

**TECHNO-ORIENTALISM CHALLENGED: STUDYING COUNTER-NARRATIVES IN VIDEO GAMES AND FILMS**Dur-e-Afshan Babar<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Nighat Ahmad<sup>2</sup>

Original Article

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**Abstract**

*Orientalism has always faced resistance in different genres like novels, dramas and poetry but this study will highlight how resistance to Techno-Orientalism is shown with counter-narratives. The counter-narratives specifically in the film Reluctant Fundamentalist (2012) directed by Mira Nair, and Hizbollah's video game Al Quwwat Al Khasa (Special Force) will be explored. The selected film and video game have been analyzed in detail. It is also studied how both these genres challenge the metanarrative of the West, particularly America, and in what ways their approach towards counter-narratives differs. The main method used for the content analysis involves playing the whole video game and watching the complete film while taking notes and screenshots of relevant visual signifiers. Other methods like studying the film and the video game as texts, and their discourse analysis, were also employed. The main significance of this study is that it highlights that techno-orientalism targeting entire Asian countries but it focuses on Muslims. Muslims are stereotyped in Hollywood films, and American video games, and how those brutal American stereotypical representations of Muslims are challenged by the counter-narratives presented in our selected film and video game.*

**Keywords:** Techno- Orientalism, Counter-narrative, Video games, Stereotype, Metanarrative.

**INTRODUCTION**

Techno-Orientalism is a relevantly new form of Orientalism. The definition of Techno-Orientalism according to Roh is "the phenomenon of imagining Asia and Asians in hypo- or hyper-technological terms in cultural productions and political discourse Techno-Orientalist imaginations are infused with the languages and codes of the technological and the futuristic. These developed alongside industrial advances in the West and have become part of the West's project of securing dominance as architects of the future, a project that requires configurations of the East as the very technology with which to shape it" (Roh, 2015).

Techno-Orientalism is an advanced tool to marginalize and stereotype the east. In the

western world, specifically, America has always used different technological inventions and media forms to propagate her ideology and political messages. Technology is not used to clarify the misconceptions about the East, it is rather used to make the truth vaguer and presented deep fake realities. These political messages and ideologies are replicated and repeated numberless times through traditional and digital media, thus making them the metanarratives that everyone believes them to be true. The shift from Orientalism to Techno-Orientalism is modified according to the demand of American foreign policy. According to Edward said it is a political demand of the US government to present an imaginative east threatening an imaginative West (Said, 1993). Western powers have to update their old version of Orient in this current and technically advanced

environment. Roh holds the opinion that “Adding “techno” to Orientalism registers the embeddedness of such civilizational logic within the sixty-year American struggle for military-industrial techno-dominance in the supposedly epic contest over the fate of the world” (Roh, 2015).

In response to this, marginalized communities such as Muslims, specifically Arabs have challenged these metanarratives, and have formed their counter-narratives, to have a balanced representation of their community and religion.

The western world, specifically America has always used different media forms to propagate their ideology and political messages. These political messages and ideologies are replicated and repeated numberless times through traditional and digital media, thus making them the metanarratives that everyone believes to be true. In response to this, marginalized communities such as Muslims, specifically Arabs have challenged these metanarratives, and have formed their counter-narratives, to have a balanced representation of their community and religion.

Raúl Alberto Mora defines counter-narrative in the article titled ‘*Counter-Narrative*’ as “the narratives that arise from the vantage point of those who have been historically marginalized.” The word “counter-” conjures up images of a zone of resistance to established dominance. A counter-narrative goes beyond the idea that individuals in positions of relative power may simply recount the experiences of those on the edges. These must instead emerge from the edges, from the viewpoints and voices of marginalized people. As a result, a counter-narrative extends beyond the relaying of marginalized stories. A counter-narrative has the effect of empowering and giving agency to those communities. Members of marginalized communities contribute different points of view by choosing their own words and narrating their own tales, assisting in the creation of complex narratives that properly represent their lives.

Raúl Alberto Mora says, “Scholars in different social sciences have relied on counter-narratives to illustrate their research. Fields such as Critical Race Theory and LatCrit, Political Science, Sociology, Education, Postcolonial / Postmodern and Indigenous Studies have embraced the potential of counter-narratives as part of their research methodologies. Counter-narratives have also found a healthy niche in qualitative inquiry in approaches such as narrative inquiry, life history, and especially in the indigenous-based approach of testimony. These approaches have placed a premium on the use of counter-narratives as a source of socially conscious qualitative research.”

Counter narratives are an important and crucial part of today's world affairs narratives, especially in an increasingly multicultural globe. The tales and voices of various people and societies, particularly those who are currently marginalized, must be considered in intercultural discussion. If the purpose of intercultural dialogue is to improve mutual understanding, participants must hear from usually ignored populations.

Raúl Alberto Mora suggests that “researchers worldwide need to embrace the potential of counter-narratives as the means to improve our collective understanding and even as a precursor to conflict resolution. Only if we create the conditions where all those involved in social interactions have a space to tell their stories in their own terms will we find effective ways to engage in empowering dialogue leading to sustainable solutions to today's crises” (Penix-Tadsen, 2019).

In this study, we have selected Mira Nair's film *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012), and Hizbollah's video game *Al Quwwat Al Khasa* (Special Force), and have analyzed in detail how both these media challenge the metanarrative of the West, particularly America, and in what ways their approach towards counter-narratives differs (Hamid, 2007).

Nair's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012) is a counter-narrative in the context of

9/11. The dominant narrative of the attack is recorded as explained in the official commission report by the federal government on the 9/11 attacks. "The September 11 attack is a sequence of four coordinated terrorist attacks by Al Qaeda, an Islamic terrorist group. Four passenger airlines bound for California from various cities in the North Eastern part of the United States run by two major air carrier i.e; United Airlines and American Airlines were hijacked by nineteen Al-Qaeda terrorists. North and South towers of the World Trade Centre were crashed by American Airline flight 11 and United Airlines flight 175 respectively that took off from Boston's Logan International airport en route to Los Angeles. The third plane Airline flight 77 that took off from Dulles International Airport smashed into Pentagon which is the headquarters of the U.S Department of Defence at Virginia. The fourth plane United Airlines flight 93, that took off from New York International airport en route to San Francisco, headed to Washington D.C initially, later collided into the field in Stonycreek Township at Pennsylvania" (Hamid, 2007).

9/11 brought a huge pile of hardships for the Muslims of the world because of the dominant or metanarrative associated with it, thus *Reluctant Fundamentalist* directed by Mira Nair, is an adaptation based on a novel of the same title written by Mohsin Hamid. It is about the Post 9/11 impact on a Pakistani man named Changez. We, in this study, analyze in detail how the film is challenging the metanarrative, and poses a counter-narrative (Hamid, 2007).

9/11 is a primary reason behind many of the military video games too. As Jeneen Naji and Msughter Iwar in their study titled '*Simulated stereotypes turning the unreal real: An analysis of representations of the 'Other' in traditional media forms and digital games*' state that, "the events of September 11, 2001 have proved to be singularly significant because of the new meaning it brought to video games. It marked an increase in video games where the objective is to fight 'terrorism', combat games in the Middle East and in the general

militarization of the digital entertainment public sphere" (Iwar, 2013).

In this context, *Al Quwwat Al Khasa* (Special Force) is a video game created by Lebanon based military organization Hizbollah, that posits a counter-narrative to the Western and American stereotypical representation of Muslims, specifically Arabs in the video games. In her study titled '*Arab Gamers: An Identity Inclusivity Study*', Bushra Alfaraj states:

"[The] same Arab stereotypes seen in Hollywood have made their way to Arab representation in video games; most interestingly enough, games produced in North America had a tendency to perpetuate the terroristic Arab stereotype, while games produced in Japan were more likely to give Arab characters vaguer representations or ones that are not entirely fleshed out. We postulate that North American games that perpetuate the terroristic Arab stereotype rely heavily on Orientalist notions and estrangement from familiarity with Arab culture, while the Japanese games with Arab representations that are lacking in satisfactory portrayals are the product of unfamiliarity with Arabs in general" (Alfaraj., 2016).

In 2003, the Central Internet Bureau of the Lebanese Hezbollah organization issued a direct response to games like *Delta Force* and *America's Army*. The movement's promotional tool, *Al Quwwat Al-Khasa* (Special Force), deals with the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon and hails Hezbollah's participation in the Israeli Army's retreat. Putting it simple, both these media, the film and the video game selected, are successful counter-narratives from the marginalized Muslim community, challenging the American and Western metanarrative. This claim is explored, examined, and analyzed in detail in the discussion part of this study.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

More clearly stated, this study tries to answer the following three questions:

1. How metanarrative is challenged in the film *Reluctant Fundamentalist*?
2. How metanarrative is challenged in the video game *Al Quwwat Al Khasa* (Special Force)?
3. What is the difference between the ways metanarrative is challenged in the film and the video game?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to ensure a high quality of content finding and creation, several procedures were followed and used while working on this study. First, a keen textual analysis of both the film, and the video game was carried out, which simply means that the film and the video game were considered as texts, like any other literary text. Along with that, the discourse in both the media was also analyzed. Most importantly, the visual analysis of the film and video game was carried out. The main method used for the content analysis involves playing the whole video game, and watching the complete film, while taking notes and screenshots of relevant visual signifiers. Apart from the analysis of the primary sources, different national and international journals were searched for finding relevant secondary data. The search process uncovered a wide range of articles published in the selected domain. The keen analysis of both the primary and secondary sources (although supreme importance was given to the primary sources) led the researcher to defend his claim more boldly, and also made this study more authentic and reliable.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 1-Counter-narrative in the film *Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012).

9/11. These digits and a slash are associated with a change in history, and is now regarded in history just like AD and BC. People refer to events as pre, and post-9/11, in the same way as they use AD and BC. In their

study titled "*Attack and the Aftermath: A Critique on Counter Narratives in Post 9/11 Films*" K. Abarna Sri Preethi and S. Saira Banu say:

"The world knows how significant is the day September 11, 2001, that changed the facets of world politics, business, history, and life. Immediately after this attack on World Trade Centre and Pentagon, writers accepted the mandate to make the people aware of the reason behind the attack and its consequences, hence many writers used this theme for creating literary works. Few writers made attempts to pin down counter-narrative to argue against the dominant narrative. Thus Post 9/11 fiction as a sub-genre of American literature emerged" (SriPreethi, 2001).

That 9/11 fiction produced mainly by American or Western writers brought out many stereotypes and negative trends, especially the Islamophobic fiction that changed the perception about Muslims forever. Now, any person who do not have first-hand experience of meeting, and dealing with a Muslim, presupposes that every Muslim, or Muslim-like person is a terrorist, savage, and barbarian. Against this othering of Muslims, and being labelled as terrorists, writers from this marginalized side started resistance through their writings. They produced literature that counters the metanarrative that all Muslims are terrorists and America is right in her War on Terror. According to Kathryn Mary Elizabeth Lee, "[The counter-narratives] provide a background and context for the events of 9/11, as well as offer resistance to the media's focus on heroics, unquestioning patriotism and the belief that America was completely blameless for what happened" (Lee, 2013).

In the same way, Hollywood produced films about the 9/11 attacks, and prolonged the stereotypes that were already present in written literature. In response to that, film industries

from the marginalized side gave a counter-narrative, and expressed their voice of resistance through their films. One such example is the film *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, directed by Mira Nair. *Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an adaptation based on a novel of the same title written by Mohsin Hamid. It is about the Post 9/11 impact on a Pakistani man named Changez. Ana Cristina Mendes and Karen Bennett in their study titled “*Refracting Fundamentalism in Mira Nair’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2012)*”, state that:

“Nair’s adaptation of Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* aims to offer a counter-narrative to earlier Hollywood productions such as Oliver Stone’s *World Trade Center* (2006), Paul Greengrass’ *United 93* (2006) and Stephen Daldry’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2011), which effectively nourished a cultural amnesia behind the commemorative and memorialising culture of 9/11. It was the one-sidedness of the post-9/11 trauma depicted in these cinematic narratives that Nair attempted to balance” (Melanie Rohse, 2013).

According to K. Abarna Sri Preethi and S. Saira Banu:

“This film calls for the inclusion of a suppressed voice to take the centre stage. He claims for a part in the narrative of the historical perceptions underpinning the position of the people from the Arabian and Middle Eastern nations. Changez is portrayed as the representative of all the innocent Muslims and Arabians who wanted their voices to be included in the prominent narrative” (SriPreethi, 2001).

K. Abarna Sri Preethi and S. Saira Banu further say that during his search for identification, Changez has to metaphorically respond to Bush's question, "Are you with us or with the terrorists?" He was defined by his ability to respond to three different components of the dominating narratives. To begin with, America and her citizens are blameless. Second, there is no room for suspects and persons suspected of being terrorists to express themselves, but the character Changez is able to express himself and his constraints. Third, this narrative opposes the stereotype of Arabs and Muslims as barbaric, uneducated, and impoverished. The struggle of an innocent Muslim in an airport is also depicted in this film, particularly after the 9/11 attacks. Changez, on the other hand, was able to develop a micro-narrative of his own life throughout the film.

There are many scenes in the novel that show this stereotypical behavior of Americans. We will show some of those scenes through selected figures from the film.



Figure 1.1: Changez’s conversation with the journalist and CIA operative Bobby Lincoln (Liev Schreiber) attempts to set up a dialogue about the tragic events by showing both perspectives.

When the CIA undercover agent Bobby Lincoln as a journalist starts interviewing Changez, the very first statement that Changez records is that “looks can be deceiving. I am a lover of America.”



Figure 1.2

The confrontation between Changez and Bobby reflects the mutual hostility with which America and Pakistan (or the Muslim world) regard one another. At this point, Changez actually refers to his outlook, specifically the beard that he has grown. It

answers the common misunderstood notion kept by Americans and Westerners that everyone with a beard is a terrorist. Later on in the film, it is shown that Sikhs are also targeted by the violent nationalist Americans, just because they have beards.



Figure 1.3

The jingoist Americans were so ignorant that they did not even know what Muslims are, and how they look. They just developed the stereotype embedded into their minds by their media and Hollywood, that Muslims have beards, and they are all terrorists. Therefore, they targeted every person that had a beard, and looked different from Americans. More simply, any beard or a turban was a target. Specifically, the Asians were harshly targeted

and discriminated because of their color and outlook. In a random shot, an Asian-looking person can be seen putting an American flag on his car, because the violent nationalist American mob may torture or even kill him if he did not show loyalty to America, and that too, is a narrow chance that a flag would really save his life. The narrator (Changez) says that this flag was a shield for the vulnerable people.



Figure 1.4

In the film, these notions are boldly challenged that not every man who grows a beard is a terrorist. The source text for the film, that is the novel by Hamid, “offers a nakedly confrontational stance in [its] deliberately crude narrative, which [is] at times even accusatory and offensive” (Melanie Rohse, 2013). While the film is more like a conciliatory work for the initiation of a dialogue situation between the two countries (USA and Pakistan). In Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes’ words:

“In Nair’s recasting of the novel’s monologic form into a dialogue set the aim of bridging the East–West divide. She attempted to counterbalance Changez’s menacing tone in the novel,

driven by a desire to foster the audience’s empathy for the Muslim protagonist of a 9/11-centred plot, moving it out of the hot-blooded political debate and into the emotional, human dimension” (Bennett, 2012).

Changez reacts to the 9/11 attacks in an ambivalent way. He is both happy and sad over this episode. The reason why he is happy is that he believes that the American pride is being challenged by someone, and her belief of being invincible is also shaken. Changez is in Manila Philippine, when the 9/11 attacks happen, and his reaction is evident from the following figure, when he watches on TV, the planes hitting the world trade center.



Figure 1.5

It does not show that he is happy for the deaths of thousands of innocent American citizens, but the very fact that he still belongs to his part of the world, and has emotional and spiritual connections with it. Hamid himself, through his mouthpiece character Changez in the novel, says that “in each of the major conflicts and standoffs that ringed my mother continent of Asia, America played a central role” (Hamid, 2007). It is this feeling of revenge against the hegemonic America that he portrays as a counter-narrative, and as a justification for his sense of happiness over the 9/11 episode.

When Changez returns from Manila, he is separated from his colleagues because of

his apparent Asian appearance. Jim, Changez’s boss, tells the airport security personnel that he (Changez) works for me, but they do not listen to him, and takes Changez for a severe investigation. The investigation officer orders him first, to remove all of his outerwear, and a moment later, his underwear too.

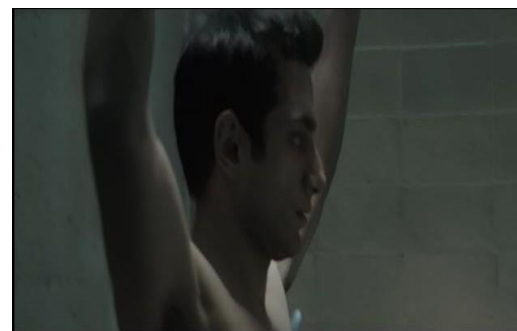


Figure 1.6

He is very embarrassed for being treated differently, even when he works for their country. Despite his appeals time and again, he is not listened to, and the investigation is carried out

more severely. In the interview with Bobby, Changez offers his counter-narrative, that I worked for your country, and your country treated me as if I was a terrorist

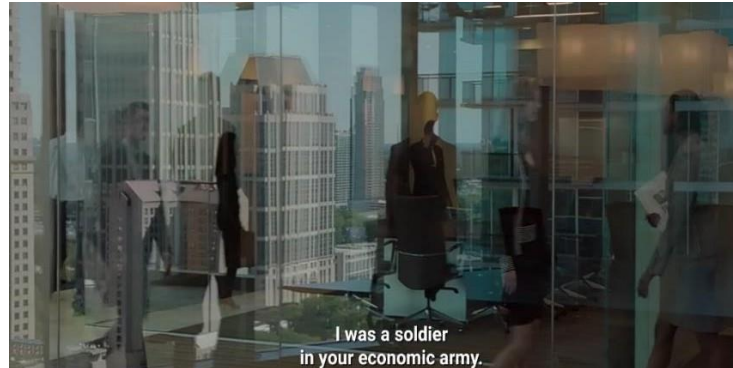


Figure 1.7

“I was a soldier in your economic army”. The choice of Changez’s words show that he considers American Capitalism as an economical crusade over the poor third world countries.

The aftermath of 9/11 proved bitter and harsh for Muslims, as shown in the film through the protagonist Changez. His close friends, and even his girlfriend looks at him with suspicion. After the humiliating investigation at the airport,

Erica, while talking to Changez, tells him that “how the lunatics hijacked planes from two different states, killing thousands of people not to mention themselves. It’s beyond human comprehension.” And then curiously asks Changez, “how does it happen like that?” As if Changez was a part of everything that happened that day. Changez is hurt by this, and answers Erica that “what makes you think I’d know?”

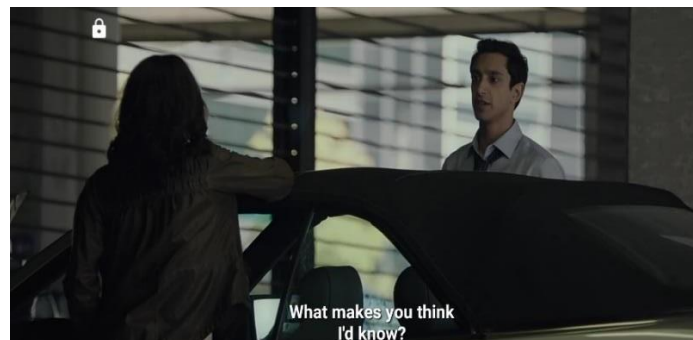


Figure 1.8

A person who lived, studied, and worked at, and for America for many years, is discriminated and has been treated this savage way. What could we imagine for those, who were there for some ordinary jobs, and those who were kept in the detention centers like the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp. They have

developed stereotypes against Muslims to the extreme levels. The colleagues at Changez’s office are also no exception. One of the colleagues tells Wainwright (an African American friend of Changez) that “[Muslims] believe God told them to blow us up. It’s in their book.”



Figure 1.9

Even Wainwright, who is a close friend of Changez, tells him that “your beard is frightening people”. Later on, Changez’s boss, Jim also comments about his beard, and tells him to look after his appearance.

Changez is arrested, and investigated yet again, due to his appearances. This time,

the investigation is more severe verbally. They ask questions that are by no means related to Changez. When the police officer arrests him, he asks Changez, “you got any weapons on you?” And when he is put in the investigation center the officers ask even more bitter and stereotypical questions.

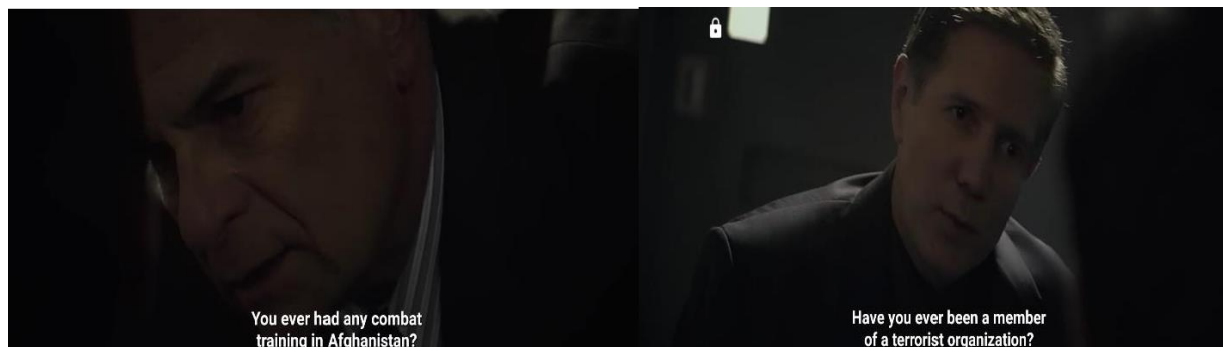


Figure 1.10

“You ever had any combat training in Afghanistan?” and “Have you ever been a member of a terrorist organization?” These are the questions that are asked by the officers from Changez. These scenes imply that how prejudiced and stereotypical the American nation had become. The underlying notion and counter-narrative is that not every Muslim necessarily has combat trainings, and nor do they belong to terrorist organizations. In the interview with Bobby, Changez states that “you picked a side after 9/11. I didn’t have to. It was picked for me”. This refers to the prejudice of Americans against all Muslims as terrorists, and so as Changez says, a side is picked for, or rather imposed upon Muslims.

As a positive endnote, Changez tells Bobby that “yes, I am a Pakistani. Yes, I am a Muslim. Yes, I am an opponent of your country’s assault on mine. But that’s not all I am. We are both more than these things. And I’ve never taken up arms, and I never will.” This is the main counter-narrative that is given in the film against the metanarrative that all Muslims are terrorists and they have taken up arms to spread terror in the world. That is how America made the pretext for the so-called War on Terror, and told the world that you are either with us, or with the terrorists, and this is how a side was picked for Muslims. Thus, a counter-narrative was seriously necessary, as Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes puts it:

“Nair’s reasons for adapting Hamid’s story for the screen was to showcase Pakistan’s rich artistic expressions, revealing Pakistan in a way that one never sees it in the newspapers, with its extraordinary refinement. By her own admission, instead of merely articulating Pakistan as an actor in the global War on Terror, she looked for a tale to tell of contemporary Pakistan, a tale one never sees. [she] wanted to make a contemporary film about Pakistan, one that would break all misconceptions about the country and reveal it in a manner not seen before — as a simmering, confident nation ... To curb damaging stereotypes, the filmmaker intended to display the various cultural achievements (in opposition to the difficulties) of a nation known to many in the West through processes of othering in many sections of the mainstream media. Her Pakistan is a place vivified by the searing poetry of Faiz, its heart-stopping Sufi music and ancient culture that is confident in fashion, painting and performance, not just Islamic extremism and the terrorism that often accompanies it.” (Bennett, 2012)

It is concluded that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012), directed by Mira Nair, is a film that truly presents the voice of the voiceless and marginalized Muslims. It is a counter-narrative that challenges the metanarrative of 9/11-based films propagated by the Hollywood film industry.

## **2-Counter-narrative in Hizbollah’s video game *Al Quwwat Al Khasa* (Special Force)**

As we have discussed in the previous section, the digital media is a main source of propagating metanarratives, and people from the marginalized side have also started using the digital space as a battleground for expressing their voice and presenting their

counter-narratives. We discussed how a film is used to counter the metanarrative of the Hollywood, and challenge their stereotypical representations of the ‘other’. In the same way, video game is yet another, and nowadays, the most important digital media space, where America and Europe have formed their metanarrative. According to Bushra Alfaraj:

“Arab ethnic identity is among many minority groups that have been susceptible to being stereotyped by mainstream video games produced in North America and Japan, and as result contributed to the lacking intersectional approaches to showcasing these identities in video games. This not only keeps popular culture producers confined to the boundaries of their limited knowledge or experience with minority identities, but also leaves consumers who belong to those minority groups feeling excluded as audience members. . . American shooter games have relied on the model of the terroristic Arab male who serves as a faceless protagonist that the player must annihilate in order to progress in the game. Shooter games guilty of perpetuating this stereotype include *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, *S/War*, *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*, *America’s Army*, *Conflict: Desert Storm II*, and *Counter Strike: Condition Zero*” (Alfaraj 2016).

For a long time, there was no answer to their metanarratives, but eventually, the Lebanon based military organization Hizbollah, and the Syrian based Afkar Media started expressing their counter-narratives by designing video games that represent the Arab and Muslim side. According to Sisler:

“A direct answer to games like Delta Force or America’s Army came from the Central Internet Bureau of Lebanese Hezbollah movement in

2003. The action game *Al Quwwat al-Khasa* (Special

Force, Solution, 2003), a promotional tool for the movement, deals with the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon and glorifies the role of Hezbollah in the retreat of the Israeli Army" (Šisler, 2008).

David Machin and Usama Suleiman in their study titled '*Arab and American computer war games: The influence of a global technology on discourse*', state that:

"The American computer game industry has grown extensively over the past 10 years and now surpasses Hollywood in terms of the revenue it generates. . . there are close links both between the American computer war game industry and the American military, and between the 'missions' of computer war games and actual American military special operations. . . . These gaming 'missions' take place in Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, and other parts of the Middle East. . . . Thus, players in Lebanon, Jordan, and other Middle East countries get to 'kill' Islamic terrorists operating in their own country through playing imported games, and perhaps it is no surprise that many Arab game designers see this as simply propaganda, and as evidence of an overwhelming pro-Israel bias in the mainstream media. This has led them to begin to produce their own computer games, so as to present a different perspective on events" (Machin, 2006).

And according to Bushra Alfaraj:

"The issue with this misrepresentation in video games had reached a point where Arab game of the 2000s began producing shooter and war video games in retaliation to the Western ones that depicted Arabs so negatively, except the Arab producers reversed the roles between protagonist and antagonist so that the player assumes the role of an

Arab character defending his land from Western enemies. Such game titles include *Under Ash* and *Special Force*" (Alfaraj, 2016).

Machin Also states:

"Our main focus will be Hezbollah's video game *Al Quwwat Al Khasa* (Special Force). In Lebanon, in 2001, the Hezbollah Internet Central Bureau undertook the design of Special Force, a computer game inspired by *Delta Force* that would allow players to fight as one of a group of Islamic resistance fighters, killing Israeli commandos. The makers of the game wanted to 'contest the view of Arabs and Muslims being portrayed as terrorists in Western games and introduce the Resistance to the young people . . . The decision to produce the game formed part of this media challenge. It was to celebrate the Islamic resistance, engage young people who were not around at the time of the main occupation, and remind Israelis of the presence of an effective challenge. . . the game showed the integrity of the resistance and the fight against the occupation and, according to the back cover of the game, allowed each player to 'be a partner in victory'. As a result of its games and other media activities, Hezbollah became lionized in the Arab world as a model of resistance to the new Western colonialism, gaining respect particularly among young Arabs around the world" (Machin, 2006).

*Al Quwwat Al Khasa* (Special Force) was especially challenging the American video game *Delta Force*.

"One of the propaganda aims of the US game, we might say, is to make terrorists appear as a non-descript and all-pervasive threat. . . . Visually all enemies look identical, facially and in their (non-military) clothing. . . Several other aspects of the way in which

enemies are represented are worth including here: for instance, their unconfident and angular poses, shooting from the back of a moving pick-up truck or raising their weapons above their heads – common images in the news media which suggest they are not ‘real’ soldiers and so removes legitimacy from their actions. In terms of sound, Delta Force enemies shout in panic, especially when the player approaches (a situation in which, in reality, it would be best to keep quiet)....Delta Force enemies are therefore depicted as disorganized and as lacking the courage of US soldiers

who do not cry out in pain when they die” (Machin, 2006).

On the other hand, in the Arab game, the enemy is specified. “The enemy in the [Special Force] is collectivized. Linguistically this is realized through terms such as ‘Israeli’, ‘Zionist enemy’, and ‘defeated army’. . . The enemies of the Arab game are linguistically categorized as defeated enemies, and visually through exaggeratedly large blue Stars of David (Machin, 2006).

The star of David can be seen clearly on the shoulder of the enemy soldier, as shown in the following figure:



Figure 2.1

The Israeli soldiers are clearly identified by the Star of David on their uniforms. (Schulzke, 2014)

In term of locations, in the American game Delta Force, “locations all look alike. . . The precise details of towns and roads are not represented. The landscape is hilly and little else. At best small details, such as flat-roofed houses, index a generic African or Mediterranean/Arab environment.”While on the other hand, “the Arab game treats locations very differently. Here the action takes place in

named places that actually exist, and these places are represented in specific detail” (Machin, 2006).One such example is the town of Bint e Jabel, as shown in the game:



Figure: 2.2

The fallen soldiers of Hizbollah are referred to as martyrs. In Sisler's words, "fallen comrades, the real fighters of Hezbollah, throughout the game are consistently referred to as martyrs (ash- shuhada')" (Šisler, 2008). It is

evident from the following figure. On the top right corner of the screen, it is written in Arabic as 'Shaheed'. Also in the sniper scope, the enemy can be seen holding the flag of Isreal:



Figure 2.3

"The Special force games praise martyrdom through their depiction of real and fictional people who are labelled martyrs and praised for their selflessness. Martyrdom provides an opportunity to establish a connection between the games and real-world fighting, as the games display pictures of real Hezbollah members who died in battle" (Schulzke, 2014). Also, when the Hizbollah fighters are hit, they say 'Alhamdulellah', and 'Labaik Ya Rasool Allah'. The fighters also have Muslim names such as Hadi, and Hatar.

The *Special Force* deals with real events that occurred during the battles between Hizbollah and the Isreali army, IDF. According to Marcus Schulzke:

"Missions are named after real battles and include key details from those

battles in an effort to connect the simulations to reality. For example, a *Special force 2* battle recreating Operation *Change of Direction 11* shows a helicopter crash to represent an Israeli helicopter that was shot down during that operation" (Schulzke, 2014).

The sense of reality that is simulated in the *Special Force* gives the player the feeling that s/he is part of the real conflict, and is one of the fighters fighting for the cause of Hizbollah. The details about the shooting of the Isreali helicopter are shown in the game as evident from the figure below:



Figure 2.4

“Another mission allows players to attack a convoy and capture two IDF soldiers, who

represent soldiers who were actually captured during the war” (Schulzke, 2014).



Figure 2.5

On the basis of these visual and textual evidences, it is marked that *Al Quwwat Al Khasa* (Special Force) is a successful counter-narrative representing Arab and Muslim point of view, posed against the metanarrative posited in the American video games that shows Arabs and Muslims as terrorists, savage, and barbarians. In the *Delta Force*,

“..... enemies are linguistically functionalized, primarily by means of the key term ‘terrorist’, and visually classified – biologically through their stereotyped Middle-Eastern features and culturally through their beards, black jumpers, and the way they raise their weapons in undisciplined poses, which then contrasts with the US soldiers’ efficiency and economy of movement.” (Machin, 2006)

On the other hand, “*Special Force* soldiers are shown with very rudimentary weapons such as the Kalashnikov automatic rifle. This suggests that these weapons have a symbolic function. They show that Hizbollah soldiers fight with their will, rather than with technology” (Machin, 2006)

According to David Machin & Usama Suleiman, “The mission statement is a mandatory element of all special operations war games. It consists of a description of the situation that requires special operations action

and a mission – a specific goal for the special operation, for instance rescuing hostages, taking control of a particular place, or destroying a particular group of enemies” (Machin, 2006). The linguistic choice for the mission statement of the American game *Delta Force* shows clear stereotypes against Arabs and specifically the people of Lebanon. The mission statement of the Arab game *Special Force* is a straightforward counter-narrative that shows the Israeli Army as the oppressor and fighting them is considered necessary in order to through them out of Lebanon.

It is thus concluded that Middle Eastern video game producers have successfully implemented the counter-narratives in their video games, specifically *Al Quwwat Al Khasa* (Special Force) by Hizbollah, in order to oppose the ways, they have been represented by western publishers in the video games like *Delta Force*.

### 3-Difference between the ways metanarrative is challenged in the film and the video game

For decades, the United States has employed entertainment media to promote its political agendas. The majority of today’s media formats and genres originated in the United States. Newspapers,

television shows, news bulletins, films, radio, and programming in the local language

substantially mirror the original US exports. The video game is a recent addition to this. There is difference in the ways these various genres are dealt with, and narratives are propagated through these genres in multiple ways. In the same way, there is difference in the ways counter-narratives are constructed against every genre. Our focus is specifically on the film, and the video game that we have selected for this study.

The counter-narrative given in Mira Nair's film *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012) is more implicit than explicit. She has tried to reconcile the relationship between Pakistan and the US, which was really deteriorating at that time. In the film, it is shown that fundamentalism is not the way, whether it is religious fundamentalism, or economic fundamentalism. Changez rejects the economic fundamentalism at Underwood Samson, and also when a fundamental religious leader asks him to join his group, he boldly rejects that too, because the leader talks about the fundamentals. Changez wants his own chosen way to live his life, as Thom F. Cavalli states in the study titled '*Dangerous Values: A Film Review of The Reluctant Fundamentalist*', "There is only one reliable truth that rises above all else, and that is one's own. Whereas fundamentals are a human invention, truth derives from the Self. Not knowing the difference can cost a person their life" (Cavalli, 2022).

In the film, the counter-narrative is presented in a convincing way, as against Hamid's original novel. It is done so, because of an intentional purpose. The film genre has a broader reach as compared to the novel, and common folk needs to be convinced using different tactics. Through her implicit counter-narrative in the film, Nair "sets up a dialogue about the tragic events by showing both perspectives. Indeed, the filmmaker stresses cultural negotiation when [bringing up] the adaptation" (Melanie Rohse, 2013).

The discourse of the film is yet another way of presenting the counter-narrative. After studying the film as a text, it is found that the way a character talks to other characters in the film,

has a significant effect on the perception of the film. Counter-narrative is embedded in the discourse of the film, and it needs to be keenly focused. Another closely related phenomenon to discourse is the language. What pattern of words is used in a particular situation, tells us that what is the intention of the creator of the linguistic message. In the film, language is used artistically to present the counter-narrative.

On the other hand, in retaliation to the American video games, Arab and other Muslim game designers, built shooter games that are identical to those made elsewhere, except that the playable characters are Arab and Muslim heroes fighting and defending their homeland against foreign soldiers. The Arab video game *Al Quwwat Al Khassa* (Special Force), which is one of the subjects of this study, is a prominent example of such counter-narratives through video games.

In the video game *Al Quwwat Al Khassa*, the counter-narrative is blunt and explicit. The Arab game designers have explicitly and clearly shown their narrative, and "have undoubtedly succeeded in bending the American model in a quite different direction" (Penix-Tadsen, 2019). As Marcus Schulzke puts it, "with the release of *Special force* . . . and its sequel *Special force 2* [Hizbollah] allow players to become fighters in a virtual war against Israel, acting out real battles from recent conflicts in Lebanon" (Schulzke, 2014). There are more ways of presenting the counter-narrative through video games as compared to films. Hizbollah, while designing the game has taken special care of taking into consideration every single aspect that could possibly show their point of view. They have intentionally kept Arabic as the main language of the game.



Figure 3.1

All the important information is given in Arabic, although other major languages are also available, such as French and English, in order to attract international players for playing the game.

Moreover, the counter-narrative is embedded into video games in three ways. First, the iconographical representation of the 'us', and the 'other'. The 'us' is glorified, and the 'other' is humiliated. Secondly, narrative structure of the game also carries counter-narratives, as in the case of Hizbollah's *Special Force*. Thirdly, the whole gameplay is designed in a way that it promotes the agenda of the designers. Hizbollah's *Al Quwwat Al Khasa* (Special Force) has employed all these levels of narrative construction, and thus has successfully challenged the American metanarrative.

The basic difference among the ways in which metanarrative is challenged in the film and the video game thus lies in the linguistic choices, narrative construction, iconographical representation, discourse formation, and explicit and implicit counter-narrative portrayal.

## CONCLUSION

The Western world, particularly the United States, has long used various media formats to spread its ideology and political ideas. These political messages and ideologies are endlessly reproduced and repeated in traditional and digital media, resulting in metanarratives that everyone thinks to be true. As a result, marginalised groups like Muslims, particularly Arabs, have questioned these metanarratives and created their own counter-narratives in order to have a more equal picture of their community and faith.

The researcher extensively studied the primary sources (the film *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and the video game *Al Quwwat Al Khasa*), along with secondary works based on these sources and found that both of the media contain successful counter-narratives against the Western, specifically American metanarratives.

It is found in the study that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012), directed by Mira Nair, is a film that truly presents the voice of the voiceless and marginalized Muslims. It is a counter-narrative that challenges the metanarrative of 9/11-based films propagated by the Hollywood film industry. In the analysis of the video game, it also was found that Middle Eastern video game producers have successfully implemented the counter-narratives in their video games, specifically *Al Quwwat Al Khasa* (Special Force) by Hizbollah, in order to oppose the ways, they have been represented by western publishers in the video games like *Delta Force*. Ultimately, it was discovered that the basic difference among the ways in which metanarrative is challenged in the film and the video game lies in the linguistic choices, narrative construction, iconographical representation, discourse formation, and explicit and implicit counter-narrative portrayal.

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