

PERPETUAL POLEMOS: WAR PROFITEERING IN ASSASSIN'S CREED ODYSSEY

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Assassin's Creed Odyssey; the newest entry in Assassin's Creed series, provides interesting expressions of historical dominant Ancient Greece. The most unique and outstanding aspects of its expressions are those of war profiteering in Ancient Greece and its intersection with modern concepts and processes of war profiteering. Through textual analysis of the game's sign systems and rules, it is discovered that this game also strongly enforces perpetuated violent methods as means of profiteering through codification of those methods into key ludic rules of the game which create dissonance between its story and its gameplay. Finally, this research is expected provide new insight about expressions of union between violence and profit making in digital games.

Keynote: *Digital games, War, Profiteering, Violence, Rules, Narrative, Assassin's Creed*

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Introduction: The Second Peloponnesian War and Its Role in Ancient Greek History and Culture

Ancient Greek society was a volatile one, with constant conflicts against external actors and among city states themselves (Bowden, 1995; Hall, 1995; Hodkinson, 1995; Millet, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Peloponnesian War mainly between city states of Sparta and Athens including their respective allies, in particular, stood out as an epitome of perpetual widespread armed conflicts in Ancient Greece. The vacuum of outer threat in the aftermath of the Persian War resulted in struggles for military supremacy which; despite Greek society's hegemonic city states, involved various actors with self or collective interests and competing agencies (Roberts, 2017).

Short interval of peace periods in Ancient Greece would be immediately followed by violent conflicts between Sparta and Athens in battles for hegemonic supremacy of Ancient Greece (Bowden, 1995; Hall, 1995; Hodkinson, 1995; Millet, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Despite Spartan army's fearsome reputation, Athens managed to maintain their influence by naval domination throughout the Aegean Sea (Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Another factors which perpetuated armed conflicts between city states are constant pleas from multiple city states under Athens' Delian League and Spartan's Peloponnesian League regarding perceived aggressions from each other (Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). As Sparta and Athens were politically obliged to provide protections toward members of their respective city states leagues, they were almost always called to arms in the interval between the First and Second Peloponnesian War (Bowden, 1995; Hall, 1995; Hodkinson, 1995; Millet, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017).

Thus began the Second Peloponnesian War; an armed conflict which changed wartime social dynamics of Ancient Greece (Roberts, 2017). Wars in Ancient Greece were previously short, seasonal and sporadic (Roberts, 2017) with even the Persian War was decided in only few key conflicts (Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). The Second Peloponnesian War was a full-fledged conflict which lasted with constantly full intensity for 27 years and demanded vast human resources (Kagan, 1987; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). To verbally illustrate the magnitude of its impact, the Second Peloponnesian War did "introduce new ways of fighting, blur social

distinctions, multiply civil strife within poleis, and eradicate the time-honored tradition of fighting only in the spring and summer” (Roberts, 2017: 67). The Second Peloponnesian War marked the beginning of war as “an all-consuming, year round way of life” (Roberts, 2017: 67) in Ancient Greece and the end of its golden age (Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017).

The Second Peloponnesian War was ultimately won by the Peloponnesian league with surrender of Athens and dissolution of the Delian league as results of peace treaties (Kagan, 1987; Bowden, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Yet the end of the war of epic social catastrophe did not cease armed conflicts among city states (Kagan, 1987; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017) and those conflicts ironically gradually led to the end of Spartan hegemony due to governance politic neglects, economic strains in post-war time, and shortages of manpower to maintain its military might (Roberts, 2017). It was not until unification conquest of Ancient Greek world by the Kingdom of Macedonia that Ancient Greece experienced relatively more stable political circumstances (Austin, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Even then, wars still occurred (Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017).

Other than its historical significances, concepts, values and processes of war are deeply entrenched in Ancient Greek culture (Kagan, 1987; Bowden, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017) as “since the days of Achilles, bravery in warfare had been the supreme virtue of a Greek man” (Roberts, 2017: 72). Perhaps no city states codified their culture around war stricter than Sparta (Kagan, 1987; Hodkinson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Since early age, sons of Spartan citizens had been drafted into military service programs until their retirement age (Roberts, 2017) in addition to the city state’s education, social systems, and hegemonic dominance which revolve around military services (Hodkinson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Failure to graduate into active military service almost equalled to disgrace for Spartan men (Roberts, 2017). Take Athens as another example. Despite its democratic governance and priority on intellectual progress, provocation from the Peloponnesian League meant Athens needed to retaliate by force as their virtues demanded them to do so (Kagan, 1987; Roberts, 2017). Posthumously, only Spartans who died in war were to be commemorated with headstones and the epitaph of Aeschylus; an Athenian poet who is deemed as “the father of Greek tragedy” (Roberts, 2017: 72), only commemorated his military services (Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017).

War is also a prominent topic in Ancient Greek cultural artefacts (Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Homer's *Iliad*; one of greatest Ancient Greek poems, almost entirely discusses warfare (Sage, 1996). Homer's poetic style in general also often discusses various aspects of warfare (Bowden, 1995; Sage, 1996) "including weapons, tactics, and code of behaviour" (Sage, 1996: 1). Expressions of warfare in Ancient Greek are not limited to poems. Sage (1996) argues that Mycenaean period of Ancient Greece bore witness to representations of warfare in various art forms in addition to documentations of arsenals and processes of war despite their obscurity. The late Classical Greek period demonstrated various commemorations and heroic portrayals of soldiers who fell at war which served as attribution of virtuous Greeks in war (Rice, 1995).

War's ubiquity in Ancient Greek world begs a simple question; what caused it? Sage (1996) proposes three main causes of war in Ancient Greece. The first cause was religion; albeit inadvertently (Bowden, 1995; Sage, 1996). War marks a separation from daily life and there were various religious observances related to war; including praising military servicemen, dignifying the fallen and committing conflicts in specific time frame (Bowden, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). War, thus, became an integral part in observances of Ancient Greece religion although religious influences of war waned significantly during the Second Peloponnesian War (Roberts, 2017). The second cause of Ancient Greek war was political (Millet, 1995; Rice, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Ancient Greek city states were hostile toward each other (Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017) and armed conflicts were considered to be "a normal expedient in political life" (Sage, 1996: xi). Military participations and successes were also considered as measurements of political actors' might; thus war became an important instrument in imposing one's hegemonic dominance over others (Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). For all its virtuous, political and symbolical significances, there was another, much more pragmatic, cause of war in Ancient Greece: profit (Kagan, 1987; Foxhall, 1995; Hodkinson, 1995; Jackson, 1995; Millett, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017).

War Profiteering in Ancient Greece as A Reflection of Contemporary War Profiteering

Profit was a major motivation in Ancient Greek warfare (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Jackson (1995) argues that raids for post-battle loots including city wealth, defeated combatants who were to be sold as slaves, and livestock were widely practiced in Ancient Greek warfare. Such actions did not receive ramifications due to Ancient Greek society generally perceived forcible transfers of wealth and resources from the conquered to their conquerors as rightful and normal; even just and respectful (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996). Jackson (1995) elaborates that there were very limited restrictions of raids and plunders in Ancient Greek warfare with only ones' kin and religious places were declared as off-limits. The significance of profit was profound to the point of "wars must have had to promise plunder if they were to be thought worth starting" (Jackson, 1995: 69).

Raiding and plundering for loots are also significant topics in Ancient Greek cultural artefacts (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996). Homeric poems glorify acts of raiding and plundering in war and do not portray them as illegitimate means of profit-making (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996). Indeed, raiding and plundering are culturally significant practices of Ancient Greek mythopoetic (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996) as Homer's poems about the mythical Trojan War elaborate in details conflicts of accumulating wealth between Achilles and Agamemnon in which they prevent each other to gain maximum profit during the course of war (Sage, 1996). Odysseus is also depicted as boastful regarding his many successes in raids (Sage, 1996).

While practices of raiding and plundering had been common since earlier periods of Ancient Greece, they peaked in fourth century BCE during the Second Peloponnesian War as they became increasingly frequent and violent with introduction of territorial annexation as a new form of war profiteering (Kagan, 1987; Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017).

Conflicting city state actors were vying to occupy strategic geographical locations during the Second Peloponnesian War for accesses to resources, military plan, hegemony and bargaining powers (Roberts, 2017). Roberts (2017) explains a phase of the Second Peloponnesian War where Athenian forces occupied Pylos and advanced to Sphacteria which enabled them to temporarily gained upper hands from the Spartans due to the Pylos' natural fortifications, bushfire on Sphacteria, combined with Athenian military forces' tactical ingenuities. It was also not uncommon for both the Delian League and the Peloponnesian to launched

occupations for geographical advantages including body of water and fertile soils (Roberts, 2017).

Prominence of war in Ancient Greece also resulted in numbers of mercenaries who worked for most profitable bidders; namely mainland Ancient Greek tyrants (Sage, 1996). Although tyranny had mostly fallen out of favour to oligarchic and democratic governances and the profession was in decline, mercenaries regained prominence during the Second Peloponnesian War as it drained the human resources of both the League and the Peloponnesian League (Kagan, 1987; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Employments of mercenaries at the Second Peloponnesian War were initiated by the Peloponnesian League and were later followed by their rivalling the Delian League (Sage, 1996). Other than human resources shortages, there are several reasons for widespread employment of mercenaries in Ancient Greece (Sage, 1996).

The first reason was the Second Peloponnesian War's transactional nature where city states were obligated to financially compensate their citizens for participating at the war (Sage, 1996). Therefore, contracting better trained and experienced mercenaries for relatively small payments were considered to be more profitable compared to recruiting, training, in addition to financially compensating citizens (Sage, 1996). This was exceptionally prominent in the democratic Athens where its governance politic depended on majority vote (Kagan, 1987; Millett, 1995; Roberts, 2017).

The second reason was the Second Peloponnesian War's dynamic warfare tactics in which new strategies were constantly introduced (Sage, 1996). As the ever-changing warfare required constant military retraining of, it was considered to be more logically "economical to employ mercenaries than to train and keep in being units a state's own citizens" (Sage, 1996: 149) due to their vast numbers and little to no considerations regarding their well-beings (Sage, 1996). Finally, there are mutualistic symbioses among city states and mercenary groups as high demands for the profession resulted in its growth in numbers and availability across Ancient Greece (Sage, 1996). Mercenaries were ubiquitous in all Ancient Greek city states during the Second Peloponnesian War as its "length, nature, intensity and innovations" (Sage, 1996: 152) increased demands for mercenaries exponentially; who themselves were

motivated by profit of war loots (Sage, 1996).

Another strong significance of Ancient Greek war profiteering is its relevance in modern era. Concepts and processes of war profiteering in Ancient Greece parallel those in contemporary context (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Nordstrom, 2004). Nordstrom (2004) argues that 20th century and 21st century armed conflicts often take form in prolonged bushfire war which involve multiple factions and occur across national borders. Such conflicts are also proverbial fertile soils for profiteering through military industries arms dealing, money laundering, trade of wars' supporting equipment (Nordstrom, 2004; Kinsella, 2011).

Governments spent 700 billion US Dollars on armament through legitimate military industries in 1990s; which did not take into account illegitimate arms trade which were estimated to be valued at 500 billion US Dollars annually (Nordstrom, 2004). Additionally, arms trade is dominated by major countries and serves as a mean to solidify their powers through destabilization of developing countries in the form of supplying arms to conflicting actors (Kinsella, 2011). Private military companies' (PMC) involvements in armed conflicts are also common occurrence in modern warfare similar to how mercenaries were ubiquitous in Ancient Greece due to practical and moral eases in employing them. (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Nordstrom, 2004). One evidence is account of Mozambican civil war in 1980s where former Irish Republican Army combatants could be found providing their services thousands of miles away from Ireland (Nordstrom, 2004).

However, literatures about Ancient Greek warfare indicate that wars are relatively clear-cut affairs with defined actors, goals and modes of operation (Kagan, 1987; Bowden, 1995; Hall, 1995; Hodkinson, 1995; Jackson, 1995; Millet, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). The Second Peloponnesian War in particular was series of conflicts mainly between the Delian League and the Peloponnesian League with exchanging victories until they leaned to the latter's favour and ended in peace treaties to Sparta's advantages; all of which are documented clearly (Kagan, 1987; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). 20th and 21st century's armed conflicts on the other hand are more complicated, with various interest groups who intentionally practicing war profiteering through intersections of legal and illicit means are hidden behind biased or limited professional journalistic framings in reporting wars and convoluted; even obstructive,

bureaucratic diplomacy efforts to prevent or stop wars (Nordstrom, 2004). Nordstrom (2004) terms this as the shadow of war; proverbial invisible hands who pull strings and prevent publics to understand whole realities of wars.

To summarise, Ancient Greek warfare concerned much with profit gain through raiding, looting, plundering, occupying, and violent non-state actors outsourcing (Kagan, 1987; Jackson, 1995; Millett, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Such practice was perceived as normalcy in Ancient Greek society and which is also reflected various accounts and appraisals in Ancient Greek cultural artefacts (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996). Ancient Greek war profiteering also parallels war profiteering of contemporary age namely in how violent armed conflicts are mainly motivated by profit and result in material gains and losses for participating actors (Nordstrom, 2004; Kinsella, 2011). They differ, however, in invisibility as Ancient Greek warfare is a distant past phenomenon which only provides historical and cultural artefacts as research sources; which in turn depict Ancient Greek warfare as clearly-defined violent conflicts (Kagan, 1987; Jackson, 1995; Millett, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017).

Modern war profiteering, on the other hand, is an ongoing phenomenon which provides more sources to identify its invisibility in forms of shadow enterprises which are proverbially fuelled by armed conflicts and supported by cooperation from various major global institutions (Nordstrom, 2004; Kinsella, 2011). The next chapter of this article will textually analyse (Fernandez-Vara, 2015) representation and simulation (Neitzel, 2005; Mayra, 2008; Juul, 2009; Sicart, 2009; Bogost, 2010; Fernandez-Vara, 2015) of war and its corollaries in Assassin's Creed Odyssey as a fascinating intersection of Ancient Greek and modern war profiteering.

War Profiteering of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*: Discussion and Conclusion

As one of few triple-A games set in historical Ancient Greece, Assassin's Creed Odyssey represent and simulate (Neitzel, 2005; Mayra, 2008; Sicart, 2009; Bogost, 2010) unique blend of Ancient Greek war profiteering (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017) and its modern day counterpart (Nordstorm, 2004; Kinsella, 2011). The game's narrative takes place during the Peloponnesian War where the conflict was manipulated by the Cult of Kosmos; main antagonist

group of the game and aim, for solidification of influence and perpetuation of the Second Peloponnesian War for their material ends. The Cult of Kosmos itself is depicted as a secret society with members who were spread out in various socio-political groups in the game's Ancient Greek setting.

There were seven branches of the Cult of Kosmos and two leader figures. Each branch was locally led by sages who were most influential members of their respective branches. Each branch also served specific purposes; the Eye of Kosmos acted as information gatherers of the cult; the Silver Vein were the Cult of Kosmos' financial benefactors; Gods of the Aegean Sea maintained the cult's naval dominance; Worshippers of Bloodline who were fervent supporters of Deimos served as religious manipulators; Heroes of the Cult were the cult's mightiest combatants; Peloponnesian League conspirators; and members of the Delian League who served the Cult of Kosmos' interests instead of their city state and its allies. Two leader figures of the Cult of Kosmos were The Ghost of Kosmos who turned out to be Aspasia; Perikles' spouse, and Deimos who were the protagonist's sibling.

The Cult of Kosmos fill the role of invisible hands of war in the form of extra-state shadows network who machinated conflicts through specific methodologies for their own gain (Nordstrom, 2004; Kinsella, 2011; Bina, 2013). They also parallel extra-legal real-world power configurations of businesspeople, military officers and politicians in widening their reaches, solidifying their dominance and consolidating their means of profit within network of politic and market (Nordstrom, 2004; Kinsella, 2011). Nordstrom (2004) argues that shadows network possesses several key characteristics. The first characteristic is the network's multidimensionality which consist of economic prospectors, political power brokers and armed forces who follow certain set of values (Nordstrom, 2004).

This network "of power and exchange are governed by rules of exchange, codes of conduct, hierarchies of defense and power" (Nordstrom, 2004: 107), thus indicating its orderly nature (Nordstrom, 2004; Kinsella, 2011) despite its invisibility and apparent disconnectedness (Nordstrom, 2004). The Cult of Kosmos fits into this category due to their aforementioned memberships which consist mostly of politicians, businesspersons, and military officers and/or combatants who are either affiliated or not affiliated with Athens or Sparta. More importantly, the Cult of Kosmos members are guided by monotheistic creed which emphasizes orderly and

peaceful Ancient Greek world which interestingly is at odd with the cult's modes of operation.

Secondly, shadow networks operate across borders (Nordstrom, 2004) and "blur distinction between discrete nation states and recognized political and national borders" (Nordstrom, 2004: 107). Although this characteristic is downplayed by the Ancient Greek setting of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* in which all city states virtually shares the same culture despite several differences and had vastly different border system from modern nation states, the Cult of Kosmos again fits in this characteristic due to its diverse members who originate from various Ancient Greek city states and even from beyond or unknown regions. Yet they network with little to no difficulty to consolidate the Cult of Kosmos' political power and gaining profit through their operation all across Ancient Greek world.

Finally, shadow networks are hybrid of formal and non-formal organization (Nordstrom, 2004). The Cult of Kosmos has formally integrated structures with codes of conduct despite its invisibility but at the same time consist of double agents from various affiliations with considerable resources who use or abuse their power and wealth for the cult's political solidification and/or financial gains. Flexibility of movements to conduct enterprises by businesspersons further supported by non-state military forces of the Cult of Kosmos, thus forming an extra-state process who orchestrate, perpetuate and make profit from the Second Peloponnesian War.

Reflecting from modern war profiteering methods and characteristics of the Cult of Kosmos as a shadow network, pre-set narratives (Neitzel, 2005; Bogost, 2010) of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* represent (Newman, 2004; Neitzel, 2005; Bogost, 2010) Ancient Greek war profiteering (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996) by Sparta, Athens and the Cult of Kosmos in three methods which are manipulation, violence, and business enterprises (Nordstrom, 2004; Kinsella, 2011) is formulated. The foremost method of the Cult of Kosmos in machinating war is manipulation through legality (Nordstrom, 2004). Nordstrom (2004) argues that legality is dynamic and arbitrary concept where social actors with greater power possess more influence in conceptualizing and exercising aspects of legality. Many members of the Cult of Kosmos; namely historical-based Aspasia the Ghost of Sparta, Kleon of the Delian League and Pausanias of the Peloponnesian League, were legitimately influential political actors within their respective borders who were in turn able to steer governance politic decision making to the secretive cabal's favour. Aspasia, through her spousal

relationship with Perikles, gained vast wealth and socio-political influence. Kleon actively undermined Perikles; who opted more defensive strategy for Athens, through offensive campaigns propaganda. He ultimately achieved his goals through machinations with his fellow Delian League branch members in conjunctions with to plague of Athens (Roberts, 2017). In Sparta, Pausanias also conspired with his fellow cultists to prolong the Second Peloponnesian War and nullify diplomatic efforts to end war from the Peloponnesian League behalf. Their efforts bore fruits as the Second Peloponnesian War continued after the conclusion of Cult of Kosmos narrative chapter in the game.

Another legitimacy comes in the form of Oracle of Delphi's manipulation by the Cult of Kosmos. Oracle of Delphi was among supreme religious figures of Ancient Greece of which her prophecies were considered to be divine in nature and to be obeyed (Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). In Assassin's Creed Odyssey, there is a fascinating representation of Oracle of Delphi which depicts her as invisible hands' instrument as she delivered her prophecies in accordance to instructions by the Cult of Kosmos. This ensured any decision to be undertaken by Ancient Greek political actors were, unknowingly, in accordance to the Cult of Kosmos' interests. Cult of Kosmos' manipulations through religious aspects of Assassin's Creed Odyssey's settings are afforded by legal aspects of its represented Ancient Greek. The cult's manipulations of the Oracle of Delphi had big impacts due to cultural values which persuade Ancient Greek society to obey her decrees; including royalties and other prominent political actors (Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017).

Narratively specific, Assassin's Creed Odyssey's representation of Persian War in prologue portion of the game depicts it as strongly related to manipulation of the Oracle of Delphi by the Cult of Kosmos. It depicts the cult ordering the Oracle of Delphi to stop Sparta from advance to offense as the secret cabal supported Xerxes I of Persia and did not wish the mighty city state to intervene. Leonidas I of Sparta, however, became aware of such conspiracy during his pilgrimage to the Temple of Apollo for consultation with the Oracle of Delphi and openly defied the Cult of Kosmos' machinations. The cult in turn have been hunting down his kin since the warrior king lost his life during the Persian War as the cult deemed his bloodline jeopardizing their plan, especially the protagonist's nuclear family as direct and immediate descendants of Leonidas I.

In term of ludo-narrative, Cult of Kosmos' manipulations of the Oracle of Delphi are directly responsible in transformations of two Spartan siblings into the Eagle Bearer; the game's

protagonist as well as the older sibling, and Deimos; the game's main antagonist and the younger sibling. Regardless of players' choices of in-game avatar, the Cult of Kosmos would instruct the Oracle of Delphi to deliver prophecies regarding the younger sibling would bring destruction to Sparta, thus, had to be eliminated. Through pre-set narrative of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* both siblings would be separated from each other and from their mother; Leonidas' daughter, for decades as a result of the Cult of Kosmos' manipulation with regard to intersection between legality and religion (Sage, 1996; Nordstorm, 2004; Roberts, 2017) before being reunited through procedural narrative's contingencies of the game (Neitzel, 2005; Bogost, 2010).

Cult of Kosmos manipulations in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*'s representations and simulations (Juil, 2005; Neitzel, 2005; Sicart, 2009; Bogost, 2010) of Ancient Greek society are paired by their military might and violent modus operandi. Several members of the Cult of Kosmos are narratively depicted as high ranking military officers with Kleon and Pausanias particularly serve as supreme commanders of Athens and Sparta respectively due to their statuses as premiere statesman and King. These narrative elements are supported by another element in the form of Cult of Kosmos members who are heavily guarded by either Spartan or Athenian armies, and several story plots involve members of the Cult of Kosmos commit act of violent armed aggressions. Additionally, the Cult of Kosmos also employ militia units which are referred as Cultist Guards with main purposes to enforce their important members and in accomplishing their goals which require extra-legal acts of violence. Aforementioned cultist guards are significant plot devices during *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*'s representation of the Athenian plague where they; alongside Deimos, murdered Phoebe and Perikles. These representations resulted in intensifying animosity from the Eagle Bearer's toward the Cult of Kosmos, and progression of Kleon's machinations to be the premiere statesman of Athens.

Abundance of mercenaries; *misthios* as they are referred in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*, in Ancient Greece is also represented and simulated in the game. Various characters who represent Sparta, Athens and the Cult of Kosmos are depicted as regular employers of mercenaries. In ludonarrative contexts of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*, mercenaries are mostly hired by Sparta and Athens as outsourcing workforces to strengthen their rank and files for geopolitical conquests Second Peloponnesian War and to apprehend/terminate outlaws. The Cult of Kosmos are depicted to be hiring mercenaries mainly to commit clandestine assassination of individuals when mobilisation of manipulated Spartan and/or Athenian forces are not the most logical option. Said

practice is particularly important during narrative plot which depicts group of mercenaries hired by the Peloponnesian League branch are dispatched to intercept the Eagle Bearer from regrouping with the Spartan general Brasidas after accomplishing a series of missions. Additionally, the Cult of Kosmos' Heroes of the Cult branch consist entirely of powerful mercenaries who work primarily for the cult; namely in eliminating the Eagle Bearer. Exelsias the Legend; Heroes of the Cult's sage, is also ranked as the top mercenary in Ancient Greece by the game's default, thus, indicating the Cult of Kosmos' formidable military might. All elaborated aspects above demonstrate the Cult of Kosmos' capability in solidifying their dominances through political and military means. To complete the analysis of shadows network in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey's* pre-set narratives, representations of extra-legal business enterprises will be analysed (Nordstrom, 2004; Kinsella, 2011).

In war profiteering context, business enterprises are means of profit making in war through transactions and perpetuation of conflict(s) as results of manipulations and violent methods discussed above (Nordstrom, 2004; Kinsella, 2011). Three most significant represented forms of business enterprises in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* are military services, arm trades, natural resources processing, and slavery. Latter three practices are mostly conducted by the Cult of Kosmos' Silver Vein branch namely by the Centaur of Euboea who is depicted as a copper businessman and slave trader and Polemon the Wise, the cult's main financial benefactor who is also the sage of his branch and major arms supplier during the Second Peloponnesian War.

Yet, dynamics between the Silver Vein branch and Aspasia; the Ghost of Kosmos, in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* provides interesting subversion from Nordstrom's (2004) account and Kinsella's (2011) argument of war profiteering which emphasizes cohesion among politicians, military factions and businessperson. While the branch was being successful in gaining profit for the Cult of Kosmos, their modes of operating which require perpetuation of wars are at odds with the Ghost of Kosmos' vision of an orderly Ancient Greece under the Cult of Kosmos hegemony. Through this particular plot, representation of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey's* shell layer narratives (Neitzel, 2005; Mayra, 2008) provide negotiations of Ancient Greek war depictions which indicate their occurrences as an accepted normalcy (Kagan, 1987; Bowden, 1995; Hall, 1995; Hodkinson, 1995; Millet, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017)) and shadows networking which emphasizes cohesion among all involved actors and less than ideal peace-making attempts (Nordstrom, 2004).

Another interesting perspective of Assassin's Creed Odyssey is its ludo-narrative dissonance of what its story tries to tell with what its rules afford (Juul, 2005; Neitzel, Sicart, 2009; Bogost, 2010). While the pre-set narratives theme represents discourse of armed conflict resolution (Neitzel, 2005; Sisler, 2008), the game's rules afford inconsistent simulations of its theme (Sicart, 2009). Such dissonance, contingent upon their choices, afford *Assassin's Creed Odyssey's* players potential to be the prime war profiteer as the game's rules strongly integrate key processes and values of war profiteering in both Ancient Greek (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017) and modern contexts (Nordstrom, 2004; Kinsella, 2011) with respect to goal attainment in the game (Huizinga, 1980; Caillois, 2001).

Following paragraphs will analyse afforded simulations of the Eagle Bearer as mercenary (Sage, 1996; Nordstrom, 2004) in Assassin's Creed Odyssey. the Eagle Bearer is not officially associated with any notable fictional organisation of the franchise, whereas historical protagonists of previous games are members of either Assassin Brotherhood, the Templar order, or their respective precursors. Their status as a non-partisan digital game unit is enforced by *Assassin's Creed Odyssey's* rules which provide little restrictions and little to no meaningful consequence in simulating act of violence (Cogburn & Silcox, 2009; Sicart, 2009; Gunter, 2016) regardless of represented factions, and affordances of profit maximization by players through simulations (Juul, 2005; Neitzel, 2005; Mayra, 2008; Sicart, 2009) which have their conceptual and procedural roots in Ancient Greek (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017) and modern mercenary practices.

Outside of story missions, players are afforded with various hyperfictions (Tringham, 2015) in form of side quests which emphasize simulation elements of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey's* expressions of Ancient Greek mercenary (Sicart, 2009; Bogost, 2010). Based on their activities, there are three forms of mercenary side quests in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* which are bounty hunting, contracts and conquests. Bounty hunting in the game's context refer to simulation of eliminating targeted individuals for substantial amounts of Drachmae; Ancient Greek currency, and/or resources in addition to experience points. Targeted individuals may vary from unarmed civilians, to Spartan and/or Athenian soldiers, to fellow mercenaries. Despite variations of targets, they are mostly related to ongoing process of the Second Peloponnesian War. Targeted civilians are often politicians who are affiliated with either the Peloponnesian League or the Delian League, Spartan or Athenian forces need to be eliminated for their opponents to advance, and mercenaries may disrupt Spartan/Athenian military campaigns in the Second Peloponnesian War thus need to

be eliminated. Bounties are also usually issued by certain local military garrisons; further simulating mercenaries' modes of operation during the Second Peloponnesian War (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Simulations of bounty hunting are most commonly embedded into daily mission game mechanism.

Contracts are encapsulations and afforded instantiations (Bogost, 2006) of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey's* mercenary activities expressions which are not limited to elimination of specific individual(s). Contracts can take forms in delivery, escort missions, resources gathering, animal hunting and plethora of other activities. Contracts' simulations are enforced by war profiteering narratives which mostly depict them as directly related to the ongoing process of the Second Peloponnesian War. They also depict the Eagle Bearer's activities as a mercenary during their downtime as some contracts are only loosely related to the Second Peloponnesian War and emphasize more on mundane daily activities of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey's* depictions of Ancient Greek world. There two main difference between bounties and contracts. The first is in their rewards as contracts provide players with opportunity to gain rare orichalcum minerals which cannot be purchased in in-game virtual stores. Additionally, as contracts are embedded into weekly mission game mechanism, they tend to be lengthier compared to bounties.

The final side quest hyperfiction (Tringham, 2015) of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* is conquest which is also the most important due to its vital ludo-narrative role in expressing (Juul, 2005; Neitzel, 2005; Mayra, 2008; Sicart, 2009; Bogost, 2010; Tringham, 2015) the Second Peloponnesian War and its strong correspondent with historical Ancient Greek war profiteering processes namely in territorial annexation ((Kagan, 1987; Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017) war loots plunder (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017) and involvement of mercenaries (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996; Roberts, 2017). Conquest also simulates modern war profiteering processes of geopolitical destabilization (Nordstrom, 2004; Kinsella, 2011) and armed conflict perpetuation (Nordstrom, 2004; Kinsella, 2011).

In *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*, conquest is a simulation of destabilizing the status quo in certain virtual region of the game through raiding military and political outposts, and trade posts which operate under either Spartan or Athenian authority in addition to killing hegemonic military personnels in that region. Each action committed by players will decrease the power of hegemonic Spartan or Athenian forces, which will culminate in identity reveal of regional leaders for players

to dispose. Land or naval conquest will be available at the point when power parameter of Spartan or Athenian hegemonic has reached weakened status and regional leader has been disposed. Players can choose to assist either the hegemonic force in certain region to maintain their dominance, or challenging force to invade said region. Land conquests are simulated as a small sized infantry combat on a limited open-air area where players as the Eagle Bearer must deplete the opposing faction's equivalent of health bar icon before their faction's equivalent of health bar icon is depleted through eliminations of opposing faction's foot soldiers and their superior officers in addition to occasional contracted mercenary. When instantiating simulations of naval conquest, players will control the Adrestia; the Eagle Bearer's trireme ship, to eliminate opposing faction's warships. Successful conquest will provide players with substantial amount of drachmae, resources; including the rare obsidian glasses, and high level equipments in addition to experience points.

Conquest simulations in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* correspond strongly with armed conflict perpetuation mode of operating in modern war profiteering (Nordstrom, 2004; Brauer & Dune, 2011; Kinsella, 2011) due to its unlimited procedural affordances. Unlike in most games with similar conventions which often simulate conquer of certain virtual locations as playable only once, players can always simulate conquest in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* by repeating aforementioned procedures. Each conquest will not provide regressive amount of rewards, thus making every conquest equally profitable. These affordances result in possibility of perpetuated armed conflicts among Sparta, Athens and the Eagle Bearer which are oriented on procedural rhetoric (Bogost, 2010) of war profiteering (Nordstrom, 2004; Brauer & Dune, 2011; Kinsella, 2011). Ludics affordances of violent armed conflict perpetuations in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* correlate with Nordstrom's (2004) arguments of institutionalizations of violence which refer to how violent modes of operation are vital instruments in enforcing core political values and processes of certain cultural identity group (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012); including nation states. To contextualize institutionalization of violence (2004) within the context of digital games ludo-narrative dimension which dictate their expressions as contingent to their rules (Caillois, 2001; Juul, 2005; Sicart, 2009; Bogost, 2010), perpetuation of violent armed conflicts as designed systems and rules are proverbial corridors of representations and simulations of war profiteering in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*

To support arguments above, rules codification of violent armed conflicts perpetuations for profit

as affordances foundation of lieutenant recruitments and fortress raid simulations in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* will be analysed. Slavery, in addition to raid and plunder, are common forms of war profiteering in Ancient Greece (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996) and they are expressed via representations and simulations (Jull, 2005; Neitzel, 2005; Mayra, 2008; Sicart, 2009; Bogost, 2010) by abstraction, encapsulation and instantiation (Bogost, 2006) of violent methods. Violence in lieutenant recruitments are expressed ambivalently since the game affords non-violent methods of recruitments through completion, or conditional completion, of hyperfictions.

However, most in-game units can only be recruited as players' lieutenant after they are non-lethally defeated in combat, akin to how defeated combatants in Ancient Greece were treated as commodities (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996). There is also no critical dynamics between players as the Eagle Bearer and In-games unit which are forcefully recruited through enforcement of perpetuated violent armed conflicts as *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* key ludic rules. Once recruited, they will become players' properties forever akin to concepts and processes of slavery in Ancient Greece (Jackson, 1995; Sage, 1996). This ludic system differs *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* from similar mainstream game in *Middle-earth: Shadow of War* (Monolith Productions, 2017) which expresses slavery and its corollaries ambivalently through ludo-narrative dissonances where the game enforces slavery as its core mechanic yet provides subversive interpretations through its storytelling (Kunzelman, 2017) and several ludic rules.

Simulations and narrative of raid, on the other hand, are not ambivalent as they fully encapsulate perpetuation of violent armed conflict which is oriented on players' hyperfictional (Tringham, 2015) profit. In simulating raid, players must infiltrate fortresses within the game world to eliminate high ranking military officers loot various virtual boxes and chests which contain in-game resources, drachmae, and even legendary armors and weapons. Eliminating top ranking officer in fortresses; referred as polemarch in the game, will also provide players with virtual emblems which can be exchanged for drachmae, experience points and legendary items from Spartan general Lysander and/or Athenian general Demosthenes. Unlike lieutenant recruitments, raids do not afford players with option to simulate those hyperfictions non-lethally.

To summarize analysis of war profiteering in *Assassin's Creed's Odyssey*, arguments can be made that war profiteering concepts and process are expressed in both its shell layer (Mayra, 2008) which consists of the game's pre-set narratives and other forms of representations and signs

(Mayra, 2008), and its core layer which concerns with its ludic elements and play culture (Mayra, 2008). The shell layer of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* concerns with representing the Cult of Kosmos as the invisible shadows network (Nordstrom, 2004) of Ancient Greece who engineer the Second Peloponnesian War and drive its socio-political trajectory to their favour; and also as a network whom the Eagle Bearer must stop to end the war and to reunite with their family. Yet simulations of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey's* main narratives only make up partial portions of the game's overall procedural rhetoric (Bogost, 2010) due to its ludo-narrative dissonance, as perpetuation of violence as means of war profiteering are enforced to become the game's dominant ludic systems. In essence, what *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* attempts to symbolise through its pre-set narratives is often at odds with its ludic affordances (Juul, 2005; Neitzel, 2005; Sicart, 2009). Despite their depiction as peacemaker of *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* expressions of the Second Peloponnesian War, its ludic affordances and rules enforcement enable players to become the prime war profiteer of Ancient Greece

This type of ludo-narrative dissonance is not exclusive to *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* as encapsulations of violence (Goldstein, 2005; Bogost, 2006) are incorporated as vital ludic elements to support fulfilments of players' intrinsic needs in interacting with digital games (Goldstein, 2005; Rigby & Ryan, 2011) because of its strong appeal toward digital game culture's core demography (Gunter, 2005; Anderson et al., 2007; Fron et al., 2007). Several prominent examples including the aforementioned *Middle-earth: Shadow of War* which express violent slavery as its main ludo-narrative procedural rhetoric where collections and detachments of dominated orcs become key ludic strategy in advancing in the game (Bogost, 2010; Kunzelman, 2017), and *Far Cry 4* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2014) which simulates armed conflict in the form of civil war as a profitable enterprise as players via Ajay Ghale can obtain various elite weapons in the process. To conclude, the less-visible encapsulations and instantiations of profit making as companion of perpetuated violent means are key ludic elements in mainstream video games which parallel to expressions of war profiteering in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* and indicate the hegemony of union between violence and profit making in digital games; to make mercenaries out of players.

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