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Exploring the Digital Land of the Dead: Hybrid Pan-Latinidad in *Grim Fandango*

Apart from its innovative design as one of the first 3D rendered point-and-click adventures, there is one thing that was and still is even more ground-breaking about LucasArts' *Grim Fandango* (1998), especially from a Cultural Studies perspective: It is one of the first games which focuses on a story and gaming experience that revolves around Latinx culture and (re-)constructs a hybrid pan-Latinx identity.[1] Even today, more than 20 years after *Grim Fandango* was first published and republished in a remastered version in 2015, games that center on Latinx experiences are scarce. In their study "The Virtual Census: Representations of Gender, Race and Age in Video Games," Dimitri Williams et al. find that only about three percent of video game characters can be recognized as Latinx and less than five percent of those are actually playable. This seems at odds with the fact that Latinx children and teenagers play more hours per day than children of any other ethnic group in the U.S., according to studies by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and by the Pew Research Center.[2] Thus, they represent a large part, if not the largest, of the group of potential players. Nevertheless, the representation of Latinas and Latinos in video games still tends to be largely stereotypical. Most commonly Latinas and Latinos are either depicted as hyper-masculine, violent, and potentially criminal men, or as oversexualized, objectified women.[3] Arts and humanities scholar Frederick Luis Al-

1 Like other ethnic markers, the term used by members of the group as well as outsiders to describe the part of U.S. population that is from Latin American descent has changed over the years and will continue to do so. In this text, however, I will use the word 'Latinx' as a gender inclusive term for the group. The 'x' stands in for both genders, that would otherwise be denoted by an 'a' or 'o' at the end of a nationality or other group name. Further it includes identities that do not adhere to or identify with one of these genders. Referring to material that predates the use of the 'x' to denote this inclusive understanding of gender and identity, I will apply the gendered endings of 'a/o' or 'as/os' for national and ethnic groups, such as, for example, Chicana/o.

2 For information on the demographics of gamers in the U.S., see the study of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (available online at www.kff.org/disparities-policy/press-release/daily-media-use-among-children-and-teens-up-dramatically-from-five-years-ago) and the Pew Research Center's study (available online at www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/17/views-on-gaming-differ-by-race-ethnicity).

3 On the prevailing sexism in video games, see Anita Sarkeesian's video-blog "Tropes vs. Women in Video Games" available online at www.feministfrequency.com/series/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games.

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dama characterizes these enduring problematic practices in the relatively young medium of video games as follows: "When not a marauding gang in need of a good pummeling, urban-set, single player and multi-player video games typically place Latinos in the background streetscape for a verisimilar ghetto look" (242).[4] These overly simplistic constructs can, as Aldama argues, even lead to "exclusionary practices [towards Latinx people] in the real world" (256).[5]

In sharp contrast, *Grim Fandango* offers another perspective on Latinoness, or *latinidad,* wrapped in a detective story inspired by film noir. The player takes over the role of Manuel 'Manny' Calavera, who is dead – as are all other characters in the game. Manny works for the "Department of the Dead" and it is his job to sell tickets to newly deceased for their journey through the Land of the Dead to the next stage of their afterlife. Depending on the virtuousness during their lifetime, they either travel in a luxury train, a cruise-ship, or, if less righteous, on foot. Manny has hit a slump in his job as travel agent / grim reaper and needs to make some successful deals in order to also be able to leave this stage of existence behind. He suspects that his boss, Don Copal, and his co-worker, Domino Hurley, are behind his failures at work. When a woman whom Manny serves as an agent, Mercedes 'Meche' Colomar, suddenly disappears, he starts to investigate and embarks on a journey through the Land of the Dead in search for the perpetrators. It is noteworthy that the game's version of the afterlife combines the idea of an active existence in the hereafter that appears to be rooted in indigenous mythology, which attributes a very active role to the deceased (see Marchi), with a capitalist logic that is ingrained in U.S.-American ideology and which strongly resembles the world of the living: including nine-to-five jobs, bureaucracy, and other real-life institutions one might hope not to encounter in life after death.

Not only the plot, however, might be a direct adaptation of a film noir movie, with the obvious exception that all characters are skeletons and demons. The clothes that the characters wear as well as the objects they interact with and

4 As Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, and Ortiz point out, Latino/a television portrayals resemble their video game counterparts in rareness of appearance as well as in their stereotypical construction, "consistently confining Latinos to a narrow set of roles, such as that of the Latin lover, buffoon, and criminal" (348).

5 Also compare Dimitri Williams et al.'s study: "Although there are no race data for older game players, we do know that Latino children play more video games than white children, so it is conceivable that they play more as teenagers and adults. Nevertheless, Latinos are unlikely to see representations of their ethnic group among game characters and never as primary characters. According to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), this lack of appearance is a direct signal to Latinos that they are relatively unimportant and powerless compared to more heavily present groups. In addition, perceptions about Latinos may change for members of other groups" (828).

the Art Deco interior of the buildings evoke the 1920s to 1940s, which was the heyday of film noir. Meche, for example, wears a hat no flapper girl would be ashamed of and the pin-stripe suits of the male characters equally fit the fashion of the time. Candlestick telephones with a rotary dial and separate ear- and mouthpieces and numerous other objects equally add to the game's noir atmosphere. In interviews, director and writer Tim Schafer mentions that *Casablanca* (1941) was a huge inspiration for *Grim Fandango*. This becomes particularly apparent in the second chapter of the game in which Manny owns a casino in a small harbor town called Rubacava. This intertextual reference or even homage clearly alludes to the character of Richard 'Rick' Blaine and his Café Américain in the famous movie featuring Humphrey Bogart. This chapter of the game features the highest ratio of locations the player can visit, including a beatnik café, a racetrack, a police station, a tattoo parlor, and a factory, among others, which creates a dense urban atmosphere. The urbanity, which the gamespace reproduces, is also a distinct part of film noir (see Christopher).

As can already be deduced from this short introduction to the game, its plot and motifs are inspired by Latin American as well as U.S.-American sources, or in other words, the game amalgamizes elements from multiple Latin American cultures and U.S. culture into one hybrid form. This implies an understanding of hybridity that "has long left behind the negative implications and connotations of inferiority, contamination, miscegenation and perversion, which it had had in nineteenth-century racist scientific discourses" (Raab and Butler 1) and sees the term as "a most useful metaphor for conceptualizing and analyzing cultural contact, transfer and exchange" (1). This is very much in the vein of postcolonial scholar Homi K. Bhabha's understanding of hybridity. Bhabha quotes the Chicana/o performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña and his metaphor for emerging hybrid identities in the Mexican dish *menudo chowder*. This perception of identity interprets the contact and exchange between people of different cultural or ethnic backgrounds as a process in which something new forms without the complete dissolving of its parts. Those elements, which are incommensurable, remain as discernable "stubborn chunks (Asians, Blacks, Latinos & Native Americans)" (Gómez-Peña 71) in the soup that is society – while also being "condemned merely to float" (71).[6] Comparable to the metaphorical *menudo chowder*, hybridity offers an option for the creation of an identity that can be a completely

6 As indissoluble markers of ancestry, the "stubborn chunks" (Gómez-Peña 71) refuse to cave in to assimilating concepts of Americanness such as the melting pot, which Gómez-Peña characterizes as a biased and romanticized concept: "[T]hat particular romance [American romance with immigration] had always been selective, and [...] the promise of the 'melting plot' [*sic*] was strictly meant for 'white' immigrants" (71).

new thing blending several others without destroying them in the process. Along these lines, I argue that *Grim Fandango* – although produced and developed by a primarily Anglo- and Asian-American team – iterates a hybrid pan-Latinx identity: (1) on a visual level this occurs through the construction of the city including its architectural style, (2) on an auditory level via language as well as music, and (3) through the incorporation and transformation of religious and mythologic motifs, narratives, and characters.

Spatial, Audiovisual, and Cultural Pan-*Latinidad* in *Grim Fandango*

The hybrid identity *Grim Fandango* substantiates itself on the level of architecture most noticeably in the way in which the capital of the Land of the Dead is constructed. For instance, the city's name, 'El Marrow,' is a hybrid of a Spanish article and an English noun. And like marrow is at the center of the bone, the eponymous city is at the center of the game – with two of the game's four chapters taking place in it (the first and the last chapter take place in this city, which frames the adventure and emphasizes its central role in the game). This digital urban center is based on the paradigmatic U.S. metropole, New York City, hybridized with numerous markers of Latin American culture. For example, in the first part of *Grim Fandango*, whenever players can look out of the window or in the few scenes in which they enter the streets, they encounter buildings that resemble famous landmarks such as the Chrysler Building, the Empire State building, or the Eldorado apartment building.[7] These visual references to New York City simultaneously construe a connection to various Latin American nations since the Latinx community of the city is very heterogeneous – with the largest proportion of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans.[8] The same heterogeneity can be found when examining New York's demographics at the smaller level of the neighborhood. While Latinx neighborhoods in, for example, Los Angeles, are very homogenous and the city and its Latinx community is primarily perceived as Mexican or Chicanx, in New York City "Latino neighborhoods have large

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7 While this Upper West Side's luxurious apartment building with its double towered structure might not be one of the most famous sights of New York it is still a clear reference to the city as well as to the myth of El Dorado, which was first believed to be a golden chieftain, then a city, and later even a land of gold (see Silver).

8 See the 2010 census report for New York City which is available online at: www1.nyc.gov/assets/planning/down-load/pdf/data-maps/nyc-population/census2010/t_sf1_p8_nyc.pdf.

non-Latino minorities (African-American, Asian, Black Caribbean, new European, etc.) of 30 to 45 percent" (Davis 41). In a game that otherwise relies heavily on cultural practices and symbols stemming from Mexican and Chicanx culture as, for example, in the Day of the Dead motif, the reference to this particular city substantially contributes to the production of a pan-Latinx identity.

Further, the game does not leave the city unchanged or try to simulate New York City as closely as possible, emulating streets, buildings, and places, as numerous other games do. The *Grand Theft Auto* series, for example, is well-known for its architecturally 'realistic' representation of the Big Apple called "Liberty City." Along these lines, communication scientist Antonio Corona describes modding projects that generate a "Mexican-based *GTA* game" (464) based on *GTA: San Andreas* (2004) as a "sort of hybrid representation, in which the gamespace is an amalgam of U.S. and Latin American spaces, and which, similar to border settlements, requires active discrimination on the part of the player to be read as the national representation it aims to be" (464). While the resulting hybridity that Corona identifies in these GTA-mods might be unintentional or even unwanted in those mods, in *Grim Fandango* it is a clear motif of the game. The players' perception of the Land of the Dead as a hybrid of Latin America and the U.S. indeed appears to be one of its implied readings.

Refraining from a 'simple' digital mimesis, *Grim Fandango* transforms well-known landmarks or whole neighborhoods and latinizes them by altering their shape. The first street that the player enters, for example, appears to be directly rendered after a picture of the Meatpacking District – including the typical red brick houses, the iron fire escape ladders, and wooden rooftop water towers. Yet this impression only lasts for the duration of a first glance. By placing several markers of indigenous culture in this urban setting, such as obelisks and buildings that call to mind Mesoamerican temples and step pyramids, the game generates a hybrid city that is at once U.S.-American and Latinx as well as modern and pre-Columbian. The game further emphasizes this hybridization via another architectural marker of indigenous American culture – ornaments embedded in the outer walls of skyscrapers that depict monsters or animal faces based on indigenous stonemasonry and artworks such as the Maya calendar.[9] This Mesoamerican artwork features iconographic faces of animals, deities, or humans of religious or mythological significance engraved or chiseled into them. The major-

9 The artist Peter Chan, who was responsible for a lot of the original artwork and design in the game, features some of this work on his website, available online at www.peterchanconceptart.com.

ity of buildings in the game feature such signifiers and thus immensely contribute to its particular (hybrid) atmosphere.

At first glance, one might argue that the constant usage of these icons and symbols by the non-Latinx developer team presents a form of exoticism, or just plain commodification of indigenous culture. Following the comparatist Joseph Theodoor Leerssen's definition, exoticism is the appreciation of another culture but "exclusively in terms of its strangeness; it is reduced to the aspects wherein it differs from the domestic standard" (325). In other words, exoticism is a process of reduction of complexity comparable to that of stereotyping or Othering.[10] In *Grim Fandango*, however, the depiction of indigenous symbols seems crucial to the creation of a game experience which transports a complex vision of Latinoness and recreates a positive hybrid U.S.-Latinx identity. Thus, *Grim Fandango* does not use Latinx culture to Other but provides an actual hybrid game world – which can positively affect the auto- as well as the hetero-image of the Latinx population.[11] This is in stark contrast to most contemporaneous, and even contemporary, video games which tend to focus on either the image of the luchador[12] or the stereotypical figure of the Latino gangster. Despite the stereotypical nature of this figure, most producers of action titles resort to this stereotype in a harmful attempt at 'authenticating' their product.

In addition to creating a hybrid cityscape, *Grim Fandango* also generates a hybrid pan-Latinx identity through its use of language. The first instance of this hybridity already occurs in the game's title, which is a compound of the English word *grim*, as in the Grim Reaper (Manny's job), and the Spanish word *fandango* which is the name of a song and dance originating from the Iberian Peninsula. The title thus combines the Anglo-American version of personified death with the Latinx couple dance. While death is a male figure in many Western mythologies and religions (for example, in Greek mythology or Christianity), in those based on Roman languages, it is most commonly a female figure, matching

10 'Othering' is a part of the process of identity construction, in which the self is defined by demarcation from a supposed 'Other' (see Hall 128). However, by Othering an individual or a group of people their status is subjugated from that of subjects to mere objects and as such they cannot participate in the discourse that negotiates their identity and position within society (see Pickering 71).

11 Those terms refer to the perception of a group or nation from within (auto-image) and from the outside (hetero-image). For a detailed description of the comparatist understanding of the terms see Beller and Leerssen (343).

12 A Latinx wrestler or *luchador* character, which are easily identifiable by their typical mask, can be found in almost every Fighting Game (such as the *Street Fighter* or *Tekken* series) but also in the Metroidvanian *Guacamelee! 1* and *2* in which the player takes over the role of the luchador Juan Aguacate to save the day.

the feminine gender of its Spanish designation, *la muerte*. The term *fandango* appears to be equally equivocal and has come to connote more than just a specific dance in Texas and California "[s]ince at least the early eighteenth century" (Castro 103). In the context of Chicana/o culture, the word describes a public place for a party or dance as well as gambling. Thus, the establishments that offered their patrons the opportunity to gamble, dance, and have a party were called "*fandango* houses" (Castro 104; emphasis in the original). The game's narrative more or less directly refers to both meanings of the word. Not only does Manny run a casino or *fandango* house during his time in Rubacava, the romantic dance for two could also be interpreted as a metaphorical description of Manny's quest to find Meche and the evolving love story between them.

Another detail which fosters this sense of hybrid identity on an auditive level in the original English-language version of the game is the repeated insertion of Spanish phrases into the mainly English utterances of the characters. This clearly marks their Latinx background. At the same time, those utterances are still easily decipherable for players who do not speak the language, which plays a large role in regard to the marketability of the game. The fact that Manny is voiced by the Cuban American actor Antonio 'Tony' Plana – who played in ABC's *Ugly Betty*, *CSI*, *Deep Space Nine*, and numerous other shows and movies – further underlines the mixture of several Latin American cultures that are combined in the game's inclusive vision of pan-*latinidad*. An additional auditive marker of this pan-Latinx identity is the pan flute motive appearing several times in the score, titled "Ninth Heaven," which is a clear reference to South American music from the Andean regions of Peru and Bolivia. In addition, the score also includes elements of Jazz and Swing music, both originally U.S.-American genres. With its music as well as its dialogues, the game amalgamizes various national influences on an auditory level, thus conveying yet another facet of Latinx and U.S.-American hybridity.

One of the characters who embodies the game's specific version of hybrid *latinidad* is Manny's sidekick Glottis. The non-player character (NPC) is depicted as a large yellow creature with a dog-like face and a profound love for automobiles, which fits his job as Manny's driver and mechanic. Only with the help of this NPC sidekick can the player travel from one stage to another. And, like every good sidekick, Glottis provides comic relief throughout the game. The character's appearance is directly inspired by U.S.-American hot-rod culture and in particular by Rat Fink and other monsters designed by Ed 'Big Daddy' Roth, one of the most famous hot-rod cartoonists. This reference to Ed Roth's comic hot-rod creatures is emphasized, when the large yellow dog-monster builds a hot-rod called the 'bone-wagon,' with flames painted on the sides of the car and a large chrome exhaust – which fits the way "in which young [working class] people modified or

'hot rodded' the cars of domestic brands and raced them" (Gartman 172–173) in California starting in the 1940s. Indeed, the character combines this typical U.S.-American hot-rod culture with pre-Columbian mythology in the form of the Aztec deity *Xolotl*.[13] The word *Xolotl* stems from the language Nahuatl and translates to "divine dog" (Carrasco and Sessions 48). The character's intertextual connection to the Aztec deity becomes apparent when looking at their functions in their respective narratives. *Xolotl* is a deity connected to death and the underworld, where he helps the dead to reach the next world across a seven-armed river, comparable to the five rivers in the ancient Greek underworld, Hades. In Aztec mythology, it is also *Xolotl*'s task to guide and guard the sun on its journey through the underworld every night, "so that it may exit the Underworld and be reborn each morning" (Maffie 207). Like his Mesoamerican predecessor, Glottis accompanies Manny on his travel through the Land of the Dead, the underworld, and helps him to reach the next stage of existence.

As yet another direct reference to Aztec philosophy, *Grim Fandango*'s plot unfolds over four years on four consecutive Days of the Dead. In Aztec and other Mesoamerican peoples' belief systems there are several spheres of existence, split up into three main stages. In this system *Mictlan* is the name of the underworld – a space the soul has to traverse to reach heaven. The Aztecs believed that this journey takes a soul four years; the same time that it takes Manny to complete his adventure and leave the Land of the Dead behind.[14] The Day of the Dead, however, is not only the major topos of the game and an important festivity for large parts of the Latinx community in the United States, it also is a prime example for the hybridity of cultures and their constantly changing nature. The holiday itself is based on the veneration of a family's deceased members, which is common in numerous Latin-American cultures and can be traced back to pre-Columbian times. Media studies scholar Regina Marchi

13 One of the depictions of the deity with a dog's head can be found in the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, named after the Hungarian collector Gabriel Fejérváry and the English antiquarian Joseph Mayer, who owned the artefact. Today the codex is kept at the World Museum in Liverpool. The archeologists Maarten Jansen and Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez argue in favor of renaming the calendar document as Codex Tezcatlipoca after the deity that is depicted in the center of its first page (see 61). Such a renaming process could be read as a powerful anti-colonial sign, shifting the attention back to the indigenous culture that created the artefact and away from the colonizing power that still possesses it.

14 The only exception to this rule were warriors who died in battle and mothers who died during childbirth, they directly reached heaven, called *topan* or *ilhuicatl* (although in Aztec mythology the concept is separated into 13 distinctive forms of heaven). The middle world, inhabited by the living, is called *cemanahuatl* or *tlalticpac*. For a detailed account of the various stages of existence of the Aztec philosophy, see Maffie.

explains the handling of death, which interconnects and integrates the world of the dead into the day-to-day life of the living, as follows:

> In the worldview of the Aztecs, Maya, Olmecs, Mixtecs, Zapotecs, Aymara, Quechua, and other agricultural-based aboriginal peoples of the Americas, maintaining harmony between the worlds of the living and the dead was a crucial spiritual belief before the arrival of Europeans to the hemisphere. Festivals to honor the dead via the construction of harvest altars were held throughout the calendar year in conjunction with harvest cycles, as the dead were thought to have powers to enhance or thwart agricultural and reproductive fertility. (276–277)

El Día de los Muertos also incorporates Catholic traditions that were brought to the Americas by Spanish colonizers and missionaries and that were forced upon the indigenous population.[15] In their contemporary form, the celebrations present an amalgamation of Catholic holidays with the particularly indigenous form of worshiping the deceased. It is particularly noteworthy that, "[i]n contrast to official All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day observances, filled with thoughts of suffering and mournful supplications to free souls from their purgatorial incarceration, Day of the Dead celebrations in Indigenous regions of Latin America manifest feelings of happy reunion between heavenly and terrestrial relatives" (Marchi 277).

Another marker for the hybrid nature of modern Day of the Dead festivities is their contemporary form of street processions – closely resembling U.S.-American celebratory parades such as the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City or the Mardi Gras Parade in New Orleans. These processions are a comparably new invention of Latinas and Latinos within the United States. In most Latin American countries people used to celebrate by visiting the graveyard and bringing special foods and drinks as offerings to enjoy with their family or by building altars with fresh or hand-cut paper marigolds to honor the deceased. The flowers are believed to help guide the souls on their way from the Land of the Dead to the realm of the living with their bright color and their strong scent.[16] However, as Marchi points out, "United States Day of the Dead events

15 The Catholic Church regularly used existing religious places, practices, and festivities and incorporated or rather re-labelled them and thus facilitated the transition of the indigenous people from their original beliefs to Christianity in Europe as well as in the Americas and the rest of the world. This specific strategy of Christianization is known as *Interpretatio Christiania* (see Eberlein).

16 Marchi emphasizes the importance of these activities in strengthening the community's cohesion: "In Latin America, rituals such as refurbishing gravesites, constructing altars, or preparing special foods for the holiday require the collaboration of extended networks of family and

are not simply Latin American celebrations transferred to a new location. They are hybrid formations that communicate vastly different meanings than do celebrations with the same name in Latin America" (274). She traces this transformation and the intertwined rise in popularity of the holiday in the U.S. back to the year 1972. In that year, Chicana/o artists and activists in San Francisco and in East Los Angeles were the first to organize processions, in which they dressed as skeletons and marched to the nearest cemetery (see Marchi 281). The Californian Chicana/o activists further developed the existing traditions not only to create group cohesion within their communities but also to popularize their culture and festivities among the rest of U.S.-American society.[17]

Today, the festive processions draw a heterogeneous crowd from all ethnic groups in the U.S. and have even been exported back to numerous Latin American countries.[18] Mexico City, for example, did not have a Day of the Dead parade before 2016. Only after the opening sequence of the James Bond movie *Spectre* (2015) had imagined such festivities in Mexico City, which were up to that point primarily found within the United States, did city planners identify the potential of such a parade to attract tourists and generate revenue. In addition, these developments embody the constant hybridization of societies as well as the travelling of cultural practices accelerated through the media. In this vein, the Day of the Dead processions constitute a case of 'Latinization' of American mainstream but simultaneously also a case of 'Americanization' of mainstream culture in Latin American countries.

Conclusion

The version of a pan-Latinx identity, which *Grim Fandango* iterates, can be read as relativizing national backgrounds, which is not an unproblematic stance regarding assimilation and loss of culture, or as Latinx studies scholars Clara Ira-

friends who come together to pray for the deceased, visit each other's altars to pay respects to the dead, share festive food, and reaffirm collective identity and solidarity" (284).

17 The historian Eric Hobsbawm identified the process of inventing new traditions as a means of generating solidarity for a certain group. Hobsbawm further pointed out the tendency within these social processes to incorporate older traditions or to refer to "history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion" (12).

18 Marchi specifies the rising popularity of the Day of the Dead procession in San Francisco today as "attract[ing] an estimated 20,000 participants spanning all ages, races, and ethnicities – making it the largest Day of the Dead processions in the United States. The procession is not only pan-Latino, but Pan-American, reflecting the many diverse cultures coexisting in San Francisco (and the United States)" (282).

zábal and Ramzi Farhat describe it, the "homogenization of [...] communities" (221). Despite those dangers, Irazábal and Farhat strongly argue in favor of this interpretation of *latinidad* in a U.S.-American context, stressing its community-building potential:

> In general, the further consolidation of a post-national or pan-Latino identity has been a boost to the fortunes of urban Latinos. This convergence, in many ways, reflects the fact that Latino communities in the United States face common challenges such as coming to terms with Americanization, developing a sense of citizenship, enduring the migratory experience, and positively utilizing aspects of transnational memory and identity [...] Predictably, this has enabled the formation of a larger, more visible group that can better gain recognition and entitlements from the state. (220)

The implicit complications of a pan-Latinx identity should not be left unmentioned: tensions between groups within a larger "imagined community" (Anderson 6) such as among Latinx people in the U.S. persist and will not be resolved by a video game – a task it is not fit to fulfill nor sets out to accomplish.[19] It is arguable, however, whether these limitations outweigh the positive ramifications an "immersive [gaming] experience" (Penix-Tadsen 176) can have for the process of identity construction for members of the in- *and* out-group – that is players that would consider themselves to be Latinx as well as players who affiliate with another ethnic identity.

Along these lines, I further argue that in spite of issues regarding exoticism and cultural appropriation, *Grim Fandango* construes a hybrid version of *latinidad* that incorporates Latinx and U.S.-American traditions in a pan-Latinx or even pan-American gaming experience that is unique in its medium. While the line between appropriation and celebration of a culture can be a thin one, particularly when the cultural artifact is also a product which is designed to generate profit, as it is the case with video games, it would be wrong to assume that this artifact cannot be efficacious in regard to a group's identity construction just

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19 I am using Benedict Anderson's term here, who argues that every nation is an 'imagined community,' due to the fact that it is impossible to know each and every member of that group: "In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because even the members of the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion [...] In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined" (6, emphasis in the original). The word *imagined* in this context obviously does not denote that a community is not 'real.' Indeed, imagined communities are bound through shared common values, language, norms, and, of course, narratives.

because it has been produced within a capitalistic system. In this vein, the game can be interpreted as a positive factor in the complex process of identity construction of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. by generating group cohesion comparable to Day of the Dead celebrations and other shared traditions. Of course, this happens within the limits of its medium, but especially when keeping in mind the demographics of gamers in the U.S., who are to a large percentage Latinx, the role of video games in this process of (re-)negotiating identity should not be underestimated. Simultaneously, *Grim Fandango* can contribute to a positive hetero image held by other ethnic groups in the country and elsewhere as one of the few non-stereotypical representations of *latinidad* in video games.

Ideally, the game might further have a continuing impact on its genre and particularly on the way in which ethnicity is (re-)constructed in video games. In its creation of an immersive hybrid U.S.-American and Latinx world, it sets a positive example by managing to do without simplistic stereotypes and Othering. As has been demonstrated, the game generates this hybridity through, among other things, its characters. For instance, those characters fuse Aztec mythology with U.S. subculture, as is the case with Glottis. Also contributing to this hybridity are the game's auditory elements. The score, for example, consists of a mixture of typical U.S.-American elements as well as Latinx elements, including pan-flute music, which is a clear reference to musical traditions stemming from the Andean region of South America, as well as Jazz and Swing music. Possibly one of the most immersive factors through which *Grim Fandango* realizes this hybrid world, however, is through its digital spaces. The player can explore the game's spaces and encounter sites and buildings that have markers of Latinx culture as well as markers of U.S.-American culture at all stages.

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