

Episode 75:
Worldbuilding Beyond Borders

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M: You're listening to Worldbuilding for Masochists.

C: And we're wondering why we do this to ourselves.

R: Well, because that cabin that they keep putting on Twitter and saying, "Would you come stay here without any cell phone and internet for a month?" isn't apparently a real offer so we need some form of escape. I'm Rowenna Miller.

M: I'm Marshall Ryan Maresca.

C: I'm Cass Morris. And this is Episode 75: Worldbuilding Beyond Borders.

[intro music plays]

C: Which frankly makes us sound much more charitable than we really are, especially...

R: It really does.

C: Especially to our characters.

[C & R laugh]

R: And our readers.

C: Yeah, that too, that too.

M: You know, I would love, I don't know if this would necessarily be a cozy fantasy, but where the main characters are essentially Peace Corps or something going places like, oh, there's a plague here, we'll just help people and cure it, or do things like that. They never draw their swords, they never do anything— they just solve problems, and do kind things, and that's the whole thing.

C: I saw a concept one time for, I think it was supposed to be for a roleplaying game, it was one of those cozy concepts rather than an action adventure concept for an RPG, that was like, what if it's these people that are just animal conservationists, they're just taking care of their critters. I'm like, I love it, that's great, that would be awesome.

R: I like it.

[M laughs]

C: And then I imagine, because it was somehow *Star Wars* related, and I was thinking, except that my character in that world would still be a rebel fighter but who keeps coming across these animals in her fights and is like, "Wait, I have to save this and take it to my friends at the conservation. Here, take this cute thing, I picked it up on the battlefield, I don't know what it is, it's cute though. It likes to be scratched under the chin so here, have this, and I'm gonna go now, back to my fighting."

R: They have an absolutely zero Tribble tolerance policy ever since that one incident at the shelter.

C: I mean, that's fair. That's a fair policy to have.

[R laughs]

M: Definitely, definitely a wise choice to avoid the things that are self-breeding and explosive.

R: You don't want that.

C: Anything born pregnant, that's just, you don't want that.

R: No.

C: That's bad, just bad. Anyway, news! Does anyone have any news? Does anyone have any excitement happening?

R: God, I hope not.

M: Well, Cass, I think you have some excitement happening in that something that was announced recently that for you is news for the summer.

C: Yes! That's true! That's true. I have been invited to be the Toastmaster at ArmadilloCon in Austin the first weekend in August and I am super excited. I have been wanting to get to ArmadilloCon and now I have to go, I had to say yes, of course, so I'm looking forward to that.

R: Yay!

C: I'm still not really sure what the job entails besides being their official extrovert for the weekend is what seems to be the duties, and I'm OK with that, that works for me.

[R laughs]

M: That and making a speech. You make a speech.

C: I did ask, I asked for parameters on any speech making. Just give me some boundaries, and length, and things like that. But I don't know what those are yet.

R: Boundaries so you can test them.

C: Yeah, probably. Hope you like rhetoric jokes!

M: Oh, I think you'll find your crowd for that.

C: It'll be a good crowd for that? Good.

M: I think so. I think so. Aaaaand... that's about it. I had a book come out last month.

C: You did, it's awesome, I hate you, jerk.

[M laughs]

C: As usual, I had to send Marshall a message the next day, yelling at him for keeping me from my sleep.

M: That just means I did a very good job to deny you sleep.

C: You did, and I'm angry, and everyone should go read *Assassins of Consequence*.

M: And then you can also be angry at me.

R: Yes, you too can be.

C: And then you too can be angry at Marshall.

M: I need plenty of people to be very mad at me about the events of this book.

C: Oh, I think also by the time this episode releases, I will have officially rereleased *From Unseen Fire* and *Give Way to Night* in ebook with their shiny new covers.

M: Ooh.

R: They're so shiny!

M: They're very shiny.

R: They're so shiny!

C: So if you want the newly revised and improved editions... I actually don't know, that's just what they used to put on books in the olden days when they put out a second edition. But that's what it is so go get them.

M: Excellent. You should get them. Everyone should get those. Even if you already got them before, get them again.

C: Get them again.

R: Because you want the new shiny covers, they're really cool.

M: Yeah.

R: Collect them all.

[C laughs]

M: And Rowenna, do you have any news?

R: I got nothing, no.

[C & M laugh]

R: What is time, what's going on, I have no idea.

M: I know the feeling. [laughs]

R: Yeah.

[5:14]

M: Alright, so this time around we're talking about not so much nations in terms of countries but more in terms of, partly in terms of national identity, and what makes a nation, and what makes a people. Because that isn't always where the actual borders are in terms of how people think about themselves. And that can be an interesting thing to play with in your worldbuilding.

R: Yes. And it's a complex and interesting thing even in the real world. I think we often think of everything existing in a map with neat little borders and they're all different colors, but the way that people actually think about themselves can vary quite a bit. You talk to people from other countries, sometimes they do identify more with an ethnic group than they do with, "I live within these borders." So I think that's an interesting thing to push back on, our assumption, and it's not a uniquely American assumption but I think as Americans we do tend to assume, well, identity, nationhood, equals this stamped out place on a map that I exist within. And it's like, well, that's one way to think about it.

C: I think it's a fairly modern notion too because for so much of history, most people did not know what the map looked like. That's a relatively recent invention, really. And the idea, we talked about this in our cartography episode with Peng Shepherd, that the maps didn't always reflect the reality of space either. So what did you think of as your nation without that idea of a

border you could see on a map? How did you identify yourself as part of a people, part of a group?

R: I think this particularly can be a very uncomfortable topic given certain world events right now in which the rhetoric of nationhood and the rhetoric of what is a people can be deployed in ways that are not necessarily equitable or acknowledging the reality of the situation as perceived by other people? So yeah.

M: Especially in current events but also in recent events, in terms of, say, being a child of the 80s, you remember that there was once a country called Yugoslavia, but almost nobody in Yugoslavia thought of themselves as Yugoslavian because it was basically five different things that somebody else said, "No, you're all a country now, you're one country," and they were all like, "Hmmm, not really, I'd say no."

C: "Are we though? Are we?"

M: "Are we?"

R: "Do we get a say in this? Because we're not sure."

C: I feel like we're still seeing the fallout of that in what white people did to so much of Africa. Just being like, "We're just gonna draw this squiggly line here and we're paying no attention to who actually lives here and what they actually think of each other, yes yes, very good, very good, chaps, that's a lovely map, looks well divided, I'm going home for tea." And yeah, not a great practice as it turns out.

[M & R laugh]

M: That was an actual transcript of the events right there.

C: Yes, read that from a document from 18-dickety-2.

R: But yeah, the question of, so this was very important to the British, and French, and Dutch, and other various peoples who were divvying up that land, they had to draw some lines.

M: Who decided they had the right to divvy up land and draw lines.

R: Who decided they had the right to draw these lines. But you have to question too, to what extent were the lines even important to the people who were there at the time? Different lines may have been chosen or no lines at all, we don't need lines, thank you. So it's complicated and our assumptions can actually historically have produced some rather... nasty side effects. And any time that we get in a fight with each other and have to redraw the lines, there's always a problem. Every time. Every time!

C: And hasn't this even happened even between the US and Canada, every once in a while I feel like they redefine the border, and it shifts just a little bit, and it's like, wait, what happened, who actually knows exactly what side of the border that tree is on?

M: Or they define the border in a very specific way without looking at what the repercussions are. There is this one little town that is, because the border is defined as exactly, whatever, the 54th parallel north? I forget exactly. But there's this one little town, it's just this little nub of a town on a peninsula, that is in the US because it's below, but there is no way to get to anywhere else without first going into Canada because it is basically just part of this Canadian city that just this little nub on the peninsula extends past the 54th parallel, and so therefore by definition that is a US town right there. And they're utterly reliant on their Canadian neighbors for all things because there's absolutely no infrastructure connecting them to the rest of the US.

R: Awkward.

C: Good job, good job politicians in whatever year that was, good job.

R: You see these stories where borders have gone up at some point and suddenly and sometimes violently it's like, yeah, this went through my town, and half of my family lives over there, and I haven't seen them in 20 years. Or yeah, sometimes we come to the wall that they built and are like, [sadly] "Hi." "Hi." because this artificial border goes through places that people already exist in. In every place we've ever put up a border, people have lived there before the border happened. So any time this happens, there's gonna be some kind of weird fallout, and sometimes beyond weird, sometimes tragic.

C: And that brings up a really great point, which is what even is a border and how does anyone know where the border is? And sometimes it's super easy. Sometimes it's the river. Rivers make great borders because you can't miss it, it's right there. We know we're on this side and we know you're on this side. But beyond that, beyond something really physically distinct like a river or an ocean or something, how do people know where a border is? You can put up signs I guess, you can build a wall, lots of people have done that throughout history...

R: With varying degrees of success.

C: With varying degrees of success. But without those things, how does the physical space... how does it matter to the people living on one side of The Border or the other? And is it a fixed spot or not? It's something I've found interesting, I've been listening to a podcast recently about Rome's relationship with its quote-unquote "barbarian" neighbors throughout history. And for so much of the time, they would talk about being on the border but it wasn't like a fixed line, it was sort of understood as a nebulous, inchoate space that was like, well, we know this town is ours and then beyond that, somewhere it changes. But it's not a fixed point, it's not like you step over the border, the border was more a region than a line the way I think we think about it because how modern maps make us think of things.

R: You're sort of getting less Roman and more those other guys gradually.

C: Yeah. And people would move back and forth. Even Hadrian's Wall, which people think of as being the border of the Roman Empire, it was really more to be a customs checkpoint, and control trade, and stuff like that. People went back and forth all the time.

R: It was largely symbolic. [laughs]

C: Yeah, we just sort of felt like doing a thing to... make a big deal out of ourselves and... People moved back and forth all the time, and that happened with the Germanic tribes too, they would move back and forth too, and it was never as fixed an idea as I think our modern mind tends to think of a border.

R: And I think that that, when we talk about moving and the movement of people, that raises another point, which is... we think of the space that we occupy as fixed, largely, like I live in this house, and this house is part of this town, and this town is part of this state, which is part of this country, and these are all fixed things that exist in space. But historically, plenty of people did not live fixed in space, they moved. And so what does a border mean to you if your life is nomadic, semi-nomadic, is seasonal and you're living one part of your life in this area, one part in another, or you're fully moving around continuously? You don't necessarily tie your sense of what is my nation, what is my people, to this spot in space because you don't have a singular spot in space that you drop a pin here on.

M: Your definition of who your people are is that shared culture, maybe shared languages, shared story. And then you can have, the interesting thing is, you have a people, a sense of identity that is maybe not necessarily national identity — which is again another thread to pull at there, what is a cultural identity if it's not a national identity? — but who are within a more physical nation where there's one national identity but then you have, say, a nomadic people who are moving in and out who have a completely different identity, but are maybe living together in a cohesive way, or maybe not so much.

R: Yes, I mean, if we, for the moment, the thought experiment, toss the idea of your place where you live is defined by a border and that is who you are, not just where you are, what are other ways that people can define their... their nationhood or peoplehood, for lack of a better term?

[15:31]

M: Right, is it an ethnic group, and how broadly or narrowly do you define an ethnic group? Is it by shared language, is it by shared religion, is it by... or even a shared common location that's a different part of the world like if you're talking about a diaspora group who will still identify with where they came from, even if within wherever they are, they may have all come from the same place two, three, four generations ago but they still hold onto that as a sense of identity even if not necessarily a sense of... even if there isn't still that same cultural or linguistic connection.

R: Yeah, you said earlier, Marshall, and I liked how you phrased this, they share a story. Can it be even something to the sense of, we as a people share this story of where we came from, who we are, and that is who we are as a people, we have this story that we tell ourselves about ourselves.

C: I would love to see that literalized in some way. We talk so much about the things that magic makes real, that it literalizes in fantasy fiction, and what if simply by hearing a story your identity changed, your sense of nationhood changed, because you had heard the story? I don't know, there might be something there. [laughs]

R: Yeah. I like that. Or you are given a role in the story.

C: Mmm!

R: You are written into the story in some way. By being written into the story, now you are part of the story, and you're part of the story, you're part of the people.

M: I mean, there's been a few things I can think of that used the concept of a verbal virus almost, where by hearing a thing, it then basically colonizes in your brain and you become part of whatever this new thing is. It's usually like, there's this one weird zombie movie called *Pontypool* where the zombieness is spread through words, and if you hear the correct phrases from an infected person, it's going to infect you. And it's set in Canada but it only works in English so they have to talk French to each other to not...

[C & R laugh]

M: To not infect each other. It's a weird, brilliant little movie.

C: That is kind of glorious. I love that, that's pretty good. And I've seen sometimes the story being an initiation into adulthood but I don't think I've seen it really attached to nationhood in the same way.

R: I do enjoy how you brought up Canada and the linguistics of Canada. Because I think language is another way that you can think of this is what makes a people, and it's fascinating to me that the Quebecois are very proud of their French, and this is an important part of their identity, and even to the point that multiple times they see themselves as having a separate enough identity to try to separate from Canada in one way or another. Which has not happened but this is an identity that separates them from others within their nation to some degree. And it would be interesting, I actually haven't followed that recently, to what extent is that still simmering, has that cooled down for the most part, is there still any conversation about that? But what always fascinated me was that the Quebecois French speakers are even more vigilantly proud of their language than French people in some ways.

M: Which, that's saying something.

C: That's a lot.

R: It's hard, yeah. That's a lot. Because the French language, like all other language, will pick up words from English or other languages and just adopt them. But the Quebecois rejected this. So in French, they just took "walkman" and said, "It's [French accent] walkman" and the Quebecois were like, "No, we're making up a word for that, it's bandolier" or something like this. And in French, I forget what the Quebecois word is, but "parking" in French is just "[French accent] parking" which is hilarious, like, "Where's the [French accent] parking?" But they made up a word for it in Quebecois French because they did not want to be amalgamating with English in any way, even if that was what mainland France was doing.

M: That also makes me think of how pockets of language will stick in isolated communities. Cajun is a separate language that still exists in pockets in Louisiana. And it's kind of fascinating, it's like, how does this survive, and thus an identity survive, even though in full modernity there

must be so much interconnectivity that you wouldn't think that an isolated pocket would still exist, but yet it does. And I think there's also something like islands off North Carolina that had that?

C: It's Virginia. Tangier Island. Tangier Island essentially still speaks Shakespearean English and it's a really isolated community, they haven't changed much in 400 years. And they're actually imperiled now because 1. People are moving away, and 2. The island is about to be a victim of climate change, it's slowly sinking into the sea.

M: It's literally going away.

C: It's literally disappearing.

[R laughs]

C: Yeah, it's one of those weird pockets. And if you think about the Celtic languages, like Irish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic—

R: Welsh.

C: Welsh, Cornish, and Breton, the Breton language, there's been a huge movement in the last century or so to preserve those because they were getting completely wiped out by English, as it tends to do to everything it touches, much like zombie plagues ourselves, the English people.

R: Yes, yes.

C: You hear it and...

R: Are we sure that this movie that you saw, *Marshall*, wasn't a pro-French speaking, English is a plague, kind of propaganda?

M: It certainly was a metaphor for English is a plague.

[R laughs]

C: Fair. But yeah, there's been this movement to preserve those because those regions have a sense of national identity even within whatever other country they are part of. Being part of the Celtic nation is also a part of identity along with being British, or French, or what have you.

R: And it's interesting too, you want to talk about places that the borders have shifted over the years, the UK is certainly one of those places that the borders continuously shifted over the years, and are still in weird flux, and to what degree do you identify with the larger nation versus the chunk of it that you're from, versus a linguistic group. I think it's an interesting case study of, when everything around you is changing, where do you identify?

C: There's a great line in one of my favorite musicals, *Chess*, the first act is set in the town of Merano and the line is, "Right now we're Italian, we used to be German, the borders keep shifting around."

[everyone laughs]

C: I was like, perfect, that's lovely.

R: Yes.

M: You can also have the sort of what if, even though you have a personal identity with wherever you are because of language or whatever, there can be the sort of blanket over identity that some people will still have. Like there was a concept of the German people well before there was a Germany.

C: Long, long before.

M: And all these tiny little archduchies and what have you that all considered themselves German, but what did that mean because there were 100 mini nations, each with their own royal lines and all that. It's just madness if you try and think about it, but the idea that there was still that sense of identity despite not being a nation is an interesting concept. And one of those things I'm always fascinated with because I do love maps is how do you show this sort of thing on the map and what's the easiest way, when you're doing your worldbuilding work, of expressing this when it's not... I want to say reductive.

C: Yeah.

R: I would love to see a watercolor map.

C: Oh, that would be awesome!

R: The different peoples are represented by watercolors, and they're bleeding into each other, and there's overlap.

C: That would be so cool and so expensive, no publisher would pay for that.

R: [laughs] No one's gonna do that.

M: No one's gonna do that.

R: That's a bonus feature on your website.

C: That's a bonus feature.

M: Not a mass market paperback, yeah.

R: That's gonna be on your Patreon because you're not gonna get any publisher to sign off on that.

C: It's a gorgeous idea though! I love that.

M: I actually did play with that a little bit on the world map for Maradaine, where I have no hard borders—

C: Marshall, you're gesturing at it, you realize our listeners can't see you, right?

[R laughs]

M: Yes, I know.

C: OK. [laughs]

M: I know. I'm gesturing at it because—

C: He is, he's gesturing at the map.

[C & R laugh]

R: He is. He's Vanna White-ing it.

C: He's gonna cut all of this and us mocking him.

R: [laughs] He hates us.

M: I love y'all. You know that.

[R laughs]

M: Where I did just have the colors sort of bleed into each other rather than draw borderlines. Which I think is a fun thing to do.

C: Our mapmakers use dotted lines, they do that thing where they'd put the stripeys over a section if it's interdicted or in dispute, but even that, that still seems sort of reductive in some ways. I think that's a fair question to ask. How do you represent it?

R: There are some fun representations of Native American tribes that do a similar thing, there was a lot of overlap there, and you have tribes that were groups that were then part of larger tribes, and the tribes were then part of larger alliances, and so this all fit together. You can find some fun maps of those, especially since those shifted historically too, what groups occupied particular areas. If I think of it, I'll do a Google and...

C: One of my favorite genres of Youtube video is something that shows a map changing over time.

M: Ohhhhh.

C: Oh, I just love them. It's like ASMR for my eyes. It's like, yes, this is beautiful, I love it, keep feeding this to me. Because there's so many stories in there!

M: Yes! In doing your worldbuilding, if you can actually justify making such a video yourself of where you're showing the shifting of things over time, then that's super cool. Though fantasy tends to avoid that sort of thing, which is a shame. Because in fantasy you often get the sort of thing of this group of people are a people who are a nation, and that's been this way since—

C: And they always have been and they always will be.

M: And they always have been and will be.

R: World without end.

M: Yep. And this map has not changed in 10,000 years.

C: I've liked following that in your books, Marshall, in the gangs of Aventil and how their territory shifts from book to book. I think that's fun. You should animate that.

M: It would be a quick animation because there's only four of those maps but still...

C: No, you could show them blobbing and...

R: Draw it up!

C: It could be a gif or something.

M: It could be a gif.

C: It could be a seven second TikTok.

M: Ooh.

C: Haaah!

M: Aha. And 30 people would see it. [laughs] But that sort of thing is always such a fun thing to do. But then in fantasy worldbuilding, you can have the idea of who are a people or who are a nation be more strictly defined because if you're bringing magic or... gods and godly intervention into it, then it can be just by divine edict. I'm thinking specifically of *The Belgariad*, the seven gods made seven peoples, and six of them were like, "These will be our peoples!" And then the seventh god was like, "I've decided I don't want a people, never mind." So those people are like, "But... but... so we're without a god?" "Yep. Go off. See ya." [laughs] "Find something else to do."

C: One of my faves, *Kushiel's Legacy*, it's an our world map but it's a historical fantasy, and so the English Channel is impassible for magical reasons.

M: Oooh!

C: Yeah! And it's a major plot point in the first trilogy, figuring out how to get around that, and how to ameliorate it, and whatever, but for hundreds of years, only occasionally did a ship make it from one coast to another. So in that world, England and France — or the England and France analogues, they have different names — are much more divergent than they are in our history because you literally couldn't cross the channel, and it's for magical reasons. It's actually a magical dude on an island being like, "None shall pass."

[C & M just a line on the map, but if the person who drew the line on the map is a wizard of sufficient power who can be like, "I've drawn this line," and then a big wall...

C: Appears, yeah.

R: Or the other way around, that a border that's not really real can still be somewhat real. Like if the border itself is somewhat intelligent, yeah, it pops up anywhere in a 50 mile radius and we all know when it pops up, that's the border. And it means something. Maybe magic works over there and it doesn't work over here, or magic does different things, or certain languages have magical powers that others don't but only when the border's working in that way, that'd be kind of fun, the border is in fact a character almost.

C: The magic wind's a-blowing so you can't get from New York to Jersey today because the magic wind's coming off the ocean and until that dies down...

laugh]

C: And you can do things like that in fantasy and have there be a real reason why these two countries that are right next to each other don't talk to each other. Because magic.

M: And also because magic, borders can be a significantly more real thing. Because it might be

R: You can't... Yep. Or you can't cross it. Or you can't cross it, it's a magical border that you can't cross, and it keeps popping up in different spots. Sorry. Them's the breaks.

C: Might pop up in the middle of your living room, who knows. Super inconvenient.

R: Sorry about that.

C: Wait a while. It'll go away eventually. Oooh, what if it popped up in the middle of a person! That would be terrible!

R: It doesn't do that! It doesn't do that!

C: OK, I'm glad.

R: Yeah. You just kind of blorp off to whichever side, yeah, you're fine.

C: It could feel weird for a minute as you're suddenly three feet to the left but...

R: Well, yeah. Yeah. Bleh.

C: It doesn't splice you in half.

R: No.

C: Good, I'm glad, thanks for reassuring me, Rowenna.

R: No problem, any time! I'm mean to my characters, but not quite that mean!

[C & R laugh]

M: Not quite sudden bisection.

C: Sudden vivisection.

R: Spontaneous bisection! [laughs]

C: Eww. I'm sure someone's done that.

R: Yeah, I know, I avoid that.

M: Also the concept of the border can be something magical, so it's not... The difference between your nations doesn't necessarily have to be a traditionally physical thing, it can be some sort of magical thing like... what is it... is it Cat Valente's *Palimpsest*? That it's a city you can only get to if you've had sex with somebody else from the city? It's basically your passport is an STD. And what is, I haven't read this one yet, but is it China Miéville's *The City & the City* where two different cities are in the same physical space but... I don't know if they're separated by some sort of magic or if it is just custom, you don't acknowledge the people of the other city, you just pretend they're not there unless... But I think it's magically enforced or something like that? I don't know.

C: Hmm. That'd be some very strange etiquette in how to negotiate that.

M: But yeah, I think it is definition of citizenship by etiquette almost, of who you are and where you are is entirely about acknowledgement.

R: That's in some ways, isn't that what nationhood, and peoplehood, and citizenship are, is what acknowledges who?

M: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Who is acknowledged by what entity? I mean, we've certainly...

C: And what does it get you? I think that's part of it too. Do you have the right to vote? Do you have the right to marry somebody of this culture? Do you have the right to do trade with these people? I feel like that is a lot of what historically has defined the idea of belonging to a nation. With or without the borders, what could you do based on your identity?

R: Right. And who is doling out the acknowledgements and who is the enforcement for that? And when you have really small communities, it doesn't even have to be articulated necessarily, it's just that everyone knows everyone, and we know you're in or you're out, and if you're not someone that we know, we're not gonna deal with you. But the larger you get, the more layered the bureaucracy becomes and can become this sense of yes, there becomes things like papers, and certificates, and passports, and identity cards, or however you're imagining this working. And can certainly be magical.

C: Yeah. For the first chunk of American history, the way you became a citizen was by turning up and saying, hey, I'd like to pay taxes here.

R: Sure! [laughs]

C: That was what you did.

R: We'd love to have you! Taxes, yes!

C: And now there's this absolute labyrinth to get through. Yeah, as the state becomes complex, so often, I think, do the mechanisms of becoming part of the state become more complex.

M: And also what can become more complex is, how are you defining what a nation is and then within the nation, are there subsections, and how do you define that? There's even what are you calling it, are you calling it a kingdom, are you calling it a country, are you calling it, you know... And how do they call themselves? The country may call itself the Democratic Republic of Whatever but there's no democracy or republicanism happening there.

[C laughs]

R: These are just words that we picked.

M: You're calling something an empire, what makes it an empire and what are those distinctions? And are you a citizen of the empire or are you a citizen of one of the sections that are just controlled by the empire but are not full members of the empire or something like that?

R: Right, and I think you have even the storytelling of naming itself, but then that's part of this larger storytelling that crafts a nation that says even, who can be a citizen? Who is invited in? Who is welcome to be part of this group? I think that's an interesting part too. Are we going to have you just show and say, "Hi, I want to be part of your group," and we're like, "Yeah, sure, you can be part of our nation! We welcome everybody." Or, "No... no. We don't even have a citizenship test because no. We don't welcome new people, you have to be one of us from the beginning."

M: We don't like your kind around here.

R: Nope.

M: But also, is there levels of citizenship or belonging? Is there, say, a distinction between a citizen and a civilian or something like that? You live here, and you have rights and obligations, but you're not really a citizen. Not like that guy over there who gets to vote.

C: I mean, that's been the case for women for most of history.

R: Many places, many times.

C: It's like, ah yes, you're a citizen of this country but you don't actually get to do anything with that. [laughs]

R: You're subject to its laws, we can still hold you accountable to the things that we require from you, however we are not going to give you the rights and benefits thereof.

C: And there have been protests throughout history too where women have been like, “Ummm, if we’re not getting any of the benefits, I don’t think I should have to pay you taxes. That does not seem... I’m not down with it.”

R: “I’m really not pleased with this.”

C: “I don’t want to do that.”

R: I think it’s interesting, even if you look back at... the Thirteen Colonies, they had different rules for women’s participation, and actually right after the Revolution, New Jersey actually did grant women the right to vote. It didn’t last very long. But I find it interesting that you have this very small new nation, we’re still not all on the same page, and our identity as a state, we’re going to grant certain citizenship rights that other places aren’t. We’re going to have different opinions on slavery and who is and is not a person in our particular corner of the nation, which... talk about a contradiction to begin with. Even putting a pin in the horrors that were American slavery, the fact that you have a nation that didn’t even agree on...

M: Who was a person.

R: Are you a person? Are you a person or not? That we could put a pin in that one is...

C: And no one wanted to deal with that one, they just kept kicking that can down the line for as long as possible.

R: Someone’s gonna have to deal with it eventually but it’s not gonna be me!

C: Just all these founders nose gaming out of that discussion.

R: Yeah! Like, nope! But yeah, and the fact that this rather drastic variation in national identity could be kicked down to a state level, and that state identity in some ways superseded a national identity in terms of, are we gonna make a decision about personhood?

M: Right. And can, say, a people be defined by, say, at that point was it going to be one nation with 13 states, or was it gonna be 13 nations with a loose connection to each other like a loose alliance?

R: We tried the whole Articles of Confederation thing first, we decided to go a little more unified than that, but still not really where we’re at now.

M: It could have ended up a lot more like what we were talking about before with Germany, where you have all these different tiny nations, but we’re all German, but we’re also each our own little thing.

R: It is kind of interesting, I’m trying to think of, it seems like most times — and I’m generalizing horribly, so please point out exceptions to this, because I’m not thinking of them — when you start out with loose amalgamations of smaller nations that have their own identity but they loosely...

M: Have a joint identity.

R: Have a joint identity with others, that slowly that joint identity begins to take over more and more of a national identity, and eventually kind of shifts over. Like the Thirteen Colonies, like the German states. One that I actually don't know as much about as I probably should are the Native American alliances. To what extent did those begin to matter as much as tribal identity? I don't know. That could be a good exception to the rule, I don't know enough about it to know.

M: I know as a kid, we learned about the five tribes of the Iroquois Nation.

R: Yes.

M: How much of that was bullshit and how much of that was accurate I don't even know. This is what we're taught, and that adds another thing, how much of a national identity is imposed externally from other people saying, "They're all Germans."

R: Right, right. "We recognize those people as a people." And they're like, "Hell no, we don't even like them!" [laughs]

C: Yeah, and how much of the conglomeration happens voluntarily, how much happens involuntarily, how much is one component of that blob enforcing itself on others? And I can think about this happening, I can think about it happening on practically every continent at some point in history where, whether through military force or not, some part of that nation starts exerting influence on its neighbors. And even if they are not fully subsumed to one another... they begin having multi-level identities as their more localized group and then their larger group. Because you think about even today, the sheer number of different identities within almost any large, geographically large nation. You know, China, India, the US, I mean, gosh, our regions don't get along half the time.

[C & M laugh]

[41:18]

C: So yeah, it's a super interesting thing to think about. How does one nation start exerting itself upon the others, either by force or just by sort of culturally overwhelming them? Or economically overwhelming them.

R: And how much cultural or economic overwhelm is just, that's what happens when someone gets more powerful than their neighbors, and how much of it is intentional even without military intervention? How much of it is, if you're gonna trade with us you're gonna use our money? Or you're gonna speak our dialect if you're gonna work with us. Or we're going to gather a joint military so we can defend against our common enemies, but to do that we're gonna do it by our rules, so your kids better all be trained to do it our way... or else they don't really have a future in that particular career. I mean, that kind of stuff happened all over the place. I remember, I think it was 1870, the Franco-Prussian War, they realized when they put together French troops from all over France that the ones from the south couldn't understand what the Parisians were saying.

[M laughs]

R: Because the languages were still different enough that they didn't follow. So they after this instituted a nationwide school system so that everyone would speak the same French. So education can overwhelm localized identity when you have larger overarching national education systems.

M: And then you get something like who gets to decide what's actual, proper French?

R: Parisians, apparently.

[42:53]