

The Waging of a Virtual War against Islam:
An Assessment of How Post-9/11 War-themed Video Games Stereotype Muslims

by

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The above committee determined that the thesis is acceptable in form and content and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate during an oral examination. A signed copy of the Certificate of Approval is available from the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Abstract

Research suggests that American popular culture represents Muslim peoples, places, and cultures in ways that perpetuate Islamophobic ideas, and scholars have examined how fictional television shows and films communicate Islamophobic ideology among the American public, and around the world. While much research focuses on popular culture in the form of television and film, less has addressed how video games represent Muslims. The present study seeks to address this gap in the literature by exploring the representation of Muslim people in 15 popular war video games released in the post-9/11 era. Through the use of a self-ethnography of play (focusing on the play-able stories video games tell about Muslim people and places as well as the images they create) and an analysis of game-related paratext (promotional materials, game reviews, player comments), this study identifies stereotypes within the war games that resemble many of the most common Muslim stereotypes found within Hollywood films and television shows. The analysis revealed that seven of the ten most common Muslim stereotypes found within popular films and television shows are also found within the 15 war games selected for study. These findings suggest that video games communicate stereotypes of Muslims that mirror and perpetuate those found in popular culture, thus feeding into a larger Islamophobic ideology in American society. These findings should concern criminologists, as the negative representation of Muslims in popular culture could exacerbate Islamophobia, and encourage the surveillance and over-policing of Muslim people. Future research should aim to develop concrete strategies for countering negative depictions of Muslims in video games, so as to reduce the Islamophobic climate that such stereotypes contribute to.

Keywords: *Muslims, media representations, popular culture, Muslim stereotypes, Islamophobia, video games, films and television shows*

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the two most important people in my life, my parents –Sawsan and Osama Fadl. It is due to the immaculate example set by the both of you that I have come to know what true Islam is; such has been the inspiration for the topic of this thesis. Through your endless love and compassion, you have taught me what it means to be not only a good Muslim, but a good human overall. It is with great pride and confidence that I attribute my accomplishments to the both of you.

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Introduction and Importance of Media Representations

Approximately two decades after its launch in 2001, the US-led Global War on Terror has maintained a reputation of being one of the most expensive and violent campaigns in modern history. According to the National Defense Budget, estimates for 2019 indicate that the War on Terror cost over \$2.1 trillion, encompassing over 10% of the US's total national debt (Kimberly, 2018). Furthermore, the global campaign is estimated to have resulted in the deaths of over two million people worldwide, including over one million casualties in Iraq, 220,000 casualties in Afghanistan, and 80,000 casualties in Pakistan (IPPNW Germany, 2015). Yet, despite the insurmountably high cost and death toll of the War on Terror, the US-led campaign has sustained enough public support throughout the past two decades to remain a top priority for the US government (Sides & Gross, 2013).

This public support for war even in the face of rising costs and increasing deaths is considerably associated with notions of Islamophobia among the American public (Sides & Gross, 2013). Research suggests that those with less favourable views of Muslims are more likely to support policies associated with the War on Terror than those who view Muslims more positively (Sides & Gross, 2013). Americans who view Muslims negatively are more likely to support increased spending on war, defense, and border security, and less likely to support spending on foreign aid (Sides & Gross, 2013). Those with negative views of Muslims are also more likely to approve of how the War on Terror is being handled in both Iraq and Afghanistan (Sides & Gross, 2013).

The fact that Americans are supporting a war fought across Muslim-majority countries speaks to a reality that extends far beyond the War on Terror alone. This unfortunate reality is that Islamophobia is indeed prevalent within American society (Samari, 2016). This is evidenced

by the fact that anti-Islamic sentiment among Americans has risen to a high of 67%, as of 2015 (Samari, 2016). Hate crimes against Muslims are also on the rise, as reports compiled by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) indicate that incidents involving anti-Muslim bias increased by 65% within the United States between 2014 and 2016 (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2017). In fact, CAIR asserts that incidents of Islamophobia rose by 57% in 2016 alone (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2017). The prevalence of Islamophobia within American society is especially concerning during this era in which one of the most deadly and expensive global wars is being perpetuated by a government that regularly prides itself on securing the liberty, democracy and justice of all. It is therefore pertinent to explore how such Islamophobic ideas are produced and sustained in American society, and also, to consider how these ideas might be countered.

Special attention should be paid to the potential association between Islamophobia and popular culture, as popular media products such as television shows, Hollywood films and video games indeed have the power to influence public perceptions in significant ways (Deskins, 2013; Hall, 1997). In fact, research suggests that stereotypes within both television shows and video games have the capacity to encourage or perpetuate prejudicial views against Muslims among those who view and play them (Deskins, 2013; Hussain, 2010). With this in mind, this thesis aims to interrogate the depiction of Muslims within post-9/11 popular culture, and thus aims to answer the following research question: how are Muslims represented within war video games produced and circulated in the early 21st century? Researchers have demonstrated that popular culture's vilification of Muslims has a long history, and in the post-9/11 context of the global War on Terror, television shows and Hollywood films continue to portray Muslims and Arabs as enemies to America (Shaheen, 2003). More often than not, Muslims are represented by popular

television shows and films as violent extremists and terrorist threats to the United States, and the West more broadly (Shaheen, 2003). Popular culture's stereotyping of Muslims is not just entertainment, as it can have serious consequences for Muslims living in the US and all over the world. These mediated depictions of Muslims can increase social prejudice and discrimination, encourage division and conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims (Šisler, 2008), and lead to an "us versus them" narrative supportive of the US-led Global War on Terror (Sides & Gross, 2013).

Current research on the representation of Muslims by popular culture tends to focus primarily on how television shows and Hollywood films stereotype and demonize Muslims. However, researchers are only beginning to examine how Muslims are represented by the interactive stories and play-able scenarios of the digital media products produced and sold by the multi-billion dollar video games industry (Šisler, 2008). There is a need for more critical research on the power of digital games to stereotype and demonize Muslims, especially because video games are interwoven with contemporary society. In fact, 80% of American households own at least one video game console. Moreover, video games are displacing other forms of entertainment, as approximately 50% of gamers prefer video games to music and television (Electronic Software Association, 2015). Evidently, video games are being played by large numbers of people, and they are a significant means of representation. This paper aims to fill this gap in the research through a study of the stories about and images of Muslims in 15 commercially successful and critically acclaimed popular war games released since 9/11. This study focuses particularly on war-themed video games because Muslims are recurrently depicted as "enemies" and "terrorists" in these.

The proposed hypothesis is twofold: 1) Muslims are demonized in video games just as they are in American popular films and television shows; and, 2) the demonization of Muslims in video games perpetuates longstanding and current stereotypes of Muslim people in popular culture, and these stereotypes link with Islamophobia in the US-led global War on Terror. To break this hypothesis down, the present study asks and attempts to answer the following research questions: 1) how are Muslims depicted in war video games?; and 2) do these video game depictions of Muslims perpetuate or challenge longstanding and current stereotypes of Muslim people in popular culture and the broader society?

To answer these questions, the present study examines the representations and images of Muslims in 15 popular video games released from 2001 until 2016, thus exploring the simulated “modalities of realism” encoded and played in the games (Mirrlees, 2014). First, ten common stereotypes of Muslims found within films and television shows are identified. Next, the representation of Muslims in war-themed video games is examined to determine whether or not these stereotypes (if any) are also perpetuated by video games.

Such a study may produce new knowledge of how digital entertainment products like video games can exacerbate or reduce Islamophobia in US society, and perhaps around the world. Consequently, there is a hope that doing this research may shed light on how video games may contribute to or challenge stereotypes of Muslims and the wider Islamophobic culture that has emerged in North America and internationally since the terrorist attack of 9/11, and the subsequent Global War on Terror. Indeed, video games have the capacity to perpetuate prejudiced attitudes, and even lead to increased verbal and physical aggression against minorities (Deskens, 2013). Ideally, this research will inform video game developers of these consequences, and encourage consumers to be more critical when purchasing and playing these games.

The importance of studying the impact that media representations can have on society's values cannot be understated. Indeed, the media representations permeated throughout popular culture have the capacity to significantly influence the values, beliefs and practices of citizens (Deskins, 2013; Hall, 1997). While the term popular culture is somewhat broad in its definition, popular culture can be understood as the commercially produced works of fiction--music, novels, magazines, television shows, films, and video games--that represent society to itself in partial and selective ways and are consumed by a large number of a society's population (Popular Culture, 2018). While popular culture is part and product of society, and may exert influence upon how large numbers of people think about society and act within it, popular culture's effects are uncertain because the messages encoded into popular texts may be decoded by audiences in a range of different ways (Hall, 1980). Media corporations encode popular culture with preferred messages and distribute these texts to viewers, who then decode or interpret them in a variety of different ways. So, while media corporations produce popular culture and encode it with dominant messages, the ways that audiences, viewers and users of popular culture decode these messages is uncertain.

While the encoding/decoding process is complex and the meanings audiences make of popular culture are frequently multiple, this study is concerned with the possible influence that popular media representations can have on audiences, and the broader society. As Hall (1997) states, the messages encoded into media products act as meaningful representations of reality. The languages, signs and images depicted in media products serve as a conceptual roadmap, which audiences use to make meaning of the world (Hall, 1997). In other words, the media representations found within popular culture shape how viewers come to understand reality. Consequently, fictional representations of people, places, and things--in even the most ostensibly

neutral or entertaining popular forms--may have the power to shape society's collective perception of real world phenomena (Hall, 1997).

Significantly, this study is concerned with how popular culture has the capacity to construct the societal meaning of Muslims, and influence what Muslim people mean to large numbers of non-Muslim people in society. Research has examined the link between popular media representations of Muslims and the influence of these representations on real public perceptions of Muslims. Hussain (2010) demonstrates that popular films and television shows often create negative representations of Muslims--and Islam as a whole--by scripting Muslim characters that are primarily violent, malevolent or evil: Sayid of *Lost* (2004-2010), Imam Kareem Said in *Oz* (1997-2003), Abu Fayed in *24* (2001-2014), and professional wrestlers Abdullah the Butcher, Muhammad Hassan, and Sabu. According to Hussain (2010), when violent Muslims are the only Islam-related images made available to society by popular culture, then a large number of people in society may perceive the violent actions of a minority of Muslim terrorists as the norm, and this stereotype is amplified. In other words, the fictional depiction of violent Muslims by popular culture makes the rare and despicable terroristic violence of a few Muslims in the world seem larger and more common than they really are, and makes it seem as though most Muslims are threats to America. Put simply, fictional representations of Muslims in popular culture have the capacity to influence public perceptions of real world Muslims. These perceptions were captured in a 2005 poll by Pew Forum, where 36% of Americans believed that Islam encourages violence (Hussain, 2010). Another poll conducted in 2006 by the *Washington Post* revealed that 46% of Americans viewed Islam negatively (Hussain, 2010).

These stereotypical representations of Muslims in popular culture can become especially dangerous when mobilized by real political actors, as politicians may cater to dominant public perceptions to secure votes, and as of late, many right-wing politicians have been playing upon Islamophobic ideology to rally voters to their leadership and parties. A specific example of a politician pandering to the Islamophobia in American society is US president Donald Trump, whose 2016 election campaign was full of anti-Muslim rhetoric. Taking note of the public's rising anxieties towards the terrorist group, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Trump capitalized on the white Christian working class's fear of Muslims by drawing strong moral boundaries around Muslims during his campaign (Lamont, Park, Ayala-Hurtado, 2017). By pandering to anti-Islamic views, Trump was able to capture the votes of many concerned voters and ultimately secure victory. As such, the negative depictions of Muslims in television and film can and do link with real world politics, as fictional representations of Muslims intersect with real political actions and outcomes.

Similar to the ways in which films and television shows intersect with and possibly influence real world politics, so too may video games. One example of popular culture's explicit relationship to real world geopolitics is the linkage between the US military and video games (Mirrlees, 2016). In several notable instances, war-themed video games have been used in one way or another by the US Department of Defense as a recruitment and combat training tool. Also, Mirrlees (2016) explains how the video game *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (COD: MW2)* was used by a white supremacist terrorist to train for a 2011 car bombing in Norway. According to the bomber, *COD: MW2* served as an efficient military simulator, as it provided him with what he considered to be simulated target practice (Mirrlees, 2016). What is important to note, is that this incident is not simply an isolated example of video games being used for real

world violence, but rather a reflection of a more pervasive reality. This reality is that military shooters such as *COD: MW2* are actually used by US military personnel when preparing for battle (Mirrlees, 2016).

The US military's involvement with video games is explored further by Mirrlees (2014), who examines how video games—specifically *Medal of Honor: Operation Anaconda (MoH: OA)*—is routinely used as a tool by the US military to foster public support for the United States' Department of Defense (DOD) and the broader NATO-supported war in Afghanistan, which has been ongoing for over 17 years. Overall, the *Medal of Honor* series is a valuable public relations tool for the US DOD that encourages players to support the troops, and the US's Global War on Terror (Mirrlees, 2014). It is for this reason that the game heavily focuses on placing Americans as heroes in a foreign war, and Muslims as foreign terrorists that must be neutralized and killed. Mirrlees (2014) also explores how *MoH: OA*'s story mode simulates the “reality” of war by immersing players in the game as “virtual-citizen-soldiers”. Essentially, the game's simulation of a real war provides players with the opportunity to feel like they are actually fighting for their country, thus linking patriotism to militarism and virtually enlisting players as part of the US military's war against Muslim terrorists across Afghanistan.

A similar simulation unfolds with *SOCOM I: Navy SEALs (SOCOM I)* and *SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs (SOCOM II)*. From a game development standpoint, the ‘realistic’ war gameplay found within these games not only benefits the branding of the PlayStation console, but also benefits the US Navy's recruitment goals (Mirrlees, 2009). Furthermore, from a gameplay standpoint, these games are designed in a way that fosters “virtual cyborg-soldiering,” meaning they place the player in the shoes of a virtual soldier, who wages war on behalf of a virtual State (Mirrlees, 2009). Despite the fact that playing games like *MoH: OA*, *SOCOM I*, and

SOCOM II is not the same as fighting in a real war, the DOD has done a tremendous job of using these games to convince players to join the US military, and to make civilians feel closer to real wars. Clearly, war-themed video games are political.

Furthermore, playing military shooter video games may have real world consequences. Mantello (2017) argues that military shooters have undergone a shift in the way they are viewed, as war video games that used to be considered unnecessarily violent are now considered socially acceptable. This is due largely to the participation of the US military in creating and promoting these video games (Mantello, 2017). Mantello (2017) explains that military shooter video games blur the line between virtual reality and reality itself, thus conditioning players into becoming future soldiers (Mantello, 2017). This conditioning has implications, as the constant exposure to military games promotes a subculture in favour of militant warfare among players (Mantello, 2017). More importantly, this sense of militancy and animosity created by video games is directed at a specific demographic target, being whichever population is portrayed as the enemy in the video game being played. As with the abovementioned example of *Medal of Honor: Operation Anaconda*, players who are put in the shoes of a virtual American soldier and tasked with killing Muslim terrorists may experience a sense of dislike or even hatred towards Muslims. In other words, the play experiences enabled by war-themed video games may desensitize players to the real killing of Muslims by real military forces, or to the killing of whoever or whatever group of people the game constructs as the enemy. First-person shooter war video games convey “us versus them” narratives supportive of the US-led Global War on Terror, and these can have real world consequences (Sides & Gross, 2013). For these reasons, video games are not just escapist entertainment, but connected to the real geopolitical world. As such, it is important to critically examine the geopolitics of video games, and so this study scrutinizes the

representations of Muslims video games construct and communicate far and wide. Critical studies of the political representation of Muslims in war video games may offer valuable insight into the relationship between popular culture, Islamophobia and war.

II. Literature Review

In addressing the relationship between media representations and Islamophobia, one must acknowledge that media representations of race, religion and cultural identity matter, as they can serve to perpetuate the subjugation of certain groups. Indeed, the social relations in contemporary society have been fundamentally changed by media, as the images and stories that make up media have come to define reality itself (Fiske & Hancock, 2016). Fiske & Hancock (2016) explain that we are living in a media-saturated culture in which distinctions between real and unreal become difficult to determine. Films, television shows and video games assist in structuring our understanding of who and what we are as a society, as the narratives put forth by these forms of entertainment intersect with and shape public consciousness (Fiske & Hancock, 2016). In other words, the public does not passively consume images and stories within media, but instead uses them as reference points for reality (Fiske & Hancock, 2016). The important role of the media as a means of meaning-making for society becomes especially problematic when entertainment media such as films, television shows and video games convey negative representations of certain minority groups in American society, such as Arabs and Muslims. Certainly, one-dimensional negative representations may stand in for a more complex and balanced view of reality, and thus create or perpetuate real negative attitudes toward the groups being represented.

With the importance of media representations as a means of contributing to patterns of prejudice against certain groups in mind, this chapter provides an overview of two areas of scholarly literature relevant to this study of the representation of Muslims by war video games: (1) the history and characteristics of Islamophobia and Islamophobic ideology; and, (2) the perpetuation of Islamophobia through Muslim stereotypes in American popular films and

television shows. The first part of this chapter provides a brief review of the emergence of Islamophobia throughout history, and highlights some of the claims it makes about Islam and Muslim people. The second part of this chapter provides a comprehensive review of the most prominent Muslim stereotypes found within American popular films and television shows throughout the last century. Together, these two areas of literature help build a general understanding of Islamophobia and its prominence in popular culture, and are integral to the ensuing study's analysis of the stereotypical representation of Muslims by war video games.

a) The History of Islamophobia

One topic that is especially relevant to the study of representations of Muslims in popular culture is Islamophobia. In simple terms, Islamophobia is defined as a system of hateful ideas about and practices towards Muslims by non-Muslims (Mirrlees, 2017). More specifically, it is a belief system in which Muslim people are seen as radically different from and incompatible with other religious groups; Muslims are believed to be culturally inferior, and a violent and ever-growing threat that poses a great danger to American security (Mirrlees, 2017). While Islamophobia is attitudinal, it can manifest itself through behaviour as well, as Islamophobia is demonstrated by anti-Muslim beliefs and anti-Muslim practices (Samari, 2016). Islamophobia is indeed prevalent today, most notably in the United States. In 2015, anti-Muslim attitudes among Americans rose to a high of 67%, while hate crimes against Muslims in the United States are occurring five times more often than they were prior to 9/11 (Samari, 2016). Anti-Muslim hate crime is also prevalent in Canada. Of the 460 hate crimes targeting religion reported to Canadian police in 2016, 139 (30%) were against Muslim people (Statistics Canada, 2018). Crimes committed against Muslims were also the most frequently violent in comparison to other

religious groups, as 56% of hate crimes against Muslims in 2016 were violent (Statistics Canada, 2018).

The prevalence of Islamophobia in modern day North America is heavily linked to the Global War on Terror, in which the US State launched a war against the so-called Muslim world in response to the events of 9/11 (Kundnani, 2014). The politicization of anti-Muslim rhetoric was entirely functional to the Global War on Terror, as the construction of Muslims as enemy threats was necessary to rationalize the invasion of numerous Muslim majority countries (Kundnani, 2014). Through the use of ongoing drone attacks, bombings, and ground deployments issued by the US, the Global War on Terror resulted in the deaths of over half a million Muslims, and costed taxpayers over \$6 trillion (Engelhardt, 2018; Al Jazeera, 2018). To understand the emergence of the Global War on Terror and its linkage with Islamophobia in modern day North America, one must become familiar with the long and complex historical relationship between the growth and expansion of the Western Empires throughout the East.

Contrary to what one might assume, the history of Islamophobia has more to do with imperial geopolitics than it does with religion. While religious conflict did indeed occur throughout history, political rivalries and competing imperial agendas motivated hatred towards Islam (Kumar, 2012). At particular moments in history, the ruling elites of Western Empires would consciously construct and deploy anti-Muslim prejudice to benefit their goals (Kumar, 2012). The first instance in which Muslims were constructed as threats in Europe was the eleventh century Crusades, in which Christian rulers in Spain began a war to take back the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslim invaders who had taken it three centuries prior (O'Callaghan, 2003; Kumar, 2012). While this Holy War was upheld through the guise of religion, in truth, Christian rulers, knights, and merchants saw political, economic, and military benefits to

establishing a Latin Kingdom in the Middle East (O'Callaghan, 2003; Kumar, 2012). To justify this holy conquest, European elites generated arguments that Islam's holy prophet, Muhammed (peace be upon him), schemed himself to power through violence and sexual perversion (O'Callaghan, 2003; Kumar, 2012). These fraudulent arguments began to circulate between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, thus debasing Islam and successfully constructing Muslims as dangerous people and enemy threats to the Christian West. Consequently, the European ruling elites were able to mobilize an army to rid their land of Muslims (O'Callaghan, 2003).

The practice of demonizing Islam for political purposes continued years later, shifting from Europe to the United States. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Great Powers, England and France, colonized areas within the Middle East and North Africa, setting up study centers to produce knowledge about what they referred to as the "orient" (Said, 1978; Kumar, 2012). This led to orientalist scholarship, which largely informed the development of an elite Western vocabulary about "Islam" (Said, 1978; Kumar, 2012). While it started out as a legitimate quest for knowledge about Muslims, oriental studies shifted into a means of generalizing Muslims in the "Muslim world" (Said, 1978). Under the assumption that Muslims are a distinct culture or race, orientalists began to believe that they could understand all Muslims through sweeping generalizations. What followed was a generalization of all Muslims as barbaric or inferior and in need of containment or improvement at the hands of superior (Western) races (Kumar, 2012). Due to a sense of racial superiority, British colonizers claimed it was the duty of the rational colonizer to civilize the lesser, barbaric races through colonization (Said, 1978; Kumar, 2012). From the perspective of colonial experts, colonial people deserved to be colonized (Said, 1994). Moreover, starting in the early twentieth century, and especially following World War II, many Americans believed that they had a duty to take on this burden of

colonialization from Great Britain (Kumar, 2012). In other words, it was the duty of the new American Empire to civilize Muslims. Indeed, the United States took over for France and England after World War II, borrowing the orientalism-driven view that Muslims must be made over or changed (Said, 1978).

However, unlike Britain, which colonized Muslims due to views of racial superiority, the United States aimed to transform Muslim-majority societies for the purpose of advancing liberal democratic capitalism against the Soviet Union, which would also make inroads in many Muslim countries. In the early 1950s, the United States began its quest to become the world's greatest superpower, as opportunities for economic imperialism arose (Said, 1978; Kumar, 2012). The United States acknowledged that newly decolonized nations were unable to oppose the overtaking of their markets (Kumar, 2012). With this in mind, Washington aimed to establish an "open door" policy, which would allow the United States to enter foreign markets and establish multinational trade (Kumar, 2012). Doing so would also allow the United States to gain influence and control over susceptible governments, thus increasing its international dominance. In order for the American Empire to successfully establish liberal democratic capitalist policies, the integration and influencing of foreign nations —particularly in the Middle East— would need to be justified. This justification would be manufactured with the use of modernization theory, which rose to popularity among American scholars between the 1950s and 1970s (Kumar, 2012; Bernstein, 1971). The theory brought forth the idea that there are two types of societies: (a) traditional societies, which are politically authoritarian and slow to change, and (b) modern societies, which are democratic and egalitarian (Bernstein, 1971). More importantly, the theory posited that traditional societies could only progress if change is brought upon by modern societies (Bernstein, 1971).

Drawing upon modernization theory, the US government aimed to perpetuate an “us” versus “them” mentality among the public, involving the West as “us” and the Muslim Middle East as “them”. By constructing the view that the Western world is rational, democratic, and civilized, while Middle Eastern societies are uncivilized and authoritarian, the US’s expansion into and attempt to exert influence within Muslim countries could be justified (Kumar, 2012). Thus, in 1967, the American government began using media to manipulate public perceptions and attitudes towards Muslims in the Arab world (Said, 1994). Narratives of Arabs being barbaric and uncivilized dominated both European and American literature, swaying public discourse surrounding Muslims (Said, 1994). Journalists filled the market with books that dehumanized Arabs by painting them as violent (Said, 1994). Through this vilification of Muslims, the United States would garner public support for expanding into the Middle East, and furthering its interests there. Indeed, a US-led Western cultural imperialist campaign against Islam had begun; one that would last for decades (Said, 1994).

The plan to influence Muslim-dominated countries for economic and political benefit escalated drastically in the beginning of the 21st century, when the attacks on the twin towers on September 11th of 2001 exacerbated public angst towards Muslims. While Arabs and Muslims were treated like terrorists even before 9/11, the events of 9/11 worsened their persecution (Kumar, 2012). First, the US’s violent foreign policy toward the Muslim World intensified, as the Bush administration used the 9/11 attacks to convince the public that fighting terrorism abroad would be necessary to prevent further terror attacks at home (Kundnani, 2014). This marked the beginning of the Global War on Terror, in which the United States would invade Iraq and Afghanistan under the guise of combatting foreign terrorists (Kundnani, 2014). Second, domestic anti-Muslim policy intensified, as the second phase of the War on Terror involved a

focus on homegrown terrorism (Kundnani, 2014). Under the Bush administration, the Department of Homeland Security collected information on American Muslims in what they claimed to be an effort to combat domestic terrorism (Alimahomed, 2014). This continued under the Obama administration, as in August of 2011, the White House published a new domestic strategy aimed at preventing radicalization and extremist ideology among American Muslims (Kundnani, 2014).

Essentially, what resulted from the 9/11 terrorist attacks was the convergence of foreign and domestic policy (Kumar, 2012), with State campaigns against Muslims abroad being mirrored by campaigns at home. In addition to laws that governed relations with Muslims abroad, laws were now being created to govern relations with Muslims within America (Kumar, 2012; Alimahomed, 2014). The events of 9/11 sparked the State's reconstruction of the "Islamic terrorist", a new enemy threat to America that would be fought abroad and at home (Kumar, 2012). In essence, while some Muslims in the US and around the world were being radicalized to take up arms against the US and its allies, the figure of the "radicalized" Muslim was also constructed by the US State to create a sense of fear of Muslims, which would be used to garner support for US wars in Muslim countries abroad (Kumar, 2012).

In sum, the long history of Western Empire and Orientalist constructions of the Muslim as "Other" in conjunction with the US's post-World War II rise as a new superpower and the US's post-9/11 Global War on Terror in the "Muslim World" represents the economic and geopolitical backdrop for the negative representations of Muslims that exist in American popular culture. As the next section demonstrates, films and television shows have become a powerful medium through which the Orient, the Muslim World, and anti-Muslim sentiment can be created and spread (Said, 1994). Movies television shows, and video games contain and communicate

many negative messages about and images of Muslims, and these contribute to the existing climate of Islamophobia and maintain public support for the US wars in Muslim-majority states.

b) Muslim Stereotypes in Films and Television Shows

Indeed, American popular culture is full of negative Muslim stereotypes, and this can be evidenced by examining many of the films and television series produced by Hollywood and the US entertainment industries throughout the twentieth century. Hollywood's contribution to the stereotyping and demonization of Muslims is demonstrated empirically by Jack Shaheen's (2003) analysis of the depiction of Muslims and Arabs in over 900 films and television shows produced by Hollywood between 1894 and 2001. The following section summarizes the ten most prominent Muslim stereotypes found within American films and television shows as identified by Shaheen (2003) and other researchers.

Stereotype #1: Muslims as Arabs. When Muslims are depicted in films and television shows, they are almost always presented as Arabs. While only 12% of Muslims around the world are Arab, Hollywood often paints the picture that all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs (Shaheen, 2003; Dodge, 2018). Shaheen (2003) notes that Hollywood frequently fails to distinguish between Arabs and Muslims, as the two are often depicted as one and the same. Specific films in which Arabs and Muslims are presented as one include *The Castilian* (1963) and *Kazeem* (1996) (Shaheen, 2003). In reality, many Muslims are non-Arab, but films such as *Naked Lunch* (1991), *Armour of God II: Operation Condor* (1991), *The Siege* (1998), *Aladdin* (1992), *Three Kings* (1999), and *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991) depict Muslims speaking Arabic, perpetuating the Muslim Arab stereotype (Ramji, 2016).

Hollywood gives special attention to Egyptian Arabs, who appear in over 100 films (Shaheen, 2003). In *Made for Love* (1926) and *Sphinx* (1981), villainous Egyptians are seen

targeting Western women (Shaheen, 2003). Egyptian Arabs also make appearances in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1986), *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), *Cairo Operation* (1965) and *Trunk to Cairo* (1965) (Shaheen, 2003). In all these filmic representations, no effort is made to differentiate the Arab characters from Muslims, and moreover, their anti-Western antics align with Hollywood's anti-Western Muslim stereotype.

Another indication that Arabs are not differentiated from Muslims is that many films present the leaders of Arab countries and communities as Muslims. Muslim leaders who govern Arab communities are known as sheikhs ("Sheikh", n.d.). However, in reality, many Arab communities around the world have non-Muslim leaders. Hollywood has a history of ignoring this fact, as many films set in Arab communities often represent sheikhs, further perpetuating the notion that Arabs and Muslims are inseparable. Examples include *The Unfaithful Odalisque* (1903), *The Arab* (1915), *The Sheik* (1921), *The Adventures of Hajji Baba* (1954), *The Fire and the Sword* (1914), and *Protocol* (1984) (Shaheen, 2003). Rather than presenting non-Muslim leaders of Arab communities, each of the aforementioned movies choose to depict sheikhs instead.

Stereotype #2: Muslims as Terrorists. One of the most common Muslim stereotypes found in films is the depiction of Muslims as terrorists. Shaheen (2003) finds that Hollywood productions typically portray Arabs—and Muslims alike—as dangerous savages, or religious extremists who are hateful towards Jews and Christians. Shaheen (2003) notes that from 1896 until today, filmmakers have represented Arabs as a collective enemy to the United States of America. In many films, Arabs are depicted as brutal, uncivilized religious extremists focused on terrorizing Westerners, and killing innocent American and Western civilians (Shaheen, 2003).

The first Hollywood film to depict Muslims as terrorists is *Sirocco* (1951), which represents Syrian Arabs as extremists who attack French soldiers (Shaheen, 2003). Arabs are also seen invading the United States and terrorizing innocent people in *Golden Hands of Kurigal* (1949), *Terror Squad* (1988), *True Lies* (1994), and *The Siege* (1998) (Shaheen, 2003). *The Siege* is especially concerning, as it portrays Arab immigrants destroying the city of Manhattan (Shaheen, 2003). With the assistance of Arab-American university students, an auto mechanic, and a college teacher, the Arab immigrants destroy Manhattan's FBI building (Shaheen, 2003). This trend continues in *Prisoner in the Middle* (1974), where Israeli forces combat Palestinian nuclear terrorists (Shaheen, 2003).

Hollywood films seem to focus excessively on stereotyping Palestinian Arabs as terrorists. This is seen in *True Lies* (1994) and *Wanted Dead or Alive* (1987), where Palestinian characters are depicted as nuclear terrorists (Shaheen, 2003). Moreover, in *Half-Moon Street* (1986) *Terror in Beverly Hills* (1988), and *Appointment with Death* (1988), Palestinians attack or threaten Western women and children (Shaheen, 2003). Perhaps the most extreme depiction of Palestinian terrorism is seen in *Black Sunday* (1977), in which a Palestinian terrorist plans to exterminate 80,000 Superbowl attendees (Shaheen, 2003). While these depictions represent a specific demographic of Muslims, movies such as *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *Jarhead* (2005) and *The Kingdom* (2007) present Muslims--and Muslim countries--in general as terrorist threats. Other, older examples include *Hostage Flight* (1985), *The Last Precinct* (1986), *Sword of Gideon* (1986), *The Taking of Flight 847* (1988), *Under Siege* (1992), and *Voyage of Terror: The Achille Lauro Affair* (1990) (Kozlovic, 2009).

In addition to films and television shows, the news media often depicts Muslims as terrorists as well, as American media outlets frequently privilege the framing of Muslims, Arabs,

and people from the Middle East as violent terrorists as opposed to ordinary law-abiding citizens (Saleem, Prot, Anderson, & Lemieux, 2017). Drawing from a sample of 146 cable and network news programs that aired between 2008 and 2012, Dixon and Williams (2015) find that since 9/11, the news media has dedicated a significant amount of time to reporting on terrorist attacks committed by Muslims. Results from their analysis indicated that 81% of Muslims covered in network and cable news programs appeared as terrorists (Dixon & Williams, 2015). Similar findings are presented by Powell (2011), who studied news coverage of the 11 terrorist events that occurred in the United States since 9/11. In doing so, Powell (2011) identifies a recurring news media frame in which Muslims and Arabs are routinely associated with terrorism. More specifically, Powell's (2011) analysis indicated that news outlets covered the events in ways that promoted a fear of Muslims/Arabs working together against a "Christian America". Very often, Hollywood films and American news media together play a role in associating Arab-Muslims with terrorism.

Stereotype #3: Muslim Women as Weak and Unworthy. When Muslim women make appearances in films, they are often represented in ways that make them appear as undesirable, indecent, or suppressed. This is illustrated in the way that Arab women are demonized, erotized, and humiliated in over 50 major films (Shaheen, 2003). For instance, many major Hollywood films portray Arab or Muslim women as disposable and scandalous belly dancers, whose sole purpose is to be used by or seduce men (Shaheen, 2003). Additionally, over 16 films analyzed by Shaheen (2003) depict Arab women as mute slaves, reinforcing the idea that Muslim women are helpless victims of abuse by bad Muslim men. The idea that Muslim women are undesirable is evident in movies involving sheikhs, in which the Muslim leaders often disregard Arab women, and instead display a preference for Western women (Shaheen, 2003). These stereotypes can be

subtle as well, as background shots within some movies depict Arab women as overweight and unattractive (Shaheen, 2003). Background shots also serve to enforce the idea that Muslim women are unworthy and insignificant, as films such as *The Sheltering Sky* (1990) tend to only include Muslim women in the background as opposed to front and centre (Ramji, 2005).

The American news media also often stereotype Muslim women as weak and submissive. News media often represents Muslim women as oppressed victims who need liberation from an essentially women-oppressing religion (Ahmed and Matthes, 2017). This was seen in the weeks following the events of 9/11, when the concept of ‘women of cover’, as coined by President George Bush, became rampant across news media (Stabile & Kumar, 2005). News magazines such as the *New York Times* magazine, *Business Week*, and *Newsweek* began to feature veiled Muslim women on their front pages in an effort to draw attention towards the supposed oppression of women in Afghanistan (Stabile & Kumar, 2005). For example, news headlines include, “Lifting the Veil”, “Free to Choose”, “Unveiling Freedom”, “Under the Veil”, “Beneath the Veil”, and “Unveiled Threat” (Alsultany, 2013). Furthermore, news articles depicted Muslim women unveiling themselves to signal their ‘freedom’, implying that veils such as the burqa and hijab act as a form of gender-based oppression (Stabile & Kumar, 2005). Additionally, in 2004, Muslim women Homa Arjomand, Fatima Houda-Pepin, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali publicized their stances against Sharia-based tribunals (Korteweg, 2008), and many American newspapers then used these women’s views to make the claim that Islam as a whole is essentially a religion of gender oppression (Korteweg, 2008). Arguably, these news media portrayals of Muslim women have contributed to the belief that Muslim women are victims of their own religion and culture (Navarro, 2010).

Stereotype #4: Muslims as Violent. Another common stereotype perpetuated by films and television shows is that Islam is a religion of violence. This is illustrated in the way that Hollywood films portray Muslims and Arabs as murderers, rapists, extremists, or abusers of women (Shaheen, 2003). For example, in *A Daughter of the Congo* (1930), *Drums of Africa* (1963), and *Ashanti* (1979), Arabs are represented as enslaving and abusing Africans (Shaheen, 2003). The idea that Arabs are rapists, killers, and kidnappers is a common theme as well, as depicted in *Captured by Bedouins* (1912) and *The Pelican Brief* (1993) (Shaheen, 2003). These themes are especially present in Israeli-made films, which typically portray Palestinians as aggressive, sex-obsessed terrorizers (Shaheen, 2003). Moreover, in movies such as *Rollover* (1981), *Wrong Is Right* (1982), *The Jewel of the Nile* (1985), and *American Ninja 4: The Annihilation* (1991), Arabs appear in missile bases armed with nuclear weapons, suggesting an obsession with armed violence (Shaheen, 2003).

The notion that Islam itself is a religion that encourages violence is presented in *Legion of the Doomed* (1959), in which an Arab kills another man in the name of Allah, the Arab name for God (Shaheen, 2003). The same notion is presented in *Not Without My Daughter* (1991), in which an Iranian husband is seen battering his American wife in order to force her to follow the principles of Islam (Ramji, 2005). Another film that presents Islam as a violent religion is *United 93* (2006), which tells the story of one of the hijacked planes during 9/11 (Riegler, 2010). In the very first scene of the film, the Muslim terrorists who later hijack the flight are shown performing their morning prayers, presenting the idea that these terrorists are supposedly devout Muslims (Riegler, 2010). By doing so, the film draws an association between devotion to Islam and terror, instilling the notion that Islam is a religion that promotes violent ideals. Not only is Islam depicted as violent, but it is also depicted as anti-Christian and anti-Jewish (Shaheen,

2003). This is exhibited in *Another Dawn* (1937), when a US military officer explicitly states that Muslims hate Christians (Shaheen, 2003).

Hussain (2010) finds that the association between Islam and violence is more commonly displayed in drama-based American television shows, where Muslims are often portrayed as dangerous non-Americans with a violent religion. This is illustrated in *Sleeper Cell* (2005-2006), *Oz* (1997-2003), *Lost* (2004-2010), and *24* (2001-2014), where Muslim characters are heavily involved in violence (Hussain, 2010). Comparatively, comedy-based television shows tend to depict Muslims more realistically, as seen in *Aliens in America* (2007-2008), in which a Muslim immigrant high school student attempts to peacefully fit into American society (Hussain, 2010).

The association between Islam and violence is commonly made by news media as well. A meta-analysis of 345 published studies conducted by Ahmed and Matthes (2017) finds that Islam tends to be portrayed as a violent religion in the media. This is supported by Said (1980), who notes that Islam is typically portrayed as a religion of irrational violence. This was seen in the news coverage of British national Bob Woolmer's death, when the British news presented Muslims as violent and irrational (Malcolm, Bairner, and Curry, 2010). The association between Islam and violence was also perpetuated by the news media during the Park 51 controversy of 2010, in which the building of an interfaith mosque in New York City sparked public outrage (Gerhauser, 2014). When speaking to the building of the mosque, politicians such as Mitt Romney stated that the mosque could potentially be used by extremists for recruiting purposes (Gerhauser, 2014). Such statements imply that creating spaces for Muslims to meet and pray runs the risk of harboring terrorism, thus creating an association between Islam and violence.

Stereotype #5: Muslims as Anti-American. Shaheen's (2003) study of films and television shows reveals that Muslims and Arabs alike are routinely depicted as enemies to the West and to

America in particular. For over a century, Hollywood has repeatedly portrayed Arabs as anti-Western and anti-American (Shaheen, 2003). This can be seen in movies such as *21 Hours at Munich* (1976), *Victory at Entebbe* (1976), *The Delta Force* (1986), and *Iron Eagle* (1986), in which Muslim or Arab characters appear as villains who hate Western peace-seeking nations (Guterman, 2013). The association between Muslims and anti-Americanism in *Rules of Engagement* (2000) is especially explicit, as the Muslim terrorists in the film declare Islamic Jihad against the United States, calling upon all Muslims to kill Americans and their allies (Kozlovic, 2009). Another example of a film depicting a Muslim character with anti-American motives is *Wrong is Right* (1982), in which a sheikh is seen supplying nuclear weapons to terrorists to drop on New York city (Kozlovic, 2009).

While the abovementioned films directly portray Muslims as anti-American, many films use less explicit tactics to convey the same message. Generally, the representation of Muslims and Arabs as enemies to the West is achieved in two ways: 1) Arabs are depicted killing or harassing Westerners; or, 2) Westerners are depicted killing Arabs. As Shaheen (2003) notes, the killing of Arabs by Americans is shown in more than 14 feature films. One example of Westerners killing Arabs can be seen in the abovementioned film, *Rules of Engagement* (2000), which generalizes Arabs as intensely anti-American (Shaheen, 2003). In the film, US marines are shown shooting 83 Yemeni men, women, and children (Shaheen, 2003). The victims, or rather enemies of the West, shift from Yemenis to Algerians in *Lost Command* (1966), which depicts French soldiers killing Algerians (Shaheen, 2003). Some films even depict the Pentagon approving of such killings of Muslims, as is the case in *True Lies* (1994), *Executive Decision* (1996), and *Freedom Strike* (1998) (Shaheen, 2003). *The Leopard Woman* (1920) and *Nighthawks* (1981) present Muslims —women in particular— as bombers set on killing

Westerners (Shaheen, 2003). A more severe example is *Black Sunday* (1977), in which Palestinians terrorize Americans on US soil by attempting to murder the American President, along with 80,000 Superbowl attendees (Shaheen, 2003). By routinely showing Westerners killing Arabs, and Arabs killing Westerners, the idea that Muslims and Arabs are enemies to the West--typified by America--is constantly reinforced by popular Hollywood films.

Stereotype #6: Muslims as Foreign. In addition to being represented as anti-American in films and television shows, Muslims are also often depicted as non-American. That is to say, they are typically portrayed as being foreigners, not American citizens, even though there are over three million Muslim-Americans (a little over 1% of the total population) (Pew Research Center, 2017). For instance, when Arabs appear in films, they are commonly portrayed as being Egyptian (Shaheen, 2003). In fact, Egyptian characters appear in over 100 films analyzed by Shaheen (2003), including *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1986), *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), *Cairo Operation* (1965), *Trunk to Cairo* (1965), *Cleopatra* (1912), *The Ten Commandments* (1923) and *The Prince of Egypt* (1998). Arabs are also commonly portrayed as being Palestinian, as seen in *Prisoner in the Middle* (1974), *Ministry of Vengeance* (1989), *Half-Moon Street* (1986), *Terror in Beverly Hills* (1988), *Appointment with Death* (1988), *Navy SEALs* (1990), and *Executive Decision* (1996) (Shaheen, 2003).

Arab characters appear as Libyans in *A Yank in Libya* (1942) and *Lion of The Desert* (1981), Syrians in *Sirocco* (1951), and Iraqis in *Three Kings* (1999) and *Adventure in Iraq* (1943) (Shaheen, 2003; Kozlovic, 2009). They appear as Yemenis in *Rules of Engagement* (2000), Algerians in *The Lost Command* (1966), and Moroccans in *Road to Morocco* (1942), *Bound in Morocco* (1918), *Beast of Morocco* (1966), and *Ishtar* (1987) (Shaheen, 2003; Kozlovic, 2009). They also appear as Somalin in *Black Hawk Down* (2001), Lebanese in *Killing Streets* (1991),

and Saudi Arabian in *The Kingdom* (2007) and *The Grid* (2004) (Aguayo, 2009; Kozlovic, 2009). While not all these films present Arabs as being necessarily anti-American in their values and behaviour, they do present Arabs as being non-American. Rarely do Hollywood films represent Arabs as being ordinary hard-working, law-abiding and tax-paying American citizens (Shaheen, 2003). This instills a sense of distance between American audiences and Muslim Arabs, as films and television shows create the false notion that most Arabs and Muslims are outsiders who live afar.

Stereotype #7: Muslims as Uncivilized. In comparison to the many Western and American characters who are depicted as heroic, civilized and progressive, Muslim and Arab characters are commonly presented as primitive or uncivilized in films and television shows (Guterman, 2013). In over 20 French Foreign Legion movies, civilized legionnaires are shown attacking primitive Bedouin (Shaheen, 2003). This stark contrast between civilized non-Arabs and regressive Arabs has existed for over 80 years in films, as seen with *The Unknown* in 1915 all the way until *Legionnaire* in 1998 (Shaheen, 2003). In these films, Arabs are represented as disorderly and barbaric, reinforcing the idea that Muslims are primitive (Shaheen, 2003). For example, in the television series *Sleeper Cell* (2005), the head of a terrorist cell, Faris Al-Farik is depicted as a cold and heartless Muslim (Guterman, 2013). On numerous occasions, Al-Farik behaves barbarically, as he orders the stoning of another character, and is involved in the murder of a teenage girl (Guterman, 2013).

Additionally, filmmakers have used geography and space as a way to present Muslims as primitive. In many cases, when films show the living arrangements of Arabs, they are seen occupying spaces of sand and dirt, most typically deserts. For example, in the film, *Captured by Bedouins* (1912), an American maiden is kidnapped by Arabic-speaking desert bandits (Shaheen,

2003). The same is seen in *The Steel Lady* (1953), which also depicts Arabs raiding the desert (Shaheen, 2003). Desert sheikhs are another tool that filmmakers use to show Arabs occupying desert areas. Desert sheikhs exist in movies such as *Ali Baba Goes to Town* (1937), *His Lamp* (1952), *Sahara* (1983), *Protocol* (1984), *Bolero* (1984), and *Never Say Never Again* (1986) (Shaheen, 2003). Films that depict Arabs in general occupying desert landscapes covered in palm trees and camels include *The Unfaithful Odalisque* (1900), *The Palace of Arabian Nights* (1905), *The Arab* (1915), *The Sheikh* (1921), *The Desert Song* (1929), and *Thief of Damascus* (1952) (Ramji, 2016). By routinely depicting Arabs living in deserts as opposed to urban city centres, a contrast is drawn between Americans living in modern and developed cities and Arabs living in backwards and undeveloped wastelands. It is in this way that filmmakers use space and location to reinforce the notion that Muslims are regressive, or in some way behind the progress of the West.

Stereotype #8: Muslims as Untrustworthy. Another stereotype of Muslims perpetuated by films and television shows is the idea that Muslims are as a whole, an untrustworthy people. Through an analysis of the two most successful Iraq War films, *American Sniper* (2014) and *The Hurt Locker* (2008), Peterson (2017) finds that these films send audiences the message that Muslims are deceitful. For example, in *American Sniper*, an Arab butcher plans to undermine the American military. At first, the butcher seems compassionate and welcoming, as he offers dinner to US soldiers. However, in truth, the butcher is harboring weapons underneath his floorboards. The idea that Muslims are deceptive is replicated in *The Hurt Locker*, in which the main character, Sergeant James, sees an Iraqi child whose body has been turned into a bomb. By presenting an Iraqi child as a weapon, *The Hurt Locker* puts forth the idea that even Muslim children are untrustworthy and possible threats to America. This same tactic is used in *The*

Kingdom (2007), in which a young Muslim girl gives a seemingly harmless blue marble to an FBI agent, when in fact the marble is a type of marble used by suicide-bombers before detonating themselves (Aguayo, 2009). Together, *American Sniper*, *The Hurt Locker*, and *The Kingdom* present the notion that trusting a Muslim, whether it be a seemingly compassionate butcher or an Iraqi child, is a bad idea.

British television shows also convey the idea that domestic Muslims are no more trustworthy, and no less corrupt. In *Spooks* (2002-2011), Muslim agents tasked with safeguarding Britain's national security turn out to be covert threats to it (Morey, 2010). In another instance, Muslim youngsters are seen being trained to become suicide bombers in a Birmingham Mosque, further creating the idea that British Muslims are a "homegrown" terrorist threat (Morey & Yaqin, 2011). Consequently, Britain is depicted as a nation whose multiculturalism is a problem, as being inclusive has fostered Muslim terrorists and brought new threats to the nation (Morey, 2010). By doing so, *Spooks* advances the idea that British Muslims in the country are not to be trusted, as they are the cause for the nation's corruption and possibly, even the nation's eventual downfall (Morey, 2010).

Stereotype #9: Muslims as Inhuman. Another common practice in films and television shows is to depict Muslims as inhuman. According to Shaheen (2003), only five percent of Arab roles in films are presented as normal, human characters. In the majority of films with Arab roles, Muslim characters are shown to be lacking human qualities in one way or another. Two of the most notable human qualities that Muslims are implied to be lacking are compassion and mercy, as Arabs are often portrayed as wanton murderers and abusers of women (Shaheen, 2003). One less pronounced but still ever-present human quality that Muslims are shown to be lacking is morality. Arabs are constantly portrayed as evil, such as in *Imar the Servitor* (1914)

and *The Mummy Returns* (2001), both of which associate either Syrian or Sudanese Arabs with wickedness (Shaheen, 2003). In fact, Shaheen (2003) notes that this association between Arabs and evil is made in hundreds of movies, as Arabs have been shown assaulting Americans, Europeans, Africans, Israelis, and even fellow Arabs. By depicting Arabs attacking people from many different races, Hollywood promotes the idea that Muslims are not just enemies to Americans, but in fact enemies to the entire human race, an inhuman global threat to global humanity.

Hollywood's representation of Muslims as less human than non-Muslims can sometimes be literal, such as when Arabs are referred to as "dogs" or "monkeys" in films (Shaheen, 2003). Moreover, in the film *Naked Lunch* (1991), one character's drug-induced hallucination involves a fictional land called the Interzone, in which Arabs reside with half-aliens and half-insects. While the film indeed depicts Arabs as human, they are grouped together with non-human creatures, implying that they are less human than the Americans and Westerners enjoying their trip through the Interzone (Ramji, 2005). These instances strip Arabs of their humanity, further hinting that Muslims are inhuman. Other instances in which Arabs are literally depicted as anything but human are found in *The Egyptian Mummy* (1914), and *Dust of Egypt* (1915), both of which depict deceased Egyptians as mummies (Shaheen, 2003). The mummified Arab stereotype appears in at least 26 Hollywood films, as a link between Egypt and the undead is presented repeatedly (Shaheen, 2003). In this sense, the human trait that Muslims are implied to be lacking is literally life itself.

Stereotype #10: Muslims as Perverted. The final common stereotype promoted by films and television shows to be discussed is that Arabs are excessively salacious. A recurring trait found among fictional sheikhs—who in reality are meant to be wise pious elders—is lust. More

often than not, sheikhs are depicted lusting after Western women (Shaheen, 2003). Many films depict western women defending themselves from sex-crazed sheikhs bent on deflowering them (Shaheen, 2003). For instance, in *Armour of God II: Operation Condor* (1991), rich sheikhs are shown bartering over two Western women who were kidnapped and put up for auction as sex slaves (Ramji, 2005). Said (1978) makes note of another instance in *The Sheik* (1921), in which a sheikh captures a blonde woman and says: “My men are going to kill you, but they like to amuse themselves before”. Films in which sheikhs are seen threatening to rape women include *Sahara* (1983), *Protocol* (1984), *Bolero* (1984), and *Never Say Never Again* (1986) (Shaheen, 2003). The trend continues in *Captured by Bedouins* (1912), and *The Pelican Brief* (1993), where Arabs are seen attempting to rape or abduct Western women (Shaheen, 2003). Even silent films follow suit, as movies such as *Unfaithful Odalisque* (1903), and *The Arab* (1915) present sheikhs in a perverted manner (Shaheen, 2003).

The notion that Arabs are hyper-sexual extends beyond sheikhs, as demonstrated in *The Kingdom* (2007), which represents Muslims in general as lecherous. In the film, an American female agent is advised for her own safety to conceal her womanly features around Muslim men, implying that Muslim men are unable to control their sexual urges around women (Aguayo, 2009). The representation of Arabs as lustful extends to Palestinians as well, as many Israeli-made films depict concupiscent Palestinians obsessed with sex and violence (Shaheen, 2003). Similar to Palestinians, Egyptians are also typically seen attempting to defile Western women, as evidenced in *Made for Love* (1926) and *Sphinx* (1981) (Shaheen, 2003). By recurrently presenting sheikhs, Palestinians, and Egyptians as lascivious and sex-obsessed, films and television shows create the notion that Muslims are a perverted people. In sum, the ten stereotypes discussed in this section are among the most pervasive representations of Muslim

people found within films and television shows, as identified by Shaheen (2003) and other researchers. These will serve as the focal point of the current study, as the same stereotypes will be cross-examined within a selection of war-themed video games.

III. Methods

In consideration of the above-mentioned Muslim stereotypes in films and television shows, the current study examines the representations and images of Muslims in war-themed video games, thus exploring the simulated “modalities of realism” encoded and played in the games (Mirrlees, 2014). The purpose of this analysis is to capture the media representation of Muslims in video games and compare it to the media representation of Muslims in films and television shows. To achieve this, the current study employs a hands-on assessment of war-themed video games and their related paratext. The majority of research is conducted via what is called a self-ethnography of play, a commonly used method in game studies (Apperley and Jayemane, 2012). The self-ethnography of play procedure —similar to a typical ethnography— involves direct observation of the phenomenon being studied (Alvesson, 2003). However, what separates this technique from a typical ethnography is that it places the researcher in a more active role than a typical ethnography would, as the researcher observes a particular setting or experience by actively engaging with it (Alvesson, 2003). This means that in the context of this study, the media representations within the video games are observed through direct immersion and engagement; this being actual gameplay. The majority of in-game experiences examined in this study focus on the story modes within the games, as it is within the story modes that the narratives are played, and that the most significant messages about and images of Muslims appear.

As a methodology in game studies, the self-ethnography of play method offers valuable insight towards understanding the narrative and textual content within digital game worlds (Miller, 2008). This is because the self-ethnographic approach involves inserting oneself directly into a video game via firsthand gameplay. Doing so allows an individual to study a virtual space

and interpret the contents within it through one's own experience, rather than rely on the varying secondhand interpretations produced by other players. For this study, the war games selected for analysis were played by this author, and the majority of gameplay focused on the story modes within each game. The games were played on their respective game consoles, including the PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, Nintendo Gamecube, and PC. My self-ethnographic research practice involved a complete playthrough of each game's campaign mode from beginning to end. For the purposes of experiencing all that the campaigns offered, the difficulty setting (if provided) was set to the easiest, so as to enable a swift yet comprehensive play through of each level. By setting the difficulty level to easy, I was able to virtually walk around the simulated worlds of each game and explore and analyze its virtual content in detail without having to worry about failing the mission and being routinely killed by an enemy combatant. Of course, when analyzing the virtual content within each game, a particular focus was paid towards the ten common stereotypes found within films and television shows identified previously, as the goal of this self-ethnography of play was to determine whether or not the Muslim and Arab characters I encountered in these games perpetuated or challenged the stereotypes of Muslim and Arab people and culture. Through this interactive mode of analysis, the representations within each game were observed and analyzed.

In addition to direct gameplay, this study's methodological approach gathered information about the games (e.g., market, story, public reception and so on) selected for study through an examination of each games' "paratext". Coined by Gerard Genette (1997), the term paratext was originally meant to refer to material both inside and outside a book that would provide additional context, such as a front cover or footnotes. However, the concept can be extended to cinema and video games to account for publicity materials such as trailers, review

sites, fan pages, and forums (Burt, 2007). The utility of paratext analysis as a methodology in game studies is noted by Consalvo (2007), who suggests that the paratext surrounding a video game is often more central to one's gameplay experience than the content within the game itself. This is because paratexts such as trailers, guidebooks, fan pages, and review sites serve a unique 'pedagogical function', as they offer gamers insight towards how to play, judge, and think about the games they play (Consalvo, 2007). Essentially, video game paratexts provide players with unique lenses through which they can come to understand a video game and the gaming experience as a whole, beyond what is offered through the simulated content found directly within the game (Burwell and Miller, 2016). Therefore, by analyzing the trailers, reviews, and forums relating to the selected video games, the broader public discourse surrounding the video games and the related gaming experience is explored. Such an examination provides background details about the selected games that would not be evident from only playing them and taking notes, including their development processes, sales figures, review scores, and broader uptake in society.

This study's analysis of the selected games is split into two sections, and moves from the general to the specific. The first section is a general overview of each game's paratext and main storyline, while the second section focuses on the specific representation of Muslims in each game. Through direct gameplay, the content in each game is cross-examined with the ten common Muslim stereotypes found in films and television shows, in order to determine which stereotypes (if any) are also found within the games. In the context of this study, the term 'media representation' refers specifically to the video games' depiction of characters who are implied to be Muslim/Arab, geographic locations that appear to be inhabited and/or dominated by Muslim/Arab people, and ideas and beliefs that are implied to be Islamic or related to Muslim

people, places and culture. One example would be the depiction of US army soldiers invading a desert land guarded by Arab-speaking soldiers. In this example, both the enemy-characters and location presented are implied to be associated with Muslims. These representations may occur in a visual cutscene or during actual gameplay; both of which are typically present within the games' story modes.

The selection criteria for the video games are based on two factors: the time period in which the games were released, and the subject matter within the video games. With regards to the former factor, the video games selected for this study were released between 2001 and 2016, as this encompasses the video games released in the post-9/11 era. This time period was chosen due to the shift in the geopolitical atmosphere in North America following the events of 9/11, particularly surrounding Muslims (Kumar, 2012). By selecting games released after 9/11, this study ensures that the representations examined in the video games can be contextualized with regard to the geopolitical climate of the US's Global War on Terror, and the exacerbation of Islamophobic ideology (Kumar, 2012). The second factor that determined which video games would be selected is the narrative content of the video games, meaning the subject matter. In order to ensure relevancy to the current study, each of the selected video games: (a) represent Muslim or Arab people and places, and (b) contain themes related to war. Indeed, focusing on video games with these two aspects assures that the representations of Muslims analyzed herein relate to the current context of the Global War on Terror and the emboldening of Islamophobic ideology.

Due to the requirement that the games contain themes of war, it follows suit that all of the games selected for this study belong to the war-themed genre of video games. War games, as a genre, contain several key characteristics that qualify them as such. The defining quality of a

war-themed game is that both its gameplay and its narrative pertain to a war of some kind. In other words, not only does the story pertain specifically to war, but so too does the gameplay experience. Typical player activities involve moving through warzones, shooting enemy soldiers, controlling war-themed vehicles such as tanks and fighter jets, and gathering intelligence on opposing enemy factions. In terms of the player's visual perspective, war-themed games can be first-person shooters (seen through the viewpoint of the fictional character's own eyes), third-person shooters (viewpoint is positioned slightly behind the playable character), top-down shooters (camera is aimed above the playable character), or side-scrolling shooters (camera pans from left to right of screen, following the playable character). With these selection factors in mind, a purposeful sample of 15 war-themed video games is examined. These video games include:

1. Conflict: Desert Storm (2002)
2. SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs (2002)
3. Conflict: Desert Storm 2 (2003)
4. Full Spectrum Warrior (2004)
5. Close Combat: First to Fight (2005)
6. Battlefield 2 (2005)
7. Metal Slug Anthology (2006)
8. Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare (2007)
9. Army of Two (2008)
10. Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (2009)
11. Medal of Honor (2010)
12. ARMA 2: Operation Arrowhead [expansion] (2010)
13. Battlefield 3 (2011)
14. Spec Ops: The Line (2012)
15. Medal of Honor: Warfighter (2012)

In addition to successfully meeting the aforementioned selection criteria (each game was released in the post-9/11 era, and contains images of Muslims and/or Arabs), these 15 war-themed games were selected due to their popularity and success among game players and critics

alike. Based upon paratextual data, this sample of video games represents the highest selling and highest scoring war-themed video games released since 2001, as their sales indicate widespread commercial circulation and popular uptake, and their reviews by game critics indicate widespread acclaim. Paratextual material such as sales figures and review scores provide a useful means for gauging popularity of games, as they are often indicative of how video games are being received and judged by the majority of those who play them. With regards to the current sample of 15 war games, each game selected for this study has either sold over 1 million copies, or has scored at least a 7/10 by a professional video game website, such as Metacritic, IGN, Gamespot, or Steam. Due to their commercial success and popularity, these 15 war-themed games are clearly important to study, as they are evidently being played and enjoyed by large numbers of people.

IV. Research Findings

a) Analysis (General) - War-themed Video Games

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare. The first game analyzed is *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), released on November 5th, 2007 in North America for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 (IGDB, 2007). The game was developed by Infinity Ward and published by Activision (IGDB, 2007). 17.28 million copies have been sold as of 2018 (Statista, 2018), and it maintains a 94% Metacritic score for both the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 version, indicating widespread acclaim (Metacritic, 2007). The cover art for the game depicts a soldier holding a gun with two helicopters flying behind him in the background.

The storyline in the game's campaign takes place during a fictional Russian civil war in 2011, in which Russian ultranationalists, led by Imran Zakhaev, seek to revert Russia back to its former Soviet-style leadership. At the same time, a revolution in Saudi Arabia occurs, led by Khaled Al-Asad. Due to their fear that these two figures will unite against the West, the United States and United Kingdom armies join to stop them. Al-Asad is a ruthless anti-Western dictator, as he assassinates the Saudi Arabian president to send a message to the rest of the country. This prompts the United States to invade Saudi Arabia in order to defeat Al-Asad and save the country. Therefore, the US's invasion of Saudi Arabia is justified for the purposes of saving the local population from Al-Asad's reign. The American war against and killing of Al-Asad and Zakhaev's soldiers throughout the campaign is also rationalized as a pre-emptive measure to stop Al-Asad and Zakhaev from launching nuclear weapons at the US Eastern Seaboard.

Throughout the campaign, the player invades countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Russia. To make progress throughout the game, the player must ravage warzones commanded by enemy forces, and shoot and kill the enemy combatants in each area.

Various tasks committed along the way include destroying enemy tanks, turrets, and weapons, locating pieces of enemy intelligence, and rescuing members of your squad from being held hostage or killed by opposing forces. The player takes control of various members of the British Special Air Service (SAS), and the United States Marine Corps (USMC). Such characters include SAS recruit Sergeant John MacTavish, SAS officer Captain John Price, and Sergeant Paul Jackson of the USMC 1st Force Recon. As for the non-playable characters, one ally is the leader of the Russian loyalists, Sergeant Kamarov, who aids the SAS and USMC forces in taking down Al-Asad and Sakhaev. Another non-playable ally is Nikolai, a Russian informant who assists the SAS. As for the antagonists, the primary enemy is Imran Zakhiev, the leader of the Russian ultranationalist party. The secondary antagonist is Khaled Al-Asad, the commander of the forces within the Middle East and the dictator of Saudi Arabia. He is considered the most powerful man in the Middle East, as noted by American forces during the campaign.

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2. The second game analyzed is *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009), released on November 10th, 2009 in North America for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 (IGDB, 2009). It was developed by Infinity Ward and published by Activision (IGDB, 2009). The game received a 94% Metacritic score on both the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 (Metacritic, 2009), and 25 million copies have been sold by 2018 (Statista, 2018). The cover art for the game depicts a soldier with flames and smoke surrounding him.

The game's campaign involves a fictional war that takes place in 2016, when Russian ultranationalists, led by Vladimir Makarov, take over the Russian Federation with the intent of taking revenge on the West for their previous defeat in the first game. The Russian ultranationalists begin committing terrorism across Europe, which prompts multinational special operations unit, Task Force 141, and the United States Army Rangers to take action. One key

event during the campaign is a mass shooting committed by the ultranationalists, who cover it up as an “American-sponsored attack”. This sparks a war between the US and Russia, prompting Russia to invade the East Coast of the United States and start a battle in Washington, D.C. Therefore, the rationale for the US’s involvement in the conflict is twofold: (a) to defend US territory from the invading Russian military and ultranationalists, and (b) to capture Makarov and reveal him to be the source of the terrorist attacks against Europe, thus clearing the US’s name and stopping the war between Russia and the US.

Throughout the campaign, the player visits places such as Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Washington D.C. The player progresses through the campaign by completing various missions in battle, such as killing enemy soldiers, breaching enemy bases, destroying enemy tanks and helicopters, and protecting valuable intelligence. For the majority of the campaign, the player controls Sergeant Gary Sanderson, a British member of Task Force 141. However, the player can also control Private Joseph Allen and Private James Ramirez of the United States Army Rangers. As for the game’s non-playable characters, allies include Lieutenant Simon Riley of Task Force 141, Sergeant Foley and Corporal Dunn of the United States Army Rangers, Captain John Price of the British Special Air Service, and a Russian informant named Nikolai. The main antagonist of the game is General Shepherd, who starts out as an ally and later becomes a traitor. The secondary antagonist is Vladamir Makarov, the Russian terrorist commanding the Russian ultranationalist party.

Battlefield 3. The third game analyzed is *Battlefield 3* (2011), released on October 25th, 2011 in North America for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC (IGDB, 2011). It was developed by EA DICE and published by Electronic Arts (IGDB, 2007). It sold 15 million copies by 2012

(Gamer Network, 2012), and received a Metacritic score of 89% for the PC version (Metacritic, 2011). The cover art depicts a soldier surrounded by tanks and helicopters in the background.

The campaign's storyline takes place in the year 2014, and revolves around a fictional conflict between the United States of America and Russia. The enemy faction is the People's Liberation & Resistance (PLR), an Iranian paramilitary insurgent group that stages a coup d'état in Iran, thus putting the country under military dictatorship. In response, the US military invades in the hopes of capturing their leader, Faruk Al-Bashir. Upon invading Iran, it is revealed that Russian forces are working with Faruk, as they plan to detonate nuclear weapons in Paris and New York City. It then becomes the US's top priority to stop both Al-Bashir and Russian forces from carrying out their plan to use nuclear weapons. The story provides several justifications for the actions carried out by the US throughout the campaign. For instance, the US invades Iran in an effort to liberate Iran from an oppressive dictatorship, thus perpetuating the bogus notion that all wars the US fights are in some way related to spreading freedom and democracy to the less fortunate. The US also fights against Russian forces, as their defeat is necessary to prevent an attack on New York City, thus depicting US war as inherently defensive and reactive, not offensive and proactive.

Much of the game's story mode takes place in Iran and Iraq. However, the player also visits locations such as Azerbaijan, France, and New York City. Progression is achieved mostly by destroying enemy bases, gathering valuable intelligence, and driving vehicles through cities overrun by enemies and killing them. The main protagonist is Sergeant Henry Blackburn, a member of the US Marine Corps 1st Recon Battalion. The player also controls Sergeant Jonathan Miller, a tank operator, and Lieutenant Jennifer Colby Hawkins, a weapon systems officer. As for the non-playable characters, the player is aided by Russian Special Forces –Spetsnaz Team,

led by Russian GRU agent Dimitri Mayakovsky. Similar to the American soldiers, Spetsnaz Team aims to stop the People's Liberation and Resistance and prevent a nuclear attack on Paris. While Dimitri himself is playable, his GRU squad mates, Vladimir and Kiril, are not. As for the antagonists, while the main villain is a former CIA agent named Solomon, the majority of the campaign focuses on Faruk Al-Bashir, the leader of the People's Liberation and Resistance. Faruk is presented as a brown-skinned Iranian dictator with a thick accent.

Medal of Honor. The fourth game analyzed is *Medal of Honor* (2010), released on October 12th, 2010 in North America for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 (IGDB, 2010). The storymode was developed by Danger Close Games while the multiplayer was developed by EA DICE (IGDB, 2010). *Medal of Honor* (2010) was published by Electronic Arts (IGDB, 2010), and received a 75% Metacritic score for the PlayStation 3 version (Metacritic, 2010). Reports indicate that approximately 5 million copies of the game have been sold by 2018 (“VGChartz: Medal of Honor”, 2018). The cover art depicts a soldier holding a gun while surrounded by smoke.

Not much context is provided for the storyline in the campaign. From what little is explained, the events of the story take place immediately after the terrorist attacks on the twin towers on September 11th, 2001. Following the catastrophe of 9/11, the United States Naval Special Warfare Development Group invades Afghanistan in an effort to combat Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces, who have taken over parts of the country. Justification for the SEALs' invasion of Afghanistan is provided through the implication that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces hold ties to the 9/11 terror attacks. Therefore, the US's rationale for invading Afghanistan and killing Muslim terrorists is that doing so is necessary to prevent further terror attacks on American soil. While the story is largely fictional, it is loosely based on Operation Anaconda, with events

closely mimicking the seizing of Bagram Airfield, the Battle of Shah-i-Kot, and the Battle of Takur Ghar (“Medal of Honor”, 2017).

The entire campaign takes place in Afghanistan, while glimpses of the US are shown through a monitor used to communicate with a high-ranking US politician during cutscenes between stages in the game. While progression through the missions usually involves shooting and killing Taliban and Al-Qaeda soldiers, other tasks include invading enemy bases, saving hostages, destroying enemy artillery, and gathering intelligence about enemy hideouts. The player controls various American soldiers, including Tier 1 Operator, code-named “Rabbit”, Delta Force sniper code-named "Deuce", Ranger Dante Adams, and Apache helicopter gunner Brad Hawkins. Non-playable allies include the Afghan National Army (ANA), NATO forces, and an Afghani informant named Tariq. The two primary antagonist forces are the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

Spec Ops: The Line. The fifth game analyzed is *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012), released for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC on June 26th, 2012 in North America (IGDB, 2012). The game was developed by Yager Development and published by 2K Games (IGDB, 2012). Reports indicate the approximately 1 million copies of the game were sold by 2018 (“VGChartz: Spec Ops: The Line”, 2018), while the PC version maintains a 76% Metacritic score (Metacritic, 2012). The cover art for the game depicts a soldier holding a gun with a helicopter in the background.

The game tells the fictional story of a deadly sandstorm that devastates Dubai, leaving its population in a state of emergency. Consequently, the United States 33rd Infantry Battalion enters Dubai in an effort to aid the population and provide some humanitarian relief. Struggling to maintain order, the 33rd Infantry declares martial law on the population and begins committing

atrocities. In response to this, the CIA sends in an elite US Delta Force to combat the 33rd Infantry in an effort to halt their oppression. Due to the drastic shift in conflict, justification for the US's involvement shifts as well. Prior to the game's opening, the aim of the US is to provide relief to the suffering Dubai population after the sandstorm, apropos the logic of "humanitarian intervention". However, by the time the game begins, the 33rd Infantry has gone rogue and is committing atrocities, so the aim of the US security state is to send in a Delta Force and bring order. Therefore, while the rationale for the US's invasion of Dubai is initially to save the local citizens from natural disaster, it later becomes to save the citizens from rogue US soldiers.

The entire campaign takes place in the city of Dubai, within the United Arab Emirates. Progression is achieved by moving through the city of Dubai, shooting enemies, seizing capture points, and rescuing hostages. The player controls Martin Walker of the US Delta Force, who is aided by First Lieutenant Alphanso Adams and Staff Sergeant John Lugo. The player is also aided by CIA agent Gould, who assists the Delta Force in escaping a trap. Additionally, CIA agent Jeff Riggs assists the Delta Force by leading a raid on Dubai's last water supply in an effort to halt the 33rd Infantry's operations. As for the antagonists, while the player combats militant locals, the primary enemy is the United States 33rd Infantry Battalion, led by Colonel John Konrad.

Full Spectrum Warrior. The sixth game analyzed is *Full Spectrum Warrior* (2004), released on June 1st, 2004 for the Xbox and PlayStation 2 in North America (IGDB, 2004). The game was developed by Pandemic Studios and Mass Media Inc., and was published by THQ (IGDB, 2004). Approximately 1 million copies of the game have been sold by 2018 ("VGChartz: Full Spectrum Warrior", 2018), and the Xbox version of the game maintains a Metacritic score

of 84% (Metacritic, 2004). The cover art for the game depicts US soldiers with a helicopter in the background.

The campaign's story pertains to a fictional war in 2004, in which Al-Qaeda and Taliban loyalists take refuge in the fictional land of Zekistan after committing several terror attacks in Europe. In Zekistan, tyrannical dictator Mohammad Jabbour Al-Afad uses the Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces to commit atrocities against the local population, prompting NATO to step in. Under NATO's direction, the US seeks to defeat Al-Afad in order to save the Zeki population from his reign of terror. The invasion is also in response to Al-Qaeda and the Taliban's terror attacks on Europe. Therefore, the rationale for the US's invasion of Zekistan is to defend Europe from further terror attacks, and to save the Zeki population.

The entire campaign takes place in the fictional land of Zekistan, which is implied to be a Muslim-dominated country due to its Arabic-speaking citizens and the many mosques scattered throughout the state. Progression through the campaign is achieved by navigating the streets of Zekistan, killing enemy soldiers, locating enemy hideouts, guiding tanks to various destinations, and rescuing civilians. The player controls Alpha and Bravo of squad Charlie 90, sent in by NATO. Playable soldiers include Sergeant Chago Mendez, Private Asher Shehadi, Private Daniel Shimenski, Private Samuel Ota, Corporal Michael Picoli, Corporal Andre Devereux, Sergeant Eric Williams, and Private Alexander Silverman ("Full Spectrum Warrior", 2014). As for non-playable characters, allies include Alpha and Bravo team's commander, Lieutenant Phillips, as well as a Zeki citizen who provides information to the team. While enemy soldiers are part of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, the primary antagonist is Mohammad Jabbour Al-Afad, the tyrannical dictator of Zekistan.

Close Combat: First to Fight. The seventh game analyzed is *Close Combat: First to Fight* (2005), released on April 6th, 2005 in North America for the Xbox (IGDB, 2005). The game was developed by Destineer, and published by 2K Games and MacSoft (IGDB, 2005). While sales figures for the game are reported to be less than 1 million (“VGChartz: Close Combat: First to Fight”, 2018), *Close Combat: First to Fight* (2005) maintains a 7.3 score from GameSpot (2005), indicating positive reception. The cover art for the game depicts a US marine holding a sword, with other soldiers behind him.

The campaign involves a fictional conflict within Lebanon during 2006, in which Syrian and Iranian militant groups seek to take over the country in the absence of Lebanon’s ill Prime Minister. This prompts the United Nations to send in US marines in order to settle unrest within the country. The purpose of the US’s invasion is to serve as peacekeepers and minimize the civil war between the Lebanese militia and the Islamist extremist group, the Atash Movement. Essentially, the US seeks to prevent terrorist activities from being committed against the Lebanese population, as well as the rest of the world.

The entire campaign takes place in Lebanon, primarily within the city of Beirut. The gameplay involves running through Beirut and shooting and killing enemy soldiers, rescuing innocent Lebanese civilians, locating and capturing important enemy leaders, and destroying enemy tanks and artillery. The player controls a marine lance corporal and three other US marines. Throughout the campaign, the US marines encounter several enemy factions, including the Lebanese militia, which is comprised of former Lebanese soldiers and Syrian soldiers. They are headed by Akhbar al-Soud, a former arms dealer. Another enemy faction is the Iran-supported Atash Movement, which consists of Islamic extremists, and is led by a radical Muslim cleric named Tarik Qadan. Enemies also include the Syrian army, led by a suspected Yemeni

terrorist named General Badr, and the Iranian Special Forces, led by a terrorist supporter named Adullah Bin Katan.

Conflict: Desert Storm. The eighth game to be analyzed is *Conflict: Desert Storm* (2002), released on September 30th, 2002 in North America for the PlayStation 2, Xbox, Gamecube and PC (IGDB, 2002). The game was developed by Pivotal Games, and published by SCi Games and Gotham Games (IGDB, 2002). Approximately 2.5 million copies of *Conflict: Desert Storm* (2002) have been sold by 2018 (“VGChartz: Conflict: Desert Storm”, 2018), and the PC version of the game maintains a score of 9/10 on Steam, indicating positive user reviews (Steam, 2018). The cover art for the game depicts a soldier with a helicopter in the background.

The game’s campaign is based on the actual Gulf War, codenamed Operation Desert Storm. In 1990, Iraqi forces (led by Saddam Hussein) invade Kuwait, prompting a US-led coalition to intervene in the country, and go to war against Iraq on behalf of Kuwait, a US protectorate and source of oil. The game follows either the British 22nd Special Air Service (SAS) or the US Delta Force as they fight to push Iraqi forces out of Kuwait in 1991. The purpose of deploying the coalition in Kuwait is to push Iraqi forces out of the country and save Emir Jaber III. Therefore, the rationale for the US’s role in the conflict is to save Kuwait’s population, and prevent escalating conflict between Kuwait and Iraq.

While the majority of the campaign takes place in either Kuwait or Iraq, the player also visits cities that border Saudi Arabia. Gameplay mostly involves killing enemy soldiers, infiltrating enemy bases, protecting hostages, destroying enemy artillery, and locating key enemy figures. The player fights as either the British 22nd Special Air Service (SAS) or the US Delta Force, with the opportunity to play as Sgt. John Bradley, Cpl. Paul Foley, Cpl. Mick Connors, and Cpl. David Jones. One non-playable ally is Dr. Franklin, a nuclear expert for the US military

who helps US forces disable a weapon of mass destruction that the Iraqi forces attempt to use. The enemy is the Iraqi army, led by main antagonist and Supreme Commander, General Aziz.

Army of Two. The ninth game analyzed is *Army of Two* (2008), released on March 6th, 2008 in North America for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 (IGDB, 2008). The game was developed by EA Montreal and published by Electronic Arts (IGDB, 2008). Approximately 2.8 million copies of *Army of Two* (2008) have been sold by 2018 (“VGCharts: Army of Two”, 2018), and the game maintains a 74% Metacritic score, indicating positive reception (Metacritic, 2008). The cover art for *Army of Two* (2008) depicts two masked figures above a city with buildings.

While the first mission of the campaign takes place in the year 1993, the majority of the campaign takes place after the events of September 11th, 2001. The story follows the fictional private military corporation known as Security and Strategy Corporation (SSC), which sends out two of its contractors, Tyson Rios and Elliot Salem into hostile areas within the Middle East to combat terrorism. The overall purpose of the protagonists is to defeat Islamic terrorists from Al-Qaeda and the Abu-Sayaff terrorist organization. This mostly involves capturing terrorist leaders in Middle Eastern nations, as well as defending US property and vessels from terrorist attacks. Essentially, the player fights to combat Islamic terrorism worldwide, which involves defending both citizens within the US and citizens within Islamic nations.

Throughout the campaign, which spans from 1993 to 2009, the player visits Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, China, and the US. The main protagonists are Tyson Rios and Elliot Salem who first serve in the US army, and later the SSC. Non-playable allies include Cha-Min Soo –a South Korean weapons specialist who serves as an arms dealer for the protagonists, and Alice Murray –Tyson and Elliot’s mission coordinator. *Army of Two* (2008) contains several enemies,

one of whom is Phillip Clyde, a mercenary who starts out as a supporting character working for the SCC, but later leaks US troop positions to terrorists. Other enemies include Abdullahi Mo'Allim –a Somali warlord, Mohammed Al-Habiib –an Al-Qaeda terrorist, and Ali Youssef – an Iraqi terrorist. Finally, the main enemy is the Abu-Sayaff terrorist organization, a Jihadist militant group headed by Cebu Mohammed.

SOCOM US Navy SEALs. The tenth game analyzed is *SOCOM US Navy SEALs* (2002), which was released on August 27th, 2002 in North America for the PlayStation 2 (IGDB, 2002). The game was developed by Zipper Interactive and published by Sony Computer Entertainment (IGDB, 2002). It has sold 3.65 million copies by 2018 (“VGChartz: SOCOM: US Navy SEALs”, 2018), and maintains an 82% Metacritic score (Metacritic, 2002). The cover art for the game depicts soldiers with guns standing in front of a body of water.

The storyline for the campaign takes place between 2006 and 2007, and involves a fictional narrative in which the US Navy SEALs team combats several unrelated terrorist groups throughout the world. The first of these groups is the Iron Brotherhood, a terrorist organization that aims to destroy an oil platform and cause a major oil spill in Alaska. The second terrorist group is Riddah Rouge, which gains access to valuable biological data in Thailand. The third group is a mercenary organization called Preemptive Strike, who illegally stockpiles European weapons in the Congo. The last terrorist group is Allah Sadikahu, who illegally gains possession of nuclear weapons in Turkmenistan. In each scenario, the US Navy SEALs are called in by the native government to defeat the terrorists and save the locals. Therefore, justification for the US's involvement in these affairs is to save others, primarily foreigners, when they are in danger. Again, the image of the US at war is one of benevolence, a state that only intervenes elsewhere to help or save others from evil.

Throughout the campaign, the player visits Alaska, Thailand, the Congo, and Turkmenistan. Gameplay typically involves shooting and killing enemy soldiers, gathering intelligence, invading enemy bases, and rescuing hostages. The player controls the US Navy SEALs team, which is made up of Kahuna, Boomer, Specter, and Jester. One non-playable ally is Basim Maccek, an informant working for the US who is captured by terrorists for gaining intelligence on their illegal activities. As for non-playable antagonists, there are numerous villains in the game. One villain is Stanislav, the leader of the Iron Brotherhood. Another villain is Nikolai Petrenko, a high-ranking Russian member of the Iron Brotherhood who is captured and interrogated by the player. A third villain is Sudarak Thongkon, the leader of Riddah Rouge, who takes the US Ambassador to Thailand and his wife hostage. A fourth villain is Magnus, who leads the mercenary group Preemptive Strike in gathering weapons and capturing US marines in the Congo. Lastly, the final villains are Mullah Bahir Al-Qadi and Imad Al-Qadi, the leaders of the terrorist group, Allah Sadikahu, active in Turkmenistan.

Medal of Honor: Warfighter. The eleventh game analyzed is *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2012), released on October 23rd, 2012 in North America for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and PC (IGDB, 2012). The game was developed by Danger Close Games and published by Electronic Arts (IGDB, 2012). Although it received a negative review score of 55% on Metacritic (2012), it managed to sell an impressive 3 million copies by 2013 (GameSpot, 2013). The cover art for the game depicts a soldier holding his gun.

The game's campaign involves a fictional story that takes place in 2002. When a black market arms deal involving Al-Qaeda members takes place in Karachi, Pakistan, Task Force Mako, a US squad comprised of former US Navy SEALs are sent in to intervene. The squad learns of the existence of explosives being held somewhere by terrorists. This leads the squad to

the Philippines, where they find the Islamist terrorist organization, the Abu Sayyaf group.

Following the escape of the terrorist group, an interrogation in Pakistan leads the US squad into a terrorist base in Yemen where the explosives are found and seized. Intel then leads the team to Sarajevo, where two ships carrying more explosives are set to sail to Pakistan and Croatia. The team then follow the ship to Karachi and raid the terrorist's base, hoping to defeat the group once and for all. Essentially, the US's main goal is end terrorism around the world, which involves entering foreign countries to save hostages and capture terrorists. Therefore, the US's involvement in foreign affairs is justified for the purpose of combatting terrorism worldwide and ensuring the security of itself and others.

Throughout the campaign, the player visits the Philippines, Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia, Dubai, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Progression from level to level is achieved by shooting and killing enemy soldiers, tailing suspicious targets, and controlling various vehicles in chases through cities. The main protagonists are Task Force Blackbird and Task Force Mako, both of which are American special units. The player controls Preacher of Task Force Blackbird, and Stump of Task Force Mako. As for non-playable characters, one ally is the leader of the Philippine Army SOCOM forces, General Barrera, who assists the US squad in combatting the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group in the Philippines. Another ally is Ajab, a Pakistani undercover operative who works with special operations team, Task Force Blackbird. A third ally is Greko, the leader of the Polish GROM squad, who assists Task Force Mako in catching an arms dealer in Bosnia. The main enemy in the game is the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group, which consists of key figures Ibrahim al-Najdi and Marwan al-Khalifa. While the secondary antagonist is a Bosnian arms dealer named Stovan Botic, the primary antagonist is Hassan, a wealthy Arab banker in Dubai responsible for hoarding explosives.

Arma 2: Operation Arrowhead. The twelfth game analyzed is *Arma 2* (2009). The primary focus of this study is *Operation Arrowhead* (2010), the expansion to the base game. The expansion was released on June 29th, 2010, available worldwide on PC (IGDB, 2010). While the expansion was developed by Bohemia Interactive Studio, 505 Games handled publishing in Europe, and Meridian 4 handled publishing in North America (IGDB, 2010). The expansion received a 77% Metacritic score (Metacritic, 2009), indicating positive acclaim. While sales figures for the expansion are not public, the base game has sold 2.3 million copies by 2015 (SteamSpy, 2017). The cover art for the expansion depicts a soldier aiming his gun whilst yelling.

The expansion's story takes place in 2012, when anti-government rebels in the fictional nation of Takistan destroy the country's oil wells to weaken its armed forces, causing an economic crisis. In response, the Socialist Supreme Bureau, led by Colonel Muhammad Aziz, threatens to launch missiles on the fictional nation of Karzakhstan if Sharig Plateau, an oil-rich piece of land, is not returned to Takistan. After Takistan fails to respond to an ultimatum provided by Western countries—in which Takistan is asked to withdraw its forces—US and NATO forces invade Takistan. Essentially, the US's goal is to defend Karzakhstan, which involves assisting Takistani rebels, neutralizing the Socialist Supreme Bureau's missiles, and capturing Aziz. Therefore, the US's involvement in the conflict is justified by having the US fight in the interests of Karzakhstan.

The entirety of the expansion's story takes place in the fictional land of Takistan. Progression throughout the missions involves killing enemy soldiers, rescuing hostages, navigating tanks and choppers, and locating key figures. The player controls soldiers representing US and NATO forces. These soldiers are aided by Takistani and Karzeghi citizens,

such as Latif Spanta and Sadid Zafar. The primary antagonist is Colonel Muhammad Aziz, head of the Socialist Supreme Bureau of Takistan.

Metal Slug Anthology. The thirteenth game analyzed is *Metal Slug Anthology* (2006), which is a compilation of Metal Slug games that was released on December 14th, 2006 in North America for the PlayStation 2, PlayStation Portable, Nintendo Wii, and PC (IGDB, 2006). The compilation was developed by Terminal Reality, Nazca Corporation, Noise Factory, and SNK Playmore, with SNK Playmore also handling publishing duties (IGDB, 2006). While sales figures indicate that less than 1 million copies have been sold by 2018 (“VGChartz: Metal Slug Anthology”, 2018), the collection received an 80% review score on Metacritic (2006), indicating positive acclaim. The cover art for the game depicts a tank surrounded by bullet holes.

While the collection includes *Metal Slug* games 1 through 6, the primary focus of this study is the second game in the compilation: *Metal Slug 2* (1998), as it is the only game in the series to include Arab characters. The game’s campaign takes place in the year 2030, and involves a story that connects directly to the first game’s campaign. After General Morden and his international Rebel Army is defeated in the first game, Morden and his Rebel army return to stage a coup d’état against the world’s governments and gain access to advanced weaponry. This prompts the Peregrine Falcon Strike Force—a faction of the ‘Regular Army’, a world government coalition—to take action. Morden also teams up with aliens, who end up betraying him in an effort to destroy the Earth. Therefore, while the Peregrine Falcon Strike Force’s main task is to prevent the Rebel Army from overthrowing the world’s governments, priority later shifts to saving the Earth from annihilation at the hands of aliens.

Most of the locations in the game are unspecified; however, it is heavily implied that one location is Saudi Arabia, as soldiers belonging to the Arabian Infantry—Saudi Arabia’s army—

are positioned throughout the desert stage. The player also visits outer space in the later portion of the game. Progression through missions mainly involves running through the different stages and shooting enemies, destroying enemy artillery, defeating bosses, and rescuing prisoners. The player controls Capt. Marco Rossi and Lt. Tarma of the Peregrine Falcon Strike Force, as well as Sgt. Eri Kasamoto and Sgt. Fiolina Germi of the Intelligence Agency's Special Ops Squad: Sparrows. One non-playable ally is a prisoner named Hyakutaro Ichimonki, who upon being rescued, will fight alongside the player. Another supporting character is Sgt. Rumi Aikawa, who is an army supplier who drops useful items for the player to collect. The main antagonist is General Donald Morden and his Rebel Army, who seek to overthrow the world's governments. The secondary antagonist is Saudi Arabia's army, known as the Arabian Infantry, which is led by Abul Abbas. The Arabian Infantry allies with the Rebel Army, assisting it in its goal of overthrowing the world's governments. Lastly, the final enemies are the Martians, who originally work with the Rebel Army, but end up betraying them in order to weaken the Earth's military.

It is significant to note that in the context of this study, *Metal Slug Anthology* (2006) is unique in comparison to the rest of the games analyzed. This is because though the collection itself was released in 2006, three of the six games included within *Metal Slug Anthology* (2006) were released in the 1990s. It follows suit, then, that the early *Metal Slug* games adopt an aesthetic from war movies of the 1970s and 80s, such as *Rambo* (1982). Indeed, *Metal Slug 1*, *2* and *3* were developed prior to 9/11, and therefore contain themes that resemble the landscape of war as it existed before the occurrence of the Global War on Terror. Yet, *Metal Slug 4*, *5* and *6* were released after 9/11, during a time in which war-themed video games had shifted toward the vilification of Islam. For this reason, *Metal Slug Anthology* (2006) is an interesting war game, as

its development and release cycle spans throughout the pre-post 9/11 eras, therefore capturing the resulting shift in the climate of war.

Battlefield 2. The fourteenth game analyzed is *Battlefield 2* (2005), released on June 21st, 2005 in North America for the PC (IGDB, 2005). The game was developed by Digital Illusions CE and published by EA Games (IGDB, 2005). Approximately 2.25 copies of *Battlefield 2* (2005) have been sold by 2018 (Video Game Sales Wiki, 2018), and the game maintains a 91% Metacritic score (Metacritic, 2005). The cover art for the game depicts a soldier with helicopters in the background.

While the game does not include a campaign mode, there is some context to the multiplayer game mode. In 2007, a world war erupts due to reasons that are not made clear to the player. On one side of the war, there is the United States, the European Union, and Britain, while the other side consists of Russia, China, and the Middle Eastern Coalition –a fictional collection of Arabic-speaking nations such as Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, and Syria (“Battlefield 2”, 2018). While the cause of the war is not outright mentioned, the description of the Gulf of Oman map implies that the nations involved are battling for control over the world’s oil reserves.

In total, there are five maps in China, nine maps in Arab/Middle Eastern nations, and two maps on tropical islands. At the beginning of each multiplayer match, players can select one of three factions: The United States Marine Corps, China, and the Middle Eastern Coalition. Consequently, heroes and enemies vary depending on who the player chooses to play as. Gameplay primarily involves killing players on the opposing team and capturing control points.

Conflict: Desert Storm 2. The fifteenth game analyzed is *Conflict: Desert Storm 2* (2003), released on October 7th, 2003 in North America for the Xbox, PlayStation 2, and Gamecube (IGDB, 2003). The game was developed by Pivotal Games, while publishing was

handled by SCi Games in Europe, and Gotham Games in North America (IGDB, 2003).

Approximately 1 million copies of *Conflict: Desert Storm 2* (2003) have been sold by 2018 (“VGChartz: Conflict: Desert Storm 2”, 2018), and the Gamecube version of the game received a Metacritic score of 73%, indicating positive acclaim (Metacritic, 2004). The cover art for the game depicts American soldiers in a desert with a helicopter in the background.

The game’s campaign takes off where the story in the last game ended. Similar to the first game, *Conflict Desert Storm 2*’s (2003) campaign is loosely based on the Gulf War. Following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the consequent invasion of Iraq by the US in 1991, Kuwait is on the brink of liberation. As a last resort, the Iraqi army sets fire to several Kuwaiti oil wells in order to do as much damage as possible to the local population. As a response, the US Delta Force enters Kuwait in an effort to defeat the remaining Iraqi troops and save the Kuwaiti population. The US’s involvement in the war is rationalized by their purpose to aid Kuwait and prevent further destruction.

The two locations visited in the game are Kuwait and Iraq. Gameplay involves shooting enemies, rescuing hostages, infiltrating enemy bases, and disarming weapons of mass destruction. The player takes control of Alpha-One commander, Sgt. John Bradley, and his troops, Cpl. Paul Foley, Cpl. Mick Connors, and Cpl. David Jones. Allies include Delta Force operators and drill instructors such as Sgt. Arnold, MSG. Peters, and MSG. Boothe. The sole enemy of the game is the Iraqi army.

b) Analysis (Specific) - Stereotypes of Muslims in War Games

Muslims as Arabs. The first common Muslim stereotype found within the games analyzed is Muslims as Arabs. This stereotype is found within *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*

(2007), as the Islamist extremists and Muslim-dominated countries depicted in the game are heavily implied to be Arab. For example, the terrorist soldiers found in the stage, “The Coup”, are aesthetically presented as typical Arabs, baring brown skin, facial hair, and keffeyehs (red Arabian scarves). Moreover, these Islamic extremists are heard shouting in Arabic when the player engages them in combat. The idea that the Islamic extremists in the game are Arabs is further cemented by the fact that there is Arabic writing on many walls and posters in Muslim-dominated countries, as seen in the stage, “Charlie Don’t Surf”. Similarly, the Muslim-dominated countries invaded in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009) are portrayed as having an Arab populace. This is seen in the campaign stage, “Team Player”, and the multiplayer map “Kirachi”, where Afghanistan and Kirachi, Pakistan are shown to have Arabic writing on signs and shops. Moreover, enemies in the “Team Player” stage wear stereotypical Arab scarves and are even heard speaking Arabic in Saudi Arabian dialect. This is inconsistent with the fact that Arabic is not one of Afghanistan’s national languages –Pashto and Dari (Central Intelligence Agency, 2016), which is where the stage takes place.

The Muslim-dominated regions visited within *Battlefield 3* (2011) are also implied to be populated by Arab inhabitants. This is evident in the stage “Operation Swordbreaker”, which takes place in Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan. In this stage, Arabic writing is seen written on the walls, as well as on the shops, hotels, and street signs. Additionally, the stage “Fear No Evil”, which takes place in downtown Tehran, Iran, also has Arabic writing written on the shops. This is despite the fact that only about 2% of Iran’s population speaks Arabic (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). Muslims are depicted as Arabs in *Full Spectrum Warrior* (2004), as several clues hint that Zekistan’s native language is Arabic. For instance, in Chapter 1, Arabic writing is written on shop signs and posters on the wall. Moreover, in Chapter 10, one civilian speaks with

the US soldiers in Arabic at length. During this exchange, the Zeki citizen says “May Allah be with you” to one of the US soldiers, implying that he is not just an Arabic-speaker, but a Muslim Arabic-speaker. Not only do the inhabitants of Zekistan speak Arabic, but so too do the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces. This is made evident in Chapter 5, when upon having a frag thrown at him, one enemy yells “Taharako! Taharako!”, which means “Move! Move!” in Arabic.

The characters and locales within *Close Combat: First to Fight* (2005) are implied to be Arab, as the opening cutscene depicts one terrorist holding a rocket launcher while speaking Arabic. Moreover, in the first mission, a terrorist is heard giving orders to other soldiers in Arabic. Additionally, Arabic writing is written on the shop signs, as well as on boxes inside some of the houses. Together, these instances confirm that not only are the inhabitants of Lebanon Arab-speakers, but so too are the invading Islamist extremists. The Muslim characters and Muslim-dominated regions visited in *Conflict: Desert Storm* (2002) are represented as Arab, as evidenced by the fact that the Iraqi soldiers speak Arabic, as heard in Mission 12. Moreover, Arabic writing is seen written on crates in Kuwait during Mission 2, on an airbase building in Iraq during Mission 3, and on the walls of a building in Saudi Arabia in Mission 8.

In *SOCOM US Navy SEALs* (2002), terrorists belonging to the Allah Sadikahu group are heard having full conversations in Arabic in the “Prison Break” mission. Additionally, in the same mission, Basim Maccek, an informant working for the US, is also heard speaking Arabic to the US soldiers. In *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2012) Al-Qaeda terrorists are heard speaking Arabic in the mission, “Unintended Consequences”, which takes place in Kirachi, Pakistan. Enemies also speak Arabic to one another in the stage, “Through the Eyes of Evil”, which takes place in Yemen. Moreover, writing on the walls of Yemen contain Arabic writing. Similarly, Arabic writing is found on buildings in Somalia in the mission “Shore Leaves”, and on shops in

Dubai in the mission “Hello and Dubai”. Even the fictional land of Takistan is shown to have an Arab-speaking population in *Arma 2: Operation Arrowhead* (2010). This is implied in Mission 2, in which Arabic writing can be seen written on shop signs. Similarly, Mission 3 depicts Arabic letters written on bombs made by a local man.

The Arab-Muslim stereotype persists with *Metal Slug Anthology* (2006), which makes it clear that Saudi Arabia is indeed an Arabian nation. The game makes this evident by referring to Saudi Arabia’s army as the Arabian Infantry. Additionally, Arab writing is written on shop signs and mosques in the first mission of the game, which takes place in Saudi Arabia. In *Battlefield 2* (2005), Arabic writing is found on the walls, shops signs, and buildings of Afghanistan in the map “Road to Jalalabad”, Doha, Qatar in “Sharqi Peninsula”, and Mashtuur City in the map of the same name. Moreover, the Middle Eastern Coalition (MEC) is made up of Arabic-speaking nations such as Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, and Syria. It is made clear that the MEC is Arabian as MEC soldiers can be heard speaking Arabic to one another over a radio when the player selects them. Similarly, *Conflict: Desert Storm 2* (2003) depicts the Muslim-dominated locations within the game as places inhabited by Arabs. This is evident in the stage “Air Strike”, where Arabic writing is written on street signs in Kuwait, and in “Prisoners of War”, where Arabic writing is written on street signs in Iraq. Iraqi soldiers are also presented as Arab-speakers, as they are heard speaking Arabic during gameplay in the stage “Street Battle”, and in a cutscene during the “Prisoners of War” mission.

Muslims as Terrorists. The second common Muslim stereotype found within the games analysed is Muslims as terrorists. This stereotype is found in *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), as the Muslim extremists within the game are depicted as threats that aim to terrorize others. This is perhaps demonstrated most clearly by the fact that the secondary antagonist,

Khaled Al-Asad is a Muslim terrorist. Additionally, specific instances of Muslims committing acts of terror can be seen during the campaign stage, “The Coup”, when Al-Asad’s men take the president of Saudi Arabia, Al-Fulani, captive in a car. During this sequence, the player sees terrorists shooting and killing unarmed civilians on the street whilst shouting in Arabic. Similarly, the Muslim characters in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009) are represented as Islamic extremists. This is apparent in the “Team Player” stage in Afghanistan, where a drawing of deceased terrorist leader, Khaled Al-Asad, is shown on a wall. In addition to the drawing, resistance posters in favour of Al-Asad with Arabic writing are also present on the walls, further associating Islam with terrorism. The game’s stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists is also reinforced by the fact that the Arabic-speaking enemies in the “Team Player” stage belong to a terrorist military faction that seizes Afghanistan, called OpFor. Another example of the association between terrorism and Islam can be seen in the multiplayer map “Afghan”, where Arabic writing on the wall of a cave translates to “those who oppose Al-Asad must die”, indicating that those who oppose the extremist will be killed.

Battlefield 3 (2011) follows suit, as the main enemies throughout the campaign are Iranian soldiers employed by the People’s Liberation & Resistance (PLR). The sentiment that Muslims are terroristic is specifically presented in the stage, “Going Hunting”, where the player must engage in battle with the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF). During this mission, the player must combat Iranian jets and destroy parked planes at the IRIAF airport. In addition to a terrorist-owned airport, Iranian PLR soldiers are seen having taken over a school in “Operation Swordbreaker”, and a bank in “Operation Guillotine”. This domination of public educational institutions by terroristic Muslims belonging to the PLR further cements the idea that Muslims are ruthless terrorists, especially given that the game does not convey any positive images of

Muslim people. *Medal of Honor* (2010) also stereotypes Muslims as terrorists, as the two main enemy combatants in the game are Islamic extremist groups, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. One specific indication that these Islamic extremists are terrorists is seen in the stage “Breaking Bagram”, where the player invades a Taliban base harbouring dangerous weapons, such as tanks and artillery needed for terrorist activities. Another indication that these Islamic extremists are terrorists is seen in the same stage when the player finds several dead civilian hostages tied up in chairs at the enemies’ base. This demonstrates that unlike soldiers in the American military, who only kill enemy combatants, the Taliban forces are cruel terrorists who brutally kill and take civilians hostage.

In *Full Spectrum Warrior* (2004), Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces commit acts of terror throughout the campaign. For instance, in Chapter 3, the terrorists take over a hotel, while in Chapter 4, the terrorists take over Al-Afad International Airport. In addition to portraying Al-Qaeda and the Taliban as terrorist forces, the game suggests that Islam itself is a religion of terror. This is done in the second epilogue mission, when the player is sent to a mosque, where the terrorist group, the Black Brigade is hiding. This implies that mosques are places where terrorists frequent, further insinuating that Muslims are terrorists. The association between Islam and terrorism is also presented in *Close Combat: First to Fight* (2005), in which Islamist extremists are seen committing several terroristic acts. For example, in the third mission, Syrian forces riding in a vehicle approach and attack the US marines. Moreover, a cutscene in the following mission reveals that there is heavy Syrian support for the “criminal” Akhbar al-Soud and his militia. In this same mission, a large weapons cache belonging to Akhbar al-Soud is spotted. Perhaps the more severe terrorist activities are seen in the text briefing for Mission 7, in which it is mentioned that Atash radicals, supported by Major Abdullah Bin Katan and the

Iranian Special Forces, have taken control of several American University buildings, trapping students inside. Moreover, the text briefing for Mission 17 reveals that General Badr of the Syrian army has invaded the Lebanese government building and declared himself the head of the Lebanese government. Together, these examples of Islamist extremists committing acts of terror lend support to the notion that Muslims are terrorists.

In *Army of Two* (2008), four out of the five key antagonists in the game are Islamic extremists who commit acts of terror. For instance, Mohammed Al-Habiib is an Al-Qaeda terrorist who seizes a missile facility with Soviet M-11 missiles in Afghanistan during the Afghanistan mission. Additionally, in the Iraq mission, Ali Youssef, a loyal supporter of Saddam Hussein, puts a US Army base under siege in Iraq and explodes a chopper, killing the main characters' former squad mate Lt. Col Eisenhower. Another example of Islamic extremism can be seen during the South China Sea mission, when the Abu-Sayaff terrorist organization seizes control of a US Navy aircraft carrier. In the following cutscene, Alice Murray explicitly mentions that its leader, Cebu Mohammed, is one of the most powerful terrorists in the world. In *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2012) four key figures in the game are affiliated with the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group. For instance, The Cleric —otherwise known as Hassan— is an Arab banker from Dubai who attempts to commit suicide with a bomb strapped onto his back in the mission, “Shut it Down”, with the goal of killing the SEALs with him. Additionally, Ibrahim al-Najdi is a member of the Abu Sayyaf group who executes one of the main players, Preacher, during an interrogation in the mission, “Bump in the Night”. Another member of the Abu Sayyaf group is Marwan al-Khalifa, who holds hostages in Isabella City and explodes a train station in the mission “Changing Tides”, thus ending his life. The final key figure is Faraz, a Pakistani

jihad subject who is affiliated with terrorists, as indicated when he reveals valuable information about The Cleric in the mission “Finding Faraz”.

In *SOCOM US Navy SEALs* (2002), the Allah Sadikahu terrorist group is comprised of Muslim extremists. This is evident in the text brief for the mission “Mouth of The Beast”, which explains that Mullah Bahir Al-Qadi and Imad Al-Qadi are the leaders of Allah Sadikahu. Members of Allah Sadikahu are seen committing acts typical of terrorists in a cutscene for the mission “Prison Break”, where two Arab men exchange money for a portable nuclear device. Allah Sadikahu’s terroristic nature is further cemented in the text brief for the same mission, where it is explained that terrorists have captured and imprisoned informant Basim Maccek for gaining valuable information on their illegal activities. *Arma 2: Operation Arrowhead* (2010) also presents Muslims as terrorists, as the primary antagonist, Muhammad Aziz, is presented as a political extremist. This is evident by the fact that Aziz is the head of the Socialist Supreme Bureau of Takistan, which is effectively the Takistani militia. Aziz’s terroristic nature is revealed in the intro cutscene when he threatens to launch missiles on the fictional nation of Karzeghistan if it does not return a piece of land to Takistan. The Muslim terrorist stereotype continues in *Metal Slug Anthology* (2006), in which the Arabian Infantry assists the Rebel Army in overthrowing the world’s governments. Additionally, in the first mission of the game, one of the boss enemies is a mosque called Artillery Mosque, which has rockets and missiles attached to it, and fires at the player. By portraying a mosque as a deadly weapon used by terrorists, an association between an Islamic holy place of worship and terrorism is made.

Muslims as Violent. The third common Muslim stereotype found within the games analyzed is Muslims as violent. This stereotype is found within *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), as it presents Muslims as ruthless and aggressive people who seek to cause destruction

and suffering. This is seen in the stage, “The Coup”, when Saudi Arabian dictator Khaled Al-Asad claims that he aims to defeat the West in front of his soldiers. Upon hearing this, his men raise their guns in the air and fire while shouting in Arabic to celebrate his declaration of violence. Another indication of violent Muslims is seen at the end of this same stage, when Al-Asad publicly broadcasts the execution of Saudi Arabian president Al-Fulani for the entire country to witness. Not only does this present Al-Asad and his men as violent, but it also suggests that Muslim-dominated countries such as Saudi Arabia are places where violence is a public spectacle. Another example of Muslims as violent can be seen in the stage, “Charlie Don’t Surf”, where posters with nukes on them are plastered across Kuwait City, Kuwait. Additionally, there are pictures of guns painted on the walls outside, further insinuating that places populated by Arab people are in some way predisposed to a love for violence. The association between Muslims and violence is found in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009) as well, as the Muslim-dominated locales within the game are associated with violence. This is evident in the multiplayer map “Afghan”, which includes posters on the walls that depict Arabic writing and nukes. Furthermore, in the stage “Team Player”, a symbol with crossed swords is drawn on the walls of a city in Afghanistan. The crossed swords closely resemble the emblem of Saudi Arabia, which makes sense given that the terrorists in that same stage speak in Saudi Arabian dialect. It is significant to note that the emblem on the walls is marked with a gun in between the swords, further cementing the association between Muslims and violence.

In *Battlefield 3* (2011), the Muslim areas and characters are portrayed as violent people and places. For example, in the stage “Thunder Run”, the player encounters an enemy encampment with tanks and rocket artillery in Dasht-e Kavir, Iran. Additionally, in the stage “Fear No Evil”, the leader of the People’s Liberation & Resistance (PLR), Faruk Al-Bashir, is

shown broadcasting the killing of an American soldier and later posting it on the Internet for the world to see. While the weapon-filled enemy base in Iran paints the picture that Muslim-dominated regions such as Iran are violent places, the public and mediatized murder of the American committed by Al-Bashir implies that Muslim people are not only violent individuals, but callous propagandists. In *Medal of Honor* (2010), Muslim soldiers within the Taliban are depicted using unnecessarily aggressive and ruthless tactics during combat. For example, in the stage “First In”, Taliban members are seen using the defenseless bodies of tied up hostages for cover when the player tries to shoot at them. Moreover, in this same stage, Taliban soldiers use a dead man’s body as a bomb when they strap an explosive to it and tie his body to a wheelchair. While war is indeed expected to be violent, the actions of the Taliban are much more violent than those of the American soldiers, painting the picture that Muslim soldiers are more violent than others.

Muslims within *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012) are depicted as violent, or unnecessarily aggressive, as seen in the stage, “Chapter 1: The Evacuation”, where three Farsi-speaking people with guns ambush the player. Their aggression becomes evident when one of the three is heard yelling “f*ck you!” in response to Walker’s offer to aid them. Additionally, in the stage, “Chapter 7: The Battle”, the words, “Freedom grows from bloodied sand” and “Damn the 33rd” are seen spray-painted on walls beside a pile of dead American soldiers. This implies that these soldiers were killed by locals who hate the 33rd Infantry. Another indication that Muslims are violent can be seen in the stage, “Chapter 13: Adams”, when a mob of civilians lynch one of the American soldiers, Lugo, who was sent to help them. Together, these instances present the notion that the residents of Dubai are violent and aggressive people who are hostile even towards those who aim to help them. In *Full Spectrum Warrior* (2004), Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces

commit several severe acts of violence against the local Zeki population. For example, in Chapter 5, the bodies of dozens of dead Zeki citizens are found rotting in a dump in the middle of the streets, having been slaughtered by terrorists. The full extent of the atrocities committed by the terrorists becomes clear in the ending cutscene, where text on screen reads, “Over 23,000 ethnic Zekes are found in mass grave sites scattered across the country”. Another specific example of Muslim characters being violent can be seen in the intro cutscene, when one terrorist takes out a rocket launcher and fires it at a non-hostile NATO vehicle moving along the streets. Due to the fact that Al-Qaeda and the Taliban claim to be Islamic groups, the instances of violence committed by Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the game imply that Islam is a violent religion.

In *Close Combat: First to Fight* (2005), Islamic extremists commit several violent acts throughout the campaign, particularly towards innocent civilians. For instance, in the opening cutscene, it is mentioned that six civilians have been killed by the terrorists. In this same cutscene, terrorists are seen launching a rocket at a building, and opening fire on civilians. Moreover, in the fourth mission, the Atash movement and Lebanese militia invade the American University of Beirut, where many students are located. Lastly, in the text briefing for Mission 10, it is mentioned that General Badr of the Syrian army takes over and threatens a hospital that treats marines. In *Conflict: Desert Storm* (2002), the Iraqi army commits several violent acts against both Arabs and non-Arabs. In addition to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, a specific example of the Iraqi army’s violence towards Arabs can be seen in Mission 8, in which the Iraqi army positions several hostile tanks within Saudi Arabia. Evidence of Iraq’s violence towards non-Arabs can be seen in Mission 7, in which an Iraqi SAM shoots down a US helicopter. This, of course, is in addition to the ongoing violence committed between the Iraqi army and US soldiers

throughout the campaign. Another indication that Muslims are violent is found in the text briefing for Mission 14, in which it is said that the Iraqi army commander, General Aziz, plans on fighting to the last Iraqi soldier, thus dragging out the war.

In *Army of Two* (2008), the Muslim characters and Muslim-dominated region of Somalia are associated with violence. For example, the face of a Somalian man with crossing guns, and skulls with crossed bones painted on the walls of Somalia in the opening mission of the campaign suggest that Somalia is a place that breeds violence. This is reinforced by Abdullahi Mo'Allim, a Somali warlord who uses a gold-plated AK-47, essentially treating the deadly weapon as a customizable toy. Mo'Allim also implies that the Somalian people are violent people, as he tells the protagonists, "This is how we say hello in our country.", while having gunmen surround the player. In *SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs* (2002), members of the Allah Sadikahu terrorist group are depicted behaving violently. For example, in the mission "Prison Break", one terrorist screams "Allahu Akhbar!" which means "God almighty!", when firing his gun at the player. Furthermore, in the mission "Mouth of The Beast", one terrorist says to a group of followers, "We must detonate these bombs... to prove our greatness". This suggests that the Muslim extremists are willing to commit severe acts of violence to prove themselves to Allah. The terrorist group's violent reputation is further indicated in the text brief for the same mission, where Bahir Al-Qadi is described as having a reputation for being a ruthless leader.

In *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2012), Muslim characters are shown either condoning or committing violence. For example, in the mission "Shore Leave", Somali Al-Shabaab pirates detain a US captain as a hostage, and engage in a standoff against the US Navy. Moreover, in the stage "Bump in the Night", Ibrahim al-Najdi shoots Preacher in the head during an interrogation after Preacher makes a remark about Ibrahim's mother. Another instance of Muslim extremists

behaving violently is seen in the stage “Finding Faraz”, when Faraz is killed by an unseen sniper while being interrogated by the player, so that the terrorists can prevent him from leaking valuable information. The association between Muslims and violence is further cemented in the stage “Through the Eyes of Evil”, when Hassan says to his followers, “Some of you may be selected for advanced training to carry the jihad to the infidel lands”. Together, these instances of Arabs committing or condoning acts of violence present the notion that Muslims are violent people. This trend continues in *Arma 2: Operation Arrowhead* (2010), in which the militia headed by Muslim antagonist Mohammed Aziz commits several violent acts throughout the campaign. For example, in Mission 3, one hostage named Joe Harris is found dead at the enemy’s base, having been killed by the militia. Furthermore, in this same mission, the player finds that the base has been rigged with explosives. A local Takistani man soon reveals that he was forced by Aziz’s militia to create the bomb. Together, these instances show that Mohammed Aziz and the Socialist Supreme Bureau of Takistan are willing to commit extreme acts of violence to get what they desire.

Arabs are also shown behaving violently in *Metal Slug Anthology* (2006), as seen in the first mission of the game, where bearded Arabs dressed in traditional Saudi Arabian clothing attack the player with machetes. Moreover, several hostages are seen tied up in ropes throughout the stage, having been captured by the Arabs. Together, the capturing of hostages and aggressive utilization of machetes suggest that Arabs are violent people. Similarly, Iraqi soldiers are shown committing severe acts of violence throughout *Conflict: Desert Storm 2* (2003). This is particularly evident in the mission “Prisoners of War”, in which Iraqi soldiers torture captured US soldiers. In a cutscene for the mission, an Iraqi soldier repeatedly punches a captured US soldier during an interrogation, causing him to bleed significantly. During gameplay following

this, a chair covered in blood is found in an Iraqi prisoner camp, further indicating that the Iraqi soldiers have tortured captured inmates.

Muslims as Anti-American. The fourth common Muslim stereotype found within the games analyzed is Muslims as anti-American. This is seen in *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), as Muslims in the game are presented as hateful towards the West. This is seen in the stage, “The Coup”, when Al-Asad states that the monarchy of Saudi Arabia has been in collusion with the West for self-interest. For this reason, Al-Asad encourages his followers to free themselves from “foreign oppression”, and restore independence to their nation. This means that Al-Asad not only blames the West for the corruption of his nation, but also insists that the West is a foreign oppressor. He then blatantly threatens the West, stating, “Just as they lay waste to our country, we shall lay waste to theirs”. It is in this way that Al-Asad and his Islamic regime are depicted as hateful towards the West. This anti-Western sentiment translates to hatred towards Americans in particular, as America is represented in the game as the dominant expression of the West. This can be seen in the stage, “Charlie Don’t Surf”, where propaganda posters depict Middle Eastern soldiers attacking American soldiers, and enemies proclaim “The Americans!” in fear upon seeing American forces. Similarly, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009) associates Muslim-dominated spaces in the game with hatred towards Americans. For example, in a city in Afghanistan during the “Team Player” stage, the word “infidel” is written on some walls, surrounded by terrorist resistance posters. It is likely that the writing is referring to those that the terrorists are rising up against, those being the Americans. More Muslim-derived anti-American symbolism can be found in the multiplayer map “Afghan”, where posters depicting Middle Eastern troops fighting American troops are plastered across virtual walls.

The stereotyping of Muslims as anti-American continues in *Medal of Honor* (2010), as both the Islamic extremists and the Americans in the game display animosity towards one another. The Americans' hostility towards Muslims is evident during one cutscene, in which a high-ranking American politician recklessly orders an attack on unknown vehicles after being warned that they might be ally forces. Upon realizing that he ordered an attack on allied Afghan National Army (ANA) forces, he dismisses the casualties and orders the American soldiers to move on, as the help of the ANA is unwanted. This implies that the lives of Muslim soldiers are considered by the politician to be expendable. The Islamic extremists' hostility towards Americans is evident in a different cutscene, in which it is mentioned that Al-Qaeda is prepared to bring the fight to American soil, indicating that the Islamic group's primary targets are Americans. Anti-American sentiment is found in *Army of Two* (2008) as well, as the majority of the campaign's events revolve around the Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the twin towers on September 11th. A brief glimpse of the attacks are seen on a television screen during one of the game's cutscenes. Another indication that Muslims are anti-American is presented in the Somalia mission, when Mo'Allim says to the main characters, "Well look who it is... Johnny American. You think you own the whole world. That you can go wherever you please, take whatever you want. But this is not your country". This dialogue suggests that Somalians —or at least Mo'Allim and his followers— hold a sense of resentment towards Americans.

Muslims as Foreign. The fifth common Muslim stereotype found within the games analyzed is Muslims as foreign. This stereotype is found within *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), as Muslims of many nationalities outside the United States are shown, but no American soldiers or civilians are depicted as Muslim. Throughout the campaign, the player visits several Muslim-populated locations such as Al Qunfudhah and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait City in

Kuwait, and Basra in Iraq. In each of these locales, Arabic writing and jihadist posters can be seen on the street signs, walls, and shops, indicating that these are places inhabited by Muslims. At no point in the game, however, are any American Muslims represented. Similarly, in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009), Muslims from several countries other than the United States are represented. Muslim-dominated countries visited during the campaign and multiplayer include the Tian Shan Mountain Range in Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, and Karachi, Pakistan. However, Muslim Americans remain unrepresented, as the American locations such as Washington D.C. and Arcadia County show no signs of Muslim inhabitants. Once again, the Muslim is cast as an un or non-American other, not part of the American citizenry.

The trend continues in *Battlefield 3* (2011), as the player visits Iraq, Iran, and Azerbaijan, all of which are predominantly Muslim-majority states. However, unlike the aforementioned places, the New York City stage in the game includes no sign that any of the residents are Muslim. Therefore, Muslim-Americans are entirely unrepresented in the game, as a focus is aimed particular at Muslims outside the US. In *Close Combat: First to Fight* (2005), the enemies within the campaign come from various Muslim-dominated nation-states. For instance, Akhbar Al-Soud and his militia are Lebanese, Major Abdullah Bin Katan and his Special Forces are Iranian, and the army led by General Badr is Syrian. Additionally, General Badr himself is Yemeni, further indicating that Muslims come from foreign countries and lands, all outside of the North American region.

In *Conflict: Desert Storm* (2002), the player visits several Muslim-dominated countries outside of North America, such as Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, no American characters are portrayed as Arab, as the Arabic-speaking characters are of foreign nationalities. For instance, General Aziz and his soldiers are Iraqi, while the Arab-speaking civilians in

Mission 2 are Kuwaiti. Similarly, the Muslim characters in *Army of Two* (2008) each belong to non-American nationalities, as Abdullahi Mo'Allim is Somalian, Ali Youssef is Iraqi, and Cebu Mohammed is Chinese. The only Muslim character whose nationality is not made clear is Mohammed Al-Habib; however, his positioning in Afghanistan suggests that he too, is not American. *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2012) follows suit, as the player visits several Muslim-dominated regions outside of North America, such as Somalia, Pakistan, Dubai, and Yemen. However, no representation for Muslims within North America can be found in the game.

In *Battlefield 2* (2005), the Middle Eastern Coalition (MEC) is made up entirely of foreign Arab nations. This includes Lebanon, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Syria, and areas within the Arabian Peninsula. Consequently, the MEC consists of Arab soldiers, as evidenced by the Arabic speech that can be heard from MEC soldiers in battle. However, no American Arabs are represented, as soldiers from the United States Marine Corps are solely English-speaking. By representing the foreign MEC as Arab, and the United States Marine Corps as not, it is implied that Muslims are explicitly foreign. Similarly, only Muslims outside of North America are represented in *Conflict: Desert Storm 2* (2003). This is evident by the fact that the non-American characters in the game are the Iraqi soldiers and Emir Jaber III of Kuwait, while the American characters are the US Delta Force, none of whom are implied to be Muslim.

Muslims as Uncivilized. The sixth common Muslim stereotype found within the games analyzed is Muslims as uncivilized. This stereotype is found within *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), as the Muslim-dominated locales visited within the game are represented as war-town desert cities surrounded by broken buildings and paves of sand. This is the case for all Muslim-dominated cities in the game, including Al Qunfudhah, Riyadh, Kuwait City, and Basra. Furthermore, in the stage, “Charlie Don’t Surf”, which takes place in Kuwait City, a sign near

the road depicts a picture of a camel in place of where a sign of a car would typically be expected. This suggests that the people in Kuwait City rely on less sophisticated forms of transportation than Westerners do, further implying that Muslim-dominated cities are less developed than Western cities.

Similar to *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), the Muslim-dominated regions visited in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009) are presented as less technologically developed and more damaged than the American regions. This is evident in stages such as “Team Player”, where Afghanistan is presented as a war-torn desert land with broken buildings. The American soldiers are even shown recklessly exploding one large building as if the Afghani city’s buildings are disposable. Moreover, cross signs depicting pictures of camels and goats are seen on the road, suggesting that unlike modern regions in the West that use cars for travel, Muslim-dominated areas such as Afghanistan are reliant on camels and goats for transportation. In addition to “Team Player”, stages such as “The Enemy of My Enemy” and “Endgame” also present Afghanistan as an uncivilized country, portraying land covered in dust and uninhabited caves. This is in stark contrast to the modern-looking cities in the American stages of the campaign, such as “Exodus”, where Arcadia County is shown to have fully-intact houses and clean neighbourhoods, despite being in the middle of a warzone.

The Muslim-dominated areas within *Battlefield 3* (2011) are presented as destroyed underdeveloped wastelands, as evidenced in the stage “Operation Swordbreaker”, in which Iraq is depicted as a desert land with broken buildings and a destroyed school. Similarly, in the stage, “Operation Guillotine”, Terhan, Iran is also presented as a destroyed city with broken buildings, ravaged cars, and graffiti-plastered walls. The trend continues in the stage “Thunder Run”, as Dasht-e Kavir, Iran is filled with ramshackle buildings that appear to be under construction, and

nowhere close to being complete. In contrast to this, Paris, France, and New York City, USA, are depicted as fully developed cities with intact buildings and unscathed infrastructures. As evidenced from these examples, there is a stark contrast between the Muslim-dominated countries and non-Muslim-dominated locales presented in the game. Similarly, the Muslim-dominated country of Afghanistan is presented as a desolate wasteland in *Medal of Honor* (2010). This is seen in the stage “First In”, in which Gardez, Afghanistan is depicted as a desert with dirty, broken houses, destroyed vehicles, and goats walking around the street. Likewise, in the stage “Breaking Bagram”, the Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan is presented as a desert wasteland with broken houses. This continues in the stage “Dorothy’s a B*tch”, as Shahikot Valley is covered in mountains, and goats are seen walking around. Together, these representations of Afghanistan as a place of dirt, broken homes, and freely walking animals imply that the Muslim-dominated region is less civilized than the sprawling urban cities found in America.

In *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012), Dubai is presented as a demolished and dysfunctional city. Due to both the deadly sandstorm and the 33rd Infantry’s takeover, Dubai is depicted as a city that was once prosperous, but is no longer so. This is evident by the abundance of sand paved across the land, and broken buildings. In the stage, “Chapter 7: The Battle”, one area within the city resembles a junkyard, as broken cars and heaps of trash lay covered in dust. Moreover, in “Chapter 1: The Evacuation”, the player passes through broken-down street signs and a destroyed news station, indicating that while once developed, Dubai has now become an uninhabitable city. In *Full Spectrum Warrior* (2004), the state of Zekistan is portrayed as a war-torn broken-down country. In addition to the broken buildings with dirty decaying walls scattered throughout every mission of the campaign, many buildings have graffiti plastered

across them, particularly in Chapter 7. Moreover, unlike most Western states where animals are typically found in zoos, farms, or inside people's homes, animals in Zekistan are seen running freely around the streets. This is seen in the intro cutscene, when a wild dog is shown walking without an owner on the street. Moreover, in Chapter 1, chickens are seen running loose around the city, while a large animal resembling a horse or bull is seen lying dead on the ground. This suggests that the Muslim-dominated nation of Zekistan is in a state of disorder.

In *Close Combat: First to Fight* (2005) the Muslim-dominated region of Lebanon is depicted as a dirty, war-torn country. This is perhaps most evident in the fifteenth mission, in which almost all the buildings are severely damaged, while massive heaps of rubble cover the ground. Additionally, in the first mission, broken cars and fallen barrels are seen scattered throughout the streets, while the third mission shows broken windows and civilians running around in panic. Together, these depictions portray Lebanon as a country of chaos, where war has stripped the nation of all civility. The Muslim-dominated regions within *Conflict: Desert Storm* (2002) are also portrayed as war-torn sand-covered wastelands. This is seen in Mission 2, where the scenery in Kuwait consists of dirty houses, broken buildings, and destroyed vehicles. Similarly, Saudi Arabia is depicted as a dirty broken-down land with garbage lying on the rooftops of broken buildings in Mission 8. Lastly, Mission 2 depicts civilians running around the streets of Kuwait in panic, indicating that unlike a peaceful civilized nation, Kuwait is a country of constant unrest and havoc.

The trend continues in *Army of Two* (2008), as Muslim-dominated regions such as Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan are presented as dirty, war-torn nations. For instance, in the opening mission of the game, Somalia is shown to have dirty houses with broken floors and walls, and destroyed vehicles in the middle of the streets. Similarly, in their respective missions,

both Iraq and Afghanistan contain dirty, broken buildings with heaps of trash and dust on the ground. In contrast to this, the Miami mission depicts Miami, Florida as a clean city with intact buildings, unlike the Muslim-dominated locales in the game. The Muslims as uncivilized stereotype is presented in *SOCOM US Navy SEALs* (2002) as well, as the Muslim-dominated country of Turkmenistan is depicted as a barren desert wasteland. This is evident in both the “Prison Break” mission and the “Deathblow” mission, where Turkmenistan is shown to have dirty houses with broken walls and missing ceilings. Additionally, in the “Mouth of The Beast” mission, men are seen hiding out in caves, further suggesting that Turkmenistan is an uninhabitable nation.

In *Arma 2: Operation Arrowhead* (2010), the fictitious Muslim-inhabited land of Takistan is depicted as a war-torn desert wasteland. This is evidenced in the intro cutscene, as news footage of the conflict within Takistan shows the country in a state of war, with constant explosions and gunfire appearing on screen. Furthermore, Mission 1 and Mission 3 contain dirty, broken buildings and abandoned shops within the barren desert of Takistan. Together, these depictions imply that the fictional Muslim-dominated region of Takistan has lost all civility and infrastructure, presumably due to the war. Likewise, in *Metal Slug Anthology* (2006), the Muslim-dominated region of Saudi Arabia is presented as a barren desert with dirty, broken homes. This is evident in the first mission, where small dirty huts made of wood and cloth occupy the background scenery. Additionally, enemy Arab soldiers are seen riding camels when attacking the player, as opposed to the Rebel Army soldiers who are seen riding tanks in the same stage. This contrast between Arabs who ride camels and non-Arabs who ride tanks implies that Muslims are not as civilized as non-Muslims are.

Battlefield 2 (2005) also depicts Muslim-dominated regions as barren war-torn wastelands, as most of the Middle Eastern maps involve desert terrain, in contrast to the urban and woodland terrain of maps in China. Among the Middle Eastern maps, “Mashtuur City” and “Sharqi Peninsula” contain dirty broken buildings, while “Gulf of Oman” and “Highway Tampa” depict broken fences and decaying walls. Moreover, “Road to Jalalabad” contains destroyed cars on fire, while “Kubra Dam” depicts a significant amount of buildings undergoing construction. Together, these instances suggest that the Middle Eastern locations mentioned are uninhabitable in comparison to the Chinese maps, such as “Dalian Plant” and “Daqing Oilfields”.

Muslims as Untrustworthy. The seventh common Muslim stereotype found within the games analyzed is Muslims as untrustworthy. This stereotype is found within *Battlefield 3* (2011), as the Muslim characters in the game are depicted as deceitful. For instance in the stage “Uprising”, a People’s Liberation & Resistance (PLR) soldier is heard on a loudspeaker claiming that all injured American soldiers will receive treatment for their injuries if they come out into the open. However, upon spotting the American soldiers, the PLR soldiers immediately engage in a gunfight, revealing that the peace offering was fraudulent. Additionally, in the stage “Fear No Evil”, Al-Bashir is seen speaking into a camera saying, “You come to our country to murder us, yet we are the terrorists”. While Al-Bashir seems to be playing the role of a victim, in reality, he plans to kill many innocent people with the use of nuclear weapons. Therefore, Al-Bashir’s attempt to present himself as an innocent victim is dishonest.

Muslims are also depicted as untrustworthy in *Medal of Honor* (2010), as the only allied Muslim character in the game turns out to be mischievous. In the stage, “First In”, the American forces are aided by an ex-Taliban member named Tariq. However, it is implied that Tariq deceives the Americans, as the SEALs’ cover is given away. The American soldiers reinforce the

idea that Tariq is untrustworthy when they question his ties with the Taliban, despite the fact that he was just held captive as a hostage by the Taliban. Whether or not Tariq did indeed betray the Americans, the fact that they suspect him to be working with the very people who held him hostage only minutes ago suggests that the Americans hold an inherent distrust for the Muslim character.

Counter-Stereotypes. Interestingly, while few and far in between, some of the games analyzed contain counter-stereotypes to the ten common Muslim stereotypes. For example, *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012) presents Muslims as non-Arab, thus challenging the stereotype that all Muslims are Arab. This is evident by the fact that several enemy combatants in the game are heard speaking Farsi, such as in “Chapter 1: The Evacuation”. Another counter-stereotype —also found in *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012)— is that Americans are presented as terrorists, thus challenging the stereotype that Muslims are terrorists. While the player does encounter some hostile Dubai citizens, the game makes it very clear that the primary antagonists are the 33rd Infantry, who have committed several atrocities against the local Arab and Muslim inhabitants. In a somewhat convoluted twist, the US’s main enemy is itself, as for the majority of the game, the good Americans of US Delta Force spend most of their time fighting the bad Americans of the 33rd Infantry.

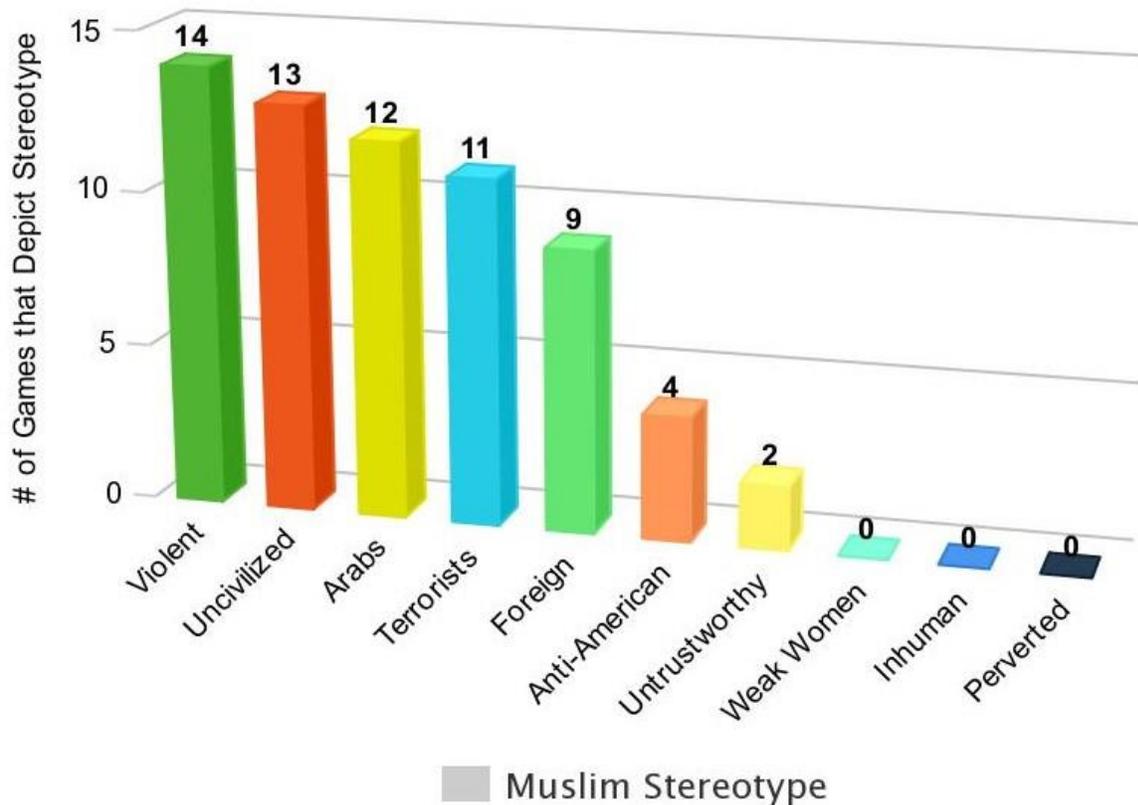
Another counter-stereotype is found in *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2012), as it challenges the notion that Muslims are uncivilized. While films and television shows have frequently presented Muslim-dominated regions as war-torn barren wastelands in states of chaos, *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2012) presents some Muslim-dominated regions as the opposite. Admittedly, Somalia and Darra Adamkhel, Pakistan are indeed depicted as dirty, broken down places with heaps of trash on the ground, as seen in the stages “Shore Leaves” and “Finding

Faraz”. However, Kirachi, Pakistan, and Dubai are presented as lively cities with open shops, intact buildings, functioning traffic, and an uninterrupted civilian population roaming the streets. This is evident in the stages “Hot Pursuit” and “Hello and Dubai”. By presenting these two Muslim-dominated regions as places of stability and civility, *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2012) offers a unique depiction of Muslim-dominated states, thus challenging the notion that Muslims are uncivilized.

The last counter-stereotype is found within *Arma 2: Operation Arrowhead* (2010), which depicts Muslims as pro-American, rather than anti-American. This is evidenced by the Takistani residents’ willingness to both trust and cooperate with American soldiers. One example of Muslims trusting Americans is seen in Mission 2, when local villagers request aid from the American soldiers upon seeing them. When the soldiers ask the villagers what they need, one villager named Karim Masood says, “Good American... go kill militia. Allahu akbar!”. An example of Muslims cooperating with Americans is seen in Mission 2, when a Karzeghi warrior named Latif Spanta tells US soldiers where he believes civilian captives are located. Furthermore, in Mission 3, a local man named Sadid Zafar tells the US soldiers where the enemies are located, and what weapons they are using. Zafar even displays concern for the Americans’ safety, as he says “No shoot! Americans! We friends... Careful Americans, danger”. By depicting Takistani and Karzeghi citizens assisting US soldiers, *Arma 2: Operation Arrowhead* (2010) counters the stereotype that Muslims are anti-American.

V. Summary of Findings

Table 1: Representation of Muslim Stereotypes in Games



As indicated in *Table 1*, of the ten common Muslim stereotypes found within films and television shows, seven are found within the current sample of video games. In the 15 war games featuring Muslim peoples, places and cultures, the stereotype depicted most often is Muslims as violent, as 93% (14/15) of games convey this stereotype. The second most commonly depicted stereotype is Muslims as uncivilized, as this is conveyed in 87% (13/15) of games. Muslims are portrayed as Arabs in 80% (12/15) of games, and terrorists in 73% (11/15). The next most depicted stereotype is Muslims as foreign, as this is presented in 60% (9/15) of games. Of the seven stereotypes found within the games, Muslims as anti-American and Muslims as untrustworthy are depicted the least, with Muslims being presented as anti-American in 27%

(4/15) of games, and untrustworthy in 13% (2/15). Out of the ten stereotypes identified in films and television shows, three are not found in any of the video games (Muslims as inhuman, Muslims as perverted, and Muslim women as weak/unworthy).

It should also be noted that counter-stereotypes are found in 20% (3/15) of the games analyzed. These three games are *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012), *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2012), and *Arma 2: Operation Arrowhead* (2010). *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2012) and *Arma 2: Operation Arrowhead* (2010) each contain one counter-stereotype, with the former depicting Muslims as civilized, and the latter depicting Muslims as pro-American. *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012) contains two counter-stereotypes: Muslims as non-Arab, and non-Muslims as terrorists.

With these findings in mind, the paratextual analysis of the 15 war games indicates that even though these games contain negative stereotypes of Muslims, they are critically and commercially successful. An examination of the games' review scores and sales figures reveals that 12 of the 15 games were both critically and commercially successful, as they sold over 1 million copies and received a positive review score of at least 7/10 from professional video game critics. Only two games were critically but not commercially successful, as they sold less than 1 million copies (*Close Combat: First to Fight* [2005], and *Metal Slug Anthology* [2006]), and only one game was commercially but not critically successful, as it scored less than a 7/10 (*Medal of Honor: Warfighter* [2012]). Therefore, the 15 war games analyzed were able to achieve widespread acclaim and acceptance in society irregardless of their negative stereotyping of Muslims.

VI. Discussion

a) Addressing the Research Questions

This study has aimed to investigate how Muslims are depicted in war video games, and whether or not these depictions of Muslims perpetuate or challenge longstanding and current stereotypes of Muslim people in popular culture (and in the broader Western and US society). In response to the first research question, the analysis of the 15 war games has revealed that Muslims are depicted negatively in war video games. Seven out of the ten popular Muslim stereotypes found in films and television shows were identified in the games selected for study, as Muslims are portrayed as Arab, violent, uncivilized, terroristic, anti-American, foreign, and untrustworthy. While the depiction of Muslims as Arab, foreign, and uncivilized serve to paint Muslims as distant ‘others’ to the common American individual, the violent, untrustworthy, terroristic, and anti-American stereotypes insinuate that Muslims are not just different from Americans, but also dangerous and threatening to US security. While a few counter-stereotypes were identified in the games, these were comparatively rare. These findings suggest that Muslims are indeed demonized in video games similar to their demonization in films and television shows. Therefore, in response to the second research question, the depictions of Muslims in video games perpetuate longstanding and current stereotypes of Muslim people in popular culture and society.

The negative stereotypes of Muslims that films and television shows propagate should not be treated lightly, as they intersect with a real world context in which the US wages the Global War on Terror across Muslim-majority countries and a moment in US history when rising anti-Muslim sentiment and hate crimes against Muslims is significant and growing (Hussain, 2010; Borell, 2015). The negative depictions of Muslims in war video games perpetuate and

solidify these stereotypes, and may contribute to contemporary Islamophobia. Indeed, if negative Muslim stereotypes presented in films and television shows have the capacity to perpetuate a climate of Islamophobia, then so too do these same stereotypes in video games.

The potential implications of these findings are significant, as the virtual interactions with simulated Muslims in video games might perpetuate Islamophobic ideas among those who play them in a context of war. Following Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding Model of Communication, the negative representations of Muslims encoded into these video games may be decoded by those who play them in at least three different ways: (1) dominant hegemonic decoding –players uncritically accept the preferred meaning of the game's representation of Muslims; (2) negotiated decoding –players slightly dissent from the preferred meaning of the game's representation of Muslims; and, (3) oppositional decoding –in which viewers criticize the dominant or preferred meaning of the game's representation of Muslims. Similar to the ways in which viewers decode messages in films and television shows, the millions of people that play war video games may decode messages about and images of Muslims within games in any one of the three aforementioned ways. Through the process of dominant hegemonic decoding, players might uncritically accept the negative stereotypes of Muslims within the games as truth. Players who do so are therefore more inclined to develop resentment towards Muslims, as they may believe that Muslim people are indeed violent, terroristic, and anti-American as the video games suggest.

The digital stereotyping of Muslims is a social problem. The continuing and global growth of the multi-billion dollar video game industry exposes millions of North Americans (and people around the world) to these negative representations of Muslims (Electronic Software Association, 2015). Consequently, the virtual interactions with simulated Muslims in these video

games may perpetuate Islamophobic ideas among millions of players, thus exacerbating the current climate of militarism against Muslims and Islamophobia within North America. In addition to contributing to Islamophobia within North America, negative depictions of Muslims in video games may have consequences for Muslims in Muslim-majority states as well. This is due to the fact that war games are effective tools at garnering support for the Global War on Terror, in which Muslim-majority nations have been invaded, occupied and bombed for the purposes of advancing and securing American and Western interests (Sides & Gross, 2013; Said, 1994). As noted by Mirrlees (2016), military shooters are used by the Department of Defense as a means to create “virtual-citizen-soldiers”, and thus motivate players to support the US military. Through exposure to the seemingly authentic war experiences simulated within war games, players experience modalities of realism in which the American military becomes associated with heroism (Mirrlees, 2014). In the case of the 15 war games analyzed, players are constantly exposed to war stories in which the American military personnel fights against foreign Islamic threats. The message being promoted within these games is clear: Americans are good and Muslims are bad.

The potential influence of these video games is significant, as Hussain (2010) notes that when the only Islam-related images available on television are violent, then the violent actions of a minority of Muslims become exaggerated. Similarly, when video games depict Muslims as violent, terroristic, anti-American, and untrustworthy, and these are the dominant images of Muslims put forth by war games, then players may begin to believe that all Muslims are like this, and that the violent actions of some Muslim terrorists are representative of every Muslim, everywhere. As a consequence, people who play Islamophobic war games may be more likely to develop a sense of devotion to America and the US military, and imagine themselves to be

patriotic Americans by expressing hostility and accepting violence toward Muslims. At the most extreme level, this sense of devotion may eventually lead to recruitment with the American military, for the purposes of waging wars against or combatting “dangerous” Muslim states and peoples abroad. On a less severe level, this sense of devotion may at the very least motivate players to support the Global War on Terror, in which the US wages a cross-border war against terrorists in Muslim-majority States.

b) Significance to Criminology

Certainly, the findings presented in this study are relevant to communication and media studies, as they point to popular culture’s power to represent and misrepresent minority groups in North American society. However, these findings hold special significance to the field of criminology for several reasons. First, through their contribution to the already existing climate of Islamophobia in society, the negative and often hateful depictions of Muslims in war video games have the potential to increase the likelihood of hate crimes against Muslims (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2018; Borell, 2015). Virtually killing Muslims may prime people for real anti-Muslim violence, or at least, desensitize people to the harm being done to Muslims in the US and around the world. Consequently, these video games may influence impressionable minds or confirm the Islamophobic bias held by many on the far right and foment the anti-Muslim hatred of the right-wing extremist movement. This means that the depiction of Muslims as dangerous ‘others’ in video games may perpetuate Islamophobic notions among large audiences. This is especially problematic, as Muslims are more likely to experience hate crimes when the surrounding climate is one in which Islamophobia is prevalent (Borell, 2015). It is for this reason that criminologists should be concerned about the negative depiction of Muslims in war video

games, as these depictions have the potential to perpetuate a climate of Islamophobia and thus motivate hate crimes against Muslims.

Second, video games' portrayal of Muslims as dangerous may increase the likelihood for "moral panic". The concept of moral panic has been significant to the field of criminology ever since its conception by Cohen in 1973. According to Cohen (1973), a moral panic is a general feeling of fear towards a perceived threat held by a large number of people. Moral panics manifest due to a culmination of five ingredients: public concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility (Cohen, 1973). The first two components —public concern and hostility— are of most relevance to the present study, as negative stereotypes in video games have the potential to promote both. The first component, public concern, is defined as a heightened level of anxiety towards a specific issue, which might arise due to media attention (Cohen, 1973). Possibly, the depiction of Muslims as dangerous threats and enemies of the American way of life in video games places unnecessary public attention on and whips up angst about Muslims. This leads to the second component of moral panics, hostility, which involves a level of resentment towards a specific person or group of people due to their apparent wrongdoings (Cohen, 1973). Certainly, the negative attention placed on Muslims from the way they are depicted as violent, terroristic, and anti-American in war games may contribute to a sense of resentment towards Muslims among the public, further building the foundation for a hateful moral panic surrounding Muslims.

The formation of a moral panic surrounding Muslims is indeed relevant to the field of criminology, as moral panics have been shown to influence laws and policing practices in negative ways (Prado, 2011). For example, in the 1990s, a moral panic surrounding the motorcycle gang, the Hell's Angels, arose in Quebec, causing intimidation among members of

the public and the police (Prado, 2011). Due to the police's increased anxiety towards the Hell's Angels, police officers altered the ways in which they interacted with motorcycle gangs by increasing their use of force against them (Prado, 2011). Similarly, a heightened sense of anxiety towards Muslims may intensify the policing of Muslims, as a disproportionate amount of public resources and national security projects may be allocated to combatting the perceived threat of Muslims as terrorists at the expense of focusing on other possible terrorist threats, such as white supremacist and neo-Nazi hate groups.

Indeed, the portrayal of Muslims as violent, terroristic, anti-American, and untrustworthy in video games may contribute or give popular legitimacy to the State's construction of Muslims as national security threats. One significant aspect that is prevalent within a climate of Islamophobia is a heightened fear of Muslims (Gottschalk and Greenberg, 2008). That is to say, that a climate in which Islamophobia is promoted is also one in which a fear of Muslims is fostered. As a response to the public's heightened fear of Muslims, States have responded to the public's perceived threat of Muslims using coercive measures. Examples of real world policing of Muslims by post-9/11 security States include the increased surveillance of Muslims both in North America and internationally.

The increased surveillance of Muslims in the United States traces back to 2001, immediately following the events of 9/11. With the emergence of the Global War on Terror, the FBI shifted its counterterrorism priorities to focus primarily on monitoring Muslim American citizens (often in violation of their privacy). In the decade following 9/11, homeland security spending increased from \$16 billion to \$69.1 billion--a 300% rise (Alimahomed, 2014). A portion of these funds was allocated towards the intensive screening of individuals from Muslim-majority countries (Alimahomed, 2014). In 2002, the National Security Entry-Exit Registration

System (NSEERS) was initiated by the Department of Homeland Security in an effort to combat terrorism (Alimahomed, 2014). The purpose of the NSEERS was to register, fingerprint, and photograph foreign nationals from countries that were considered to support terrorists (Alimahomed, 2014). Between 2002 and 2003, the system collected registration information from over 80,000 males living in the United States who were from Muslim-majority countries (Alimahomed, 2014). This surveillance strategy should be of special concern to criminologists not only for its outright criminalization of Muslims, but also because it is a counterproductive crime control technique. As stated by Kundnani (2014), gathering large quantities of information makes it more difficult for law enforcement agencies to accurately connect material to specific criminal acts. Essentially, relying on an influx of data causes intelligence agencies to be less effective at detecting actual terrorist plots, as important information is lost among a myriad of useless data (Kundnani, 2014). It is in this way that the NSEERS proved to be a counteractive tool for crime control.

The increased surveillance of Muslims in the United States continued in 2006 when the FBI counterterrorism unit produced its first significant report on 'homegrown radicalization' (Alimahomed, 2014). The report defined several indicators of pre-radicalization, most of which described typical Muslim citizens. Such identification factors included the presence of facial hair, attendance at mosques, and wearing traditional Muslim clothing (Alimahomed, 2014). The potential adverse effects of this demonization are discussed by Kundnani (2014), who argues persuasively that the State's othering and ramped up policing of Muslims, and the alienation of Muslims within American society due to these coercive practices, has the potential to foster terrorism rather than prevent it. This is supported by several major criminological theories such as Durkheim's (1951) theory of anomie and Becker's (1963) labelling theory. In short, the

theories posit that those who are made to feel abnormal or morally different from the rest of society are more likely to embrace criminal behaviour (Durkheim, 1951; Becker, 1963).

Therefore, the increased surveillance of Muslims within North America should warrant concern among criminologists for two reasons: (a) the increased surveillance of Muslims is itself a practice of crime control, and (b) the resulting alienation of Muslims could exacerbate terror-related crimes.

Additional evidence of increased surveillance of Muslims can be seen not just in North America, but also in countries overseas. According to a study conducted by Cherney and Murphy (2016), many participants in a sample of 104 Australian Muslim adults admitted that they had been commonly stopped and questioned at an Australian airport in the past (Cherney and Murphy, 2016). Similarly, Muslims in Britain have experienced increased surveillance as well. According to discussion groups commissioned by the Independent Police Complaints Commission, British Muslims have reported feelings of being increasingly targeted by police since 9/11, both formally and informally (Thiel, 2009; Choudhury and Fenwick 2011). Such feelings may be the result of recent changes in Britain's national security legislation, which have increased the frequency in which Muslims come into contact with police forces (Blackwood, Hopkins, and Reicher, 2013). More specifically, Section 44 of the Terrorism Act (2000) grants police the ability to stop and search individuals in certain locations without requiring 'reasonable suspicion' (Blackwood, Hopkins, and Reicher, 2013). This has increased Muslims' subjugation to 'stop and search' procedures, causing them to encounter police more often (Blackwood, Hopkins, and Reicher, 2013). Clearly, in the post-9/11 context of the Global War on Terror, Muslims have become a stigmatized minority and subject to intense surveillance and policing (Cherney and Murphy, 2016). The negative stereotyping and demonization of Muslims as threats

to American and Western national security by the war-themed video games analyzed in this study do nothing to curb the growing moral panic surrounding Muslims in US and Western society in the present age. In fact, these games seem to prey up non-Muslim anxieties about Muslims and perpetuate a climate of Islamophobia that continues to heat up, and by doing so, they might exacerbate the moral panic surrounding Muslims, and encourage broad public support for the national Security State's heightened surveillance and over-policing of Muslim people both within North America and worldwide.

VII. Conclusion

a) Limitations

The present study of how war-themed video games convey negative stereotypes of Muslims is not without its limitations, and these limitations will now be discussed. First, though the current study focuses primarily on depictions of Muslims, many of the representations explored in this study more accurately depict Arabs. As with most representations of Middle Eastern people in television shows and films, video games often do not specify that the characters depicted are Muslim. Instead, video games tend to imply that characters are Muslim by placing these characters in Muslim-dominated countries and presenting them as Arabic speakers. While speaking Arabic does not indicate that a person is Muslim, the issue is that video games fail to challenge the common misconception that all Muslims are Arab and all Arabs are Muslim (Shaheen, 2003). This is evident by the fact that some of the games analyzed in this study depict characters speaking Arabic even when they are in non-Arabic speaking nations, such as Afghanistan or Pakistan. Therefore, by representing characters as Arabic-speakers living in Muslim-dominated countries, video games strongly insinuate that the characters depicted are Muslim. Nevertheless, because video games rarely explicitly mention that characters are Muslim, the representations explored in this study may more accurately reflect Arabs rather than Muslims exclusively.

Another limitation with the current study is that claims regarding the cause and effect relationship between video game depictions and players' attitudes were avoided. In other words, the present study does not subscribe to "media effects" paradigms, nor does it try to assess the effect that negative depictions of Muslims in video games might actually have on players' attitudes toward and beliefs about Muslims. This is because the notion that any media or cultural

product has a direct effect on how someone thinks and behaves is methodologically and theoretically problematic (Gauntlett 2018), and even if this were not the case, such a cause and effect assessment would require the intensive measuring of players' attitudes following their game-play experience and exposure to the stereotypes of Muslims. Instead, this study's focus is aimed towards discussing the potential contribution that negative depictions of Muslims in video games make to the already existing climate of Islamophobia in North America, and throughout much of the West. Rather than argue that war games unilaterally cause Islamophobia, the present study argues that negative depictions in video games contribute to a climate of Islamophobia that has been long existent in the United States, and across the Western world.

Admittedly, avoiding the notion that video game stereotypes of Muslims directly shape or cause players to hold stereotypical ideas about Muslims means that there is an opportunity to undertake future studies of the complex and often contradictory relationship between war video games and players, virtual animosity toward and violence against Muslims in video games, and real hatred and violence against Muslims in society. So, while this study has demonstrated that video games communicate negative stereotypes of Muslims in a time in which the US wages war in Muslim majority countries, in which Islamophobic ideology is pervasive, and in which hate crimes against Muslims continue to increase, it does not conclude that video games are solely responsible for these problems.

b) Summative Statements and Future Research

The current study set out to examine the depiction of Muslims in 15 of the most popular war-themed video games in the post-9/11 era. Findings indicate that Muslims are demonized in video games just as they are in films and television shows, as Muslims are commonly depicted as threats to America and the West. Findings also reveal that the negative representation of

Muslims in video games perpetuates longstanding and current stereotypes of Muslim people in popular culture, as the majority of stereotypes found within films and television shows are also found within the 15 games analyzed. Therefore, war-themed video games contribute to the already existing climate of Islamophobia within North America, thus perpetuating the likelihood for moral panics about, the surveillance and over-policing of, and hate crimes against Muslims. These trends should be especially concerning for critical criminologists and anyone interested in living in an inclusive multicultural society, where all peoples, regardless of their culture or religion, may thrive.

Additional concern should be warranted by the fact that exposure to these stereotypes may encourage militaristic anti-Muslim sentiments among players. As evidenced by the fact that these are war games that immerse players in and glorify the violence of the US State in world affairs, the simulated interactions between heroic American soldiers and villainized Muslims may facilitate a sense that to be a patriotic citizen or a member of the US military, one must hate or want to kill Muslims. But this is an unfair idea, as Muslim-Americans have served, and continue to serve, in the US military. In any case, war video games help the US State garner support for the Global War on Terror and normalize the American military's near permanent war across Muslim-majority states.

Ideally, the findings presented in this study and their potential consequences should be considered by both developers and consumers of war games. Developers should be aware that the ways they choose to represent groups of people can have real world influences, as video games are products of education just as much as they are products of entertainment. As for consumers, it is imperative that those who play video games understand that their contents are fictional. At the very least, one should understand that the violent and terroristic Muslim

characters found within war games are often not in any way representative of the majority of real Muslim people who live in North America and around the world. In this regard, there is a need for future research on popular and digital media representations of Muslims that develop strategies and tactics for probing and countering such negative, libelous, hateful, and false depictions of Muslims in video games. By addressing the ways in which depictions of North American religious minority groups such as Muslims are encoded into video games, and imagining concrete strategies and tactics for countering these negative representations, researchers can work toward building a more harmonious and inclusive society than this one.

In developing strategies to counter the negative representations of Muslims in video games, attention should be paid to how feminists have combatted sexist images of women in the very same medium. Similar to how Muslim characters are often depicted negatively in video games, so too are women, as female characters are often represented in video games as scantily clad sexual objects (Bègue, Sarda, Gentile, Bry, & Roché, 2017). In their fight to combat sexism in video games, feminists have pressured the video game industry to limit the sexist stereotyping of women (Bonenfant, and Tre´panier-Jobin, 2017). Specific pressure tactics include the boycotting of video games that sexualize women, and the demand for more diverse, empowering representations of female characters (Shaw, 2017). By applying similar pressure tactics to the video game developers responsible for creating war-themed video games containing negative stereotypes of Muslims, consumers can take a firm stance against Islamophobia and encourage developers to stop negatively stereotyping Muslims in their games. While Hollywood has faced pressure from American Muslims to stop stereotyping Muslims in films and television shows, the video game industry has yet to face similar pressure (Rose, 2016). By being held accountable for

the content presented in their video games, developers might become more cautious about how they choose to represent people and places.

It is also worth noting that the presentation of more counter-stereotypes such as the few found in the war games analyzed may be effective in discouraging Islamophobia among players. While there are some anti-war war games that discourage war in general (*This War of Mine* [2014], *Cannon Fodder* [1993]), there are no anti-war war games featuring Americans and non-American Muslims working together to combat the horrors of war, and certainly no anti-war war games in which Americans and non-American Muslims wage peace. Indeed, the presentation of pro-Muslim themes within war-themed video games may counteract the negative depictions that currently permeate the genre. Nevertheless, the development of more concrete strategies to combat negative depictions in video games is necessary. Whether it be through discouraging developers from infusing their games with negative stereotypes, or through encouraging the presentation of counter-stereotypes in games, such efforts may prove to be significantly effective in combatting Islamophobia.

Of course, provoking such a change within the video game industry would require that both game developers and players are made aware of the potential implications discussed in this study. It is therefore necessary to address the negative stereotyping of Muslims within war-themed games publicly, in such a way that will attract the attention of those working within the video game industry. This may be achieved through various forms of lobbying. For example, writing to news outlets regarding the video game industry's negative stereotyping of Muslims may encourage news coverage of the phenomenon, thereby informing the public of the issue. Another method of raising awareness to the negative stereotyping of Muslims within war games is to support the development of an educational documentary on the matter (one in which the

findings discussed in this study are presented). The development of such a documentary, as well as the publication of a story by the news media might gain the attention of both developers and players, and push them to change. Surely, lobbying for change in these ways may encourage video game developers to join the discussion, if not for genuine concern then for the desire to avert negative attention.

Perhaps the most efficient means of integrating developers into the discussion would be to facilitate direct consultation between war game developers and experts on Islamophobia. For example, war game developers might work closely with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a leading advocacy organization aimed at combatting Islamophobia based in Washington, D.C. This would provide experts on the problem of Islamophobia with the opportunity to directly inform developers of the potential implications that the negative stereotyping of Muslims may have, and perhaps encourage more positive, accurate representations of Muslim people within the war games instead. Indeed, it is only once developers are pressured by society that they will feel obligated to consult experts within academia. If a change in the way that Muslims are stereotyped within war video games is to be brought about, then it is pertinent that those with the power to design, produce and sell war games in which Muslims are repeatedly demonized as the enemy, are made to care, and made to change their ways. Perhaps the most significant step towards achieving this is to raise awareness about the hateful stereotypes of Muslims that war video games carry to the world, and to raise consciousness about their potentially deleterious impact upon real Muslims. I hope that this study serves as the first step in that direction.

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