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PROSPECTS FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

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Prospects for Anthropological Research in South-East Europe

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The book marks a new phase in the fruitful collaboration between the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology Russian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Ethnography Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. It is an important publication for any future research on the development of ethnology and anthropology in Southeast Europe. The papers presented here, the topics they raise and the methods they employ, comprise an overview of the issues, concepts, phenomena and research methodologies anthropology in this has been dealing with in the early 21st century. Positions of the discipline itself, transformations of traditional culture and various phenomena of contemporary culture in Southeastern Europe are subjected to a theoretical scrutiny in the papers of this volume.

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Ljiljana Gavrilović

MMORPGS AND NATIONALISM[1]

Communities which form within the worlds of digital games, especially MMORPGs are, in theory, a-national, because the basic premise of digital worlds is their limitlessness and the overcoming of boundaries that exist in the physical world. Gamers from different European countries are based on servers which are designated as international (English language European servers), these people speak different languages, but English is the default lingua franca.

Even though it is generally assumed that most guilds (communities) on these servers are international, there is also a strong tendency to form "national" guilds, comprised of gamers who speak the same native language. On the one hand, this is the consequence of the desire for better/easier understanding and communication within the community, but – as analyses of gamer behaviour on Chinese and Taiwanese servers show – also the assumption of shared cultural preferences, that serve to enhance the internal cohesion of the community. "National" guilds will often recruit members by publishing calls in their native language on public channels, which serves to deter anyone who doesn't speak the language in question. In these cases it is irrelevant where (in which country) the players are physically based, as the national borders are equated with the boundaries of language.

This paper will analyze recruiting messages published by "national" guilds, the behaviour/attitudes of the players and the discussions of ethnic/national issues on public channels and social networks in the MMORPG World of Warcraft. The data shows that, regardless of the assumed lack of borders in digital worlds, boundaries in online spaces are often set in accordance with ideas about nations

that players have in the physical world. On the other hand, there is the possibility that some gamers, through meeting and conversing with people from different countries and cultures in the digital world, correct and change the attitudes they formed in their physical surroundings, which then serves to facilitate their joining international communities, as well as diminishing ethnic barriers in the "real" world.

Key words: MMORPG, World of Warcraft, nationalism

"ALLE MENSCHEN WERDEN BRÜDER...". At the start of this century, when digital massively multiplayer online (role-playing) games (MMOG/MMORPG) began their conquest of the world,[2] there was an assumption that they are one of the routes of multiculturalism and transnationalism – a way to overcome boundaries between cultures, and with them, national borders. And truly, people from all over the world started meeting in the same (digital) spaces and spending a good chunk of their free time in constant interaction. As Lin and Sun put it:

> "even though individuals may not be able to see the physical landscape of other worlds in MMOG interactive spaces, they can still sense other cultures and the potential for interacting with other people in those cultures. Population movement via telepresence and part-time residency in foreign spaces supports the idea that entering a MMOG world is not, as many believe, 'escaping from reality and entering virtual fantasy space'. Instead, it repressaents 'entering new space' in which the influences of political and social

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[2] *Massively multiplayer online role-playing game* (MMORPG) is a genre of digital games in which a large number of players are simultaneously situated in the virtual world of the game, wherein each player gets into constant interactions (of cooperation or conflict) with other players. *Meridian 59* (The 3DO Company, 1996) and *The Realm Online* (Sierra Online 1996) are considered as the earliest games of this kind, even though *Ultima Online* (Origin Systems, 1997) is mostly cited as the very first, as it really was the first fame to achieve thus unheard of popularity, with 200000 subscribers in 2000.

power tied to physical location are reduced" (Lin and Sun 2011, 14).

In fact, games are, by rule of thumb, designed in a way which implies multiculturalism when it comes to attitudes and behaviour of the players:

"Applying this debate to the ascribed transnational character of MMORPG's, it can be stated that games like WoW[3] fundamentally provide 'transnational' 'virtual spaces' where culturally diverse people interact with each other on a daily basis. Indicative of the 'default multinationalism' which lies at the heart of WoW is the elaborate *Code of Conduct5*, enforcing a certain amount of 'civilized openness' amongst its members" (van Es 2009, 4).

However, things are not that simple. Game designers as well as researchers are aware that:

"(in) the fantasy space of MMOGs, players bring their cultural habits and political views from their physical worlds. However, since real-world politics (including the power associated with business profits) do not fully control game worlds, they still retain meaning as spaces that support border crossing with little or no control, contacts between foreigners, and opportunities to experience different cultures" (Lin and Sun 2011, 14).

Nevertheless, everyone seems to have predicted that "cultural habits and political views" include, among other things, the view/understanding of the concept of nation and the relationship every player has to "their own", as well as other nations, and that these attitudes (as well as all other attitudes pertaining to other identity issues, which are considered in detail) influence everyday behaviour in the new setting. As early as 2006, Taylor pointed out

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[3] WoW: an acronym usually used to designate the game *World of Warcraft*, and which will be used further in the article.

the necessity of studying the behaviour of players in online games which stems from their understanding of the concept of nation and the importance the feeling of belonging to a nation has for them in the physical/"real" world (RL[4]). However, there has been little research of this kind up to now: aside from her article in which the key issues and questions are pointed out (Taylor 2006), there has been one, as of yet unpublished, MA thesis on the subject (van Es 2009), one article (Lin and Sun) which deals with Chinese and Taiwanese culture in digital space, and one, also unpublished, PhD thesis (Feng 2014) which considers the cultural conditioning of gamers' behaviour.

The lack of research on the ways in which different national feelings and concepts of nation influence gamers' behaviour stems from the fact that most research up to this point was conducted in English speaking environments. And, as the boundaries of language in digital worlds are mostly synonymous with borders of nation (in the best romanticist manner, but also for the simple reason of more successful communication), research in English speaking environments could hardly afford fertile ground for research on (different forms of) nationalism. Behaviour in games, at least in those in which it is possible, has, on occasion, been linked to issues of race – which is in keeping with the American anthropological and sociological tradition, and can be equated with questions of nationalism being asked in different historical/cultural/political contexts (Eriksen 1994/2010, 6–8)[5]. However, in these cases more attention is given to the design of virtual worlds, or rather, the shaping of games in accordance with racial and ethnic stereotypes:

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[4] The usual acronym for the "real"/physical world is RL – *Real Life.*

[5] Even though Eriksen revised this opinion in the third edition of the book, considering that the concepts of race and ethnicity should be kept separate (Eriksen 1994/2010, 8–9), in the case of studying MMOG/MMORPGa, especially if the behaviour of the payers is being studied and not the design of the game, the equation between the two concepts can be kept because "nobody on the Internet knows that you're a dog, nor can they easily determine if you're black or white, male or female, gay or straight, or rich or poor. But they can immediately notice what language and dialect you are using" (Warschauer 2000, 156).

"Stereotypes can be found in virtually any game—Cuban drug dealers in Vice City; muscle-bound, violent rappers in Def Jam Vendetta; and Arab terrorists in every war game. Ready to Rumble, a boxing game, like GTA III, covers all bases, including racialized stereotypes of virtually, every community of color. The most popular character in the game is Afro Thunder, a gigantic, Afrowearing boxer who is more adept at talking trash than fighting. The game also features a Hawaiian sumo wrestler, who of course is fat, speaks poor English, and has slanty eyes; a heavy-accented Croatian immigrant; and a Mexican boxer named Angel (Raging) Riveria" (Leonard 2006, 84–85).

Or, as Monson precisely defined it: "the message is clear – video and computer games rely heavily on racial and ethnic stereotyping of the most blatant kind (Monson 2012, 52)

Yet, there are sporadic studies of different player behaviour in line with differences in cultural models from which they enter into digital worlds (Nardi 2010, 176–196; Lin and Sun 2011; Feng 2014), but not studies (except partially, cf. Gavrilović 2012) of whether and to what extent the offline concepts of ethnicity and nation influence the everyday behaviour of players in a world which is not supposed to be nationally fragmented, nor studies of whether and in what way this behaviour changes over time.

... OR MAYBE NOT? In a globalized world –

"(...) race and ethnicity matter as much as ever as a source of oppression. On the other hand, as globalization and economic change blur traditional racial and ethnic boundaries, race and ethnicity increasingly intersect with other identity markers, related to religion, nationality, gender, and language in stimulating social struggle" (Warschauer 2000, 152).

The same goes for the Internet: even though it is a global network, the space within it is segmented in different ways, in

accordance to the interests of the (potential) visitors, users and those who actively participate in creating content for online locations. One way of segmenting and framing is the use of language – locations, blogs and the use of social networks in languages of small nations and groups are, in fact, closed spaces in which intra-group communication takes place, communication in which *only* those who understand/speak the language of the group can take part. In a certain sense this can be considered as ghettoization, as the use of "small" languages disables dialogue/communication with members of other linguistic/cultural traditions, which effectively restricts the space for action of minority communities on the Internet. At the same time, this diminishes the possibility of representing one's culture *worldwide*, but facilitates communication between members who feel they belong to a group, regardless of their current location (cf. Warschauer 2000; Gavrilović 2008). The same process takes place in a large number of MMOGs as well.

Of course, this does not pertain to all online games: those that are based on cooperation, but not on everyday communication among players (such as *Facebook* games) are not susceptible to players grouping according to language, because the communication among players is minimal, and often nonexistent or not needed. On the other hand, teams in e-sports, which demand exceptional coordination in order to achieve results, are, by rule, comprised of members who share a native language; however, this has less to do with national preferences and more with the need for streamlining communication among members of the team. However, even among *casual* players (those who aren't members of tightly defined teams) of such games, one can often encounter complaints:

> "Am I the only one who finds it hard to actually find people who can understand english? Either I'm playing with a team, with people from Spain or France, who can't speak english, or simply playing in a team where noone speaks. Which I find quite odd. Also for the EUNE servers, which is where I made a smurf, perhaps better luck there. But nope, only eastern European languages. Is it really that hard to find someone to communicate with?" (user: AA, 30. 01 2014,

http://forums.euw.leagueoflegends.com/board/showt
hread.php?t=1583455).

A more precise description of the problem is given by another player, speaking about the lack of success due to the language barrier:

> "We had 4 people speaking 4 different languages and because of that we couldn't talk about anything going on in the game. So many ult combo's went out the window, People just jumped the back line and no one could say anything because of the language barriers. I've played so many games where this has been a problem. People on my team not being bad teammates or trolling but just a team that is genuinely unable to work well together because they literally cannot communicate with one another effectively. I don't know if it's a problem on any of the other servers but in my experience it happens very very frequently on EU" (user: xD; 12. 03. 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/Overwatch/comments/5yy691/eu_servers_and_language_barriers/?st=jecxankj&sh=ce22625a).

Quick and effective communication between team members in this case isn't just a matter of personal preference among players, it is a prerequisite for effective teamwork and achieving the desired results, thus the complaints about the lack of a common language cannot only be interpreted as a desire for national/linguistic grouping, but should rather be attributed to the need for more efficient gameplay.[6]

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[6] This is line with the increasing tendency to rationalize every type of game as much as possible – to build the neoliberal concept of efficiency into gameplay in the way it has been built into behaviour in the physical world (Valkyrie 2017, 375–9), this is most evident in e-sports.

WoW AND THE POLITICS OF MULTICULTURALISM/ MULTILINGUALISM[7]. There are, however, games which aren't just about competition, but represent worlds in which players spend time, make and achieve personal goals – in which an alternative life is lived. In these spaces, communication and the establishing of different social relations is one of the most important facets of the world. Social behaviour in these games is not just determined by the efficiency of achieving results, and is thus influenced by a variety of factors – foremost by identity practices shaped in the physical world, among which the concept of nation and national belonging ranks high.

The most famous and still the largest (in terms of duration as well as the number of registered and active players) MMORPG is *World of Warcraft,*[8] which began it's – at this point 14-year-long – existence in November of 2004 (in the US and Australia). It was the fourth game designed within the *Warcraft* universe[9] set in the imaginary world of Azeroth, and the first game in the franchise that was completely conceived as an MMORPG. In 2005, WoW made it to Europe and Asia. In the first year alone, Azeroth was settled by more than 3.5 million players from every corner of the physical world. By 2008 the number of players reached 11.5 million, and settled at just over 11 million by mid-2011, it reached its peak at 12 million during 2010. The number of subscribers declined since then: with every

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[7] Data for analysis: the recruitment messages of "national" guilds, the behaviour/attitudes of players and debates about ethnic/national issues in public and private (guild) channels based on three EU servers, as well as on social networks where players gather. The data was collected between 2014 and 2018. All statements are cited verbatim, without correcting grammatical or orthographic errors.

[8] Blizzard Entertainment, 2004.

[9] Real-time strategy games: *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans*, 1994; *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness* 1995 and the expansion *Beyond the Dark Portal* 1996; *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* 2002 and the expansion *The Frozen Throne* 2003. The possibility of multiplayer gaming was introduced in *Warcraft III*.

new expansion[10] the population increases to over 10 million for a while, and then gradually declines to about 7 million players, with the largest drop taking place in mid-2015, when the number of denizens of Azeroth fell to about 5.6 million.[11] After 2015, Blizzard Entertainment stopped publishing data on subscriber numbers, but using financial reports, it is estimated that the number of subscribers is now stable at around 5 million.[12]

This huge number of players is not situated in the same space: the world of Azeroth is divided into 3 large zones[13], within in which it is further divided into servers (realms), which constitute the main space for communication and grouping among players.[14] The basic unit of social organizing among players is the guild. Guilds don't have a pre-defined internal structure or number of members, so internal relations in these communities can vary: there are guilds that are tightly organized with a hierarchical structure, but there are also those that favor democratic decision making; in larger

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[10] In the meantime, the game received five expansions (meaning an expansion of the story, and withit, the world): The Burning Crusade 2007, Wrath of the Lich King 2008, Cataclysm 2010, Mists of Pandaria 2012 and Warlords of Draenor 2014. In July 2015 a new expansion titled Legion was announced.

[11] Of course, these numbers only include gamers who pay for their subscriptions and play on official servers, and not those who play on pirate servers and are left out of the official statistics. The source of the data about the number of players, up until the second quarter of 2015 can be found here: http://www.statista.com/statistics/276601/number-of-world-of-warcraft-subscribers-by-quarter/.

[12] These assessments are from January 2018, but an increase in player numbers is expected in the second half of the year, because a new expansion (*Battle for Azerot*) was announced for August 14th 2018.

[13] US (which encompasses North and South America, Oceania and Australia), Asia and Europe.

[14] Over the last two expansions the possibility of "jumping" from server to server was introduced when doing certain tasks for which the game groups players automatically, rather than let players organize themselves (LFR, DF, LFG). This doesn't change the scheme of organization, althrough it can sometimes lead to communication problems which are absent from self-organized groups.

guilds it is easier to organize groups for specific activities, while smaller guilds tend to facilitate closer interpersonal relationships etc.

Communication within the game can be public or private. Public communication takes place on two channels (*General* and *Trade*), and it is exclusively written, while private communication takes place within guilds and in private conversations between players and can be written (*chat*) or audio.

Even with a significantly smaller number of subscribers than at the height of its popularity, WoW is still the game/digital world with the largest stable population (in comparison to other MMORPGs). This, as well as its long duration, makes it a fertile ground for studying different player behaviour and their interactions, including behaviour and attitudes pertaining to players' understanding of the concept of nation in the physical world.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE? T. L. Taylor cites a conversation among players (outside any channel) which she witnessed in 2005, and which prompted her to consider national approaches to WoW:

> "Player 1: english in general please
> P2: this is not general!
> P1: it doesn't matter, english in all channels apart from tells
> P3 [part of the Danish-speaking group]: err nope dude
> P1: no, english en general chats is the rule
> P1: in*
> P2: say has no rules for that
> P4 [another member of the group]: well . . . ah ah ah . . . you can't touch me
> P1: english in all chat apart from /w [whisper, private messages from one player to another]
> P1: its in the server rules
> P1: go read if you don't believe me" (Taylor 2006, 320).

Taylor further states that in many cases she heard that: "[p]layers regularly say that Blizzard prohibits anything other than English in nonprivate speech, often directing people (as in the previous incident) to 'go read the rules'" (Ibid.).

And that they even threaten to report those who do not obey this rule, even though, in the written rules there is no mention of this – on the contrary, it is recommended that players communicate in the language that the greatest number of them understand, and it is clearly stated that the use of other languages (i.e. those that aren't the default language of the game and its tech support) will not be sanctioned.

So, in 2005, among a number of players there was still the belief that the "official" language of the *realm* was the mandatory language of communication within it, even though those who were in Azeroth from the very beginning decidedly state that this was never the case. Rather, the players used their native languages, even in public communication, and the easier communication in these languages caused the grouping of players on certain servers:

> "Never heard of that. I had to leave my first realm back in classic (on release) due to people speaking mainly Spanish and being aggressive to anyone speaking English (I'm Spanish myself, but it meant people were not… kind towards you if you tried using English), and the first PvP realm I played in was basically taken over by Spaniards. Also during classic" (user: N; 30. 04. 2015, https://eu.battle.net/forums/en/wow/topic/ 14 381090012?page=1).

Many years later (in 2016), in one of the public channels (*Trade chat,* on another server), a conversation on the same topic took place, but with significantly different answers:

> "R.: Hey quick question, whats the primary language of this realm?
> M.: English?
> S.: English
> S2.: Dick
> S3: idk look at chat :L

E.: Engrish
G.: american
H.: dansk
I.: russian
R.: ancient hebrew
M.: Canadian
G2.: clue is in the realm list
P.: klingon
A.: Romana
H2.: hungary
F.: Bullshit mostly
R2.: Mandalorian
I.: latin
H.: I. : откуда вы
B.: ancient egyptian
N.: Mongolia
R.: wha the realm list says isnt always true
S4.: Norway"

The flow of the conversation shows that the issue of English-as-official-language isn't taken seriously by anyone anymore, because, in the meantime, the policy that allows all languages became abundantly clear. The so-called "official language of the realm" pertains only to the language in which the game and the tech support for it is delivered to users. However, the fact that the question was even asked shows that there were still players (probably new ones) who weren't familiar with the multilingual policy.

Blizzard never attempted to prescribe any language to its users. And this doesn't only pertain to European servers, but also those in the US/North America:

"There are no 'english speaking' realms. There are no 'spanish speaking' realms. ... All NA servers are in the same queues. There is no rule saying that you have to speak english to play the game" (user: S; 4. 01. 2012. https://us.battle.net/forums/en/wow/topic/3867056 866),

Over the years, asking questions about English as the ultimate language of communication came to cause near-universal condemnation:

> "these threads all boil down to the same thing: I can't understand what they're saying, so make them speak my language or get them out of here" (user: M; 4. 01. 2012. https://us.battle.net/forums/en/wow/topic/3867056 866),

And those who would ask them were often designated as "racists", or at least as "insensitive" toward players who speak languages other than English. This, however, doesn't stop players from complaining about the language barrier, especially in cases when they are forced to use tools for grouping (LFR, DF), when the server groups players for certain tasks and the group ends up with more people who (maybe) don't speak English:

> "I would like a server that is really active and not only some random languages in the chat I don't know" (user JH; 1. 04 2018, https://www.facebook.com/groups/ OriginalWoWeu/?fref=nf).

This change in understanding of the concept of "official" language as the only language of public communication is a process which, as we can see, has been taking place since the very beginning of the game and all new players are consistently taught tolerance and understanding that all languages are equal.

The preferred multilingualism becomes most prominent on New Year's Eve, when players on European servers start wishing a happy new year to everyone on the public *Trade* channel, using most European and even some non-European languages to do so. This is the only moment when no one complains about the use of local languages on one of the official channels, on the contrary – the multinational spirit of European servers shines through.

EACH TO THEIR OWN. Yet, the very concept and game design are, at least in part, in opposition to the preferred (and theoretically

assumed) multilingualism/multinationalism of the game. From the very beginning, on European servers the game was offered in multiple languages (English, Spanish, German, French), and later added Russian (2008), Portuguese (2011) and Italian (2012), so the grouping of players in line with native language is clear and expected. On US servers, the game was first offered only in English, but a version in Spanish was quickly added, as well as a version in Portuguese. Versions of the game in different languages are logical from the standpoint of expanding the player base to those who don't speak English, but they also cause the closing off of players into the confines of "their own" language, thus diminishing the possibility of interactions between people from different cultural/linguistic zones.

Regardless of game design, speakers of languages that don't have a specialized version of the game tend to group on certain servers, which means that their languages frequently pop up in public communication:

> "Europe is obviously a continent of many, many languages. Unofficial language communities do gravitate towards particular servers, there's the Afrikaans communities on Kazzak and Sylvanas, the Arabic and Dutch communities on Kazzak, the Finnish communities on Stormreaver & Tarren Mill, the Russian community on Silvermoon (they literally hate playing with their own people sometimes), Swedish community on Frostmane and so on..." (user: LC; 1. 04. 2018, https://www.facebook.com/groups/OriginalWo Weu/?fref=nf).

Which players often view as "natural" grouping in national frameworks:

> "(t)here's many 'unofficial' language X servers, like for example greek and genjuros, Hungarian on Ragnaros, etc. but there's many English speakers on all of these that I've ever been to, there just tends to be places where some nationalities congregate when they want to play with their own kind" (user: JS; 1. 04. 2018,

https://www.facebook.com/groups/OriginalWoWeu/? fref=nf).

This is obviously an idea which was imported from the physical into the digital world. In line with this idea about national grouping as completely "normal", new players are often advised to do some research before entering the world in order to determine on which server the speakers of their language (even if it's English) congregate, in order to ease themselves into the game.

Another way of grouping according to language is by forming guilds.[15] In early 2018, there were 19104 guilds which had at least some results in the final segment of the last expansion[16] (https://www.wowprogress.com, 4. 3. 2018), and their layout according o servers divided by language was:

Server language	Number of guilds	Server language	Number of guilds
English	7511	German	5982
French	2586	Russian	2078
Spanish	679	Italian	248
Portuguese	32		

[15] Language is by no means the only criterion for joining a specific guild: an important criterion is the player's relationship to the game (casual/hardcore), age (there are guilds whose members are all middle-aged or older, and there are many guilds that don't accept players under 18 years of age), the size of the guild and others.

[16] This means that they killed at least one "boss" from the final raid, playing at the easiest level of difficulty (*Normal*, which is followed by *Heroic* and *Epic*). As only "big" guilds can organize teams for completing specific tasks, they are the only ones considered in the analysis, because they are the only ones that appear on the scoreboards. Of course, there is a great number of guilds that don't want to raid or don't have enough (interested) members, and are more focused on the social or economic aspects of the game. Their number varies and it's practically impossible to count them, especially while taking into account the languages they speak. Thus data from wowpeogress.com, even though incomplete remains the most reliable.

English servers are also considered international because it is assumed that speakers of German, French or Russian will congregate on "their own servers" while all others will mostly go to English servers as English is taught in schools in virtually every European country, making it a *lingua franca.* Thus, English servers also tend to house a great number of guilds which are marked as language specific. These are mostly "smaller" languages that don't have specialized servers, even though there are those who choose to play on an English/international server, but keep the intra-group communication in another language:

Arabic [17]	11	Bulgarian	29	Chinese	6
Croatian	19	Czech	137	Danish	102
Estonian	5	Finnish	113	Greek	39
Hebrew	6	Hungarian	123	Iranian	11
Korean	2	Latvian	4	Lithuanian	4
Norwegian	69	Polish	187	Portuguese [18]	12
Romanian	24	Slovakian	1	Slovenian	2
Swedish	244	Turkish	89	Italian	1
Total: 25 languages; 1240 guilds					

This means that there were only 6271 English-speaking/international guilds, which is just under a third of the total number of guilds on all European servers. This, in turn, means that a large number of European players chose[19] to play in communities the primary language of which isn't English.

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[17] Aside from the 12 on English speaking servers there i another Arabic guild on a Spanish server.

[18] Out of these 13, 11 are based on a server connected to the Portuguese, so they can easly change the language of public communication.

[19] It is impossible to determine this number precisely: data on the number of players on each server isn't available – only the number of characters, and as one player can have 1–11 characters per server, and up to 50 per user account, there is no way to determine their real number.

The strategies of organizing into national guilds vary. Recruitment messages (on one of the public channels or in *Guild Finder*) in different European languages are obviously targeted only at the speakers of those languages (who do not have to be members of the specific nation the language of which is used, but these cases are rare), and in these cases the linguistic exclusivity is complete:

> "Guilda *** – 11/11 HC si 1/11M recruteaza romani pt Antorus Mitic raid/social. Pst me pt detalii."

> "Hrvatski guild svi lvl ilvl clase su DOBRO DOŠLE !!!!!"

There are, however, messages in English which underline the exclusive national criteria for taking on new members (e.g. "ONLY POLISH"), and in these cases it remains unclear why the recruitment message is in English, if only members belonging to one nation are expected to apply.

Some of the national guilds are so exclusive, that they are willing to shut down due to lack of membership rather than lower their criteria and accept players who aren't *hardcore,* or internationalize. This happened to the *Paragon* guild which was considered one of the most successful on a global level for years. Seita, the longstanding Guild Mater explained the decision to shut down the guild in this way:

> "We have decided to stop raiding which obviously means we will not be a part of the world first race in Legion. In the end it came between going international, playing with suboptimal Finnish roster or quitting. For a while I was seriously considering going the international route, but in the end decided it was not worth the trouble for me" (25. 02. 2016, https://www.paragon.fi/node/1122.html).

The other, completely opposite option is to change the character of the guild over time, as shown by the case of the ExYu guild, which was founded with the goal of gathering players from the territories of the Former Yugoslavia, but was, in 2016, completely international, with basic communication taking place in English, while the majority of the members (aside from the Guild

Master, a woman from Former Yugoslavia) didn't even know why the guild bore the name it did.

There are guilds that seek membership among players who speak closely related languages – in these cases nationality isn't the deciding criteria, but rather the possibility of mutual understanding. Even though different yet related languages are spoken, it can be assumed that the desirable members are somehow "less foreign" (Eriksen 1994/2010, 137) than all others who speak different languages and, possibly, come from vastly different cultures. This mostly pertains to Scandinavian (the Danish, Norwegians and Swedes), Belgian-Dutch, Czech-Slovakian and Balkan guilds ("We are Duch/Belgium gaming clan, playing WOW with friends. We recruit Duch/Belgium people only – 18+, no exeptions"), while in other cases guilds decide to extend their membership to those who don't speak their native language, even though they point out certain preferences ("We prefer players from CZECH or SLOVAKIA but others are welcome as well"; "Norvegian guild but evry one is wellcome"). Aside from this, there are guilds that are conceived as international from the beginning, but with an accent on specific nations/languages and the idea that all of these languages be used equally in internal communication ("Looking for English/Russian/Lithuanian speaking people...").

There are those guilds whose basic recruitment messages are in English, but they re repeated in the preferred language of internal communication ("Balkan: Prvi balkanski guild na CoA serveru; Midhnight Mafia: Pozdrav svima novi guild traze se svi balkanci da pokrenemo ovaj guild"), which obviously means they are counting on international membership, even though players speaking a specific language are preferred. In these cases the communication within the community is, by rule, bilingual: it is considered good manners to use English when members who don't speak the specific preferred language are present.

National guild names, such as "Proud to be Danish", "Danish Vikings", "Polania", "Magyar Szövetésg", "Croatian Knights", "Polish Winged Hussars", "OnlyTurko", "Türk Guildi", clearly point to the intention to organize on a national basis when founding a guild, but this doesn't mean (as evidenced by the example of the ExYu guild)

that this intention is achieved in practice. Besides, there are names which point to the regional character of a guild ("Balkan") and the expectation that its members come from the designated region.[20] Thus we see that the practice of naming guilds doesn't necessarily correspond to their national/international character, as the spectrum reaches from localized guild names even though they are open to all players, across the completely opposite practice of naming a guild in English, yet insisting on members belonging to a certain nationality, to complete localization, when both the name and the recruitment message are in a specific language, unknown to most of the gaming population.

There is a special case comprised of guilds in languages that are considered a "minority" everywhere. This is exemplified by the Japanese guild n the European Russian server or Japanese guilds on US servers: the lack of a localized version of the game directed Japanese players to servers outside their zone, where, despite the language barrier, they feel better than they would in "their own" zone (where the language barrier also exists), and in which there are apparent national tensions in the physical world. The same goes for "national" guilds that lack a national space in the physical world (that lack a nation-state), but successfully organize in a digital framework (the example of which is a Kurdish guild on one of the European servers).

From all of the above we can see that there are numerous strategies of including nationality into organizing communities in digital game spaces. These can go from complete disregard for nationality while embracing the official language of the server as the basic language of internal communication, to complete national exclusivity.

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[20] Guilds that have the word Balkan in their name or recruitment message are usually looking for members from the Former Yugoslavia, not Greeks, Bulgarians or Romanians, because the language of the message/communication is usually one of the languages derived from Serbo-Croatian.

IF THERE ARE NO CHINESE, I CAN AT LEAST DISLIKE/HATE THE RUSSIANS. WoW, at least according to the literature lacks the prejudice which is usual in other games: the Chinese aren't mentioned as gold-farmers,[21] for the simple reason that the Chinese play their own localized version of the game on their own servers in the Asian zone.[22] It was the very size of the WoW universe that facilitated the division into zones and disabled the birth of this specific kind of prejudice, because players from the European zone never come into contact with players from China. But, the division into zones, or rather the restricting of the population to players from European countries, enabled the birth of prejudice toward certain European peoples on European servers, prejudice which was mostly imported from the physical world. Mostly, this is generalized at the level of language:

"D: germans are cancerous in pugs (Pick Up Groups)

V: I live in germany and yes, germans are unfriendly"
(Guild chat, 6. 09. 2016)

This excerpt clearly shows the connection being established between the behaviour of players from German-speaking areas (including people from Austria and Switzerland) with the impression/prejudice which exists about Germans in the physical world, which is evident in this example:

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[21] This is the most famous national/cultural prejudice among gamers in general ("They're all Chinese and they all farm. Case... freaking... closed", Yee 2006), even though turning digital goods and services into real money occurs in all Third World countries (Heeks 2008). It wasn't imported from the physical world, it exists only within the confines of the digital worlds of various games.

[22] Coming into contact with Chinese or goldfarmers from another country is only possible through buying WoW currency or other goods/services from sources outside the game specializing in such transactions for various games. Even through *Blizzard Entertainment* forbids both goldfarming and using these services, on almost every server there are messages advertizing services offered outside the game, but they usually aren't reacted to publicly, and even if they are, they aren't linked to Chinese players.

"A: do germans get more mean when their ilvl
increases?
D: no they get dumber
A: dumber
A: true D:
S: They'll get even the dumbest
I: I worked 10+ years in Germany, they are very nice
people
A: I live in munich
A: they're considered nicer among germans, but hah!"
(Guild chat, 07. 09. 2016).

Stereotypes about members of specific nations are most
frequently displayed in private communication within communities,
especially when there are no members of these nations within these
groups (in the guild in whose chat Germans were negatively
characterized, there are no Germans, even though the guild is
international), but there are national prejudices which are displayed
on public channels, such as the prejudice about the poverty of
Romanians:

"M: Any romanian guilds ?
R: romanians cant afford wow" (General, 24.
09 2017).

A prejudice, which, even though based on the objectively bad
economic status of Romania in comparison to some other members
of the EU, is still malicious.[23] In general, negative attitudes on

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[23] A good example of rating players of different nationalities appears
in a comment about another game (Counter-Strike: Global Offensive). From it,
it's obvious that practically everyone (except members of the nation the author
of the comment belongs to), are negatively characterized: "well after years of
online-gaming I somehow feel like all polish gamers only know one word, don't
know any English and are somewhere between 0 and 13 years old. French
gamers also seem to know only their own langauge but at least it has more than
one word. German gamers consist of people under 16 and people over 35 and
speak all kind of different dialects except for regular German you hear on tv.
But at least they know some English. Sometimes. Ah, also there are Turkish
gamers – those don't know any language at all, but have names like
xXIstanbulStyle63Xx (c_n, 29 Aug 2015, http://9gag.com/gag/aPGx6RB/how-

members of different nations aren't a regular occurrence, especially in public communication, but that is probably a consequence of the strict behaviour guidelines, which prohibit insults based on identity, and which, if reported, could result in a long-term ban.

This, however, does not stop players from venting their negative thoughts and attitudes eslewhere. Foremost in different locations where WoW players congregate (Battle.net,[24] MMOChampion, reddit etc.). Judging by these locations, on European servers, the position of the usually disliked Chinese is taken up by the Russians. Even though the anti-Russian sentiment isn't visible in the game itself, alternative locations are chock-full of complaints about Russian players, going from the fact that Russian names are unreadable because they're in Cyrillic.[25]

> "Every battleground it's Russians. What really buggers me is that I can't even pronounce their name. If I say to my teammates in chat kill that healer gzebdshalzkss nobody has a clue who you are talking about because to us their names are literally unreadable. Wow should translate their names in latin letters for us. We are not russians we can't read russian so don't give us russian letters for gods sake how can I lead my team when I can't even pronounce their names" (Voïdelf, 14. 01. 2018, https://eu.battle.net/forums/en/wow/topic/17 617701892)

russian-cs-go-players-see-the-world-when-i-tell-russians-that-i-m-from-finland)

[24] Blizzard precisely defines the violation of rules on race and ethnicity as: "both clear and masked language and/or links to websites containing such language or images which: Promote racial/ethnic hatred; Are recognized as a racial/ethnic slur; Allude to a symbol of racial/ethnic hatred", and it pertains to nationality as well: "language and/or links to websites containing such language or images which: Promote national hatred; Are recognized as national slurs; Allude to symbols of national hatred" (eu.battle.net/en/community).

[25] Players who complain about not being able to read Cyrillic names are from areas which lack the need to install a Cyrillic keyboard as part of their operating system. Installing Cyrillic support for Windows solves this problem.

To the fact that Russians converse in Russian/Cyrillic amongst themselves when they're in a group with players from other countries:

> "The only problem i see, is the language barrier because of the cyrillic alphabet." (sunxsera, 17. 10. 2015, https://www.mmo-champion.com/threads/ 188 0917-What-s-the-problem-with-Russians/page2) .

As if a conversation in a foreign language would be any more understandable if it was written in the Latin alphabet, to the fact that in the PVP (*Player versus Player)* segment of the game the Russians enter the battleground with groups that were organized in advance (and, of course, win), that their strategies of gameplay are unacceptable.

> "Seriously, it was way better when they had their place to do whatever, far away from our servers. They ruin every BG with endless graveyard farmings and pointless defends in AV and dumb holding the flags forever and all that !@#$. They are doing this %^-* just to piss people off, man i want them gone from EU servers, I know its never going to happen but this is !@#$ (Talldarin, 23. 09. 2016, https://eu battle.net/forums/en/wow/topic/17613462055?page =1)

And even that they generally cheat in the game and that this is a well-known fact:

> "Russia and balkan countries are known for their corruption and cheating in every spectrum of life. It is not that far grasped to say it is the same in their gaming culture." (Hanablossom, 17. 10. 2015, https:// www.mmo-champion.com/threads/1880917-What-s-the-problem-with-Russians/page2).

> All the complaints about the Russians are best summed up in the statement: "M: the problem with Russians is that they are Russian" (Guild chat, 01. 12. 2017).

On one hand, this is the consequence of a lack of understanding of the Russian language and culture, which positions the Russians on the far end of the spectrum of otherness – they are "more foreign" than members of other European nations, which is recognized by many who object to the negative perception of Russian players:

> "This is another thing that annoys me about the EU WoW community. Every time they lose to Russian players, they specifically rant about overall and suggest/ask for Russians to be removed from our regional servers. When it's a team of Spanish, do they ask for Spanish players to be removed from our servers?
> Do they ask for other Italian, French, German, Swedish, British, Danish etc etc to be removed? no – it's because they can read their names and server names but they can't read the Russian's players names. So basically, these people are just xenophobes... even if that's on a minor level or major level" (Inspired, 25. 09. 2016, https://eu.battle.net/forums/en/wow/topic/1761346 2055).

While, on the other hand it is a consequence of geopolitical relations (Vice 2017) and the generally negative image of Russia in Western media (Kabel 2017, 34), that, in the physical world shapes the attitudes and opinions of the players. The animosity toward Russians is the best example of importing offline attitudes about specific nations into digital space, in which there is no reason for them.

AND YET IT MOVES. Despite the idea that MMORPGs afford players a multicultural space in which boundaries between languages, cultures and nations have no meaning, the presented data shows that players import their offline nationalism into this space to a large extent. While nationalism is not immanent to the concept of the game, it is meaningful for the behaviour of the players as it is based on their personal RL experiences and worldviews. Yet, the relationship toward nation ("one's own",

"others" or different variants in-between) in the space of games is restricted to a choice of who one will be in community with and to the occasional display of attitudes in public, or in the private space of a guild, and to a far lesser extent to everyday behaviour and achieving of goals within the game. The grouping of players from different cultural/linguistic zones, although occasionally negatively commented on, is never the cause for giving up a common goal. There have been no recoded cases of anyone leaving a group because there were too many Russians or Germans in it, and thus giving up their goal or postponing its completion, despite the limited possibilities of communication. This points to a real disregard for national borders, as much as they may be declaratively maintained. As shown by the example of players from Serbia (Gavrilović 2012), the process of overcoming borders is slow and hard, all the more slow the harder the attitudes, beliefs and prejudices imported from the physical world. And this obviously doesn't pertain only to Serbia, but to the whole European and global player population.

Still, a large number of players publicly express attitudes which are in opposition to maintaining national borders in digital space. Some of them think that entering digital space enabled them to be in contact with people they wouldn't have otherwise been able to meet, and that this experience positively impacted their lives in the physical world and enabled them to attain knowledge which they would have had a hard time gaining in the physical world:

> "Ive actually become better at speaking and writing english due to playing WoW on EU servers. And I love that Im in a guild with people all over Europe. Im danish but would never chose a danish only speaking guild or if we had servers only for danes (like the french and the germans have)" (M. B, 1. 04. 2018,
> https://www.facebook.com/groups/OriginalWoWeu/).

While others are firm believers in the multicultural potential of the game:

> "My general philosophy is, that while playing WOW, we are either of Horde, Alliance or those that dont care about either but just do stuff they like. Nationality belongs outside the game world." (Dezri, 24. 09. 2016, https://eu.battle.net/forums/en/wow/topic/1761346 2055?page=2)

> "nationalism should have nothing to do with wow.join a debating club for such subjects if they really concern you" (Martikk, 24- 09. 2016, https://eu.battle.net /forums/en/wow/topic/17613462055?page=3)

They are in complete alignment with the assumptions that have been around since the inception of digital worlds, even if they aren't being achieved in practice at the expected pace. Yet, as within digital worlds nationalism doesn't reflect on the real behaviour of the players, it can be assumed that the value system by which some nations are more worthy than others will change toward the expected/desired understanding that "O : Nationalism (...) gratest sickness of 20th century, in the end we are all people that share same values" (Guild chat, 07. 04. 2017).

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