

“For the Horde and the Nation?” A Study of ‘National Play’ in World of Warcraft.

[FINAL VERSION]

Master Thesis – Research Master Sociology of Culture, Media and the Arts
Erasmus University Rotterdam

By: Nicky van Es [302291]
Email: nicky.vanes@gmail.com
Word count: 9.975 (excl. appendices)
Date: 13-07-2012

Direct Supervisor

Dr. S. Aupers
Associate Professor – Cultural Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences, *Erasmus University Rotterdam*

Second Reader

Prof. Dr. M.S.S.E. Janssen
Professor – Sociology of Media and Culture
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, *Erasmus University Rotterdam*

Abstract

The virtual worlds of MMORPG's have been frequently described as inherently transnational, providing a platform through which thousands of people from all over the world interact with each other on a daily basis. However, in assuming that much of these transnational interactions are welcomed by the inhabitants of virtual worlds, contemporary research on the study of virtual worlds has neglected the importance of nationality and national identity in the way(s) in which one interacts with and within the transnational environment of MMORPG's. Providing an exploratory qualitative study of nationalism in the *World of Warcraft*, this research aims to problematise this assumption. The analysis shows that a considerable amount of conflict arises between European members about nationalism in *Azeroth* – either located in the ‘real-world’ or in the virtual lore of WoW. As people engage in ‘national play’ in *Azeroth*, people demarcate themselves from other nationalities through explicitly highlighting their national identity in game, playing in national guilds and/or on distinctively national servers. At the ‘virtual’ end of the spectrum, we find the ‘virtual nationalists’ which follow a nationalistic interpretation of the lore of *Warcraft*, aimed at establishing a separation of virtual races in *Azeroth* and to strengthen a virtual national identity. Indicative of demarcating and fragmenting the *World of Warcraft* on the basis of an ‘imagined’ national identity, this research shows that the inherent transnational nature of the game by no means implies the formation of an “open”, cosmopolitan disposition amongst its players.

Keywords

Virtual Worlds, Nationalism, Popular Culture, Globalization, Cultural Identity

Possible Submissions

Games and Culture; Game Studies; European Journal of Cultural Studies

1) Introduction – *The World of Warcraft: “Globally connecting people?”*

Randy Marsh: Stan! Stan!

Stan Marsh: Hang on guys, my dad wants something.

Randy Marsh: Stan!

Stan Marsh: What?

Stan Marsh: You've been on your computer all weekend. Shouldn't you go out and socialize with your friends?

Stan Marsh: I am socializing r-tard! I'm logged on to an MMORPG, with people from all over the world and getting XP with my party using teamspeak.

[pause]

Randy Marsh: [hurt] I'm not an r-tard¹.

~ *South Park: “Make Love, Not Warcraft”* (2006; S10E08)

*The World of Warcraft*² (henceforth: WoW) formed the central theme of the (in)famous *South Park* episode, ‘Make Love, Not Warcraft’ (2006), paying a *homage* to this popular cultural phenomenon which currently holds over 10 million active subscribers worldwide³. In satirically exaggerating the contemporary omnipresence of this *Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game* (MMORPG) in the daily lives of people, the creators of *South Park* simultaneously underscore the notion that WoW *does* provide an important platform for social interaction amongst its transnational player-base. Relating this notion to the current academic debate coalescing around the study of the “virtual world” of WoW – and those provided by MMORPG’s in general – it has been frequently stated that these worlds are ‘...inhabited by people of various ages, cultural contexts, and social backgrounds from many different parts of the world.’ (Corneliussen & Rettberg, 2006: 7).

In being constructed out of a *bricolage* of myths and legends (e.g. Corneliussen & Rettberg, 2006; Aupers, 2007; Krzywinska, 2006), derived from a wide range of ‘real-world’

¹ Source: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0850173/quotes>, last accessed at: 06-07-2012.

² *The World of Warcraft* is the most successful game-series produced by developer and publisher *Blizzard Entertainment*, and was officially launched on the 24th of November, 2004 (Source: <http://eu.blizzard.com/en-gb/company/about/profile.html>, last accessed at: 06-07-2012).

³ As measured in the first quarter of 2012. This is a significant drop in members since 12 million members were active on WoW in late 2010 (source: <http://wow.joystiq.com/2012/02/09/world-of-warcraft-subscriber-numbers/>, last accessed at 25-07-12).

cultural inclinations and conventions, *Azeroth*⁴ is being represented in the literature as a transnational and multicultural environment, both in terms of its community as well as in its structure (Taylor, 2006). It is in this sense that Steinkuhler (2006) refers games as ‘incubators of a new pop cosmopolitanism’, noting that the transnational nature of MMORPG’s contributes to the formation of a more open and encompassing attitude towards cultural diversity through participation within such virtual worlds.

This notion is prevalent as an implicit underlying assumption in most of the studies towards the ways in which people from different social backgrounds – such as age, gender, sexuality and education (e.g. Turkle, 1994; Taylor, 1999, 2002; Williams *et al.*, 2006; Yee, 2006; Duchenaut *et al.*, 2006) – ascribe different meanings to their participation in virtual worlds, “overlooking” a potential importance of one’s nationality or national identity in their interactions with and within MMORPG’s. In aiming to provide an exploratory study towards the ways in which national culture and identity are deemed of importance within the transnational virtual *World of Warcraft*, this article addresses the following central question: *How do national culture and identity play a role in interacting with and within the transnational World of Warcraft?*

2) Theoretical Framework – National ‘imagination’ in Times of Globalization

2.1) *The Global March of Cosmopolitanism*

The (physical) world we live in today is considerably a more “smaller” place, which has been frequently addressed in the literature concerned with the process of cultural globalization. Due to increased cultural exchange and migration between countries all over the world (e.g. Achterberg *et al.*, 2011; Roudometof, 2005), traditional borders and boundaries – geographically between nation-states as well as symbolically between national cultures – become “blurred”, resulting in a situation in which national systems of meaning lose their legitimacy amidst the plurality of cultural meanings equally available on a daily basis (Beck, 2002: 19). Through the ‘...proliferation of channels and the increasingly ubiquitous nature of computing and telecommunications...’ (Jenkins, 2006: 154), people are more than ever engaged in social interaction and activities which transcend the boundaries of their national

⁴ *Azeroth* is the common name of the ‘virtual world’ encountered within *WoW*.

context (Roudometof, 2005: 119). Being increasingly exposed to a multitude of cultural conventions through the global dissemination of media and popular culture, globalization is conceived to be 'internal', originating '...from *within* the national societies.' (Beck, 2002: 17), leading to the formation of a 'global consciousness' in order to give meaning to life in an increasingly transnational world (*Ibid.*).

This 'global consciousness' (Beck, 2002) is frequently conceptualized as *cosmopolitanism*, an identity disposition from which an 'openness to the world' (Corpus Ong, 2009: 454) is conceived paramount to national or local conventions in the interpretation of global media and popular cultural products (e.g. Kuipers & de Kloet, 2009). As we thus increasingly are conceived to live life in 'transnational social spaces' (Roudometof, 2005), pervaded by global media and popular culture, national or local layers of identity are subsequently conceived to be a less tenable disposition, in favor of a more "open" and "encompassing" cosmopolitan one. As the 'transcultural flows of popular culture' are conceived to lead to the formation of what Jenkins (2006) calls 'pop cosmopolitanism', embracing other cultural perspectives through active engagement with global popular culture (Jenkins, 2006: 156).

Applying this debate to the ascribed transnational character of MMORPG's, it can be stated that games like WoW fundamentally provide 'transnational "virtual" spaces' where culturally diverse people interact with each other on a daily basis. Indicative of the 'default multinationalism' (Taylor, 2006) which lies at the heart of WoW is the elaborate *Code of Conduct*⁵, enforcing a certain amount of "civilized openness" amongst its members. In addition, communication on the European-English servers⁶ is only allowed to proceed in English (*Ibid.*), further requiring an "open" and approachable disposition from the majority of European players whose primary language is *not* English.

Transnationalism is not only socially and legally institutionalized in the structure of WoW, but culturally as well. As the cultural structure - or "lore" - of *Azeroth* is constructed out of a *bricolage* of cultural elements derived from a diverse array of (popular) national myths, legends and conventions (Kryzwinska, 2006; Corneliussen & Rettberg, 2006; Aupers, 2007), people from equally diverse backgrounds are sure to be confronted with this cultural diversity when they venture the *World of Warcraft*. Through coping with this deeply embedded social and cultural diversity, MMORPG's are conceived to actively contribute to the formation of a cosmopolitan disposition amongst its inhabitants (Steinkuhler, 2006).

⁵ Source: http://us.blizzard.com/en-us/company/legal/wow_tou.html, last accessed at: 18-06-2012.

⁶ Elaboration on the specific technical infrastructure of WoW, embodied through various regionally servers can be found in *appendix A*.

Cautiously taking a moral stance on this subject, Castronova (2005) states that ‘...synthetic worlds might also shatter the current view of objective reality and, for kicks, alter the nation-state system that has dominated international affairs since the Peace of Westphalia.’ (Castronova, 2005: 249). Drawing back on the lack of academic focus on the presumed importance of one’s nationality in interacting with and within virtual worlds – despite extensive research into the importance of other social categories (e.g. Turkle, 1994; Taylor, 1999, 2002; Williams *et al.*, 2006; Yee, 2006; Duchenaud *et al.*, 2006) – it might in fact be stated that the ‘synthetic worlds’ of MMORPG’s effectively contribute to a diminishing importance of nationally derived systems of meaning, propagating of a more open, cosmopolitan one, extending above and beyond the nation-state...

2.2) ‘The Enemy Strikes Back?’ - The Power of Imagined Nations

But, can we indeed assume that the increased cultural exchange and exposure to global media and popular culture result in the formation of a more “open”, cosmopolitan attitude, as the aforementioned authors have argued (e.g. Beck, 2002; Jenkins, 2006; Roudometof, 2005; Corpus Ong, 2009)? Based on the literature on “banal nationalism” (Billig, 1995) we might as well assume that due to the increased transnational cultural exchange has contributed to a sense of a ‘naturalness of a world of nations’, making the concept of national identity an ‘universal code of particularity’ (*Ibid.*: 72-73).

As national music has increased in popularity since the 1990’s in favor of declining popularity of American and otherwise foreign music in Germany, France and the Netherlands (Achterberg *et al.*, 2011), distinctively national television shows fill the prestigious prime-time slots on national television (Jenkins, 2006) and the Internet seems to provide an excellent platform for national communities to establish and construct their national identity (Eriksen, 2007), it is argued by these authors that *just because* of the increased “interconnectedness” in the world, people are conceived to increasingly manifest sentiments of national resistance against the effects of transnationalism – *especially* in Europe (e.g. Beck & Grande, 2006).

The ‘legitimation crisis’ of national systems of meaning (Beck, 2002: 19) is thus contrarily met with a defensive reaction, where people are increasingly trying to (re)legitimize a specifically shared, national identity. In rightfully pointing out that this disposition is ‘imagined’, Anderson (2006[1983]) notes that this sense of national

brotherhood exists only in the imagination of its members, making media and popular culture an instrument *par excellence* for feeding and (re)emphasizing this imagination, and to provide the audience with a shared 'sense of belonging' (Morley, 2001). As even the most global cultural products and media are being adopted to suit the culturally specific needs of a national or local audience, indicative of what has been termed as *glocalization* (Robertson, 1995), WoW should be no exception to this.

At a first glance this becomes immediately apparent through the national sub-regions within the European server-landscape, providing specified German, French, Spanish and Russian servers – next to the international, English-language ones – to provide game-play for these nations in the comfort of their own native language through a more “culturally familiar” interpretation of *Azeroth*⁷. In addition, players from all over the world can approach the game in various ways of “imaginative play” to contribute to a stronger sense of “belonging” to a certain national culture amidst the plurality of cultural backgrounds as encountered in both the community and the lore of WoW. As one’s national identity is being placed central in one’s interactions with and within *Azeroth*, the question remains is: what manifestations of nationalism are encountered within WoW?

3) Methodology – Exploring Nationalism in WoW

In order to collect the data necessary for exploring the manifestations of nationalism in WoW, we rely on the method of ‘theoretical sampling’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1999[1967]). In actively looking for nationalism in *Azeroth*, this research by no means implies a representative analysis of the WoW-community as a whole, but explicitly focuses on that part which places a central emphasis on their national identity in the game. As the technical infrastructure of WoW is maintained by *Blizzard* through a system of four regional servers⁸ – United States, Europe, China and Korea – this research chooses to focus explicitly on national play as manifested in and through the European community. As the national variety within Europe is conceived to be larger than in the other regions, as well as the fact that the nations of

⁷ Indicative of these more “culturally familiar” interpretations of *Azeroth* manifests itself, next to utilizing culturally specific names and terminology in the main storyline of WoW, in the nationally specific names which some of these servers have, i.e. German servers (*Nethersturm, Blutkessel, Echsenkessel, Festung der Stürme, Das Konsortium, Das Syndikat*) and French servers (*Chants éternels, Marécage de Zangar, Temple noir, Ysondre, Les Sentinelles, Confrérie du Thorium*). Source: http://www.wowwiki.com/Realms_list, last accessed at 07-07-2012.

⁸ For an overview of the division of regional and sub-regional server clusters, see *appendix A*.

Europe are specifically showing sentiments of revived nationalism (Beck & Grande, 2006; Achterberg *et al.*, 2011), issues surrounding national identity and culture are more prevalent within Europe.

The centrality of one's national identity in the game is expected to manifest itself into two prominent ways in *Azeroth*. In the first place, it has often been stated that people inhabit virtual worlds to engage in *social interaction*. Enabled, and often required by the structure of the game, players meaningfully interact with others and form virtual social collectives, known as *guilds* in WoW. Motivated by the need to collectively overcome the game's most difficult challenges (Williams *et al.*, 2006), receive social support for personal problems (Whippey, 2010), collectively engage in the creation of WoW-related content (Lowood, 2006; Ang *et al.*, 2010) and maintain strong social ties and 'camaraderie' (Chen, 2009), MMORPG's have frequently been celebrated for their potential to increase the social capital of its inhabitants. In ranging from "loose connections" between relative and distant strangers ('bridging' social capital) to lasting, emotional supportive friendships ('bonding' social capital) (Putnam, 2002), people are clearly not "bowling alone" in *Azeroth* (sic.).

Related to this social aspect of WoW, it is stated that some guilds which are encountered in *Azeroth* have the distinctive character of being a 'national guild' (Taylor, 2006). In limiting membership access on the basis of nationality, speaking the same native tongue and having a similar cultural background are conceived to be central in these national guilds. Increasing the likelihood of obtaining 'bonding' social capital in national guilds – due to frequent "real-life" meetings within the proximity of their own country – these guilds, as primary sites of social interaction, can be examined for the meanings which they attach to nationality "in-game".

The second way in which one's national identity is conceived to be of central importance, is in relation to the construction of the digital persona (or: *avatar*) and their engagement in *identity-play*. As people (re)construct their own identity in *Azeroth*, enlarging or downplaying certain identity-traits (Taylor, 2002, 2006; Turkle, 1994), even using the relatively safe confinements of the virtual to experiment with 'socially undesirable' emotions (e.g. Jansz, 2005), the "real-life" age, gender, sexuality (*and* nationality!) is directly transferred into WoW, albeit in resemblance of one's "real-life" identity or in opposition to this⁹. Extending this argument, it needs to be explored in what way(s) one's national identity is of importance in the way in which one interacts with, and gives meaning to, their existence in WoW. Being

⁹ A prime example of this can be found in the practice of "gender-bending", in which a man adopts the virtual personality of a woman, and vice versa (Turkle, 1994; Corneliussen & Rettberg, 2006; Taylor, 2002).

fundamentally ‘imagined’ (Anderson, 2006[1983]), national identity can thus be conceived to originate from “real-world” national cultures and feed back into the realms of WoW. On the other hand, a strong sense of “virtual nationhood” can also be imagined on the basis of the rich and detailed lore of *Azeroth*.

In starting out with gathering data concerned with national guilds in WoW, the database provided by www.wowprogress.com is utilized. This database, containing information on a large share of active *Player versus Environment* (PvE) ‘raiding’ guilds in the world, indicates that there are over 1.500 non-English speaking national-language guilds represented by a total of 25 languages across the European-English server landscape¹⁰. Subsequent data is gathered from a sample of fifty to sixty guilds of each represented language, based on their availability of data accessible to outsider access a selection of these guilds can be used for gathering more in-depth information concerning the general profile of these national guilds as such.

In order to obtain information regarding the ways in which the individual members of the WoW-community actively deliberates on the importance of their national identity in *Azeroth*, we utilized the official *Blizzard.eu* forums¹¹. Through searching these forums for topics and comment on various key-terms, such as “nationalism”, “nationality”, “national identity”, “virtual identity”, “culture” and “mythology”, relevant data is gathered on how WoW-players relate to and reflect on these topics¹². We ended up with a total amount of 39 forum topics¹³, containing a significant amount of discussion amongst various members that were in turn divided into three general themes related to “national play” in *Azeroth*. The first theme will encapsulate those topics which indicate how “real-world” national identity is expressed by players in their interactions with and within WoW. The second theme draws the attention more closer to the content of the virtual world of *Azeroth*, through exploring the

¹⁰ A remark in utilizing this data is at place, since it only contains information regarding specific PvE-guilds in WoW which are incorporated into the database, excluding for example *Player versus Player* (PvP) and *Role-Playing* (RP) guilds or other PvE guilds which are not active enough or did not bother to register themselves on wowprogress.com. For the division of national guilds per language, see **table 1** in *appendix B*.

¹¹ Using the information on the public forums of *Blizzard* is not completely unbiased. As the main language of these forums is English, messages in other languages are not allowed, hence excluding those players who might have an opinion on the matter, but are unable to overcome the language-barrier and express their thoughts in English. In respect to the representativeness of nationalities on these forums then, it can also be expected that there is an overrepresentation of certain national groups which are generally more comfortable in interacting in English as a second language – through having sufficient access to English education and media – most notably North-West European countries.

¹² The key-terms used to gather the data on the *Blizzard* forums might be biased in the case in which they imply that people are already very nationalistic as they are active on these topics. As the following analyses will show however, these topics provide decent discussions amongst multiple members who uphold different opinions on these matters than others – both fellow countrymen and –woman and ‘foreigners’ who joined the topic.

¹³ For an overview of these topics, see *appendix C*.

ways in which the digital representations of national cultures are being negotiated by the players from their own national background. The third theme will focus completely on *Azeroth* itself, and how the game-specific lore is interpreted along demarcating nationalistic lines by players who engage in virtual nationalistic role-play.

The notion of “national play” is thus conceived to exist in terms of a continuum, located in nationalistic sentiments originating from the “real-world” to manifestations of ‘virtual-world’ nationalism, these players place national identity at the center of their approach to WoW. Following these lines, we will first start our analysis towards the manifestations of ‘real-world’ nationalism in WoW, and increasingly zoom-in on the virtual world itself.

4) Analysis – Manifestations of Nationalism in WoW

“National play”, as manifested through the profiles of national guilds in WoW, is mainly motivated by two reasons¹⁴. The first reason is purely pragmatic, where an emphasis is being placed on sharing a similar language (thus not necessarily emphasizing a similar nationality) to improve communication and game-play when collectively engaged in overcoming the most difficult content of the game – or: “raiding”. Secondly, and placing a larger emphasis on nationality, national play is motivated by a conceived increase in social ‘bonding’ capital. As for example the profile of the Swedish guild Fatalis¹⁵ illustrates: ‘We are swedish speaking on Ventrilo [external chat-program] and ingame. We like to have it that way to minimize the misunderstandings during raids. Also, it leads to good friendships and that is what makes this game fun.’ Following the reasoning of these guilds, sharing a similar cultural background contributes to mutual understanding and less in-group drama which might result out of a cultural *faux pas*. In addition, living in geographical proximity of each other, the members of these national guilds can relatively more easily extend their ties “in real life”.

The data provided by these national guilds however, proved to be insufficient in numerous ways. Prominent amongst these were the overall large amount of inaccessible websites of these guilds including the fact that most of the virtual domains of these guilds

¹⁴ An elaborate version of the analysis towards the meanings ascribed to national play by national guild can be found in *appendix B.2*.

¹⁵ Source: <http://www.wowprogress.com/guild/eu/outland/Fatalis>, last accessed at 20-06-2012.

are displayed in their respective native language, making it a next-to impossible task to analyze the member-discussions of these national guilds represented by over a dozen of languages. In further analyzing the meanings which are attributed to different way(s) of “national play” by the individual members themselves, the entire next section of the analyses will be based on cases derived from the interactions between members as encountered on the *Blizzard.eu* forums.

4.1) *(Re)Constructing National Identities in Azeroth*

4.1.1) *“Showing Off National Identities” – National Pride in Azeroth*

Indicative of the importance of the “real-world” national identity in *Azeroth*, is through the explicit referencing to one’s nationality in the chosen name for the avatar through which one interacts with and within WoW. In regard to this manifestation of “national branding” one’s avatar, a Dutch player called [Laventrix] notes that Danish players in particular are relatively more prone to expressing their nationality in WoW than any other nationalities, illustrated in the topic called ‘*Danish people*’. As dozens of people – both Danes and non-Danes – are joining the discussion, this topic is particularly illustrative of an active deliberation on the potential explanation(s) for this manifestation of “Danish pride” in *Azeroth*.

In addressing this point however, the Danish community is divided to the extent to which they identify themselves with these manifestations of national pride as displayed by their fellow country-men and women in WoW. As some Danes are displaying an outright embracement of this pride, such as [Strausholm] states ‘I AM PROUD OF MY DANISH LEGACY’, followed by ‘DK’ (times fourteen), others take a more moderate stance on the topic, talking not directly about themselves but referring to the Danish in general. [Darkness] illustrates this by stating that ‘...many Danish people love their country and love showing other people that they are from that country’, implying that this active manifestation of a Danish identity is directed outwards, demarcating the Danes from non-Danish players in WoW, additionally manifested in the use of ‘...the letters Øø and Ææ to show people we are Danish.’ Following a similar reasoning, [Luxu] mentions that the ‘...Danes have a larger tendency to reassert themselves compared to other nationalities.’, accordingly originating from a national fear of global misrecognition, illustrated by the following quote: ‘I think we are afraid that the world belittles us, so everyone has to know who we are.’. In addition,

there are Danes who conceive of these nationalistic manifestations to have a negative effect on their own feelings of national pride, as [Whishblade] states in quite an annoyed manner: 'Some Danes just lack imagination, creativity, just do it for !@#\$\$s and giggles or deliberately wanna annoy those that dislike such dumb names, myself included. My poor Dane pride...Why, people...? Why?! ='['.

In elaborating on the reasons why the Danish community of WoW-players are conceived to have a larger tendency than others to show their national identity in the game, people attribute their explanation in Danish history. As [Vaneras] – an official *Blizzard* forum moderator – illustrates in this respect (original post had 'DK' attached at the end of each word, removed for readability):

Although I am Danish myself, I find this trend rather silly and I never really understood why anyone feel the need to do this. I realise that it is of course a matter of national pride, but my personal theory why it is so common amongst Danes, is that special Danish cultural as well as subconscious need to reassert ourselves since we got our butts massively kicked back in 1864. Imo [in my opinion] that would also explain why we feel the need to decorate our landscape as well as Christmas trees with Danish flags so much :-)]

This player thus explains that the specific need of the Danish to show signs of national pride in *Azeroth* is related to the specific cultural history of the Danes, in which – according to [Vaneras] – the Danes suffer from a “chronic” need to (re)address their Danish identity after the defeat against the Prussians in 1864. In further elaborating on the historical development of Denmark which accumulated in the ascribed need for Danes to show their “national colors” in WoW, another player [Nardaria] claims that this needs to be located earlier in 1801-1807, during the “Battle of Copenhagen” and the Napoleon wars, making an end to Danish influence over Norway and Sweden. Reminiscing of the glorious days of the Kalmar Union – where Denmark reigned over Sweden and Norway under the initial lead of queen Margrethe the 1st – the fact that Denmark joined forces with Napoleon and had to give up Norway and Sweden is being considered to have left an even more significant impact on Danish identity, according to [Nardaria]. In reasserting the Danish identity in opposition to the Swedes or Norwegians, and vice versa, as the Swedish player [Antler] sarcastically adds to the debate: 'Danish people have inferiority baby brother complex towards the other Nordic countries, it

developed into hybris and that's why they add DK.', indicating that as a Swede [Antler] also constructs his national identity in relation to its "baby brother", Denmark.

On the other hand, [Darkglow] notes that this expression of nationalism is also used to reinforce social cohesion amongst the Danish themselves, stating that '...we like to have easy identifiable names – because we get a kick from talking to other Danish players on the internet (I guess)'. In taking these easy identifiable names, players facilitate the process of getting into contact with fellow countrymen and women in the virtual *World of Warcraft*, hence making "national play" more likely to occur. This manifests itself most clearly in the shape of national guilds, characterized by their central focus on exclusive membership based on (shared) nationality. The point made by [Huskin], who is in a high-ranked 'pure Danish guild', is indicative of an additional motivations for this national community formation in WoW in relation to the Danes, as '...a lot of Danish folks find it rather cozy to be with each other and fairly uncomplicated, since we pretty much share the same values and humour, making for very good buddies during whatever you do ingame and even out of game as well.'

In sum, it can be stated that this case illustrates that national play is directed at demarcating national identities within the world of *Azeroth*, actively excluding or including players based on their nationality, as well as strengthening it amongst the Danish themselves. The motivations of the players which place their national identity central to their interactions with and within WoW, are frequently resulting into conflict with those who adhere to a more open attitude and embrace the transnational potential of WoW. As [Gilmoriël] notes that he/she thinks that these expressions of nationalism in WoW are 'counter-intuitive' to the nature of the Internet, as 'You can meet people from all over the world in this game, so why would you actively sequester yourself in a group that excludes all other nationalities apart from your own.'

4.1.2) "National Invasions!" – 'Unofficially' Claiming Servers for National Play

Further elaborating on the importance of "real-world" nationality and national identities in *Azeroth*, it can be stated that the notion of national play is frequently extended to the technical infrastructure of WoW itself. As for some players the expression of their nationality and/or playing in national guilds is not enough, and they can decide to dominate particular servers of the English-European landscape based on shared nationalities. Reaching the point

of “critical mass” when sufficient amount of members within a national community express the desire to exclude themselves from the rest of the European community – through forums, websites etc. – these members engage in a genuine “national migration” to a specific server, henceforth claiming this server as an *unofficial*¹⁶ national server. Characterized by a high amount of national homogeneity amongst the members on these servers, the activity which takes place on these servers – e.g. social interaction (chat), trade, battle groups, raids and guilds – proceeds from the confinements of a collectively shared, non-English mother language.

Illustrations of these unofficial national servers can be found, for example in referencing to the server *Bloodscalp* as ‘*Hunscalp*’ in the similar named topic, to indicate that there are a majority of Hungarian players active on this server [Rámpáge]. In addition, the server *Burning Blade* (‘*Czech Blade*’ [Luxoticor]) is conceived to be dominated by ‘Czechs and Slovaks’ [Rinos]¹⁷, *Burning Legion* has been ‘taken over’ by the Polish [Spirox], as well as *Dunemaul* by the Turkish [Savage]¹⁸. In the topic ‘*Ive had it tbh (to be honest)*’, [Fejk] posts a list of European-English servers which are, according to him/her, ‘...completely non English’:

Stormreaver(aka Finnreaver) - alot of Finnish people time to make it a finland server

Shattered Halls - So many swedish people cant even read trade before someone mouths off in swedish

Shattered Hand - Same thing but alot of rude people

Stormscale(or Swescale as many prefer) - So many of them aswell i used to play their during TBC on my alt and i can tell you it wasnt fun.

Burning Legion - Mostly turkish people or bulgarian some romians/ polish ppl aswell

Alonsus - Greek

Hakkar/Crushridge - This is italians servers now and im never gonna play their again

¹⁶ These servers are denounced as ‘unofficial’, in the sense that they are not recognized as national servers by *Blizzard*, and hence not enjoy the storyline of the game in their own language as well as not receive customer support in their native language.

¹⁷ In topic: “*víteje! To Burning Blade the Czech server...*”

¹⁸ In topic: “*Polish servers!*”

The frustrations of those (native) English-language players are thus frequently voiced in the WoW forums. The experiences of the abovementioned player [Fejk] on the ascribed Swedish server of *Stormscale* and on the Italian *Hakkar & Crushridge* servers are far from positive. As the English-speaking community on these servers are now a minority, and they find *their Azeroth* to be increasingly invaded by non-English speaking players, making game-play to a certain extent impossible and less satisfying for them. In placing this as a central topic of debate, the topic called 'A British realm for British people', player [Zaputoo] starts by stating that: 'Numerous countries get a realm to themselves and some realms unofficially belong to other countries like Crushridge. Being in a different timezone on an Island with a different culture to central Europe a realm restricted to British IPs would be great.' By explicitly stating that due to cultural differences, amongst others, the British would deserve their own server – followed by the comment that 'The only people opposed to this are anti British racists' – makes it a lively debate, discussing British identity initially in contrast to that encountered in central Europe.

The quite aggressive opinion of [Zaputoo] is not shared by the largest part of the community, and it is even 'low rated', meaning that a significant amount of members reported the post as offensive. In the process of discussing and negotiating the notion of a British identity, most players who consider themselves to be British take offense into such "narrow-minded" statements made by their fellow countrymen, relating it to the present social situation in England. As [Smokesalot] responds to this thread:

I hate when these threads appear in english and it makes me feel ashamed to just to live in a country with such small minded people but unfortunately a lot of the general public in the UK are largely anti European it's a case that they most Brits fear what they don't truly understand.

but it makes me laugh that if you look at history the UK has been at the center Europe one of the major powers but to say we are not European is ludicrous

The initial request by [Zaputoo] for 'British servers for British people' is thus conceived by this player to be related to the "real-world" nationalistic sentiments in contemporary British society, as another player, [Aughar] similarly responds to this debate by saying: '...the OP (original post) seems to sum up the paranoia British people have towards other nationals who live in Britain today. One could say the world is evolving. British society isn't.' At the

same time, both these players – [Smokesalot] and [Aughar] – imply that it is ‘ludicrous’ to conceive of the British as ‘not European’ and that British society is not ‘evolving like the rest of the world’, indicative of a more open (even cosmopolitan) attitude towards Europe and the world as a whole. Following this line of thought, most of the members maintain that there are already enough English servers, and restricting access to “British IPs” only will mean that another part of the British community wouldn’t be able to play with other Europeans anymore, which goes against the motivation of, for example, [Ellieviasa], to play WoW: ‘Playing with people from a wider variety of places is more exiting you’ll learn things about other people’s customs and culture.’. These British players, in contrast to [Zaputoo], like to play with their ‘European brethren’ [Naåvi] and hold the opinion that ‘Diversity is part of what makes MMOs great’ [Mindcircus].

These “advocates of transnational play” are represented in largely all discussions concerning the discussions and negotiations of national play in WoW. Whereas the more cosmopolitan players, express the desire to utilize the transnational potential of WoW to establish interactions with culturally diverse people, others like to demarcate themselves from others based on their national identity, placing to a certain extend more emphasis on their nationality in their interactions with and within *Azeroth*. But there’s also another type of conflict regarding British nationalism that revolves around the notion of national differences *within* Great-Britain. It is, for example, manifest in the following comment made by [Penpusher]: ‘im English not british. I was born in England, not in England and Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland’. Extending this reasoning are players who are explicitly offended by these notions of a British-server in English, as [Tolaana] states: ‘Being Welsh (so unfortunately British) I find this RACIST!!!...Anyway, on topic – Britain has more than English you fool! If you want a British server, then it will need to include Gaelic (Scottish + Irish) and Welsh! Would you like that?’.

These sentiments clearly show signs of what might be called ‘basic Balkanization’ (Alstynne & Brynjolfsson, 1996), aimed at establishing physical separation from the proximate geographical area these nations are embedded in. As [Penpusher] and [Tolaana] in this respect draw attention to the internal national differences of the geographical region of Great-Britain. According to these players, the discussion surrounding the possible existence of British Servers cannot be limited to English-language servers only, as the Scottish, Irish and Welsh would also logically deserve their own servers in their respective languages¹⁹.

¹⁹ These “balkanizing” statements are also voiced in the discussions surrounding the requests for ‘Balkan Servers’ and ‘Arab Servers’, in which several players within these discussions also draw attention to the internal national

Based on fundamental cultural differences *within* Britain – mostly aimed at perceived differences in language, customs and conventions – these players attach a negative connotation to the assumingly English-way of being British, as it envelops multiple national identities which are (at times) in conflict with one another.

4.1.3) “National Separatism” – ‘Nationalizing’ the World of Warcraft

In placing an even more rigorous emphasis on nationality and national identity in WoW, people from a diverse array of national backgrounds display the desire for global recognition through being granted with their own official WoW-servers. This manifest itself in the large and diverse amount of topics²⁰ which are instigated by the European community, requesting the implementation of official national (Portuguese, Hungarian, Czech, Greek, Swedish, Scottish, Dutch, Polish, Italian and Turkish; see *appendix C*) and regional (Balkan, Arab and British; see *appendix C*) servers by *Blizzard*.

Case in point is the discussion topic called ‘*About the new Brazilian servers*’, started by a Portuguese player, [Etna], which is a direct response to *Blizzard’s* implementation of a Brazilian-Portuguese localized version of WoW on Brazilian servers, in July 2011²¹. The topic is started with the following statement:

First of all they [Brazilians] don't speak Brazilian Portuguese they just speak Portuguese, the Brazilian Portuguese or Portuguese Portuguese are just stuff that came out of the internet from Pirates that wanted subtitles from their regions or wanted to download films were the audio was in Portuguese and they wanted the audio from their regions.

Its the same way has you don't say Mexican Spanish or Argentine Spanish, Porto Rico Spanish, etc.

OT [on topic] so you guys are opening Brazilian realms for Portuguese Speaking community, What about the guys in Europe?

differences within these regions which harbor fundamentally different – and at times even hostile towards one another – cultural groups which each would deserve their own respective national server.

²⁰ A certain amount of these topics are instigated by the English-speaking community of WoW, requesting national servers for example the Hungarians or the Polish as they are conceived to have already ‘unofficially’ taken over an English-language server

²¹ Source: <http://us.blizzard.com/en-us/company/press/pressreleases.html?id=3170334>, last accessed at 22-06-2012.

By first having the feeling of having to set the record straight, this Portuguese player is clearly annoyed with the fact that the Brazilians have got their own servers to enjoy WoW in their language – which is essentially Portuguese according to [Etna] who maintains that Brazilian Portuguese is a ‘pirated’ version of the ‘original’ Portuguese – whilst the Portuguese themselves are still without their own servers. By setting the tone of the discussion in this way, placing a central emphasis on the Portuguese language, the debate immediately is drawn into the direction of elaborating on the national identity of the Portuguese in relation to the Brazilians, in which a lot of arguments are being derived from their shared colonial past and culture.

One of the first reactions to the original post of [Etna] comes from [Wildthing], and is fully supportive of the (implicit) point that [Etna] is making, stating that [Wildthing’s] fellow Portuguese guild-mates are ‘...awfull mad of seeing that Brazilian Portuguese Monstrosity...wth is that? A MultiMillion company doesn’t have a employee capable enough of knowing how not to insult, lets say, 30k Portuguese players?’. Strongly relating to this opinion, [Metalslug] agrees that ‘...there no such exists BR-PT, only Portuguese. Brazilians slack very hard speaking/writing Portuguese language.’. Apparently these Portuguese players find it hard to understand that a less superior version of *their* language has been glorified into a genuine server, without them being able to enjoy it as well. As the opinion of [Panike] illustrates: ‘So, let me get this straight... Blizzard will release a PT-BR version of the game and we (Portugal) won’t be able to play it? We found Brazil just so you know it.’, followed by a link to a Wikipedia-page regarding the history of Brazil.

This supportive stance towards Portuguese as “original” and the Brazilian version as a “cheap rip-off”, hurting the pride of the Portuguese themselves, is also supported through a more moderate stance. In struggling to except the legitimate existence of the Brazilian-Portuguese language, [Cudab] elaborates on this point:

I believe in Brazilian-Portuguese. Not on a personal level, hell, I find their Portuguese just a cheap version of ours, original and correct, Portuguese.

But I do believe it as a fact, it's very much well documented and accepted as a fact, Brazilian-Portuguese does exist. It's not something we can just deny because of our hurt pride, let me remind you that just a few months ago, our own dictionaries had to be remade in favor of the rules the Brazilian built over the years. We taught them how to speak, and now they are teaching us. A low blow, but a fact indeed.

Regarding to the acknowledgement of the Brazilian-Portuguese language, people also frequently refer to the Orthographic Agreement of 1990, after which both the Portuguese and Brazilian-Portuguese were conceived to be official languages with diverging grammar. As [Snorkle] points out: 'If there was no such thing as Brazilian Portuguese, how come the orthographic agreement is having so much opposition and isn't widely accepted? Heck, if there's no difference, why is there a need for the agreement at all???' . These players thus refer to the "official status" of the Brazilian-Portuguese language, legitimating the construction of Brazilian servers in line with their domesticated version of Portuguese. This acknowledgement goes accompanied by the fact that there appear to be many more Brazilians than Portuguese, making the creation and maintenance of a Portuguese server not 'economically justifiable' - [Richeron] - for an organization as Blizzard, whereas a Brazilian ones are. Hence, some Portuguese players get the feeling that '...we do get ignored a lot because we're small, unlike our large American cousins and their strange lingo. And that clashes with our inferiority complex'.

It is clear from this remark that the commercial interests of the multinational corporation *Blizzard* are clashing with the cultural views of the Portuguese which (still) conceive of themselves to be superior to their Brazilian "enfant terrible". Others, however, rather incorporate Brazil into their Portuguese identity - instead of constructing it in opposition to - such as [Agamemnon] who states in this regard: 'I'm very proud of my countries past, Im a proud Portuguese that looks at Brazil as our greatest deed. I don't like that kind of small-minded nationalism, if you are proud of our country, than be proud that 300 million people speak our language even if it's a little different.'

At the other end of the debate, we find those players who are actively constructing a Brazilian identity in direct opposition to Portugal. Indicative of this is the opinion of Brazilian player [Zulfor], showing considerable pride for his Brazilian identity when motivating his/her argument that Brazil deserves its own servers, unlike the Portuguese. This is mainly built upon the notion that Brazil is in a relatively good economic situation - mentioning a GDP which surpasses that of 'even England and France' - with the next Olympic and World Cup coming up in Brazil as well. Later on in his post, [Zulfor] reacts with a certain amount of animosity towards the Portuguese, clearly enforcing his Brazilian identity *vis á vis* Portugal:

After Brazil had a hard start 600yrs been stolen,slaved and robbed by
Portugese and Spanish is with joy when i see a portugese geeza cleaning

toilets, waiters, chefs, construction or working as janitor in London (where i live) and there is quite a few doing this Lol

Portugal should stop with this superior attitude... what is Portugal?

The best country from Africa and the worst from Europe..

Interesting to note at this point is the way in which the shared colonial past between Portugal and Brazil keeps on playing a significant part in deliberating on either national identities. As some Portuguese players feel genuinely hurt in their national pride by the implementation of several Brazilian servers by *Blizzard*, actively negotiating – and at times romanticizing – their Portuguese identity in relation to the colonial history of Brazil. On the other hand, Brazilian players such as [Zulfor] respond to this debate by adhering to more anti-colonialist sentiments, placing central emphasis on the ‘stealing, slaving and robbing’ practices of the Portuguese whilst in the contemporary world Brazil has managed to develop into a more successful and economically prosperous country than Portugal – and a lot of other European countries for that matter.

As *Blizzard* implements national servers for certain countries, but not for others, members engage in a lively debate to gain recognition as a national community, having the same desires and conceived rights to national play as other nations who are granted their “official slice of the ‘WoW-pie’”. In placing a central emphasis on their Portuguese identity, these Portuguese players feel the need to reassert themselves after *Blizzard* implemented Brazilian-servers instead of Portuguese ones. Through romantically reminiscing about the shared colonial past between Portugal and Brazil, a selection of the Portuguese players feel genuinely hurt in their national pride by this ‘business decision’ made by *Blizzard*. The Brazilian players, in contrast, construct their identity in opposition to the Portuguese players, drawing on the contemporary (financially) prosperous and superior position of Brazil in the world.

4.2) *Negotiating ‘Real’ and ‘Virtual’ Nationality in Azeroth*

Continuing the analysis towards the importance of national identity in WoW, we shift our focus to the complex interplay between the virtual representations²² of specific national

²² For a description of the ‘real-world’ cultural inspiration for several of the virtual races of *Azeroth* which will be drawn upon in several cases utilized in this study, see *appendix D*.

cultural traits and conventions in the lore of *Azeroth* and the “real-world” national identities which the community bring with them as they interact with and within WoW. On the one hand, players might be confronted with certain representations in WoW which do not converge with their own conception of their national identity. In actively contesting these conceived “blatant stereotypes”, people vent their frustration with certain representations in the game on the forums. Interesting topics of debate in this respect are coalescing around the forthcoming release of the new WoW-expansion, *Mists of Pandaria* (MoP), later on in 2012. Indicative of this is the topic with the all-saying title ‘*Still not too late to scrap this RACIST expansion*’, in which player [Vandy] is voicing his dissatisfaction with MoP, objecting ‘...the blatant stereotyping of Asian people (particularly Chinese) that MoP already promises.’ [Vandy] later elaborates on his statement, giving the following interpretation of MoP:

The problem with MoP is that it stands to combine accents, landscape, architecture, philosophy and a country's national animal along with other 'Chinese' things in one package. MoP is clearly based on China - not modern China, but on the 'perceived China' that exists only in the realm of stereotype.

My decision to make this thread (which, I knew, would be troublesome), comes based on long experience of the hurt done to Chinese people (including my own family) by this form of stereotyping.

Conceiving of the virtual representations of Chinese culture in WoW to be detrimental to the public perception towards Chinese (and other Asian) people who are conceived to be trying to break with certain ‘damaging’ stereotypes which are being reinforced in *Azeroth*. This opinion tends to be supported by other members of the community, for example, when [Watonga] mentions his South-American friend ‘...took offense of the troll temples aswell...’, and in the case of the Englishman [Jorrok], who ‘...sometimes find the Gilneas stereotypes a bit harsh, despite them being based on English life a century ago’. For these players apparently, the ways in which their national culture is represented in *Azeroth* raises dubious feelings for not being congruent with the national image these players uphold of themselves.

On the other hand, however, people also tend to embrace certain representations found in *Azeroth*, as they open up the possibility of “role-playing” (RP) in the context of Greek

mythology²³, Celtic history²⁴ and the Vikings²⁵. The way in one's digital character is formed in *Azeroth* for role-playing, in example, a Viking, depends to a large extent on wearing the "right" clothing in-game. The topic '*Viking type armor*' is illustrative of a discussion centered around this issue, showing that conflict arises within the Scandinavian community when the representation of a Viking in WoW seems to be more based on popularized images of Vikings conveyed by Hollywood, than the "true" and historical Vikings. In response to the suggestion posted by [Sactz] that the use of the *Ymirjar Lord gear* might be fitting for RPing a Viking, [Dremthar] annoyingly responds with 'You call that Viking armour? Sure, if you are in an American comic book or movie. What I learned in history class, they liked to wear leather.', indicating a part of the Scandinavian community whom do not identify with the Americanized, popular cultural image of the Vikings.

Instead, 'proud Scandinavians' like [Deekan] know that 'Our [referring to Vikings] shield is round and made of wood with a metal frame.', apparently successful in customizing his/her character in such a way that it contributes to an increased sense of one's cultural heritage and identity as opposed to those who uphold the "wrong", Hollywood conceptions of Vikings.. In negotiating the content of WoW in terms of one's national identity, people thus both display a negative conception towards some elements in the game, whilst at the same time positively valuing others and actively incorporate them into their avatar and interactions with and within *Azeroth*.

4.3) '*Virtual Nationalism*' in *Azeroth*

Where the ending of the previous paragraph was illustrative of ways in which people place a central emphasis on national cultural conventions and characteristics derived from the "real-world" into their engagements with and within the virtual world of *Azeroth*, this paragraph is focused on the ways in which nationalistic tendencies are solely based on the virtual context of the WoW-specific lore. Depending on one's desire to completely break with the rules and conventions of the outside world, people can choose to fully immerse themselves into the cultural and historical context *Azeroth* through adopting a nationalistic perspective when they engage in role-play. This virtual nationalistic RP can be conceived to proceed broadly along two lines. This manifests itself in the first place in that part of the role-playing

²³ See topic: "*Greek mythology role play*"

²⁴ See topic: "*RPing a celt (and more specifically is it possible)?*"

²⁵ See topic: "*Viking type armor*"

community which aims at externally demarcating races from each other, based on their race-specific cultural history. It is here we find exclusive guilds based on the in-game race people chose to play, as the topic called '*Defias Brotherhood RP Guild List!*' by [Ephitos] shows. This designated RP-server contains guilds such as '*Winterblades*' (Night Elf), '*Ere Argus*' (Draenei), '*The Greymane Resolve*' (Worgen/Gilnean) and '*The Three Hammers*' (Dwarves), all facilitating nationalistic RP for those players who want to break away from the Allied-fraction these races belong to and engage in a quest to revive and strengthen one's 'own kind'. On the side of the *Horde*, there is also a significant amount of 'virtual national guild', such as the '*Rite of the Earth Mother*' (Tauren), '*The Orcs of the Red Blade*' (Orcs), '*Sin Belore*' (Blood-Elf) and the '*Cult of Shadow*', centered around '*...aid(ing) the Forsaken Nation and empower it!*'.

By means of paying significant attention to the (detailed) race-specific history of each playable type of character in WoW, these players frequently refer to the historical period of each specific race *before* its alignment with either the *Horde* or the *Alliance*. In breaking away from this main opposition, these players seek to construct their virtual identity through contrast with other races belonging to the same fraction, based on differences in homeland, history and culture, as interpreted from the WoW-lore. However, players do not only demarcate races from each other in order to engage in virtual nationalistic play, as they can also draw separating boundaries *within* races itself. This is, ironically, conceived to specifically "fit" within the virtual context of the *Human*-race in *Azeroth*, as the rivalry history of the eight human nations is placed central in the human-specific lore.

Descriptive of this last remark is the topic called '*The obsession with Lordaeron...*', in which [Gunnell] asks the community for an explanation of the large prevalence of people who are role-playing the *Human*-race in *Azeroth* show nationalistic sentiments derived from their imagined belonging to the most-northern virtual nation of *Lordaeron*. As some people locate the motivation for these manifestations of virtual nationalism in the specific history of *Lordaeron*, as [Dalrick] for example conceives of this virtual nation to be '*...like the center of tragedy, and therefore it makes the perfect scene for dark, more dramatic filled roleplay*', others make intertextual references in referring to the influence of the popular HBO-series *Game of Thrones* (2011) in shaping medieval, nationalistic role-play. Through '*...perpetuating a stereotype that grimdark Northerners are somehow superior to the puny Southrons*', [Amarae] conceives that the popular series contributes to nationalistic sentiments amongst those who hail from the most northern nation of *Lordaeron*.

In contrasting this virtual national identity to their own, players who conceive of themselves as originating from the southern virtual nation of *Stormwind* show counter-

nationalistic sentiments. As [Gethric] states: 'I'm a true Stormwindian, born and bred!' and with [Castle] singing 'Boooooooooorn in the S W C !! (to the tune of Bruce Springsteens "Born in the USA")', these players effectively construct their virtual national identity as a "southerner" in opposition to those "overly proud" northerners.

In relating these manifestations of nationalism to the ones described in the previous paragraphs, it can be concluded that the "virtual nationalists" are located at the opposite end of the national-play continuum, breaking with "real-world" culturally specific conventions and focusing exclusively on the ones encountered in the virtual world. Even though these "real-world" cultural characteristics tend to play no role whatsoever in the approach to WoW by the virtual nationalists, the relation with the "real-world" is present in the underlying doctrine, or ideology of nationalism. Striving to achieve geographical and/or racial segregation in the virtual context of WoW, accompanied by a strong sense of nationhood or pride backed up by the cultural history of the virtual races central to the lore of *Azeroth*, these virtual nationalists are reminiscent of what is called 'cyberbalkanization' (Alstynne & Brynjolfsson, 1996), engaging in the formation of 'special interest groups', in this case based on shared nationalistic interpretations of WoW (*Ibid.*).

5) Conclusion & Discussion - 'National Play' in WoW

Being a prominent part of our contemporary popular culture, the *World of Warcraft* and MMORPG's alike have frequently been celebrated for providing a transnational environment in which people (we) '...learn about, debate, and value our diverse orientations, cultures, and backgrounds within the realm of play.' (Taylor, 2006: 319). Through actively being confronted with the cultural diversity of virtual worlds on a daily basis, MMORPG's are conceived to evoke a cosmopolitan disposition amongst its inhabitants (Steinkuehler, 2006). This notion remains prevalent as an underlying assumption within the academic debate concerned with the study of virtual worlds, resulting in a "blind spot" for the importance of national culture and identity in the study of transnational virtual worlds, whilst the importance of other social categories such as age, gender, sexuality and education are extensively studied (e.g. Turkle, 1994; Taylor, 1999, 2002; Williams *et al.*, 2011; Yee, 2006; Duchenaud *et al.*, 2006).

As the analysis of this research has indicated, this assumption is considerably problematic – particularly since expressions of and conflicts about nationalism are quite prominent on various WoW fora. In the first place, conflict arises between players who manifest nationalistic sentiments on the one hand, and those who adhere to a more cosmopolitan disposition. Whereas the former player aims to demarcate themselves from others based on nationality, the latter type conceives of this practice to be detrimental to the transnational nature of MMORPG's. In the second place, intercultural contact in WoW results in conflict between players from different countries, as linguistic and cultural barriers inhibit interactions with people from other nationalities. In addition, conflict arises in response to localization decisions made by *Blizzard*, as the implementation of the Brazilian-server even evokes post-colonial sentiments amongst a part of the Portuguese community. Thirdly, conflicts arise on the forums between players from within geographical regions, actively separating national identities from their connection to specific regions within Europe, such as Great-Britain, the Balkans and the Arab world, indicative of 'Balkanizing' (Alstynne & Brynjolfsson, 1996) sentiments amongst these people. And last, but not least, people engage in virtual nationalistic role-play, coalescing around nationalistic interpretations of the lore of *Warcraft* to draw demarcating lines in and between the virtual races encountered *Azeroth*. This separation within the virtual space of WoW is underscored by sentiments reminiscent of 'cyberbalkanization' (*Ibid.*), as it is directed towards dividing the role-playing community on the basis of their nationalistic interpretation of the lore of WoW.

In short, the analysis has shown that the transnational *potential* of WoW by no means for certain establishes an assumed "unity in difference", as instances of resistance based on a strong sense of nationality demarcate, and at times even (cyber)Balkanize the *World of Warcraft*. In either being manifested through "real-world" nationalistic sentiments which are being brought into the virtual confinements of WoW or through more virtual nationalistic expressions, people are clearly resisting the inherent transnational nature of WoW through national play. Instead of complying to the ascribed transnational nature of WoW and embracing the cultural diversity it harbors (Taylor, 2006; Steinkuehler, 2006), this part of the European community actively negotiates and contests this through emphasizing their national identity in *Azeroth*.

Despite the promising premises of an open and cosmopolitan disposition through global popular culture (Jenkins, 2006; Kuipers & de Kloet; 2009), national systems of meaning have not lost their significance in the inherent transnational *World of Warcraft*. At times strongly reminiscent of glocalization (Robertson, 1995), people express the desire to play secluded

from other nationalities whilst enjoying the game from within the confinement of their own culture with likeminded individuals on their own national server, indicating an attempt to make nationalism in *Azeroth* more 'banal' (Billig, 1995). Extending the reasoning on the increased instances of 'national resistance' in response to the effects of the increased interconnectedness in the world (Achterberg *et al.*, 2011), these nationalistic sentiments encountered in WoW might indicate the same notion of a resurgence of nationalism, especially in Europe (Beck & Grande, 2006).

Further research in the light of this study can be aimed at discovering the mechanisms which contribute to an increase in nationalistic sentiments due to increased exposure to cultural diversity in virtual worlds. Through engaging in a longitudinal study, it can be assessed if, and how, people get more nationalistic through playing WoW. In addition, this research utilizes relatively passive data encountered on fora. Setting out to retrieve active manipulatory data through conducting interviews, more context can be provided to individual accounts of national play. Finally, the question of generalizability of this study also requires further research. Through conducting web surveys within a representative sample of the European WoW-community, the share of those players who engage in national play can be assessed and related to their transnational counterparts.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor dr. Stef Aupers for consistently providing good feedback and constructive criticism in the development of this paper. In addition, I would like to thanks prof. dr. Liesbeth van Zoonen, Lili Wiesenhütter, Sirinthra Boonyabhas, Frank Olie, Juliana Brunello, Maloe Sniekers and Yun-An Dung for their insightful comments during the formative stages of the initial idea for this research.

6) Bibliography

- Achterberg, P., Heilbron, J., Houtman, D. & S. Aupers (2011). 'A Cultural Globalization of Popular Music? American, Dutch, French and German Popular Music Charts (1965 to 2006).', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(5), 589-608.
- Alstyne, M. van & E. Brynjolfsson (1996). 'Electronic Communities: Global Villages or Cyberbalkanization? (Best Theme Paper)', *ICIS 1996 Proceedings*, 80-98.
- Anderson, B. (2006[1983]). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.*, London: Verso.
- Ang, C.S., Zaphiris, P. & S. Wilson (2010). 'Computer Games and Sociocultural Play: An Activity Theoretical Perspective.', *Games and Culture*, 5(4), 354-380.
- Aupers, S. (2007). "Better than the real world" On the Reality and Meaning of Online Computer Games, *Fabula*, 48, 250-269.
- Beck, U. (2002) 'The cosmopolitan society and its enemies.', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 19(1-2), 17-44.
- Beck, U. & E. Grande (2006). 'Cosmopolitanism. Europe's Way Out of Crisis.', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 10(1), 67-85.
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal Nationalism*, London: Sage Publications
- Castronova, E. (2005). *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games.*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chen, M.G. (2008). 'Communication, Coordination, and Camaraderie in World of Warcraft.', *Games and Culture*, 4(1), 47-73.
- Corneliusson, H.G. & J.W. Rettberg (2008). *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity. A World of Warcraft Reader.*, Cambridge, London: The MIT Press.
- Corpus Ong, J. (2009). 'The cosmopolitan continuum: locating cosmopolitanism in media and cultural studies.', *Media, Culture & Society*, 31(3), 449-466.
- Ducheneaut, N., Yee, N., Nickell, E. & R.J. Moore (2006). 'Building a MMO with Mass Appeal: A Look at Gameplay in World of Warcraft.', *Games and Culture*, 1, 281-317.
- Eriksen, T.H. (2007). 'Nationalism and the Internet.', *Nations and Nationalism*, 13(1), 1-17.
- Glaser, B.G. & A.L. Strauss (1999[1967]). *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research.*, Piscataway, PA: Aldine Transaction.
- Jansz, J. (2005). 'The emotional appeal of violent video games for adolescent males.', *Communication Theory*, 15, 219-241.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). 'Pop Cosmopolitanism. Mapping Cultural Flows in an Age of Media Convergence.', in: H. Jenkins (ed.) *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers. Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 152-172.
- Krzywinska, B. (2006). 'Blood Scythes, Festivals, Quests, and Backstories. World Creation and Rhetorics of Myth in World of Warcraft.', *Games and Culture*, 1(4), 383-396.
- Kuipers, G. & J. de Kloet (2009). 'Banal cosmopolitanism and *The Lord of the Rings*: The limited role of national differences in global media consumption.', *Poetics*, 37, 99-118.
- Lowood, H. (2006). 'Storyline, Dance/Music, or PvP?: Game Movies and Community Players in World of Warcraft.', *Games and Culture*, 1(4), 362-382.
- Morley, D. (2001). 'Belongings. Place, Space and Identity in a Mediated World.', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4(4), 425-448.
- Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling Alone. The collapse and revival of American Community.*, New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Robertson, R. (1995). 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity.', in: Featherstone, M., Lash, S. & R. Robertson. *Global Modernities*, London, California & New Delhi: Sage Publications.

- Roudometof, V. (2005). 'Transnationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Glocalization.' *Current Sociology*, 53(1), 113-135.
- Steinkuehler, C.A. (2006). 'Virtual Worlds, Learning, & the New Pop Cosmopolitanism', *Teachers College Record*, <http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 12843, Date Accessed: 06-07-2012.
- Taylor, T.L. (1999). 'Life in Virtual Worlds. Plural Existence, Multimodalities, and Other Online Research Challenges.', *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 43(3), 436-449.
- Taylor, T.L. (2002). 'Living Digitally: Embodiment in Virtual Worlds.', in: R. Schroeder (Ed.), *The Social Life of Avatars: Presence and Interaction in Shared Virtual Environments*, London: Springer-Verlag, 40-62.
- Taylor, T.L. (2006). 'Does WoW Change Everything? How a PvP Server, Multinational Player Base, and Surveillance Mod Scene Caused Me Pause.', *Games and Culture*, 1(4), 318-337.
- Turkle, S. (1994). 'Constructions and Reconstructions of Self in Virtual Reality: Playing in the MUDs.', *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 1(3), 158-167.
- Whippey, C. (2010). 'Community in World of Warcraft: The Fulfillment of Social Needs.', *Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology*, 18(1), 49-59.
- Williams, D., Ducheneaut, N., Xiong, L., Zhang, Y., Yee, N. & E. Nickell (2006). 'From Tree House to Barracks. The Social Life of Guilds in World of Warcraft.', *Games and Culture*, 1(4), 338-361.
- Yee, N. (2006). 'The Demographics, Motivations and Derived Experiences of Users of Massively-Multiuser Online Graphical Environments.', *PRESENCE: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments*, 15, 309-329.

7) Appendices

Appendix A. Overview of the 'official' *Blizzard* regional and sub-regional server distribution of *The World of Warcraft* (source: http://www.wowwiki.com/Realms_list; retrieved at: 07-07-2012).

I. US Region

- US Pacific [total: 72 servers]
- US Mountain [total: 12 servers]
- US Central [total: 75 servers]
- US Eastern [total: 68 servers]
- Oceania [total: 12 servers]
- Latin America [total: 3 servers]
- Brazil [total: 5 servers]

II. European Region

- English [total: 113 servers]
- German [total: 84 servers]
- French [total: 37 servers]
- Spanish [total: 11 servers]
- Russian [total: 20 servers]

III. China Region

- Region 1 [total: 48 servers]
- Region 2 (Beijing) [total: 44 servers]
- Region 3 (Sichuan) [total: 15 servers]
- Region 4 (Guangdong) [total: 30 servers]
- Region 5 (Shanghai) [total: 1 server]
- Region 6 (Beijing) [total: 40 servers]
- Taiwan [total: 39 servers]

IV. Korea Region

- Korea [total: 33 servers]

Appendix B.1. Overview of the prevalence of tier13²⁶ guilds, having a “primary language” other than English on the European-English server cluster (source: www.wowprogress.com; retrieved at 17-03-2012).

	Primary Language	Amount of Guilds
1.	Swedish	342
2.	Italian	248
3.	Polish	227
4.	Finnish	202
5.	Czech	175
6.	Hungarian	160
7.	Danish	156
8.	Turkish	107
9.	Norwegian	74
10.	Portuguese	74
11.	Dutch	62
12.	Greek	52
13.	Bulgarian	40
14.	Romanian	23
15.	Croatian	19
16.	Russian*	17
17.	Chinese*	16
18.	Slovenian	8
19.	Estonian	5
20.	Hebrew	5
21.	Lithuanian	5
22.	Latvian	3
23.	Japanese	3
24.	Spanish*	2
25.	Korean*	1
26.	German*	0
27.	France*	0

* Languages which have their own ‘official’ national servers

²⁶ Tier 13 guilds are those guilds who partake or have partaken into the newest challenges offered by the latest patch of software, illustrating that these guilds are still active.

Appendix B.2. Elaboration on the analysis towards the ascribed motivations of ‘national play’ as manifested in the national guilds of WoW.

To further explore the meanings which are attached to playing in these national-language guilds, the general profile of the guilds belonging to the top-twelve represented national guilds in WoW are analyzed. A minimum of 50 guilds per language were analyzed, resulting into a selection of about 8-12 guilds per language which had sufficient non-member access to the virtual domain of their guild-community. In looking at the self-description of the guild as found on either their own website or as displayed on wowprogress.com, we analyzed the ways in which these guilds construct their own identity as a ‘national guild’ as such²⁷.

The first underlying motivations which is being attached to this form of ‘national play’ within the national-language PvE-guilds is practical. Communicating in and through a shared mother language is conceived to significantly smoothen game-play, especially when collectively engaged in overcoming the most difficult challenges the game has to offer. In addition to this practical aspect of national play, the guilds also explain their exclusive national member base on the basis of an increased likelihood to develop social contacts which might even transfer into the ‘real-world’. In this respect, Swedish guild *Fatalis*²⁸ illustrates these two underlying motivations for national play: "We are swedish speaking on Ventrilo and ingame. We like to have it that way to minimize the misunderstandings during raids. Also, it leads to good friendships and that is what makes this game fun."

Another motivation for engaging in ‘national guilds’ in WoW has to do with the added competitive aspect. As every guild gets points as they progress through the different and increasingly difficult challenges the game has to offer, these guilds compete with each other in terms of who kills what boss the fastest and with the most skill. Through playing in a national guild the range of competition between guilds in WoW is being extended, with not only competing to be the best on a global scale and on the specific server, but also to compete to be the best guild of the country. Following this reasoning, Portuguese guild *Momentum*²⁹ states that it "...is a guild that fights for the top spots nationally.", indicative of their primary focus on becoming the best Portuguese guild, hence making global competition subordinate towards national competition.

In general, however, these guilds seem to place the emphasis more on sharing a similar language (non-English) than sharing a similar nationality and/or cultural background. As ‘smoothing out’ communication is one of the central motivations for ‘national play’, there are guilds for example who’s primary language is Swedish, but consider themselves to be a Scandinavian guilds, incorporating not only Swedish members, but also Norwegians, Danes and Fins – given that they possess a significant skill in speaking the Swedish language³⁰. This is for example illustrated by the guild *Postal*³¹, as it describes itself as: "Postal is a Scandinavian guild..." [...] "The guild currently has a mix of Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Finnish members."

Within the same range of Scandinavian guilds however, there are other guilds – mostly Danish and Finnish – which place their national identity at the center of their guild, making explicit references to romanticize this national identity as is for example the case with the Finnish guild *Sisu*³², which describe themselves as followed: "From the roadless wilderness of the Far North, through the snow-

²⁷ A side note is necessary at this point, since the analysis extends across national guilds who’s primary language is anything but English, most of the information is displayed in their respective native tongue. In order to (partly) solve this problem, *Google Translate* was utilized to translate ‘foreign’ information into English. Despite this being a time-consuming and at times resulting in confusing results, most of the translations could be made good sense of. Unfortunately, it appeared to be difficult to analyze a large share of the Turkish guilds (which were largely closed to outsider access) and Greek guilds whose ‘digital usage’ of their language differs remarkably from the official written Greek, and is hence not supported by *Google Translate*.

²⁸ Source: <http://www.wowprogress.com/guild/eu/outland/Fatalis>

²⁹ Source: <http://momentum-gb.wowstead.com/info>, translated into English through *Google Translate*.

³⁰ This trend is also prevalent amongst Czech guilds which are often Czech/Slovakian guilds and Dutch guilds which incorporate Belgian players, placing a central emphasis on sharing a similar language to facilitate game-play instead of a shared nationality.

³¹ Source: <http://www.wowprogress.com/guild/eu/aszune/Postal>

³² Source: <http://www.sisuguild.fi/smf/index.php>

covered forests shrouded in the Eternal Night of the winter, echoes our warcry. [...] Upholding the tradition of the mythical heroes of Kalevala, the great Finnish epic, we shall overcome the odds by strength or by skill." Being unable to reach further into the community of these guilds proved to be largely impossible, due to the fact that limited outsider access to their virtual domains and the use of their native, non-English language were frequently encountered.

Even though the general profiles of these national guilds do generally not incorporate references to negotiating a 'strong' or 'romantic' national identity – despite several Danish and Finnish guilds – into their guild identity, the fact remains that these guilds divide up the European WoW-community based on their linguistic capabilities which, in turn are strongly related to national origins.

Appendix C. Overview of the forum-topics analyzed for this study, divided up according to central theme.

I. 'Real-world' nationalism in WoW

- Topic: (Locked) Balkan servers [115 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2624872990?page=1>
- Topic: Can we see some Arab servers coming? [73 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/1710176750#6>
- Topic: About the new Brazilian servers [97 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2423163064?page=1>
- Topic: Hunscalep [20 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2624873722#14>
- Topic: Hey all, why not Greek? [45 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2868765517>
- Topic: We want WoW in Swedish blizzard ! [81 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3430036056?page=1>
- Topic: (Locked)A British realm for British people. [179 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3313136013?page=1>
- Topic: (Locked)Scottish Realm [220 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3161501371?page=1>
- Topic: (Locked) A Dutch Realm/server [487 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3161451213?page=1>
- Topic: vítejte! to Burning Blade the Czech server.... [9 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2793223011#8>
- Topic: Polish servers! [44 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3553599154?page=1>
- Topic: I and my friends want Turkish server [56 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2690870912>
- Topic: Danish People. [160 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3523403962?page=1>
- Topic: (Locked)Blizzard is Racist. [44 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3635914027?page=1>
- Topic: (Locked)A response to the 'British only realm' [24 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3313136424#14>
- Topic: British spellings for English (EU) servers. [460 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2463328294?page=1>
- Topic: Greek alphabet for World of Warcraft [91 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/1820954312?page=3>
- Topic: Ive had it tbh! [51 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/1874251644>
- Topic: (Locked) Suggestion - Swedish language pack [99 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/1679478019?page=1>
- Topic: (Locked) A.A.A = WOW in Lingua Italiana [80 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/999251045?page=1>

II. Virtual representations of 'real-world' cultural traits and conventions

- Topic: 'Northern' accents IC [209 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2592150389?page=1>
- Topic: Mythologies which used in WoW [19 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2064229442#7>
- Topic: Japanese: Horde-like or Alliance-like? [52 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/1999562642#16>
- Topic: Revised naming guide (by Sejavictrix and lil' o' me) [22 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/859356704?page=1>
- Topic: Mists of Panaria, For The Money? [44 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3225376118?page=1>
- Topic: (Locked) Still not too late to scrap this RACIST expansion. [107 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3161448912?page=1>

III. "Virtual-world" nationalism in WoW

- Topic: National Parties, we lack 'em. [25 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/1535583734>
- Topic: [H-RP] The Apothecary Society Recruiting [15 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/1934653863#4>
- Topic: Defias Brotherhood RP Guild List! [31 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2037904576#2>
- Topic: Stop hating on worgen and halfbreeds and stuff. [108 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3553606309?page=1>
- Topic: The obsession with Lordaeron... [130 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3646204921?page=1>
- Topic: This is truly sad... but please don't call me a Hater. [111 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2868760006#18>
- Topic: (Locked) Americans stealin' our guilds! [77 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/1267069048?page=1>
- Topic: Rping a celt (and more specifically is it possible)? [15 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/1620672203#4>
- Topic: Greek mythology role-play [9 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3312966106>
- Topic: Viking type armor [20 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/3389172026>

IV. Additional Topics

- Topic: (Locked) Oslo bombing and Utøya shooting [501 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2423043530?page=1>
- Topic: Thor (The Heimdall casting thing) [20 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2037896290#2>
- Topic: Just read this. [117 posts]
 - o Source: <http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/2868635839?page=6>

Appendix D. Illustrations of the virtual representations of 'real-world' cultural characteristics and conventions, as encountered in the lore of *Warcraft*. All the descriptions found below are constructed through selecting and combining parts of the WoW-lore as described in the 'digital encyclopedia' of WoW (www.wowwiki.com)³³.

Pandaren³⁴ - Resembling Asian (more specifically, Chinese) culture

The enigmatic *Pandaren* are one of the most elusive races of *Azeroth*. *Pandaren* come from the *Pandaren Empire of Pandaria*. They are humanoid pandas with a great love of nature and strong ales. Each pandaren belongs to a *shao'din*, which is their word for "clan". Pandaren society has changed from its origins. Where once the pandaren were a mighty empire, standing proud beside their night elf allies, now they are a simple people who want only peace and a safe home. Yet the world is a dangerous place, and only through an acceptance of the violence that comes with life can the pandaren continue to prosper. *Pandaren* have a fierce and deep belief in the connection of the material and spiritual worlds. Pandaren are known for their art of *acupressure*. *Acupressure points* such as the one in the right arm, can quicken the heart rate and cause the muscles to contract. Other points on the left arm can calm a user down if needed. The pandaren are an old and refined culture with many traditions and arts important to their way of life, none of which have influenced the pandaren so thoroughly as the *art of brewing*. The brews, for the most part, carry the hallowed names of the original *brewmasters* who created them. *Chou Ling Sing*, *Hong Liu*, and the *brewmaster* known only as *Xiang* are the three most revered *brewmasters*, and they had a frequent and friendly rivalry. They take the same stance regarding their martial arts as they do every other part of their lives. They use what works, perfecting it with terrifying results, and they don't use what doesn't work.

Worgen³⁵/Gilneas³⁶ - Resembling Victorian Britain culture

Worgen are large, lupine humanoids reminiscent of a *werewolf* that walks upright, but lopes on all fours to run. A person from *Gilneas* is referred to as *Gilnean*. Like their leader, *Gilnean* people are often burly and gruff. Extremely isolationist, they supported the Greymane Wall's construction. They speak common, and have their faith in the Holy Light. Their resources are unknown. Moreover, their costumes, weapons, architecture, and accents have great Victorian connotations; along with the cold and rainy weather of the peninsula, it gives the feeling of being in the London of the nineteenth century.

Dwarves³⁷ - Resembling Norse mythology, but with a Scottish accent

Dwarves are short and stout creatures mostly inhabiting *Khaz Modan* in the *Eastern Kingdoms*. They are shorter than *humans* but taller than *gnomes*, taking advantage of their size when possible and relying on their robustness and strength when not. As in most modern fantasy, the dwarves in the *Warcraft* universe draw parallels to those in *Tolkien's* *legendarium* as well as the original race in Norse mythology. Most notably, and common to both sources, are their facility with and affinity for mining and other crafts of earth and stone. Their short stature and general appearance are common throughout mythology as well as fiction. The *Warcraft* dwarves' descent from the earthen also mirrors both sources. The *Warcraft* dwarven affinity for mechanical engineering may derive in part from the *Warhammer* games' depiction of dwarves as technologically apt or may itself simply be an extension of their affinity for mining and metalcraft. This also relates to Norse mythology where they are the creators of many of the gods' artifacts and weapons, such as Thor's hammer *Mjollnir*.

³³ These descriptions are thus by no means our own interpretation of the lore of *Warcraft*, instead they are literally derived from the game-specific lore, aimed at providing the reader with some additional information on a selection of the underlying cultural references of relevant game-specific terms and concepts present in this research.

³⁴ Source: <http://www.wowwiki.com/Pandaren>, last accessed at 02-07-2012.

³⁵ Source: <http://www.wowwiki.com/Worgen>, last accessed at 02-07-2012.

³⁶ Source: <http://www.wowwiki.com/Gilneas>, last accessed at 02-07-2012.

³⁷ Source: <http://www.wowwiki.com/Dwarf>, last accessed at 02-07-2012

Trolls³⁸ - Resembling exotic, Caribbean tribal culture with a Jamaican and/or Cuban accent

Trolls are often tall, lanky, and muscular. They have both *elven* and *orcish* characteristics with their fierce fangs and long ears. Their long arms, strong legs and quick reflexes make them adept hunters. *Trolls* are very isolated beings. Most trolls speak *Zandali* and *Common* as their primary languages. However, due to their isolation, some trolls have forgotten *Zandali* and use *Low Common* as their primary language instead. *Cannibalism* is a relatively common troll practice. Not all trolls practice *voodoo*, but it is as widespread as cannibalism. Trolls have a characteristic way of speaking. Words like "yo" (a greeting) and "mon" (man) are common expressions. They speak with varying accents that resemble that of Jamaicans and Cubans. Cuban-sounding accents are more common among *forest trolls*.

Vrykul³⁹ - Resembling Norse mythology

Vrykul (pronounced [ˈvraɪ.kʊl]) are a race of heavily Norse-themed half-giant warriors native to the *Howling Fjord*, located in southeastern *Northrend*. It is said that in ancient times the *vrykul race* inhabited the land, founding a vast and prosperous civilization. Suddenly one day, without warning or explanation, the *vrykul race* vanished, leaving behind only deserted villages and abandoned temples. The *vrykul* seem to be inspired by the *Einherjar* (ine-her-yar, "lone ravagers/army of one") of Norse mythology who were the spirits of warriors who died glorious deaths in battle and were resurrected to serve the gods at the time of *Ragnarök*. Unlike the *Einherjar* however, the *vrykul* serve an evil purpose.

Uldum⁴⁰ - Resembling mythological Egypt

The landscape of *Uldum* is predominately desert, with a large river giving life to an oasis in the center of the region. The oasis offers much to the native inhabitants, *tol'vir* and beast alike. The *Ramkahen* have populated much of the northern half: their capital city rests here, as does their trade center, training grounds, and several fruit and crop fields. Further down the river, past the *Vir'naal Dam*, the *Neferset* have seized control of the *Lost City of the Tol'vir*, as well as the *Gate of Hamatep* near the *Vir'naal River Delta*. Much of the remainder of *Uldum* is wind-swept desert, dunes swallowing many of the old tombs and ruins

³⁸ Source: <http://www.wowwiki.com/Troll>, last accessed at 02-07-2012.

³⁹ Source: <http://www.wowwiki.com/Vrykul>, last accessed at 02-07-2012.

⁴⁰ Source: <http://www.wowwiki.com/Uldum>, last accessed at 02-07-2012.