

Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity in Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's

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Abstract

This dissertation examines both Virtual Worlds and Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG) and ideas of Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity. These two subjects are examined in order to establish whether or not it is possible to identify a potential link between them. The ambition of establishing the possibility of this link is an effort to move towards gaining an increased understanding that is the social phenomenon of the growth of Virtual Worlds. The discussion will outline the existing models and ideas relating to Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity before moving on to give a history of the development of Virtual Worlds. From here Virtual Worlds will be explored to see what characteristics are present that can allow us to establish whether or not a link between the ideas of Nationalism can be established, in order to further our understanding of why these behaviours are manifesting themselves in Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's.

Introduction

The current period of time in which we find ourselves living is one seen by many as being a time of unprecedented change (Webster, 2001; 1). This period has come to be known as 'The Information Age' by many pundits, commentators, analysts and authors such as Manuel Castells (1996-98) . The speed at which the Information Age has made its impacts felt so greatly is truly remarkable, within two decades digitalisation has transformed our daily lives. Its effects can be felt throughout our offices, homes and educational institutions. The advancement of Information Communication Technologies, such as mobile telephones, high-speed broadband internet, and their increasing availability represent the Information Age's most significant impacts for this discussion. These advances allow us to engage in many activities regardless of time or location in a way that would have been previously unimaginable (Webster, 2001; 2-5).

For the purposes of this debate we need only to focus on the aspects of the information touched on above , specifically in the fields of ICT. The 1990's bore witness to much

frenzied hype around the future of internet and ‘cyberspace’. Whilst the turn of the millennium saw an economic crash that ended such dreams, at the same time a shift in culture and people’s behaviour was taking place. The spread of personal computers, laptops, mobile telephones and the internet has affected the way we go about many of our everyday activities. More and more we use these tools to carry out tasks such as social exchanges, online shopping and searching for information. Amongst the various new uses of such technologies lies Multiplayer game playing (Mäyra, 2008; 119), in the form of Virtual Worlds and Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG). These Virtual Worlds have generated much interest, not just from users but writers and academics of various fields of expertise.

With the development of Virtual Worlds accelerating at a dizzying pace, and the populations growing rapidly, this interest has grown. The economist Edward Castronova has taken a significant interest in these objects, and describes the mass influx of people coming to inhabit these Virtual Worlds as an ‘Exodus to the Virtual World’ (2007), an idea which actually forms the title of one of his books on the subject of Virtual Worlds.

So why is this relevant? What is the significance of this? Well, Castronova helps demonstrate this in an earlier piece. In his book *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Videogames* (2005), Castronova explains that the significance of these Virtual Worlds is in fact, us, the users of them. He claims that:

there are many more users than you might imagine; their numbers are growing rapidly; they are located in places you’d never suspect; they are not the people you thought they would be; and their motives seem to be both more sensible and loaded with heavy implications. (Castronova, 2005; 51).

What Castronova helps to explain is that these Virtual Worlds are being inhabited by all types of people, of all ages, from all over the real world (2005). The relevance of this is that, as is

again explained by Castronova, these Virtual Worlds are coming to host a number of ordinary human affairs, such as conflict, trade, love and governance (2005; 2). This is further exemplified by Peter Ludlow and Mark Wallace (2007) who explain that within the growing Virtual Worlds available to us, we can witness the occurrence of events that would seem perfectly natural within the real world. These events include the singer Regina Spektor releasing an album in the Virtual World Second Life (2003) before it was released physically in the real world, clothing brand American Apparel also opened a shop within the same Virtual World, and even Universal Music opening a 'showcase stage' hosting performances from artists such as Chamillionaire (2007; 1).

In other words, what this shows us is that these Virtual Worlds are increasingly mimicking the real world in which we live our daily lives. As Castronova explained there is a demonstration of 'ordinary human affairs' (2005; 2) taking place. As populations of these spaces increases and subsequently the amount of money and interest they generate, it becomes of increasing relevance for us to attempt to understand this phenomenon. Whilst there is growing amounts of useful literature being generated explaining what is going on in Virtual Worlds, and often its implications; it seems to be that there is very little that offers an explanation as to why people are behaving the way they do in these spaces.

It is here that we lead on to this discussion. Why examine Virtual Worlds for a link with Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity? As I explained, in my research I have come across little literature or research that attempts to explain what is going on in these Virtual Worlds. We appear to be developing an understanding of what is happening, but not why. I have also explained that in many ways, these Virtual Worlds are increasingly becoming more like the real world. In examining the existing literature of Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity and seeing if there is indeed a link between what is occurring within these Virtual Worlds, it may help to give us a greater understanding of why it is that the events taking place within these spaces are occurring.

The literature already in place on the subjects of Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity may be well suited to explaining both the behaviours of those large populations within Virtual Worlds and the forces taking hold within them. The literature of Nationalism sets out models that attempt to explain the behaviour of large groups of people, why they come together and what it is that binds them together. This could potentially help us to gain a greater understanding of the actions and sense of attachment that users develop to their Virtual Worlds.

If this is true, and a link can be established, it may be possible to look at Virtual Worlds as entities similar to the existing nations. This would mean that it may be possible to examine the way that people attach themselves to these Virtual Worlds and their fellow inhabitants in a similar way to the way we examine the National Identity of existing national communities. This could possibly be achieved by attempting to apply the existing ideas and models of National Identity to Identity formation within Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's.

The aim of this discussion is to attempt to identify whether or not there is any link that can be established between the existing text on Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity and the understanding are starting to develop of Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's. This will be done by first looking at the text on Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity and identifying what are the key defining components within them. From here the discussion will move onto exploring what Virtual Worlds are, and what aspects could possibly be linked to the defining characteristics of Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity. In doing this it may become possible to identify the areas that may be possible to explain from a political viewpoint, using the discourse on the ideology of Nationalism.

Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity

The Ideology of Nationalism has been the pivotal factor in the shaping of global politics since its inception in the latter part of the 18th century. Nationalism has laid at the heart of wars, and been responsible for millions of people willingly laying down their lives for the cause of their 'fatherland' (Ozkirimli, 2000; 1). It is this powerful, emotional and often irrational

ideology that has played such a key role in the lives of billions of people that this discussion attempts to explore. In this section we shall examine what Nationalism is and how it is presented .

An important port of call in this examination of Nationalism, is the work of Anthony D. Smith. In his piece *Nationalism* (2001), Smith examines the concepts of Nationalism. Smith describes both the term and ideology Nationalism as being relatively modern, attributing its first usages to Johann Gottfried Herder and Augustin de Barruell in the late 18th century. Smith identifies Nationalism to have five key ‘meanings’ (2001; 5-6), which have been developed over the past century. These meanings are as follows:

1. The process leading to the formation or growth of a nation;
2. The sentiment or consciousness of belonging to the nation;
3. The language and symbolism of the nation;
4. The social and political movement on behalf of the nation;
5. The doctrine and/or ideology of the nation, both general and in particular.

Smith understands Nationalism to refer to one or more of the last three meanings outlined above. Each of these meanings implies a sense of ‘national feeling’ and is already present amongst at least some part of the population. Smith notes that this needs to be remembered as serving the purpose of connecting the more active, organized sector groups to those more fragmented and passive sectors of society. In discussing the concepts of Nationalism, Smith also notes that as a ‘sociopolitical movement’ Nationalism appears to be similar to most other sociopolitical movements. This comparison is made as, in principle; Nationalism shares similar characteristics amongst its organisations, activities and techniques. There is however one major, significant, defining difference; Nationalism’s emphasis on cultural gestation and representation. A key component in the concept of Nationalism, according to Smith, is its reliance on the population to become immersed within the culture of their nation. This cultural immersion includes a renewed interest in history, re-examination of native language helped through disciplines such as philology and lexicography, restoration of native arts and

crafts, music, native dance and folksong and cultivation of literature, particularly in the forms of poetry and drama. For Smith, this accounts for the amount of literary societies, historical research and music festivals and music festivals associated with Nationalist movements, as opposed to protest rallies, declarations or armed resistance. Furthermore this explains the disproportionate amount of 'humanistic' intellectuals represented in nationalist movements and revivals.

Unlike the discourse of Nationalism, its symbolism is clearly and vividly objectively encapsulated in its all-encompassing object, the nation (Smith, 2001). This sentiment is echoed in Ernst Renan's key work *Qu'est-ce Qu'une Nation?* (What is a Nation?) originally written in 1882. For Renan, 'the nation is a soul, a spiritual principle'. The nation is the symbol that represents the possession of a shared legacy of memories, as Smith alludes to. Renan takes this idea further, stating the nation is the symbolic end product of a long period of work, sacrifice and devotion. Another point of agreement between Renan and Smith is that of a consciousness or awareness of belonging to the nation. According to Renan, it is a consent, desire and will to live together and value a common heritage along with a coupled shared history that constitutes a nation, this can be seen when Renan claims that 'The desire of nations to be together is the only real criterion that must always be taken into account' (1994 [1882] ; 17). Renan goes on to identify this shared past as the social principle that the national idea rests upon. In order for a nation to exist, its people have to share common glories in the past and a will to do so again in the future. Renan claims that nations are held together not by shared laws, or rights or frontiers, but instead to have worked, suffered and hoped together as one; and the want or desire to continue to do so. (1994 [1882]: 17-18).

Not all who have written on the topic of Nationalism necessarily share this view however. Joseph Stalin, writing in his piece *The Nation*, Stalin takes a slightly different approach to understanding the idea of the nation, and subsequently Nationalism. Stalin, unlike Renan, chooses to focus on the more tangible aspects that form a nation. For the most part of this text, Stalin points to factors such as the presence of a stable community, common language, common territory, common economy and economic cohesion. Unlike Renan, Stalin appears to be more interested in the more physical mechanisms that help constitute the make-up of

nations, paying little attention to those individuals that actually make up the nation. Even later in the text where Stalin does discuss the individuals of the nation, he takes a much more methodical approach. Stalin discusses what he calls the ‘psychological make-up or...national character’, which unlike the more emotional ideas of Renan, represents a common set of psychological characteristics, passed from generation to the next which forms a common culture, and composes a characteristic of the nation. Stalin goes on to offer the following definition of what exactly constitutes a nation:

A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture. (1994 [1913]: 20)

Özkirimli describes this definition as one the most well known definitions of the nation (2005: 16). It also helps to demonstrate some of the problems scholars have discovered in defining and understanding both nation and Nationalism. Both Renan and Stalin’s pieces were seen as pivotal in understanding the nation, nationhood and Nationalism, yet the characteristics used in their respective pieces are somewhat at odds with each other. Özkirimli points out that as is the case for most concepts within social science, Nationalism is subject to competing definitions. The works of Renan and Stalin illustrated above help to demonstrate these competing definitions known as the ‘Objective’ and ‘Subjective’ definitions of Nationalism. Stalin’s definition is seen to fall more into the category of the objective definitions. There is however some problems with this definition, and others based on what Özkirimli calls ‘objective definitions of nationhood’, as he goes on to explain. One such problem is that it is not clear which or how many of these characteristics a group needs to possess in order to be termed a nation (2001: 16). Another problem identified by Ignatieff is that the claims made to national distinctiveness are often orientated towards their close neighbours, whether it be implicit or explicit. Ignatieff looks to Freud in helping to explain this, arguing that the groups with smaller actual differences are more likely to over emphasise the differences in their imagination (1999: 94). Özkirimli terms such objective attempts to arrive at a definition of Nationalism as ‘necessarily arbitrary, hence fundamentally misguided’ (2005: 17).

The objective vs. subjective definitions of Nationalism also helps to highlight Hans Kohn's (1958) distinction between Civic and Ethnic Nationalism. Ideas based on the objective definitions, such as Stalin's, fall into the Ethnic Category. Ethnic Nationalism emphasises ideas of a common descent and cultural sameness, making the nation overtly exclusive. According to Ignatieff, unity is achieved through the pre-existing characteristics such as language, religion, customs and traditions, making the nation a 'Place of passionate attachment' (1994; 4). Ethnic nationalism claims that an individual's deepest attachments are inherited, therefore membership to a nation can only be acquired through blood, at birth (Özkişimli, 2005; 23). Civic Nationalism on the other hand, claims a nation to be a shared commitment to the public institutions of state and society. Membership is not related to race, colour creed, language or ethnicity; it is instead made up of those that subscribe to the political creed of a nation. This Nationalism is therefore civic, as it represents a community of equal rights, bearing citizens united in a patriotic attachment to shared practices and values (Ignatieff, 1994; 3-4).

Meanwhile, Subjective definitions of Nationalism are what Heywood (2003) describes as 'psycho-political' and according to Ozkişimli (2005) are centred around the characteristics of self-awareness, solidarity, loyalty and common will. This strand of definition can be exemplified by Renan's text discussed above. Subjective definitions of Nationalism can also be seen by sociologist Max Weber in his piece 'The Nation' (1994 [1948]). In this piece, Weber would appear to quite explicitly reject suggestions made by the Objective definitions, sharing an emphasis on the emotional aspects of Nationalism seen by Renan above. This can be seen from the opening passage of this piece:

The fervour of this emotional influence does not, in the main, have an economic origin. It is based upon sentiments of prestige... (1994 [1948]: 21)

Weber later goes on to state that a nation cannot be understood in terms of the shared empirical qualities common to those seen as its members. Instead, Weber believes, it refers to

one group of people that share a specific sentiment of solidarity in the face of other groups. However, like objective views of Nationalism, subjective definitions also come with problems and criticisms. One such problem is identified by Özkirimli (2005), and is related to the issue of specifying the right unit. If it is granted that one given group of people can be termed as a unified, united nation, are aware of their specific uniqueness, there remains the question of why it is that we feel related to these people and not to others. This leads one to assume, as Özkirimli (2005) neither Subjective or Objective definitions of Nationalism alone are adequate in explaining this social and political phenomenon. This final point relating to how one identifies those we feel an affinity or relation to also leads into the ideas of Identity, which we shall now attempt to examine.

One of the most influential pieces written about the topic of identity comes from Benedict Anderson, in the work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2006). In writing this piece Anderson was attempting to explain how every successful revolution to have occurred in the wake of World War II can be defined in Nationalist terms. In doing this Anderson focuses mainly on the cultural aspects of Nationalism. For Anderson, both Nationalism and Nationality are best understood as cultural artefacts. He argues that the emergence of Nationalism can be traced back to the late Eighteenth Century; as a result of “spontaneous distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces” (2006; 4). According to Anderson, once this had happened, it was possible for these to effectively become ‘models’ of Nationalism, used in a variety of social terrains and by numerous different ideologies. A key problem in the understanding of Nationalism is, Anderson claims, caused by confusion surrounding terminology of the concept of the nation. Famously, Anderson argues it is easier to look at the nation in the same way as religion or kinship, or as he puts it ‘imagined political communities’ that are in their very nature both limited and sovereign. These communities are seen as imagined as even in the world’s smallest nations, members will never meet, know or hear of the majority of their fellow members. Despite this members still possess the image of their national community in their mind. Nations are seen here as limited as they are finite in size; defined by borders, with other nations making up the geographical space beyond one nation’s own borders. Anderson sees nations as being sovereign due to them being born out of the age of enlightenment and revolution, and finally a community as ‘regardless of actual inequality and exploitation they

may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (2006; 7). It is this fraternity amongst members that has allowed for so many millions of people to lay down their lives, willingly, under the guise of the limited imaginings of the nation.

Despite Anderson's terming of nations, and national communities, as being 'imagined'; one should not draw from this as them being false. In fact, Anderson argues to the contrary. He claims that any community larger than that of a small village of face-to-face contact is imagined. If one pictures a nation such as China or India, both of which are nations estimated to have well in excess of one billion members (figures according to www.cia.gov), then it seems plausible to accept Anderson's notion that the entire community of a given nation can exist only as an 'imagined community' living in the mind of its members. The ideas put forward here by Anderson seem to be compatible with those outlined by Renan, as discussed above. Whilst Renan, is talking more on the subject of nations, where as Anderson is focusing more on the idea of Identity, it seems possible to conclude that both are thinking along similar lines. Renan credits the existence of nations to the will of the people to continue as a united, sovereign nation. Similarly, Anderson appears to claim that the existence of national communities (and therefore identity) is born out of the imagination of its members. For the purpose of this discussion, in attempting to establish a link between the ideas and models of Nationalism and Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's it would seem logical that any community existing in these spaces is largely due to both the will and imagination of those that inhabit these spaces.

The idea of Identity is something that cannot be separated from Nationalism. This is a point highlighted by Heywood, who notes that there is not a form of Nationalism that does not address the issue of identity (2003; 167). Similarly, much of the debate and literature on Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's is focused on ideas of identity. The exploration into the possibility of a link between ideas of identity and whether Nationalism's ideas of identity can help explain behaviour within Virtual Worlds, and MMORPG's will form a key part later in this discussion.

We can gain a further insight into idea of National Identity through looking at David Miller, in his piece *On Nationality* (1995). Miller believes that to understand National Identity, one must first have a clear vision of what exactly it is that constitutes a nation. As we have already seen this is a complex task, forming the centre of much debate. Whilst this is a debate that need not be extensively examined here, the insight Miller offers here is both interesting and valuable to this debate. Miller explains that nations do not exist independently of peoples beliefs. The criteria for defining a nation are much more complex than for most other things, as with nations a person's beliefs also come into the equation. According to Miller, in classing a group of people a 'nation' you are not only commenting on their physical characteristics or behaviour, but also on how they view themselves. In describing a group in this way you are implying that they work and play together, and also see themselves as co-operating to achieve some end, and have mutual obligations to each other, in the same way a work or sports 'team' may.

Miller (1995) also notes that much of the confusion surrounding the idea of nationhood stems from the interchanging use of the terms 'nation' and 'state' in everyday language. 'Nation' can often be seen used as a synonym for 'state', for example many refer to 'the newly emerging nations of the Third World' when really they are talking about the newly formed states (1995; 18). For Miller, a 'nation' is a community of people that aspire to be politically self-determining, whilst 'state' refers to the set of political institutions they possess/wish to possess en route to being a politically self-determining body. This distinction is of some value for this discussion. Miller goes on to explain that it is possible to see nations as minority groups scattered across a number of states, with the example of Kurds and Palestinians today used to highlight this. This position is one that is perhaps possible to see as contrary and in the face of views of others, such as Stalin, who talk of a nation needing a common territory to exist. It is of use to this debate as if it is possible to find some form of link to Nationalism and these Virtual Worlds, they are likely to fall into (or close to) this category.

Another passage from Miller's *On Nationality* (1995) that is both of interest and value to this discussion is the section in which five key characteristics of National Identity are identified

and explained. The first of these characteristics identified by Miller is that National Identity is constituted by belief. This means that for a National Identity to exist it is ultimately down to the will of a given nation's members to believe in its existence and see fellow members as compatriots. This is reminiscent of what was earlier discussed in relation to the work of Renan, a point which Miller himself makes note of (1995; 22-23).

The second feature is that a National Identity embodies a historical continuity. To some extent this point is closely tied to the previous characteristic as it is linked to a given person's ability to feel a connection to others sharing a National Identity, looking both backwards to the past and forwards to the future. The example used here is often to look at military conflicts. However, there is also the idea of the work and toil that those previously have endeavoured in order to build a future for those of the 'nation' in the future. This links back to what is mentioned previously about a similarity to a 'team' and team spirit, where members of a national community are bound by a 'community of obligation' (1995; 23).

National Identity's third distinguishing feature is that it is an active identity. As a nation, members form a community that actively do things and take part in activities together. In taking decisions, working towards the accomplishment of desired aims as a nation, electing leaders etc. In doing this, the national community is acting in a nationalistic manner, as it is determining its own course, for good or bad. This also links to the previous point, as a nation becomes what it is through the decisions it makes, meaning that the link between the past and future is not merely a causal one (1995; 24).

Miller's fourth characteristic of national identity is that the national community is connected to a particular geographic space. This distinguishes them from other types of community groups. For example, if we look at a religious community there is often a sacred site or place of origin. However, unlike a nation, religious communities do not see it as essential to their identities to reside in these geographical places. For nations however, a homeland is an absolute necessity. Part of the actions of a national community's identity (as seen above) must involve controlling a specific region (1995; 24-25).

Miller's final characteristic of what constitutes a National Identity is that the people share a set of common characteristics to which he refers as a 'common public culture' (1995; 25). The notion that part of this is based upon biological descent is untrue, and leads directly to racism. In fact, Miller goes on to suggest that 'ethnic mixing' may be a source of a nation's distinctive character. Therefore immigration can add to a given group's common public culture, given that they come to share in a common National Identity. The settler cultures of the New World such as the American and Australian are cited as examples here. It is also untrue to suggest that the common public culture required must be monolithic and can be differing from one national grouping to another (1995; 25). Lastly, it is also untrue to claim that all members of a national grouping exhibit each in equal measure. Whilst members may not have a concrete idea of what constitutes their own common public culture, they may instead be aware of differences when confronted with foreigners. National Identities have the ability to exercise a pervasive influence on people's behaviour, and yet still remain unarticulated (1995; 25-26).

What are Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's, and where have they come from?

It seems sensible to start with a brief outline of what exactly Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's are. As if often the way, this task is made more complex by the fact that there appears to be competing ideas and definitions for the two, as well as the two terms are often being used in an interchangeable fashion. Whilst these two terms are admittedly closely related, it appears there are, albeit subtle, differences. One definition offered comes from the Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. who describe Virtual Worlds as:

Multi-player (or multi-user) system which is presented as having a large-scale geography. May be divided into game worlds and social worlds, the latter having no objective goals. (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008; 252)

Whilst the same book describes MMORPG's in terms of Online role-playing games, as follows:

Game type where several (typically several thousand) players act simultaneously in the same server base world. Users normally pay a monthly fee and connect by their internet account. An online role-playing game is a graphically illustrated MUD . This type of game is often termed an MMORPG. (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008; 252).

For Richard Bartle the word ‘world’, in this context, is used in the same manner as when we say “the business world”. When it is understood in this manner, we can understand world as not necessarily referring to an entire planet, as it is often inferred by its everyday usage. Bartle goes on to explain that ‘Real’ is that which is, ‘Imaginary’ is that which isn’t and the ‘Virtual’ that which isn’t but having the form or effect of that which is. For Bartle, Virtual Worlds are ‘places where the imaginary meets the real’ (Bartle, 1; 2004). He later goes on to explain that MMORPG’s are a recent development in the history of Virtual Worlds, originally known as persistent worlds, but gained the classification MMORPG due to the vast numbers of players subscribing to play the games. In a separate piece, Bartle comments on how at various times these Virtual Worlds have been referred to as games, simulations, services and media; he claims that contrary to this they are in fact places. Virtual Worlds do share some common characteristics with other places, for example they are in existence at all times, you can visit them at any time and do things in real time whilst visiting them (Bartle, 2007; 158).

These digital video games are derived from an evolution of traditional game forms. MMORPG’s are an evolution of computer based Role Playing Games (RPG’s) played offline, which in turn evolved from table-top RPG’s. A key hinge in RPG’s of all forms is the cultivation of characters. As the name suggests, these games are about taking on, cultivating and development of another character or persona, and taking on the ‘role’ or identity of this character in the game. Whilst it is true that in almost all videogames, there are marked differences to be seen in the RPG genre. These differences are owed to the inspirations taken from table top RPG Dungeons & Dragons where players created a fantasy character, which ‘levels up’ with the acquisition of skills and experience points and collaborate with others to play out scenarios. Setting them apart from many other videogames, as a large chunk of their

appeal is tied up in ideas of identity, which shall be discussed later. It is the expansion in recent years of cyberspace that has allowed the evolution of RPG's to move from being played in the same room by a group of people in table top and early computer based offline RPG's to the MMORPG's that this discussion focuses on. These MMORPG's have their own certain set of features that separate them from previous forms of RPG, and that make them of interest here. MMORPG's are, as is obvious from their name, played online; the effect of this is that "players inhabit and shape the events of a persistent, shared game world" (Burn and Carr, 2006; 14-28).

Having now gained an understanding of what it is that these Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's actually are. We shall attempt to chart their history, growth and development, in order to understand how they have come to the point they are at today. According to Bartle, 5 'Ages' can be seen in the history of the development of Virtual Worlds. The first of such ages is seen as being the period 1978-85 (Bartle, 2004; 4). This period is typified by Multi-User Dungeons (MUD's), which are widely regarded as the first form of MMORPG's (Mayra, 2008) (Bartle, 2004) (Castronova, 2005). These MUD's included titles such as Empire (1972), Avatar (1977-79) and MUD1 (1978). Avatar is seen by Bartle as 'the first ever fully functional graphical virtual world' (2004; 18). It introduced genre-defining features such as navigation of a graphically represented dungeon, battling monsters and collecting treasure. This title also fostered the first signs of social network and game communities amongst players. Communication amongst players was an important feature, with the ability to join small player groups offering opportunities to be more successful in the games challenges than solo players; which became a cornerstone characteristic of online games to come (Mayra, 2008; 121-122). MUD1 (1978) also offered developments in the genre, with the development of the use of rooms, objects and commands. This title additionally introduced the ability to acquire 'godly powers', allowing some of the games administrative work to advanced players, creating the first signs of hierarchy amongst the game community (Mayra, 2008; 122).

The second age of Virtual Worlds is seen as 1985-89 (Bartle, 2004; 7-9). This second phase in the development of Virtual Worlds saw the first signs of commercial success with titles

such as MUD1 (1978), Federation II, Shades (1985), and Gods going 'live' on CompuServe. Commercial success bought an increasing number of inhabitants of Virtual Worlds, which lead to the appearance of some of the same social problems seen in other social contexts. The result of this was the emergence of player-to-player debate on the very subject of in-game player interaction. An example of this is the 'great debate' in the game Habitat (1986). Players of the game engaged in debates as to what form the Habitat (1986) society should take. Much of this surrounded unresolved questions relating to the status of the games 'reality', and whether or not an avatar can be viewed as an extension of a human being; thus entitled to be treated the same as a real person? The debate soon entered legal and philosophical territory, posing the question, 'is a Habitat (1986) murder a crime?' (Mayra, 2008; 122-24).

The period 1989-95 represents Bartle's third age of Virtual Worlds (2004; 9-12). New game types started to appear with programmes allowing players to create objects and functionality within the game world. A significant MOO to appear was LambdaMOO (1990), thanks largely to the discussion which was to appear thanks to 'Mr. Bungle' and the subsequent 'Rape in Cyberspace' (Dibble, 1993) case, which reignited many of the issues seen in the 'great debate' linked to Habitat (1986).

The third age of Virtual Worlds was typified by mass extension. However, it was not until the fourth age (1995-97) (Bartle, 2004; 13-17) that really substantial commercial success was achieved once business became the force driving the expansion of Virtual Worlds. Whilst previously Virtual Worlds were reliant mainly on undergraduates and amateur enthusiasts, this period saw business taking an interest in their development and marketing. This coincided with the 'WWW' (World-Wide-Web) era, in which there was an explosion in the numbers of people with access to the internet. This meant that the expansion seen in the third age of Virtual Worlds was massively accelerated and companies designing successful Virtual Worlds, generating huge profits, for example titles such as Gemstone III (1989) and Dragon's Gate (1991) were netting profits of over \$1,000,000 a month (Bartle, 2004; 15). However, this was short lived due to a change in the business model.

Bartle's fifth age of Virtual Worlds takes us from 1997 to the present day. The development of Ultima Online (1997) saw the coming of age Virtual Worlds. Within 3 months Ultima Online (1997) gained 50,000 subscribers and hit the 100,000 mark within a year, all paying a \$9.99 subscription fee per month. This was largely thanks to the design team, who succeeded in creating a Virtual World both richer and deeper than previously seen MUD's. Ultima Online (1997) provided an emphasis on community building, player-driven action and the accommodation of different playing styles. Virtual Worlds were also furthered massively thanks to the graphical advances of EverQuest (1999) being the first to establish a successful 3D, allowing for users to feel an even greater level of immersion within their chosen Virtual World. The combination of these aspects has led us to the point now where MMORPG's such as World of Warcraft (2004) (currently the market leader) had subscription figures of over 11.5 million users by the end of 2008 (Cavalli, 2008 www.wired.com).

Life inside Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's

Having established what exactly Virtual Worlds and Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games are and how they have developed; it is necessary to examine what goes on inside these spaces.

It was noted at the end of the previous section that the population of many of these Virtual landscapes is indeed quite sizeable, it is of value to examine how these population masses manifest themselves. It is interesting that, in the introduction of a substantive study into many aspects of the MMORPG World of Warcraft (2004), authors Hilde G. Corneliussen and Jill Walker Rettberg note this MMORPG has 'as many players as Sweden or Bolivia has inhabitants' (2008; 2). Straight away this suggests that the inhabitants of a Virtual World can indeed be considered a nation, or at least in the same terms as one. This is emphasised further in the same piece as it is noted that many Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's have their own language and culture. Looking at this in terms of nations, we can see that this seems to fit the objective criteria of Nationalism, and is even highlighted by Stalin (1994 [1919]) as being a key characteristic in defining a nation.

If the previous passage demonstrates that Virtual Worlds can be seen in similar terms to that of nations, then perhaps it is possible to view behaviours exhibited within them in similar terms also. In our earlier examination of the existing literature of Nationalism, we saw a number of the authors discuss the population of a given nation to possess a 'will' or 'desire' to continue as a nation (Smith, 2001) (Renan, 1994 [1882]) (Weber, 1994 [1948]). Now these may seem a curious concept in the modern day. People inhabiting most established nations were born into and know nothing other than the nation they find themselves in. It appears that it may well be valid to suggest that for many of those born in the modern era, the notion of a world where nations do not exist is completely alien and incomprehensible. Perhaps the continued existence of nations, and their population's acceptance is born more out of a combination of familiarity and apathy. Whilst I am not suggesting that the notion of a collective understanding to continue as a unified group amongst a nation's members is an irrelevant notion, it is perhaps seen as a given in today's world. Conversely, Virtual Worlds would simply cease to function if this will or desire to continue was not present within its populace. Becoming an inhabitant of Virtual Worlds is not something that tends to happen by accident. There are a significant number of the hurdles that means deciding to join a Virtual World takes a very conscious decision. In order to access a Virtual World you are often required to purchase or download the necessary software, you are then asked to create an account which often requires authorising a regular subscription fee, agreeing to the terms and conditions of the publishing company and then creating the character which becomes your vehicle to explore the Virtual World (Castronova, 2005; 29-30). It is also true that you are usually required to 'sign in', entering your account details every time you wish to enter a Virtual World. It would therefore seem possible to suggest that the 'will' or 'desire' to continue to constitute a unified group is very much present within Virtual Worlds.

It is Stalin's definition of what characteristics constitute a nation that leads us to the next feature of Virtual Worlds I shall examine. According to Stalin, a common 'economic life' (1994 [1913]; 20) is one of the aspects of which a nation is based upon. It can be seen that there is very much an active economy alive within Virtual Worlds. This is discussed by Edward Castronova, who remarks 'With very few exceptions, every synthetic world has a set of user institutions, game mechanics, and AI [Artificial Intelligence] systems that collectively constitute an economy.' (2005;172). Castronova in fact goes on to explain that 'it would be

impossible to design a synthetic world without an economy. If you create a 3D space with things to do and then admit people into it, economic decisions will be made.’ (2005; 173).

These economies are subject to and bear resemblances to the market forces we experience on a daily basis. This is highlighted by Peter Ludlow and Mark Wallace (2007), who followed the journey of a virtual newspaper in *Second Life* (2003) and *The Sims Online* (2002). Ludlow and Wallace discuss the emergence of the ‘virtual commerce’ emerging within *Virtual Worlds* and the capability for some to earn in excess of \$100,000 a year (2007; 59). In doing this they ‘experiment’ by opening a ‘goth supply store’ in *The Sims Online* (2002) *Virtual World*. They explain that it is possible to purchase furniture, garden decorations, beds and toilets, artwork, clothing etc. through the interface provided within *The Sims Online* (2002) using simoleans, if done in bulk it is possible to gain a discount on such goods. Doing this allows goods to then be sold on for a modest profit in some instances (2007;59). The market for virtual good and services has grown to the point that it actually acts to blur the lines between the ‘Real’ and the *Virtual World*. Ludlow and Wallace demonstrate that inhabitants of *The Sims Online* (2002) have also managed to make money offering their services as architects for virtual homes, or even as partners for cybersex (2007; 61).

What is really interesting is the way that the economies of *Virtual Worlds* not only blur the line between the *Real* and *Virtual Worlds*, they take the leap across. Ludlow and Wallace show that the one of main sources of income in many *Virtual Worlds*, such as *The Sims Online* (2002), is the selling of virtual currency. The story of a character called ‘Respected Banker’, who sells the virtual currency Simoleans in exchange for real world currency. Respected Banker claims that ‘*The Sims Online* is my real-life job,’ (Ludlow and Wallace, 2007;61). The way that this character achieves this is through the transferral of ‘real world’ money, i.e. US Dollars, into their PayPal account outside of the game world and then transferring the equivalent Simoleans into their ‘customers’ account (2007; 61). Here we can understand that the economies of both the *Virtual* and *Real Worlds* clearly overlap. A quick scan of online auction sites such as Ebay can demonstrate the extent of this market, with many items and currencies being sold for a number of different *Virtual Worlds*. This blurring of the lines can also be demonstrated by the emergence of real life ‘sweatshops’ appearing in

China, where players play these games for many hours a day in order to level up characters and collect items which can then be sold on, using the internet (Second Skin, 2008).

If we can understand the economies of Virtual Worlds as having a presence in the market place of Real World economies, it may help to further present the argument that their economy fulfils the criteria laid out by Stalin as a defining characteristic of a nation. Our ability to see the economies of Virtual Worlds as entities similar to that of economies of established nations in the Real World is helped by Edward Castronova (2001) whose study of the MMORPG Everquest (1999) economy allowed him to calculate the Gross National Product (GNP) of this Virtual World and subsequently plot it in a comparative table in relation to the GNP of the economies of established nations. His original study found the GNP of Everquest's (1999) Virtual World, Norrath, was the 77th richest country in the world equal to nations such as Russia (2001; 28). These findings certainly seem to suggest that it is possible to view the economies of Virtual Worlds in similar terms to those of established nations, therefore giving them the validity required to understand them as fulfilling the criteria of a common 'economic life' laid out by Stalin's definition of the nation (1994 [1913]).

Virtual Identities for Virtual Worlds?

As touched on previously, it is impossible to separate ideas of Nationalism and Identity (Heywood, 2003). Similarly there has been much debate on identity in these Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's. Bartle asserts that 'The celebration of identity is the fundamental, critical, absolutely core point of virtual worlds' and adds that 'everything that players do ultimately concerns the development of their own identity' (2004; 159). On this basis then, it seems safe to assume that ideas of Identity are of particular importance for both Nationalism and Virtual Worlds, and therefore worthy of further examination here.

An important aspect of the players online identity is the level to which they become immersed within the Virtual World, and the extent to which they eventually become an extension of the persons 'real world' identity. It is suggested that for a player and their online

character, a leaning towards each other is ‘almost unavoidable’. Virtual Worlds offer a combination of environment and fellow players that present a constant stream of challenges; the response to which helps shape the identity of the individual in the same way as it would in the real world (Bartle, 2004; 161).

It is an intrinsic feature within Virtual Worlds and MMORPG’s that foster this process, in a way that other online areas or activities, such as forums or emails, do not. Upon entering a Virtual World or MMORPG, the user is required to create the character with which they navigate the Virtual World. The character, which is known as an avatar, the player assumes becomes the actor with which the player sees the Virtual World through the eyes of. In doing so, users often generate avatars that are an extension of themselves, incorporating and exploring parts of their personality, which they are often reluctant to explore in their everyday lives outside of Virtual Worlds (Bartle, 2004; 162). It is this aspect that brings a level of immersion to these Virtual Worlds, perhaps above any other.

This point is supported by Edward Castronova. He demonstrates this in his explanation of the process of entering a Virtual World; he also demonstrates how quickly this process can happen. Castronova outlines the process a player has to go through to build or create their avatar. Having stated that the player chooses the avatar’s appearance (height, build, clothing, skin colour etc), he goes on to talk of how the player chooses the avatar’s attributes:

Not knowing what this world will be like, it’s hard to know what kind of person to be. You wonder, should I increase my strength, or my intelligence, or what?

Ah. Just a moment. Something important just happened. You said my strength, not its strength...You were thinking of this digital body as you, not just a representation of you. (Castronova, 2005; 32)

This extract from Castronova, helps illustrate my previous point of the speed at which one can become immersed with the character the player uses to navigate their Virtual World. Castronova goes on to explain that, psychologically, this process is quite natural as the avatar created is ‘just an extension of your body into a new space’ (2005; 45).

This idea that a player becomes immersed with the character with which they use to navigate Virtual Worlds can have a significant impact on their lives, both inside and outside the game world. We previously touched upon a character named ‘Mr. Bungle’ in the Virtual World LambdaMOO (1990). This character sparked controversy when it was alleged that this character raped a fellow inhabitant of this game world. Shortly after the supposed ‘rape’, the player who’s character was subjected to Mr. Bungle’s attack wrote on the games mailing list:

I also think that Mr. Bungle was being a vicious, vile fuckhead, and I...want his ass scattered from #17 to the Cinder Pile. I’m not calling for policies, trials or better jails. I’m not sure what I’m calling for. Virtual castration, if I could it manage it. (Dibbell, 1993).

Dibbell goes on to explain that months after this incident occurred, that the woman whose character was subjected to this attack wrote this post whilst ‘tears were streaming down her face’. Which for Dibbell (1993), demonstrates that the emotional attachment players get to their characters is very much a sign of real emotion.

If I may digress slightly for a moment, there is also another interesting part of the avatar creation process that links to a character’s identity within the game world. Upon having created an avatar, players are often required to join a ‘faction’ or grouping of similar relevance. This is particularly true of MMORPG’s, and shall illustrate this point using the example of World of Warcraft (2004). In World of Warcraft (2004) players are divided into two factions, the ‘Alliance’ and the ‘Horde’. These are of significance here due the similarities they hold to ideas of Identity and Nationalism. Tanya Krzywinska explains that

these factions are made up depending on the ‘race’ of the character (2007; 104). Parallels can immediately be drawn here to the Nationalist literature previously examined, in particular those relating to the ideas Objective definitions and Ethnic Nationalism. Ethnic Nationalism alludes to an emphasis on race, with its claims that National Identity is gained through blood and a shared history, passing on from one generation to the next. Whilst obviously, Identity cannot be passed on through blood in *World of Warcraft* (2004), this is mitigated by the back stories given to each of the factions, representing a shared history. Further inspection shows that this notion of a shared history is a common theme throughout the literature relating to Nationalism, ideas of a shared history being linked to the nation and National Identity can be seen in Smith (2001), Renan (1994 [1882]), Stalin (1994 [1913]) and Miller (1995).

Furthermore, it is possible to interpret this as the idea of Identity formation, in the face of an ‘other’ as eluded to by the likes of Stalin (1994 [1913]), Heywood (2003) and Miller(1995). As Krzywinska explains, the very nature of these factions invokes rivalry. Members of the factions often battle with each other, and are separated into different territories of the game world (2007; 104). Therefore this may help to explain some of the behaviour depicted in some Virtual Worlds and MMORPG’s in Nationalistic terms. Whilst the link may also be somewhat tenuous, Krzywinska may also have highlighted the idea noted by previously by Stalin (1994 [1913]) and Miller (1995) in regards to a common homeland.

Digressions aside, I shall return to the topic of player-character immersion. An interesting perspective on this is given by Sherry Turkle (1995). Turkle suggests that due to Virtual Worlds lack of origins and foundations they are compatible with a postmodernist perspective. For a postmodernist, the world lacks depth and represents a series of surfaces, each of which are there to be explored. Therefore Virtual Worlds can be viewed in a similar way to our everyday lives, as they simply present another surface which can be explored. (1995; 47-48). In this understanding of the world each of these surfaces hold equal legitimacy and validity, this leads Turkle to argue that our embodied ‘Real Life’ which we go about on a daily basis has an equal grounding in reality as the Virtual Worlds people choose to inhabit. According to Turkle, MUD’s blur the line between the game worlds and real life (RL) (1995; 186), which as a result means “MUD players can develop a way of thinking in which life is made

up of many windows and RL is only one of them” (1995; 192). Turkle exemplifies by highlighting the case of an MUD player called Stewart. Stewart spends around forty hours a week within various Virtual Worlds; Turkle says that it would be ‘misleading’ to describe these activities as ‘playing’. Instead Turkle refers to this as ‘constructing a life that is more expansive than the one he lives in physical reality.’ (1995; 193). Turkle demonstrates this further by showing how Stewarts develops his first romantic relationship with a fellow inhabitant of his Virtual World; allowing him to experience things, such as dates, that he had never experienced in RL (1995; 194).

This display of blossoming romance within a Virtual Worlds is by no means an uncommon occurrence. The documentary film *Second Skin* (2008) follows a number of couples that have met within MMORPG’s such as *Everquest II* and *World of Warcraft* (2004) and then go on to get married in real life. This film also helps support the claims made previously in this section about player immersion in Virtual Worlds and the blurring of lines between the Virtual and Real worlds. *Second Skin* (2008) also follows Dan Bustard, a player of *World of Warcraft* (2004), who becomes addicted to this particular game. As a result of his addiction, Dan Bustard subsequently loses his relationship, job and house. Admittedly, parts of this section on the Identity of players within Virtual Worlds and MMORPG may seem irrelevant to the broader discussion of Nationalism and a possible link with Virtual Worlds. However, as has been touched upon Identity and its formation is central to both Nationalism and Virtual Worlds. In coming to understand how inhabitants of Virtual Worlds identify with their online persona, and subsequently become immersed within their Virtual Worlds it may possibly help us to gain an increased understanding of Identity formation. Nationalism, as a long established political ideology, has an understanding of Identity based upon pre-existing models. In attempting to examine the two different ideas of Identity and find possible linkages between the two, it may help to further our understanding of Identity in relation to both Nationalism and Virtual Worlds. The following section is a case study that helps to highlight the linkages between Nationalism and Virtual Worlds, and the overlaps between two and the blurring of lines between reality and the virtual. The groups seen in the following study appear to carry many of the traits one would expect of a group belonging to a National Community, not to that of a videogame.

Virtual Diaspora – A Case Study.

A particularly interesting piece on this is seen in the work of Celia Pearce (2006) who followed a group of players from the Massively Multiplayer Online Game Uru: Ages Beyond Myst (2003). The game itself only ran online for a relatively short period of time before its closure in February 2004. In terms of subscribed inhabitants it was also a relatively small game, with around 10,000 players (Pearce, 2006; 19). However, following the closure of this Virtual World, the player community demonstrated a passionate response. Pearce's study followed the inhabitants of this Virtual World once the game itself had ceased to exist. The behaviour exhibited by the players of Uru (2003) highlights some traits that are worth examining for the purpose of this exploration into a possible link between Virtual Worlds and Nationalism.

There is one particular group of around 300 players that lay at the core of Pearce's study. In Pearce's words, this group 'immigrated and formed an "ethnic" community in There (2003), an online virtual world' (Pearce, 2006; 19). Once this group had relocated to their new habitat, players took advantage of the ability to create things within the There, an activity afforded to them by the player asset creation tools within the game. This allowed players to combine the existing culture of There with that they were already familiar with in Uru (2003). This resulted in the creation of 'a hybrid culture that is comparable to a Chinatown or Little Italy in the United States' (Pearce, 2006; 19-20). This would appear to demonstrate a manifestation of Nationalistic behaviours within Virtual Worlds. Immediately, one can see a link to the ideas of Miller (1995), who explained that immigration can lead to the enriching of a given National Identity as long as the immigrant group adds to the existing culture. Pearce explains how within There the Uru Diaspora recreated their culture, replicating artefacts, objects and architecture. In many cases these Uruesque objects were created with obvious references to the Uru back story. Taking advantage of the ability to auction off player-created objects within There, players sold the objects and buildings they created to the general There population. This process allowed the Uru Diaspora to become more a part of the common public culture of There (2003), to the point at which they eventually assimilated, feeling as much 'Therians' as 'Uruvians'. Interestingly, once a player-run version of Uru reemerged, the 'Uruvian' immigrants in There (2003) chose to not to return to their 'homeland' of Uru (2006; 19-20).

The example given above of the migrant Uru Diaspora in *There* is not an isolated occurrence. In the same study by Celia Pearce (2006), another group can be seen demonstrating similar behaviour. This group can be found in the *Virtual World Second Life* (2003), once again made up of migrant inhabitants of Uru. This group, like the first group discussed, also demonstrate a knowledge and expression of an individual or specific culture. The Uru Diaspora found within *Second Life* (2003) also made use of player creation tools to recreate cultural aspects from Uru. However, this group went one step further and created many exact replicas of portions of the Uru *Virtual World* with incredible detail. This again highlights characteristics of Nationalism discussed previously. In an extension of the previous point of immigration enriching a pre-existing National Identity, it also shows links to the ideas of a possession of a culture distinct to a specific group (Weber, 1994 [1948]) (Anderson, 2006) (Miller, 1995). This behaviour appears to demonstrate that groups within *Virtual Worlds* do possess a recognition of a culture specific to them, depending upon the *Virtual World* in which they inhabit and different to those in different *Virtual Worlds*. This certainly seems to mimic the understanding of culture in relation to the existing ideas of Nationalism and Identity.

The Uru Diaspora's act of migrating on mass into another *Virtual World* following the closure of their own could be understood as a demonstration of the group's awareness of their own culturally distinct identity. It has already been cited that for many this is a key aspect in Nationalism and ideas of National Identity. Miller (1995) highlighted this as a component in his description of National Identity, and this ties in with the ideas of symbolism noted by Smith (2001). It has been mentioned above how the Uru Diaspora used the tools and dynamics built into the *There* *Virtual World* to create a culture clearly their own. In doing this, the Uru Diasporas in Pearce's study also demonstrate another of the ideas seen in the literature of Nationalism. This criteria is that of an awareness of their existence and a will to continue as a unified national group. If a group demonstrates an awareness of the existence and desire to maintain their distinct cultural identity, it appears to suggest that this group holds at least some level of consciousness of their existence as a group and a will to continue to do so.

It has already been established that one of the major criterion for the existence of a nation or National Identity is the will or desire of its members to continue in solidarity (Renan, 1994 [1882]) (Weber, 1994 [1948]) (Anderson, 2006) (Miller, 1995). The reoccurrence of this aspect seems to suggest its importance, when classing a group as a nation or National Community.

If one looks at the ideas touched on here by Renan (1994 [1882]), Smith (2001), Weber (1994 [1948]) and Miller (1995) it is possible to understand these as implying that part of what constitutes a national group or community is a conscious and collective will to act as a unified group, and continue to do so. The findings from Pearce's (2006) study of this Uru Diaspora, showing the movement of a sizeable group from on Virtual World (Uru) to another (There) can be construed as showing that this group do indeed possess both a consciousness and a will to act as a unified community. As Pearce highlighted the 'collective trauma' (2006; 19) suffered by the Uru Diaspora in the closure of the Virtual World in which they inhabited, many members of the group were unified into a collective group. In moving from Uru to There this group has shown a will to continue as a unified group or community as is outlined by the Nationalist literature mentioned above. For example, it would certainly seem that this group of people possess the 'shared sense of solidarity' (1994 [1948]; 22), grouping together to maintain their shared identity in the new Virtual World which they inhabit. This behaviour could be considered as a possible link showing some similarity in the behaviour of inhabitants of Virtual Worlds and the models of Nationalism and Identity, giving us some insight into the behaviour of inhabitants of Virtual Worlds.

Furthermore, this can also be linked to Renan and Miller's ideas of a national group identity being formed around a shared historic link. The Uru Diaspora experienced what Pearce calls 'a collective trauma' (2006; 19), which could be seen as an interpretation of Renan's 'legacy of remembrances' or 'to have suffered together' (1994 [1882]; 17).

The behaviour of this Diaspora carries the traits outlined in relation to notions of a shared history and culture. Again this is a point touched upon in the Nationalism literature outlined

previously. This is emphasised by Smith (2001), Anderson (2006) and Miller (1995). All talk of the importance of a shared history in relation to the formation of a nation and a national identity. This idea of shared history is also touched upon by Renan (1994 [1882]) and Weber (1994 [1948]) and as explained by Renan an important part of this is the sharing of common history is ‘having suffered together’ (1994 [1882]; 17). It could be that the previously mentioned ‘collective trauma’ (Pearce, 2006; 19) of the Uru Diaspora’s ‘home’ Uru being shut down may represent Renan’s shared suffering.

The language used by Pearce here is intriguing. In describing the group as an “ethnic” community’ the connotations of an ethnic group migrating from country to country are immediately apparent.

What this case study can show us is that it does seem possible to suggest that it may be a link between the behaviours exhibited within Virtual Worlds and the existing models of Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity. This may mean that it is possible for us to gain a greater understanding of what is occurring in Virtual Worlds, and possibly look to these existing models of Nationalism in forming better explanations of the behaviours demonstrated in these places and the developments being made within them.

Conclusion

The stated aim of this piece was to attempt to establish whether we can understand there to be a link between the behaviours exhibited by those within Virtual Worlds and MMORPG’s and the pre-existing models of Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity.

The initial task was to examine the existing models of Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity in order to determine what the key distinguishing features of nations and national identities are. This was done by attempting to recognise the themes that appeared to emerge as common amongst the various bodies of literature. Once identified, these features were then attempted to be applied to Virtual Worlds to see if they were relevant and applicable, which in turn

could possibly help to further our existing understanding of why these behaviours take place in these spaces.

By and large, the various works on Virtual Worlds examined seemed to identify events and behaviours that could possibly be understood in terms of the key characteristics of Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity. We have seen through various sources that those within Virtual Worlds can be understood to possess the 'will' or 'desire' to continue as a unified group seen as necessary to be considered a nation or national community. It has been seen that Virtual Worlds also possess some of the other characteristics identified as important in defining nations; they hold significant populations often tied to a particular geographical space, albeit a virtual space; they involve a history and culture of their own; and they can be seen as possessing active economies. We have also seen discussion from various academics discussing Virtual Worlds in similar terms to existing nations; this was seen in terms of population size and economic terms.

It seems permissible then, to suggest that there is potentially a link to Nationalism and its existing models of Nationhood and Identity to the behaviours of those inhabiting Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's. It would be premature to assert that this dissertation proves either way the presence or not of a possible link between Nationalism and Virtual Worlds. What I believe it has established however, is that there appears to be some cross over between the ideas presented in the existing literature on the two respective subjects.

The identification of any possible link between Nationalist ideas and Virtual Worlds would appear to yet be some way from being proved one way or another. The fact is that there is very little research or study on the subject, if any at all. The result of this is that any current attempts to assess any possible link is mostly speculative, and far from being able to be seen as concrete evidence either proving or disproving a possible link.

What has become clear from this dissertation however, as suggested previously, is that there are some aspects where these two bodies of knowledge overlap. What this shows is that there are some certain areas that can be examined further in order to establish the extent to which there may be an existence of a link between Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity.

The point of identifying a link between Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity is that it may help us to understand better the social phenomenon that is these Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's. As people move on mass into these Virtual Worlds, and we come to see the lines between the real and game worlds merge, it becomes increasingly important to at least attempt to understand why we see the behaviours exhibited. With the populations of these Virtual Worlds increasing and their economies subsequently growing, the lines between the real and the virtual will continue to blur in the ways we have already identified. As noted previously, it seems apparent that we have a good understanding of what is happening within Virtual Worlds, but there seems to be little offered in terms of why.

An example of this is Celia Pearce's study of the Uru Diaspora (2006). Whilst Pearce very clearly and cleverly manages to track and follow this Uru Diaspora (a task that is by no means an easy feat), she seems to fall short of attempting to explain why this group acts in such a way. Perhaps then these models of Nationalism and Identity can attempt to bridge this gap. In this example, it would seem useful to look at Pearce's study and attempting to understand the behaviours shown in terms of Nationalism; as demonstrated the behaviours exhibited by Pearce's Uru Diaspora (2006) certainly seem to fit in with the literature of Nationalism previously outlined.

Whilst learning to understand these Virtual Worlds in terms of Nationalism, what becomes apparent is that we may need to learn to adapt the way we look at Nationalism in order to achieve this. In re-examining the way we look at Nationalism we may be able to both understand the behaviour of those inhabiting these Virtual Worlds and possibly gain a new perspective on Nationalism and Identity in the modern world. This perhaps holds a certain relevance for Nationalism as a political ideology. As Heywood explains, 'Few political

ideologies have been forced to endure prophecies of their imminent demise as long as nationalism' (2003; 185). If this is indeed the case that Nationalism is of declining significance in the modern world, then maybe it's application and ability to provide explanations to a very modern phenomenon in the form of Virtual Worlds and MMORPG's. Which could possibly raise questions such as, can Nationalism be adapted to Virtual Worlds? Can Nationalism apply to Virtual Worlds? As before, these questions need further, more direct research and study to be answered properly.

What this discussion has discovered is that it is not yet possible to discount the possibility of a link between Virtual Worlds and Nationalism. Therefore, further study is required to fully understand if indeed it is possible for existing ideas of Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity to offer anything towards our understanding and explaining of the behaviours we see occurring within Virtual Worlds. If such a link can be discovered, it is then necessary to ask to what extent we can see a mirroring of ideas of Nationalism from the real world occurring in the virtual, and what implications this may have. It may also be possible to use this understanding to be able to predict, manage and control these Virtual Worlds, drawing on the past experiences we have come to understand using the existing knowledge of Nationalism.

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