# Chapter 3
# Reconstructing the Recent Past on Wikipedia: The Vietnam War and September 11 attacks

In this chapter, I explore the articles on the Vietnam War and the September 11 attacks to examine how Wikipedians engage with history while they create historical narratives about the recent past. As I will show over the next few pages, Wikipedians approach the history of the Vietnam War and the September 11 attacks in a more personal and emotional way than in the articles relating to the Great Depression and the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This does not mean that these two articles are products of personal reflection. Instead, there is a combination of multiple methods and approaches that lead to the production of historical knowledge. However, the "talk pages" of these two case studies reveal that the more recent nature of the Vietnam War and the September 11 attacks encourages Wikipedians to express their personal memories and experiences, which they try to integrate into the historical narratives of the two articles. This is significant, as it shows how editors engage with a more recent event in US history, how they make sense of the past while they try to contribute to the production of historical knowledge, and which of their contributions end up in the main articles.

## The Vietnam War

A major traumatic event in modern US history is Vietnam War. The Wikipedia article on the Vietnam War was created in November 2001 and has been constantly edited ever since.[1] It has been ranked as a level-4 vital article in History, and was a "good article" nominee but it did not ultimately manage to meet the overall "good article criteria".[2] Several Wikiprojects have been involved in the editing of the article, such as the WikiProject Military History, WikiProject Cold War, WikiProject History, WikiProject Socialism, WikiProject Vietnam, WikiProject Soviet Union, WikiProject Russia, WikiProject Southeast Asia, WikiProject Laos, WikiProject United States, WikiProject United States History, and WikiPro-

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1 "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://xtools.wmflabs.org/articleinfo/en.wikipedia.org/Vietnam_War
2 "Talk:Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Vietnam_War

ject Australia.[3] The article is also supported by two further projects, the Wikipedia Version 1.0 Editorial Team, which aims to publish articles for offline use, and the Pritzker Military Library WikiProject, which is responsible for improving articles related to the Pritzker Military Museum & Library in Chicago.[4] All these WikiProjects have rated the article as a C-class article, which means that there is room for further improvement.[5]

The main article is very extensive and covers different aspects of the Vietnam War. It contains an introductory section and some information on the historical background of the war, and then multiple sections on the history of Vietnam and the United States from the 1950s to 1960s.[6] Like most Wikipedia articles, the page on the Vietnam War contains table boxes, which in this case detail the countries involved, dates and locations of battles, results, commanders and leaders, strength, casualties, and losses, several pictures, maps, short films, and at the end of the page an extensive bibliography.[7]

The "talk pages" that sit behind the main article are also very long and there have been frequent discussion posts since the initial creation of the article in 2001.[8] As in all the previous articles we have considered, the discussion here is both diverse and refers to several different topics. Nevertheless, there are some common themes to which the involved editors have paid more attention and have tended to focus their editing activity. The most popular topic of discussion relates to the "defeat" of the US in the Vietnam War. Some Wikipedians have expressed their doubts as to whether the war was a victory or a defeat; and, even if it was a defeat, whether it was then a military defeat or a political defeat.

In November 2006, the main article on the Vietnam War mentioned that the Vietnam War constituted a political defeat for the US and a military victory for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.[9] An anonymous user interpreted this statement as suggesting that the war was not only a political defeat for the US, but also

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**3** Ibid.

**4** Ibid. For these two projects, see "Wikipedia:Version 1.0 Editorial Team," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Version_1.0_Editorial_Team; "Wikipedia: GLAM/Pritzker," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia: GLAM/Pritzker

**5** "Talk:Vietnam War".

**6** "Vietnam War".

**7** Ibid.

**8** "Talk:Vietnam War".

**9** For the version of the article in early November 2006, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid= 87388601

a military defeat. On this point, the user then created a discussion thread titled "American Defeat?" in which they wrote:

> I notice the article once said "political defeat" and now "Political and military" defeat in the war box, US won every single engagement of the war apart from the earlier Vietcong vicotories [sic] that fueled the US intervention.[10]

Another user, "RM Gillespie," one of the top editors on the article with several awarded barnstars for their contributions relating to the Vietnam War, responded:

> Every single engagement of the war? Perhaps you have never heard of the fall of the Ashau SF border camp? Or the loss of Kham Duc – the largest American defeat of the conflict?[11]

While this debate was taking place, the involved editors were editing the article on the Vietnam War.[12] On December 28, 2006, the user "Cripipper," a significant editor of the article with several contributions, edited the result of the Vietnam War in the inbox of the article and added that the war was both a "political defeat for the U.S". and a "strategic military defeat for the U.S".[13]

However, on the discussion page the debate continued. More and more users were taking part in the discussion. For some editors, the war was a political defeat for the US and a military defeat for the South Vietnam.[14] For other editors, the reunification of North and South Vietnam under a communist regime and the withdrawal of US troops signified both a political and military defeat.[15] The user "Corporaljohny" argued in a comment that the withdrawal of US military forces from the Vietnam War did not signify a military defeat but a political one, as it was a result of Congress pulling military funding.[16] This user did not only leave their comment on the discussion page, but also then deleted the sentence "strate-

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**10** "Talk:Vietnam War/Archive 6," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Vietnam_War/Archive_6#American_Defeat
**11** Ibid. For the profile page of the user "RM Gillespie," see "User:RM Gillespie," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:RM_Gillespie
**12** For the revision history of the page between November 2006 and January 2007, see "Vietnam War: Revision history," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&dir=prev&offset=20061109120123%7C86697610&limit=500&action=history
**13** For the version of the article after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=96912331
**14** "Talk:Vietnam War/Archive 6".
**15** Ibid.
**16** Ibid.

gic military defeat for the U.S". from the infobox of the main article.[17] After some days, "Cripipper" intervened again and added the following line to the infobox, suggesting that the Vietnam War had resulted in a "political and strategic defeat for the U.S".[18] On the discussion page, "Cripipper" also directly replied to "Corporaljohny" by making the comment below:

> U.S. troops were not withdrawn because of Congress pulling the funding for them. They were withdrawn as part of Nixon's "Vietnamization" plan.[19]

Following the same line of thinking, another user, "Heavy Metal Cellist," added:

> Congress withdrew funding because everyone had realized that the war was a stalemate, and that the US wasn't winning. Consensus has already been reached on this issue; the war was a strategic defeat as well. I have corrected the battlebox to the status of the war that we agreed on back in December.[20]

The involved users made some more posts on the "talk page," but the main article did not receive any more editing changes.

Around the same time, another anonymous user created a related discussion thread titled "Political defeat for US (?)," in which the user expressed their strong opposition to the characterization of the US defeat as "political".[21] This user made the following comments:

> I notice this article refers to the war as being a "political defeat" for the U.S. A number of commentators these days refer to the U.S. defeat as "political," and not military as well. I do not believe this is the case. Make no mistake, this war was a military defeat for the U.S. Just because the VC didn't follow the Western "rules" of classic military conflict doesn't mean that they didn't prevail militarily. Guerrilla warfare is every bit as valid a form of war as any classic Western military doctrine. [. . .] Additionally, if you're going to label this war as a "political," and not military defeat for the U.S., then you could really say the same for many other wars throughout history. For example, you could say that the German defeat in World War I was a "political" defeat (as strikes and political turbulence on their homefront played a major role in their defeat). Same thing goes for World War II. If Hitler had simply allowed his generals to run the war and had not meddled, then the Germans would have probably prevailed.[22]

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**17**  For the version of the article after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=98702739

**18**  For the version of the article after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=98856916

**19**  "Talk:Vietnam War/Archive 6".

**20**  Ibid.

**21**  "Talk:Vietnam War/Archive 6".

**22**  Ibid.

For this user, the article misrepresented the outcome of the Vietnam War and followed a biased, Western-centric point of view, which goes against the main principles of Wikipedia. The comment motivated other editors to engage with this issue and write down their own interpretations. The user "Dan4J" agreed with the anonymous user's statement and asked the involved editors to review this position.[23] Another user intervened and argued:

> No matter what you do, no matter how you want to lable [sic] it, when you leave, you lose. Period. If not emotionally attached, it should not be a difficult concept to understand.[24]

This user, "Factus," made an interesting point. They argued that the use of the term "political defeat" to describe the result of the Vietnam War reveals an emotional bond with the conflict and makes it clear that the history of the Vietnam War is not represented neutrally on the Wikipedia page. As shown in the first chapter, emotions and personal points of view do not comply with Wikipedia guidelines and policies. For "Factus," the use of "political defeat" signifies an emotional attachment to the past that favors the US position on the war and does not present a balanced historical narrative.

At the same time, a similar discussion thread appeared on the "talk page" with the title "Strategic Military Defeat for the US?" in which some users argued that the Vietnam War was a "political loss" but not a military one, as the US won all the related battles.[25] Other editors intervened in the discussion and the debate continued. Their arguments were very similar to those mentioned above. Meanwhile, on January 13, 2007, the user "Hanzohattori" edited the article and removed the line that the Vietnam War was a "political and strategic defeat for the U.S" from the infobox.[26] Thus, the article included only that the war signified a "military victory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam over Republic of Vietnam forces in 1975".[27] There were no references to the US. A few days later, the user "Cripipper" edited the article again and added a line designating the war as a "political defeat for United States".[28]

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**23** Ibid.

**24** Ibid.

**25** "Talk:Vietnam War/Archive 7," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Vietnam_War/Archive_7#Strategic_Military_defeat_for_the_US

**26** For the version of the article after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=100493932

**27** Ibid.

**28** For the version of the article after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=104626199

However, the debate did not end there. Some months later, a discussion thread titled "The outcome was not simply 'Defeat for the US and Allies'," appeared on the "talk page" of the article, continuing the debate about whether the result of the Vietnam War was a military or political defeat.[29] An anonymous user tried to explain that the Vietnam War could not be regarded and represented as a military defeat, as the US had managed to accomplish all its objectives.[30] That statement provoked several reactions from other editors, who intervened in the discussion. The user "Mmx1" expressed their disagreement, arguing:

> And what is the difference between military defeat and political defeat? The purpose of military force is to serve political ends. Whether South Vietnam fell because of the generals or politicians is irrelevant; in the end NVA tanks were still rolling through Saigon. Calling it a "tactical" victory may let you pat yourself on the back for a job well done but it's irrelevant if it fails to uphold our strategic aims – which it did.[31]

Another user, "I stand on land," replied:

> Military objectives are not always the same as political ones. Our far reaching political objective was the securing of the area to stem the spread of communism. The military objective of the Vietnam war was to stop the North Vietnamese forces from overrunning South Vietnam. The military objectives were on a tactical and strategic level, and once completed, were counted successful. Tactically, we were successful until we felt it no longer necessary to hold a military presence. There's no rationale to suggest that the military was anything but successful until the disengagement; the point at which it was determined the objectives were met. By the logic in the last paragraph, the US lost world war I because we did not politically create stability in Germany.[32]

The debate continued with more Wikipedia users getting involved in the discussion and expressing their own historical understandings about the outcome of the Vietnam War. While these discussions were taking place, several editors again started to edit the main article on the Vietnam War and, more specifically, the infobox within the article.[33] On May 10, 2007, the user "El C" removed the term "political"

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**29** "Talk:Vietnam War/Archive 9," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Vietnam_War/Archive_9#The_outcome_was_not_simply_%22Defeat_for_the_US_and_Allies%22

**30** Ibid.

**31** Ibid.

**32** Ibid.

**33** For the revision history of the page between May and June 2007, see "Vietnam War: Revision history," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&dir=prev&offset=20070416071040%7C123189569&limit=500&action=history

from "United States defeat".[34] Thus, the article then simply mentioned that the Vietnam War had resulted in the "United States defeat". A few days later, the user "Kobalt64" added that the outcome of the Vietnam War was a "decisive defeat of United States and allied armed forces".[35] One hour after this, the user "Hughstew," the top editor of the article and a holder of a Master's degree in History, as mentioned on their profile page, deleted the term "decisive" and changed the sentence to "defeat of United States and Allies".[36] On May 19, the user "I stand on land," made a radical change to the article. They added to the infobox that the outcome of the Vietnam War was a "strategic defeat for US and Allies" and a "tactical victory for US and Allies".[37] Immediately, the user "Sohelpme" deleted the "tactical victory for US and Allies" from the infobox and changed the result into "overall defeat for US and Allies".[38] One day later, on May 20, 2007, the user "Hughstew" removed the term "overall" from the "defeat," claiming that this term did not make any sense.[39] The editing of the article continued, and on June 3, 2007, the user "kaliqx" added the term "political" to the "defeat for the US and Allies" and mentioned that the Vietnam War also resulted in the "withdrawal of American military personnel".[40] The next day, the user "Hughstew" removed the term "political" by claiming that the use of the word "political" was biased and represented a "POV".[41] The same user also argued that the official history of the US army does not present that view. One day later, the user "kaliqx" once again made an edit, this time deleting the

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34  For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=129729089

35  For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=131467469

36  For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=131475001 For the profile page of the user, see "User:Hughstew," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Hughstew For the top editors of the page, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://xtools.wmflabs.org/articleinfo/en.wikipedia.org/Vietnam_War

37  For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=131946032

38  For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=132067371

39  For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=132139246

40  For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=135510565

41  For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=135737888

whole sentence "Defeat for the US and Allies".[42] A few hours later, the user "Hugh-stew" removed the edit and reverted the older version of the article.[43] On June 12, 2007, the user "Onetwo1" removed the whole sentence "Defeat for the US and Allies" and the debate ended here for a while.[44]

Over time, however, the debate about the result of the Vietnam War resumed and the Wikipedia page continued to receive frequent changes right up until the current version of the page. Since 2007, the article's infobox does not have any reference to whether the Vietnam War was a defeat, military or political, for the United States. In 2011, in a discussion thread named "Not Stating USA was defeated is POV," several Wikipedians argued that the lack of reference to the defeat of the US in the Vietnam War constituted a clear violence of POV, as the US did not manage to achieve their objectives.[45] Other Wikipedians replied that the US did not lose the war, as American forces left before the defeat of the South Vietnamese.[46] The debate about the outcome of the Vietnam War did not continue any further. Now, the current version of the article includes a reference which states that the Vietnam War resulted in a "North Vietnamese and Viet Cong/PRG victory," the "withdrawal of U.S. coalition's forces from Vietnam," "Communist forces tak[ing] power in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos," the "Reunification of Vietnam," the "Start of the boat people and refugee crises," and the "Start of the Cambodian genocide and the third Indochina War".[47]

The example above is a sample from a long and extensive debate about whether the war resulted in either a military or a political defeat for the US. The conflicts between Wikipedia users in relation to this topic were not only about how a historical event should be represented on Wikipedia, but also how the involved editors should deal with a traumatic historical event and present it in a balanced and neutral way, as Wikipedia guidelines require. On the one hand, some editors could not accept the notion of a US defeat in Vietnam, so they saw the practice of editing as a chance to change or re-examine what had happened in the past. On the other hand, some editors followed Wikipedia's guidelines

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42 For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=136274067

43 For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=136516693

44 For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=137640001

45 "Talk:Vietnam War/Archive 18," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Vietnam_War/Archive_18#Not_stating_USA_was_defeated_is_POV

46 Ibid.

47 "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War

more closely, engaged with academic works, and tried to represent the history of the war in a non-biased way. Ultimately, for those on both sides, Wikipedia becomes a space where history does not belong to the past but is always present and negotiable. Wikipedia gives the public the opportunity to not only narrate the past, but also to reconstruct and perform it.[48]

In the last decades, several studies have examined the neutrality of Wikipedia's contents and many have criticized Wikipedia for its perceived gender bias and the lack of content about women. As was also shown in the case of the Great Depression, these critiques have forced Wikipedia editors to pay more attention to gender-related issues and to ensure that Wikipedia's contents is more inclusive. A relevant incident took place on the "talk page" of the Vietnam War article, where one user, "Goldsphinx," wrote:

> Hello! As part of a gender equity project for my college course, I would like to add a section to the Vietnam War article entitled "American Women in Vietnam". While the existing article as a whole is very rich in detail, I think that Wikipedia users would benefit from my contribution. After conducting extensive research, I have prepared a section that I feel is appropriate. The section includes information about the jobs that women held in Vietnam while on active duty and also briefly explores the dynamics between men and women serving in Vietnam. I feel the addition of a women's section would complement the existing article and provide a more complete picture of the Vietnam War.[49]

In the framework of collaboration between Wikipedia and educational institutions, this user wanted to share their project on the role of American women in the Vietnam War.[50] In this way, the user thought that they could contribute to the development of the article and make the coverage of the topic even more inclusive by adding a section on a neglected area pertaining to the conflict. However, not all users agreed with that suggestion. Another user, "Owain the 1st," replied:

> Why just American women? Not going to bother with Vietnamese women? I do not agree with just a section for American women. If you want to put a section in about women then include them all or do not bother. This article already suffers from too much from the American side and does not need any more I believe.[51]

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**48** On the performative dimension of the past, see J. Winter, "The Performance of the Past: Memory, History, Identity," in *Performing the Past. Memory, History and Identity in Europe*, ed. K. Tilmans, F. van Vree, and J. Winter (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 11–23; Jerome de Groot, "Invitation to Historians," *Rethinking History* 18 (2014): 599–612.

**49** "Talk:Vietnam War/Archive 19," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Vietnam_War/Archive_19

**50** On the collaboration between Wikipedia and academia, see Ramjohn and Davis, "Equity, Policy, and Newcomers".

**51** "Talk:Vietnam War/Archive 19".

Goldsphinx, I would suggest that you place the material here on the talk page so that we may see what you are talking about.
≫–Berean–Hunter–► ((☉)) 18:56, 27 April 2011 (UTC)

> Not only that, but if it's original research it might not belong here.Intothatdarkness (talk) 20:04, 27 April 2011 (UTC)

>> Not only that, but the mention of "active duty" suggests that this is limited to American Women serving in the military. I'm not female, but I spent the years of '64-'72 in Vietnam as a US govt contractor and can observe from my experience there (though I can't presently cite reliable supporting sources for this) that a fair number of nonmilitary women from the US and elsewhere also spent time in Vietnam in various capacities during the VN War years. Wtmitchell (talk) (earlier *Boracay Bill*) 09:39, 28 April 2011 (UTC)

>>> Quite so. You had women from the Red Cross, USO, USAID I think had some, embassy staff, and missionaries working in SVN, and that's just from the US.Intothatdarkness (talk) 14:31, 28 April 2011 (UTC)

**Figure 18:** Screenshot of discussion, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk: Vietnam_War/Archive_19.

An interesting dialogue then followed this comment, in which several users expressed their own thoughts about a potential section on the role of women in the Vietnam War (Figure 18).

The user "Wtmitchell," who is one of the top editors of the article, used their own personal memory from their involvement in the Vietnam War to confirm that several nonmilitary American women took part in the war.[52] It is interesting that, on the one hand, Wikipedia editors use academic secondary sources to provide a balanced and impartial historical narrative on the Vietnam War, and, on the other hand, their own personal experiences are also present in the discussion and often determine how they approach history. It is even more interesting, in this case, that the other involved users seemed to be convinced by the comments from "Wtmitchell". Specifically, they made the following replies in the discussion thread (Figure 19).

> If this can be written in a NPOV manner and covers all sides of the story then yes (but it might be better as a seperate lined articel.Slatersteven (talk) 14:39, 28 April 2011 (UTC)

I realize that women held a variety of positions during the Vietnam War, and that they all deserve to be covered. However, my hope is that my addition to this article may serve as a starting place to open up discussion rather than act as an end-all authority. I now see that my title may be misleading- my section is specifically about female nurses serving in Vietnam, so I will change the title to clarify this. As for the role that Vietnamese women played in the war, I agree that it too is deserving of recognition. However, as I am not an expert on Vietnamese women, I will leave it to others better informed than myself to make their own contributions regarding this topic. Goldsphinx (talk) 16:12, 28 April 2011 (UTC)

> Great! Show us what you've got.
> ≫–Berean–Hunter–► ((☉)) 16:17, 28 April 2011 (UTC)

>> If you want to put your piece in then go ahead but title it like women in the Vietnam war or something like that then people can add stuff about Vietnamese women as well.Good luck.Owain the 1st (talk) 16:19, 28 April 2011 (UTC)

**Figure 19:** Screenshot of discussion, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk: Vietnam_War/Archive_19.

As a result, the user "Goldsphinx" attached a section on American Nurses in Vietnam accompanied by a short bibliography. Other users then gave feedback to

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**52** For the top editors of the article, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://xtools.wmflabs.org/articleinfo/en.wikipedia.org/Vietnam_War

"Goldsphinx," made comments on their work, and suggested improvements to the length, prose, and structure of the proposed section. Finally, on April 28, 2011, once the relevant discussions had reached their conclusion, all the involved editors created a section titled "Women in Vietnam," to which they added "Goldsphinx" piece.[53] The editors did not stop at this point, however; they continued to investigate the topic. In the next two days, they added a further piece on the participation of Vietnamese women in the war, which was then gradually developed over time.[54] A few years later, the editors also added one more subsection on the role of women journalists, who had been reporting the war.[55]

In the examples analyzed above, Wikipedia functions as a digital space where Wikipedians can share their memories and experiences about the Vietnam War. At the same time, Wikipedia becomes a place where users can cite the academic works that they have read in relation to the topic and make historical arguments based on their sources. The coexistence of personal memories and lived experiences of the recent past with secondary sources challenges the general perception of Wikipedia and its contents as being exclusively the result of secondary research. Instead, it complicates the process of historical knowledge production. It is, however, evident that the transformation of discussion topics on the "talk pages" into the sort of historical knowledge that is then presented in the main articles goes through a process of gatekeeping, in which some more experienced editors check the validity of the proposed edits and then confirm or reject them.

As shown above, certain users aimed to change the historical narrative about the Vietnam War as it was represented in the main article. They shared their interpretations and understandings of this historical event and tried to convince fellow Wikipedians that their points merited inclusion on the main page. Wikipedia blurs the famous distinction of Hayden White between the "practical past" and the "historical past".[56] According to White, the "historical past" is the past historians try to study scientifically, while the "practical past" is the past as a space

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**53** For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=426408049#Women_in_Vietnam

**54** For the version of the page after the edit, see "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&oldid=426803808#Women_in_Vietnam For the revision history of the article during April and May 2011, see "Vietnam War: Revision history," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vietnam_War&offset=20110519085733%7C429851833&limit=500&action=history

**55** See the current version of the article: "Vietnam War," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War

**56** Hayden White, "The Practical Past," *Historein* 10 (2010): 10–19; Hayden White, "Politics, History and the Practical Past," *Storia della Storiografia* 61 (2012): 127–34.

of experience. The latter has practical and political use in the present. On Wikipedia, there is a dialogue between the "practical" and the "historical" past. The two pasts are not in conflict but coexist and determine users' engagement with history and the production of historical knowledge. Of course, in the "talk pages," there is an emphasis on the "practical past," the aspects of the past which most users are interested in and tend to bring into the discussion. Meanwhile, in the main article, there is the "historical past," which is the product of discussions, debates, guidelines, policies, and historical arguments. Nevertheless, both pages are in a constant dialogue. They redefine each other. Edits in the main article provoke debates, and these debates typically result in further edits. The debates force users to intervene in the discussion and share their personal experiences. These experiences often become the starting point for further research via secondary works that then help users to shape their own historical arguments and reconstruct the past according to Wikipedia's guidelines. In the "talk page" relating to the Vietnam War article, personal memories and experiences from the past blend with users' interpretations of various secondary sources and define Wikipedians' efforts to produce historical narratives about the subject.

## The September 11 attacks

The September 11 attacks are widely acknowledged as some of the most traumatic events in modern US history. The main Wikipedia entry relating to these events was initially created on November 11, 2001, and has been constantly updated ever since.[57] The Wikipedia community lists the article as a "level-4 vital article in History".[58] The article is also part of multiple WikiProjects, such as the WikiProject International Relations, WikiProject Islam, WikiProject Military History, WikiProject Terrorism, WikiProject United States, WikiProject United States History, etc.[59] There is a separate WikiProject that focuses on the September 11 attacks, the WikiProject September 11, 2001.[60] Regarding the rating of the article, it is a "former featured article" and has been listed as a "History good article".[61] The article has

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**57**  "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://xtools.wmflabs.org/articleinfo/en.wikipedia.org/September_11_attacks

**58**  "Talk:September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:September_11_attacks

**59**  Ibid.

**60**  Ibid.

**61**  Ibid. For "History good articles," see "Wikipedia:Good articles/History," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Good_articles/History

also appeared ten times in the report about the top twenty-five Wikipedia articles of the week.[62]

The main article offers extensive coverage of the attacks. Its contents include some more general information on the historical context in which these events took place, and there are more specialized sections on the attacks themselves, the aftermath, the effects, the subsequent investigations, the memorials, etc.[63] Images, videos, and graphs coexist and contribute to the coverage of the September 11 attacks.[64] An interesting characteristic of the main article is that almost every section has a hyperlink to a separate article that analyzes that particular topic more extensively. For example, the section on the attacks themselves has a link to the Wikipedia article "Timeline for the day of the September 11 attacks," and the section on the memorials for the 9/11 attacks has a link to the article "Memorials and services for the September 11 attacks".[65] This shows how extensively the editors have analyzed the topic and how they have created separate articles in which they provide more detailed coverage of each related sub-topic. The discussion page of the article is the longest of all the other examined case studies, which is probably because the 9/11 attacks belong to the recent past and, therefore, more people have lived experiences of that day. The article covers multiple topics. Two of the most frequently discussed topics, which I will analyze in this section, are whether the September 11 attacks were terrorist acts or not, and whether personal memories and experiences about the 9/11 attacks should have a place in the article.[66]

Following the initial creation of the article, the editors started to discuss what terrorism is more generally, what potentially made these attacks terroristic, and, more importantly, whether these attacks truly were acts of terrorism. This happened because the very first sentence of the main page mentioned that the September 11 attacks constituted "the deadliest terrorist attack in human history".[67] Many users

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**62** "Talk:September 11 attacks". For the top 25 report, see "Wikipedia:Top 25 Report," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Top_25_Report

**63** "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks

**64** Ibid.

**65** Ibid.

**66** There was also extensive discussion of the conspiracy theories related to the 9/11 attacks, which I could not include in this section. This discussion soon resulted in the creation of a separate Wikipedia article, see "9/11 conspiracy theories," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/9/11_conspiracy_theories

**67** For the version of the article in September 2002, see "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&oldid=343551

Can anyone think of deadlier terrorist attacks? I have trouble imagining one. Wars, battles, and government-driven massacres have killed more people in one day, but nothing that could be reasonably described as a terrorist incident. Correct? --The Cunctator

I think that it may go to the definition of "terrorist", which is notoriously problematic. Are government-driven massacres terrorist attacks? I'm inclined to say that they are, since a major purpose is to instill fear in the remaining population; "state terrorism" is not an oxymoron to me. Others will disagree, of course. So in any case, in order to be impartial on the state terrorism issue, we would have to say "deadliest non-state terrorist incident".

I made the change when I did specifically because I realised that I no longer saw US news media describing the attack as the worst ever, only as the worst in the US. Perhaps they were simply being cautious, but should we not be as cautious? Ultimately, I think that the burden of proof rests on those making the claim, and I didn't see any attempt to justify it on the talk page; if I had, I'd have added to that discussion first. But I may have missed something, so let me know.

— Toby 01:55 Sep 29, 2002 (UTC)

> Unless you can provide an example of a deadlier terrorist attack, I am reverting it to deadliest in the "world". --rmhermen

I can't imagine why you think the burden of proof lies with *me*. It would be one thing if most other sources agreed with you. But they don't; outside of right-wing literature, I usually see only phrases like "deadliest terrorist attack in US history" or "deadliest act of terrorism on US soil". It would be one thing if I were saying ‹What most people think that they know isn't necessarily so.›. But I'm not; instead, you're the one that's advocating a stronger statement than the other media are making.

In an attempt to do your research for you, I looked for historical surveys of terrorist incidents with death tolls, as well as for examples of deadlier terrorist incidents. I found nothing useful either way. So perhaps the other news media simply don't know. Well, fine, but we don't know either. We can't just make up information since we suspect that it goes one way rather than the other. Since you are advocating making claims that you don't know to be true, while I am not, I say that *you* should provide a reference to a comprehensive survey that ranks this attack deadliest *before* putting such a phrase in. This is nothing more than simple intellectual integrity, on the part of all of us.

— Toby 06:02 Oct 29, 2002 (UTC)

[…]

"Some people claim that it was the deadliest terrorist attack in the world."

> Can somebody point me to a deadlier terrorist attack that ever took place? --mav

depends on your definition of terrorism im sure...Vera Cruz

> Exactly. And on what you consider a single attack. And on whether you consider indirect deaths as counting. Perhaps "many people" would be more acceptable? -Martin

> Based on our own definition at terrorism. --mav

I'll go check out our definition, but for a discussion of deadlier attacks, Noam Chomsky, for example, argues⤢ that the attack on the Sudanese pharmaceutical plant had a far greater death toll in total, so it depends on your definition of terrorism and how you count the deaths. (3 edit conflicts so far.) DanKeshet

> > "Terrorism refers to the systemic or calculated use of violence or the threat of violence, against the civilian population, to instill fear in an audience for purposes of obtaining political goals"

> > The holocaust would do then. Note that terrorism has an entire section on "Problems with the definition"... -Martin

> > > Using this definition, Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing, was the greatest terrorist attacks (calculated use of violence against the civilian population, to instill fear in an audience of obtaining political goals) 62.212.110.113 10:29 4 Jul 2003 (UTC)

**Figure 20:** Screenshots of discussion, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:September_11_attacks/Archive_2.

took part in the discussion and tried to find other deadly terrorist attacks that had taken place in human history and to understand why the September 11 attacks were considered to be the deadliest according to Wikipedia. I cite a few examples from those discussions here (Figure 20).

These excerpts are only part of a more extensive discussion; however, they are representative of how certain Wikipedia users had started to make sense of the September 11 attacks, examining whether they were the deadliest attacks in human history and what particular features made the attacks terrorist in nature. In doing so, the users were trying to better understand the attacks and,

perhaps more significantly, to decide on how these events should be represented in the article. To better codify what happened in the past, the users compared the September 11 attacks to other contemporary events in US history.

In January 2004, another discussion started on the "talk page" of the main article and focused on whether the word "terrorism" constituted a point of view (POV). At that time, the article had as its sub-title "The September 11, 2001 Terrorist Attacks".[68] As such, several users started to discuss whether this term was appropriate for the historical representation of 9/11, or if it potentially violated Wikipedia's position on neutrality. Specifically, the user "Kingsturtle" wrote:

> Yes, the events of September 11, 2001 were heinous [sic] and caused great pain and hardship. Nevertheless, the term terrorist is POV. The definition changes through time, and can be debated. President Reagan said it best: "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter". He said this when defending the actions of people he supported who were accused of being terrorists. Terrible acts of this kind that you support, you can call freedom fighting. The word terrorist can only exist with a POV. I realize it is difficult to change all the related pages, but they should really all be renamed September 11, 2001 attacks. P.S. No, I do not think the attackers were freedom fighters. But I don't think they were terrorists either. Terrorist is a label placed.[69]

For this user, the term "terrorism" signified a POV, so the editors should avoid it. Other users responded to that comment and took part in the discussion (Figure 21).

OK, so what what would you call the ,er, attackers? And , also, what would your definition of the word *terrorist* be? Arno

This is bizarre--I've never actually heard anyone (outside Wikipedia) argue that they *weren't* terrorists. Purposely killing civilians on a large scale is a fairly canonical example of terrorism. I've heard people claim that the terrorism was *justified*, but never that it wasn't terrorism at all. --Delirium 20:01, 15 Jan 2004 (UTC)

Do we want to change Bombing of Dresden in World War II to Terrorist bombing of Dresden in World War II? The Fellowship of the Troll 22:49, 16 Jan 2004 (UTC)
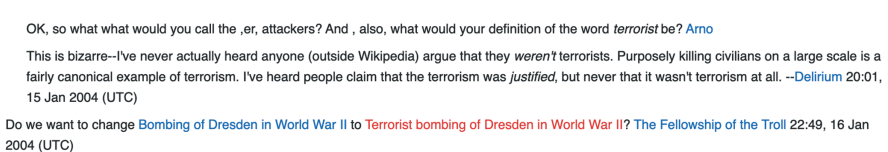
**Figure 21:** Screenshot of discussion, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:September_11_attacks/Archive_2.

The other involved users did not seem to agree with the suggestion by "Kingsturtle". For some of them, it was more than obvious that the attacks were acts of terrorism, while others compared the 9/11 attacks with other historical events of the past in order to show that the term could be equally applied to other examples. The discussion continued, as more and more users began to take part on the "talk page" to discuss whether these were "terrorist" attacks, and, even if they

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**68**  "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&oldid=2072923
**69**  "Talk:September 11 attacks/Archive 2".

You may not move this page w/o moving the associated talk page and fixing the many double redirects linking to the new article. Why singular, not plural? The phrase "September 11, 2001 Terrorist Attacks" is the overwhelming convention used. Please make your case before moving and move it properly if you do, or it will be moved back again. --Jiang 23:26, 14 Jan 2004 (UTC)

> See above. "Terrorist" has taken on an inherently negative meaning, just like the word "murder". It is not a simple technical term. If we were to talk about "Israeli terrorism" when Israel bombs civilian centres in the occupied territories, people would object too. So please move it back. --Wik 14:52, Jan 15, 2004 (UTC)

I don't see why that's a problem. Murdering an office-building full of civilians is a canonical example of terrorism. The fact that that has inherently negative connotations is hardly surprising, as most people consider killing civilian inhabitants of an office building an inherently bad thing. Are you going to argue that we can't say Charles Manson had anything to do with murder now, because that would be characterizing him in an inherently negative way? Should we neutrally say that he caused the lives of some people to end? --Delirium 19:58, 15 Jan 2004 (UTC)

> We can't pass off moral judgments as fact, even if they are held by "most people". Some people do justify those attacks, so we can't use language that implies condemnation. Those who justify it don't call it terrorism. If this article is not moved, anyone might as well describe Israeli or U.S. military actions as (state) terrorism. Remember the U.S. killed some 3,000 civilians in Afghanistan alone, and an additional 10,000 in Iraq. --Wik 20:56, Jan 15, 2004 (UTC)

> So we can't call Charles Manson a murderer either, because that implies condemnation? I don't see the difference. In this case, it's held by *nearly all people*. Even Iran calls it "terrorism" (they imply the US brought it on itself, but still use the term "terrorism"). "State terrorism", by contrast, is far more controversial. --Delirium 21:48, 15 Jan 2004 (UTC)

> > We are to report facts, not make moral judgments. Why call Charles Manson a murderer and not George W. Bush, who is responsible for many more killings? We should only report factually who killed whom, and let the readers make their own moral judgment. --Wik 22:17, Jan 15, 2004 (UTC)

What do those who disagree with the label "terrorist" call these attacks then? I don't see how these attacks don't meet *our* definition of terrorism - "calculated use of violence or the threat of violence, against the civilian population, usually for the purpose of obtaining political or religious goals." --Jiang 21:46, 15 Jan 2004 (UTC)

> Simply "attacks". The title "September 11, 2001 Attacks" is absolutely sufficient and unambiguous. I think "our" definition of terrorism is incomplete, missing the inherent negativism. The term is not used in this merely technical sense; the actual "terrorists" rarely see themselves as "terrorists". --Wik 22:17, Jan 15, 2004 (UTC)

Al-Jazeera uses "terrorist" [4]⟶. Can you show me links of how the Arab/leftist media refers to these attacks? Here's Merriam-Webster's definition: "the systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion" and terror: "1 : a state of intense fear 2 a : one that inspires fear : SCOURGE b : a frightening aspect <the terrors of invasion> c : a cause of anxiety : WORRY d : an appalling person or thing; especially : BRAT 3 : REIGN OF TERROR 4 : violence (as bombing) committed by groups in order to intimidate a population or government into granting their demands <insurrection and revolutionary terror>" What's wrong with this definition? --Jiang 23:03, 15 Jan 2004 (UTC)

> Well, many don't use the word "terrorist". Just do a Google search for "September 11 attacks". What's wrong with the definition is that it misses the fact that people only call those actions terrorism that they want to condemn and not those that they support. I wouldn't mind if we were to use your definition consistently, but I have a feeling you may be the first to protest when Israeli or U.S. actions were to be described as terrorist. --Wik 23:39, Jan 15, 2004 (UTC)

Sure many people don't use the word "terrorist", but more people do. I would like us to use a term commonly used elsewhere. Proof that the other name is common must be given.

Whenever a state's action is deemed 'terrorist', we *should* acknowledge the claim that it is state terrorism. I find it only derogatory for states to be "terrorist" when they have armed forces at their disposal, removing the necessity to attack civilian targets to make their voice heard. Calling an organization "terrorist" only has negative connotations in that attacking and frightening civilians is wrong, not because the word is obscene or innaccurate. --Jiang 01:41, 16 Jan 2004 (UTC)

**Figure 22:** Screenshot of discussion, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk: September_11_attacks/Archive_2.

were, whether the article should use the term "terrorist" in its sub-title. This following excerpt from the discussion is indicative of certain users' arguments (Figure 22).

The discussion went on, focusing more on the use of the term "terrorist" in the sub-title of the article. It is interesting to note that, even though most involved editors believed that the attacks constituted acts of terrorism, there was uncertainty about whether the article should start by highlighting the terrorist nature of these events. As a result, a poll was created by the users concerning the use of the word "terrorist" in the sub-title of the article. Many users voted, and the result

of the poll suggested that the article should refer to the attacks as simply "September 11, 2001 attacks".[70] Several users then clarified that this did not mean that the attacks were not terrorist acts, but that they did not believe it made any sense to begin the article in this way.[71] At the end of January 2004, the term "terrorist" was removed from the introductory sentence of the article.[72]

The debate did not end at this point, however; it continued over the next few months. Even though the sub-title remained in the form that the users had voted on, several other users also attempted to remove the term "terrorist" from the introductory section of the article. Other users then responded to that action by added it in again.[73] On March 14, 2004, the user "KingTurtle" removed the term "terrorist" from the introduction and, the next day, the user "Cecropia" reversed this edit. As the users could not reach a consensus on this matter, they created a discussion thread on the "talk page" named "Deleting Terrorist".[74] The following discussion then took place (Figure 23).

This is just a part of the discussion that followed, but it is representative of why the users could not reach consensus about the use of that term. Some editors were trying to follow the guidelines of Wikipedia about the NPOV, so for them the term "terrorist" was not neutral and signified a violation of the NPOV. For others, the 9/11 attacks were terrorist attacks, so the representation of this "truth" cannot be a POV. By the end of the discussion, the article continued to contain the term "terrorist" in its introductory description.

A few months later, in November 2004, the discussion about "terrorism" started again on the "talk page" and became more intense, when the user "Rebroad" edited the article and added the term "Freedom fighter" close to the term

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**70** "Talk:September 11 attacks/Archive 3," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:September_11_attacks/Archive_3#Article_Title

**71** Ibid.

**72** For how the article was at the end of January 2004, see "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&oldid=2290545 For the revision history of the article in January 2004, see "September 11 attacks: Revision history," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&dir=prev&limit=500&action=history and "September 11 attacks: Revision history," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&dir=prev&offset=20040116211858%7C2168401&limit=500&action=history

**73** For the revision history of the article from January to March 2004, while these "edit wars" were taking place, see "September 11 attacks: Revision history," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&dir=prev&offset=20040116211858%7C2168401&limit=500&action=history

**74** "Talk:September 11 attacks/Archive 7," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:September_11_attacks/Archive_7

### Deleting terrorist

I'm surprised at KingTurtle, an admin, removing the word "terrorist" from the description of the 9/11 attacks as POV. I don't even think the terrorists themselves think the attacks (at least the 3000 non-combtanat civilians killed in the WTC attack) weren't terror attacks. What were they then. If these attacks aren't terrorist we should simply delete the entry under terrorism in Wikipedia, and give it a REDIRECT to newspeak. Cecropia 00:28, 15 Mar 2004 (UTC)

> I totally support your revert. If premeditated mass murder of innocent civilians isn't terrorism, nothing is. You are correct that Al Qaeda itself views 9/11 as terrorism-- a somehow justified terrorism. If KingTurtle wants to join them in sanctioning it he is free to do so, but he shouldn't turn language upside down in the process. JDG 02:11, 15 Mar 2004 (UTC)

>> The word terrorist was removed from the title of this article and it should be removed from the first paragraph of the article as well. The word terrorist is POV, IMHO. You ask me *what were they then* and my reply is they were attacks. Why do we need any adjective in front of the word "attacks"? The people working on the terrorism article can't come up with an easy definition of the term. The word is loaded with meanings and submeanings. Kingturtle 02:30, 15 Mar 2004 (UTC)

>>> Therefore you think that maybe they weren't terrorist attacks? The fact isn't POV, only the label is. So you think a NPOV encyclopedia should avoid an obvious truth that some consider controversial—that's a POV in itself. For that matter calling it a "suicide" attack is POV and politically freighted. Death to the perpetrators was an "effect", not a motivation, as is true suicide. Why not call them a "homicide" attack as some do? As I said, newspeak. Cecropia 02:54, 15 Mar 2004 (UTC)

>> I concur, this is precisely the nonsense that I feared. Terrorist is not some evil word not be to be uttered, and it mist be used in the articl. Arno 06:14, 15 Mar 2004 (UTC)

>>> Placing a value-judgement adjective in front of a noun does not represent an obvious truth. There is no reason to place such an adjective. You won't believe it, but calling any attack a *terrorist* attack is newspeak. When asked why he supported the terrorist attacks of the Contras, Ronald Reagan said they weren't terrorists, they were freedom fighters. So we get to pick and choose which is which, depending on what side they are on. As I said, our fellow wikipedians cannot even come up with a fair definition on terrorism. I'd rather call this article 9/11 - IMHO that is the most NPOV title we could have. Kingturtle 06:43, 15 Mar 2004 (UTC)

**Figure 23:** Screenshot of discussion, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:September_11_attacks/Archive_7.

"terrorist".[75] Other editors soon reverted this edit, so the debate moved to the "talk page". "Rebroad" argued that if the editors of the article were to allow the use of the term "terrorist," they should also then use the term "Freedom fighters" to show all the different perspectives on the involved agents in this historical event.[76] In this way, "Rebroad" proposed, the article would then be in line with Wikipedia's NPOV policy. Several users reacted to this suggestion (Figure 24).

Among all these comments, one of the most intriguing was written by "JesseG," who offered a different perspective on why the term "Freedom fighters" should not have a place in the article and on the broader role of Wikipedia. This user suggested that if Wikipedians were not to use the term "terrorist" for the September 11 attacks, but were to use the term "Freedom fighters," they would be disrespecting the memory of the victims who had died in these attacks.[77] "JesseG" saw Wikipedia

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**75** For the revision history of the article in November 2004, see "September 11 attacks: Revision history," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&offset=20050208032811%7C10054462&limit=500&action=history For the article after the edit by "Rebroad," see "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&oldid=7847793

**76** "Talk:September 11 attacks/Archive 11," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:September_11_attacks/Archive_11

**77** Ibid.

Terrorist in this instance is describing the attacks, which were unquestionably, methodologically, an act of terrorism. "Freedom fighter" is a POV label for the attackers themselves. One is factual, and the other is a point of view, and in any case not appropriate where you inserted it because it does not modify "people", it modifies "action". Graft 16:16, 25 Nov 2004 (UTC)

> Thanks for your input. I think most people agree that both Terrorist and Freedom fighters are the same thing, but the phrases are opposing POV. They both have a cause, and the innocent people that die are victims as well as "collateral damage". Every act of harm can be viewed in this way. Every bomb. Every cause. It just requires you to look at it from a different perspective. For some people that can be quite hard to do. --Rebroad 19:16, 25 Nov 2004 (UTC)

[…]

Rebroad, please stop the vandalism of this article. You inserted this morning that it was a "terrorist/freedom fighter" attack. This article is returned as the first item on a Google search for "September 11, 2001 attacks": see [2] ⬈ You make Wikipedia look stupid with edits like that. I could understand the strong feelings if this was some kind of borderline incident, but it was an anonymous attack intended to kill thousands of non-combatants (using other civilians are weapons!) in order to spread fear throughout America and many other parts of the world. It was the Platonic form of terrorism. Slim 13:21, Nov 26, 2004 (UTC)

**Figure 24:** Screenshots of discussion, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk: September_11_attacks/Archive_11.

as a virtual "site of memory," in which editors should not only write about what happened in the past but also pay respect to the victims of that past.[78] For this reason, Wikipedia articles are significant for the users because they are not only pages containing information about the past, but also determine how the readers will remember that past. At the same time, the guidelines and policies of Wikipedia enhance a non-emotional understanding of the past and promote the neutrality of historical knowledge. Therefore, the user "WhisperToMe," an experienced editor and one of the top contributors to the article, replied to "JesseG" stressing that Wikipedia was an encyclopedia, not a memorial site, and should comply with the NPOV policy.[79] This is the main challenge for Wikipedia users: to write about history by sharing their personal experiences and understandings of history, but also to try to follow all the existing policies that Wikipedia has established. The debate effectively ended here, though a few more discussion threads did appear over the following years. As of today, the current version of the September 11 attacks article includes the term "terrorist," not in its sub-title, but in its introductory description.[80]

The contemporary nature and traumatic character of the September 11 attacks has resulted in many users seeing the related Wikipedia article as a memory site, in which the involved editors can honor the victims. For example,

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**78** For the term "site of memory," see Wolff, "The Historian's Craft, Popular Memory, and Wikipedia," 66. The term comes from the work of Pierre Nora: see Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de mémoire".

**79** Ibid. For the top editors of the article, see "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://xtools.wmflabs.org/articleinfo/en.wikipedia.org/September_11_attacks For the profile page of the user "WhisperToMe," see "User:WhisperToMe," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:WhisperToMe

**80** See "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks

on September 11, 2011, the third anniversary of the attacks, the user "Rickyrab" created a discussion thread titled "In Memorium" on the "talk page" and wrote the following:

> To the about three thousand folks, sixteen palm trees (in the Winter Garden), countless other living things, etc., that perished on 9/11/2001, I dedicate this section in your memory. Amen.[81]

This user, who is a "Veteran Editor" of Wikipedia and is from New York, viewed Wikipedia as a space in which Wikipedians could not only write about what happened but also commemorate the memory of those who died during the 9/11 attacks.[82]

During the same period, some editors started to demand the inclusion of more memorial material within the article itself. In 2004, the main article did not have any section on the existing memorials, only some hyperlinks to other online memorial sites and to the article "Memorials and services for the September 11 attacks," which contained lists of the existing memorials dedicated to the victims.[83] The editors, however, perceived a lack of relevant material on the main page; and, as a result, in the same year, a discussion thread titled "Memorials" appeared on the "talk page".[84] In this discussion thread, the user "Ground broken" proposed the inclusion of more material relating to the various memorials in the main article. Specifically, "Ground broken" urged other users to consider all the memorials that currently existed in the communities close to Manhattan and to include references to them in the main article.[85] However, this post did not appear to attract the attention of many users, so the discussion ended there.

One year later, some users started to edit the article and added a section on the memorials for the victims.[86] This section included information on the existing

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**81** "Talk:September 11 attacks/Archive 13," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wiki pedia.org/wiki/Talk:September_11_attacks/Archive_13#In_Memorium

**82** For the profile of the user, see "User:Rickyrab," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https:// en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Rickyrab

**83** For the version of the article "September 11 attacks" in September 2004, see "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sep tember_11_attacks&oldid=5813754 For the separate article on memorials, see "Memorials and services for the September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipe dia.org/wiki/Memorials_and_services_for_the_September_11_attacks

**84** "Talk:September 11 attacks/Archive 13".

**85** Ibid.

**86** For the revision history of the article between September and November 2005, see "September 11 attacks: Revision history," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/ w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&offset=20051106013913%7C27492931&limit=500&action=

memorials, such as America's Heroes Memorial within the Pentagon, but also planned memorials, such as the outdoor Pentagon Memorial and the World Trade Center site.[87] The editors were then constantly adding more and more information to this section. Nevertheless, in September 2006, a user asked on the "talk page" if Wikipedia administrators had any plan to "make a memorial page for the events of that tragic day".[88] One user, "Goldbez," one of the top editors of the article, replied that "there is already one," which was a reference to a memorial wiki focused on the 9/11 attacks that did also exist at that time but has now been permanently removed.[89] An interesting comment soon followed that post, where the user "Nymichael" mentioned:

> Living at 8th St & Broadway, highest point between Empire State Building and WTC, photos we took from the rooftop, Ground Zero, Union Square and Washington Sq Park are at newyorkpix.com, added the link for a first hand view from the frozen zone.[90]

This user was willing to share their own photographs, which they had taken from their house close to the site of the 9/11 attacks, and, in this way, to contribute to a better representation of the topic in the main article. However, the discussion did not continue.

In July 2007, a related discussion appeared when the user "Haemo," another top editor of the article, wrote on the "talk page" that the section on memorials needed more pictures, as the topic felt incomplete and not particularly well-covered.[91] This user cited some pictures that depicted the Tribute in Light, and asked the other involved editors for their opinions on which pictures should be placed into the main article.[92] "Haemo" also removed a picture of the World

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history For the first version of the article after the edit, see "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&oldid=23380500#Memorials

**87**  For example, see the version of the article on January 3, 2006, "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&oldid=33679603#Memorials

**88**  "Talk:September 11 attacks/Archive 21," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:September_11_attacks/Archive_21#Memorial

**89**  Ibid. For the top editors of the article, see "September 11 attacks," accessed February 14, 2021, https://xtools.wmflabs.org/articleinfo/en.wikipedia.org/September_11_attacks For the 9/11. On the memorial wiki and why it has been permanently removed, see Keegan, "A History of Newswork on Wikipedia," 1–10; "Talk:September 11 attacks/Archive 21".

**90**  "Talk:September 11 attacks/Archive 21".

**91**  "Talk:September 11 attacks/Archive 31," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:September_11_attacks/Archive_31

**92**  Ibid.

Trade Center Cross because, they claimed, it was not a memorial.[93] Instead, "Haemo" suggested a picture of the America's Heroes Memorial. To this another user, "Aude," a significant contributor to the article, replied.[94] The following discussion then took place (Figure 25).

**Actual editing - "Memorials" section**
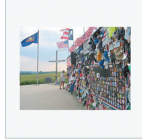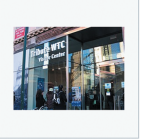


Image A

I've re-written the memorials section, since it seemed a bit lacking. It can be more thouroughly sourced, and I intended to do that at a later date, but I don't believe any of the information is contentious. I would, however, like to talk about how to improve it. We have two options for the "Tribute in Light" picture, A or B. Personally, I like B, but it seems a lot of people like A more. We also definitely need another image; there were two other ones, which I removed - the first, because the World Trade Center Cross is not a memorial, and the second because it was too large. The America's Heroes Memorial might be a good choice, but I'm open to other options too. --Haemo 06:47, 21 July 2007 (UTC)



Image B



America's Heroes Memorial

Excellent work. Possibly, the section could stand to be shorter with details in the subarticle. But, the subarticle is a mess now and is in serious need of work. Things to note in the section and/or subarticle (1) there's a temporary Flight 93 memorial [Added] (2) last September, the Tribute WTC 9/11 Visitor Center opened. [6]
The center includes exhibits, and they organize guided tours (3) The WTC Memorial Foundation organized the "9/11 and the American Landscape: Photographs by Jonathan Hyman" exhibition in 7 World Trade Center last September/October. [7] (4) I don't have a source for it right now, but a lot of progress has been made in construction of the outdoor memorial at the Pentagon. I don't think it's officially scheduled to be complete until next year, but think it will be finished sooner. It's not easy to get a photo of the memorial construction, but maybe. I have uploaded a couple more photos for the subarticle, but I'm fine with using the America's Heroes Memorial photo here. --Aude (talk) 14:42, 21 July 2007 (UTC)



Flight 93 temporary memorial



Tribute WTC 9/11 Visitor Center

**Figure 25:** Screenshot of discussion, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:September_11_attacks/Archive_31.

Thus, "Haemo" added a photo of the Flight 93 temporary memorial to the relevant section and removed a photo placed by the user "John Manuel," which showed a memorial from Jersey City facing the former location of the Twin Towers.[95] However, that edit provoked a reaction from "John Manuel," who argued:

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**93** Ibid.

**94** Ibid.

**95** For the revision history of the article in July 2007, see "September 11 attacks: Revision history," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&offset=20071031213143%7C168382204&limit=500&action=history For the version of the article with the photo of "John Manuel," see "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&oldid=145783292#Memorials For the version of the article after the edit by "Haemo," see "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&oldid=146636871#Memorials

> To give the respect to the victims, survivors and to the significance, that is increasing with the past of time, we need to add a gallery to this article, in which it can be "portrayed", the different memorials, all of them are very important and deserve to be mentioned and their picture shown in this page.[96]

It is very interesting to note that "John Manuel" perceived the editing process as a practice that should "give respect to the victims [and] survivors" of the 9/11 attacks, and, for this reason, goes on to argue that all existing memorials should be referenced on the page. Nevertheless, the user "Haemo" offered a different perspective on the existence of so many pictures in the article, as well as their more appropriate placement in the separate Wikipedia article "Memorials and services for the September 11 attacks," which is devoted to that specific thematic area. "Haemo" wrote:

> Any gallery would be on the September 11, 2001 attack memorials and services subpage, not this one. The image you keep re-adding is not exactly appropriate for this page – it's of a minor, non-permanent memorial which is not mentioned in the article. This page already has too many pictures, and three in that small space is too many. I know you like the image, because you took it, and it's a nice picture, but this isn't the right place for it.[97]

The user "John Manuel" replied (Figure 26).

It is not only that is nice, it is substantial because shows where once the tower were. Those flags and every single item belongs to that catastrophe. Probably, you sought this from TV, I was there, right in Manhattan and I experienced and lost friends who had children which I played with in the park. The photo, means the whole a lot for many people. I observe that you has put another photo, it is OK. The section is about "Memorials" and this photo reminds the reader exactly of the location of the towers. We are in disagreement at this point. It is OK too. Your POV is respected, it doesn't mean that we should follow it. I suggest to cool it off for a while and then comeback to this point. If the article has "too much" photos then as in the WP:MOS (Which it doesn't explicitly states how much is too much) a gallery is recommended. Another photo that can be included is this:



Let us respect the significance of this horrendous episode in our history by continue working together in spite of our disagreements.

Remember, let time talk to us, well greetings, and happy editing John Manuel-14:19, 23 July 2007 (UTC)

**Figure 26:** Screenshot of comment, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:September_11_attacks/Archive_31.

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96 "Talk:September 11 attacks/Archive 31".
97 Ibid.

"John Manuel" shared again their personal experience, the fact that they lived in Manhattan and had lost friends in the attacks. For "John Manuel" the photos of memorials constituted a sign of honor to the victims of 9/11. The discussion did not go much further, as the user "Haemo" disagreed with the points raised. "Haemo" argued that they "don't need more photos of memorials" and that the images already included were representative enough of the 9/11 attacks.[98] "John Manuel" replied again:

> Haemo, thank you for explaining your reasons, it is fine to disagree; [. . .] Do you think that knowing and experiencing the pain of the disappearance of one of my friends who left his two children and wife alone forever, it is also "silly"? Now, about your temporal statement. No matter who long will pass this will remain in my soul, I have never cope nor I will be able to. [. . .] You and nobody will change that. The view is explicit, see again the photo of the plaque and you will perhaps understand why that view will be forever in our memories. At least of those who experienced at first hand the horrible event. [. . .] You probably will need to excuse me, because incidentally, for me this is not silly at all. It is a strong remembrance not only of that event but the responsibilities ahead and the almost complete change of the world order. Now, you seem a little obsessed with this, as I suggested to you let the time flow; there are other issues to improve in Wikipedia I am sure you know. Thank you again for your response but I disagree with you, with my cognitive and emotional will. Have an enjoyable editing time.[99]

"John Manuel" expressed their strong disagreement with "Haemo" by pointing to their emotional bond with this historical event and the responsibilities that Wikipedia users have to the victims of such attacks. These responsibilities do not only relate to the past but also to the future; and, namely, in relation to how the September 11 attacks are to be represented on Wikipedia. The representation of this historical event on the site will, ultimately, determine what readers of Wikipedia learn about it.

"Haemo" continued this debate by arguing that Wikipedia is not a memorial site, but an encyclopedia, so emotions should not have any place in the article. They argued:

> You seem a little bit too emotionally invested in this to edit an encyclopedia article about this – perhaps you should try contributing to some of the memorial Wikis that exist online. I can't say anything about your personal pain, your memories, or what you feel about the events. However, from an encyclopedic perspective, they're not exactly relevant here. Wikipedia is not a memorial; your reasons for keeping this image might be very important to you, but from an encyclopedic perspective they are not appropriate or productive.[100]

**98** Ibid.
**99** Ibid.
**100** Ibid.

To which "John Manuel" replied:

> That is according to Haemo's views, correct? I ask you for waiting but you couldn't do this. Why can't you? because you are emotionally invested truly in this too. Thats [sic] is why you recurrently come here, the other case is because you have other motives rather than contribute to this encyclopedia, I challenge you as you have done above, to go to other wikis or other pages and leave this up to other users. I bet you cannot because you are too involved on this subject for some reason. I tell you what you could do, go edit some art articles. It will give you a fresh start. However if you want to state here then do not judge anybody's motivations. Are you an overseer? Judge? Well in here you are an editor? Let go to your peer-review. You will learn eventually to do this in here. I promise.[101]

The debate between these two editors focused more on their emotional motives when it came to their engagement with the article. "Haemo" criticized "John Manuel" for being "too emotionally invested" in the topic, concluding that their edits were not appropriate nor neutral. On the other hand, "John Manuel" argued that their affective motives and personal experience of the 9/11 attacks should not undermine their contributions. Instead, they suggest, the role of the editor should be to commemorate the victims of these attacks.

The debate continued, as more users intervened in the discussion and supported the idea proposed by "Haemo" about including more pictures in the other article, "Memorials and services for the September 11 attacks".[102] While this discussion was taking place on the "talk page," the users "Aude," "Haemo," and "John Manuel" were all editing the article by adding and removing pictures.[103] At the end of July and for the next few months, the section on memorials included only the image of "The Tribute in Light".[104] The current version of the section still contains this image but another has also now been added, depicting "The Last Column" being removed from the World Trade Center site and displayed at the 9/11 Museum.[105]

The examples above reveal the complexity of writing about and representing the September 11 attacks on Wikipedia. Many users are emotionally engaged with these traumatic historical events and view editing as a means to commemorate the past and the memories of the victims. Wikipedia users are affected by the presence

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**101** Ibid.

**102** Ibid.

**103** "September 11 attacks: Revision history".

**104** For the version of the article at the end of July 2007, see "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=September_11_attacks&oldid=147909121#Memorials

**105** See "September 11 attacks," *Wikipedia*, accessed February 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks#Memorials

of the past, and as the philosopher of history, Eelco Runia, has put it, we should not be afraid of having "ourselves affected by the past".[106] For Runia, it is very difficult to be affected by the presence of the past.[107] As he has explained, it is not the story itself that causes the presence of the past but the different ways in which the past affects and forces someone to rewrite the story about themselves or about a nation.[108] Wikipedia users are affected and "moved by the past" because they are enabled by Wikipedia to think and write about history, and to agree or disagree about how a historical event should be represented in its main articles. This is also what the historian Jörn Rüsen has highlighted. For Rüsen, emotions play a fundamental role in how we make sense of the past and, more importantly, in how we try to historicize the past.[109] Emotions help us perceive the past as something that needs interpretation, and in this way the past can become historical knowledge.[110] This is how Wikipedia users try to approach the September 11 attacks and produce historical knowledge. The traumatic nature of the past is present all throughout Wikipedia discussions and forces users to think about, write, and re-write the September 11 attacks.

However, Wikipedians' memories and personal experiences from the past remain only on the "talk pages" and do not determine the representation of the event within the main article. As Brian Keegan has mentioned in his study on how Wikipedia responded to the 9/11 attacks, Wikipedia managed to exclude much 9/11 memorial-related content on the grounds that it was "unencyclopedic".[111] In 2003 the Wikimedia Foundation hosted the Memorial Wiki Project that aimed to provide more information on the personal experiences and memorials related to the 9/11 attacks.[112] However, for several users, the purpose of this project was ahistorical, non-NPOV, and far too personal.[113] Thus, in 2005 the project became inactive and eventually closed.[114] The same approach could be said to characterize the main Wikipedia article on the 9/11 attacks. Many editors argued that they should include memorial pages for each separate victim, by adding in-

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**106**  Runia, *Moved by the Past*, 88–9.

**107**  Ibid., 92.

**108**  Ibid., 93.

**109**  Jörn Rüsen, "Emotional Forces in Historical Thinking: Some Metahistorical Reflections and the Case of Mourning," *Historein* 8 (2009): 41–53.

**110**  Ibid., 44.

**111**  Keegan, "A History of Newswork on Wikipedia," 1.

**112**  Ibid., 3.

**113**  Ibid.

**114**  Ibid.

formation about those individuals' personal experiences, but Wikipedia privileged its own encyclopedic character over any commemorative function.[115]

Keegan's general point is confirmed in the examples mentioned above. However, this should not allow us to underestimate Wikipedia users' engagement with history. The main article, which is the final product of the writing and editing process, is still constantly being debated, discussed, and negotiated. The engagement of Wikipedians with the September 11 attacks is more personal and emotional than what we have encountered in the other three case studies.[116] Though Wikipedians' memories and experiences of the 9/11 attacks remain strictly confined to the "talk page," they reveal important information about how users approach the past and aim to reconstruct it. In addition to this, even if a user does not ultimately succeed in changing the final written product, that user can still begin a discussion thread on the topic and all of their comments can at least be part of the wider conversation on the "talk page". In this way, even if their contributions do not change the content of the main article, they can open a window for further discussion, debate, and a reexamination of the past. Thus, Wikipedia users can see themselves as part of the broader editing process on Wikipedia.[117]

## History in constant motion: From the distant to the recent past

The four case studies reveal the different ways that Wikipedia users approach the past when they write about history. Wikipedians do not contribute to the production of historical knowledge by compiling more and more information, as traditional encyclopedias used to do, but engage with the past in multiple different ways, by conducting their own (secondary) research, reading books, searching for historical information on the web, visiting museums and historical sites, participating in historical events, and sharing their personal perspectives about history. In all case studies, we can detect some of those methods when it comes to the production of history. However, there do remain significant differences between

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**115** Ibid., 6.

**116** On the engagement of Americans with the "national trauma" of the September 11 attacks, see Marita Sturken, *Memory, Kitch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

**117** Nina Simon describes a similar experience in a participatory museum's exhibition: see Nina Simon, "Participatory Design and the Future of Museums," in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011), 24–5.

the case studies examined so far. In the "talk pages" of the Great Depression and the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Wikipedians' engagement with academic scholarship determines much of the discussion about history, while their personal memories and experiences are naturally limited and play a lesser role. On the other hand, in the main articles on both the Vietnam War and the September 11 attacks, personal experiences and memories play a pivotal role in the discussions and serve to shape Wikipedians' contributions.

This does not mean, of course, that the articles on the Vietnam War and September 11 attacks are simply products of personal reflection on history. Even these two case studies are a blend of dialogue, compliance with the relevant guidelines, engagement with academic works and popular historical forms, personal experiences and memories of the past. This is because Wikipedians' personal reflections on the past do not stand alone. They confront the policy of NPOV, which often causes further discussions and debates on how historical knowledge should be represented on Wikipedia. Even though Wikipedia users are "touched" or "affected" by the recent past, they try to present a balanced historical narrative that will shed light on all related aspects of the past.[118] Many Wikipedia users share their own interpretations of a historical event on the "talk page" of the relevant article, but their contributions do not necessarily result in the editing of the main piece. This does not mean that their comments are not important. Instead, their comments reveal how Wikipedians perceive the past, how they try to approach it, what information they want to include or exclude in the article, and what visual elements they believe should be added or removed. In this process, the determinant factor is the users' relation to history. For the distant past (the "zamani"), Wikipedians' engagement is far more academic and scientific, while for the recent past (the "sasha") they tend to express their memories and historical understandings more freely. These two different types of past determine how Wikipedians make "sense of history".[119]

In 1951, the novelist William Faulkner wrote the famous phrase: "The past is never dead. It is not even the past".[120] On Wikipedia, the past is not dead, is not even the past, because it is in constant motion, it always changes, it includes and excludes historical information. The past moves from the recent present to the distant past, from the "sasha" to "zamani". That movement also changes the way a historical event is represented on Wikipedia. Does this happen only on Wikipedia? Definitely not. It is part of the epistemology of historical scholarship. But on

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**118** For the term "touched by the past," see Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, 10. For the term "affected by the past," see Runia, *Moved by the Past*, 88–9.

**119** For the term "sense of history," see Glassberg, *Sense of History*, 6.

**120** William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

Wikipedia, the motion of history is visible, we not only see the final historical product, which is never truly final as it constantly changes, but the whole process behind it. We see what happens in the forefront of historical knowledge production, in the main article, and what happens in the backstage, on the "talk pages". We can track the history of a historical article and what changes haven taken place. Were these changes the result of a broader consensus or an "edit war?" Were they the result of Wikipedia guidelines or personal engagement with the past? How do editors make sense of the past while they try to contribute to the production of historical knowledge? Wikipedia "talk pages" shed light on these questions and reveal all the levels of the users' engagement with history. As Roy Rosenzweig has put it, the success of Wikipedia does not lie in the accuracy of its published content at any one time but in its ability to edit its contents constantly.[121] Wikipedia articles are in constant state of change. As Rosenzweig notes, Wikipedia looks like a first draft of history but is open to constant revisions.[122]

By whom is history set in motion? By "a bunch of nobodies," to borrow a phrase from Andrew Lih.[123] All Wikipedia users, some of whom have been mentioned above, share their authority about history and contribute to the production of historical knowledge. Many of them share their opinions and arguments about history in the discussion threads, but few of them manage to edit any main articles or, therefore, change the representation of a given historical event on Wikipedia. The discussions on the "talk pages" move far faster than the editing process of the main article. This is logical to a certain extent, as the "talk pages" offer space for discussion and debate, a part of which can then end up in the main entry. However, all the involved users manage to share their authority to some extent, whether this is on the "talk page" or in the main article itself. Wikipedia embodies what Michael Frisch has termed "shared authority," an influential concept in public history.[124] Frisch called upon oral and public historians to not just extract knowledge from the public or to simply communicate historical knowledge to the public.[125] Instead, Frisch championed the development of a dialogue between the historian and the public, which would advance a democratized shared historical consciousness and encourage more participation in debates about history.[126] Do we notice that on Wikipedia? Yes, I think. Wikipedia users,

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[121] Rosenzweig, "Wikipedia: Can History Be Open Source?" 135, cited in Niederer and van Dijck, "Wisdom of the Crowd or technicity of the content?" 1375.

[122] Rosenzweig, "Wikipedia: Can History Be Open Source?" 136.

[123] Lih, *The Wikipedia Revolution*.

[124] Frisch, *A Shared Authority*.

[125] Ibid., xxii.

[126] Ibid.

even if they have a historical education or just an interest in history, collaborate, agree, and disagree on various matters to produce historical knowledge. Nevertheless, Wikipedia users do not base their contributions only on their own personal memories, as Robert Wolff has argued, but on a combination of different things: memories, experiences, political beliefs, academic works, and historical information available on the Web.[127] The way Wikipedians engage with history depends on the relative position of a given historical event in the lives of the editors involved; in other words, the extent to which Wikipedians have developed lived experiences and memories from the past. The more recent the past is, the more personal the reflections of Wikipedians are.

Michael Frisch also made another significant point. He argued that historical authority should no longer serve as an instrument of power and hierarchy.[128] On Wikipedia, the authority is not the academic historian, whom Frisch seemingly had in mind when he wrote his book, but anyone with an interest in history or in the topic of a particular article. This does not mean that on Wikipedia there are no power structures or forms of hierarchy that determine the nature of historical knowledge. On the contrary, these structures explain how the engagement with history on the "talk pages" can result in editing changes in the main article. The only way to reveal these structures of power is to shed some light on the profile pages of the Wikipedia users themselves. Thus, we will better understand which users make most edits in an article, who these users are, and what are their main characteristics. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

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**127**  Wolff, "The Historian's Craft, Popular Memory, and Wikipedia," 66.
**128**  Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xx.