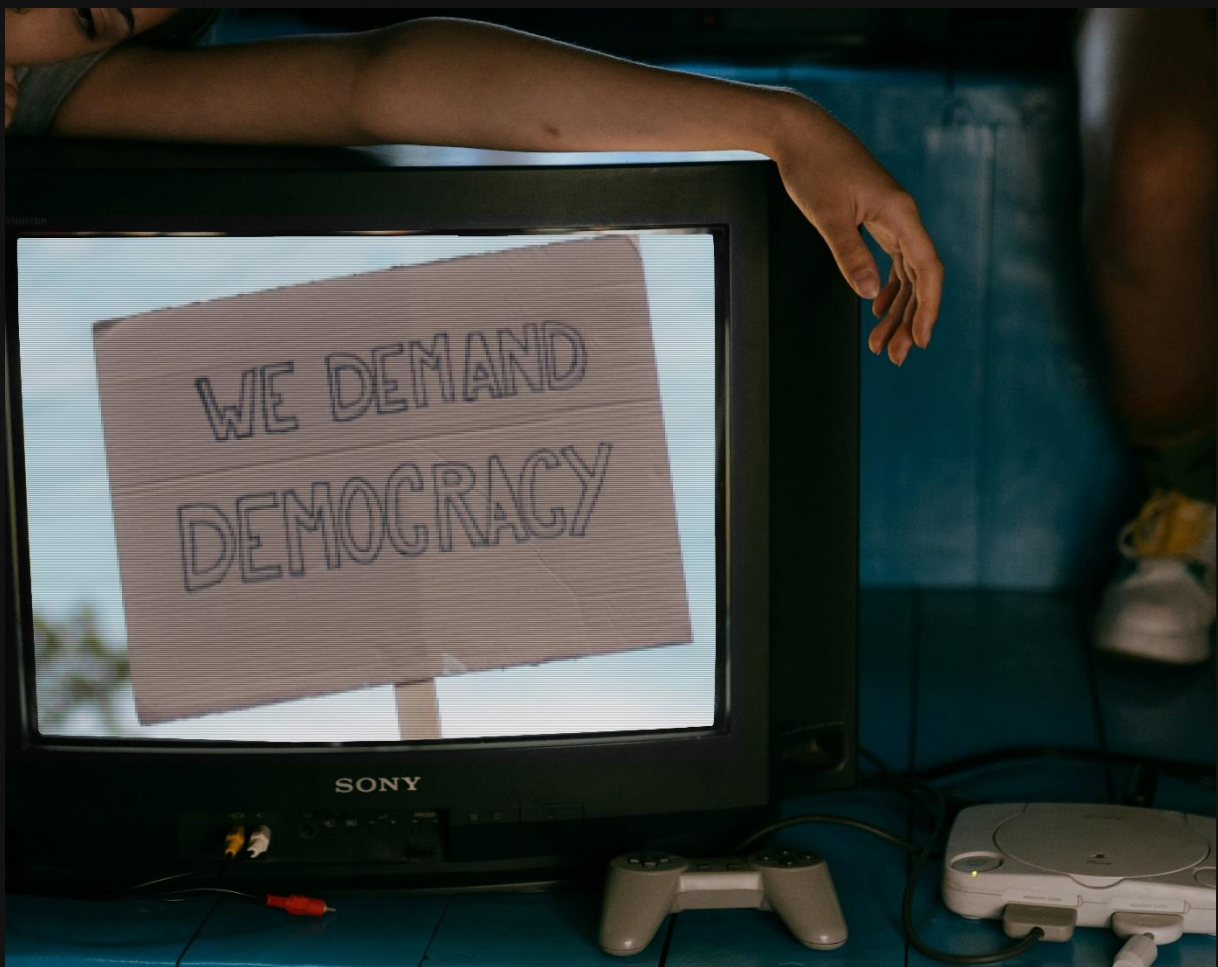


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Untitled. © Collage by Felix Zimmermann. Photos by cottonbro, Pexels, and Fred Moon, Unsplash.

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Special Issue

**Democracy Dies Playfully. (Anti-)Democratic Ideas in
and Around Video Games**

edited by

Eugen Pfister, Tobias Winnerling and Felix Zimmermann



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Issue 13 (2020)

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Discrepancy Detected. Operationalizing Immigration and Borderzone Policy in Papers, Please

David Kocik

Abstract

This article examines how *Papers, Please* (2013) critiques modern immigration policies by operationalizing immigration law and borderzone security. In the game, the player is an immigration officer at a recently demilitarized zone between two fictionalized countries. Every in-game day, the player decides which migrants must be admitted, rejected, or detained by comparing increasingly complicated documentation to ever-changing immigration policies. Through a visual and operational emphasis on rules and paperwork, *Papers, Please* conveys how supposedly fair immigration processes prioritize documentation and order over the lives and rights of individual immigrants. The game also shows how modern governments implement haphazard and reactionary immigration policies through ever-changing rules for the player to follow. By making the player complicit in the systemization of immigration, the game shows how seemingly equitable borderzone policies support daily unethical and dehumanizing treatment of migrants at highly regulated borders.

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Keywords: Immigration, *Papers, Please*, Government, Democracy, Law, gameenvironments

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Who claims borders, who regulates borders, and who crosses borders have long been questions for political, ethical, social, and economic institutions, video games being no exception. Games about borders, immigration, or expansionist policies, such as *Civilization VI* (2016), often position the player as the leader of the country. In *Papers, Please* (2013), you play a border agent, shuffling through paperwork, double-checking expiration dates, and stamping migrants' passports as they come through

your booth. A simple clerical worker, the player gets an inside look into how the borderzone of a totalitarian nation operates every day. As a criticism of aggressive governmental institutions, including oppressive immigration policies, *Papers, Please* diverges from dominant news and media discourses about borders. Generally, news and media coverage portray immigration and border crossings as a problem that must be regulated by state and international institutions. As Fojas (2008) describes, most mainstream media outlets in the US describe the US-Mexico border as a necessary blockade against illegal drugs and immigration. News outlets outside the US also engage in such discourses. In their literature review research, Eberl et al. (2018) note that European media coverage generally frames migrants as criminals and malefactors, especially in the context of North African and Asian immigration. Negative press coverage of migrants, refugees, and immigration systems appear in countries worldwide, including Bangladesh, Japan, and South Africa, among others (McDonald and Jacobs 2005, Yamamoto 2013, Ubayasiri 2019). Although vastly different in economic, social, and political institutions and discourses, the dominant media environments of these nations generally position immigrants and refugees as inherently insidious groups. This negative coverage contributes to harmful perceptions of minority communities and immigrants, which in turn affects public opinion, voting habits, and policy decisions (Burscher, Spanje, and Vreese 2015, Farris and Mohamed 2018). Media coverage, in general, discursively frames borders and immigration as negative issues, often contributing to the political discourse of the necessity of harsh and oppressive border policies (Kroon et al. 2016).

Throughout *Papers, Please*, the player sees these harsh immigration policies in action, echoing the bureaucratic dehumanization of migrants generally encouraged by media and mass opinion. The game takes place in the totalitarian nation of Arstotzka, a country whose aesthetics and immigration policy pull direct influence from the

communist Eastern Bloc. For thirty in-game days, the player witnesses and carries out the ever-changing immigration policies of the Arstotzkan government, which lead to disenfranchisement, dehumanization, and oppression. This paper situates the independent border-security video game *Papers, Please* (2013) within research on ethical game design, morality, and player agency to argue the game offers a conflicting display of how governmental borders operate on a day-to-day basis, directing the player to reflect on government policies about borders and immigration. With a militarized and surveilled borderzone, *Papers, Please* specifically criticizes oppressive and violent immigration policies, such as those between Greece and Turkey and the US and Mexico. While *Papers, Please* focuses mostly on bureaucratic rules at the border, the emphasis on often-confusing policy changes portrays the messiness of border policy. Yet, the emphasis on individual decision-making potentially essentializes immigration operations from the national to the individual sphere and misrepresents the effect of national-level influence on daily operations, somewhat limiting its ability to criticize systemic immigration issues. Although the game explicitly criticizes totalitarian regimes, *Papers, Please* also demonstrates how democratic governments implement oppressive and disorderly immigration policies that dehumanize and disenfranchise migrants and refugees crossing the border.

Ethical Education and Decision Making in Game Design

With a potential emphasis on repetition and replayability, video games can illuminate how these borders function daily, showing both the oppression of individuals at the border and the complex network of democratic bureaucracy that enables that oppression. Yet, video games may simplify or misrepresent complex social issues like immigration and border procedures. Thus, we must investigate how games can represent social issues in potentially nuanced and informative ways. In recreating real-

world social issues such as immigration, video games utilize some of the same tactics as other televisual texts. However, video games, as opposed to television or movies, draw some of their meaningfulness from the ability of the player to interact directly with what is occurring on screen. Games employ what Bogost (2007, 28) terms “procedural rhetoric,” encouraging certain beliefs and opinions not simply through characterization and story but also through the methods of playing the game. Bogost (2007, 3) posits that video games create rhetorical authority by utilizing underlying and invisible codes to encourage systems of behavior, thus making claims on what behavior should/should not and can/cannot occur in certain situations, creating moral authority over the player’s decisions. Through procedural rhetoric, games can “support or challenge our understanding of the way things in the world do or should work” (Bogost 2007, 59). The procedurality of games constructs a feedback system that “renders a player’s actions as successful or not and ... orient[s] a player’s decisions while delivering a certain type of experience” (Toma 2015, 210). Hence, video games can encourage constructions of certain types of understanding much like a movie or televisual text can.

One subset of video games focuses specifically on education and creating understanding. Although somewhat disputed in definition, serious games began as small web-based flash games in the late 1990s that focused on overtly educational content and real-world societal issues like poverty (Gotterbarn 2010). Serious games have been the focus of research in a variety of disciplines, including Education, Sociology, and other social sciences due to their educational potential. In their literature review of serious games research, Connolly et al. (2012) found playing serious games was linked to increased knowledge acquisition and positive affective/motivational outcomes, supporting the assertion that games have rhetorical power. Additionally, playing serious games has been linked to a longer retention of

acquired knowledge than passive instruction in school settings (Wouters et al. 2013). Although these experiments were utilized for educational purposes, they suggest that players of video games can construct knowledge based on their experiences of playing.

Yet, the rhetorical and learning capabilities of video games have led many to call into question how video games should be designed, and whether the rhetorical strength of video games could negatively affect players' behaviors and temperament in the real world, particularly those that encourage a stereotypically masculine approach to achievement, competition, and gender norms (Gotterbarn 2010). Similarly, others studying ethical gaming caution against games that prioritize neoliberal self-focused decision-making that actively ignores the harm decisions may cause others (Sicart 2010). Most notably, public discussions of violent video games cause many to fear that children playing these games may have increased aggression or tendency toward gun use, even though many studies have argued that familial and other social factors have a greater correlation with youth violence than violent video game playing (DeCamp and Ferguson 2017). Because of the rhetorical strength and potentially dubious effects of video games, some video game researchers began focusing on how games can be utilized toward influencing growth not just in knowledge acquisition but also empathy and morality.

As the Internet expanded and the market for video games grew in the late 2000s, independent game development became a potentially financially viable enterprise, leading to a surge of serious games made for an economic, rather than educational, market. Thus, serious games reached new audiences and received more press attention in video game journalism (Juul 2019, 15). The rise of popular indie games and the accessibility of online video game market platforms like Steam allowed for

the production and economic success of games tackling serious societal issues (Croghan 2018). As Dürnberger (2014) notes, the rapidly growing gaming market allowed for a breadth of artistic and story-driven video game production previously unseen, but also necessitated questions of how video games could be designed to communicate ethical discussions of serious political issues. Ethical game researchers often deride traditional morality systems in games which create “narrative-based decision trees” (Sicart 2010, 2) that are based upon a binary good/evil continuum. For example, the original *BioShock* (2007) made the player choose between freeing and harvesting power from little girls that contain large amounts of energy. *BioShock* positions freeing the girls as inherently good and harvesting the girls as inherently evil, and characters and scenes will change positively or negatively depending on which decision the player chooses to make. Games that show ethical decisions in binary oppositions often simplify complex social issues, making multi-faceted problems facily solvable through simple, singular decisions (Dürnberger 2014). Through a dichotomy of good/evil decisions, the game designers place a procedurally rhetorical claim on what is morally right and morally wrong; even by choosing the evil option, players engage in and reinforce the definition of these actions as inherently immoral and the opposite decision as inherently moral. The treatment of ethics as an easily solvable black-and-white opposition limits the thought behind ethical decision-making, perhaps encouraging simplistic views of social issues and the world writ large.

Ethical gaming researchers offer ways in which video game design can complicate ethical decision-making, more fully portraying real-world ethical issues. These scholars call for game design that requires ethical consideration rather than strategic thinking. Sicart (2010, 8) calls for game design that increases “cognitive friction” and creates a tension between both the “procedures and semantic layers” of the game

(ibid.), forcing players to consider how the story and gameplay elements ethically link with and contradict one another. Sicart (2010) notes design scholars Alan Cooper (2004) and Donald Norman (2002) argue this “cognitive friction” is bad for user accessibility, encouraging designers to focus on time optimization over ethical interactions that require extensive player consideration before acting in the game. The focus on time optimization may lead to simplified morality systems described above, reducing moral quandaries to simple decisions that can be easily and quickly solved. Sicart (2010) calls for game design in which values and morals are embedded in the code of the game world but are not communicated to the players directly by the game, as they might be in visuals like a morality meter. In turn, the lack of information about one’s moral standing in a game world will force a player to turn from a “reactive agent to a reflective agent,” (Sicart 2010, 10) interpreting their moral rectitude in the game rather than relying on the game’s representation of their moral standing. Dürnberger (2014) sees this cognitive dissonance as a potential avenue for empathy, as games have the unique ability to place the player in another’s experience through interactivity. Ethically designed games complicate fundamental questions about ethical decision-making by depriving players of prescribed morality systems and forcing the player to reflect on their actions, complicating questions about what is morally right and wrong rather than prescribing good/evil dichotomies (ibid.).

Ethical game design focuses on the gray areas of morality, calling into questions the moral rectitude of each decision made and rejecting simplistic answers to complex issues. When focusing on social issues like immigration, ethically designed games reject simplifying the experiences of those involved, often showing how the same situation can affect different people in different ways (Toma 2015). Similarly, these ethically designed games that focus on complex issues reject a traditional satisfying conclusion for one that is open to interpretation or contestation. In this way, video

games are like other cultural products that represent real world issues that are “negotiated, contested, and understood in the cultural imaginary” (Sandell 2016, 322) for its audiences. Video games offer another avenue to exploring how cultural understandings of complex issues become fleshed out and communicated between creator and audience. For a social issue like immigration, games can portray a vast array of experiences associated with the issue and encourage critical and ethical thinking by forcing players to deeply consider the choices they have made in the created world.

Morality and Ethics in *Papers, Please*

In *Papers, Please*, the player assumes the role of a border agent in Arstotzka, a recently demilitarized nation after an intense war. As a bureaucratic worker, the player investigates passports, visas, and other government documents of potential visitors, comparing them to the ever-changing laws of immigration in corrupt Arstotzka. If the player mistakenly or purposefully lets individuals in with improper documentation, the player loses pay, which may result in them dying, losing their home, or being fired. Additionally, the shadowy insurgent group named *Order of the EZIC Star* targets the player, enlisting the agent’s help to let operatives in to take down the Arstotzkan government. Outright refusing to assist EZIC results in the player’s assassination. Thus, tensions run high in the game as various factions vie to maintain control of the border crossing. As a border agent, the player must juggle the expectations of each group, with twenty possible endings based on the player’s decisions, none of which is presented as overtly positive or correct. Due to its emphasis on ambiguity, bureaucracy, tedium, and political intrigue, scholars have analyzed *Papers, Please’s* representation of ethics, moral judgment, and rationality more than its representation of how borders operate. Yet these analyses still shed light on how *Papers, Please*

positions its understanding and portrayal of the immorality of oppressive immigration policies enacted by democratic governments.

In their analysis of ethics in *Papers, Please*, Formosa, Ryan, and Staines (2016, 220) utilize a Four Component model of ethical expertise, focusing on the game’s relationship with “moral focus,” “moral sensitivity,” “moral judgment,” and “moral action.” The authors argue the game’s focus on systemic play, rather than scripted narrative, engages a player’s moral sensitivity, the ability to assess one’s position and the other actors in different situations, and moral action, the ability to act according to one’s morals. *Paper’s Please’s* lack of a moral feedback system forces the player to morally assess their own decisions, but the repetitive nature of the gameplay may hinder ethical considerations of moral judgment, or the ability to judge the moral choice of a certain situation. Players may simply play the game to get to the end, rather than engaging in the moral judgment of each decision they make. Yet, that very repetition allows the player to encounter the “‘doing’ part of morality with procedural affordances” (Formosa, Ryan and Staines 2016, 223), suggesting that the flow of similar actions constantly challenges the morality of the player in ways that other mediums cannot. The authors argue the repetitive gameplay of accepting, rejecting, or detaining visitors of the border in *Papers, Please* forces the player to interpret and understand the morality of the system on their own, rather than through feedback from the game itself. Players then construct their understanding of government operations through the moral system the game produces.

Other researchers have analyzed how *Papers, Please* represents bureaucratic regimes and the fallibility of individual decision-making. Morrissette (2017) relates the government and immigration systems of the game to Weber’s (1930) concept of the iron cage, a term, which refers to the emphasis on rationalization and

bureaucratization over emotionality and interpersonal relationships in modern economic, social, and political spheres. Morrissette (2017) claims that through its art design, tedious play, and intense scrutiny over every player-made decision, *Papers, Please* positions governmental work as bureaucratic malaise. Although the game allows for some rebellion against the Arstotzkan government, the tediousness of play shows the relative lack of individual power and autonomy of the player in complex social situations and intense governmental oversight. To Morrissette (2017), this struggle of power between individual actors, insurgent groups, and institutionalized powers echoes the “era in which immigration flows and refugee crises are increasingly prominent issues in global politics.” The oppressive surveillance of the Arstotzkan government in *Papers, Please* represents the full bureaucratization of immigrant and refugee policy, dehumanizing these peoples in the process.

If, as Morrissette (2017) argues, the game tackles “surprisingly complex philosophical questions” about power and law, we must also investigate how the game represents and characterizes the daily operations of the border, which affects how the game positions government oversight, abuses of power, and corruption. For there to be a deeper analysis of the rhetorical power in the game’s use of bureaucracy and morality at a border crossing, we must first clarify what kind of border is operationalized in *Papers, Please*. As Özgün E, Topak (2014, 817) notes, academic research on border policy suggests that government tracking and regulation typical of a border site has moved both inside of and beyond the edges of nations through items and practices like identity cards, visas, and enhanced surveillance of minority populations. For example, the Schengen Area of Europe allows relatively free movement across national borders as long as immigrants or migrants have and maintain the correct documentation to enter and move throughout the zone. To provide a more specific definition of the site of border crossing, Topak (2014, 820) uses the term borderzone,

which are heavily-regulated sites at the edge of national territory and “liminal spaces, or zones of indistinction, where human rights are suspended and migrant bodies exist only in so far as they can be excluded at any time by border practices.” As Topak (2014, 821) argues, “territorial calculations and surveillance, practices of death and exclusion, and suspension of rights” characterize the practices of borderzone policies. The term borderzone is more specific both geographically and functionally, not referring just to the border between two nations but specific nodes on that boundary where migrants try to cross the border and face resistance. Topak’s (2014) article looks specifically at the violence, force, and heavy surveillance by Greek and Frontex forces, an EU organization specializing in borderzone regulation, at the Greece-Turkey borderzone, following this article with another focusing on the dehumanization and oppression immigrants face at the Moira refugee camp in Greece (Topak 2020). Jonathan Xavier Inda (2012, 78) notes US government officials have similarly advocated for and implemented strict regulation, control, and surveillance at the US-Mexico border. Tristan G. Creek (2014, 377) argues Australia’s policy of mandatory immigration detention for those coming via boat subjected asylum seekers to violence, oppression, and maltreatment at the hands of detention center officials, particularly for women.

The harsh policies at the borderzones of Greece, the US, and Australia reflect the borderzone in *Papers, Please*. Migrants coming through the player’s border station are met with rifle-wielding guards and fences made of barbed wire and concrete. Migrants who refuse to leave the borderzone in *Papers, Please* may also be shot by the guards. This characterizes the main setting of *Papers, Please* as a borderzone of liminal violence and oppression. Thus, an analysis of the ethics and representation of governmental power and bureaucracy in *Papers, Please* must investigate not only how the borderzone operates through the player, but also how it is used by various

factions to maintain dominance, insight violence, or cede power. Through these negotiations and lapses in power and authority, *Papers, Please* complicates notions of morality and rationality at heavily regulated borderzones. The game's portrayal and operationalization of borderzone politics, bureaucracy, and power struggles stakes claims as to how borderzones operate, providing more insight into cultural negotiations of what the idea of *border* means and criticizing oppressive and dehumanizing borderzone policies in governments like Greece, the US, and Australia.

Dehumanization of Migrants in *Papers, Please*

In the game *Papers, Please*, the player acts as a border agent in the town of Grestin, half of which is under the control of Arstotzka and half of which is under control of neighboring country Kolechia. Using only the documents provided by travelers and the Arstotzkan Ministry of Admission's primitive inspection systems, the player must decide who can enter Arstotzka, who will be detained, and who will be rejected. With each passing in-game day, the rules for entry become increasingly complicated, forcing the player to spend more and more time investigating each entrant's documents. As an agent of the Arstotzkan government, the player is punished for incorrect identifications, potentially being fired, arrested, or killed if they let in too many incorrectly documented travelers. Additionally, the player must balance the will of the Arstotzkan government with that of an insurgent group called The Order of the EZIC Star that views themselves as the saviors of Arstotzka. Although EZIC coerces the player into committing heinous acts, like poisoning a supposed assassin, the group claims it aims to purge the Arstotzkan government of corrupt politicians and give the country back to the people. The player may choose to side with either EZIC or the Arstotzkan government, or even escape to another neighboring country to completely avoid the conflict. Yet, sixteen of the twenty potential endings end with

the player being arrested, executed, or detained by the Arstotzkan government, meaning the player must make strategic decisions throughout the game to survive through to the end. As mentioned above, academic writings about the game mostly focus on the story of *Papers, Please*, yet these articles seldom look at how the day to day operations of the borderzone informs the player of how a typical national borderzone operates. Although *Papers, Please* takes place in the fictional country of Arstotzka, most of the laws and rules about immigration put forward by the Arstotzka regime replicate policies of real-world borderzones, particularly those of Greece, the US, and Australia, where violence, dehumanization, and surveillance occur.

Through the game’s interface, *Papers, Please* prioritizes the inspection of documents and the use of low-tech devices to present the borderzone as a mundane and messy setting, purposefully dehumanizing migrants and representing the borderzone crossing as a bureaucratic machine. Visually, the game prioritizes the documents used at the borderzone. For most of the playtime, the player’s screen is split between a bird’s eye view of the borderzone and the border inspector’s desk.

The desk takes up a larger portion of the screen, allowing the player to shift around various documents as needed to assess the papers of the current entrant. All the documents, from visas to passports, take up more room on the screen than any other object, including the people who wish to cross the borderzone.

Similarly, the interface forces the player to physically interact more with documents and papers rather than the humans who appear at the borderzone crossing. As the game progresses, the rules for borderzone crossing become increasingly complicated and migrants are expected to provide more and more documents for entry.



Figure 2. Basic Rules in the Rulebook. *Papers, Please* © Used with permission from 3909 LLC.

While the player can interrogate the immigrant at the station, the written transcript for these conversations is only one of fourteen possible documents the player must engage with regularly. Similarly, the only way the player can talk to the entrant is if a discrepancy is found between documents and/or other information, like weight, height, sex, or country of origin. While certain characters, such as the EZIC messenger, do talk at length, most of the migrants simply discuss why they wish to cross the borderzone and can only be talked with further if there is an error. Again, the game prioritizes the inspection of documents and investigation of discrepancies over the stories of the non-playable characters, showing how migrants and refugees are

systematically denied humanity and lived experiences. By forcing the player to routinely reject immigrants with discrepant documentation, *Papers, Please* makes the player complicit in what Robertson (2009, 331) calls a “regime of verification” that dehumanizes individuals by positioning bureaucratic documentation as the sole producer and purveyor of one's true identity. Simply, the refugees and immigrants crossing the borderzone cannot speak outside of the parameters of governmental bureaucracy, as their identities solely lie in the documents they carry. Taken in conjunction with the visual emphasis on the documents, the game further dehumanizes the migrants, devaluing their individual stories and compounding their lives to a series of bits of information. This connects *Papers, Please* to the borderzones of the US, Australia, and Greece, in which proper documentation is vital to cross the borderzone, and incorrect or missing documentation may result in detention or expulsion from the country (William Walters 2012, 66, Topak 2014, 817).

By requiring the player to engage in dehumanizing behavior, the game operationalizes borderzone policies that oppress people every day. *Papers, Please* focuses on a border agent and a swath of unnamed migrants, allowing it to highlight and criticize the dehumanization of immigrants at the borderzone both by the media and by governmental bodies on a daily basis. Indeed, the mass of shadowed migrants waiting in line to cross the Arstotzka borderzone echoes the “enemies at the gate” (Esses, Medianu and Lawson 2013, 519) discourse often seen in news coverage of immigration issues. Yet, rather than simply replicating these discourses, *Papers, Please* critiques this view, often showing migrants begging to be let into Arstotzka to see family members, get life-saving medicine, or find work. For example, during the fourth day of the game, a man begs the player to allow his wife to cross the borderzone, even though she does not have the correct documentation. Although these stories occur only in small instances of dialogue, they are littered enough

On Day 6 of *Papers, Please*, the player lets a man with correct documentation from Kolechia cross the borderzone, but he ends up being a suicide bomber who kills several police officers. In response, the Arstotzkan government requires all Kolechians to be searched for weapons before entry can be approved on Day 7. The player then must search four Kolechians who cross the borderzone that day despite each having appropriate documentation. On Day 8, the rule for searching for weapons is revoked because the Kolechian government accuses Arstotzkan of illegally targeting its citizens. These wild reversals in policy occur much quicker in *Papers, Please* than it does in real-world governments, but the game shows how governments often create immigration policy that is reactive, oppressive, and does little to ensure safety at these borderzones. *Papers, Please* echoes the confusion and violations of law in modern democratic border policy, even in the highest officials of government (Kerwin 2017). Yet, these constantly changing policies assists both in the dehumanization of migrants by denying their rights and accomplishes the task of refusing more migrants from entering the country.

Many story elements that occur at the borderzone portray crossings as particularly disorderly and violent. Over thirty-one days, many terrorist attacks occur at the borderzone, from someone bombing the wall on Day 2 to the appearance of an ominous assassin known only as the *Man in Red* who appears on Day 23. Contrary to the mundanity of daily bureaucratic operations, these events often halt player progress by cutting days short and getting in the way of making the much-needed salary for the day. These attacks also initiate responses from armed guards, with innocent bystanders often being caught in the crossfire. These story events reflect the violence experience by immigrants at borderzones. While the Arstotzkan government in *Papers, Please* operates efficiently as Morrissette claims, the borderzone, rather, is presented as a site of disruption. The ever-changing rules as well as the violent and

oppressive policies. While other pop-cultural representations often focus on singular stories, *Papers, Please* invests more time into questioning the system behind border operations, showing how something as seemingly innocuous as an inspection station provides an understanding of complex social issues and the failures of borderzone policies by governments like the US, Greece, and Australia. Yet, the game also sometimes places too much power into the player’s hands, allowing them to dictate endings by exerting surprising amounts of influence on the immigration system of a whole country. Because *Papers, Please* is a game, it makes sense that the player has more power than a typical border agent would. Allowing that amount of leverage on the system allows the player to envision ways to combat issues like war and immigration on a small scale. Yet, that agency also distracts from the ways governmental powers that supposedly cherish law and order can implement policies at borderzones that oppress vulnerable populations.

Thus, more research must be done to see how players of games such as *Papers, Please* react to and interpret the themes of the game. As Gabriel (2015) notes, games about immigration may inadvertently support stereotypes and convey misinformation about immigrants despite the creators’ efforts to look at the global issue with nuance. Looking at both the critical and audiences’ responses to the game may illuminate what major elements players take away from playing serious games. Additionally, as Sandell (2016) stated, no one representation could accurately rearticulate all the intricacies behind real-world issues, *Papers, Please* being no exception. Although the game approaches the topics of immigration and border politics in a unique way, there are still many issues the game does not tackle, like the abuse of women, racialized politics, and how economic trade affects borderzone policy. More research should be done on how other pop cultural texts including video games might represent these intersectional issues. Immigration continues to be a key issue in many countries,

including the heavily surveilled borderzones of countries like the US and Greece (Kantouris and Gatopoulos, 2020; Burnett and Liasson 2019) and the increasingly restrictive policies of Schengen Area counties like Germany (Schumacher 2019). We should continue to analyze how people learn about and conceptualize what a border is, particularly through the messages the receive and decode from pop cultural texts, which is critical in making sure future policies treat immigrants and refugees humanely. Pop cultural texts tackling immigration issues are one possible way people can become informed, but more must be done to assist the general public in understanding what is happening at heavily-regulated borderzones. Investigating how pop culture works like *Paper, Please* can coordinate with journalism or other platforms to inform citizens offers a unique and potentially effective way to greater knowledge and understanding of such a dire issue.

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