

# “Your Subaltern is not my Subaltern”: Intersectionality and the Dangers of a Single Game-story

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the recent research on the role of the postcolonial and the Subaltern in videogames (Mukherjee 2017, Mukherjee and Hammar 2018, Murray 2017), the discourse of game studies remains restricted to titles that are focused on and developed in the Global North. Often, games made in the Global South tend to get ignored even as they engage with history and culture. Their discourse and procedural rhetoric are rendered Subaltern - especially, if there is a different language involved, if the game is made in the Global South or if it addresses issues that are considered marginal. This double marginalization along the lines of language, region and culture presents a lack in the otherwise intertextual positionality of discourses around caste, religion, South Asian queer studies, disability studies, and Dalit studies, in game studies. The absence of informed representation often means that the Global South is passed through a filter of sameness; the popularization of the grand-narrative of a single game-story where caste, the diversity of religion and faith, queerness, and affinity are not reflected in videogames or games research. In the purview of some of the most promising work in videogames, from representations of (Arab) Islam (Sisler 2008) to (Western) queer game studies (Ruberg 2017) and beyond, the single game-story still presents a conundrum where there is little to no intersection with South Asia - a lack that creates, produces, packages and reproduces a singular idea of the Subaltern. The most obvious consequence is the erasure and erosion of the diversity of identity when intersections with, for example, studies of Indian Muslim videogame representation (Rizvi 2021) or gender and queerness in South Asia (Dasgupta 2017, Chatterjee 2018) or the vibrant Dalit studies discipline (Rawat and Satyanarayana 2016), are not brought to the fore in global game studies. The codified, hyperperipheral, spectral and anti-locale Subaltern is both a remnant and a function of the traditional global power asymmetries that need to be challenged in the discipline.

The epistemology of the digital requires revaluations of the kind that are already happening outside game studies. From Padmini Ray Murray (2015) declaring “Your DH is not my DH” to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s (2016) “[Beyoncé’s] feminism is not mine”, there is a growing concern regarding “the danger of a single story” (Adichie 2009). The authors of this paper seek to outline and analyze discursive absences and

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omissions that are widespread in current scholarship, interrogating and unraveling game-stories that are given precedence vis-à-vis game-stories that are not being told, and endeavor to bring the latter to the forefront. Looking in further depth at discourses of intersectionality and Subaltern studies (Spivak 2008, Chakraborty 2000, Amin and Chakrabarty 1997) beyond what has been studied in game studies (Mukherjee 2017, Gray and Leonard 2018, Shaw 2015), this paper seeks to reconfigure the Subaltern in videogames to make a case for intersectionality against the dangers of what the authors refer to as 'the single game-story'. This involves centering critical analyses of the discursive and participatory politics of representation in a variety of game-stories from South Asia, while dismantling frameworks that codify bodies and stories from the Global South. The paper is, thus, a critical and reflexive reinvestigation in the epistemological, linguistic and geopolitical hegemonies of Subalternity in games research and game-stories.

## Keywords

Videogames, subaltern, Global South, South Asia, game-story, representation

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