A New Research Agenda: Representation of Islam and Islamic Rituals in Digital Games

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“Neglected Media exhibit strong popular appeal and economic relevance, contrasted by lack of cultural prestige and scientific coverage. Often, they have a profound impact on the collective imaginary although this ‘passive’ knowledge is seldom accepted as culturally relevant.”


“Non-written media are more pervasive and more consumed by Muslim audience in the Middle East.”


Presumptions:
1. Low literacy rate
2. Dominant oral culture
3. Low penetration of the Internet
4. Wide and cheap availability

Representation of Arabs and Muslims in videogames

1. “Digital Orientalism”
2. Conflictual framework

PRINCIPES OF PERSIA: HAREM ADVENTURE, Gameloft S.A., 2003

BATTLE IN SADR CITY, KumaWar, 2005
“The United States has powerful and expensive units, including well-armed infantry and vehicles that can heal themselves. Their superior intelligence capabilities and flexible air force allow them to strike quickly anywhere on the map.”

“The Arab Global Liberation Army is distinguished by terrorists with car bombs and truck bombs, suicide bombers with explosives strapped to their bodies, anthrax and biotoxin delivery systems and angry mobs of Arabs wielding AK-47s.”

(CHICK, T. Command & Conquer: Generals. GameSpy, 2003.)

“Games invade our children’s rooms and are available in the cyber-cafés which now exist on every street corner. [They] are responsible for inciting violent behavior among Arab youth because they glorify solitude, narcissism, and hatred of the other, all of which reflect the cultural choices of the Westerners who produce them.”

Dr. Khalil Fadel, Egyptian psychoanalyst

(Mernissi, F. Digital Scheherazades in the Arab World. In: Current History. 2006)

“Most video games on the market are anti-Arab and anti-Islam. Arab gamers are playing games that attack their culture, their beliefs, and their way of life.”

Radian Kasmiya, CEO, Alkar Media

(Roumani, R. Muslims Craft Their Own Video Games, Christian Science Monitor, 2006)

“The problem behind electronic games, especially those designed for computers, is that most of them are foreign made, especially American. Therefore, they bear enormous false understandings and habituate teenagers to violence, hatred and grudges. In addition, some enforces humiliation to many of our Islamic and Arab countries, where battles are running in these Arab countries, the dead are Arab soldiers, whereas the hero who kills them is – the player himself – an American.”

Central Internet Bureau of Hezbollah

(http://www.specialforce.net/english/indexeng.htm)

“At Islamgames.com, our goal is to provide you with quality, Islamic entertainment for you as well as your children. Due to high levels of interaction, video games are actually a great learning tool, but unfortunately, many of the games available teach things contrary to the teachings of Islam.

The result, our children tend to identify with secular values and concepts more than with those of Islam. By providing an alternative to mainstream video games, we can help our children, in a subtle way, learn to identify with Islamic values, and thereby become more closely attuned to the teachings of Islam.”

Our goal is to address people in the whole world and to enable them to see the peaceful truth coming out of our civilization and religion and thus to stop spreading of the negative media image.

Our goal is to address Muslims and Arabs in a way respecting their cultural heritage. We want to help them to feel equal to the other nations so that they can develop into a civilization which will enrich the surrounding world and not only take from it.”

Afkar Media, underash.net
Conclusions

1. Interdisciplinary framework
2. Cultural translation of the Islamic message
3. Engaged videogames
4. Social networking
5. Global Islamic identity
6. Authority

Game studies methodology:

1. Audiovisual signifiers
2. Narrative structure
3. Gameplay *

* the rule system governing the players interaction with the game

Transcript of narrative introduction to the Special Force game

Light bursts in from left corner like bright shining star as the planet Earth spins away to rest in the centre of the frame, mid-distance, placed within the brilliant, shining Hizbollah logo.

The remainder of the sequence is one continuous shot.

Camera moves down in between two rows of columns painted with military camouflage; brilliant light reflects off the lens.

As camera nears the end of the row of columns, a Mirkavat tank appears from left, in medium shot; on its side is a large, bright blue, fluorescent Star of David.

Music: distant horns and military snare roll (sense of something about to happen)

Camera moves down in between two rows of columns painted with military camouflage; brilliant light reflects off the lens.

As camera nears the end of the row of columns, a Mirkavat tank appears from left, in medium shot; on its side is a large, bright blue, fluorescent Star of David.


Structuring aspects of a game:

1. The Map of the Universe
2. Level — main linear part of the game structure
3. Quest — the unity of a goal, obstacles and the resolution method
4. Transaction — atomic action of the player


Deterministic Finite State Machines

Story plots as dFSMs. The linear plot is on the left, the branching on the right.

Petri Nets examples.

a) The action generates one token if there is one token in the upper container and two in the lower container.

b) The two actions are in conflict.
PetriNNets: Description of the gameplay of al-Khiyār level from Quraiš

Moving Images & Media Rituals

Challenges:

1. Representation of time
2. Model representation of player’s level of expertise
3. Modelling of the relations between ordering in the game and universe topology

Moving Images & Media Rituals

Sheikh Mas‘udd Sabry, Islamic Researcher at IslamOnline.net, states:

"The Friday khutbah is a well-established act of worship that has been handed down and practiced through generations of the Ummah. The etiquette of Friday khutbah and its general formula—not the content—are taken from the actual practice of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) who said: “Perform Prayer the way you saw me performing it.”

Since the khutbah is a part of the whole body of the Friday Prayer and itself being an act of worship, then we have to stand by the formula given to us by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) without adding things from our imagination. There is no place for creativity in such things. The majority of scholars agree that the original case in acts of worship is to avoid addition or omission or any type of alteration.

Thus, if one performs Friday Prayer in the above-mentioned way, i.e., with the imam who delivers the Khutbah in one place while the people are in another, it will be considered invalid and unacceptable. It is required for the validity of the Friday Prayer that the Imam delivering the Khutbah and the people be present in one place."

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A Group of Islamic Researchers:

“It goes without saying that the vast majority of Muslim scholars agree on the permissibility of deputizing somebody to collect and pay out Zakah. It is thus acceptable to entrust a web site with the same task. Since the Internet offers a creative solution and an easy way for lots of people to carry out transactions, there is no harm in using it for such a task.

It should be noted, however, that such a task of paying Zakah through e-payment is a dangerous one. It is advisable that the person make sure that his money will reach its destination safely and perfectly. We are not here to accuse anybody; rather, we are just ringing the alarm and asking for caution. If you have time, it is more recommended to pay your Zakah through a deputy.”

http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnlineREnglishAsk_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503547084

Thank you for your attention.

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