2009)

Fig: The Barbary Pirates conquer Sardinia in the *Empire: Total War* AAR

Extreme as the intentions of the writer may be, this counter-narrative works on multiple levels. First, it poses an alternative to the colonization of the Africa and Asia by the European powers and transposes the whole mechanism onto Europe itself. Secondly, it has managed to subvert the intentions and the affordances of the 'official' version of the game by unlocking an unplayable faction and devising its own campaign victory conditions. The player's own experience and intentions thus play an important role in fashioning the empire-spaces in *ETW* and much of the interaction between the perceived space of the player and the conceived space of the map is fashioned imaginatively as the AARs with their detailed narratives reconstructing the action illustrate. One of the correspondents on the Total War forum answers the question 'How to win in India?' with Izzard's sketch cited above and then goes on to say: 'Tried it in game. Was going to work great until I realised indians actually do have a flag. Bastards' (Kaamos 2009). The empire-space of the RTS game spills out way beyond the games affordances and the game's map.

'Transforming the Terrain': Thirdspace, Videogames and Empire

At this point, it will be useful to return to the question of the Lefebvrian 'lived space' in the empire-building games. Following Guenzel's astute analysis of the shift from perceived to conceived spaces in *Ghost Recon* and the comparison with *ETW*, one wonders how to describe the imagined spaces of empire as encountered by players in the way in which they negotiate the spatiality and the geopolitics intended by the developers (as argued here, Creative Assembly, despite giving players much leeway, still provides its own distinct perspective on the history of empire). These imagined spaces are the lived spaces, where the populations in the game's cities live, trade, carry on their diplomatic negotiations and wars. The player is always also part of these lived spaces as the AARs tell us. In *ETW*, this third space is also intriguing because it is here that often the player faces protest. The developers have coded in a crucial element in the experience of empire: protest. Unhappy populations will riot, send letters of demands and finally, rebel. The population of the cities in *ETW* will also defend their cities as the relative weak and ill-trained armed citizenry. Thus these lived spaces of empire, operating beyond traditional spatial conceptions, are also supplementary in Jacques Derrida's sense of the word. The supplement 'leaves its trace without ever itself being either present or absent and thereby to transform the terrain' (Royle 2003: 50).

It is this 'transforming of the terrain' that needs to be considered for a fuller understanding of imperial space in *ETW* and arguably, in the general discourse of empire itself.

Poststructuralist geographer Edward Soja, revises the notion of spatiality by building on Lefebvre's notion of the lived space to propose what he calls 'thirdspace'. Soja describes thirdspace as 'realandimagined spaces' It is not possible to separate the imaginary space constructed by the perception of space in its physical and cartographic planes just as the AAR writer's imagination cannot be separate from the in-game events that are reported on. As he further explains:

> [T]hirdspace ... is rooted in just such a recombinatorial and radically open perspective. In what I will call a critical strategy of othering. I try to open up our spatial imaginaries to ways of thinking and acting politically that responds to all binarisms, to any attempt to confine political thought and action to only two alternatives by interjecting an-Other set of choices. In this critical thirding, the original binary choice is not dismissed entirely but is subjected to a creative process of restructuring selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives. (Soja 1996: 5)

In opening up the spatial imaginaries, he also brings to the forefront more marginal spaces and challenges the centre-periphery binarisms of the earlier conceptions of empire-space. He then addresses issues of spatiality from Feminist theorists such as bell hooks, Trinh la Minh and Donna Haraway and Postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.

Said's engagement with imperial spaces is essential for carrying on this discussion of thirdspace. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), he describes the journey that the protagonist of Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* makes to reach what he calls the 'heart of Africa' in terms of the European's gaining imperial mastery of the space:

> Yet underlying Marlow's inconclusiveness, his arabesque meditations on his feelings and ideas, is unrelenting course of the journey itself, which, despite all the many obstacles, is sustained through the jungle, through time, through hardship, to the heart of it all, Kurtz's ivory-trading empire. Conrad wants us to, see how J Kurtz's great looting adventure, Marlow's, journey up the river, and the itself all share a common theme: Europeans performing acts of   Imperial mastery and will in (or about) Africa. (Said 1994: 19)

According to Said, here the straightforward mapping of territory into imperial possession is beginning to be problematized already in Conrad's ambivalent late-nineteenth century account of the imperial attitude and the 'redemptive force, as well as the waste and horror, of Europe's mission in the dark world' (Ibid). Going beyond Conrad's postcolonial doubts about the legitimacy of imperial notions spatiality (which have been discussed in the sections earlier), one further struggles with the post-empire experience of thirdspace in the marginalized narratives of working class Indian women in Spivak's essay on Mahasweta Devi's short story 'Douloti the Bountiful':

> In this story, Devi offers a harrowing portrayal of a subaltern woman's exploitation in bonded labour and prostitution during the period of colonialism and subsequent national independence in India. In the final scene of this story, Douloti's 'tormented corpse' is depicted as being sprawled across a map of India, drawn by a schoolmaster in a rural village in India, just after independence from the British Empire. Despite the emancipatory promises of national independence, Devi emphasises how older forms of gender and class-based exploitation – such as bonded labour and prostitution – continue to be practised in postcolonial India. (Morton 2003: 98)

Spivak points out the problems even after the end of the British Empire in India and how decolonization itself becomes a misleading and problematic word when the spaces of the subproletariat or the subaltern are considered. She calls it 'the space of the dis-placement of the colonization-decolonization reversal [and…] the space that can become […] a representation of decolonization as such' (Spivak 1989: 106).

The dead woman sprawled on the map of India is an extremely disturbing image but it brings to mind other parallels from fiction and popular culture. The one example used in lectures on postcolonialism the world over is that of the map of the fictitious Kikuyanaland in H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1989). The intrepid British adventurers enter a land where the map resembles a woman's body (indeed, the place names such as Sheba's Breasts establish this further). So the possession of land by the colonial powers is indirectly likened to the possession of a woman's body. However, the image of a woman's body, this time a goddess's, is likewise used in the portrayal of independent India as 'Bharat Mata' (or 'Mother India) where the Indian map is covered by the goddess's body. Devi's story where the unfortunate woman falls dead on the Indian map is perhaps a scathing inversion of this image of the independent nation.
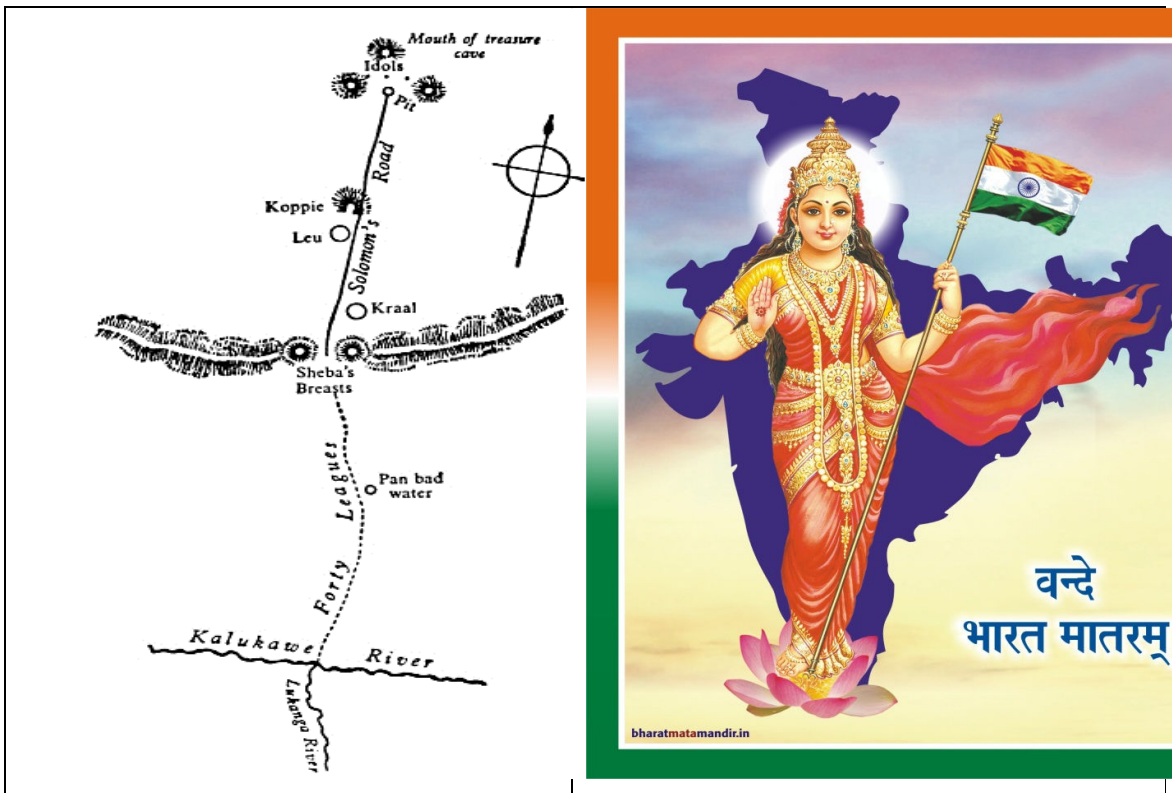
Fig: a) Map of Kikuayanaland from *King Solomon's Mines* b) 'Bharat Mata' or Mother India portrayed on a map of India

Such maps bring the discussion of spatiality from the second space of cartography simultaneously to the thirdspace of Other-ness as described by Soja. The connection between the map and the lived body, subaltern or otherwise, is a deep-rooted one. To examine this issue in terms of the videogame space in *ETW*, it will be useful to return to the question asked earlier about lived space in such empire-building games. When the player constructs a map of her own empire in *ETW*, there is much of the player's imagined spaces in the map and much that reflect issues (such as worker's riots, diplomatic offers, or buildings built) that are not obvious on the cartographic second space. Conceived space itself cannot be understood except in terms of lived space. In the *ETW* map below, one can see Spain and England carving out an empire in mainland Europe while Paris, still occupied by the French, lies besieged (the black smoke emanating out of it is indicative of the woes of the populace). Spanish agents move towards various cities in France. So clearly, the map reflects much that is going on beyond the level of conceived space in Lefebvre's trialectic description of spatiality.

Fig: Section of the map of Europe from a gameplay instance of *Empire: Total War*

However, with the expansionist logic of imperial space in *ETW* and other RTS games described earlier, the simultaneous space of protest also, arguably, affects the gameplay. Existing on the level of lived space, this is the thirdspace that Soja identifies. As in the writings of Said and Spivak, this thirdspace of protest is a problem in the videogame empires as it is in their real-life counterparts. Again, the concern of a player helpfully illustrates the problem (the description almost reads like an AAR):

> Strikes, Riots and Rebellions. How do I stop them?
>
> So I've taken most of Europe as Sweden and but I keep having money issues from exempting tax from lots of conquered cities and eventually its [sic] still not enough to fund my huge army and stop rebellions. I've rebuilt most of the junk in those cities that gets destroyed during a siege or takeover but they keep rioting an rebellion and eventually my large army is forced to stay behind and kill the rebels. I find it hard to take over the world since I've spent 5 years just behind and reconquering cities and killing rebels. Right now I'm at 1750 and its [sic] near impossible for my quest for world domination. It's just impossible to please the lower class people. How do I stop this from happening? My friend said I should change to a republic or constitutional monarchy but I doubt it will work. P.S. My government type is absolute monarchy atm. (Captainsnake 2009)

The player here is almost giving up on empire and expansion, so great is the problem caused by the protest space on his imperial map. One of the 'helpful' responses on the forum, by a

respondent called Crinalex, is equally intriguing if one is to consider this as the rationale for empire:

> I, also playing as Sweden had the exact problem around the same time. You're getting more and more schools, correct? You're building improved mining facilities and clothes and iron factories. The people who live in the countries aren't used to such awesome machinery as the one that your country probably is using, and it's costing them their jobs. At the same time, the progress in your schools and the philosophical knowledge is making them angry. Best thing is probably not to upgrade anything that brings down the happiness in the lower classes in awhile [sic], and perhaps let them destroy some of the factories, if they want to. Replacing stuff with bawdyhouses and such can also help. Hope this helped. (Crinalex 2009)

This logic runs counter to the redemptive claims that apologists of empire tend to make and it involves not taking technology and education to the colonies. Incidentally, the railway and the telegraph were held as partly responsible for creating the distrust that led to the Indian revolt of 1857 against the East India Company rule. There is no way of knowing whether Crinalex's recommendation worked as the foolproof solution for the Swedish empire in *ETW*; however, it is clear that protest (as the players' conversation above shows) and armed resistance (as encountered by the player who had recommended the Eddie Izzard tactic for conquering India) work greatly towards any comprehension of spatiality in empire-building games.

As stated earlier, alternative history-making also contributes to the challenge to empire. Almost as a postcolonial response, it is possible for players from erstwhile colonised countries to defeat their historical colonisers in *ETW* and thereby challenge imperial historiography with the alternative discourses from the RTS games. However, in doing so, they also adopt the same expansionist logic of empire that was posited by the real-life colonial powers. It cannot be denied, however, that within every such effort at expansion, whether real-life or in-game, there is an ineluctable element of the 'Other' space as Soja and others point out.

As Spivak observes in her postcolonial critique, decolonizing is a problematic term in the sense that the displacement of the colonizing powers from the colonized space still involves a logic that is similar to that used by empire. Further, the 'othered' space of protest always exists simultaneously as a 'thirding' to the spatiality of expansion as understood by empire.

In the videogame, too, the ejection of the colonizing faction from one's territory involves the same military process and this might be augmented with further expansion on the now-independent nation, which in turn starts reconfiguring space according to its territorial demands. Lived space is always part of this schema; in the case of a 'thirding', the marginal space emerges as a protest space and often, one sees in *ETW* that rebels have taken over a city – i.e. declared it independent. Mostly, the now independent city either forms a new faction or gets assimilated into some other larger state with imperial ambitions of its own.

Conclusion: Empire Remapped and Reloaded

Following the game's logic, there is no end to empire and its extent; yet, the spatial expansion is always accompanied by the thirdspace of protest. It is tempting in this context to end with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's much-debated concept of empire. For them, empire presents the paradigmatic form of 'biopower', a concept borrowed from Michel Foucault, which 'refers to a situation in which what is directly at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 24). Within such a theoretical framework, 'empire does not have any boundaries and it operates on registers of social order; it not only regulates human interactions but also seeks to rule over human nature' (Ibid.). Thus in their attempt to represent the age of empire and the corresponding conception of spatiality, one can argue that games like *ETW* end up doing much more. Whether one agrees with Hardt and Negri's view of empire as continuing into the present day, one thing is clear as far as the empire-building games such *ETW* are concerned. By allowing one to play with the supposed logic of empire, the game also brings out less obvious but key implications in understanding imperial notions of spatiality.

For Hardt and Negri, it is the multitude that will resist and reorganize the processes of empire to create a counter-empire, or an alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges that will 'deterritorialize' empire on its very own imperial terrain. They borrow the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and it will be useful to go back to the original source. To simplify a many-faceted and rather complex concept, deterritorialization is 'a capacity to take any actual thing and translate it into a movement of flow […] but deterritorialization, which relies on an initial territorialization, is also accompanied by reterritorialization [… which] arrests its tendency to produce and open flows by quantifying all exchange' (Colebrook 2001: 65).

In terms of understanding how spatiality is perceived, conceived and lived within the framework of empire, it is imperative to take into account the spaces of protest which as the an-Other space that Soja describes, deterritorializes imperial space by highlighting problems within the construction of such a space; however, this is always accompanied by a reterritorialization that closes off the flows of the marginal protest space and fixes an order of spatiality that is akin to the previous logic of imperial space. The videogame with its huge space-of-possibilities allows for many different ways in which one can (re)play the logic of empire. Together with the logic of imperialist expansion as designed by the developers through their victory conditions and other elements of gameplay, there is always the reconfiguring of space as embodied by the possibilities of alternative history, in-game opposition from the AI or other players and also the element of protest from within the lived thirdspace in the game. In a replay of the game or even in a few turns of the game (representing seasons in the real world), however, this reconfigured space itself becomes the norm, the process continues and it might be argued that the replaying of *Empire: Total War* illustrates the replaying of empire itself.

Games

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EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR, Creative Assembly, PC, 2009

RISE OF NATIONS, Big Huge Games, PC, 2003

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