MEDİAD
Medya ve Din Araştırmaları Dergisi | Journal of Media and Religion Studies

ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ | RESEARCH ARTICLE
Haziran 2022, 5(1), 37-60
Geliş: 18.03.2022 | Kabul: 06.06.2022 | Yayın: 30.06.2022
DOI: 10.47951/mediad.1089786

Reproduction of Islamophobia in a Digital Cloak: An Analysis on Digital War Game "Call of Duty"

Düriye İlkim BÜKE OKYAR*
Narmin ABDULLAYEVA**

Abstract

Islamophobia popularized as an anti-Muslim public discourse in the decade following the al-Qaida attack on the Twin-towers and Pentagon in the United States of America. Following the attacks, numerous scholarly studies have confirmed that anti-Muslim prejudice, commonly referred to as Islamophobia, has become a prominent feature of Western societies. The perception of threat at home placed Muslims at the focus as the Christian West's "Other." Within this context, this study contributes to the debate on the meaning of 'Islamophobia' based on generalizations, assumptions, and stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. Following discourse analysis as its primary methodology, the article deconstructs the representations of Islam and Muslims in the most popular digital war game, Call of Duty. Thus, this article contributes to how digital war games communicate misleading stereotypes and have been involved in stigmatizing Islam and Muslims and perpetuating Islamophobia in the context of the US-led Global War on Terror. Based on its analysis of the game, the article concludes that the stereotyped group is portrayed more often in a violent-terrorism context than in a nonviolent context where a solid associative link between terrorism and Arabs is established.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Orientalism, Cultural Racial Stereotypes, Representing "Other", Citizen-Soldiers, Digital War Games

İslamofobinin Dijital Pelerin İçinde Yeniden Üretimi: "Call Of Duty" Oyunu Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Öz

İslamofobi, el-Kaide'nin Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki İkiz Kuleler ve Pentagon'a saldırısının ardından on yıl içinde Müslüman karşıtı bir kamusal söylem olarak popüllerleşmiş bir söylem olarak literature girmiştir. Çok sayıda bilimsel çalışma, İslamofobi olarak adlandırılan Müslüman karşıtı önyargının Batı toplumlarının belirgin bir özelliği haline geldiğini doğrulamaktadır. Öyleki, evdeki tehdit algısı Müslümanları Hristiyan Batı'nın "Öteki"si olarak odak noktasına yerleştirmiştir. Bu kavramsal çerçeve içerisinde, çalışma İslam ve Müslümanlara ilişkin batının genellemeleri, ve yine bu genellemeleri Arab steriotipi içinde limitlemesi varsayımları ve kalıp yargılarından hareketle İslamofobi üzerine yapılan tartışmalara katkı sağlamayı hedefler. Bu bağlamda makale, Foucault'nun iktidar ilişkilerinin sosyal yapıları etrafında "gerçeği" formüle etmesinin bir analiziyle desteklenen Gramsci'nin hegemonya analizi, Müslümanlar ve İslam'ın Batı tarafından ötekileştirilmesi hakkında daha fazla ayrıntı vermek için ilişkisel bir teorik temel oluşturur. Bu doğrultuda da söylem analizi kullanarak, en popüler dijital savaş oyunlarından biri olan Call of Duty'deki İslam ve Müslüman betimlemelerini yapı-bozumcu bir yöntemle inceler. Dolayısıyla bu makale, dijital savaş oyunlarının ABD'nin önderlik ettiği Teröre Karşı Savaş çerçevesinde batının eylemlerini meşrulaştırmak üzere mercek altına aldığı "öteki" İslam ve Müslüman stereotipleri üzerinden İslamofobiyi yeniden üretme biçimlerine dair yapılan çalışmalara katkıda bulunmayı amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslamofobi, Oryantalizm, Kültürel Irkçı Stereotipler, Ötekinin Temsili, Vatandaş-Askerler, Dijital Savaş Oyunları

ATIF: Büke Okyar, D. İ. ve Abdullayeva, N. (2022). Reproduction of Islamophobia in a digital cloak: An analysis on digital war game "Call of Duty". *Medya ve Din Araştırmaları Dergisi (MEDİAD)*, 5(1), s. 37-60.

* Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Yeditepe Üniversitesi, ilkim.okyar@yeditepe.edu.tr, orcid.org/0000-0002-4272-8142, İstanbul, Türkiye
** Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi, Bahçeşehir Üniversitesi, narmin.abdullayeva@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0002-1734-8033, İstanbul, Türkiye

1. Introduction

On March 14, 2022, Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, a poet and the author of "Tangled in Terror: Uprooting Islamophobia" published an opinion piece on the Guardian newspaper arguing the bias reporting of Russia's war in Ukraine. His article underlined how the war is referred as "horrific" because it is taking place somewhere that is "not like Iraq or Afghanistan" (Manzoor-Khan, 2022). He noted that journalists, while referring to the high number of Ukrainian refugees, have suggested that they "deserve to be welcomed" because they are "not from Syria" (Manzoor-Khan, 2022). These conscious or unconscious references of the non-Muslim/Arab geographies and their people demonstrate West's determined and steady perception of its Other. References to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria are no more than connotations of Muslim-related wars that the West has justified through the War on Terror." The characterization of Muslims as "deserving" or, at least, "prone to violence" underscores that their lives do not have the same value as their Western "equals." The racially and religiously coded "white supremacy" could even be traced, for example, when a reporter describes a badly wounded Ukrainian as "Christian" and "white" (Manzoor-Khan, 2022). The latter reproductions of imagery normalize the relations of the Muslim/Arab geographies and their peoples with war, deprivation, and death in the Westerner's mind, depriving them from the fact that the Muslim/Arab communities living in these geographies may be victims of occupation or war as well, just like the Europeans. These forms of dehumanization can be understood as manifestation of the supremacy of the "Christian white man" in a colonial rhetoric, which continues to this day.

This article analyzes the digital war game "Call of Duty" following the "War on Terror," which was launched against the Muslim and Islamist threat in the West, where radical Islamist structures such as Al Qaeda and ISIS acted as catalysts. The study reveals that the West tends to stereotype the Muslims as its Other and thus, limits the Muslim stereotype as a unified figure defined within the discourse of Islamophobia. The latter characterization most certainly is the flesh and blood version of Samuel P. Huntington's (1993) "Clash of Civilizations" thesis, where he argues that globalization results in societies that are culturally and religiously different than each other. As the 21st century took its course, these ethnic and religious "clashes" referred to by Huntington have begun to unsettle the pluralist liberal Western state systems, in which religion gradually became more visible, particularly in the public spheres. The perceived rise in spiritual differences and the prominence of religious identity as a critical element in these pluralist Western societies, namely Europe and the United States, have presented both challenges and opportunities regarding governance issues and even created a chance to strengthen conservative, nationalist, and populist political formations. Within these untangled social and cultural endeavors, Islam emerged in the face of the West as its significant Other, as a threat that pushed the West to redefine its values.

Within the more extensive and multi-layered discourse of "who is one of us and who is not," this article assumes that the negative depictions of ethnically and religiously diverse societies of the Middle East and North Africa are constantly reproduced within an Islamophobic discourse. This production process seals these extremely various societies in one, single political geography and one single stereotype as "Arab." The latter lacks their image as the foremost menace to Western civilization where the digital platforms, particularly the online-played war games, serve to incorporate the ordinary citizens into a virtual mobilization against an "existential enemy" that attacks the Western way of life. Such a formulation of the Western perception of its Muslim Others requires a further definition of Islamophobia as a discourse that first appeared in Europe and the United States. This period coincides with the revival of Islam among second and third-generation Muslim immigrants due to the decline of religious practices with their traditional

institutionalized settings (Doyle, 2016). Consequently, the Muslim presence in Western societies has forced liberal state structures to re-examine their principles that diversity is beneficial to society and that autonomy should be enjoyed by culturally different communities within a society, including religious groups. Such perceptional challenge to the core of the Western liberal democracy imposed deeper concerns relating to its citizens' loyalties. Deep suspicion of Islam, which is seen as complicit with a hierarchical understanding of society, hostile to individual freedoms, stands almost opposite to the values of the West, emerges as a perceptional puzzle constantly suspicious of its Other. It is precisely this suspicion that lies at the heart of Islamophobia as a monolithic concept.

Todd H. Green (2015), in his book "Fear of Islam," further elaborates the West's unfounded fear of Islam rather than understanding Islam as one of the institutionalized religions in its simplified context. In this well-established study, Green defines Islamophobia around "hatred, hostility, fear and resulting discriminatory practices against Islam and Muslims" (p.9). He classifies these Islamophobic practices around five generalized views identified by the Runnymede Report published in 1997 as essential characteristics of Islamophobia. These views reflect Islam as "monolithic and static; as separate and other; as inferior; Islam as the enemy; and as manipulative" (Trust, 1997; Green, 2015, pp. 12-16). Especially in the last few decades, Islamophobia became a "shortcut" that includes all the above adjectives attributed to Islam and Muslims, with its constructed and limited synonym "Arab," and its political landscape that houses a mosaic of societies (Green, 2015, p. 12-19; Okyar, 2022). In most Western societies, the perception of Muslim Arabs as "despised" and "enemy" legitimizes cultural racist leanings, while their negative image circulated by the media naturalizes a collective social criticism against them.

The binary construction of "the civilized Christians" and "uncivilized Muslims" indeed prompts a theoretical reading of Islamophobia from a post-structuralist discourse that addresses domination and boundaries. Such discourse probably best emerges in Gramsci's analysis of hegemony, complemented by Foucault's analysis of the "truth," that offers an overall analysis of how Muslims and Islam are formulated according to the social structure of power relations (Gramsci, 1957, p. 123-123; Bates, 1975, p. 352-353). Foucault's concept of "truth discourse" refers to a mechanism that limits and excludes alternative understandings of reality for that society's "general politics" of truth (Foucault, 1972; 1980, p.131-133; McFie, 2000, p. 42-43). The fact that negative stereotypes of Muslims have become a part of the dominant (hegemon) discourse can be read through this approach. Joining Gramsci-Foucauldian concerns with Edward Said's reading of Orientalism, one can argue that hegemonic discourse is an area in the relationship between East and West, where the West is defined in a "positional superiority." Following this theoretical framework, the article aims to analyze the reproduction of Muslim stereotypes in the imagination of the West through the popular digital war game "Call of Duty" around the five defined views of Islamophobia underlined by Green. Starting from Huntington (1993) to Green (2015), the article traces how the political and cultural global conflicts are reflected on virtual platforms and how these platforms are instrumentalized as public spaces that constantly reproduce the hegemonic cultural position of the West through contemporary manifestations of Islamophobia.

The article followed a methodological approach based on context analysis to examine the Islamophobic reproduction within the digital war games, particularly Call of Duty and its title series Modern Warfare (CoD: MW) and Black Ops (CoD: BO). Different physical, textual (Arabic scripts), architectural and geographical images containing references to the Muslims in the game's title series were identified and cataloged as the result of throughout observation of the plays by the authors. The author provided the images used in the article by taking screenshots from the actual games.

1. Islamophobia at the Cossroad of Orientalism and "War on Terror"

1.1 Orientalism and Islamophobia: What are the Resemblances?

Although Orientalism as a scholarly field has a long history, the rise of Islamophobia has generally occurred since the 1990s (Modood, 1997; Halliday, 1999; Allen, 2006; Green, 2015). Both phenomena feel the need to imagine and define the Other. They tend to describe imaginative definitions such as "Muslim," "Jew," or "Orient" based on used, repetitive and fluctuating ideas, metaphors, and narratives. However, this situation reveals an essential element to emphasize the similarities and differences between both phenomena. Despite commonalities between Orientalism and Islamophobia in its modern sense, the most fundamental difference between the two resides in the sentimental residue they leave behind. Orientalism consists of a multi-layered structure that brings together negative and positive emotions that create a sense of romanticism. In contrast to the exotic and attractive romanticism that Orientalism offers, Islamophobia is based on a one-dimensional understanding of an abstracted Islam and a racialized Muslim. It leads to undesirable, pretentious distrust and hostile attitudes that feed on negative prejudices and stereotypes.

In the Christian-centered Western colonial discourse, religious identity was the first indicator of "otherness" (Maldonado-Torres, 2006 and 2014). In this attitude, while Jews and Arabs were described as "people of the wrong religion," indigenous peoples in the colonies were fictionalized as "religious people" (Said, 1974; Maldonado-Torres, 2006). In the worldwide racial/ethnic hierarchy of colonialism, "non-religious," that is, "godless" people, were at the bottom of the hierarchy. In contrast, "people of the wrong religion," that is, "people with wrong God," held altogether a different position where they been classified as "people inferior to humans," as in Rudyard Kipling's words, "half devil half child," racially and culturally inferior populations deprived of any means of the human capacity for civilization (Kipling, 2007, p. 96; Said, 1974; Bhabha, 1994, p. 67). However, the perception of the other shaped by early versions of Orientalism reclaimed a particular focus on the Muslim Other as manifested in Islamophobic discourse, where the West perceived excluded Islam as the sole threat to itself.

Concurrently, the debate about what triggered this periphrastic shift from Orientalism seems to focus primarily on emerging racist tendencies in the West, which seemed to establish in reaction to social and cultural challenges posed by globalization. The influx of refugees from the post-colonial world due to economic and political conflicts can be accounted as one of such challenges. A sizeable scholarly work reported on how the first, second, and even third generation of Muslim migrants make up the largest and most rooted non-European population which has arrived and settled in contemporary Europe (Allen, 2007; Zunes, 2017; Perocco, 2018; Helbling and Traunmüller, 2020). Again, the main arguments of these works articulate that the policies' practices that were undertaken by the West's social and political actors are intended to marginalize the Muslim immigrant population while legitimizing and reproducing social inequalities affecting the majority (Allen, 2007; Zunes, 2017; Perocco, 2018).

Yet, going back to defining what is explicitly and is not Islamophobia in this context recalls that first and foremost, Islamophobia is not racial blindness, nor is it simply a manifestation of physical forms of racism based on biological inferiority. While Islamophobia's nascent development in Western societies can be argued within the changing social structures, its historical roots to its formation remain as important. The specific racist form of Islamophobia promotes discrimination based on religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and ethnicity. It identifies the counterculture it targets—Muslims and Islam—as inferior to Western culture and civilization (Helbling and Traunmüller, 2020, p. 812). Although Islamophobia is fairly a modern concept, the root of its racist imagination coincides with the period when the relations of the European

empires with the Islamic empires changed from an "imperial" to a "colonial" relationship.1 The gradual weakening of the Ottoman Empire with the eighteenth century and its inevitable collapse following the First World War enabled European empires' colonial ambitions, mainly in Muslim North Africa and the Levant, in a power competition over the Mediterranean. These foreign incursions transformed the Muslim Arab societies of these geographies, that are, "people with false religions," into uncivilized, savage, and primitive people through a scientific, evolutionary, and thus, hierarchical reading of civilization in the Western imagination (Grosfuguel 2012, p. 12; Green 2015, p. 68, p. 80-83; Salem and Thomson 2016, p. 12).

This hierarchy between Muslim culture and the West constitutes the basis of Islamophobia's exclusionary and discriminatory fundamentals. The essential features of the racial descriptions produced by the West in the colonial literature pointed to the dominance and power of the Western self over the colonized Muslim Arab other while criticizing the constant lack of self-representation of this "other" (Büke Okyar, 2015). The Arab's inability to represent himself (French and British Mandate periods), as defined by Bhabha (1994), forms the basis of the colonial. The lack of a specific view, perhaps an identity, has shaped the stereotype of the Muslim Arab as a hybrid being, in Bhabha's words, lacking him in cultural otherness, and transformed him into something other than human. For the West, the Muslim Arab's place as the other has been fixed as a limited entity, "imitating" its oppressor in a constant need for survival. Bhabha describes this hybridity as "where the construction of a new political object that is neither the one nor the other alienates our political expectations and changes the way we know politics" (1994, p. 19). The cultural tools of Western society have reproduced the visual and perceptual images of this transformation in political, literary, and even artistic media fixing the Muslim other in one single image.

1.2. Popularizing Islamophobia and 9/11 "War on Terror"

Representations of Muslim culture and societies as the Other dominated the colonial period. From literary to visual discourse, these representations laid the groundwork for popularizing Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, mainly in Europe and the United States. This mounting social polarization hastened following the 1979 Iranian revolution. The term popularization here is meant to express a concept accepted by the general public, adapted to the understanding and taste of the majority, that is easy to understand, not complex or deep, and does not require special knowledge or training to evaluate. In this perspective, the first reference to the popularization of Islamophobia was brought up in 1997 by a report presented by the Runnymede Trust, a think tank working on racial equality in the United Kingdom. The content of the report "Islamophobia is a challenge for all of us" (Runnymede Trust, 1997) presented the word "Islamophobia" for the first time to the public discourse. However, while the report called to bridge the gap between the legal protection offered and the public understanding of discrimination, it also commercialized the term Islamophobia through the mainstream media in a self-serving legitimization. The opening sentence of Professor Gordan Conway, head of the British Muslims commission, in The Runnymede Trust (1997) report, described Islamophobia as a "challenge" to raise awareness of the increasingly internalized societal ethnic discrimination. The first reaction to the debate over this definition of Islamophobia came from Tariq Modood in 1997. Modood critiqued the report's description of Islamophobia as "slightly misleading" (p. 4) and preferred to define Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism expressed by targeting non-European and non-white Muslims. In his 1999 article, Fred Halliday argued that Islamophobic aggression in Western societies is "not against Islam as a creed, but against Muslims as a people" (p. 898). Jose P. Zuquette's (2008) definition claims that "Islamophobia designates the stigmatization of all Muslims and is defined as a widespread mindset and fear-laden discourse in which people make blanket judgments of Islam as the enemy, as the 'other,' as a dangerous and unchanged, monolithic bloc that it is the natural subject of well-deserved hostility from

Westerners" (p. 323). He further argues that the concept of Islamophobia, which is oppressive, is limiting and over-generalizing.

Islamophobia has kept its popularity in Europe and the United States despite the scholarly debated conceptual boundaries. The attack by Islamist terrorists on September 11, which targeted the symbol of American liberalism, the Twin Towers, and the Pentagon, resulting in mass casualties, further deepened the social phobia (fear) of Islam. Radical Islam has ceased to be a distant phenomenon and has been placed at the center of the popular agenda. Concepts and discourses shaped around "jihad" and "al-Qaeda" quickly took their place in the jargon of the daily media and served to crystallize the Muslim identity as the primary, singular threat to the Western way of life.

The United States' response to 9/11 has been the "War on Terror." The war targeted eliminating al-Qaeda, its corresponding Muslim terror cells, and the political regimes that support them in a global effort both inside and outside the US territories. Although the most visible manifestation of this effort involves military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, the War on Terror has turned into a multifaceted process that includes intelligence, diplomatic, legal, and political dimensions, both on the foreign and domestic fronts. The state's deployment of military actives gained from the Islamophobic narrative constructed around patriotism that justified the social acceptability of the War on Terror. This narrative has fostered a violent, anti-democratic, and misogynist Islam that materialized the "Muslim enemy" to invoke patriotic feelings against an all-out threat to US values and freedoms (Saliata, 2006, p. 246; Green, 2015, p. 103). This "Muslim enemy" became the "ultimate other" for many Americans who would see themselves as patriotic in the period following 9/11, who re-formulated their national identity against this "Muslim enemy" through the continuous social reproduction of Islamophobic images (Billing, 1995, p. 6-99; Sachs, 2003, p. 119; Saliata, 2006, p. 247).

2. The Reproduction of the Muslim Imagery as the Ultimate Other in the Cultural Industries: Digital Wargames: From the "Against Terror" to the "Anti-Muslim" War

2.1. Digital War Games: The Muslim Other

For most Westerners, the media is the primary source of information, and this is where they learn about the different peoples of the World, including the Middle East (Shaheen, 2008; Saleem and Anderson, 2013). Yet, the typical Western perceptions about Islam and the Middle East perceive "Muslims" under a distinct ethnic classification as "Arabs." Of course, the latter definition fails to identify the distinction between Arabs as religiously diversified people who speak Arabic as a native language and identify themselves as Arabs and Muslims who practice the religion of Islam. Following the 9/11 attacks, scholars observed a significant increase in the visibility of the "Arabs" and "Muslims" in the American media, which highlights negative images of Arabs much more than positive ones (Shaheen, 2008). This negative visibility of the Arab stereotypes in post- 9/11 appeared in various media venues, from Hollywood movies to mainstream news channels. Including the latter, almost all of the cultural industries in the West produced and sold stereotypes of Islam and Muslims built around traits such as violent, anti-democratic, tribal, manipulative, and misogynistic (Green, 2015; Altsultany 2012; Bakali 2016; Guterman 2013; Hussain 2010; Kozlovic 2009; Morey and Yaqin 2011; Shaheen 2008, 2014; Mirless and Ibaid, 2021).

Additionally, these cultural industries limited the visual image of the Muslim stereotype as Arab, framing all Muslims as Arabs and all Arabs as Muslims. Production of these images in the mainstream news media and particularly in Hollywood has received extensive research attention since the 2000s. However, the scholarly work investigating the contribution of online multi-player digital games to the popularization of Islamophobia has been limited (Šisler, 2008). An increased

interest in digital game platforms has emerged as an alternative discursive field of Islamophobia only in recent years. The significance of analyzing these war games resides in the utmost notion of citizenship besides its other conceptualized formulations. Especially the simulative digital war games provide a platform to virtually integrate ordinary citizens for a patriarchal military quest on a Global War on Terror. These platforms offer simulated military training, propaganda, and a naturalizing of violence by blurring the line between reality and fiction (Šisler, 2008; Mirless and Ibaid, 2021).

Today's digital video games have contributed to the discourse of Islamophobia by bringing the continuous production of the Other onto a simulative plane that pits the "Muslim enemy" defined by the media against the heroic West. Thus, over the past decade, the scholars have largely spearheaded the emergence of a critical approach to digital video games that work with their broader social contexts called "Game Studies" (Frasca 2004; Galloway 2005; Juul 2005; Raessens, Goldstein 2005; Bogost 2006). Almost half a century after Jean Piaget (1962, p. 129) defined the game as "an important method in which ideas are tested, new skills are developed, and different social roles are experienced," digital games have risen the stick to this individual experience higher. The new generation of digital games provide their users with an almost realistic experience of such social roles as the equivalent of Piaget's definition, yet in virtual settings of the online platforms. As a result, these games become operative in shaping worldviews through communication and repetition of meaning across symbols and images (Šisler, 2008, p. 203). Alexander Galloway (2004) further elaborates on the power of the imagery in digital video games, by these images' (or language) credibility as a faithful or imitative mirror of reality. He inquires the reliability of these images presenting a blunt truth about the world, or, conversely, they are separate, constructed truths (Galloway, 2004).

2.2. "Call of Duty": Mobilizing the Citizen-soldiers

Although digital video games are developed and produced in many parts of the world, the United States stands out as the center of the game industry (Mirrlees 2021). These games meet their users through consoles produced by the industry's leading names such as Microsoft (Xbox), Nintendo (Switch), Sony PlayStation (4). Although the contents of the games produced by these manufacturers vary within the advantages of their consoles, the most sold games are digital war games (Table 1).

From the choices of their designs to the advertising campaigns, these digital combat games construct a war culture within a hierarchical structure that creates the hegemonically entertaining "virtual citizen-soldier" as a subject position (Payne 2006, p. 10). By transforming unforgettable and unalterable television images of terror into game settings and fear as an object of entertainment, the "virtual citizen-soldier" serves as an excellent role for military power fantasies that came to the fore, especially after 9/11. Digital war games are designed as shooting games where players usually advance by shooting their targeted enemy from a gun-sight view. These games almost often cast the players in the role of an Anglo-American male military hero who does not hesitate to use extreme violence to protect the interests of the United States (and its allies) from threats. The physical illustration of the Anglo-American military hero exhibits a show of strength in which his muscles are exaggerated in an extremely fit body compared to its the "Other," who is considered an adversary not only by his ethnic identity but also by his physical appearance (Payne 2016, pp.9-11; Mirrlees, 2021, p. 38). If one imagines the primary interface, the player looks at a war-ravaged world from a first-person perspective focusing on the gun sight. Given the shooter's standard command, the immediate call to action is to repeatedly use lethal force without fear of moral or legal consequences. This behavior of the citizen-soldier as the subject functions as an antidote against the shock and horror posed by the targeted Other. Among the games in this scope, the most outstanding and popular is Activision's "Call of Duty."

Combined online number of the players for Call of Duty series of Cold War, Warzone, and Modern Warfare exceeds 113 million players enjoying since 2019 (Travis, 2021).

Table 1. Ranking of the top 10 selling digital video games, 2020 Source: SuperData https://charlieintel.com/modern-warfare-warzone-was-the-highest-earning-premium-game-of-2020/76106/ February 9, 2022

No	Games	Game Design	Geography	Producer	Income (USD)
1	Call Of Duty Modern Warfare	Shooting	Middle East: Iraq, Syria	Activision	1,913M
6	Call Of Duty Black Ops III	Shooting	North Africa: Egypt, Morocco	Activision	678M
10	DOOM Eternal	Shooting	Outer World	Bethesda Softworks	454M

2.3. On the Concepts of "Citizenship" and "Duty": An Analysis of the Title "Call of Duty"

Before moving on to the visual review of Call of Duty, it is of utmost importance to underline two intertwined themes revealed by the game's title. First is the concept of "duty," and the second is "citizenship." The modern liberal understanding of the West believes that rights and duties are essential in creating a healthy social order defined within the limits of citizenship. Only then an individual autonomy and the perception of society that will legitimize and maintain this autonomy can be built. Here, of course, the type of social contract people would like to assign for and political organization, namely the state they would like to contribute to, is significant in defining the relationship between "duty" and "citizenship." Dominique Leydet describes a citizen as a member of a political community who enjoys the rights and assumes the duties of membership (Leydet, 2017). Thus, citizenship emerges as a relationship between an individual and a political body that has the capacity to mobilize/collect its citizens based on their sense of duty for their imagined nation. For example, Benedict Anderson argues that the nation is an imagined concept constructed as a limited, sovereign community despite the fundamental power differences, where all members, namely citizens, share a sense of "comradeship" (Anderson, 2006, p. 50).

Meanwhile, citizenship is also determined by notions of emotional identity in a "banal nationalism" that permeates the subconscious and is supported by hidden "flags" (Billing, 1995). This ordinary nationalism among the state's members emerges when ethnic and religious identities are threatened, and it almost sees it as a duty at the expense of protecting values. This general definition of citizenship, which implies a commitment to a shared set of values and obligations, plays an important role in constructing the modern, civilized West (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992, p. 18).

That said, the second theme implied by the game's title, "call," emerges as an act of mobilization through the assembling of forces to active duty in times of war or national emergency. Of course, the type and degree of emergency determine the level of the so-called mobilization, and it is the citizen's "duty" to answer this "call" (Shesterinina, 2016, p. 411). Therefore, one can assume that the title of the digital war game recalls an imagined mobilization effort that triggers individual motivations for participation in a virtual war against the enemy. The binary spectrums of polarization around the West-East, Christian-Muslim, or modern-archaic, constitute the selective incentives shaped around the emotions, identities, and ideological commitments to recruit the "citizen-soldiers" by these war games. Within the scope of this mobilization, the citizen becomes the sole defender of the modern liberal values of the West against the "enemy Muslim," where they are called on duty to protect their Western values.

2.4. Call Of Duty and Reproduction of Islamophobic Images:

Activision launched the first game of the long-lasting Call of Duty series on October 29, 2003, right after 9/11 in 2001. The central theme of the initial game released under the title of *Infinity Warfare* was based on the depiction of World War II. The title attracted the players' attention in a short time. The game was so loved that Activision came up with two additional packs to the original game, *United Offensive* and *Finest Hour*. After its success, the company continued its series with *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), with a completely renewed geographical background offering a modern, cinematic experience. *Modern Warfare* proved to be a groundbreaking combat game, with its sales topping the yearly lists. Launching the *Black Ops* series in parallel with the *Modern Warfare* series in 2010 boosted Call of Duty's sales even higher, concealing it as the best-selling military shooting game in the history of the digital game industry (Table 1) (Payne, 2006, p. 38).

In the games, players take on the roles of Anglo-American militarized male and, occasionally, female heroes, confronting the "killable" hostile characters. In the games developed particularly following 2007, these "expendable" characters implied or possibly perceived as Muslim Arabs (Figure 1). While the article does not claim that all of the antagonists in the game are directly Muslim Arabs, the geographic backgrounds, landscapes, and other symbolic descriptions link Muslim-majority countries (Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan) to some of these imagined "killable" characters. Moreover, the United States' foreign policy following 2001 endorsed a full-scale military campaign empowered by a public media support for the justification of its actions in the "Muslim World" (Šisler, 2008; Morey and Yaqin, 2011; Green, 2015; Pratt and Woodlock, 2016; Train, 2018). The game developed its content within the latter context providing its users with a simulative experience, where emotionally mobilized citizens receive the chance to directly engage in the "War on Terror" against the "Muslims-like" enemies ready to be destroyed at the view of the gunsight (Figure 2). These "killable" Muslim characters were hinted with their stereotyped bodies, languages, voices, and cultural landscapes.

Table 2. Call of Duty: Middle Eastern Characters (2004-2021)

	Position	Nationality	Relationship	Series	Released
Yusef	Civilian	Arab/ Tunisia	Collaborator/ "other"	CoD: Finest Hour	2004
Yasir Al-Fulani	President	Arab /Saudi Arabia	Collaborator/ "other"	MW4	2007
Khalid, Al-Asad	Warlord	Arab/ Urzikstan (virtual)	Antagonist/ "other"	MW (1, 2, 3, 4, R, IW)	2009
Farid	CIA Spy	Arab/ Yemen	Friend/ belongs to "us"	Black Ops 2	2012
Dr. Yousef Salim	Scientist	Arab/ Egypt	Antagonist/ Foreigner	Black Ops 3	2015
Jabari Salah	Al-Saka Forces	Arab / Egypt	Friend/ "us"	Black Ops: Cold War/ Warzone	2020
Omar Sulaman	Al-Qatala Terror Organization	Arab/ Urzikstan (virtual country)	Antagonist/ "other"	MW	2019
Jamal Rahar "The butcher"	Al-Qatala Terror Organization	Arab/ Urzikstan (virtual country)	Antagonist/ "other"	MW	2019
Hadir Karim	Al-Qatala Terror Organization	Arab/ Urzikstan (virtual country)	Antagonist/ "other"	MW	2019
Farah Ahmet Karim	Woman / Commander	Arab/ Urzikstan (virtual country)	Collaborator/ "other"	MW	2019

2.5. Imagining the Ultimate Muslim Enemy in its Various Degrees: "Call of Duty" and its Male Arab Characters:

In the CoD: MW and CoD: BO titles of Call of Duty, nine notable characters are identified by their ethnicity. Eight of these characters are male, while only one female emerges as a key figure (Table 2). These characters have general resemblances based on their racial features: dark brown hair, slightly darker skin color, dark eyes, and thick eyebrows. However, compared to the degree of relationship, whether they are friend or foe, their overall physical outlook is either softened or stressed. For example, one of the story's main villains, "tyrant warlord" Khalid Al-Asad, is depicted as darker in his skin tone. In addition, his facial features are created to reflect his cruelness. On the other hand, the "cooperators" of the West carry relatively lighter skin and softer physical features. Yusef, a local Tunisian in *Finest Hour* (2004), is one example of these characters. He is also the first and only virtual character revealed in his traditional garb. The rest of the characters are either in their Western-style (shirt and pants) civilian suits or military uniforms. Yusef's assigned duty is to gather information to help the paramilitary British Special Forces destroy the enemy refueling center in the North African desert in 1942, in Matmata, south of Tunisia, where the Berber tribes were inhabited. Of course, Yusef, one of the first Muslim/Arab stereotypes of the series, appears in collaboration with the British demonstrates a rather friendly image of the Muslim other from North Africa.

Call of Duty remastered its main story under *Modern Warfare* in 2011 as a timeline in the near future (as the game was released in 2007). In the game, two different but intertwined storylines occur in two different geographic settings. The first story is about a civil war in Russia (between government loyalists and ultra-nationalists who desire Soviet Russia's return). The second is a coup attempt in a fictional Middle Eastern country led by separatist commander Khaled Al-Asad. Players take on the role of one of the two main Anglo-American characters in these plots: Sergeant John "Soap" MacTavish, a British Army Special Air Service member, investigating the whereabouts of a nuclear device or Sgt. Paul Jackson, a member of United States Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance, deployed to the Middle East to capture al-Asad. Although the missions of these two Anglo-American protagonists are set in different geographies, they both fight to protect Western interests against the vicious Muslim enemy. Their objective is to destroy the terrorist forces of these two terrorists, Khaled Al-Asad and Imran Zakhaev, a Russian Chechen Muslims separatist, from using the nuclear weapon they have acquired. So, as the game progresses, it is revealed that the ultra-nationalist leader Imran Zakhaev who aim to return Russia to the Soviet Union, and al-Asad are working together. Zakhaev funds a militia in the Middle Eastern controlled by warlord Khaled Al-Asad who claims his power over the region.

For the United States, in a semi-historical reality, Al-Asad's brutal rule in the region threatens the whole political stability in the Middle East. The United States' rightful concerns for the region's security is justified to the players by the vivid and disturbing images of the legitimate president of Saudi Arabia, Yasir Al-Fulani's execution by al-Asad. The murder of Yasir al-Fulani discloses a reference to the cruelty of the uncivilized societies of Muslim regimes, where "Muslims" slaughter other "Muslims" without a reliable due process. The lack of rule of law confirms the medieval Eastern regimes as the mirror image of the liberal Western democracies (Figure 1).

Omar Sulaman is one of the other vicious characters of the Middle Eastern that appears continually in the series of Modern Warfare.[2] He is the leader of Al-Qatala (possible al-Qaeda implication), a hypothetical terrorist organization operating in a hypothetical country called Urzikstan. His terrorist actions involve using poisoned gas against Western targets worldwide, one of the worst kind of attacks carried by the terrorist organizations. Sulaman claims that he seeks independence for his people at all costs but tries to achieve that goal through terror.

Sulaman, once a freedom fighter himself, a leader, and hero in the eyes of the West, gave up a relatively comfortable life to fight Russian influence in Afghanistan and became a key ally of Western powers until his political and military interests collided (a possible reference to Ussama bin-Ladin). Unlike terrorist groups that promote piety and strict doctrine, Sulaman's al-Qatara is different; It supports anarchy rather than a political establishment, and it aims to overthrow government institutions at all costs. Al-Qatala's cruel measures to liberate its occupied homeland from foreigners go as far as to launch attacks that will cause mass casualties (Figure 2).

Call of Duty's "bad Arabs" includes another character who engages to the story as one of Sulaman's closest men, Jamal Rahar. He is known for the bombings of government facilities worldwide and the beheadings of his captured prisoners. These executions earned him the nickname "the butcher" (Figure 2) The player encounters Rahar's cruelest self during an attack he performs on the US embassy. As the story unfolds, he brutally kills several US Marines with a large group of terrorists. After a vividly depicted further arm conflict, he manages to get inside the embassy and takes everyone hostage, including the ambassador. During his raid, the player witness another extremely uncomfortable scene where Rahar executes a random civilian among the hostages in cold blood in front of his son and wife. He then points his gun at the US Ambassador.[3]

Dr. Salim is another "evil Arab" character in *Black Ops III* (2015). He is an Egyptian scientist born in Cairo. He works for a corporation that conducts illegal experiments on human subjects. Salim's research for the company involves psychological stimuli to distract subjects from the intense pain the experiments inflict. He soon pioneers the later stages of the experiment that aims to develop a deadly nerve gas. The storyline of the title reveals that the nerve gas Dr. Salim is responsible for developing kills 30,000 people. As the civil war breaks and coalition forces raid Cairo, he flees and hides in the city's alleys and disappears. He is captured years later by the Egyptian army (*Black Ops III: The Battle of Cairo*).

All these characters demonstrate various degrees of evilness in their characterization. From a vicious warlord to a lawless terrorist, to a blood-thirsty villain, to a malicious scientist, these Muslim Arabs stand as the ultimate "Arab/Muslim enemy," against whom the Western societies identify themselves. This collectivity that emerges as a threat sets the central moral in the game's titles where the masculine, white, Christian Western soldiers' rightful struggle in the distant lands of the Muslim geographies to preserve the Westerners' moral superiority against the Arabs' immorality. The game invites ordinary citizens to share this experience in a virtual space through this justification. The contextual otherization of the Anglo-American heroes that were avatared by the ordinary citizens is present in the game's collectivization and "linguistic functionalization" of the Muslim other as "terrorist groups," "insurgents," or "freedom fighters" (Šisler, 2008, p. 208).

However, apart from the terrible Arab reproduced within Call of Duty's Islamophobic discourse, it is also possible to find Middle Eastern characters marginalized in a more Saidien sense. The examination of these virtual characters discloses them often as "collaborators" rather than "enemies" of the Western societies, provided that they preserve their cultural lines, that is, they are still the "other" in their language, physical appearance, and cultural leanings. Instead of assimilating into western social formulations, these characters' visual representations appear in hybridity relevant to Bhabha's definition. A rather good example of this hybrid character is Farid, a CIA agent who enters the story in Black Ops II (2012). Although he is not perceived as a familiar figure at first— due to his "undercover informant" status fighting against the Yemeni soldiers— as the game progresses, his real character surfaces as a devoted patriot of the country he serves. The notion of devotion and loyalty that is assigned to Farid's character forces him to make choices that will ultimately end with his death (the decision between keeping his secret identity or to save his (American) friend's life?). Interesting enough, within the various sliding doors of the game— which ever decision he makes through the players choosing — he dies. His unescapable death as

a Muslim/Arab figure positions him as another expandable character, while leaving the player with a sudden paucity and a slight and quick sorrow, yet the game goes on. War, conflict, and death are often assumed the "natural destiny" of predominantly Muslim countries and their people.

Another example of the hybrid Muslim emerges in one of the game's most colorful personalities, Jabari Salah from Egypt. Salah emerges as a highly cheerful and well-liked, yet secondary character. Its story begins in 1975 in El Geish el Masry, known as the Egyptian Land Forces. Two years later, he was selected for the Sa'ka Forces that cooperated with the Western powers. He later joins the counterterrorism and special operations unit led by the Western coalition. The orientalist touch in Salah's character is purely visual. It is exposed in various occasions, such as the design of his weapons adorned with exotic details (carvings containing the symbolic motifs of the Eastern cultures around them, oil lanterns, and a mechanical component that allows hookah smoking accessible by a switch). Apart from the traditional turban that signifies his ethnicity, his outfit holds exotic touches such as a snake wrapped around his body or a giant desert lizard walking alongside him during his missions. It is possible to see a similar hybridity in Salah's character similar to Farid's.

2.6. Call of Duty and Imagining the Middle Eastern Woman

Post-colonial feminist literature defines war as a patriarchal enterprise regularly accompanied by sexual violence against women in the institutions of war and countries at war (Mohanty 2011). Parallel to the real war phenomenon, it is possible to trace the links between militaristic values and masculinity in digital war games' content and fictional designs. Even the concepts of "us" and "them" in a dilemma built on the perception of "we" (West) as good and "them" (East) as bad are defined only concerning men. In Muslim societies, women are presented as weak, need of salvation, and suppressed in distinctive forms (Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991, p. 21; Mohanty, 2011, p. 77). In fact, in many different cultural industries (TV, Hollywood, literature, etc.), US operations in Muslim-majority countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria were supported and similarly represented with the idea of white American soldiers saving brown veiled Muslim women from the evil Muslim men (Shaheen, 2014, pp. 28-29; Mirless 2021, p. 37). The passive Muslim women, as victimized veiled women, are strongly underlined in the process of reproduction of "reality" by the various media. Thus, the United States and its allies have sometimes framed their attacks as part of a well-meaning liberal feminist mission to bring freedom, democracy, and human rights to "foreign" Muslim women (Figure 7).

In Call of Duty's latest title Modern Warfare, the mission to free the Muslim women and people, was given to Farah Ahmed Karim. In the storyline, her character's ideological backdrop emerges as a liberal feminist Syrian insurgent (Figure 4). Karim is the only Middle Eastern heroine of the play who rebels against the misdoing of an oppressor (Russia in this case) and the oppressor's subcontractors. Farah Karim lost her family to the war (concerning the Syrian Civil War) and struggled for survival since her childhood. Call of Duty's playwriter Taylor Kurosaki says that the real-time Kurdish Women's Protection Units (YPG) inspires Karim's character, the women's brigade of the Kurdish resistance militia in northern Syria supported by the US in their fight against ISIS (Martens, 2019). Correspondingly, her outlook is different than the traditional Middle Eastern women who are stereotyped often in passivity that stems from the lack of engagement in conflicts and portrayed as "victims, in family relations" (often linked to Islam) (Navarro, 2010, p. 95).

Farah Karim, in the game, is fictionalized against this remote Middle Eastern Muslim woman who is just a bystander rather than an active participant in her community. The images of the stereotyped Middle Eastern women gain visibility mostly in the cinematic background story of Farah Karim, often in binary opposition to Farah's own rebellious stance as a Muslim woman.

While Karim maintains her position as the West's "other" in the game, with her Middle Eastern identity highly magnified both in her physical appearance and accent, she remains loyal to the Western principles of freedom. She accentuates the power of the individual capacity, again a notion that relies primarily upon Western societies, when she claims that "will is the strongest weapon." [4] Her cooperation with the Western forces shows a certain determination against the common enemy (the head of the terrorist organization al-Qatala, Omar Sulaman, who she believes gave a bad name to her people). Yet, her loyalty is limited to her own terms when it comes to making decisions for her people (Middle Easterners), not the Europeans or Americans ("The gas kills all things, even food in the garden. If you use these tactics, you are my enemy. No exceptions!").

Although assimilated to militaristic values by her qualifications as battle commander in a uniform, Karim's worldview draws a sharp line between herself and the enemy ("The enemy came where they were not welcome and took what did not belong to them" —referring to Russia). The liberation organization under Karim's command has been labeled a terrorist organization by the Russian government (and for a short while by the Western coalition forces) due to their long-standing resistance in the putative Middle Eastern country (with reference to Syria) under Russian occupation. However, Karim identifies herself as a freedom fighter, not a "terrorist," especially for not launching attacks outside of her country's borders. She wholeheartedly believes that what distinguishes her from terrorists like Sulaman and Russian invaders is never to cross the line from defensive to offensive ("We are a protective force. We are saviors, not murderers"). Her character is tailored as a role model against the Middle East's stereotyped women. Husbands, mothers, and daughters who see Karim as an exemplary in her fighting and leadership and they join her cause without asking for anything in return (food or money). Farah's story emerges as an effort to credit the United States and Europe's friends in "War of Terror" through a rather romantic way of Orientalizing than its foes. In fact, Farah Ahmed Karim in not just a freedom fighter for her alleged nation but she is the freedom fighter for all the dominated voiceless women of the Middle East. Her character acts as a catalyst that conveys this message through a post-colonial feminist discourse.

2.7. Completing the Picture: The Other's Geographic Imaginary

By their very nature, video games provide a schematic view of the world. According to Payne, the experience of moving to a simulated playground is certainly not a technological achievement but rather a successful co-creation of the relationship between the player and the context (2006, p. 59). The players who want to experience "focuses their attention on the world around them and uses their intelligence to reinforce the reality of the experience rather than question it" (Payne, 2006, p. 59). Digital environments offer users incredible opportunities to practice this "active reality creation" (Payne, 2006, p. 57-59). But the key tools in fostering these reality-building processes are the coherent and nurturing creation of space and narrative. The stories of the characters created in the triangle of place, time, and people can deepen the reality of the leading narrative and maximize the player's experience. For example, in Call of Duty, the player moves his avatar in a two-dimensional space and moves over various physical and tactical obstacles. While doing this, it moves through architectural and geographical landscapes that are transitive with each other in a cinematic fluidity. These spatial environments are often created by repeating a limited number of symbolic textures and schemes (orientalist carpets, palm trees, desert, minarets, arches buildings, etc.). The latter fact applies to a significant number of digital war games that adopt the Middle East among its confrontation zones in a semi-historical narrative or complete fantasy. Thus, not different from the classical game concept, this spatial symbolic production manifests itself in a much more sophisticated way in Call of Duty.

In this context, the game's main goal is to create mental maps that depict a barren, lawless, and brutal geography in need of foreign intervention for its "citizens" who will never step foot in

the places where the US army is fighting (Figure 5 and Figure 6). Therefore, the putative Western powers' intervention in the Middle East is normalized, rationalized, and justified within the reality of the "War on Terror." Here, the inseparable relationship between imagined or envisioned spaces and real-time battlefields is significant (Figure 6). For example, in Call of Duty 4 Modern Warfare, the relationship between the actual battlefield (presumably in Syria or Iraq) and the imaginary country Urzkistan is built through various symbolic references that help the player to easily link these two landscapes. As articulated in one of the game's plots, Urzikstan is located on a peninsula in the Caucasus Region, on the eastern border of the Black Sea, adjacent to the Russian Federation in the north and Georgia in the east. The capital is Sakhra, where the United States Embassy is located. Its climate is primarily arid (desert connotation). Despite the actual definitions of the bordering countries, Urzikstan lacks real-time blueprints, it is entirely fictional. The latter deprivation of a real-time reference of the country projects an Orientalist perception of the Middle East in a monolithic understanding where the West is identifying itself against an imaginative territory that lacks all forms of civilization and where all are justified for the "citizen soldiers."

According to the story, Russian General Roman Barkov invaded Urzikstan in 1999 and continued his rule with an iron fist (ruthless, authoritarian governments of the East). Under Barkov, the people of Urzikstan were used as a labor force in return for food aid. Although terrorist activities within the borders of Urzikstan are included in the game plot, the fate of the actual government and army is not disclosed. Therefore, this country's possible experience of democracy and the perception of an active participant citizen in the community-state relationship is hardly in question. The historical backdrop is a mixture of the blurry chronological layers concerning various conflicts in the larger geography of the Middle East, from Afghanistan to Syria. For example, while the game underlines the Russian invasion, the player is not fully revealed if the Russian connection is through Afghanistan or Syria. In certain places in the game, where, for example, Farah plans an attack on al-Qatala, the virtual map would skim over a territory that is labeled "S" with an implication of Syria (the view will shift afterward, making one unable to read the whole name).

The same feeling of borderlessness is present between the fuzzy transfusions of interior and exterior spaces that form the theatrical setting of the game. Throughout the cinematic experience of the conflict zone, it is almost impossible where the borders are set between interior and exterior spaces. The poverty of the living spaces is implied in the derelict and worn-out items, and in the buildings ruined by conflict and war. Yet, this deprivation is the new reality of the local populations who resume their daily lives as symbolized by the washed white clothes hanging on ropes stretched between dusty, ruined buildings. The arid geography of the desert and the spatial colors reflected from it (the ordinariness of the buildings in yellowish tones of the desert), the landscape (palm trees), the architectural structures of the public spaces (bazaar) that stand out with their minarets, domes, arched passages, and Orientalist decorations represent a virtual stereotype that reduces the West's "Muslim lands" to a few simple clichés (Figure 5). The ordinary inhabitants with their veils or keffiyehs, and loose clothes; or faced covered men assumed to be the "terrorists" with their Kalashnikov (such as in the scene of al-Fulani's execution or the scene where Karim is rescued from the rubble by the White Caps) are sprinkled into the sights to complete the backdrop (Figure 3 and Figure 7).

However, this experience emphasizes not only the social, political, and economic dichotomy between the West and the East but also stresses the geographic one. While the West's individualistic, civilized liberal social order is observed in the well-structured cities, dazzling architecture, and the dynamic fluency of living spaces, there is poverty, chaos, stagnation, and absence in the Middle East, where brutality prevails. The Middle East's paucity is like the desert that lacks water to nurture vegetation. Thus, the way the desert does not have the capacity for

full-grown flora, the Middle East lacks order and the self-serving capacity of its people (Figure 6). The Western hero wandering in the torn-down alleys of the crumbled cities feels insecure and threatened by its remoteness. Therefore, killing is acceptable as a justified reflex, even personal defense. It is the "duty" of the Western hero (or even the ordinary Western citizen-soldier) to save the "defenseless" and "deprived" communities of this landscape from the "evils" it has produced and convey the "white man's burden" in bringing civilization.

Conclusion

The popular discourse of the digital war games conceals their essential role as "builders of realities" and, consequently, their key role in the processes of imagination—and social construction—of the societies to which they belong (either national or transnational). This article analyzes how these processes, the discursive strategies that reveal ethnic differences, and the different representations of Muslims with semi-historical fantasies are reproduced in the most prevalent Western-designed digital war game, Call of Duty.

In the political and social climate following 9/11, the United States and its allies constructed a rhetoric to fight terrorism under the global "War on Terror." In the social mobilization of the public, the digital war games held their share for especially virtually militarizing the public sphere (Šisler, 2008, p. 210). These games created a perceptional reality that placed the Middle East on a target board where the shooting was unrestricted. On the other hand, national and transnational members of the Muslim societies are exposed to constant otherization where the complex political relations are schematized in polarized frames of the culturally racist discourse of Islamophobia (Said 1997; Karim 2006; Šisler, 2008). Call of Duty projects this Islamophobic discourse. It empowers a simulative military quest for ordinary players by virtually mobilizing them for an imagery military quest against the Islamic threat to Western life. The deployment of these "citizen soldiers" requires the constant consolidation of Muslim/Arab stereotype as a deprived being with no capacity for self-determination and in need of salvation. To further methodize the study, the article uses Green's categorization of the Muslim other as static, inferior, enemy, and manipulative in examining the game's association of its Muslim/Arab characters and their respective landscapes. It tries to show that these qualities are repetitively produced in the game's different titles, constantly sealing the threatening status of the Muslim Other in the Islamophobic discourse.

The War on Terror ceases to be a military action and turns into a perceptual "massacre" of the Other, carried out by the "citizen soldiers" from the comfort of their consoles. This digitally submitted virtual "massacre" leads to further social polarization between West and East, Christian and Muslim. While Call of Duty allows the Western military forces and ordinary soldier-citizens to fight the war of the "good" with a flag on their shoulders, Middle Easterners are denied the same privilege. Instead, the Middle East is demarcated as a prey waiting to be destroyed at the player's gunsight, with its blurred geographical boundaries, deprived landscape, and savage, manipulative, and remote characters where the supremacy of "Christian white man" prevails.

References

Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism.* London, New York: Verso.

Allen, C. (2007). Islamophobia and its consequences. In *European Islam: Challenges for Public Policy and Society* (p. 144-167). Brussel: CEPS Centre for European Policy Studies.

Altsultany, E. (2012). *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation After 9/11.* New York: New York University Press.

Bakali, N. (2016). Popular Cultural Islamophobia: Muslim Representations in Films, News Media, and Television Programs. *Islamophobia Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education,* 5(1), 63-78.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture.* New York, London: Routledge.Bates, T. R. (1975, Apr-Jun). Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony. *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 36(2), 351-366.

Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism.* London: Sage.

Buke Okyar, I. (2022). *"Neither the sweets of Damascus nor the face of the Arab": Arab image in Turkish political cartoons, 1876-1950.* New York: Syracuse University Press.

Doyle, N. J. (2016). The fear of Islam: French context and reaction. In D. Pratt and R. Woodlock (Eds.), *Fear of Muslims? Bounderies of Religious Freedom: Regulating Religion in Diverse Societies* (pp. 167-190). Switzerland: Springer, Cham.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977.* London: Vintage.

Galloway, A. (2004). Social realism in gaming. *Game Studies,* 4(1), 1-13.

Gramsci, A. (1957). *The modern prince and other essays.* London: Lawerence & Wishart.

Grosfoguel, R. (2012). The multiple faces of Islamophobia. *Islamophobia Studies Journal,* 1(1), 9-33.

Green, T. H. (2015). *The fear of Islam: An introduction to Islamophobia in the west.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Guterman, K. (2013). The dynamics of stereotyping: Is a new image of the terrorist evolving in American popular culture?", *Terrorism and Political Violence,* 25(4), 640–652.

Halliday, F. (1999). 'Islamophobia' reconsidered. *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 22(5), 892-902.

Helbling, M. and Traunmüller, R. (2020). What is Islamophobia? Disentangling citizens' feelings toward ethnicity, religion and religiosity using a survey experiment. *British Journal of Political Science*, 50(3), 811-828.

Hobbes, T. (1986). Philosophical rudiments concerning government and society, (1651). In D. Wootton (Ed.), *Divine right and democracy: an anthology of political writing in Stuart England* (p. 450-477). London: Penguin Books.

Huntington, S. P. (1993). The clash of civilizations. *Foreign Affairs*, p. 22-49.

Hussain, A. (2010). (Re)presenting: Muslims on North American Television. *Contemporary Islam,* 4(1), 55-75.

Karim, H. K. (2006). American Media's coverage of Muslims: The historical roots of contemporary portrayals. In E. Poole and J. Richardson (Eds.), *Muslims and the News Media* (pp. 116-127). London: I. B. Tauris.

Kipling, R. (2007). *Kipling: Poems* (Everyman's Library Pocket Poets Series) New York, London, Toronto: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Kozlovic, A. (2009). Islam, Muslims and Arabs in the popular Hollywood cinema. *Comparative Islamic Studies, 3*(2), 213-246.

Leydet, D. (2017) Citizenship, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/citizenship/>.

López, F. B. (2011). Towards a definition of Islamophobia: Approximations of the early twentieth century. *Ethnic and racial studies, 34*(4), 556-573.

McCrone, D. (1998). *The Sociology of nationalism. London: Routledge.* London: Routledge.

Macfie, A. L. (2000). *Orientalism: A reader.* New York: NYU Press.

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2006). Cesaire's gift and the decolonial turn. *Radical Philosophy Review, 9*(2), 111-138.

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2014). Race, religion, and ethics in the modern / colonial world. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 42(4), 691-711.

Manzoor-Khan, S. (2022). Look at ministers' plans to secretly make Britons stateless and what do you see: Islamophobia. *The Guardian: Opinion*. Accessed on March 14, 2022. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/14/islamophobia-widespread-britain-trojan-horse-prevent-racist-joke.

Materns, T. (2019, May 30). 'Call of Duty: Modern Warfare' adds a female Middle Eastern soldier's POV. Here's why". *Los Angeles Times*.

Mirrlees, T. and Ibaid, T. (2021). The virtual killing of Muslims: Digital war games, Islamophobia, and the Global War on Terror. *Islamophobia Studies Journal, 6*(1), 33-51.

Modood, T. (1997). Introduction: The politics of multiculturalism in the new Europe. In T. Modood and P. Werbner, *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe* (p. 1-25). Zed Books.

Mohanty, C. T., Russo, A., and Torres, L. (1991). *Third world women and the politics of feminism* (Vol. 632). Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Mohanty, C. T. (2011, March 26). Imperial democracies, militarised zones, feminist engagements. *Economic and Political Weekly, 46*(13), p. 76-84.

Morey, P. and Yaqin, A. (2011). *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and representation After 9/11.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Navarro, L. (2010). Islamophobia and sexism: Muslim women in the western mass media. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 8(2), 95-114.

Payne, M. (2016). *Playing war: Military video games after 9/11.* New York: New York University Press.

Perocco, F. (2018). Anti-migrant Islamophobia in Europe. Social roots, mechanisms and actors. *REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana*, 26, 25-40.

Piaget, J. (1962). The relation of affectivity to intelligence in the mental development of the child. *Bulletin of the Menninger clinic, 26*(3), 129.

Pratt, D. and Woodlock, R. (2016). *Fear of Muslims. International perspectives on Islamophobia.* London: Springer.

Sachs, A. (2003). The ultimate "Other": Post-Colonialism and Alexander von Humboldt's ecological relationship with nature. 42(4), 111-135. *History and Theory, 42*(4), 111-135.

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism.* New York: Pantheon.

Said, E. (1997). *Covering Islam.* London: Vintage.

Salaita, S. (2006). Beyond orientalism and Islamophobia: 9/11, anti-Arab racism, and the mythos of national pride. *CR: The New Centennial Review,* 6(2), 245-266.

Saleem, M. and Anderson, C. A. (2013). Arabs as terrorists: Effects of stereotypes within violent contexts on attitudes, perceptions, and affect. *Psychology of Violence, 3*(1), 84-99.

Salem, S. and Thomson, V. (2016). Old racisms, new masks: On the continuing discontinuities of racism and the erasure of race in European contexts. *nineteen sixty nine: an ethnic studies journal, 3*(1), 1-23.

Shaheen, J. (2008). *Guilty: Hollywood's verdict on Arabs After 9/11.* Northhampton: Olive Branch Press.

Shesterinina, A. (2016). Collective threat framing and mobilization in civil war. *The American Political Science Review*, 110(3), 411–427.

Šisler, V. (2006). Representation and self-representation: Arabs and Muslims in digital games. In M. Santorineos and N. Dimitriadi, *Gaming Realities: A Challenge for Digital Culture* (pp. 85-92). Athen: Fournos.

Šisler, V. (2008). Digital Arabs representation in video games. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 11*(2), 203–220.

Travis, C. (2021) How many people play Call of Duty? Esports talk on May, 17, 2021, https://www.esportstalk.com/blog/how-many-people-play-call-of-duty/

Trein, L. (2018). Governing the fear of Islam: Thinking Islamophobia through the politics of secular affect in historical debate. *ReOrient, 4*(1), 44-58.

Trust, R. (1997). *Islamophobia: A challenge for us all* (Vol. 41). London: Runnymede Trust.

Zebiri, K. (2008). The redeployment of orientalist themes in contemporary Islamophobia. *Studies in contemporary Islam, 10*(1-2), 4-44.

Zúquete, J. P. (2008). The European extreme-right and Islam: New directions? *Journal of political ideologies, 13*(3), 321-344.

Zunes, S. (2017) Europe's refugee crisis, Terrorism, and Islamophobia, *Peace Review*, 29 (1), 1-6.

Notes

[1] Dutch colonization of Indonesia in the 17th century, British colonialism of India in the 18th century, North in the 19th century, French colonialism in Africa and British colonialism of the Middle East.

[2] "Modern Warfare® Campaign: Biographies of The Story's Major Players. Part 4: "The Butcher" And "The Wolf," [Blog post] accessed on 20 February 2022. Retrieved from https://blog.activision.com/call-of-duty/2019-10/Modern-Warfare-Campaign-Biographies-of-the-Storys-Major-Players-Part-4.

[3] "Modern Warfare® Campaign: Biographies of The Story's Major Players. Part 4: "The Butcher" And "The Wolf," [Blog post] accessed on 20 February 2022. Retrieved from https://blog.activision.com/call-of-duty/2019-10/Modern-Warfare-Campaign-Biographies-of-the-Storys-Major-Players-Part-4.

[4] "Modern warfare® campaign: biographies of the story's major players. Part 3: Farah Ahmed Karim and Hadir Ahmed Karim [Blog post], accessed on 20 February 2022. Retrieved from https://blog.activision.com/call-of-duty/2019-10/Modern-Warfare-Campaign-Biographies-of-the-Storys-Major-Players-Part-3

MEDİAD
Medya ve Din Araştırmaları Dergisi | Journal of Media and Religion Studies

İslamofobinin Dijital Pelerin İçinde Yeniden Üretimi: "Call Of Duty" Oyunu Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Düriye İlkim BÜKE OKYAR
Narmin ABDULLAYEVA

Genişletilmiş Özet

The Guardian gazetesi yazarı Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan 14 Mart 2022 tarihindeki "Bakanların Britanyalıları gizlice vatansız yapma planlarına bakın ve ne görüyorsunuz? İslamofobi (Look at ministers' plans to secretly make Britons stateless and what do you see: Islamophobia) yazısında Batı medyasındaki Müslümanlara karşı oluşmuş algının Ukrayna savaşıyla tekrar ortaya çıktığını ve bunun Islamofobik bir yansımasından başka birşey olmadığını gündeme tartışmıştır. Manzoor-Khan ana akım haber kaynaklarının, Rusya'nın Ukrayna'daki savaşını aktarırken farkındalıkla yahut farkında olmadan savaşın "Irak veya Afganistan gibi olmayan" bir coğrafyada gerçekleşmesinden ötürü Ukrayna ve Ukraynalıların başına gelenlerin "korkunç" olarak nitelendirildiğini, Ukraynalı sığınmacıların Suriyeli sığınmacıların tersine, "Müslüman olmadıkları" için memnuniyetle karşılanmayı hak ettiğiklerinin sıklıkla vurgulandığı televizyon haber programlarının Batı'nın kendinden olmayan Müslüman/Arap coğrafyasına bakışını gündeme getirmesiyle İslamophobik söyleminin Batı'da ne kadar içselleştiğinin sergilediğini savunmuştur (Manzoor-Khan, 2022). Yine aynı şekilde Irak, Afganistan ve Suriye'ye yapılan atıflar, Batı'nın "teröre karşı savaş" yoluyla meşrulaştırdığı Müslüman coğrafyalarla bağlantılı savaşları çağrıştırmakdan da öte kalmamaktadır. Öyleki bu sunuşsal biçim Müslüman/Arap coğrafyası ve bu coğrafyada yaşayan halkların Avrupalılar gibi işgal veya savaş mağduru olabilecekleri gerçeğini Batı algısından mahrum ederek, bu coğrafya ve halklarının savaş, yoksunluk ve ölümle olan ilişkilerini nispeten normalleştirmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu insanlıktan çıkarma biçimlerinin sömürgesel söylemin günümüze kadar devam eden ve "Hıristiyan beyaz adamın" üstünlüğünün bir tezahürü olduğunu söylemeyi mümkün kılmaktadır.

Bu makale, 11 Eylül sonrası El Kaide ve IŞID gibi radikal İslamcı hareketlerin katalizör vazifesi gördüğü Batı algısındaki Müslüman ve İslam tehdidine karşı başlatılan "Teröre Karşı Savaş" çerçevesinde kurgulanan dijital savaş oyunlarını incelemektedir. Çalışmanın öncelikli hipotezi Batı algısında bir Öteki olarak Müslüman karakterini klişeleştirdiğini ve bu suretle Müslüman stereotipini İslamofobik bir tasvir içinde sınırlandırdığı üzerinedir. Samual P. Huntington'ın (1993) "Medeniyetlerin Çatışması" (Clash of Civilizations) tezi küreselleşmenin kültürel ve dini açıdan çeşitlilik gösteren toplumlarla sonuçlandığını savunmuştur. Bu etnik ve dini çeşitlilik batı devlet algısının temellindeki bireyi, ona topluluk duygusu verecek sosyal bir bağlamda bütünleştiren çoğulculuk anlayışını 21. yüzyılın başında dinin kamusal alanda daha belirgin bir yer işgal etmeye başlamasıyla tedirgin etmeye başlamıştır. İnanç farklılıklarındaki artış ve dini kimliğin temel bir unsur olarak öne çıkması, yönetişim meseleleriyle ilgili hem zorluklar hem de fırsatlar sunmuş, hatta muhafazakâr, milliyetçi ve popülist siyasi oluşumları güçlendiren bir alan yaratmıştır. Huntington'ı doğrular şekilde bu süreç içerisinde batının karşı karşıya kaldığı en öne çıkan din İslam olmuştur. Bu makalenin temelini "İslam coğrafyasına dair oluşan bütünsel algının dijital platformda İslam'a ve İslam'la özleştirilen Araplar gibi etnik toplumlara yönelik olumsuz tasvirlerin

batıda bir tehdit olarak gelişen İslamofobiye dair rolü nedir?" sorusu oluşturmaktadır. Bu soru irdelendiğinde Avrupa ve Amerika'nın içinde tanımlandığı batıdaki geleneksel kurumsallaşmış biçimleriyle dini pratiklerde yaşanan düşüşün ikinci ve üçüncü nesil Müslüman göçmenler arasında İslam'ın yeniden canlanmasıyla örtüştüğü savı önem kazanmıştır (Doyle, 2016). Bu bağlamda batılı toplumlardaki Müslüman varlığı, liberal devlet yapılarını çoğulculuk anlayışı üzerinden oluşturulan bağlılıkla uyumlu olan sekülerlik anlayışlarını tekrardan incelemeye zorlamıştır. Bu sorgulamanın temelinde de hiyerarşik bir toplum anlayışıyla suç ortağı olarak görülen, bireysel özgürlüklere düşman, batının değerleriyle nerdeyse tamamen zıt ve batnın dini radikalizm içinde tanımladığı İslam'a karşı derin şüphe vardır. Monolitik bir kavram olarak İslamofobinin merkezinde tam da bu şüphe yatmaktadır.

Todd H. Green (2015), batının İslam'dan daha çok İslam'a karşı duyduğu temelsiz korkusunu araştırdığı çalışmasında İslamofobiyi "İslam'a ve Müslümanlara karşı kin, düşmanlık, korku ve bunun sonucunda ortaya çıkan ayrımcı uygulamalar" olarak özetlemiştir (s. 9). Bu ayrımcı uygulamaları Green tek parça ve statik İslam; ayrı ve öteki olarak İslam; aşağılık olarak İslam; düşman olarak İslam ve manipülatif olarak İslam gibi temel özellikler etrafında gruplamış İslamofobiyi tüm bu bakışları bünyesinde bulunduran bir "kestirme" olarak ifade etmiştir (Green, 2015, s. 12-19). Öyle ki Green bu algısal özelliklerin batıda oluşan Müslümanlara karşı eleştirileri ve ırk ayrımcılığını meşrulaştırmanın önünü açmış olduğunu, İslam ve Müslümanlık karşıtı söylemleri batı toplumunda neredeyse doğal kılmış olduğundan bahseder.

Bu tartışmayı daha teorik bir temele oturmak adına Gramsci'nin (1957, s. 122-123; Bates, 1975) hegemonya analizi, Foucault'nun Müslümanlar ve İslam hakkındaki "gerçeğin" iktidar ilişkilerinin toplumsal yapısına göre formüle edilme biçimine ilişkin analiziyle tamamlanabilir. Foucault'nun "gerçek söylem" kavramı, alternatif gerçeklik anlayışlarını sınırlar ve dışlar şekildedir (Foucault, 1980, s. 131-133; Macfie, 2000). Müslümanların olumsuz klişelerinin hâkim (hegemon) söylemin bir parçası haline gelmesi bu yaklaşım üzerinden okunabilir. Gramsci-Foucaultcu kaygılar Edward Said'in Oryantalizm okumasıyla bir araya geldiğinde, hegemonik söylemin doğu ile batı arasındaki ilişkide batı'nın 'konumsal üstün' olarak tanımlandığı bir alan olduğunu ileri sürer. Bu teorik çerçeve içerisinde makalenin amacı batıdaki genelleştirilmiş Müslüman stereotipinin Green'nin altını çizdiği farklı temasal alanlarda meşrulaştırıldığı küresel dijital platformdaki en popüler savaş oyunu olan "Call of Duty" (Görev Çağrısı) üzerinden analiz etmektir. Makale Huntington'dan (1993) başlayarak Green'e (2015) pek çok akademik çalışmanın savunduğu siyasi ve kültürel küresel çatışmaların sanal platforma nasıl yansıdığını ve batının kültürel hegemonik konumunu yirmibirinci yüzyılınana iletişim mecrası haline gelen digital platformlarda sürekli nasıl ürettiğinin izini sürerek, bu platformu İslamofobiyi meşrulaştırıcı bir üretim aracı olarak post-yapısalcı bir bakıştan yapı çözümcü (dekonstraktif) yöntemle incelemeyi hedefler.

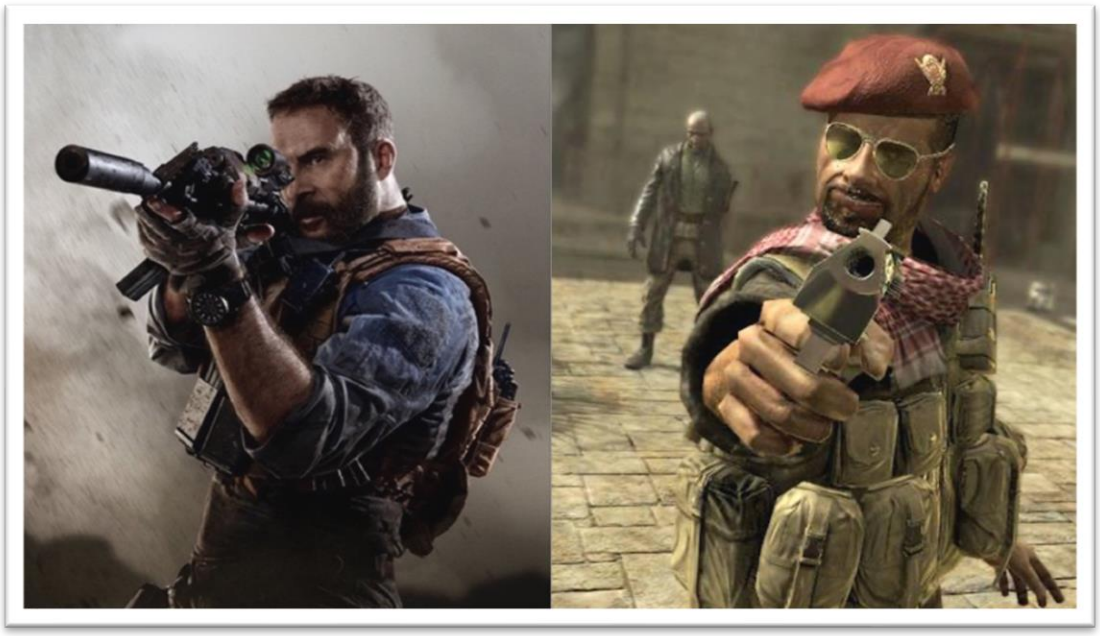

Figure 1. Call of Duty Black Ops III: Anglo-American Hero and the Warlord (al-Asad) The Anglo-American militarized male hero confronting the "killable" hostile "Arab" characters.

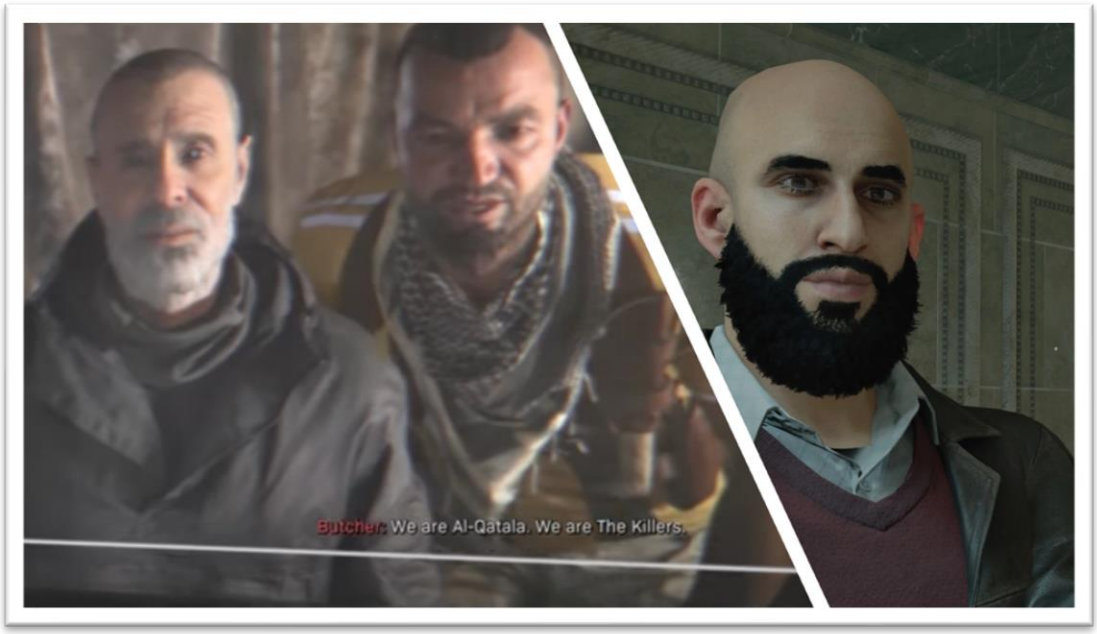

Figure 2. CoD4: Modern Warfare (2019) The Wolf, the Butcher and Chechen (Muslim) Terrorist Imran Zakhaev. Some of the other Arab/Muslim characters casted as the enemy.

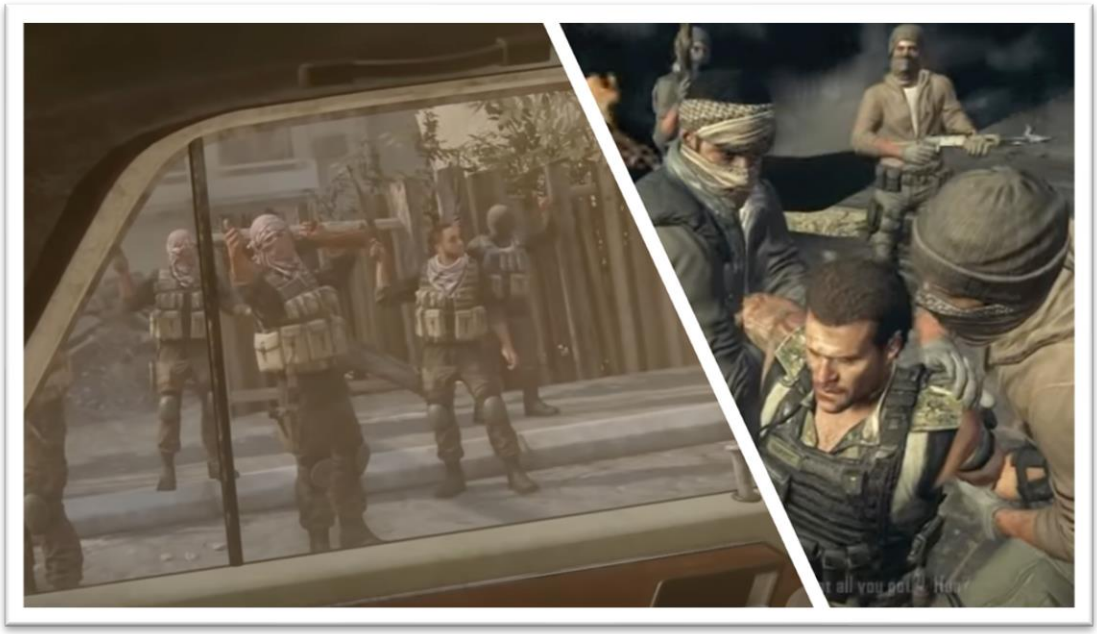

Figure 3. CoD 4: Modern Warfare, (2016) The "bad Arabs." The stereotype of the Arab men that stands as a threat to the western civilization.

Figure 4. Farah Ahmed Karim, CoD 4: Modern Warfare, (2019) "we'll take care of ours!" Farah is a character represented as the cautious ally of the wester forces. Her ethnicity is not identified, yet she is presented as the defender of the Middle East's deprived society.

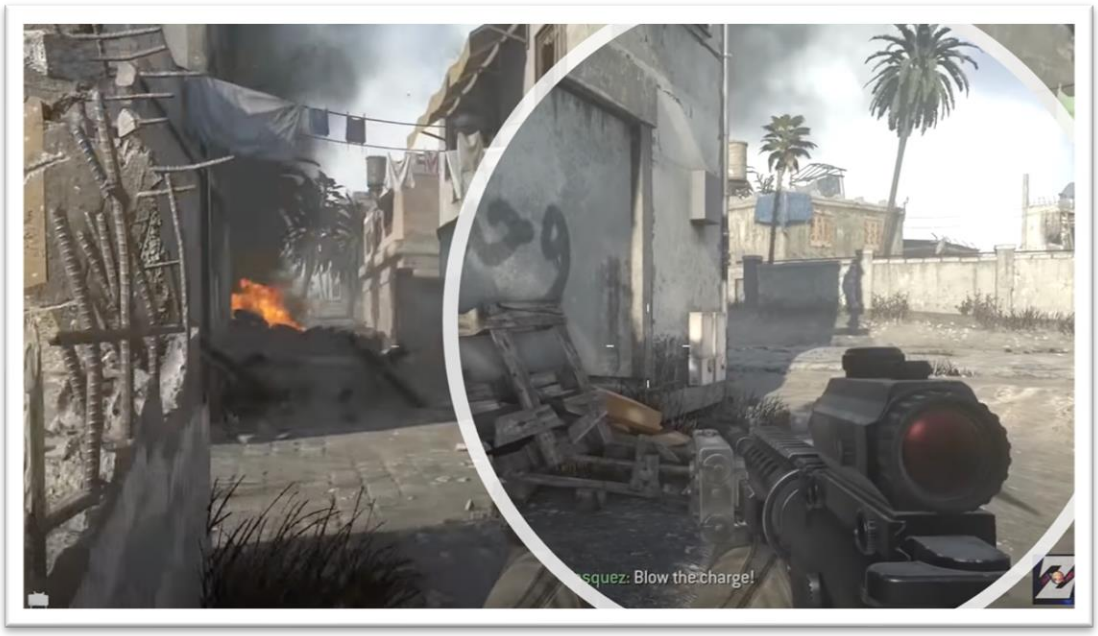

Figure 5. CoD 4: Modern Warfare (2019) Living Spaces, Text, Architecture, Landscape

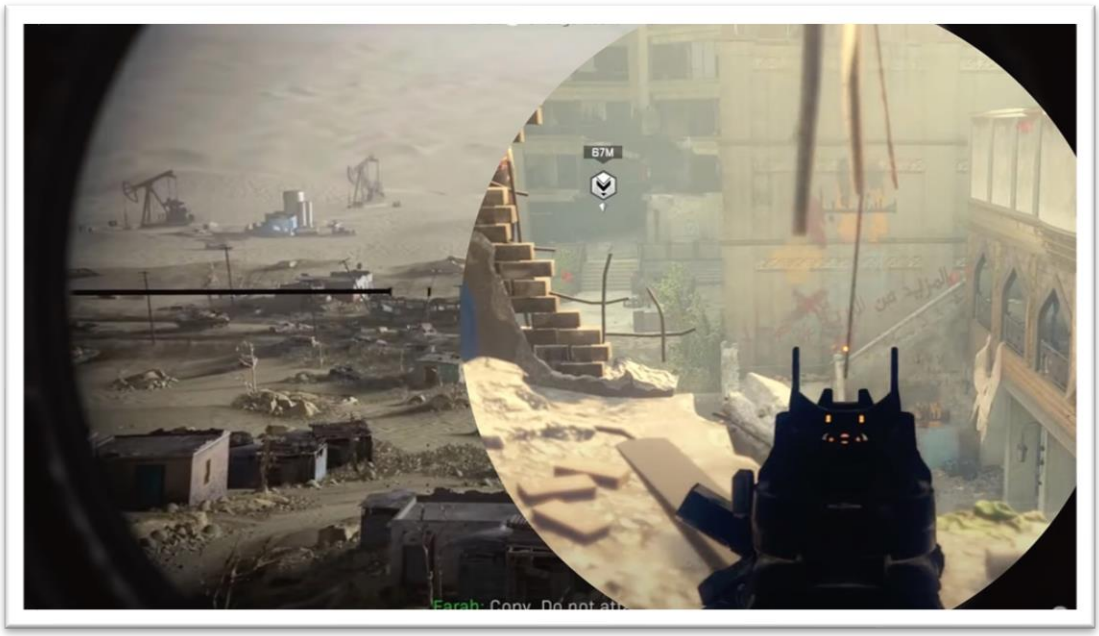

Figure 6. CoD 4: Modern Warfare (2019) and CoD: Black Ops III (2015) Paucity at the gunsight!

Figure 7. CoD: Modern Warfare Ordinary (2019) Men and Women

Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors

Yazarların çalışmadaki katkı oranları %80 birinci yazar, %20 ikinci yazar şeklindedir.

The contribution rates of the authors in the study are 80% as the first author and 20% as the second author.

****

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

****

İntihal Politikası Beyanı / Plagiarism Policy

Bu makale iThenticate yazılımıyla taranmıştır. İntihal tespit edilmemiştir.

This article has been scanned by iThenticate. No plagiarism was detected.

****

Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Beyanı / Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Statement

Bu çalışmada "Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi" kapsamında uyulması belirtilen kurallara uyulmuştur.

In this study, the rules stated in the "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" were followed.