


# Chapter 19

## Beyond the Screen: Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism in Modern Video Games – Case Studies of FPS and *Prince of Persia*

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates how Moroccan gamers perceive and respond to cultural representation in First Person Shooter (FPS) and adventure video games, particularly those set in Eastern contexts. Grounded in postcolonial theory, Orientalism, and Neo-Orientalism, the research analyzes how digital games construct symbolic, representational, and simulational borders. Using a mixed methods approach through textual analysis and a survey of Moroccan gamers (N = 56), the study explores how players in the Global South interpret cultural imagery. Results reveal that accurate and respectful portrayals foster narrative engagement and cultural connection, while orientalist tropes often generate discomfort or disengagement. Findings highlight the ethical role of cultural sensitivity in game design and the importance of addressing identity politics, media ethics, and player agency. The chapter emphasizes how games reflect digital borders and epistemic power structures and urges designers to consider the perspectives of marginalized players.*

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## INTRODUCTION

A central characteristic of colonial discourse is the construction of a superior self in opposition to a subordinate other, often articulated through enduring binaries such as West versus East and “Us” versus “Them.” Far from diminishing, this discursive framework has adapted to new cultural and technological platforms (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994). Said’s (1978) theory of Orientalism exposes the ideological mechanisms underpinning such representations, demonstrating how Western knowledge about the East is produced and circulated through a power-laden epistemological system reinforced by persistent stereotypes. In the context of globalization and pervasive digital media, technology has facilitated novel modes of ideological dissemination. As interactive and immersive artifacts, video games exemplify how contemporary media can both reflect and reproduce these colonial narratives, functioning as potent vehicles for the continuation of orientalist discourse in the digital age, often through the creation of virtual or epistemic borders that structure how cultures are perceived and engaged with (Sisler, 2008; Mukherjee, 2017).

Play is a universal human activity that attracts people across cultures (Huizinga, 1955). Combining play with technology has introduced new ways of interacting with games (Juul, 2005). A game has become a space where individuals can have multiple lives, playing roles of superheroes, soldiers, and protagonists that imitate or reconstruct real-life experiences (Aarseth, 2004). These digital spaces also establish representational or simulational borders, boundaries within which cultural narratives are framed, negotiated, or contested (Bogost, 2007). Whether these games merely imitate reality or actively construct and reinforce dominant cultural worldviews remains a question that invites sober reflection and critical debate.

One of the most popular game genres today is the first-person shooter (FPS) in which the player experiences the game events, actions, and narrative through the protagonist’s eyes (Aarseth, 2004). These games are centered on weapons, and the player’s only visible tool is a weapon. As a result, shooting the enemy is the only task he can perform. However, when the player identifies with a protagonist, many questions deserve deep reflection, such as who the protagonist is and who the enemy is and what values, religious and cultural orientations each of the opposing parties in the game holds and defends (Leonard, 2003; Sisler, 2008). In a way, real life conflicts are taken to virtual worlds where contesting ideologies grapple to prove their point of view and most importantly to disseminate their propagated discursive patterns.

Like the exilic subject navigating multiple worlds, Moroccan gamers traverse digital and epistemic boundaries, oscillating between identification and critique. This chapter engages in an act of epistemic border crossing by integrating established Western theoretical frameworks, such as Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* and Foucault’s discourse analysis, with the lived experiences of Moroccan gamers. The screen

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