

# “Digital Sovereignty”, huh?

Talk by Jaya Klara Brekke and Dan Hassan at Dat Conference 2020

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## Description

Sovereignty is popping up over the P2P space. But what do we mean by it? Some views and research emerging from cobox.cloud. co-presented with Jaya Klara Brekke (@jayapapaya) and Dan Hassan (@dan\_mi\_sun)

'Digital sovereignty' huh?

Lately, states have been calling for it, start-ups have been pitching with it, and communities have been building for it.

...but do we all mean the same thing?

and what is some of the historical baggage that the term 'sovereignty' brings with it?

## *00:15 STARTS*

INTRO (SANTIAGO): We are now live. Um, please welcome Danny and Jaya, who are going to talk to us about “Digital Sovereignty”, huh’.

JAYA KLARA BREKKE: Yeah, hello. So my name is Jaya Klara Brekke, and myself and Dan are part of Magma Collective [1], and building on DAT [2], a project called Cobox [3]. I’m also personally a researcher based out of Durham University geography department.

DAN HASSAN: Hi, I’m Dan. I’m calling in from the unceded sovereign nations of the Wurundjeri people of the Eastern Kulin nations, and I’d like to take a moment to pay my respects to elders past and present, and also to acknowledge that the strategies, cultural protocols, sophisticated technologies that have been held by the peoples of these lands, that have allowed them through the face of systems such as white supremacy, to maintain connection to protocols, culture, technology, practices, despite the erasing attempts of systems of white supremacy.

Okay, so taking a breath. As Jaya mentioned, we are part of Cobox, and Cobox is funded by the European Union, and as part of the call of the LEDGER program [4], it was particularly interested in technologies which put humans at the centre. And it also had this mention of digital sovereignty, so technologies which preserve citizens’ digital sovereignty. So, in the acknowledgement of country which I’ve just done, which is part of the protocol for the colonised lands of what is more commonly known as Australia, the city I’m in is Narm, or

Melbourne. We've got this tension between two different visions of sovereignty, and that's kind of what this talk is about.

To describe a bit my background, behind me there's some books, I've got dark hair, I've got a beard, I'm wearing a yellow hoodie, and I wear glasses. And the... I didn't really know what an acknowledgement of country was until I moved to these lands. I grew up in the UK. And, to be honest with you, growing up I didn't really know much about indigenous peoples around the globe, and I didn't really understand colonisation. And I say that as someone whose family just a couple of generations before, so my great-great-grandparents, were transported from India although through spoken language I've got family that come from the Afghan region and Mongolia, and through this system of indenture, during the collapse of slavery. My family were transported as part of the system of indenture from the Port of Calcutta to South America to grow sugar in Guyana, on the sugarcane plantation, for some 10 to 20 years they were doing that. And I know this because as part of the systems that the British had set up, they kept meticulous logs, so I'm able to, like, track back the boat on which my family were transported from India through to South America. And I mentioned the logs because Dat is a log-based or append-only log technology. So I'll loop that back in later on.

So why do I mention this? I mention this because I live on colonised lands and through my migrating here, I'm a migrant settler. I participate in the continuing ongoing process of colonisation, just through virtue of being here, and I've had a kid here now. And so I'm quite sensitive to, like, trying to understand what that means. And so a number of years ago, I'm going to share a story that I've shared on Scuttlebutt for any cipher explorers. You can look up the more verbose story later on. I was driving a car, which is unusual for me, and I heard on the radio a piece of poetry by an Aboriginal poet, which really hit me in my gut. Because at the time, I was working on a project with a few folks from Magma called Dark Crystal [5], which was essentially trying to look at how with private keys, how could we use Shamir's Secret Sharing to use the power, like the connection that we have in our social fabric to keep us from losing our private keys. And when I heard the poem [6] that day by someone who's now my friend, I feel lucky to call a friend and I appreciate the risks taken to bridge our differences. Laniyuk. What I heard in that poem was essentially an expression of or a product of Aboriginal technologies that allowed Laniyuk's ancestors to hold on to pieces of information, which allowed despite really oppressive forces of colonization, for people to remember country where they're from particular protocols. And I should mention that what is now known as Australia used to be 500 different nations.

And so what I'm trying to get at here, and this tension between different notions of sovereignty, is that it's really complex and it's really complicated, basically. And this project Cobox is coming from like the digital sovereignty end of the spectrum. And they're really disparate, why it's kind of a very rich, technologically sophisticated conceptions of sovereignty that we hold all around the place. And so kind of that's the vibe I'm bringing into this conversation and a bit the framing for what we're going to talk about. Jaya, can I hand over to you?

JAYA: Yeah, absolutely. So really, one of the reasons why I wanted to kind of propose this as a topic is because, you know, I've noticed or we've noticed in Magma, the concept of sovereignty being used by all kinds of different actors that are working on digital

technologies at the moment. And there's a kind of general sense that when we talk about sovereignty, it's something along the lines of like taking back control somehow. And it's something along the lines of taking back control from a handful of very large platforms and cloud infrastructures that fundamentally hold a lot of the control over data. And so there's, you know, a general shared sense of taking back control, but what that means kind of, for more kind of longer term projects, I suspect diverged quite a lot because, you know, the actors that are using the concept of digital sovereignty - and we can add to that also data sovereignty, self-sovereignty, there's lots of different kind of ways that this idea of kind of taking back control is being articulated through this idea of sovereignty. You know, it really kind of crosses very, very diverse actors.

So we've got is, you know, within the kind of framing of the LEDGER project that Cobox is developed within, that's the kind of European Union, European Commission kind of framing. And so here we've got like kind of national and regional states that are adopting the concept of digital sovereignty. And you see that in policy papers, you see that in strategy papers, you see that in talks by policymakers.

And then you also have, let's say, new types of cryptographic platforms that are using this term, a lot to - and I suspect that, you know, a lot of these platforms take quite a different kind of approach, or have a slightly different understanding of, you know, the long term implications of the idea of digital sovereignty than, say, the kind of national and regional states do. And then we've got, you know, communities, you know, networks of people that are building tech that are also using the concept of sovereignty, sometimes digital sovereignty, sometimes self-sovereignty.

And so, you know, kind of I think, like, this is, you know, this conversation that me and Dan are kind of opening is, I guess, like a little bit of a kind of like open conversation that we're trying to have internally in the Magma Collective right now, it's not something that we have resolved at all. Because once you do start talking about sovereignty, there's a lot of history and Dan has kind of brought up the kind of colonial histories and threads that run through this. And there's, so there's a lot of quite kind of complicated, sensitive things to think through. So by opening this conversation, it's kind of like an invitation for the community more generally to start to consider a little bit more what is it exactly that we mean by sovereignty? When we use that term. Is the term something that we want to use at all? Is it actually something that's useful and meaningful? Is that a kind of, does it have a kind of resonance? Does it have a history that, you know, we can, you know, adopt wholeheartedly? Are there other terms that we want to develop? And also, how do we understand the concept of sovereignty in relation to the digital space? How do we understand it in relation to network spaces?

And so, personally, I've been working on a kind of academic paper and with my academic hat, called 'Cryptographic Geographies', where I'm trying to work through some of these questions and hopefully that'll be ready relatively soon. But like I said, it's kind of I'm tracing this across like these three, you know, these three different actors, some of which are us, you know, and I want to kind of also open up this conversation to us as a community to really think through some of these questions. So I'm speaking of the kind of like, you know, the kind of national, regional, kind of like state-based adoption of the concept of digital sovereignty. This is very much like a kind of attempt at a reterritorialisation, right. So it's like

bringing, you know, data that is otherwise held across kind of multiple data centres, taking advantage of multiple different kind of regulatory environments, taking that, you know, back, reterritorialising it, for example, through things like data localization and policies and so on.

And, and also, there's a lot of things in the mix here, right. So I'm talking very much about kind of the GDPR framework of Europe that also gets exported to other countries. And where there's lots of kind of interesting and useful things, but there's also a lot of kind of, like more complex stuff to think through about, you know, the extent, you know, what are the limits to GDPR, right? GDPR is kind of taken very much, I believe, is very much connected to an understanding of sovereignty, that is very much a kind of state-based territorial understanding of sovereignty. And we're here, we're talking about a kind of the liberal state with this idea that like the role of the liberal state is to take care of it, you know, its citizens, the rights of its citizens, and fundamentally to protect private property and protect the conditions of well-functioning market. And so, you know, the interventions of the GDPR is a little bit along those lines, you know, and it does take very much this kind of, you know, individual-focused approach. So it's like giving individual rights to people to respond. So it's like, you know, in ways that is, I think is just rarely experienced as meaningful. So it's like, great, I get to set my cookie on a website that I'm visiting, you know, but is that an empowering experience? Like, most likely not.

Um, and also it kind of comes up against the problem that when we're talking about data, and I believe we should talk about kind of datascares, understanding these things much more as a kind of landscape approach, where we're talking about datascares, really the kind of the value and the meaning comes from the relations, right? And so when we're talking about network effects, and we're talking about big tech, there is this sinister side to it, where it's like, yes, these companies have crushed all competition and are really vicious. There's also a side to it, where it's like, fundamentally the value that we as societies get is exactly through the relations and those relations are, you know, somewhat kind of clash up against this idea that I as an individual can make meaningful decisions about my personal data. And so really, you know, there are some, there are some real limitations to the GDPR framework. And I also think that once we start looking at broader, you know, other approaches to the concept of sovereignty and other kinds of experiences, there are certain elements of the GDPR that start to look a little bit more complicated.

So, me and Dan, for example, have talked a little bit about this thing of memory and the right to be forgotten versus the right to or the need to remember. And, yeah, I don't know, Dan, do you want to come in here or should I continue?

DAN: Um, I always just vibe with what you're saying, so don't want to interject too much. So I'll keep this brief. Then also, technologically speaking, when we're dealing with the types of technologies that we're speaking about this, this is the Dat Conf but this would be applicable to say Scuttlebutt or other systems, which are append only, it's kind of like embedded within this data structure, although I know there's tricks and tips that you can do. But there's analogies then also within the technologies that we're using, around this conception of right to be forgotten through to need to remember, but then also thresholds as to who should have access or not. So yeah, to kind of contextualize that back into the tech that we're dealing with. It's kind of like, important to think about these things in their breadth. Yeah, Jaya, you keep going.

JAYA: Okay, yeah. So I mean, just to say that, like, you know, when Dan brings in, you know, some of these questions of erased histories and erased languages and, you know, colonial histories, then we're starting to look at, you know, what are the contexts that these different types of rights and approaches come out of. So, for example, you know, that brings about the need to remember, right? It brings about, you know, can we create, you know, ways of keeping and holding knowledge that is more protected, in a sense. And then, you know, in Europe, like, you know, the right to be forgotten, and the kinds of approaches to or the critiques of surveillance that come out of Europe. I believe, you know, you can trace very clearly to European history of, kind of, you know, fascist regimes and so on. So the kind of dark European history.

And so taking these more contextual, historical, political approaches, it just allows us to understand these technologies in a little bit more of a meaningful way, instead of kind of jumping to universalise conclusions immediately and believing that, you know, all aspects of the GDPR framing counts for any type of digital space whatsoever, or is the appropriate or the good response. I think there's so many valuable and interesting, important things that have come out of the GDPR in many ways, but I think there's plenty more discussions to be had also about how we can make, you know, the context of Europe a little bit more particular and stop kind of jumping to this continuous assumption of some kind of universalised viewpoint, which is a bad habit of Europe, let's say, to say the least.

So that's a little bit on, you know, the kind of approach of, or the kind of, like, let's say the adoption of the concept of digital sovereignty from a kind of national and regional state perspective. And the adoption of digital sovereignty here obviously also ties into like industrial interests and the interest to regain, you know, like legislative and regulatory control and control over the future of, you know, digital and economic development within certain territory. So states have, like a certain kind of approach, a certain set of interests that overlap with how they want to protect markets and their populations in specific ways.

And, you know, this is very much a reaction to what, like, theorists have called like platform sovereignty. So the idea that, like, you know, we've gone kind of post-sovereign and that, like, everything is deterritorialised to the digital space. There's a strong reaction against that, we're seeing very different developments right now. And that kind of curious period of time that's like an overlap between some of the things that, you know, we, in a kind of more bottom-up way are kind of concerned with, in terms of privacy questions, and these kind of like, national and regional interests and industrial interests and stuff. So I think it's an interesting time in terms of tech development for those reasons. And then, the second actor that I wanted to talk about was, to me cryptography, cryptography historically has also been very closely tied to sovereignty, right. So, the ability to share secret messages, is, part of being able to hold territorial control and so on. So there's this long-standing history of a relationship between cryptography and concepts of sovereignty.

What's interesting now is that the concept of sovereignty and the ability to use cryptography is not just held by nation states, right. It's held by also us, by different communities that are looking to develop alternatives. And I really want to try for us to push those alternatives a little bit further. Because what I have seen is, there is a tendency to fall back on - and I think this is not the case within that community, but if we talk more within distributed ledger

technologies, like blockchain space and this kind of thing, the way that cryptography is kind of being platformised in that space. So it's like, new types of platforms, but that are kind of cryptographically secure, and that are a critique of the existing platforms. But the critique is mostly along the lines of who gets to own and sell the data.

And so we fall back on very much a property approach, once again, that you know, I really think is a dead end for a whole variety of reasons. First of all, what I was mentioning earlier, the fact that really the value is in the relationships, and relational approaches. And so that's where I think the third set of actors that I would kind of like to put forward as like, you know, what I've called in this paper that I'm writing 'cryptographic communities', you know, those of us that are looking to kind of use cryptography as a way to establish meaningful networks amongst communities. You know, I think there is a, there is an alternative that we can flesh out that is not an approach that falls back on private property. And, but it's neither an approach that's just handing everything out for free. And it's not either an approach that assumes that sovereignty necessarily has to have to do with territorial control, and a property control over land. But actually understands, really draws from the kind of history of the internet more, and draws from the relational nature of networks to flesh out a different way where you know sovereignty, if we want to use that term, has more to do with our ability as a community to make meaningful decisions about the infrastructures and conditions that shape our lives.

And here I've been like very inspired by, you know, the kind of like Dat and beyond approach about, you know, that kind of local first idea. And I've been thinking a lot about what does 'local' mean in relation to some of these conversations about sovereignty, but also in relation to territory and land and place where, you know, what's interesting about local when we're talking about a kind of a digital protocol, is that we're talking about devices, right? And so the relationship between the device, the actual geographical location and a territory and a community, like all these things are up for grabs. We can shape those in ways that are very meaningful.

Am I still holding a thread here, Dan? [laughs] I had a string of notes, but I think I've gone off like.

DAN: I think you're steering a tight ship in my opinion. Keep with it.

JAYA: So it's a little bit like, I guess what I'm saying is that I'm grappling with this space. We're grappling with this space. In Magma, we're trying to kind of like have some of these conversations. And you know, we would like to kind of invite others also to join in on having some of these conversations on these three questions that I mentioned earlier: What do we mean when we say sovereignty? Is it really a term that we want to use? And how do we understand sovereignty in relation to networks and in relation to place?

And I think for me a key point of developing a kind of politics and ethics as people building tech is on this question of property. So, taking inspiration from some of Dan's networks, Dan sent me a link to the work by Aileen Moreton-Robinson who talks about, uh, her book is on Indigenous sovereignty and white possession [7]. And connects whiteness and white supremacy and the kind of white history of state formation very closely to a kind of private property approach.

And I think for, you know, not just because of the dark histories of white supremacy, but also because of the types of spaces that relational and network technologies open up for, it's much more meaningful to start carving out a very different approach. And, you know, people that are talking about Data Commons and, you know, kind of commons approach is like one avenue that people have been going down. And I'm kind of curious to keep working at this and see what else we can do. But I think there's something about, you know, the local first approach and the idea of, like, not trying to create some kind of universalised network spaces, but network spaces that are deliberate, that run alongside, you know, quite meaningful communities, and that are kind of protected in terms of kind of encryption and control, you know, control of the protocol and the network itself.

Um, but yeah, I don't know. I might stop there.

DAN: On the mention of Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson, who's written a lot of books that are worth reading. I'm just gonna like take a moment of pause. One of the struggles that I have personally had in engaging with and across the differences of histories and experiences as being a migrant settler on colonised lands with folks whose lands are being occupied and colonised is which patterns of the systems that I have grown up in, what frames of view, patterns of thought, histories that I've learned or not learned, which dominant status quo-like patterns do I bring to engagements and one of the strategies prior to reaching out to people that I embarked upon was to try to understand a little bit more - not to say that I understand but explore it a bit - was what patterns have happened on these lands specifically, that I need to watch for myself replicating.

So for example, when Captain Cook arrived to these shores, one of the sleights of hand, a major sleight of hand when Cook arrived, because I should state that of all of the colonised nations, so-called Australia is one where there was absolutely no treaty with those people who already lived here, and that was due to essentially, when Captain Cook arrived, sent back message to England saying no one lives here. It's terra nullius. It's lands unwritten.

And actually, you can see this up to the contemporary moment in the sense that Aboriginal folk here only got legal status as humans in the 70s, or I think, end of the 60s. Prior to that they were classified as flora and fauna. And so that was a proper cooking of the books, if you know what I mean, like in the log of history, the note that was sent back was there is no one here to negotiate with and set up a treaty because there's just no one here. And the way that they determined that sleight of hand was to essentially state because we don't see evidence of agriculture, because the dark-skinned people that we see here are just moving around a lot, they don't classify as what within our world frame view constitute property holders.

And so yeah, I just want to take a moment of pause to say, essentially, to even start the process of engaging with different worldviews, it's my belief that we need to be looking at, in which ways are we taught and have we inherited to do the same things? So for example, in which ways do I erase history when I'm engaging people? In which ways am I looking to extract without giving back from people? And so I'm just pausing because I don't want to preserve or put myself in a position of authority as, like, being able to tell the histories or worldviews or politics or technologies of Aboriginal folk here, because certainly isn't my

intention. And I don't want the impact of me talking about this stuff is for all of us to go out to communities across difference and see what we can learn or kind of like, take back. Because my worry there is that all of us have to some degree or more or less essentially come up in a system where we would embody some of the patterning, much of the patterning from white supremacy, and these kind of erasing and other systems, which I'm so blind to.

And some of the stuff that Jaya was just mentioning is when I talk about engaging with, it changes the nature of the work that we have to do in the framing of the kind of establishment of a different type of politics. So rather than me talking on behalf of Aboriginal folk, what I'm talking about is setting up the conditions that we can even start having a conversation with folks with radically different experiences to us. For me, personally speaking, the gut intuition that I have is, if we're talking about memory, history, technologies of resistance, technology of local first, self-determined, community-controlled, the experts and technological specialists in this field are those communities which have managed to persist through systems of forgetting of a hardcore nature such as white supremacy.

And I mentioned that at the top, due to the system of indenture I'm able to follow the logbook back to the ship that transported my family from India to Guyana. And as such, I know the name of the ship, and because I know the name of the ship, I was able to go back to the logbooks and creators of the boat. And it turns out I fucking went to uni for a year before I dropped out with a descendent of the people who the boat was named after, who created the laws and the systems of indenture. And on the other side of my family, they're Irish, this is the same person who was the administrator of the Irish potato famine. So like on two different sides of my ancestors, it's like this complete clusterfuck clash of like a strange interlocking of two people and their descendants kind of crossing paths.

And I bring all of this in to kind of complicate when we're... technology itself is not neutral. It's highly political, and the values and frames of referencing and patterning that we bring to it, we, that's kind of in the mix as we create stuff. And I don't know if this is the right moment to kind of loop in examples throughout cyberspace where... so like, for example, one really - by the way, folks, this is maybe a bit of an unusual talk for a Dat conference, should have put a warning at the top that it's going to go deep. I also want to state that towards the end of the talk, we've got some, we'll bring it back to the DAT protocol and we've got some candy at the end to say thank you for kind of coming with us on this journey. But um, so when Cypherspace, not Dat, not Scuttlebutt, but slightly different. When Ethereum first released, it was the frontier release. And again, it had a picture of like, pristine environments free of people, like this kind of, my language is gone, but like we are pioneers of this new space. And to me, colonisation was a mistake. And we need to learn from our mistakes and what patterns of thought are we bringing such as this notion of property.

So for example, the Aileen Moreton-Robinson book, I'm not going to try and paraphrase it cuz I can't, I'm not smart enough, and it's also not my place. But like the small tidbit is she talks of this notion of sovereignty which is emerging from Europe, which Europeans actually stole from India as a concept and kind of like, imported it back - *standard* - was essentially like a replica of, you have an authority that's outside of earth, a god, essentially then giving authority to god's envoy on earth, the king, who then has authority over all. And essentially what Aileen Moreton-Robinson talks about in that book is this notion that essentially things



from outside of the earth, and then a person such as the king, a sovereign, can own things, like property. And what she traces the history of essentially, when you move from god-based, religious-based through to state-based, it's kind of a similar pattern of thought, through to, I question and I wonder some of us internalised around this notion of self-sovereign identity or like, this ability to own your property, your private key to this unmediated kind of, no one can kind of tell you what you do. To my mind is, like on a similar gradient of thought, from an Aboriginal to Austr- and, again, this is clumsy because this continent was 500 nations, each with a different language set, different way of talking about it. So I'm certainly not meaning to collapse all into one frame of view. But the conception of sovereignty is just a very, it's totally inverted. There isn't property ownership. In fact, humans aren't disconnected from Country, from environment, they're of Country. If anything, people are owned by Country, and it's this circular thing. So yeah, that's one small tidbit, not to flatten it, but just to express that.

When we're talking about local first technologies, when we're talking about developing new peer to peer politics, I think we need to be wary of what patterning, what metaphors, what brainwashing, what historical lessons we haven't learned yet. And what work needs to be done to set up spaces where we can engage with other folk not to extract and take and to do the thing where you become an expert, but to actually acknowledge, do you know what, actually we're quite young, in this space of thinking about this stuff.

There are nations all over the planet, indigenous peoples who have kind of been practicing this stuff for a really long time. The Aboriginal peoples of this continent have been around for 100,000 years. It's like, the technologies that they use to remember stuff, despite really intense technologies of forgetting, which in a sense is what whiteness is, is immense. And I think yes, it's worthwhile in the projects that we do, to guard against this sense that what we're doing is... take care with feeling too confident. I think we always need to maintain a sense of unsureness and openness and curiosity around these things, as we develop our politics around this and engage in these conversations. But I'm going to hand back over to you, Jaya.

JAYA: Um, ya know, just I'm following some of the chat on the side here. And yeah, it's really cool. There's a bunch of super good comments coming up. And so a question about sovereignty, the relationship between sovereignty and autonomy or the difference between them. And I agree that like, you know, the concept of autonomy again is like something that's used super vaguely in this in the digital space at the moment. And a lot of work needs to be done on that too, because autonomy to my mind has been reduced down to like, two rather kind of lame versions of it.

The first is, you know, autonomy has come to mean autonomous systems, so even more lack of control. And then the other one has come to mean, you know, autonomy as this idea that you, as a kind of individual or as a kind of small group of individuals, take over the capacity to do everything for yourself. So again, it comes back to the kind of liberal notion of the individual very quickly, which is a shame and I think we need to kind of like push back against that and really develop some other understandings of autonomy, because usually what happens in the assumptions made about like being an autonomous individual, is that all your dependencies on other people and on the society and the natural environment around you, is repressed and ignored. And actually if we look at the conditions of, what does it mean to gain

more autonomy, usually you gain more autonomy by having even more interconnections and even more interdependencies around you. The more connections, the more interdependencies you have, the freer you actually are to move through an environment in a safe manner. So that's just a few thoughts on autonomy and I think the question between autonomy and... I personally think the cultural history of the word autonomy is perhaps easier for me to swallow than the history of the term sovereignty. But I think both of them have got some pretty vague, or are maybe not where we're headed or maybe we're trying to find something else.

And then there was also some questions or some comments about networks.

DAN: Before we jump into that Jaya, can I, this is a super gentle playful call-in of saying like, the watered down versions of autonomy aren't, if we're going to make an analogy, like not lame. And again this comes into the patterning of thoughts and what we bring to stuff, like we live in a deeply ableist, patriarchal, sexist, racist, white supremacist, kind of like, these are the conditions that we think in. But I was just going playfully go like, let's not use the metaphor of lame in that sense, because actually I think disability communities are again like, that's another realm where this kind of notion and sense of autonomy within frames of interdependence as not just a nice-to-have but as an absolute necessity to survive, inside a neoliberal survive, that as we can see in the middle of the pandemic, kind of treats some folks, often disabled folks, as expendable. So I'd say if anything, the watered down version of autonomy, if we wanted to use anything, is probably like, an abled, if you know what I mean.

JAYA: Sorry, thank you for that, Dan. Um, and then another really interesting discussion that's being had in the chat right now is on the relationship between land and networks. And I think there's so much there to talk about, both in a literal sense but also in terms of metaphors. So like, how useful various types of land metaphors are for talking about the network space. And personally sometimes I've found them to be useful, I did mention datascares earlier. But useful more in the sense of like, understanding environments somehow. I'm losing the thread here.

DAN: I'm going to do the thing that I do, which I don't know if it's exactly supporting what you're saying. So like, I saw something pop up in my feed, I was getting fed by the algorithm this like core sample from Stonehenge in the UK which, some really fucking big rocks that were prehistoric got moved quite a long way away. And the great mystery of kind of exactly where those big rocks had come from was solved by like a core sample. And this is a nice comparison, so there's also Aboriginal versions of Stonehenge, like in caves and elsewhere, where essentially the stories of those things are still known now. Whereas, although we know now where the rocks in Stonehenge have come from, as part of the datascape, we've still forgotten the knowledge of what the purpose of them was and why they're there. What made me think of that was a comment from magpie [in the chat] the Europeans alienated from their land for hundreds of years. And it's interesting thinking about networks as a knowledge... so I was thinking about, in relation, similar to you. Sorry if I totally missed the mark on that, it was maybe a moment where I was like, I have something to say and I'm not listening, I'm just going to say what was on my mind.

Time check, I don't know, we've got about maybe five more minutes and we have some news. But I don't know if you've got more to say?

JAYA: Well, I've got plenty more to say and I think we all do, and I would love to continue this conversation, this is kind of a major area of research and development of theory that I'm going to be going deeper into, so if anyone wants to join in on that journey, please do get in touch with me. I'll be gathering a lot of readings together and writing a bunch of texts and hopefully also having some more open discussions. So I think the interest for me is a broader political interest but also on a more practical level, in terms of the work that we're doing in Magma to like take some of these ideas further in terms of the tech. And I also just wanted to mention briefly - no, I'll leave it there. I think these are open questions. And yes, I'm going to hand over to Dan for our exciting news.

DAN: So as a segue now, can breathe, the kind of deep nuance and struggles that me and Jaya have been trying to wrestle with around this stuff. To loop back around - one, to thank you to the organisers. Martin, particularly, was very patient with me, I was the last person to respond to many gentle requests to please fill in the information so thank you to Martin and all the other organisers of the conference. And doing it in these times in the way that you have, it's great. And also to say thank you to the folks who have presented the other talks, one of which was our friends over at Cabal talking about the subject of moderation. [8]

So I thought I'd just take a moment to think about subjective moderation in Cabal, in relation to sovereignty, it's like a really very interesting social mechanism that's been deployed which actually is probably not best suited to state-based, top-down notions of we get to tell you, basically the Twitter or Facebook model of like a black box deciding and whatever. From a sovereign perspective, the capacity for people to individually decide for themselves what their view is, that kind of ticks the box from the property-owning conception of sovereignty, but it also bleeds over into more relational conceptions of sovereignty in the sense of, yes sure, people who are very committed to being totally independent, individual person, they can do that thing, but if you also want the collectivist approach of saying, Substack, Alex, Kira and essentially cloning their view of the network, the possibility for a relational perspective or view of the datascape isn't foreclosed. So I think the space that we're in and Dat is really ripe for these types of experiments and the nuances and complexities is exciting if we're willing to engage.

And the news that we have is, yesterday we packaged a Cobox release so I'm going to do a quick screenshare of what you can do in Cobox at the moment and maybe point you at a repost that you can try out. So I'm going to take the presenter role and... what's this button. Share your screen. Can you see Cobox?

Big thanks to Magpie in the chat, and Peg and Mu, Karissa, Kate, who've all contributed and Matt and Public Office over in Narrm.

So here we can see the view when you arrive into Cobox and essentially what we've created is shared folder spaces where you can invite friends to shared folders. So it's kind of a bit like multi-writer - it's not technically correct, but you can share a folder, it will be somewhat of a similar experience to Dropbox although more for the purposes of archiving. And so in the future we'll have Health, which will tell you who has your data, who has a copy of the data and where it is, so if here I go to delete... actually, what I'm looking here for is around this notion of sovereignty or conceptions of relationality, is that yes, I'm removing data from my

machine but it might still be on friends' or seeders'. So a seeder is kind of a link back to some of the origins of the underpinning technologies of that, such as Bittorrent, torrenting software, so here you've got seeders and within a seeder is essentially always-on peer that can, once you're in it - sorry I didn't set this, if Magpie is on, he can create me an admin account - so essentially the seeder can encrypt the copied seeds. So what I'd be able to do is, if I had a folder such as Magma, I'd be able to share the Cypher address, the Cobox folder address, and someone who's operating a seeder would be able to replicate the folder and it would be encrypted. So they would hold the data but they wouldn't be able to see it because they don't have write keys. The only people who have write keys are friends who you've invited into the folder.

The friends who are in the folder, everyone has a copy of what's in the folder itself, so these people are also seeding the data, but we've got this additional capacity where people can contribute to the uptime and the kind of replication and resilience of the dataset. So that's a foundational building block for in the future, if people want to, we've got some ideas about what a future of Cobox might look like that we're not 100 percent, it's an open area of discussion and development, an iteration within Magma.

And one of the things you'll notice here is that you're able to do all of this without any talk of a blockchain in sight. We're starting from kind of this initial principle that it's much easier to foundationally build a relational technology, where people are able to operate not purely along economic lines but maybe along principles of mutual aid, or interdependence, but that doesn't foreclose the possibility that in the future, you might be able to build some business models around it. If you want to learn more about Cobox, you can go here, and if you want to try it out, you can follow the readme instructions on server. If you get a bit lost in the many modules, you can go to our project-wide readme which will give you a map of the terrain, of the datascape.

That was a whistlestop tour, but thanks everyone for engaging, and that's a wrap. Thanks Jaya.

JAYA: Thanks Dan, thanks Martin.

### **53:14 ENDS**

[1] Magma Collective: <https://magmacollective.org>

[2] Dat <https://events.dat.foundation/2020/>

[3] CoBox: <https://cobox.cloud>

[4] LEDGER: <https://ledgerproject.eu/>

[5] Dark Crystal: <https://darkcrystal.pw/>

[6] Laniyuk, around 9mins 35 seconds in shares a story about Skin Names which is what Dan was referring to:

<https://www.3cr.org.au/spoken-word/episode-201807120900/spoken-word-laniyuk>

[7] The White Possessive; Property Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty by Aileen Moreton-Robinson: <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/the-white-possessive>

[8] Cabal's Subjective Moderation System:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z90QJl2ifmQ>