

Uplink 17
The Transnational Issue
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- *God of War* and Postcolonial History

Introduction

Another holiday season is upon us, and the worst world economic crisis since the 1930s is slowly abating, thanks in part to titanic government bailouts in the US and EU, and partly to the responsible and forwards-looking leadership of the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India and China, 42% of the planetary population). In just fifteen years, the BRIC countries transformed themselves from broken-down peripheries and neoliberal basket-cases into trillion-dollar behemoths. They are not just key locomotives of the world recovery, they are also future superheavyweights of videogame culture.

While future issues of *Uplink* will examine the contributions of the BRIC nations to videogaming more closely, this issue will focus on one of the most important but least researched, understood, or appreciated aspects of today's transnational media. This is the profound influence of postcolonial history on our contemporary media culture. This runs far deeper than the commercial success of India's Bollywood films or China's *wuxia* action spectacles in US and European markets. In a nutshell, after centuries of being the compulsory objects of someone else's modernization, the countries of the global semi-periphery and true periphery (about 80% of humanity) are inventing their very own forms of modernity and their own media cultures.

In addition to this meditation on postcolonial culture, we have updates on Sony's console strategy and an analysis of the upcoming epic *God of War 3*.

Transnational Regions and West African Media

One of the most fundamental but least theorized transformations of today's media is what we will call, for lack of a better term, transregionalism – loosely defined as regionalism in the era of the digital commons. This regionalism has one foot in geographically or linguistically-defined spaces – say, the Yoruba and Igbo video cultures of Nigeria, or the Malayali and Tamil cinema of India – but also crosses all manner of geographical and national borders (e.g. Yoruba and Tamil-language videos circulate within both a local and global diaspora).

Transregionalism should not be confused with the official national or dominant culture-industry of a given postcolonial state. Rather, it is the network of cultural flows, voluntary and involuntary migration, finance, tourism, trade and travel between nation-states and between national culture-industries. For example, the celebrated song-and-dance sequences of India's blockbuster film culture, popularly termed Bollywood (a fusion of “Bombay”, the former name of Mumbai, plus “Hollywood”), can sometime display striking moments of transregionalism, in the sense that they (1) depict complex bricolages of local and regional musical, dance and

theatrical cultures, and (2) are marketed to India's domestic audience, as well as to a globe-spanning Indian diaspora. That said, the overwhelming majority of Bollywood films operate within the narrative framework of India's postcolonial nationalism, in much the same way that Hollywood films operate within the boundaries of American consumer culture.

Transregionalism also has an economic dimension, and that is the rise of a truly multipolar world-system. This multipolar world is vastly more urbanized, more democratic, more diverse, and far more economically productive than the bipolar world of the Cold War. This is not to say that nation-states and national cultures have disappeared, but simply to note the degree to which even the largest nation-states are enmeshed in globe-spanning economic, social, cultural and geopolitical networks.

The most obvious example of this transregionalism is the European Union, which comprises 27 nations and 495 million citizens. Collectively, the nations of the EU are a superpower, with the biggest single economy on the planet and one of its most valuable and solid currencies (the euro). However, some of the most interesting examples of transregionalism are occurring in the developing world, everywhere from the networking of the Latin American countries under ALBA, to the “ASEAN plus three” discussions between the Southeast and East Asian countries. There are also a host of transregionalisms emerging around the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India and China) – Brazil is creating powerful trade, cultural and political ties with the rest of Latin American as well as the Lusophone African nations, Russia is networking with the former Soviet republics turned independent nations, India is reaching out to the South Asian region, while China is fostering good relations with its Southeast Asian and East Asian neighbors.

One of the most significant but least advertised forms of this transregionalism is taking place in West Africa. This region can be roughly defined, running from northwest to southeast, as the countries of Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Niger, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria. During the 19th and most of the 20th centuries, these countries were the colonial property of European powers, including Britain, France, Portugal and Spain. Most won their independence comparatively recent, in the final wave of decolonizations after WW II.

However, formal political independence does not automatically translate into good governance or equitable development, and many African countries (including most of the ones mentioned above) have struggled with political instability and economic hardship. That said, the first sixty years of African independence have not been noticeably worse than the first sixty years of independence anywhere else in the world. One of the nastiest and most devious media mythologies spread by the US and Western European mainstream media is the notion that Africa is a hopelessly corrupt, reactionary and backward place. Yet compared to the first sixty years of 19th century Latin America and North America, a period replete with dictatorships, inter-cine wars, slavery, destructive economic crises, and the US Civil War, the track record of the independent African countries looks surprisingly good. Interstate wars have been almost nonexistent, democracy has taken root in most countries, and social and educational indicators have improved.

This is all the more amazing considering the hostile environment in which independent African countries had to navigate – the fact that their former colonial masters remained extraordinarily rich and powerful, resulting in paternalistic forms of neocolonialism, and the fact that the superpowers of the day, the US and the USSR, often used Africa as a proxy battleground of the Cold War by arming client states to the teeth (alas, these arms were frequently turned against civilians, in the form of military coups). While the militarization of Africa declined after the end of the Cold War, Wall Street neoliberalism began to impose a new and terrible form of intervention in Africa. From 1980 to 2005, IMF-World Bank austerity policies based on

neoliberal orthodoxy ravaged the poor, demolished the middle class, and enriched the oligarchic few. Economies stagnated, real wages dropped, and living standards stagnated or even fell for most Africans.

For all its limitations, however, political independence did achieve one essential goal: it made the resistance movements against neoliberalism possible. There is no better example of this than the West Africa media culture. Since the mid-1990s, there has been an explosion of indigenous media broadcasting, distribution and production throughout Africa. This includes the dramatic expansion of FM radio broadcasting, the rise of West Africa's world-class music culture, the emergence of thriving CD and DVD television markets (e.g. Nigeria's Nollywood recorded video industry), and a massive and ongoing cellphone and Internet boom. Yet none of this would have been possible without decades of prior investments by independent African states in their own civil services, their own networks of basic and secondary education, and their own social services.

There is no better example of this dialectic of independence and transregionalism than the great Senegalese director Ousmane Sembène, one of the most protean and polymathic directors of the late 20th and early 21st century. Scholars of Francophone and Third World film have long celebrated Sembène's titanic contributions to Africa's indigenous cinema. He not only created sub-Saharan Africa's first great films, including the first to use indigenous African languages (Wolof and Bambara), he fought tirelessly his whole life for the external recognition of Africa's filmmaking talents, as well as for internal social justice within Senegal and other African countries.

Unlike so many other auteurs, who perfect a certain style and and repeat themselves thereafter, Sembène had an amazing capacity to reinvent himself as a filmmaker – the nine feature films and the various short films he created from 1966 to 2004 display extraordinary thematic variation and depth. Ironically, this thematic richness has confused all too many film critics, who have concluded – quite wrongly – that Sembène's later work was the mere continuation of his earlier, more didactic films. In reality, Sembène's final two films, *Faat Kiné* (1999) and *Mooladé* (2004) deliver some of the most advanced video techniques and stinging anti-neoliberal meditations of their day, though in two different locations. They also foreground the power and collective agency of women, in ways Sembène's previous films did not directly address. Whereas *Faat Kiné* focuses on the women professionals of the postcolonial metropolis (in this case, Dakar, the capital city of Senegal), the major characters of *Mooladé* are the women of Africa's rural countryside.[1] Both films leverage the forms of a thriving West African media culture in new and interesting ways.

To see Sembène's influence at work, one need look no further than the musical and video works of Senegalese musician Baaba Maal, and the Malian musical duo Amadou and Mariam. Baaba Maal wrote the sound-track for Sembène's anti-neocolonial drama *Guelwaar* (1992), and has become a prominent celebrity of the global music scene. Baaba Maal's video *Gorel* (note the actual running time of this video is 3:55, not 10:29), Amadou and Mariam's *Sabali*, and Amadou and Mariam's *Senegal Fast Food*, a deft collaboration with Manu Chao, feature world-class musical compositions with hard-hitting lyrics and sparkling visuals. More recently, the video for the title track of Baaba Maal's most recent album, *Television* (2009), samples acoustic and visual materials from Hollywood, Bollywood, Brazilian film, Western European film, various Internet media, and even the videogame genre (e.g. *LittleBigPlanet*'s signature cloth-based environments).

What is especially encouraging and hopeful about the West African media is the increasing influence of female artists, something visible everywhere from Sister Fa's scorching hip hop track *Milyamba* to Njaaya's stirring and soulful *Social Living*. These songs and videos detail the lives and struggles of Senegalese women facing the triple burden of domestic

patriarchy, economic neocolonialism and cultural neoliberalism. Sembène's final films, with their strong female characters and rediscovery of gender as a key site of anti-colonial history, were very much the forerunner of the progressive media productions of the contemporary women artists of West Africa.

Endnotes

1. West Africa's fast-growing cities are key drivers of its media boom. Many of these cities were former colonial metropolises, i.e. hubs of colonial administration. Upon independence, many of these cities became significant centers of indigenous media production. They include Nairobi in Kenya, Cairo in Egypt, Accra in Ghana, Lagos in Nigeria, and Dakar in Senegal.

Sony's Stop and Go

Probably the least surprising news of this autumn was Sony's decision to slash the price of the PS3 to \$299/299EUR. It's important to remember that since the launch of the PS3 in 2006, vast numbers of Wall Street flacks predicted Microsoft would crush Sony into pulp. These were the same geniuses, by an amazing coincidence, who said US housing prices would go up forever, that the gargantuan current account deficits of the US didn't matter, and that the Wall Street Bubble would inflate forever.

By contrast, *Uplink* maintained as early as 2006 that Microsoft's strategy was fundamentally flawed, and that the moment the PS3 dropped to \$300 (this is the "sweet spot" of mass consumption, equal in inflation-adjusted terms to the \$200 price tag which drove PS2 sales back in 2001), Microsoft would be lucky to retain 20% share of the world market.

The results are finally in: sales of the price-reduced PS3 have skyrocketed, while Microsoft's market share for home consoles has precipitously declined to 22% for the first three quarters of 2009.

Since it is the quasi-nobilitarian privilege of Wall Street hucksters to never, ever lose their jobs or to even exhibit the slightest iota of shame, no matter how outrageously wrong they were or how many billions of dollars they lost for their hapless clients, *Uplink* is tempted to invoke the time-honored privilege of critics of Wall Street ever since the 1930s Pecora hearings – the privilege of saying "we told you so". But that would be petty and mean-spirited. In the spirit of the upcoming holiday season, we'll limit ourselves to a simple observation. The price tag for hundreds of Wall Street analyst reports on videogaming: tens of thousands of dollars. The price tag of *Uplink's* quarterly columns: free.

That said, it's not all smooth sailing for the good ship Sony. On October 1, Sony's latest version of its highly successful PSP arrived in shops around the world, called the PSP Go. The Go was billed as the world's first all-digital portable gaming console. Whereas the PSP is just slightly too big to fit comfortably into a pocket, the Go has a compact screen and employs a sliding screen which slides open, revealing a set of controls underneath. In addition, the UMD mini-disc drive of the existing PSP has been removed, which means all games must now be downloaded and stored on the Go's internal 16GB internal drive or on plug-in memory sticks. While the Go has excellent ergonomics, a nifty design, a beautiful screen, and built-in Bluetooth capacity, it also has some limitations.

First, the prices of downloadable games are currently the same as retail prices, which may

seem like a pure markup for Sony at the expense of consumers (in reality, things are a bit more complicated than this). Second, the Go uses a proprietary cable, instead of a standard USB cable for recharging and file transfers. Third, consumers who already purchased minidisc versions of PSP games cannot transfer those games to the new device. Fourth, the price tag is a hefty \$249/249 EUR, far too expensive for most consumers.

For a current PSP owner, all these limitations can seem exasperating, and some of the product reviews have been stinging (Ars Technica reviewer Ben Kuchera [has the best-written summary here](#)). Kuchera makes some trenchant points, but it's a bit unfair to compare the Go to the existing PSP, for the simple reason that the Go is not designed to be the latter's replacement. Rather, the Go is a niche product, an all-digital supplement to the existing PSP. It is designed to appeal to consumers willing to pay extra for a smaller, lighter, and more portable gaming experience in wireless-dense cities – a polite way of saying, Japan and major Western European markets.

It's worth remembering that Sony has no control over most of the prices for the PSP's downloadable content. These are set by independent vendors and game companies, who are charging premium prices for what they see – correctly – as a premium niche product. Over time, of course, those prices will drop to lower levels.

The proprietary cable is indeed unfortunate, though it's true that it is automatically included with every Go and does fuse the media-out cable and power cable into a single unit. Still, this isn't better or worse than the custom connectors required by many other digital electronic devices. Nor is the price tag of the Go terribly out of line with the cost of other comparably-equipped media players.

Probably the biggest legitimate complaint against the Go is that consumers who already purchased minidisc versions of PSP games cannot transfer those games to the new device. The reason, of course, is that there's no way to distinguish games purchased from the used market, or borrowed from a friend, from an original purchase. Again, this isn't necessarily Sony's fault – it's up to individual game companies to decide whether to release all-digital versions of their games or not, and whether to include vouchers to allow consumers who purchase mini-disc versions of games to access free downloads as well.

What makes the Go a transitional product, however, is the fact that it inherited its control scheme from the original PSP. There were two good reasons that the PSP did not come with two thumb-nubs, similar to the controller of the PS2 and PS3. First, portable hardware is not powerful enough to depict terribly realistic 3D environments, and secondly, two thumb-nubs are an ergonomic nightmare on such a small unit. The PSP is a flat device, i.e. the surfaces and triggers are not curved, as with a standard PS2 or PS3 controller. Twin nubs might be fine for five minutes of gaming, but become a literal pain in the tendons over longer periods.

Given the need for portability and the limited utility of buttons as a control device, we would argue that the future successor of the PSP will need not just one, but two touch-screen devices. The first is an external touch-screen to facilitate easy media and web access, volume adjustments, and the like. The second would be an internal touch-pad just below the triangle, square, circle and X buttons. Users could simply navigate by effortlessly draping a finger across the pad, instead of applying constant pressure to a knob, thus enabling true 3D movement without afflicting regular users with carpal tunnel syndrome. Of course, this would increase manufacturing costs considerably, to the point where it is unlikely we will see anything like such a device in the near future.

Whatever solution Sony comes up with in terms of controls, there's no question the next generation of handheld videogame consoles (due sometime in 2011 or 2012) are going to jumpstart a whole new age of gaming. More advanced controls, online connectivity, copious onboard storage, and advanced screens will allow game-makers to take a qualitative leap

forwards in game-play – something Hideo Kojima undoubtedly has in mind with his *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* game for the PSP.

***God of War* and Postcolonial History**

At first glance, ancient Greek mythology would seem to be the perfect spawning-grounds for videogame titles. Its theatrical and lyric works, ranging from Homer's *Odyssey* to the plays of Euripedes, rank among the greatest documents of world literature. Its larger-than-life heroes, soul-shattering wars, and all-too-human deities have furnished material for countless films and television series.

Yet for decades, the track record of Greek-themed videogames has been singularly unimpressive. In part, this may have been due to the comparative sophistication of those cinematic and television narratives. The earliest videogame consoles could not compete with Hollywood's lush special effects budgets. That said, companies such as Square Enix have always found creative ways around these limitations – the average *Final Fantasy* game brims over with gods, legends and monsters. What was so hard about bringing the residents of Olympus to life in the same way?

The answer to this mystery would finally be revealed in 2005, in the form of the first certifiably outstanding Greek-mythology-themed videogame: Sony's *God of War* (2005). The game was created by Sony's Santa Monica studio, the crown jewel in the company's globe-spanning studio network, and directed by the talented David Jaffe, who has since moved on to become an independent game producer in his own right.

Unlike so many other visually stylish but narratively deficient action games, *God of War* balanced bone-crunching action sequences with a sophisticated, literate backstory. The game's creators had the key insight that due to the sheer profusion of Greek mythology throughout the 20th century media culture, the audience would demand the highest possible standard of voice-acting, character depictions and storyline to accompany the game's suitable epic style of play.

But things did not stop there. Just two years later, Sony's Santa Monica studio delivered a sequel, *God of War 2* (2007), which surpassed its worthy predecessor in every way imaginable. This was all the more remarkable, considering that the PS2 was already being supplanted by the next generation of consoles (the Xbox360 arrived in late 2005, and the Playstation 3 and Wii in 2006). Director Cory Barlog and Santa Monica's world-class artists, programmers and designers employed a judicious mixture of high-definition cut-scenes, epic boss battles, polished sound design, and subtle game-play refinements which extracted the maximum from the aging PS2 platform.

This tradition of combining the utmost technical ingenuity with the most sophisticated forms of narration is also apparent on *God of War: Chains of Olympus* (2008), a superb prequel to the events of the first *God of War*. Unlike its two predecessors, *Chains* was released on Sony's handheld console, the PSP. Independent studio Ready at Dawn worked closely with the Santa Monica team to translate the (literally and figuratively) titanic conflicts of the storyline into handheld format. The result was a world-class action title for the PSP which loses nothing of its epic scope or narrative subtlety in the transition to a physically smaller platform.

The projected finale of the series, *God of War 3*, directed by Stig Asmussen, is slated to appear on the PS3 either later this year or early 2010, and the trailers for the game show every indication of that Santa Monica will either equal or surpass the lofty standard set by its three previous games.

The remarkable achievement of publishing three world-class games in as many years is all the more extraordinary considering that the franchise has never had a single dominant

personality or director at its helm, in the way Hideo Kojima masterminded the *Metal Gear* franchise. One of the reasons for this productivity is revealed by a bonus DVD released along with the official *God of War 2* videogame, which contains documentary footage of the game's production, as well as extensive interviews with voice-actors and staff members. The animators, modelers, tool-builders, motion capture actors, testers and visual artists of the Santa Monica studio are one of the most transnational and multicultural workforces of any studio in the world.

In addition to its racial and ethnic diversity, the staff is remarkably gender-balanced, with female professionals playing key roles in sound design, visuals and scriptwriting. In particular, scriptwriter Marianne Krawczyk deserves wider recognition for her work on all of the *God of War* games (she also co-wrote the script for one of the most underrated dungeon-crawlers for the PSP, *Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade* (2005)).

Indeed, one of the reasons for the franchise's extraordinary vitality is its emphasis on the story and script. These are aspects of game design which are all too often overlooked by an industry obsessed by visual effects. It is especially significant that each of the various directors of the *God of War* series have had a direct hand in writing the story.¹ The first *God of War* was penned by the afore-mentioned Marianne Krawczyk, Keith Fay, Alexander Stein and game director David Jaffe. *God of War 2* was co-written by James Barlog (Cory's real-life father, and an experienced detective and mystery writer), Marianne Krawczyk, Ariel Lawrence, William Weissbaum and game director Cory Barlog. Something similar is true of *Chains of Olympus*, which was co-written by Cory Barlog, David Jaffe, Marianne Krawczyk, and Ready at Dawn's co-founder Ru Weerasuriya, who also directed the title.

All of these directors and writers deserve enormous credit for realizing that no mythology of the preindustrial era could be simply transferred wholesale from the literary and theatrical archives to the digital era. Nor could the franchise easily adopt the techniques of the cinema, because the result would have been a set of cut-scenes devoid of playable content. Rather, the fundamental narrative categories of Greek mythology – the cyclical time of agrarian, slave-owning city-states supercharged with Mediterranean trading-rents, buffeted by internal factionalism and external land empires – would have to be accessed and retold in a new way.

What the writers did was to take two of the most testosterone-soaked, pro-imperialist, and stereotype-infested genres of the First World mass media, namely the sword-and-sandals movie and the fantasy-adventure game, and set them in motion towards postcolonial history. The result does much more than simply critique the concept of linear time or teleological history (the ideology of gods and goddesses), as well as critique the myth of redemptive or state-sanctioned violence (the ideology of war). It is also a meditation on the categories of post-American or multipolar history.

This meditation begins with superb voice-acting, which includes Linda Hunt as the narrator of GoW1 and the voice of Gaia in GoW2, the immensely talented T.C. Carson as Kratos, and Carole Ruggier as Athena. Special mention should also be made of Michael Clarke Duncan, the voice of Atlas, as well as Harry Hamlin, who plays a surprisingly devious Perseus (a sly nod to his role as the heroic version of Perseus in the 1981 thriller *Clash of the Titans*, as well as his sparkling performance as the villainous Aaron Echolls in the TV series *Veronica Mars* (2004-2006)). Corey Burton's voice-acting as Zeus also deserves notice, due to its complex admixture of overweening hubris, leavened with half-conscious pangs of remorse. Even the smaller roles shine, everywhere from Paul Eiding's morally compromised Theseus to Bob Joles' creepily demented Icarus.

The choice of T.C. Carson, an African American stage actor with extensive voice credits in other videogame titles, is especially revealing. What Carson brings to the role of Kratos is not just bravura intensity, but a subtle, mordant quality which can only be defined as postcolonial irony. It is the awareness of the colossal brutality and violence of the empire which African

Americans are most familiar with, namely the US Empire, combined with the acknowledgement of the necessity to use the narrative tools and mass media of that Empire. This fits with Kratos' dawning realization that his entire life was a ruse of Olympian reason: he was only the tool of the gods, used to control both the titans and the human world.

Once Kratos starts to break free of the rule of the gods, he begins to access the categories of history in new and startling ways. One of the most striking and consistent themes of GoW2 is its constant emphasis on history, memory and the power of mythical retelling, to the point that even the level titles suggest memory (e.g. "Bog of the Forgotten"). Indeed, the storyline cleverly transforms the theme of retelling into a key element of game-play. Kratos acquires a limited power to rewind and travel through time, and players must solve a number of puzzles using this power. Similarly, the grim fate of the translators – they must read spells, and are then sacrificed to enable the flight of the phoenix – is both a striking commentary on the category of mythic sacrifice, as well as a mischievous and self-deprecating nod to the hapless programmers who had to figuratively sweat blood to achieve near-impossible levels of visual performance from the PS2 platform (i.e. like the blood of the translators, their labor "disappears" into the experience of the videogame).

One of the most startling revelations of the game occurs when Kratos finds himself before a shackled Atlas, the titan who carries the weight of the world on his four massive arms and broad shoulders. When Kratos strives to convince Atlas to join his quest to defeat Zeus, Atlas begins to reminisce about the Great War between the titans and gods, leading to the following cut-scene ([the complete video sequence is available on Youtube](#)):

Player action: destroy one of Atlas' chains. After chain breaks, the following cut-scene plays.

Atlas: "Who dares break my chains of torment?" *Atlas grabs Kratos and tries to crush him between an enormous thumb and forefinger. Kratos struggles to stay alive. Atlas is so enormous, his gigantic eye and part of his brow are enough to fill the entire background.*

Atlas: "You are strong. But you are far too small, even for an Olympian, to be a god." *Atlas groans, then narrows his eye as he recognizes Kratos. Atlas continues: "Kratos... you dare show your face to me, after what you have done?"*

Player action: alternately press R1 and L1 rapidly to avoid being crushed to death.

Atlas: "I will make you suffer, Kratos."

Kratos: "Atlas, you must trust me. Much has passed since we last met."

Player action: alternately press R1 and L1 rapidly once again to avoid being crushed.

Atlas: "Why would I ever trust a servant of Zeus?"

Kratos: "Because I seek to destroy Zeus." *Surprised, Atlas eases his grip and Kratos lands in Atlas' outstretched palm. Atlas laughs a mighty laugh.*

Atlas: "Kratos. Still the arrogant and foolish warrior. Hmm. I see you have not changed. And how do you plan to defeat the king of the gods?"

Kratos: "By taking the Blade of Olympus back and driving it into Zeus's heart. It commands the power I once wielded as the God of War."

Atlas: "The Blade of Olympus? I have not heard that name in many years." *Scene cuts to Atlas' reminiscence of the ancient war between the titans and gods. Lightning flickers in the hand of a young Zeus. A tornado funnel spins on the horizon. Atlas continues: "Not since... not since the end of the Great War. Blood-lust and power reigned through Zeus. His desire to rule over mortals was intolerable to us." Scene cuts to a shot of the titans and gods warring over a vast, burning landscape.*

Atlas: "The war between the titans and the Olympians forged the landscape of the mortal world." *Camera shows Hades trying to bind Chronos and extract his magic power with glowing*

golden chains. Atlas continues: "It was a war we knew the titans must win." Atlas sees Chronos is in trouble, and rushes up to drive Hades away and rescue Chronos.

Atlas: "If we lost, it would mean an end to the golden age of the titan rule. Peace and prosperity for mankind would be no more." Chronos is finally rescued, but is nearly exhausted. However, a lightning-bolt from Poseidon suddenly stuns Atlas. Shot of Poseidon wielding a magical orb, which shoots electricity at Atlas. Hades turns and throws his golden chains at Atlas. Atlas struggles desperately, but is eventually brought to earth by the golden chains. Hades strips away and absorbs Atlas' magic power, and the titan falls to the earth, helpless, with eyes full of sorrow, henceforth shackled to the bidding of the gods.

This is one of the transcendental scenes of contemporary videogame culture, and the moment that the multicultural animators, designers and programmers of Santa Monica throw down the ideological gauntlet. For this is no premodern tale of how one group of immortal beings came to overthrow another. Rather, the scene depicts the historic tragedy of capitalist modernization – the birth of the world-market via primitive accumulation. Poseidon's orb is a suggestive symbol of global commerce, a.k.a. the power to navigate the oceans, while Hades' chains are a symbol of the gold standard which drove the economy of early mercantilism and colonialism. Meanwhile, the muscular bodies of the titans are a direct reference to the bodies of Africans and indigenous Americans yoked to slavery and plantation agriculture.

If the labor-power of the titans is the corporeal link between the colonial past and the neoliberal present, then we can read the character of Kratos in a new and unexpected way. As the tool of the gods, Kratos was the personification of the Second and Third World military juntas, client states and comprador bourgeoisies which kept the semi-periphery obedient to the dictates of the US metropole. Once Kratos casts off his allegiance to the Ameri-gods, however, then he automatically acquires the status of quite a different historical agency. This agency is not the power of the Eurostate, another capitalist metropole with its own version of neoliberalism, but something rooted in the historical experience of the developing countries.

We will suggest that Kratos is one of the first great symbols of the developmental states of the semi-periphery, who are indeed rejecting the economic and political tyranny of the former metropole. This is relayed by one the final battles of GoW2, when Kratos battles against the Sisters of Fate, grotesque servants of Olympus who control the threads of the past, the present and the future. When Kratos defeats the Sisters, he acquires the power to travel through time, thereby offsetting the power of Zeus and the gods of Olympus to control space. Nowadays, the developmental states have acquired a roughly comparable power to control their accumulated labor-time, in the form of their immense foreign exchange reserves and equity stakes in their domestic economies.

Conversely, the final tragedy of GoW2 is rife with post-imperial meaning. This is the accidental death of Athena, goddess of victory and wisdom, during Kratos' confrontation with Zeus (she throws herself on Kratos' blade to save Zeus, who barely escapes with his life). This is a mordant symbol of a post-9/11 America, a society so fearful over the erosion of its rule that four hijacked jets could drive it into a fit of war-mongering madness and speculative ruination. The allegory is heightened by showing Athena's dying face turn a coppery green, a transparent reference to the Statue of Liberty. Indeed, one could go further and argue that the scene where Zeus betrays and attempts to kill Kratos at the very beginning of GoW2 is the symbolic invasion of Iraq: this is the liquidation of Saddam Hussein's rule, which was supposed to guarantee the dominion of the US Empire for another hundred years. Instead, it only accelerated the Empire's demise.

While we will have to wait until March 2010 for the release of GoW3, *Uplink* has full confidence in the ability of the Santa Monica team to go even further than GoW2, and to paint an

outline of what our multipolar world might be evolving into – to rewrite, in short, the twilight of the gods into the dawn of humanity.

Endnotes

1. This direct, hands-on role in crafting the story is unusual in the videogame industry, and comparable only to Hideo Kojima's role in scripting and writing the *Metal Gear* games, or to Insomniac's world-class *Resistance* franchise – Insomniac's CEO Ted Price helped to co-write the series' alternate-reality story.

Stay tuned for Uplink 18: The Geopolitics Issue!