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„DISEMBODIED SOCIETIES:
A MODULAR STUDY OF THE DARKNET AS A VIRTUAL
MICRONATION"

Verfasserin

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

The main objective of this thesis is to arrive at a grounded understanding of how productions of collective meaning and identity are constructed and maintained in the decentralized, unregulated realm of the Darknet, with special focus on exploring its structural likening to the micronational model. In drawing parallels between the revolutionary processes spurred by the printing press to those of Information Age technologies, the scope of the study is based on the founding notion that major societal shifts and re-configurations of collective identities can be viewed as byproducts of dramatic advancements in communications technology. The core challenge rests in developing an appropriate criteria by which to assess the Darknet's social and operational components in relation to those of the micronational model. The author concludes that both collectives can be investigated according to the following typological features: mentalities, technologies, resources and institutions. To address the gap in knowledge, Darknet mentalities are further explored on the basis of empirical, qualitative research. Results are classified and compared across three principle categories: values, affiliation and perspective. The findings provide verification of the author's original assumptions, but also leave room for further investigation.

The thesis is divided into five main chapters: (1) Introduction, referring to the aim, scope and summary of both the theoretical and empirical approach; (2) Theoretical Framework, addressing the historical and theoretical background of the study, as well as the author's core assumptions and conceptual deliberations throughout; (3) Methodology, presenting the empirical research design and instrumentation; (4) Results and Discussion, presenting the assessment of obtained qualitative data; (5) Conclusion, summarizing the study as a whole.

ABSTRACT (GERMAN)

Das Hauptziel dieser Arbeit ist es, ein grundlegendes Verständnis dafür zu entwickeln, wie kollektive Bedeutung und Identität im dezentralisierten und unreguliertem Darknet produziert und erhalten werden, mit speziellem Fokus auf die strukturelle Verbindung zu dem mikronationalen Modell. Indem Parallelen zwischen den revolutionären Prozessen angefeuert durch die Erfindung der Druckerpresse, und jenen des Informationszeitalters gezogen werden, ist die Bandbreite dieser Arbeit auf der Ansicht basiert, dass große soziale Änderungen und re-konfiguationen von Kollektiven Identitäten als Nebenprodukte des dramatischen Fortschritts der Kommunikationstechnologie angesehen werden können. Die Kernherausforderung liegt in der Entwicklung von passenden Kriterien, mit welchen man die sozialen und operativen Komponenten bewerten kann, in Relation zu denen des mikronationalen Modells. Die Autorin kommt zu dem Schluß, dass beide Kollektive an Hand der folgenden typologischen Eigenschaften untersucht werden können: Mentalitäten, Technologie, Ressourcen und Identität. Um auf die Wissenslücke über das Darknet einzugehen, werden Mentalitäten auf Basis von empirischen und qualitativen Forschungen untersucht. Die Ergebnisse werden über drei Kategorien klassifiziert und verglichen: Werte, Zugehörigkeit und Perspektive. Die Ergebnisse verifizieren die ursprünglichen Vermutung der Autorin, lassen aber Raum für weitere Untersuchungen.

Diese Arbeit ist in 5 Hauptkapitel unterteilt: (1) Einführung, Ziele, Umfang und Zusammenfassung des theoretischen und empirischen Zugangs; (2) Theoretischer Rahmen, der einerseits auf historische und theoretische Hintergründe, und andererseits auf die Kernthesen und konzeptuelle Gedanken der Autorin eingeht; (3) Methoden, Präsentation des empirischen Forschungsdesign und Instrumentalisierung; (4) Resultate, Diskussionen, Präsentation und Bewertung der gewonnenen qualitativen Daten; (5) Zusammenfassung der Arbeit als Ganzes.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the problem

As the world advances into an age of technological ubiquity and abundance, the role of communications technology as an integral feature in virtually every aspect of daily modern life is becoming evermore apparent. This inevitably calls into question the long-term implications such technology may stand to have on the continued evolution of social, political, and economic processes and formations. The leading tendency to examine such phenomena through inherently biased, nation-centric perspectives has resulted in the reinforcement of theoretical and methodological practices that ultimately fail to conceptualize the presence of new collectives in the realm of cyberspace. The Darknet and the virtual micronation are two very unique examples of such modern entities, as both seem to demonstrate structural and organizational features divorced from the traditional order of social configurations.

The significance of their study becomes more apparent when placed within a broader historical context. Previous advancements to communications technology have already shaped revolutionary processes in a similar manner. Following the arrival of printing press technology in 15th century Europe, history witnessed a dramatic transformation of Old World mentalities and collective consciousness. New and unprecedented access to information empowered individuals and ulti-

mately re-defined the conceptual boundaries of their world. Today, the emergence of decentralized, dispatialized collectives as byproducts of network communications suggests the potential for similar shifts.

1.2 State of the art

The Darknet is an enormously vast and complex network of economic, social and criminal interactions. While many contemporary researchers have engaged in studying its broader implications and features with a more narrowed focus on technological and digital resources or legal challenges to state regulation, a socially-scientific approach to the investigation of user experiences and their collective social habits across this network has been limited only to a very small pool of publications by authors such as Jamie Bartlett and Andrew Whelan. The author notes that at present, there exists a major deficit in literature and qualitative data addressing the more abstract representations of the Darknet's social and cultural dimensions. To the very best of the author's knowledge and investigation of literature, no studies have previously attempted the assess the Darknet from the perspective of a collective social construct.

The study of micronations has drawn little attention and maintained a general status of taboo across most academic circles. At present, it appears limited to a niche field of researchers, the overwhelming majority of which have concentrated their case studies on territorial micronations such as Sealand and the Principality of Hutt River. To the best of the author's knowledge and research,

very few scholars have taken upon the task of investigating micronations in cyberspace. As in the case of the Darknet, there exists a persistently uneven understanding of these collectives with regards to the more abstract and qualitative aspects of their design.

While the potential linkages between communications technologies and broader social, political and economic revolutions have been cited and studied by a more considerable number of scholars over the last 3-4 decades, most contemporary research within this field is founded upon reference to pioneered contributions of Benedict Anderson and Elizabeth L. Eisenstein. Of all the core subjects explored within the breadth of the thesis, theoretical research within the field of nationalism and transnationalism provide the greatest abundance of academic resources.

1.3 Primary research questions

To address the gap in knowledge concerning the structural and organizational characteristics of the Darknet and micronation with respect to their social configuration and means of collective identity production, the author hopes to engage both theoretically and empirically with a number of questions. The primary research questions addressed across the breadth of the theoretical and empirical sections comprise of the following: In what ways do advancements in communications technology affect social configurations (and vice versa) or result in new social configurations, such as micronations and cyber-communities? In

the context of cyberspace, what structural features constitute a virtual micronation? By applying these features to the study of the Darknet, how can this entity be defined as a virtual micronation, and how can these features be demonstrated on the basis of collective identity formation? How can parallels ultimately be drawn between the revolutionary processes spurred by the emergence of print culture in early modern Europe and new social formations?

1.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework comprises a substantial component of the author's study as a whole. The scope of the thesis is built upon the founding notion that major societal shifts and re-configurations of collective identities can be viewed as byproducts of dramatic advancements in communications technology. The author explores the modern historical context of this socio-technological symbiosis and its cumulative effects on collective consciousness and identity formation within a meta-historical narrative, drawing upon parallels between the revolutionary impacts of early printing press technologies and the successive impacts of the Information Age on contemporary understandings of collective identity. This contextual framework is applied more specifically to the emergence of national identities in early modern Europe in relation to the printing press. National identity formation is further explored from the angle of contemporary theoretical application as a way of determining an appropriate research design to the study of micronations and the Darknet. In stating the shortcomings of the na-

tion-centric perspective, the problem of its conceptual embeddedness within modern scholarship is subsequently addressed through an investigation of the transnationalist approach. In application of this alternative approach, the author explores both the micronation and the Darknet respectively, first within a broad historical context, followed by a more detailed analysis of the typological specificities of each. In outlining the operational and organizational features of these entities, the author aims to demonstrate their appropriateness for assessing the Darknet as a virtual micronational model. Theoretical assumptions are investigated with the aid of empirical, qualitative research.

1.5 Research design

The theoretical framework of the thesis was paired with a qualitative empirical study to complement and assess the author's primary assumptions regarding the appropriateness of relating the organizational structure of the Darknet to that of the micronational model. The study concentrated on the collection of data from anonymous Darknet users through the use of a basic interview protocol consisting of short-form, open-ended, opinion-based questions. Results were then explored and assessed to determine in how much they validated the author's original assumptions. All interviews were conducted electronically via social networking forums. Ultimately, the purpose of the study was to determine whether there exists a social cohesiveness among Darknet users that could be attributed to the micronational model.

1.6 Assumptions, limitations and scope

With regards to the author's empirical research, it was assumed that all involved participants would respond to the interview questions both truthfully and accurately, to the best of their ability and on the basis of personal knowledge or experience. However, as the study involved sensitive subject matter and (potentially) individuals with a criminal background, the author cannot provide any personal guarantee of accuracy on the part of participants. Limitations to the empirical research are expressed in the procedural challenges encountered by the author during the course of the study (namely, the difficulty of acquiring a sufficient pool of participants due to privacy and security issues).

The author has also posed some deliberate limitations on both the empirical and theoretical scope of the thesis. It is important to note that this thesis is exploratory in nature. As such, it makes no attempts to offer predictive analyses on the basis of its theoretical or empirical components. Due to the breadth and complexity of some of the theoretical topics covered within the thesis, the author has adjusted the theoretical scope of the investigation to follow a macro-level approach. This should not be regarded as an attempt to oversimplify the dynamic nature of such phenomena as national formation or transnational networks and flows, but as an aim to place the problem of the thesis within a meta-historical narrative.

The author would also like to note that the thesis is no way intended to provide an exclusively Euro-centric perspective of the subject matter. A focus of investigation based on historical parallels between the effects of the European printing press and the effects of the Information Age has been chosen purely for the fact that these movements provide strong features of comparison and produce a sense of historical continuity in the relationship between communications technologies and social processes.

1.7. Definition of terms

4Chan: An anonymous content-sharing forum launched in 2003. Over the years, its community has earned a largely negative reputation due to its organized acts of mischief and vigilantism, lack of regulation and controversial content.

agorism: A political philosophy that emerged in 1980 as a branch of anarcho-capitalism. Agorism rests on principles of market anarchism and a stark rejection of state intervention in economic matters, relying instead on voluntary exchanges between individuals.

anarcho-capitalism: A political and philosophical movement advocating the abolition of the state in order to attain individual sovereignty. This movement was first developed by heterodox economist Murray Rothbard, who popularized the concept through his contributions to libertarian philosophy.

Anonymous: A decentralized, non-governmental organization thought to be comprised mainly of hackers and other technical experts acting under the cover of virtual anonymity to perform coordinated acts of online mischief and vigilant-ism. Due to its inherent lack of cohesion, Anonymous is not believed to have any expressed political agenda.

Clearnet: An umbrella term used to refer to any part of the Internet that can be accessed through the use of conventional browsers and search engines.

crypto-currency: A form of digitally-encrypted, decentralized currency com-monly employed for the purpose of secure and anonymous monetary transactions between two or more parties. Crypto-currency differs from conventional cur-rency in that it has no physical denominations. The most widely-used crypto-cur-rency to date is Bitcoin.

crypto-market: A digital marketplace through which goods and services may be exchanged between two or more parties through the use of encryption. Crypto-markets are most commonly accessed for the purchase of illicit goods.

cypherpunk: Originally coined in 1993, this term refers to individuals dedicated to the development of anonymous network systems for the purpose of personal privacy protection online.[1] Cypherpunks are known for their strong advocacy of

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1   Peter Ludlow, *Crypto Anarchy Cyberstates and Pirate Utopias* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 106.

encryption; their pursuits are generally believed to be politically or ideologically-motivated.

Darknet: The part of the Internet that can only be accessed through the use of hidden browsers such as The Onion Router. The Darknet should not be confused with the Deepweb, which does not require specific program or browser.

Deepweb: Not to be confused with the Darknet, the Deepweb refers to all World Wide Web content that is publicly available but yet not accessible through classic search engines such as Yahoo and Google. It includes secure government data-bases and other non-listed sites.

diaxenospitia: A recently coined neologism, diaxenospitia refers to a collection of scattered individuals or dispersed localities forming a single collective entity. The term is used to define the abstract spatial parameters of virtual micronations.

encryption: A sophisticated method of protecting or preventing unauthorized access to private data, through the use of mathematical algorithms. Encryption is common practice on the Darknet, where privacy, anonymity and security prevail.

escrow: An element of encrypted transaction through which a neutral third party is appointed to ensure the proper completion of a sale between two remaining

parties. The third party may also act as an arbitrator in case of any dispute between the two contracting parties.

hacktivism: A portemanteau term referring to all forms of politically-motivated acts of hacking.

libertarianism: A political and philosophical movement consisting of many branches, which prizes individual liberties above all else and essentially rejects the regulatory role of the state.

micronation: An informal, low-populous collective entity claiming independence or sovereignty on the basis of one or more territorial, ideological, social, religious and economic justifications. Micronations can exist both territorially and virtually.

nationalism: Applied as an umbrella term for all phenomena related to national identity and national collective consciousness (such as nationality); within the context of this thesis, the term should not be mistaken with movements of national patriotism associated with strong political motivations and ethno-xenophobia.

Reddit: A large, quasi-anonymous social networking site designed for the purpose of content-sharing, where links can be upvoted, downvoted and commented upon. Commonly referred to as "The Front Page of the Internet," it has become

known for its diversity of content and membership, as well as for its lenient posting guidelines.

The Onion Router (TOR): A network of virtual tunnels that offers web users privacy as well as security while surfing unregulated areas of the Internet. It covers a wide range of applications, both civil and military. Relying on a decentralized architectural system, TOR essentially makes it impossible to track users by stripping away their digital identification layer by layer (hence the use of the word "onion").

trolling: A form of anti-social behaviour aimed at provoking an angry response from other Internet users by means of inflammatory content posting.

tumbling: An electronic method of disguising the traceability of Bitcoin purchases.

voluntaryism: An extended branch of libertarian philosophy, voluntaryism holds that all relations between individuals should be based on mutual consent at the micro level, and that state intervention should be excluded from all social and economic arenas.

Wikileaks: A not-for-profit organization launched in 2006 by activist-programmer Julian Assange. Through the leaking of original, classified documents, its

main aim rests on raising public awareness of corporate and government corruption and mismanagement.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SECTION I: EXPLORING NATIONALISM

1.1 Nationalism from a theoretical perspective

The spike in technological advancements over the last few decades might explain, perhaps in part, signs of an epistemological re-orientation towards new theories of collective identity construction processes and their symbiotic relationship with communications technology. Within the broad frame of modern history, this intriguing new field of study has been expanded upon by a spectrum of scholars, critics and writers, linking the pivotal impacts of print culture and Internet access to shifts in collective consciousness and new theoretical approaches to modern trends in sociopolitical organization.[2] In fact, in creating new capacities for the production and dissemination of information, the proliferation of printing press technology and print capitalism in early modern Europe has become widely attributed to the emergence of nationalism. By framing the general concept of nationhood as a historically-fixed *byproduct* of technological innovation, scholars essentially divorce themselves from the conventional limitations of methodological nationalism that have for so long dominated a vast array of disciplines.

2   James Dewar, "The Information Age and the Printing Press" *RAND* 2000 (1998): 23.

Such an epistemological rejection of methodological nationalism implies, by default, the defective nature of this perspective within a contemporary, globalized context. This becomes even more evident when one considers the fundamental homogeneity of this form of identification, which essentially distinguishes itself from other forms in that it "locates the source of individual identity within a 'people.'"[3] In such a way, Greenfeld contends, it becomes a conditional status by which all other lines of identity are measured in a more superficial manner.[4] Wimmer and Schiller argue that the popularization of the nation-centric approach in the field of social sciences rests in a faulty perception of the "apparent naturalness and givenness of a world divided into societies along the lines of nation-states [and that] because they were structured according to nation-state principles, these became so routinely assumed and 'banal', that they vanished from sight altogether."[5] From a theoretical perspective, one might argue that this "vanishing" of nation-centrism can be attributed to the continued scholarly reinvention of membership and identity politics in response to major social, political and economic shifts. In this regard, James asserts that national formation theories, equipped with a "commonsensical force," have endured well even within contemporary postmodern settings.[6] As the author hopes to demonstrate in subsequent sections of Chapter 2, nation-centrism has also become problematic in the study of emerging social configurations.

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3   Liah Greenfeld*, Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity. Cambridge* (MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 3.
4   Ibid., 3-4.
5   Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, "Methodological nationalism and beyond: nation-state building, migration and the social sciences." *Global Networks* 2 (2002): 304.
6   Paul James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1996): 18.

The continuous evolution of typological interpretations of nationalist theories has warranted the creation of a broad range of conceptual categories by which to distinguish them. Llobera's assessment is structured on the basis of four key theoretical perspectives: primordialism, sociobiology, modernization and evolutionary approach. Primordialist and sociobiological approaches, more reflective of a bygone, biologically-deterministic outlook, rest on the principle assumption that the nation, as a collective identity, has existed all throughout human history.[7] While both claim national identity to be rooted primarily in blood ties, they may, however, also extend meaning to more symbolic mechanisms of biological relatedness such as linguistic, territorial and cultural ties, which still tend to evoke a powerful sense of loyalty and belonging.[8] Llobera suggests that the sociobiological model may further distinguish itself from primordialism in its fusion of both "rational and irrational elements."[9] As such, it perpetuates the notion of ethnic kinship through culturally-inscribed practices.[10] Following the genocidal atrocities of the Second World War, both primordialist and sociobiological theories diminished under harsh criticisms for their inability to grasp the politics and poetics of modernity.[11]

Modernization and evolutionary theories abandon the link to ethnic affiliation entirely, looking instead at how nationalism has consistently adapted itself to progress.[12] More specifically, modernization theories maintain that nationalism

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7   Josep R. Llobera, "Recent Theories of Nationalism." *University College London* (1999): 10.
8   Ibid., 4.
9   Josep R. Llobera, *An Invitation to Anthropology: The Structure, Evolution and Cultural Identity of Human Societies (*New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 200.
10 James, 16.
11 Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: a Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society," *Center of Migration Studies of New-York* 38 (2004): 20.
12 Llobera, *An Invitation to Anthropology,* 202.

emerged as the by-product of a transitional period towards the contemporary sociopolitical configurations.[13] Accordingly, it is a perspective that explores nationalism within the context of economic, political, social, cultural and technological evolution. Academic successors such as Anderson and Eisenstein have responded to the limitations of modernization perspective by expanding upon the widespread impacts of communications technology on collective identity formation.

A broad illustration of the gradual and continuous remodelling of nationalist theories anchors this social construct within the frame of a medieval context.[14] Therefore, to be use10d appropriately when drawing parallels or performing comparative analyses to successive changes in social consciousness, it must be maintained that nationalism is a contingent byproduct of historical forces. In this respect, it is not a suitable framework by which to study alternative forms of government and social organization, such as the micronation or Darknet. Along these line**s**, the printing press demonstrates how communications technology, in making knowledge more accessible to the individual, served as a precursor to a long line of shifts in identity politics and collective consciousness, which would ultimately lead towards the emergence of nationalism.

1.2 The print revolution as a precursor to national identity formation

From an evolutionary perspective, the idea of national consciousness did not exist within the conceptual limitations of the medieval period.[15] In such a

13 Llobera, "Recent Theories of Nationalism," 10.
14 Llobera, *An Invitation to Anthropology,* 202.
15 Gurutz Jauergui Bereciartu, *Decline of the Nation-State* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986), 3.

context, James indicates that journeying beyond the confines of one's local dwelling was a rarity for most; the notion of "compatriotism with strangers" as based on linkages of identity to birthplace, was simply not recognized as a constitutive medium by the general populace of the Middle Ages.[16] However, this is not meant to promote an oversimplified view of early modern social configurations. In fact, though the subject remains one of hot dispute even today, most contemporary thinkers tend to reject the notion that an individual living within this period would have been "conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation – only through some general category."[17] Greenfeld explains that concepts of self-image and behavioural orientation would have simply been dictated by different situational constraints, depending largely on the ascribed social status of the individual.[18] Nevertheless, in studying the effects of the print revolution on a broad range of developments in early modern Europe, Eisenstein argues that a significant shift in patterns of human self-awareness most definitely ushered the Renaissance era towards a new period of individualism and introspection.[19]

In Benedict's view, the single-most revolutionary instrument involved in the shift towards new inklings of national consciousness was the movable type mechanical printing technology that ignited the age of print capitalism.[20] The emergence of nation-based social and political configurations could then only be real-

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16 James, 45.
17 Elizabeth L Eisenstein,. *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe, Second Edition.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 143.
18 Greenfeld, 5.
19 Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe,* 143.
20 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 56.

ized through the abandonment of three major features that had dominated the medieval worldview: the inseparability of the Latin script language as an exclusive key to ontological truth, the belief in a divinely-inspired and deterministic hierarchical superstructure, and a cosmological temporality that often blurred the lines between fact and folklore and placed man at the centre of the cosmos.[21] Anderson's notable contribution to this disciplinary approach mirrors the earlier publications of scholars such as Eisensten and Marshall McLuhan, who in his 1962 volume, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographical Man*, had already accredited print culture for its revolutionary impacts.[22] In this regard, Eisenstein's contribution, while somewhat detached from more direct explorations of identity formation within this context, has largely expanded upon the "preservative powers of print" and its relationship to cumulative change.[23]

The emergence of print capitalism in 15th century Europe confronted book markets with the necessary task of developing standardized vernaculars for a growing readership.[24] This demand was further reinforced by a number of other somewhat mercurial factors that paved a direct path to a rise in national consciousness.[25] Firstly, new stylistic developments had already begun to change the nature of the Latin script to such an extent that its relevance both in ecclesiastical and everyday life was heavily diminished, subsequently flipping the elitist imbalances that had characterized the period until then.[26] In this regard, the poten-

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21 Anderson, 51-52.
22 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 82.
23 Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 87.
24 Ibid., 36.
25 Anderson article, 53.
26 Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, xvii.

tial of literate surgery was finally secured against previously repeated setbacks that had generally kept literacy limited to clerics and variegated circles of academics.[27]

Secondly, as the initiator of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther also played a critical role in developing this potential further. His early translation of the Bible into German vernacular, beyond simply making the work accessible to a wider readership, inaugurated a new period of thinking based on "radical subjectivism" and emphasis on the private conscience.[28] In making it possible for readers to develop their own private interpretations of Biblical literature, Luther unintentionally shifted emphasis away from the scriptural authority of the Catholic Church towards the engendering of the individual and their own private judgements and enquiries.[29] Furthermore, in his defiance to the authority of the pope, Luther inadvertently laid the foundations for a secularist concept of statehood.[30]

The third and final factor was the gradual spread of vernaculars as tools for administrative centralization by "certain well-positioned would-be absolutist monarchs."[31] The rising force of capitalism accelerated this movement further, as standardization of grammar and orthography were crucial to the creation of a broad, accessible readership across Europe.[32] Prior to the invention of mechanic-

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27 Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 537-538.
28 Edwin M. Yoder, *The Historical Present: Uses and Abuses of the Past* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 161.
29 Yoder, 161.
30 Ibid., 161.
31 Anderson, 54.
32 Eisenstein,. *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 57

al print, the populations of Europe had been divided by an immense diversity of spoken dialects that kept them confined within these very local limitations.

According to Benedict, the social cohesion achieved through standardization was possible thanks to three distinct factors. For one, it opened up a new avenue through which fields of information exchange and communication could finally be merged to create standardized points reference, distinct both from Latin and the commonly-spoken vernaculars of the day.[33] This not only offered individuals unprecedented access to literature and knowledge that would not have been so widely available mere generations earlier, but also gradually enabled them to develop a greater awareness of the large linguistic community within which they resided.[34] As one can imagine, these early processes of collective identity formation would have broader, long-term implications.

Secondly, the permanence of print gave a new typographical fixity to language, stabilizing or at least slowing down the rate at which language evolved.[35] This was not something that could have been possible just decades prior, as printed works were no longer "subject to the individualizing and 'unconsciously modernizing' habits of monastic tribes."[36] To appreciate the significance of this innovative feature, Eisenstein draws attention to the fact that in order to be "transmitted by writing from one generation to the next, information had to be conveyed by drifting texts and vanishing manuscripts," which were also subject to the wear and tears of moisture, theft, fire and other elements of decay.[37] The re-

33 Anderson, 56.
34 Ibid., 54.
35 Anderson, 54.
36 Ibid., 57.
37 Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 87.

production of ideas in the form of hundreds of identical printed copies ensured that they would not only be more likely to spread, but also be more likely to endure the tests of time.[38]

Third and lastly, print-capitalism eventually led to a more solid form of linguistic standardization and the elimination of sparsely spoken dialects.[39] Dominant forms of German, Czech, French and Italian helped ensure a smooth process towards broader cultural assimilation. In long-term perspective, the standardization of print had causative effects on the development of new philosophical and scientific movements, which played their part in challenging the traditional order of socio-political configurations and religious orthodoxy through the promotion of advanced learning.[40] Offering knowledge and information to a broader readership opened up new forums of information-exchange, free-thought and debate that continued to reinforce productions of collective identity and meaning. This shift from religiously-dominant methods of interpretation to a new availability of cumulative, uncorrupted knowledge did away with historical cosmologies and gradually re-oriented collective perceptions of individual self-placement.[41] According to Rosaldo, "Never had scholars found so many words, images, and diagrams at their fingertips. And never before had things been so confusing with… Dante's world view achieving prominent visibility at the same time that Copernican views were making their way into print."[42]

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38 Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe,* 87.
39 Anderson, 57.
40 Dewar, 12.
41 Ibid., 12.
42 Rosaldo Renato, "The Cultural Impact of the Printed Word, A Review Article." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23 (1981): 508.

1.3 The permanence of print: An overview of long-standing effects

Exploring the effects of the printing press on education and literacy rates in Europe underlines the immediate impacts of communications technology on shifting medieval consciousness away from the Old World ethos. However, the fixed, cumulative effects of the print revolution echo further across the pages of early modern history. Eisenstein argues that, in fact, of all the added benefits of duplication, its preservative impact is undoubtedly the most important feature of the long-standing influence of print.[43] Beyond its unifying force, the duplication of materials brought about a reinforcement and amplification of both new and exist- ing information and ideas.[44] One must note that this went beyond the mere limits of printed literature, as the reproduction of resources extended also to the realms of cartography, science and mathematics, music and artistic workman- ship.[45] For the first time, maps, calendars, illustrations, diagrams and various sys- tems of notation could be studied and accessed simultaneously across different localities, which, Eisenstein argues, "constituted a kind of communications re- volution in itself."[46] In considering long-term implications, the printing press can essentially be regarded as a precursor to a systematic and historically-cumulat- ive production of culture that continued to evolve for centuries onwards. Maps and atlases were especially crucial to the creation of "uniform spatio-temporal images," offering people a greater sense of collective consciousness through geo-

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43 Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 87.
44 Ibid., 99.
45 Ibid., 97.
46 Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press As an Agent of Change: Communications and cultural transformations in early-modern Europe, Volumes I and II*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 30.

graphical commonalities.[47] Thus, beyond the unifying factor of linguistic associ-

ation, reproductions of territorial imagery gradually shifted medieval thought

patterns towards a new conception of situational context. The gradual standard-

ization of vernacular, followed by its adoption as a tool of administrative central-

ization, could therefore be viewed as a more transitional period of proto-national

developments. The reinforcement of territorial imagery in the form of maps and

other geographical illustrations appears to have had an even more solidifying im-

pact on productions of collective consciousness. It is estimated that by the end of

the first half of the 17th century, approximately 430 000 works had already been

printed across Europe.[48] One may wonder to what extent the dissemination of

cartographic materials could have shaped such age-defining events as the ratific-

ation of the Treaty of Westphalia, described as "the majestic portal which leads

from the *old world* into the *new world*."[49] As the treaty had no other objective but

to guarantee state sovereignty and non-interference based on the principle of

territoriality, it offers a more solid example of how print culture might have indir-

ectly led to a formal consolidation of national identities that is still reflected

today.

47 Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 81.
48 Eltjo Buringh and Jan Luiten van Zanden, "Charting the 'Rise of the West': Manuscripts and Printed
     Books in Europe, A long-term perspective from the sixth through eighteenth centuries*," The Journal of
     Economic History* 69 (2009): 418.
49 Daniel Philipott, "The religious Roots of Modern International Relations," *Word Politics* 52 (2000): 208*.*

SECTION II

THEORIES OF TRANSNATIONALISM

1.1 Transnationalism as a globally-integrated model of representation

The emergence of national configurations of collective identity alongside the creation of many new humanistic disciplines led to an incorporation of the latter within the nation-based narrative.[50] This process is still reflected today, as methodological nationalism has maintained its currency within contemporary scholarship. Benedict blames this on the "modularity" of the concept: by detaching it from its historical coordinates, it is a term "capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations."[51] However, just as the spectral effects of the printing revolution ushered early medieval Europe towards the path of modernization, so today the processes of globalization – accelerated by the exponential advancement of communications technology – are increasing both the physical and conceptual permeability of nation-state boundaries, and thus provoking new reflections on collective consciousness.[52] By implication, these phenomena point to the challenge of incorporating new models of social configuration, such as the micronation and Darknet, within an alternative theoretical framework. In an effort

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50 David Thelen, "How Natural are National and Transnational Citizenship? A Historical Perspective," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 7 (2000): 549.
51 Anderson, 6.
52 James, xv.

to depart from inherent biases, one must therefore adopt a more inclusive disciplinary approach that would extend beyond limitations of the national context. This is of paramount importance, as micronations are at once conceptually related to and yet functionally divorced from the Westphalian state model; they can therefore be interpreted on both a basis of ontological continuity and discontinuity. Moreover, the "cyber" dimension of the Darknet and the virtual micronation suggests a relative incompatibility with the nation-based narrative. For decades, this belief appears to have gained wider following within academic circles, as many new social movements have evolved online and outside the narrow scope of this theoretical framework. Correspondingly, James argues that despite "living through a time when the nation-state continues to be one of the central constituents of international relations... [the] slow death [of nationalism] is constantly proclaimed."[53]

In response to the methodological and theoretical gaps and constraints associated with national models of representation, transnationalism has recently produced a more notable presence within numerous fields of scholarship, establishing itself as a less normative approach to the study of networks spanning different geographies.[54] The first applications of this perspective are noted in early 20th century migrant record documents referring to the "transnational" flows of immigrants entering the United States; this conveys an early departure from social methodological nationalism.[55] However, due to the fact that transnationalism

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53 James, xi.
54 Bart Cammaerts and Leo Van Audenhove, "Online political debate, unbounded citizenship, and the problematic nature of a transnational public sphere," *Political Communication* 2 (2005): 7.
55 Derya Ozkul, "Transnational migration research," *Sociopedia* (2012): 7.

refers pluralistically to all links and interactions between individuals and institu-

tions, it is widely regarded as a conceptual predecessor of nationalism.[56]

The transnational quality of global migration flows and socio-political prac-

tices has made it especially pertinent to the study of diasporic communities and

migrant networks. However, as both a paradigm and a methodological orienta-

tion, transnationalism owes much of its popularity to its widely encompassing

criteria, which consider the more abstract connections and virtual dimensions in

a new "planet-spanning" context.[57] On the other hand, it has also been criticized

as "hollow" in regards to its seemingly unlimited inclusiveness.[58] Vertovec at-

tempts to further disentangle the term by studying it within the conceptual

framework of six distinct categories. In his view, transnationalism explores social

formations with regards to social morphology, types of consciousness, modes of

cultural reproduction, avenues of capital, sites of political engagement, and

(re-)constructions of "place" and locality.[59] As the subsequent sections of Chapter

2 will demonstrate, these features can be applied to the study of both microna-

tions and the Darknet.

56 Ozkul, 2.
57 Steven Vertovec, "Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (1999):
    2.
58 Ozkul, 2.
59 Vertovec, 4.

1.2 Identities and spaces: Conceptualizing transnationalism in cyber-space

Alongside the development of contemporary network-based communications technologies, transnationalism has come to redefine old concepts of "real" social space to further incorporate the disembodied realm of cyberspace.[60] This is relevant even today, as the realist bias of thinking still dominates many fields and clearly lacks a more critical approach to the temporal, representational and de-territorial features of virtual technology.[61] Der Derian contends that the disem-bodied communities of cyberspace are still very much a subject of academic ta-boo, and that questions of identity, border and legitimacy therefore continue to be framed within "necessitous narratives" of nationalism, not taking into account the shape-shifting facets of globalization.[62] The need to align these concepts with a more contemporary perspective is thus continuously challenged by questions of territoriality which have, until now, been a dominant criterion in the shaping and defining of movements and actors. Some scholars seem to regard this as less of a theoretical challenge and more a question of mass epistemological conformity to myths propagated by the nation-state in an effort to maintain its de facto legitim-acy. In this regard, transnationalism is simply better adapted to the critical ana-lysis of virtual levels of abstraction that characterize micronations and various

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60 Said Saddiki, "Transnational Virtual Space: A New Arena and New Actors," (2009): 138.
61 James Der Derian, "A Virtual Theory of Global Politics, Mimetic War and the Spectral State," Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, *American Society of International Law* 93 (1999): 167.
62 Ibid., 167.

other cyber-communities; it removes these well-established biases from the broader discourse.

The re-configuration of spatial networks outside the realm of territorial boundaries poses a genuine theoretical challenge to the analysis of collectives situated exclusively in cyberspace.[63] The standard opposing view purports that without a geographical dimension and tangible medium of expression, the Darknet – by extension of the Internet at large – simply cannot be considered a space.[64] This is especially true in the case of legal discourse in its attempts to re-concile conceptual abstractions and inconsistencies with the practice of national and international law.[65] The "deterritorialization" of nation-states has already triggered debate about this issue, with regards to new notions of membership and identity politics.[66] Until now, the nation-state has generally been regarded as a key producer of meaning and identity with reference to social and political pro-cesses and constructs.[67] This, however, is incompatible with the fact that within this new dispatialized context that caters more to individual expression, individu-als might not necessarily feel primarily or exclusively bound by formal and legal productions of collective identity.[68] To support this claim, Levitt and Schiller sug-gest the notion that individuals can exist within a social field (such as the territ-orial boundaries of a nation-state), but still conduct themselves in a manner that

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63 Ozkul, 7.
64 Andrea Lazar, "Transnational migration studies: Reframing Sociological Imagination and Reach," *Journal of comparative research in anthropology and sociology* 2 (2011): 77.
65 Julie E. Cohen,"Cyberspace as/and space," *Columbia Law Review* 107 (2007): 212.
66 Blanc, Cristina Szanton Blanc, Linda Basch and Nina Glick Schiller, "Transnationalism, Nation-States, and Culture," *Current Anthropology* 36 (1995): 685.
67 Michael Peter Smith, "Transnationalism and Citizenship," *Approaching Transnationalisms* (2003): 4.
68 Heike Mónica Greschke, *Is There a Home in Cyberspace? The Internet in Migrants' Everyday Life and the Emergence of Global Communities* (New York: Routledge, 2012): 65.

opposes or disregards the "practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group."[69] Again, this argumentation will be explored in subsequent sections concerning micronations and the Darknet.

The relevance of nationalism as a guiding principle of identity and organization is again further challenged by the fact that due to the varying scales and levels within which transnational movements take place, individuals become entangled within a multitude of social, political, and cultural institutions of varying levels of legitimacy and importance.[70] While nationalism remains firmly embedded as a social construct, the assumption that these formal identities are superimposed rather than built upon by the individual already indicates a shift of perspectives. It goes to suggests that with regards to collective identity production, transnational processes are undermining both the sovereignty and the legal regulatory power of the nation-state in an unprecedented way.[71] Smith suggests that for more effective analysis of these criss-crossing paradigms, nation-states and transnational flows should be regarded as "mutually constitutive" social formations.[72] As the following two sections of Chapter 2 will attempt to demonstrate, though the micronation and Darknet are models of new social configuration when compared to the nation-state, all three models exhibit unique and overlapping features.

69 Levitt and Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity,"1010.
70 Ibid., 1013.
71 Lazar, 71.
72 Smith, 4

SECTION III

MICRONATIONS IN CYBERSPACE

1.1 Conceptual challenges

A broad survey of transnationally-oriented literature would suggest that while a relatively small group of authors and academics have written about virtual collectives from sociological and interactionist perspectives, the most extensive portion of research in this domain appears to fall within the fields of migration flows and jurisprudence. Across a broader spectrum of scholarship, anomalous "cyberworlds" and micronations have attracted little attention. Conventional wisdom discredits these entities only further; they are regarded by most as inherently humourous and existentially futile.[73] The result is a persistently uneven understanding of micronations with regards to the more abstract and qualitative aspects of their design.

The majority of territorial micronations arose within the second half of the 20th century, and those that are exclusively web-based have raised this count higher. While the term "micronation" implies reference to a characteristically low-populous entity, it lacks definition beyond this point.[74] Typological conceptualization is complicated not only by the juxtaposition of "real" and virtual spaces, but also by the fact that micronations have emerged for a plethora of reasons,

73 Adam Gryndehøj, "Captain Calamity's Sovereign State of Forvik: Micronations and the Failure of Cultural Nationalism," *The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* 8 (2014): 35.
74 Robert Istok and Stefania Novakova, "Micronationalism as a Phenomenon of the Present," *Folia geographica* 56 (2014): 47.

ranging from the more tongue-in-cheek to the long-term and ambitious.[75] The task rests on establishing how and where to impose limits on typological criteria. In this regard, geographically-situated entities are nevertheless still easier to identify and assess; the vast majority of academic literature within this niche field is dedicated to their study. Territorial micronations tend to structure themselves after the Westphalian state model in their use of passports, emblems, postage stamps, currencies and other formal instruments for the production of collective identity.[76] Many aspire to maintain or acquire sovereign status over designated physical territories. Their common application of such conventional features may lead one to assume that to a large extent, territorial micronations operate much like miniature versions of the conventional state model. Two of the most notable examples include the Principlaity of Hutt River, situated in Western Australia, and the offshore anti-aircraft platform known as Sealand.

Virtual micronations are more of a conceptual enigma as they have emerged only very recently, almost in parallel with the early expansion of the Internet. Originally founded in 1979, the Kingdom of Talossa is not only one of the oldest territorial micronations to date, but in 1995 also became the first to extend its presence to the realm of cyberspace.[77] A perusal of its website reveals in greater detail the features of this bizarre undertaking. The Kingdom is governed under a constitutional monarchy, with its own prime minister, cabinet and bicameral legislature. Apart from adopting the more ceremonial trappings of nationhood, it has even developed its own written and spoken language. Since going

75 Irina Ulrike Andel, *Micronations in Space and Time, Form and Flux* (Vienna: Springer Vienna, 2011), 17.
76 Istok and Novakova, 48.
77 Ibid., 49.

virtual in 1995, Talossa has attracted thousands of curious surfers as well as many more like-minded individuals; the number of virtual micronations has been steadily on the rise and is currently estimated at a few hundred cyber-localities.[78] Other principally web-based micronations include a public initiative called Wirtland, whose main goal rests on establishing itself an economically self-sustained cyber-entity; the Kingdom of Hanover, which claims to have been founded by "refugees" fleeing their former Kingdom of Morovia (another Internet-based micronation); and the famous Kingdom of Lovely, which was created by British author Danny Wallace as an experimental exercise. The Slovenian artistic collective, Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK), has also been labelled a virtual micronation. Though not primarily based online, it defines itself as "a state that exists only in time" and makes no claim to territory.[79]

While these aforementioned examples serve to represent the more established of cyber-collectives, far more appear to fail in this regard. A more elaborate survey of registered, web-based "micronations" produces questionable results. Over half of those listed are either defunct or impossible to locate. The Free State of Daryl consists of nothing more than an improvised statement of secession on a free blog-hosting website; the Aerican Empire's "national symbol" is a yellow smiley icon on a red and white banner. Some have designed flags and emblems, yet most appear to be little more than fictional, role-playing societies. The challenge of navigating one's way towards a clearer interpretation of the Darknet within this labyrinth of topological ambiguity once again reiterates the

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78 Istok and Novakova, 49.
79 Jonah Westerman, "Contesting Utopias: Individual Collectivity and Temporal Hybridity in the NSK," *State in Time*, Irwin, (2010): 142.

need for a more structured set of criteria by which to define the virtual micronation.

1.2 Micronations in cyberspace: Definitions, goals and representations

Though the Westphalian model itself has already been discredited by many as a mythical force of integration, the fabricated nature of micronations is, by comparison, far more apparent. It is thus something of an irony to consider that the latter is in fact, by structural and conceptual extension, an imitation of the nation-state. A comparative approach adds new levels of complexity to an already complex endeavour, with many departing factors to take into consideration. Comparisons to the nation-state necessitate comparisons to other micronations with additional regards to spatiality and deterritorialization, ideology, identity politics, membership criteria and culture. Such a course of investigation inevitably leads to futile debates over what constitutes "real," "more real," "less real," and to what extent simulations can produce "real symptoms" within the physical domain.[80] In a context characterized by new instances of space-time compression, integrated communications technologies, globalized networks and transnational flows of varying levels and scales, any fixed notion of reality becomes an impossibility.[81] Der Derian expands the assertion further, citing Paul Virilio's illustration of a world in which "there is no more here and there, only the

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80 Der Derian, 172.
81 Ibid., 173.

mental confusion of near and far, present and future, real and unreal – a mix of history, stories, and the hallucinatory Utopia of communication technologies."[82]

In a measure against such theoretical digressions, virtual micronations ought to be defined according to broader typological distinctions that go beyond the conceptual challenges of addressing their in independence of time and place. Therefore, rather than scrutinizing these entities on the basis of their already well-articulated shortcomings and lack of formal state recognition, the author proposes a more descriptive approach of investigation, focusing namely on the nature of their internal operations and collective intent. Istok and Novakova categorize web-based micronations across a spectrum of "seriousness," measured by their degree of media presence, Internet presence, population size, connection to formal government authorities and duration of existence.[83] This typology encompasses all cyber-entities claiming the status of "micronation," whether their aims be of an ambitious or purely humorous nature.[84] This is a helpful starting point, but still lacks a qualitative element, as it relies primarily on quantifiable variables to explain their configuration. Removing the "less serious" categories from the equation simplifies matters considerably, as it re-orients the focus to those cyber-collectives established on the basis of more elaborate intent and design. Wirtland and Talossa are two long-term, multi-person virtual micronations by which the more abstract and practical elements of this construct can be better assessed, as both demonstrate evidence of more serious intent and substantial membership support.

82 Der Derian, 172.
83 Istok and Novakova, 48.
84 Ibid., 48.

1.3 Conceptualizing the micronation

Most essentially, the virtual micronation exists within cyberspace; the term "virtual" connotes a lack of material element, or "nowhereness." Their only physical presence is manifested in the electronic networks that allow users to connect and access them. Across micronation-based forums and wikis, this distribution of localities is referred to neologistically as "diaxenospitia." Though the term exists and is only used by adherents of micronational movements, its definition is just one example of how such groups might look for ways to add new meaning to their own notion of the collective. Just as nationalist theories have been continuously readjusting their applicability to changing sociopolitical circumstances, so, too, the members of virtual micronations appear to be doing the same in this case, though to a far lesser extent. According to the Fifth World Wiki, diaxenospitia refers to "inhabited localities or populated places (aka hamlets, villages, towns, cities or megacities), whether dispersed or nucleated, [as] located within a single, more or less continuous, geographic area."[85] As such, they may be rendered non-secessionist by default, as claims over territorial space exist beyond their means of control and standards of collective identification. In this way they differ from Westphalian and micronational models of organization. One must assume, therefore, that understandings of membership and collective identity are developed through other, non-material vehicles of unification.

85 "Diaxenospitia," http://fifthworld.wikia.com/wiki/Diaxenospitia

As the examples in sub-section 1.2 have hopefully illustrated, both territorial and virtual micronations alike may exude attributes of a more serious or more experimental – sometimes deliberately humorous or provocative – nature. For the sake of a more concise definition, the latter example would best be excluded from the analysis, as it lacks a consistent set of defining characteristics and motivations. Contrastingly, the attributes and motivations of the more serious, long-term micronations appear to generally be constructed according to well-defined economic, sociopolitical or ideological pursuits. The fact that these entities aim to create alternative spheres of influence and self-governance also implies a representational detachment from standard values and practices, as those typically propagated by the nation-state. However, while this certainly establishes an area of commons upon which to build identity and membership, one may argue that a widely-shared set of views or motivations is still not enough for a group of individuals dispersed across the globe to proclaim themselves micronationals. To distinguish itself as a socially-distinct, self-governing organism, some greater organizational and operational features must also be apparent.

One last problematic factor in describing virtual micronations as distinct social constructs lies in the fact that despite whatever detachments members may feel toward the locality within which they reside, they are still physically bound to it, regardless. As such, members of such a construct can come to think of themselves as extending from the boundaries of space-time as a disembodied collective of values and shared motivations.[86] Westerman quotes Laibach's de-

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86 Westerman,143.

scription of the NSK, which cleverly demonstrates how collective situation within a "non-place" can still be conceptualized:

> [The NSK] has no formal 'government' and no central committee, only citizens, few bureaucrats and some administrators... It is based on a self-management and non-alignment and it coexists as a parasite within existing, already established bodies in the entire area of time.[87]

This offers an interesting point of reasoning that could very well be applied to the conceptual challenges of addressing cyberspace as an actual space, in which individuals can still exist as disembodied extensions of their material selves. It signifies an individualization of the collective, thus insinuating a greater mobility for the individual within a larger system in which each individual can create their "own context of articulation."[88] A collective construct with its own decentralized management systems can therefore be considered a kind of informal node of governance within the formal state system at large. Citing Shearing and Wood, Martin elaborates on this conception of nodal governance as an "interconnected operati[on] within a broader network of governing structures."[89] Within such a context, governance is considered a fluid, decentralized process in which "state institutions are not afforded conceptual priority."[90] Citing Burris, Drahos et al.,

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87 Westerman, 136.
88 Ibid., 142.
89 James Martin, *Drugs on the Dark Net: How Cryptomarkets Are Transforming the Global Trade in Illicit Drugs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 12.
90 Ibid., 12.

Martin elaborates further on the structural constitution of a governing node, which, according to the authors must exhibit four key characteristics to be considered an operational collective system: mentalities, which include political ideologies and organizational cultures; technologies, which "translate nodal mentalities into purposeful action" through developments such as military strategies or project management systems; resources, such as money, computer hardware, or intellectual contributions through specialist expertise; and finally, institutions, which represent the organizational hierarchy and labour divisions within the node.[91] As this concept refers to the operations within a given area from a decentralized perspective, it is very much applicable to the study of both micronations and the Darknet.

91 Martin, 12.

<center>**SECTION IV**</center>

<center>**THE DARKNET**</center>

1.1 The birth of the Darknet

Expanding upon the definition outlined in Chapter 1, the Darknet's operational structure as a micronational model will now be investigated more closely within the context of its historical conception, structural underpinnings and historical parallels to the printing revolution. In the most succinct of terms, the Darknet refers to a mesh of networks and technologies employed for the purpose of online content sharing.[92] These networks, while technically separate and inaccessible through the use of ordinary web browsers on the Clearnet, are still functionally-dependent on the wider realm of digitally-linked operations referred to as "the Internet." The Darknet distinguishes itself from the web at large by enabling users to conduct themselves within a decentralized, anonymous network topology in which all communications are transmitted through an encrypted, peer-to-peer system.[93] The fact that the Darknet's architecture is founded chiefly on principles of decentralized operation adds another level of complexity to its study as a unified social configuration. In illustrating the Darknet within a micronational context it is crucial to explore historical origins, as this offers insight into the ideological groundwork of its inception. Historical considerations are

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92 Paul Biddle, Paul England, Marcus Peinado, and Bryan Willman, "The Darknet and the Future of Content Distribution," *Springer Berlin Heidelberg* 2696 (2003): 160.
93 Symon Aked,Christopher Bolan and Murray Brand, "Determining What Characteristics Constitute a Darknet," *Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 11th Australian Information Security Management Conference*, Perth, Australia (2013): 14.

also vital in drawing parallels to preceding communications technology break-throughs and their acceleration of social and political change.[94]

The creation of the Darknet has its place within the broader history of the Internet as a whole. The first records of experimentation with alternative methodologies of telecommunications network implementation by American engineers and computer scientists date back to the early 1960s.[95] By the end of the decade, these early initiatives had evolved into a full-scale development sponsored by the US Defence Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), after which the network was named.[96] ARPANET, though comparatively miniscule at the time, was the revolutionary information-sharing system that would later evolve into the modern Internet. This unprecedented new network design was originally intended for the purpose of creating local links between separately-stored digital resources. Though initially accessible only to a small fellowship of government officials and academic elites, by the 1980s the rising popularity of the network had gradually shaped it into a digital social platform for more casual interactions.[97] Never before had individuals been capable of communicating remotely with one another in real time through a virtual system of such sophisticated proportions. To meet the growing demand of access by new users, within just a few decades ARPANET underwent a rapid evolution from the relatively primitive bulletin board systems of the 1970s and 80s to the more cohesive networks of the 1990s and today.[98] By the turn of the new millennium, the number of

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94 Der Derian, 171.
95 Barry M. Leiner et al., "A Brief History of the Internet," *ACM SIGCOMM Computer Communication Review* 39 (2009): 23.
96 Ibid., 23.
97 Jamie Bartlett, *The Darknet: Inside the Digital Underworld* (London: William Heinemann, 2014), 23.
98 Bartlett, 23.

Internet users had already grown exponentially. However, by this time, state regulation of cyberspace had already become an area of concern for many, as governments moved to exert greater control over Internet privacy and file-sharing practices.

In 1991, following a major FBI crackdown on a large-scale hacking operation, the American Senate introduced two bills essentially placing a ban on the use of encryption, in addition to applying new legal pressure on Internet service companies to provide the American government with access to the personal data of Internet users.[99] This quickly became interpreted by many as a blatant attempt by the heads of the nation to extend their legal jurisdiction to the realm of cyberspace.[100] Especially in the minds of those for whom the Internet had served as digital refuge away from the prying eyes of surveillance agencies and intrusive law enforcement regulators, this signalled the necessity for an alternative network that would truly honour principles of anonymity and decentralized operation. It was this crucial piece of American legislature that sparked a new movement for self-determination in cyberspace.

From an ideological perspective, one can easily postulate that the creation of the Darknet was a collective response fuelled by a rejection of Internet regulation measures and data surveillance by national governments. In 1992, a small group of engineers, mathematicians and computer scientists from various institutes, united in their strong libertarian views and technical prowess, began hosting regular gatherings to discuss concerns and propositions over how to continue

99 Bartlett, 79
100 Ludlow, 9.

maintaining free conduct and privacy online.[101] Employing their programming and

mathematical expertise to the task, this growing alliance of cypherpunks, as they

largely became known, set to work on an ambitious software project that would

enable them to thwart these government roadblocks.[102] As one of the leading pi-

oneers involved in this endeavour, retired businessman Timothy May outlined a

proposal for the adoption of digital crypto-currencies, which would enable users

to conduct all financial transactions online in a manner of complete anonymity.[103]

In fact, the principle design of the project, which May called "BlackNet," was

rooted in its use of encryption technology.[104] This unprecedented network devel-

opment, ultimately to become known as the Darknet, would come to serve as a

vast, unregulated harbour for activism, whistleblowing, file-sharing, espionage,

and a wide range of criminal activity. In addition to his direct engagement in the

development of what would eventually become known as the Darknet, May also

authored a number of documents and essays, such as his 1992 "Crypto Anarchist

Manifesto" and his 1994 Darknet e-guide, "Cyphernomicon."[105] While themed

heavily on libertarian-anarchist ideals, May's literature outlined not only the

ideological objectives of this emerging social movement, but also highlighted

communication technology's historically-rooted potential to shape and re-config-

ure social, political and economic processes: "Just as the technology of printing

altered and reduced the power of medieval guilds and the social power structure,

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101 Bartlett, 76-77.
102 Ludlow, 33.
103 Ibid., 135.
104 Ibid., 135.
105 Andy Greenberg, *This Machine Kills Secrets: How WikiLeakers, Cypherpunks, and Hacktivists   Aim to Free the World's Information* (New York : Dutton, 2012), 279.

so too will cryptologic methods fundamentally alter the nature of corporations and of government interference in economic transactions."[106] This likening of the cypherpunk movement of the Information Age to the social and cultural byproducts that emerged in response to the printing revolution of early modern Europe might not only suggest a potential shift in collective consciousness within the contemporary context, but also reinforce the idea that nation-states have long outlived their original protective purpose.[107]

1.2 The Darknet as virtual micronation: Exploring elements of nodal governance

While the legal response of nation-states to the explosive proliferation of Internet usage might simply be seen as an inevitable security measure on their part, the emergence of such a distinct social entity as the Darknet in response to this motion is a more exceptional phenomenon worthy of deeper investigation. Unfortunately, the long-standing legacy of nationalist historiography poses a great challenge for the contemporary scholar. In his *Genealogy of Models,* Friedrich Nietzsche is noted for stating that "the living generation always recognized a juridical duty toward earlier generations."[108] In this view, moral obligations to a so-called "ancestral debt" are upheld by citizens in a continued legitimization of outdated social orders, long after they have ceased to reflect the "natural" state of affairs.[109] Confined within the limits of such a worldview, Nietzsche

106 Ludlow, 62.
107 Der Derian, 164.
108 Der Derian 163
109 Ibid., 163.

reasons, one begins to attribute the notion of "good" with elements of rationality, certainty and predictability (as embodied by the nation-state), and the notion of "evil" with elements of contingency and "the unknown" (as embodied in dissidence).[110] This reasoning not only renders the nation-state an unnatural outgrowth of bygone sociopolitical realities, but again signifies the theoretical limitations in employing the nation-centric approach overall.

The transnationalist perspective surely offers a comparatively less biased vantage point from which to study social phenomena, yet the added lack of hindsight and the permeation of national rhetoric across all aspects of contemporary practice and perception further challenge the notion of the Darknet as a new, alternative social configuration. Within this section, two theoretical strategies are thus presented in an attempt to remedy these challenges. One is to position the Darknet within a broader historical context of cyclical cause and effect. From this macro perspective, the observer essentially aims to remove themselves from the contemporary conjuncture and to consider the Darknet, much like the existing social constructs, as a product of the continuously fluctuating patterns of socio-technological symbiosis. While this does not guarantee a complete removal of inherent biases, it illustrates the malleable nature of sociopolitical configurations over time, in addition to eliminating the tendency of placing one's analysis within the strict limits of their framework.

While drawing historical parallels may be regarded as vital to understanding how and why certain sociopolitical and conceptual shifts emerge, it does not

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110 Der Derian, 163.

necessarily present the scholar an alternative criteria set with which to describe and define them. As a supporting strategy, one must therefore first determine precisely which conceptual attributes can be adopted for wider use. In recognition of its broad application, Martin's reference to decentralized governing nodes is helpful in a more "anatomical" assessment of both virtual micronations and the Darknet because it refers impartially to all organized collectives so long as they exhibit the outlined characteristics. In exploring mentalities, technologies, resources and institutions, new sociopolitical configurations are defined on the basis of their independent values and operations, rather than on the basis of their relationship to any central governing authority.[111] The remainder of this section will explore the Darknet in accordance to these characteristic features.

1.2.1 Mentalities

The ideological underpinnings of support for the development of the Darknet are already apparent within the frame of its historical narrative. The fact that the Internet began as an open, unregulated network, only to become subject to the rule of law, was evidently enough to instigate a negative response from those who believed that sovereign states had no legitimate claim over the Internet in the first place.[112] To many, this was an unforgivable violation of "a nat-

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111 James Martin, *Drugs on the Dark Net: How Cryptomarkets Are Transforming the Global Trade in Illicit Drugs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 12.
112 James Grimmelmann, "Sealand, HavenCo, and the Rule of Law," Paper presented at   *the Bits Without Borders conference at Michigan State University* (2011): 54.

ural right to ignore the positive law," as, according to an individualistic vision of self-governance, any law instated by a formal governing body could only be deemed legitimate "if and only if [it] derive[s] from the consent of the governed."[113] Governments were, in effect, moving to colonize cyberspace. Hunter's Western Frontier analogy does well to illustrate the collective sentiment that arose out of this context:

> Cyberspace was once thought to be the modern equivalent of the Western Frontier. It was a place, albeit an abstract place, where land was free for the taking, explorers could roam, and communities could form with their own rules. It was an endless expanse of space: open, free, replete with possibility. No longer. As with the Western Frontier, settlers have entered this new land, charted the territory, fenced off their own little claims, and erected "No Trespassing" signs.' Cyberspace is being subdivided.[114]

Such a response to the growing regulatory efforts of nation-states appears as a prelude to the new cypherpunk subculture that would emerge shortly thereafter.[115] At the core of this movement were "profoundly antinomian" theories of free speech, sovereignty and self-determination, signalling the birth of new men-

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113 Grimmelmann, 53-54.
114 Dan Hunter, "Cyberspace as Place and the Tragedy of the Digital Anticommons," *California Law Review* 91 (2003): 442-443.
115 Greenberg, 183.

talities by which to bolster the development of digital defences against the state.[116] This would lead one to conclude that the "Darknet mentality" essentially rests on the belief that individual freedom in cyberspace should remain out of the hands of state control, and that "security through encryption was a moral imperative, because it would make all forms of government restrictions on speech unenforceable."[117]

The Internet has gradually grown to be regarded as a public forum by which ordinary citizens can engender change through exercise of free speech and exchange of information. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the presence of law enforcement in this arena feels like such an outright attack on civil liberties.[118] The fact that Internet data collection techniques are already being employed by governments and other institutions to trace individuals' activity without their immediate awareness or consent has become a subject of common knowledge and concern.[119] Critics have often accused states for downplaying these actions or concealing them under the guise of protective rhetoric.[120]

While the Darknet was still in a stage of relative infancy, poet and political activist John Perry Barlow had already garnered much attention among both the cypherpunks and the more peripheral adherents of online freedoms for his reactionary ideas about the role of the state in this regard. His radical rejection of government authority and legislated moralities is perhaps nowhere better ex-

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116 Grimmelmann, 53.
117 Ibid., 38.
118 Evgeny Morozov, "The Internet: A room of out own?" *Dissent* (2009): 85.
119 Aked, 14.
120 Celina Romany, "Interrupting the Dinner Table Conversation: Critical Perspectives, Identity Politics and Deliberative Democracy," *American Society of International Law* 93 (1999): 190.

pressed than within his famous, widely-circulated "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace," first published online in 1996:

> Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of
> flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of
> Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave
> us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no
> sovereignty where we gather.
>
> We have no elected government, nor are we likely to have
> one, so I address you with no greater authority than that
> with which liberty itself always speaks. I declare the global
> social space we are building to be naturally independent of
> the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral
> right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of
> enforcement we have true reason to fear.[121]

Though not without inviting reactions from critics over its "melodramatic" excess, one is inclined to believe that this document – along with previous and subsequent publications of a similar nature – has acquired an almost sacred status among cypherpunks and Darknet supporters over time.[122] However romanticized, Barlow's words have seemingly done well to immortalize and advocate the belief

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121 Ludlow, 28.
122 Ibid., 31.

that online law enforcement by territorial governments is an ultimately futile endeavour that should continue to be challenged by the individual.[123] Based on the continued relative success of the Darknet against government intervention, one is also led to wonder to what extent such ideologically-driven publications have had – and possibly continue to have – a more long-term, unifying effect on the anonymous members of this community.

Bartlett's accounts of his personal correspondences with Darknet users also points to evidence of an explosion of cyber-subcultures within this domain, which appear to be evolving almost as rapidly as Darknet technologies themselves. Though the emergence of cyber-culture predates the Darknet by over a decade, Bartlett's investigation into the origins of the web indicate possible overlaps between members involved with the development of earlier communication networks and those involved with the conception and development of the Darknet.[124] As many Darknet users also frequent popular social networks and imageboards in the Clearnet, such as 4chan and Reddit, one is also led to consider the idea that this community has become a growing sphere of influence in the production of cyber-culture across the visible web.[125] These networks, while still accessible through ordinary browsers, exude a more informal, unrestrained atmosphere in which anonymity is all but enforced and controversial content is easy to locate.[126] It is on this periphery between "light and dark" that one can pinpoint the origins of many of the Internet's best-known cyber-cultural phenomena: trolling, memes, Rickrolling, flaming, the iconic Guy Fawkes mask, reaction GIFs,

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123 Ludlow, xviii.
124 Bartlett, 27-28.
125 Ibid., 39.
126 Ibid., 39.

most Internet slang, as well as activist collectives such as Wikileaks and Anonymous.[127] One might also assume that as a result of these informal interactions, productions of cyber-culture have also played an adhesive role in new collective identity formations among individuals engaged in their continued reinforcement.

1.2.2 Resources and technologies

The Darknet owes a considerable amount of its operational success to the forces of intellect behind its digital resources and software developments. Without the backing and motivation of world-class academics and thinkers, mathematicians, programmers, technical experts, organized criminals and common contributors, the Darknet would cease to exist. Without its sophisticated methods of encryption and decentralized architecture, it would have no effective purpose. By accessing the Darknet, the user essentially strips away their computer's identity, layer by layer, through encrypted tunnels connected to various undetermined destinations throughout the world.[128] Ideally, this allows every user to preserve their aim of maintaining complete anonymity.[129] Anonymous monetary transactions are also made possible through the use of digital crypto-currencies, which have enabled a unique level of self-sufficient operation across Darknet markets. In fact, crypto-currency has become such a successful tool of transaction that it has worked its way into mainstream application; Bitcoin has garnered the support of an increasingly respectable community along with capturing the

127 Bartlett, 35-36.
128 Aked, 15
129 Ibid., 16.

attention of governments, businesses and the public at large.[130] Escrow and tumbling are two additional resource features employed alongside the use of cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, as a way to ensure fair and honest transactions among users and to remove the traceability of the transactions.[131] According to Bartlett, Bitcoin was allegedly developed with the intent of undermining the global banking system; in order to prevent the control and manipulation of money supplies by governments and banks, the total number of Bitcoins was limited to 21 million.[132] In pair with the collective brainpower that fuels them, the technologies and resources employed by Darknet users have proven themselves astoundingly effective and have stayed faithful to the original intentions and core values of their developers.

1.2.3 Institutions

The fact that the Darknet is a completely decentralized, anonymous network makes its informal "institutions" all the more impressive at glance. Of these, perhaps the two of most notable mention are the crypto-market and the community self-policing system.[133] That inside this hidden network there exists a multitude of anonymous, regulatory bodies managing the quality and efficiency

130 Bartlett, 90.
131 Martin, 31.
132 Bartlett, 93.
133 Bartlett, 150-151.

of both civil and criminal transactions discredits the misleading mainstream perception of the Darknet as a realm of chaos and lawlessness.[134] In general, self-policing systems encourage a collective monitoring of activity on the Darknet by all users to ensure that a basic standard of conduct is maintained – even in the case of criminal conduct.[135] According to the cypherpunk philosophy, preserving anonymity is essential to all online activity, and therefore, trust is a virtue that can only be acquired through reputation alone.[136] In the case of crypto-markets, where tens of thousands of illicit products can be purchased anonymously from all over the world, users may access rankings and contribute with feedback for whichever goods they buy, in order to ensure reliability and satisfaction of customers.[137] In a 2013 statistical review of satisfaction scores on the popular crypto-market Silk Road 2.0, Bartlett reports that out of 120,000 user reviews there was a 95% full satisfaction rate for purchases made on the market; according to a similar report conducted in the previous year, the results were "almost identical."[138] Though it is enough to assume that a considerable portion of these transactions are of an illicit nature, this should not be used to suggest that the Darknet community is completely devoid of any moral compass, as is often portrayed by news media.[139] According to Martin, the majority of dark markets remain adamant in their strict prohibition of "the most overtly and unambiguously harmful goods and services [...] such as child pornography and contract

134 Martin, 6.
135 Bartlett, 150.
136 Ibid., 150.
137 Martin, 10.
138 Bartlett, 160.
139 Martin, 6.

killing."[140] In fact, the decentralized "hacktivist" group Anonymous, though criticized for its often juvenile methods of stirring controversy in the media, has also maintained a positive reputation thanks to its continued efforts against the distribution of child pornography across the Darknet.

From a more detailed investigation of its organizational structure, one is drawn to the conclusion that the Darknet does, in fact, exhibit sufficient evidence of an elaborate organizational structure, typologically akin to that of a virtual micronation. However, to address the existing gap in knowledge concerning the more qualitative components of the Darknet's social configuration, as well as to try and validate the author's own assumptions, it was necessary to further the research through an empirical study.

140 Martin, 6

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction to the purpose of the study

Both the stated limitations of the thesis and the author's theoretical frame-
work reflect a primary emphasis on conceptually-interpretive modes of reasoning
and argumentation. The purpose of the empirical component of the study was
therefore intended to complement its theoretical portion with more qualitative,
micro-level insight as to the specific vehicles of identity-production that charac-
terize of the despatialized Darknet community. The author's goal was to arrive at
a more grounded understanding of how unique perceptions of collective meaning
are constructed and maintained in an unregulated, potentially hostile cyber-
environment.

As is reflected across the relatively limited pool of literature concerning the
Darknet, most authors have thus far only dealt with examining the technical and
resource-based elements of the network; incredibly few authors have taken on
the task of investigating its social, experience-based dimensions. In the author's
theoretical analysis of the Darknet's operational components, special attention
was paid to looking at the element of "mentalities" over other, already empiric-
ally-verified attributes. The objective was to develop some broader assumptions
about the ideological and cultural devices that have merged across this decent-
ralized, de-personalized, anonymous network of users into a socially-unified

group. Though Chapter 2, Section IV already contained some examples of ideological values, cultural symbols and publications assumed to be of importance in the production of collective meaning on the Darknet, the majority of these references are attributed to more high-profile individuals and do not necessarily aim to reflect the sentiments held by ordinary users. However, the author wanted to see to what extent these efforts and contributions were reflective of the sentiments of ordinary users accessing the Darknet, and not just those of international renown. Some of the broad, exploratory questions to be applied to the processing of collected data include the following: Is one able to identify clear, socially-unifying features among Darknet users? Do users identify themselves as members of a collective in this networking context? What common terms are employed in their descriptions of perceptions and experiences on the Darknet? How do they identify these commonalities? Based on the results, is there enough evidence to validate the author's original assumption that the Darknet could constitute a virtual micronation? The author concluded that this approach would benefit the thesis as a whole by providing a micro-level perspective of social interactions on the Darknet to supplement the largely macro-scope of the theoretical framework.

1.2 Research design

An alternation between inductive and deductive reasoning was applied throughout the length of the author's research process. From the start, it was hypothesized that the Darknet could be analyzed as a micronational model, on the basis of theoretical research and argumentation that had been developed upon prior to the empirical study. While the Darknet's economic and technical operations had already been explored at length by other authors, there appeared to be little development in the study of collective identity formation, which would be necessary to include if posing the argument that the Darknet can be defined as a virtual microntaional model. As such, the author came to the conclusion that a more complete analysis of the Darknet would have to include some data as evidence of its collective "mentalities" and social dimension. For this reason, a qualitative approach was deemed most suitable.

The author developed a series of short-form, open-ended questions to which participants would be allowed to answer in the manner of their choosing. As the main objective was to acquire as much qualitative data from each participant as possible without demotivating them, it was decided that the number of questions in the survey should be limited to no more than 10, and that each question should be posed in such a way as to allow as much input as possible from the participant and as little imposition from the author. The final questionnaire consisted of a total of 8 questions addressing a variety of topics concerning political, social and ideological perspectives in relation to the Darknet.[141] Collected data

141   See Appendix A

was examined for common "mentality" features. Though these had already been elaborated upon to some degree in the theoretical portion of the thesis, the author's own assumptions concerning cyber-culture's socially unifying potential still had to be demonstrated on a more grounded basis.

1.3 Appropriateness of the research design

This study was experimental and purely qualitative in nature. The primary objective was to collect opinion-based data that could then be used in the broader analysis of the Darknet as a micronational model. As the focus was to investigate symbolic and discursive productions of meaning among Darknet users, it was essentially concentrated on developing insight into collective values and perceptions. Originally, the author entertained the idea of distributing an opinion-based, multiple-choice questionnaire that would try to reflect on the assumptions being addressed. For one, it was supposed that an opinion-based multiple choice questionnaire would be less time-consuming for the participant and therefore would likely draw a larger sample size. Secondly, it would be a more consistent way to gather and record data.

However, upon further deliberation it was decided that this approach would, in fact, be too limited for a number of reasons. Firstly, attempting to quantify subjective, opinion-based reflections would be an unlikely way to yield accurate, representational data that could be deemed compatible with the study's objective. While the author could use such data to chart the response pat-

terns of participants, such results would be difficult to elaborate on or draw more concrete assumptions from. Secondly, providing the participants a limited pool of multiple choice answers to choose from would risk skewing the results. If a participant's answers happened to reflect opinions or experiences not specified by the questionnaire, they would have no convenient way of making this known. Along these lines, any faulty assumptions or failed considerations on the author's part would not be made evident in the results (in case a particular question had not been properly formulated or fully understood by a participant). The type of data best collected through the use of quantitative methods could reveal trends in age, sex, geographical location or personal occupation, but such information would be almost entirely irrelevant to the study's general objectives. Thirdly, assuming that the participants would be primarily concerned over the maintenance of their anonymity, the author was simply unsure of how many responses to expect in the first place. Any online surveys created through external services such as Google Forms or SurveyMonkey might be approached with suspicion, as users might express concern over where this data would ultimately be stored. As such, this potentially posed the risk of having very few members respond to the survey. Such a case would make it extremely difficult to create a sufficient sample size in the first place.

It was quickly concluded that, in consideration of all the aforementioned factors in addition to its own inherent appropriateness, a qualitative approach would be a more adequate choice for the study. Because qualitative research is, by definition, exploratory in nature, it would more effective in defining a problem

to which the author had no definitive answer or relative certainty of whether the results would in any way reflect their original assumptions. The author also assumed that because practices and interactions taking place on the Darknet are largely shrouded in secrecy, there could possibly be other unconsidered factors within the resulting data set that could reveal new insights. Systematic yet qualitative interaction would give each participant an open forum through which to express their views, in addition to allowing them to give feedback to the author regarding any shortcomings in their research design. The approach would also enable the author to delve more deeply into the questions surrounding the problem and its related nuances. Even if the qualitative study ended up taking more time and yielding less data, it was assumed that the final results would still contain more detail and thus be of more value than any data obtained through a more limited, quantitative design. Finally, in case of an exceptionally low response rate, the author decided that using a qualitative approach would still allow them the option of collecting additional data about Darknet users based on uninterrupted observations of the interactions taking place between users on different accessible social networks (if such an opt ion should be deemed necessary).

1.4 Setting and participants

The empirical study concerned globally-dispersed, unnamed participants accessing the Darknet for various purposes. Both as a result of the scattered

nature of participant situation in respect to that of the author and out of an oblig-

ation to respect the anonymity of Darknet users participating in the question-

naires, all interactions were conducted electronically through the use of private-

messaging applications, thematically-relevant discussion forums, and social net-

working sites related to the subject of the Darknet.

Due to a lack of logistical feasibility as well as out of safety and privacy

concerns, the author ultimately chose not to employ the Darknet as a direct me-

dium for selecting and surveying Darknet users. Instead, users were chosen at

random and surveyed via the social networking site Reddit, which is home to a

multitude of subsections specifically dedicated to Darknet usage and develop-

ment. To maintain an unbiased sample of participants, no profile-screening was

conducted prior to their selection. Participants were instead selected purely on

the basis of having shown evidence of recent or previous engagement in discus-

sions on one or more thematically-relevant sub-forums, including the

following: /r/AgMarket, /r/anonymous, /r/Bitcoin, /r/crypto, /r/cypherpunks,

/r/darknet, /r/DarkNetMarkets, /r/darknetplan, /r/evolutionReddit, /r/i2p,

/r/Meshnet, /r/onions, /r/privacy, /r/Rad_Decentralization, /r/SilkRoad,

/r/TheAgoraMarket, /r/TOR.

In order to acquire a sufficient sample size and understanding of parti-

cipant experiences and perceptions, the author deemed it necessary to collect at

least between 10-12 individuals for interview purposes. However, due to uncer-

tainties associated with contacted persons' willingness to cooperate and particip-

ate in the survey, in the end a total of 35 users were contacted. Of these 35 individuals, only 8 expressed an interest and took part in the final study.

1.5 Instrumentation

All qualitative data collection was conducted in the form of electronic interviews. As such, it was necessary to develop a protocol that would ensure a consistent process across all interviews. The initial series of questions posed to participants was therefore fixed, broad and open-ended to allow as much room for elaboration as possible. Upon receiving the initial set of data, the author then responded with a series of more personalized, follow-up questions to address some of the more relevant points made by participants, as well as to obtain more information or additional clarification. To be as accommodating as possible and to encourage participation, the author allowed participants the option of opting out of the study at any time, as well as the option to answer only those questions they felt comfortable addressing or had concrete answers to. In an additional attempt to encourage participation, it was communicated to the participants that there would be no word count limit or any particular criteria to follow; they would be allowed to answer the questions however they so chose. As not to sway the direction of the results, participants were given only a broad idea of the study's core objectives.

The choice to collect demographic information regarding such factors as age, sex, and geographical whereabouts was maintained as optional (though it

was assumed that few participants would solicit this information voluntarily), and it was also explained that this was not really relevant to the study in the first place. As all conduct on the Darknet is done anonymously, it was felt that making this information optional would encourage greater participation among users concerned with having their privacy or security compromised.

1.6 Procedure

Before data could be collected, it was necessary to begin by selecting individuals and contacting them with an invitation to participate in the study, as well providing them with a letter of consent to serve as an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. As previously stated, participants were selected at random, based only on their evident participation on social networking forums related to the Darknet or associated movements. Assuming that not all those contacted would respond positively, the author contacted a total of 35 random individuals with the hopes of receiving a minimum of 10-12 positive responses. In the end, a total of 8 individuals expressed an interest in participating. Following a positive response, each individual was contacted once again with a list of preliminary, open-ended questions designed to generate as much information as possible without manipulating the dialogue in any one direction. In cases where individuals expressed more enthusiasm in the study and offered more elaborate answers, follow-up interviews were conducted to expand upon data collected in the first round. Here, questions were framed around initial participant responses, but this

was again done in a broad and open-ended manner as not to sway the results. Once all data had been collected from the electronic interviews, the participants were individually thanked for their involvement and the survey was ended.

1.7 Ethical considerations

Informed consent is a critical component in virtually any research process involving the study of human subjects. In brief, it must deliberate on a number of ethical considerations for the protection of participants – namely those which pertain to voluntary conduct and rights to withdrawal, issues of confidentiality and any associated risks pertaining to involvement in the study. Due to the Darknet's association with sensitive topics of sometimes criminal and controversial nature, an emphasis on the maintenance of participant anonymity and the protection of collected data was integral the structuring of the research design. Great care was taken to ensure that participants were made fully aware of the thematic scope of the study as well as of their voluntary participation. All raw data recovered for this study will be maintained in confidentiality at all times, and the identification of participants will not be made available during or after the thesis has been submitted.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1.1 Procedural challenges

During the development of the research study, the author encountered a number of procedural challenges, due largely to the limited accessibility of data. The initial search for survey participants was first attempted on the Darknet through the use of the hidden TOR browser. With the aid of a hidden link direct-ory, the author accessed and contacted several users at random on various hid-den forums and content-sharing boards, such as TheOnionForum, Twitter clone and DeepWeb. Out of safety and privacy concerns, invitations to participate in the study were modified to omit any personal data regarding the author's back-ground. Nevertheless, the nature of the responses received from users suggested that this would not be the optimal setting for locating participants. One of the re-sponses contained explicit verbal aggressions; several more suggested trolling attempts and included various accusations of attempted surveillance by under-cover government agencies (ex. "Nice try NSA…. you dont [sic] get your cigar today!"). While these reactions to the survey invitation on the Darknet were not a point of discouragement, several of the more cordial responses included the sug-gestion that it would simply be best to attempt such a survey in social network-ing forums located on the Clearnet (Reddit being the most recommended for ac-curate results), where users would be less scrupulous regarding their anonymity

and less suspicious of "ulterior motives." Another respondent suggested that while on the Darknet, most users would be less likely to answer the survey with honest responses, or might simply mock the study. Ultimately, the author concluded that locating participants on the visible web would be much more feasible.

1.2 Processing and analysis of results

The empirical study was designed to accommodate a more exploratory approach to the collecting and analyzing of data. As such, no rigid means of analysis were employed. However, in order to produce a more relatively structured comparison of the results, responses were classified and compared for commonalities across three principle categories: values, affiliation and perspective. Value-based data incorporated all responses related to ideological and ethical self-placement, as well as to the political and philosophical views of Darknet users. Affiliation was used to identify user habits, specific motivations or interest in the Darknet, and conceptions of sociality on this dispatialized platform. Lastly, perspective was used to categorize opinions concerning the Darknet's real-world implications, with regards to such topics as political and economic impact, hacktivism, the future of content distribution and government regulation of the Internet.

1.3 Presentation of results

1.3.1 Values

Of the 8 participants that were interviewed, only 2 expressed no affiliation whatsoever with any political philosophies or movements assumed by the author to be associated with Darknet subcultures. The remaining 6 participants all noted heavy support of anarcho-capitalism and/or libertarian philosophy, such as agorism and voluntaryism (additionally specified by three of the participants). Based on the level of elaboration offered by most, the author was left with the general impression that within the community, considerable importance is attached to this particular feature of one's self-identification: "I am an anarcho-capitalist in the Rothbardian vein, formerly libertarian, formerly conservative. I accept the non-aggression ethical principle and because of that reject the idea that we need the state."

In terms of ethical perspectives, most users felt that the use of the Darknet had little to no effect on their personal outlooks, though several did note a change in their philosophical leanings over time. "The growth in use and popularity of the Darknet has made me more of a proponent of Agorism for political/economic change," explained one individual. Interestingly, all 8 of the participants expressed very strong opposition towards the principles of the sovereign state, in addition to a complete and uniform rejection of any restriction whatsoever on Internet freedoms by governments or other regulatory bodies.

Most responses regarding this subject included powerful language and common terms of criticism. "Governments have no right to be stifling expression in this way or spying on their citizens. Anonymity is an important defense mechanism against tyranny and oppression against human rights," said one user. "A sovereign's attitude towards the web, and the darkweb, then can be seen as a canary in the coal-mines of how tyrannical they are," was another's response.

1.3.2 Affiliation

Despite the enormous popularity of crypto-markets on the Darknet, most participants were relatively vague in addressing this topic when asked about their background and interest in the network. One may assume, however, that the avoidance of direct responses regarding illicit sales or purchases could have been done as a precautionary security measure. As such, the author was not able to collect more concrete data regarding user habits, though some insight was still offered. In general, participants described their use of the Darknet under a broad range of umbrella terms, such as "entrepreneurial," "commercial," "scientific," or "just out of curiosity for what's out there." 5 out of 8 expressed a sincere interest in developing their knowledge of cryptography: "I'm interested in obtaining freedom of expression and privacy by action rather than promise [...] I have more faith that my communications with others will not be snooped on if I encrypt them than if I simply rely on the promise by state actors that my communications won't be recorded."

Impressions regarding the sense of community derived from anonymous interaction on the Darknet provided very mixed results in the study. 4 out of 8 users expressed no strong sense of community across the network: "I don't think there is a large sense of community. Everyone feels like a bandit who is either there for drugs, weapons, or [child pornography]. People can be very hostile on there, even to others in their respective communities." Another user responded along similar lines: "Completely peer-to-peer and user generated. No 'common' culture exists, save for the memes created and popularized by the individuals of the community." In general, those opposed to the idea of any production of collective meaning felt that the anonymous character of the network was too much of an impediment to cultural developments on the Darknet; the latter statement can yet be regarded as somewhat self-contradictory in this respect.

The second half of participants presented contrasting views, one describing the Darknet as a "haven of sorts. I spend most of my free time online anyway and feel that the people I interact with there are way more in tune with my own values. On the darknet there are no names or faces but you know that everyone is there for similar reason, so there is definitley [sic] that feeling that you're joining a part of this 'secret' society, in a way." Another user elaborated further, linking the collectively-shared values to the Darknet's basis of community:

> On the web generally, community forms around values.
> This is the founding insight of Reddit that has proved so
> successful. The darknet is no different, only the darknet is

dark because it focuses on values that are oppressed by

authorities, sometimes for good reasons (terrorism, fraud,

violations of the NAP generally) and sometimes for bad

reasons (sovereign overreach in victimless crimes, such as

anti-drug laws and prostitution).

In general, the sharing of common values appeared to be an overlapping feature

in all affirmative responses. Interestingly, those who felt little to no sense of com-

munity seemed to reason – both directly and indirectly – that this was due to the

anonymity and lack of regulation on the network. By contrast, those who fa-

voured the notion of strong collective identity on the Darknet seemed to place

their reasoning on precisely the same grounds. One particular user explained

that the Darknet also enabled them to connect with other like-minded individuals

they would have more difficulty encountering in the "real" world: "A sense of be-

longing is generated and tied to this sharing of values... It becomes an instance

of iron sharpening iron. I could spend all week and not find articles and news of

interest to me as good as an entire community of [anarcho-capitalists] can share

links and thoughts along the same lines."

1.3.3 Perspective

Perspective was explored and analyzed on the basis of users' views of the

Darknet's overall success and future potential, the effectiveness of decentralized

hacktivist groups, and the future relationship between government regulation and dark networks. All participants expressed unequivocal faith and support for the Darknet, describing it as "the way of the future," or along similar lines. Even the briefest of responses communicated the belief that regardless of state efforts to try and exert more control over online activity (both on the Clearnet and the Darknet), this would continue to be matched by the efforts of dissidents invested in the latter's cumulative development: "I think governments and corporations will continue regulating the internet and preventing free speech. This I think will push the decentralist crowds into working harder to develop functional mesh networks impervious to systemic interruption by governments and corporations." One of the participant's responses was particularly reflective of the author's own assumptions about societal shifts in relation to technological innovation, though implicitly contradictory to idea of the Darknet as a unified micronational entity:

> We are in the early stages of a decentralizing revolution.
> This century will be a century of decentralization, the po-
> lar opposite of the 19th century, with the 20th as the pivot.
> Governments may try to fight back against this, but its
> movement is inexorable, part of the fabric of technology it-
> self as it makes each person more and more capable of
> powerful... In fact we're about to abandon democracy as a
> species over the next 100 years and move to something far
> more interesting and varied: decentralized society, decent-

ralized law, decentralized communities, decentralized pro-

duction.

Overall, the view that government authority over online activity will inevitably weaken as technologies become more powerful was apparent across all participant data.

Regarding the success of hacktivism and whistleblowing initiatives such as Anonymous and Wikileaks, opinions were once again mixed, though virtually all users communicated a general lack of support for the latter in particular, or no opinion at all on the matter: "Anonymous I don't always support, though sometimes they hit on good topics... [It] doesn't seem focused. They hit on things that strike their fancy. They aren't so much political or centered by ideology. They are 4chan inspired after all." The efforts of Wikileaks received unanimous support from all but one user, though none of the 8 participants expressed much interest in elaborating on this topic beyond stating whether or not they agreed with the overall cause.

1.4 Discussion of the results

The result of the interviews generally confirmed the author's own assumptions about the sociality of Darknet community members, but also offered some unexpected new insights. In the related sections of Chapters 2 and 3, the author posed the assumption that in order to demonstrate clear features akin to that of the virtual micronational model, the Darknet would need to be assessed and investigated on both theoretical and empirical grounds, for specific proof of unified mentalities, resources, technologies and institutions. Though evidence of the last three characteristics could easily be developed upon through findings provided by existing research, the author still needed to respond to the gap in knowledge concerning the more abstract and qualitative features of the Darknet's collective social structure. This exploratory research approach was designed in an attempt to determine whether there exists sufficient evidence of overlaps between ideologies, political perspectives, personal affiliations, attitudes towards membership and interpretations of collective identity formation among ordinary users of this network. The results of the interviews, while varied at times, did reflect an overwhelming support for radical deregulation and individual freedoms over the common good, in addition to providing some more concrete references to vehicles of collective identity production across the Darknet. In the author's own opinion, the fact that the majority of participants identified themselves as political and ideological opponents of contemporary institutional norms and values would

already suggest an emerging disjuncture between the nationally-instated practices and representations of collective identity, and those developed by the individual on the basis of their own experiences and perceptions of self-placement. Moreover, the fact that several of the interviewed participants indicated that their use of the Darknet had directly contributed to the shaping of their ethical perspectives and political alignments would heavily favour the assumption that communications technologies continue to play a role in shifts of consciousness and meaning.

Based on both the detailed statements provided by participants and the specified common features of their self-identification, it appears that the Darknet has become an invaluable forum and centre of refuge for individuals with shared, non-conformist values. Though not all participants agreed with the idea that the Darknet should be regarded as a defined community, the fact that all expressed the same core values and perceptions in this regard would nevertheless suggest otherwise. As reflections on the process of national identity formation in Chapter 1 have hopefully demonstrated, social and political transformations are not always apparent to an observer confined within the context of historical moment. Thus, the author takes care not to assume that claims of an absence of any social cohesion across the Darknet should be taken at face value. Though one might generally align one's self with any number of formal and informal institutions, this alignment need not be expressed or recognized in any deliberate way in order to maintain its validity. For example, an individual might label themselves on the basis of national citizenship in certain contexts without being attuned to this

feature of their identity on a regular basis. Therefore, it may be difficult for some Darknet users to consider themselves as members of a community in which no fixed notions of collective identity are commonly expressed, formalized or dictated. In this regard, simply because one fails to acknowledge one's self as belonging to a particular group does not diminish the actual virtue of their belonging. The same could be argued of individuals living on the cusp of disparate realities in medieval Europe. Without the aid of relative hindsight, certain social patterns and associations are more difficult to identify.

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, the process of collective identity formation can be explained as a gradual cohesion of values and other unifying features of representation. Before the advent of network communications technology, it is highly unlikely that individuals would have been able to conceive of an abstract, virtual space through which to to extend their sense of individual and collective self. However, within the contemporary context, cyberspace has added a new dimension of personal and collective "placeness" in which spatiality is of little relevance. As such, within the context of cyberspace, the non-material features of collective identification become all the more apparent and significant. In this regard, an exploration of the Darknet's resources, technologies, and institutions, paired with a more in-depth investigation of mentalities reveals a more intricate order bound by shared motivations, ideals and perceptions. The author would therefore still lean towards the original assertion that the unique, abstract features of the Darknet's social configurations qualify this network as a virtual micronational model.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Recent epistemological contributions have brought to light the pivotal impacts of communications technology on numerous revolutionary processes. New challenges to the conceptually-limited nation-centric approach suggest that though this perspective continues to dominate contemporary scholarship, thought patterns, social configurations and formal institutions, it is no longer reflective of an increasingly globalized reality. Just as individuals confined by the conceptual limitations of the medieval period would have had no notion of national identity, so today the conceptual constraints of outdated, historically-embedded perspectives impose themselves upon perceptions of collective identification in much the same way. As such, it is difficult to imagine how contemporary communications technology will truly shape and alter the nature of social configurations in the future.

What the thesis has hopefully demonstrated is that in order to develop more solid insight as to the true nature of any newly-developed collective construct, one must first position the subject within the broader context of an increasingly complex order of global-social relations. Exploring the Darknet as a micronational model may be deemed an overly ambitious undertaking, a the exponential advancement of communications technology holds, as ever, the potential to dramatically alter the limits of language and social memory, much as it did mere centuries earlier.

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APPENDIX A

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. In as much or as little detail as you wish, please describe your background and/or interest in relation to the Darknet.

2. Have you or do you affiliate yourself with any political philosophies or movements commonly associated with Darknet subcultures? Please elaborate.

3. To what extent would you say your ethical perspectives have shaped or been shaped by your interest/use of the Darknet (if at all)? Please explain.

4. In what manner or to what extent do you believe the Darknet challenges traditional agents of power (such as nation-states or international institutions), if at all?

5. Based on your impressions and/or experiences, how is the notion of community articulated through practices and social interactions on the Darknet? In what kind of ways is a sense of belonging generated and reinforced among users?

6. In terms of merits and shortcomings, what are your thoughts on the advent of rogue activist groups such as Anonymous and Wikileaks? In what manner do you perceive their conduct? Do you believe they maintain the potential to inspire real political change?

7. In the wake of increased cyber-regulation by governments and private actors, how do you envision the future of decentralized networks? What practical challenges do the latter face?

8. In your opinion, to what extent (if any) should individual conduct, privacy and the free flow of data be restricted by national and international security policies? How important is anonymity?

(Please add additional remarks below)

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MAIN SKILLS AND COMPETENCES

- Research & research analysis
- Technical writing and editing
- Database & social media management

- Excel spreadsheet
- HTML, CSS, Javascript
- Group management

WORK EXPERIENCE

Babel Media (Montreal, Canada)   September 2014 - Present
Localization Quality Assurance Tester
- Proofreading and editing of localized text for unreleased video games in the Polish language
- Translating unlocalized text from English to Polish
- Writing and editing bug reports

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Vienna, Austria)
Intern for Advocacy Section / Communications   April 2013 - August 2013
- Writing and publishing of UNODC web-stories
- Active management of social media sites and online news
- Compilation of daily press clippings on UNODC and relevant areas
- Collecting and maintaining journalist database and spam lists
- Attending Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice as branch representative, as well as other events and conferences
- Conducting research relevant to the work of the UNODC

Elections Canada (Welland, Canada)
Central Poll Supervisor   October 2008, May 2011
- Answering questions regarding voting and registration
- Overall management and maintenance of procedural accuracy and employee conduct at selected central polling stations during Canadian government election periods
- Liasing between the returning officer, assistant returning officer, and election officials

Elections Canada (Welland, Canada)
Youth Community Relations Officer   October 2008, April 2011
- Conducting information seminars and running info-kiosks during pre-election periods
- Raising general awareness among students and young people about the electoral process
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Master of Arts (MA), *University of Leipzig, University of Vienna*   2011-2013
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