

Assassin's Creed: A Multi-Cultural Read

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“Walking towards the city of Jerusalem evoked much emotion; my heart beats as I approach. As I hear the chanting of the monks, the sounds of the church bells, I know I am closer to this magical city—this place of conflict. As I reach Jerusalem, I listen carefully; perhaps I can hear the sound of an Athaan¹ piercing through the skies. To many people of the Monotheistic religions, Jerusalem is a holy land. To go there, is a journey of a lifetime, a dream, perhaps they would want to fulfill at one point in time. For a Middle-Easterner, wandering through the *Assassins’ Creed* game world might be purely driven by nostalgia, in the hope of identifying with the elements of the past. I was in it to explore a heritage many, like me, have deemed lost.” —Maha Al-Saati, of Middle-Eastern origin.

“I spent a fair amount of time during December 2007—a month during which my town in Sweden got a sum total of 6 hours of direct sunlight—in hot, sunny and dry conditions. Unlike the thousands of Swedes who fled the gloom to places like Thailand aboard chartered jets, I was bathing in the simulated radiance of medieval Jerusalem, Acre, and Damascus in the game *Assassin’s Creed*, climbing towers and mosques, leaping along rooftops, knocking off a few conspirators.” —Simon Niedenthal, of Western origin.

Abstract

Video game playing is becoming a predominant part of popular culture. Games, like *Assassin’s Creed* (Ubisoft, released 2007), *The Sims* (Maxis, released 2000), *Guitar Hero* (RedOctane, released 2005), and *World of War Craft* (Bilizzard, released 2004), have attracted many players from different cultures and age groups. In this paper, we propose that the experience of playing a video game, like *Assassin’s Creed*, is a personal experience shaped through one’s emotional values, expectations, knowledge, and attitudes as influenced by culture. To validate this claim, we provide an analysis of the experience of playing *Assassins’ Creed* from the perspectives of this paper’s four co-authors, who represent two different cultural viewpoints: Middle-Eastern and Western, as well as different intellectual disciplinary backgrounds, including architecture, theatre, and computer science. To someone from the Middle-East, for example, the game aroused many nostalgic feelings through its simulated Middle-Eastern cities, the use of Arabic words, accents and gestures, and the detailed Middle-Eastern architectural design. While such small details meant much when viewed through a Middle-Eastern eye, their values were different when viewed through a Western eye. From a Western perspective, the game play experience was heightened through the beautiful architectural detail and the use of the environment layout as a function of gameplay, such as the use of rooftops for platforming, fast movement and flying-like actions, and stealth. Thus, apparently the way the game was experienced was very different when viewed through people with different cultural backgrounds. In this paper, we aim to show this claim through thorough analysis of the game as experienced by the co-authors.

¹ The *Athaan* is the Muslim call for prayer, and is recited by a muezzin. It is broadcasted from minarets (mosque towers) in the streets of Muslim cities five times a day. It is also referred to as: athan, adhan, azaan and azzan.